



Urban Preparation: Young Black Men Moving from Chicago's South Side to Success in Higher Education (Race and Education)

Warren, Chezare
Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2017

Book Review

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Urban Preparation contributes to a needed body of research on race that investigates “mechanisms, systems, structures, and practices that have a real bearing on students’ opportunities to learn” (vii). *Urban Preparation* highlights the scholarship of leading researchers who address questions related to race, poverty, achievement gaps, and the academic performance of minority students. An underlying thesis of *Urban Preparation* is that students in general, and minority students in particular, succeed when appropriate measures are in place. This is a resource for scholars in a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to: education, law, sociology, psychology, health, political science, and social work.

The book begins with an overview of the Race and Education series at Harvard Education Press. The series editor, H. Richard Milner IV, lists several objectives that guide the series and he challenges those in power to work “for the good of humanity, to interrupt systems, policies, and practices that work only for some while others remain underserved” (ix). Reasons are given for focusing on the intersection of race and education and questions are asked related to poverty, transportation, housing, and employment, among others.

In the Introduction, Chezare Warren explains why he wrote *Urban Preparation*: “to subvert dominant narratives that insist on casting urban-dwelling young, black men and boys as ‘at-risk’ or ‘disadvantaged’” (1). He shares the stories of these young people as counter-stories that portray them as hyper-vulnerable. He is also convinced that social inequities and stories of failure must be examined alongside counter-stories of resilience, persistence, accomplishment, and triumph. The book highlights the stories of seventeen young black men who are members of the inaugural graduating class of Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men, referred to

as “UP.” UP is a high school for boys in the Englewood neighborhood which has one of the lowest median household incomes among Chicago’s Southside neighborhoods. However, UP is widely recognized for 100 percent of its graduating class gaining admission to four-year colleges and universities.

Urban Preparation aims to: (1) describe the organizational design of UP; (2) examine the intersections of place and space to discern factors that motivate young black men to succeed against the odds; and (3) explore the factors that help narrow “opportunity gaps” for urban youth, and the implications of these factors (3). The book’s qualitative data consists of interviews, field notes, memos, and participants’ responses in order to construct a “coherent continuous narrative around dominant themes” that emerged from analyzing data (8). From the data, Warren chronicles the real-life experiences of the first graduating class by grouping the students into five composite characters with overlapping characteristics.

The title of the book is derived from the school’s name but the book tells the stories of the seventeen students and “the meaning associated with growing up in an urban environment” (18). More than anything else, the book gives a better understanding of the academic and cultural strengths of urban minority youth in secondary and postsecondary settings. *Urban Preparation* is fundamentally a counter story as well as a critical study that challenges educators and all those interested in improving the education outcomes of black men and boys to listen to them and to learn from them.

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