



*Book Review*

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## **Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Individuals: Counterstories and Counterspaces**

**Wendy M. Nicholson**

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**Chaney, J.R., & Schwartz, J. (Eds.) (2017). *Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Individuals: Counterstories and Counterspaces*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 9781498540902**

**R***ace, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Individuals: Counterstories and Counterspaces* is an inside look at the significance that race, education, and incarceration bear upon individuals who were formerly behind bars; written not only by those who work with or teach this population, but by formerly incarcerated individuals themselves. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the book provides integral analysis of civil rights issues, namely, mass incarceration and its detrimental effects on individuals and communities of color, and the inequities in educational opportunities during and post release.

The collection of interdisciplinary essays is a comprehensive view into the mindset of individuals before, during, and after incarceration; as well as, what it means to educate and advocate for such individuals, both behind bars and in the college classroom. The authors and editors, an amalgamated group of individuals, comprised of students, educators, administrators, and criminal justice professionals, provide extensive accounts and analysis of the intersection of race, trauma, incarceration, and educational opportunities. The group - some of whom have been incarcerated, some of whom are professors, and at least one who is both - examine the implications of such, and provide sound recommendations about the importance of creating and fostering environments - counterspaces - conducive to educating the formerly incarcerated in the halls of academia.

Given the national discussions surrounding reentry reform espousing education as a foundation to prevent recidivism, the writing and launching of this book is not only timely, but a well-rounded and much-needed contribution to advancement of this agenda. Chaney and Schwartz offer a pedagogical framework that provides a basis for understanding race, education, trauma, and

incarceration from the inside out. Some of the contributing authors who were formerly incarcerated are given a platform to tell their own story, a counterstory - narratives about them, by them, not just simply told about them by outside observers.

The book is separated into three distinct parts: theoretical basis (*Context, Critical Race Theory, and Education's Role in Reentry*), personal narratives (*Counterstories*), and conducive environments for success (*Counterspaces*). Part I establishes a solid foundation of Critical Race Theory, the concepts of counterstory, counterspace, and Black and white privilege. The concepts and theory presented are explored and emphasized throughout the book. Particularly poignant is Dr. Tony Gaskew's exposition of *Black Cultural Privilege* and the Humiliation to Humility Perspective; "That is black truths...In essence, liberation through knowledge blackness...Nurturing a sustainable person by black truth" (p. 29).

Part II provides a platform for previously incarcerated scholars to share their stories of self-exploration and reflection. Their stories are raw and real, and give insight into who they are as people – not just as inmates. However, although Chapters 6 and 9 include short answer narratives from formerly incarcerated individuals, they appear misplaced. The chapters present the findings of two phenomenological studies, but the level of technical detail presented would be better placed in Part I as part of the book's foundation, especially compared to Chapters 7, 8, and 10, which give voice to comprehensive individual stories.

Part III delves into the educational system and how it can benefit reintegrating individuals, forcing white allies and non-incarcerated people to engage in self-analysis, confronting their own understanding and perpetuation of racial stigma and bias. This section explains the hows and whys of education as a vehicle to undergird success for returning citizens, with examples of successful programs run by formerly incarcerated individuals, scholar-allies, and colleges.

The book is well thought out and organized. Its main themes are introduced and defined at the onset and are maintained throughout the book. The chapters are straightforward and integrated in such a way that the reader begins to question their own biases and motivations, and engages in self-talk that precipitates a clarion call to action.

As a stand-alone reader or as a textbook, *Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Individuals: Counterstories and Counterspaces* is a far-reaching multi-disciplinary analysis of racialized policies, education systems, and criminal justice processes. It is an authentic and definitive work that highlights the inequities in educational opportunities and mass incarceration in communities of color. Higher education students, educators, criminal justice professionals, and policymakers will be challenged to maintain the status quo after reading this book.



**Wendy M. Nicholson** received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Tufts University and Master of Public Administration from John Jay College – City University of New York. She intends to pursue a doctorate in Educational Policy. She is currently employed by the City University of New York.