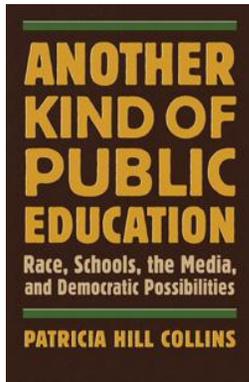


Professional Book Review

Collins, P. H. (2009). *Another Kind of Public Education*. Boston: Beacon Press. 236 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0-8070-0025-0 (pbk), \$ 21.00.

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Another Kind of Public Education is the latest book by Patricia Hill Collins, a well-known and powerful voice for Black feminism. Her works expose the interconnectivity between power, identity, knowledge, and politics. Poor and working class Black women are at the center of these patterns, bearing the difficult consequences of having many social roles, but with little respect or voice in their community. Being witness to and functioning in so many cross-cultural contexts, Black women have an incredible knowledge in regard to the oppressive systems in place, yet their experiences are often silenced. The themes presented in *Another Kind of Public*

Education echo these concerns and expose the lack of democracy in public education, the color-blind racism, the denied acknowledgement and respect, and the effects of all these on African-Americans, Brown, and poor White youth. Collins writes insightfully about the nonexistence of equal access to representation and about the lack of equal support for all in America's social systems, including education. She bemoans the dismissal of democracy in favor of privatization, the continual push to equate *public* with *poor* and *lesser*, and *private* with *rich* and *better*. In this book Collins reflects upon the public education non-privileged youth receive when having to function in the mainstream without having been valued or supported due to race, gender, education, or economics. Collins powerfully describes this other kind of public education, the impoverished system these youth suffer through.

The book begins with reflections on what the American flag means to minority populations, from Blacks, Latinos, women, children, to the working poor. Does it represent a celebration for all? The author details her experience as a young Black girl faced with being asked to describe, during a school event, the freedoms for which this country stands. She was told she could not mention how race, her race, had made a difference in attaining these freedoms, and she declined to make the speech. With a focus on Black women, the author looks at many institutions, financial, social, and educational, as conveyors of these inequalities. Although a few Black women have been able to beat the odds, such as Condoleeza Rice or Oprah Winfrey, the greater number has only struggled for little to no recognition. Collins looks as well at the historical foundations upon which these inequalities are based and at those who, privileged, continue to benefit from them.

To better understand the world we live in and its color-blindness, Collins develops the “Power-of-Domain Framework.” This is a construct of four systems of power—structural, cultural, disciplinary, and interpersonal—that control our societal interactions. With this construct, the author details the social institutions, such as schools, libraries, hospitals, and prisons, that support these domains and the social policies and racism that result from them, showing how democratic ideals have been promised but not kept. The supposedly color-blind society we are living in provides the base for the four chapters in this book. She describes how the policies that have been passed, and continue to be passed, foster an oppressive environment and social attitudes, what Collins terms the new definition of *public*. Such policies cut funding for services needed and used by those without the financial means to purchase private alternatives, including education.

Collins describes, in Chapter Two, how oppression comes in many forms. One permeating our current society is the suppression of differences. The drive to support and recognize all individuals as equal and entitled to respect and care is double-edged. The policies designed to protect individual equal access to good public resources have, in effect, stopped the recognition of educational, cultural, and societal differences and needs. Some of us benefit from a starting point full of advantages and privileges because of our race, gender, education, and economics, but many of us do not. Yet we are sold on the “one size fits all” ideology. As a result, we are told, and we believe, that we are not to see race as an issue, a human difference with a history and a living legacy.

Our color-blind society has consequences, such as what Collins terms *convenient whitening*. This situation happens within certain professional settings, in which everyone is treated as racially homogeneous. However, once outside of these settings, out in public for example, among friends or family, races are acknowledged. This often results in the White co-worker ignoring his or her Black counterpart, dismissing the working relationship both may have been comfortable with a few hours before. *Honorary white*, another term the author uses, is being seen as White when convenient for Whites, another form of color-blindness. If a multiracial group is being spoken to, it is easier not to acknowledge the differences and hence avoid changing a presentation. The author remembers being the only Black person on a tour in South Africa, and the tour director didn't change her script when describing Africans, “ignoring” the fact that there was an African-American present. The presentation proceeded with demeaning racial references, the Africans being described as uncivilized.

For all those unable to attain the means to be positively recognized, even temporarily, a new term has emerged, *Social Blackness*. This blanket term applies to all, not just African-Americans, who are supposedly poor, uneducated, and unable to contribute to society. Collins powerfully describes the social constructs, the low educational opportunities, the low wage jobs, the difficult access to resources, all of which continue to exist because they benefit privileged Whites who, having gained security and comfort in a system of power, pretend they can live their lifestyle without acknowledging the oppression facing the rest

of the American society. In her last chapter, "Somebody's Watching You," the author addresses the new youth (Black, Brown, poor, educated or not), their resources, and ways in which technology, the media, and Hip Hop give them a new identity and power in popular culture. In a society where many venues of success are denied them, or simply not being recognized as having value, these modern resources provide outlets and opportunities for an attainable social impact. All this, of course, is under the scrutiny of political powers that aim to keep them in check and under surveillance.

Collins speaks from her working-class family's and her own experiences as an African-American living and growing up in Philadelphia. She has lived with disenfranchisement, discrimination, poverty, and marginalization, facts that strengthen her position. Due to district tracking policies, she was placed into an all White high school, one of the few of her race so included. This unforeseen circumstance, although difficult since she found herself in a White world, gave Collins the skills to reach beyond the Black person's common blue-collar options. After many valued positions, such as President of the American Sociological Association Council, she is now Distinguished University Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland. The diversity of examples mentioned in her book support her presentation of the discrimination perpetrated against non-privileged populations, including how poor Black women were only finally able to gain welfare benefits in the early 60's, even though this was a service already being offered to White women. She is able to sustain her arguments within many different contexts and from many points of view as a Black middle-class woman who witnessed her parents' financial and social struggles, was schooled in a predominantly White high-school in the early '60s, and succeeded as a professor and academic.

In a few instances, Collins does not define her choice of words, failing to illustrate and develop her point. In mentioning "punitive government policies" (p. 50), for example, she makes no mention as to what these are. Nevertheless, I recommend this book for its ease of reading, well-supported descriptions, and possible social applications. Anyone involved in public office and social institutions would benefit from reading this book, as it gives an earnest look at the inequalities in and out of the professional sphere. For educators, this book illustrates the need to recognize where one comes from, racially, culturally, and socially, to diversify academic settings so as to support all students in their educational endeavors, and to better help them locate attainable resources in poor and working-class neighborhoods. Although this book illustrates the injustices perpetrated against many, it differs from Collins' other books by writing more pointedly about today's underprivileged youth, their struggles to find identity in a world more focused on forgetting them. For educators or educational policy makers, these insights invite reflection and understanding on where these marginalized youth stand and how to listen to them. This book is engaging and points to many wrongs in many diverse situations, affecting all those who are not in the privileged tier. It is eye opening and well presented. The examples used

are diverse and would serve anyone interested in the widespread consequences of educational and social racism.