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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 35

Issue 3 September - Special Issue: *Beyond the Numbers: How the Lived Experiences of Women Challenge the "Success" of Welfare Reform*

Article 21

2008

Tearing Down the Gates: Confronting the Class Divide in American Education. Peter Sacks.

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Recommended Citation

(2008) "*Tearing Down the Gates: Confronting the Class Divide in American Education.* Peter Sacks.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 3 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss3/21>

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analytical approaches of mainstream sociological theory. In addition, they stress the importance of a spatial dimension in understanding inequality and they effectively link these factors to issues of globalization, low-paid work, social exclusion and social policy. One chapter deals specifically with the way social policy in Britain and Europe has conceptualized poverty and inequality in terms of the concept of social exclusion. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, they show how complex and multidimensional contemporary analyses of inequality and class have become.

The book is a welcome addition to the rapidly expanding literature on social inequality in the Western nations and will help to reinstate class as a key interpretive concept in sociological analysis. Although the book may be regarded by some as primarily theoretical and unlimited practical value, it offers helpful insights for those working in the field of social policy and social welfare and deserves to be widely consulted. It summarizes a huge literature and will also be a useful resource for readers wishing to understand the way inequality has now been reconceptualized in the social sciences. It also shows how the concept can be used to address the serious inequalities that characterize Western societies today.

Peter Sacks. *Tearing Down the Gates: Confronting the Class Divide in American Education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. \$24.95 hardcover.

While social science research and media reports have unequivocally exposed the growing problem of income inequality in the United States in recent years, the extent to which inequality pervades the whole social structure is not often recognized. Similarly, popular beliefs about how ordinary people can succeed in a highly stratified society are seldom challenged. One popular belief concern is the role of public education. It is widely accepted that schools, colleges and universities promote social mobility and provide the knowledge and skills which the children of poor and lower income families can acquire to succeed in an open, competitive economy. Provided they are motivated, children and young people from

all social classes are said to have ample opportunities to excel.

In this revealing book, Peter Sacks not only challenges the view that the American educational system is an effective vehicle for social mobility but demonstrates convincingly that public education has become an instrument for the consolidation and amplification of social inequality. Making extensive use of case study material, poignant portraits of low-income families who struggle to utilize the educational system, as well as a wealth of statistical data, he reveals the extent to which public schools, colleges and universities have not only failed to facilitate the upward mobility of low- and middle-class children, but how they increasingly serve the interests of upper middle and higher income families. Instead of opening the gates of opportunity, new barriers to success have been created within the educational system.

It is well known that public schools have become less egalitarian as a result of the flight of white middle-class families to the suburbs, but less well known is the way these families access public funds to create programs within high-quality public schools which advantage their own children. Similarly, publicly funded charter schools and other specialized academies, which primarily serve the upper middle class, reinforce existing inequalities and hardly provide opportunities for disadvantaged children to excel. The public university system, which was created to promote educational opportunity, now also reinforces inequalities. The use of standardized tests in college admission favors the children of educated and higher income families and, as funding for higher education declines, elite state universities increasingly seek to attract students who come from these families. Sacks shows that the proportion of low income students in public universities has declined steadily over the years. Similarly, the merit scholarships which have been established by many state governments ostensibly to facilitate easy access to education, increasingly favor those who are better off.

While Sacks' book makes for depressing reading, it will hopefully galvanize action not only at the political level but among those who are committed to public education at both high schools and colleges. It is encouraging that some universities have recognized the problem and introduced new

admissions policies that remove discriminatory barriers and restore opportunities. However, as the author points out, corrective action is urgently needed not only on grounds of equity, but because the country's international economic competitiveness is being damaged by a system of public education that now reinforces rather than dismantles prevailing inequalities.

Tim Clydesdale. *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens After High School*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. \$20.00 papercover.

Interest in young adulthood has been growing over the past several years among researchers, the press, and the general public. The consensus is that individuals currently in their late teens and early twenties have a unique experience of this period of the life course, distinct from the generations that preceded them. Differences include a more heterogeneous path to adulthood, an increasingly globalized society, and a need for higher levels of education to remain competitive in a post-industrial economy.

Tim Clydesdale gives readers an opportunity to see how young people respond to these social changes. The author outlines the book's three goals: first, to portray the "moral culture" teens inhabit; second, to explore the transition from the "relatively structured" life teens lead in high school to the "fairly autonomous" one they move into, whether or not they leave home to attend college; and third, to examine how family, faith, and community shape this transition.

The book begins with a brief introduction that orients the reader to the study, and presents some of the key themes and concepts that will be expounded upon throughout the text. The author describes these concepts using memorable, rich phrases like "identity lockbox," "life tent," and "daily life management" to describe, respectively, two commonly employed strategies for safely navigating the first year after high school, and teens' main preoccupation during this time. The next chapter explores these concepts in the context of four detailed case studies. The third chapter, "Starting Points," provides an overview of faith, family, and community, which are