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Review of *Challenges of Urban Education: Sociological Perspectives for the Next Century*. Karen A. McClafferty, Carlos Alberto Torres and Theodor R. Mitchell (Eds.). Reviewed by Chad Ellett

Chad D. Ellett
Louisiana State University

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Karen A. McClafferty, Carlos Alberto Torres and Theodor R. Mitchell (Eds.), *Challenges of Urban Education: Sociological Perspectives for the Next Century*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2000. \$19.95 papercover.

This book attempts to make a contribution to the considerable discussion, debate, and documentation of education problems of the urban poor, and how they might be viewed and addressed from sociological perspectives as we end one century and move to another. This is an old and continuing debate that has long historical roots in both education and sociology. The book is divided into three main parts: I (Critical Issues in Urban Education), II (Empirical Issues on Urban Education), and III (In Conclusion: Reflections on the Dilemmas of Urban Education Reform). It is an *admixture* of perspectives of scholars, budding scholars (graduate students), and practitioners on philosophical/methodological issues in sociology and the problems and plight of the urban poor. The title of the book (Challenges of Urban Education) seems somewhat of a misnomer, since the various chapters do not detail *challenges* as much as they discuss philosophical and methodological arguments, present limited case studies and examples of sociologists at work, and practitioner reflections on the difficulties of working in urban education contexts.

The overview by McClafferty, Torres, and Mitchell is a summary of current sociological demographics in the USA having implications for education, critical "*theory*" perspectives in the field, and quantitative/qualitative methodological debates. It is short on delineating major challenges facing sociologists as they confront the problems of urban education in the 21st century. There is, however, a timely and important discussion of current and changing urban contexts and educational reform.

Part I of this book (Critical Issues) is an odd mixture of critical *theory* perspectives on the sociology of education in the United States (Apple), discussions of a seemingly endless quantitative and qualitative methodological debate in the social sciences, with a proposed "critical theory of methodology" derived from "interpretive structuralism" as a methodological alternative (Morrow), and a reasonable and rather engaging discussion of how sociology might help us make sense of social policy and how sociology as

a field of inquiry might be positioned in future developments in education and policy (Whitty).

Part II of this book (Empirical Perspectives) is again a rather odd aggregation and admixture of research studies reflecting a comparison of Charter Schools in the USA to England's Grant Maintained Schools, how they came about, their embedded politics and funding, their differences (Wells), the ambiguous role that the private sector can play in school reform (Mickelson), a rather unenlightening "comparative analysis" of school discipline policies and how they are to be understood with variations in school cultures (Fenning, Wilczynski, & Parraga), a description of how a group of university-based sociologists have developed statistical models to assist school districts in understanding changing demographics and student achievement (Dworkin, Toenjes, Purser, & Ayman Sheikh-Hussin), an historical, fluid, literary description of hip hop culture and gangsta rap and how they are to be understood as a reflection of urban culture, challenges to power through a Marxist lense, and the hopelessness in urban culture (with few implications for sociologists and their work) (McLaren), and a high school case study that attempts to show how the frustration, hopelessness, and desperation of the urban poor can be understood and addressed through the application of "critical pedagogy" and alternative perspectives on teaching and learning (Keiser).

Part III of this book (Memoirs of Urban Education Policy Makers) includes a dialogue with prominent, highly experienced higher education and K-12 educators/administrators about their perspectives on historical and predicted issues and problems in the education of the urban poor (Mitchell, Torres, & McClafferty and Handler, Thompson, & Tucker).

This book is a compilation of perspectives on critical *theory* as a model for sociologists to understand the urban poor (a more appropriate perspective might be critical *ideology*), yet again another detailed description of the plight of the urban poor (rampant nihilism) and the difficulties of their education, and a few qualitative case studies and interviews that are designed to inform us about sociological "perspectives for the next century." The book appears to offer little information that is on the cutting edge or that in any seminal way informs either education or urban

sociology as fields of scholarly inquiry. Some of the information is clearly out of date and not well integrated with important literature on schooling. The most salient quote from the book that seems to capture its thematic essence consistent with the literature on school change, reform and the plight of the urban poor is provided by Mitchell, Torres, & McClafferty at the end of Chapter 10 who state:

Much of the cyclical nature of school reform has to do with our need to address, but never to address at a very deep level, the inherent contradictions in capitalist democratic society in which we talk about equality but have social systems that are geared fundamentally around issues of inequality (p.312).

Chad D. Ellett
Louisiana State University

Katherine Kendall, *Social Work Education: Its Origins in Europe*. Alexandria, Council on Social Work Education, 2000. \$21.95 papercover; Leslie Leighninger, *Creating a New Profession: The Beginnings of Social Work Education in the United States*. Alexandria, Council on Social Work Education, 2000. \$18.95 papercover.

The telling of history is more than the chronological enumeration of events; it involves the interpretation of these events and the construction of a coherent explanation of why particular events occurred and how they evolved over time. Both books reviewed here successfully transcend the narrative style of many previous histories of the evolution of the social work profession, and offer novel perspectives that make a significant contribution to the literature. Kendall's contribution lies in documenting and explaining the history of social work in Europe and elsewhere. Leighninger's contribution has resulted in the compilation of an excellent anthology of excerpts from the writings of some of social work's founders. Both books are readable, engaging and important!

Katherine Kendall's contribution to fostering an awareness of international developments in social work and social welfare among social workers in the United States has been widely recognized. She has long been viewed as a leader in international social