Book Review

*The Chains of Black America: The Hammer of the Police and the Anvil of the Schools*. Michael Holzman. New York: Chelmsford, 2014. 285 pp.

The Black Lives Matter movement has been raising disconcerting questions about issues of mass incarceration and killing of Blacks in America at the hands of law enforcement. In addition, the state of education in black communities and its association with other problems faced by the community have become a vigorous source of debate in the current Presidential primaries. Michael Holzman’s book, *The Chains of Black America*, is a systematic effort to reveal the effects and extent of mass incarcerations in America. For him the descendants of African slaves in America are “hypersegregated” (p.27)-when black families advance in income they unlike white communities they are unable to buy into communities which provide quality schools and healthier environment. Consequently, middle-class status is precarious for black families, most African Americans find themselves at the bottom of socio-economic hierarchy leading to a caste like system which greatly inhibits their chances of getting out of their present situation.

The book is divided into eleven chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of key arguments and nation-wide statistics about the state of African Americans in the United States. Chapter two to ten provide case studies about individual cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Memphis, Milwaukee, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Rochester and Prince George’s County. Each of these chapters follows a similar structure of detailing the state of income, wealth, educational and incarceration rates in the black community vis-à-vis non-Hispanic Whites. In city after city, except for Prince George’s County, the numbers reveal the stark realities of hypersegregation. The book transitions from Prince George’s County to a hopeful conclusion that institutional reform could end the state of hypersegregation, though this will take concerted efforts across more than a generation.

The author uses Piketty’s distinction between income and wealth base inequality to make the case for lack of intergenerational mobility in Black communities. Through unearthing extensive statistics on income, wealth, education, and incarcerations this book quantifies the enormity of institutional racism in America as well as demonstrates through various linkages the vicious cycle that exists between education, poverty and incarceration.

The author argues for a range of reforms including higher pays for teachers, better infrastructure in inner-city schools as means of pushing forward reforms in education. The second major area of recommendation is criminal justice reform in bringing down the incarceration rates in the Black community as compared to the White community. The author argues that mayors and individual police officers can effect much of this change in the areas under their jurisdiction.

The book reveals startling insights into ways in which institutional racism effects young men and women such as higher death rates for males and lower incidence of marriage for young females compared to national average. The book could be improved through more reflection on such cultural dimensions which reveal the multidimensional impact of institutional discrimination. The author could focus a little more on the unique challenges faced by African Americans living in different cities to help the chapters seem less repetitive. Also, the author could explore cities, for instance in California, the book chapters are focused around the South, Mid-West and East Coast.

This is an important and timely book for academics, activists and anyone wanting to understand the Black Lives Matter movement. It is a path breaking work for professional educators involved in adult education that establishes the extent of challenges faced by our Black students. Also, it reinforces the importance of concerted efforts by adult educators in fighting institutional racism in America including questioning the business-as-usual ways of the institutions.

Michael Hotlzman is the author of “the Black Poverty Cycle and how to end it, Minority Students and Public Education” and the Schott Foundation’s report series on Black Males and Public Education.