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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 37
Issue 2 June

Article 9

2010

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Kala Chakradhar
Murray State University

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Recommended Citation

Chakradhar, Kala (2010) "Review of *Both Sides Now: The Story of School Desegregation's Graduates*. Amy Stuart Wells, Jennifer Jellison Holme, Anita Revilla, and Awo Korantemaa Ayamda. Reviewed by Kala Chakradhar.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol37/iss2/9>

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Book Reviews

Amy Stuart Wells, Jennifer Jellison Holme, Anita Revilla and Awo Korantemaa Ayamda, *Both Sides Now: The Story of School Desegregation's Graduates*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009. \$24.95 papercover.

The backdrop to this collaborative publication is the landmark Supreme Court decision fifty-five years ago that forged the desegregation initiative in educational institutions across several American states. In distinctive ways, the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling (1954) set the stage for grappling with today's multi-ethnic/racial school environment, and the ongoing shaping of school reform. Subsequent critical accounts of the outcomes of this court-mandated movement have covered a wide array of topics concerning the school populations, both white and non-white, that were affected by the decision. Within a span of more than half a century, this civil rights journey has trodden a path from segregation to desegregation and back to segregation again. It has been shaped by multiple events, the experiences of different groups, a changing political climate, economic flux and demographic shifts. Although desegregation raised consciousness and improved academic access for minorities, it failed to usher in integration in its true sense, and also resulted in serious imbalances in academic resources and performance.

This book is a diligently executed qualitative research effort by academics from education, sociology and women's studies who undertook in-depth case studies of six high schools and their graduates who were involved in the desegregation endeavor. The study involved a five-year data collection exercise and was based on more than 550 interviews of selected members of the class of 1980, as well as policy makers, lawyers, educators and others in the school districts in which the high schools were located. A content analysis of historical

Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare, June 2010, Volume XXXVII, Number 2

documents, school board minutes, yearbooks, newspaper articles and legal documents was also undertaken. The study explored the way the graduates of the schools experienced and understood desegregation and examined its effect on their lives, both then and now. In addition, the policy context that shaped these experiences is also explored.

The book's first five chapters describe the six high schools, the wider political context and the contemporary experiences of the graduates. A rationale for the sample selection and a description of the method of study are also included. The social contexts that presented barriers to the success of integration are analyzed in the form of themes such as the continuation of segregation outside of school, the role of bussing of minorities, privileged access to high-track classes, the role of a partisan media and a pervasive color-blindness, especially among teachers, that evaded discussing inter-racial issues and even eluded relevant course content. This insightful account is followed in the subsequent three chapters by a description of the post-school life of the graduates and their work, family and community life experiences. The narrative intersperses sensitive accounts of individual experiences across the schools, races, gender and economic classes through using various themes and authors' interpretations.

The foreword to the book aptly points out that "it is not the answer we might have liked, but [the book] provides the answer we need." Its strength lies in the in-depth analysis, the methodological rigor and the objectivity gained through including diverse participants from different geographical areas. Though the findings validate what other scholarly accounts have shown in terms of the gains of desegregation and continued struggles to diffuse inequities, the authors present a strong case for school restructuring. However, the teachers' perspective in the analyses is conspicuous by its absence, although their role is frequently mentioned in the graduates' narratives. Nevertheless, the book is a valuable resource for parents, educators, policy makers, researchers and counselors working in schools in this country. It promises to stimulate wider discussion about school reform, and points the way toward solving the continued social and academic marginalization of minorities.

Kala Chakradhar, Murray State University