



Book Review & Resources

Book Review of *The Chains of Black America*

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Holzman, M. D. (2015). The chains of black America: The hammer of the police; The anvil of the schools. Briarcliff Manor, NY: Chelmsford Press. ISBN-13: 978-0692369319

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 became a vigorous source of debate in the 2016 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. According to Holzman, the descendants of African slaves in America are "hypersegregated" (p.27). This occurs when black families advance in income but, unlike white families, are unable to buy into communities, which provide quality schools and healthier environments. Consequently, middle-class status is precarious for black families and most African Americans find themselves at the bottom of the 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. Chapters 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 pay for teachers and 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 such as higher death rates for males and lower incidence of marriage for young females when compared to the national average in which institutional racism affects young men and women. 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 in addition to the book chapters 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 African American 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.



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