

Orfield, G., Marin, P., & Horn, C. L. (Eds.). (2005). *Higher education and the color line: College access, racial equity, and social change*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Education Press. Pages: 228. Price USD \$29.95 (paper). ISBN 978-1-891792-59-5.

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This edited volume contains a variety of papers that were presented at Harvard University during the 2003 Color Lines Conference. Scholars from a wide range of fields came together during the conference to discuss issues of equity in higher education and specifically addressed how changes to American higher education legal policy and procedures were shaping issues of access for those historically disadvantaged by their race. As suggested by the title, the focus of the book is on access, equity, and social change. The three historical turning points that focus the papers in this book come from the American legal precedents set by *Bakke* (1978) and more recently *Grutter* and *Gratz* (2003). These moments reveal continued support for affirmative action from the U.S. court system and encourage scholars to continue researching and supporting affirmative action programs and processes. The 2003 Color Lines Conference brought together 120 papers and the nine that make up this volume represent a myriad of viewpoints and offerings. Taken together, the volume presents a useful collection of information and argument.

Higher Education and the Color Line discusses some of the core issues in the search for equity and inclusivity in higher education today and highlights three issues: equal access and funding for disadvantaged students, racial inequities that exist between the community college and the university (2-year versus 4-year colleges in the US), and whether the gap between educational interest and educational success has lessened when it comes to minority students. A few authors in this book make concrete suggestions about how to conduct research in the area of inclusivity in schools and across landscapes and suggest quite boldly that quantitative research and research questions need to change radically in order for real progress to occur (Chapter 3 “Equity in Educational Attainment: Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Inequality in the 50 States,” by Derek V. Price and Jill K. Wohlford).

In the introduction, Gary Orfield suggests that the book isn't for the faint of heart: “this book is not optimistic about the role of colleges and universities in the struggle for social justice” (p. 7). Many of the authors suggest that a part of the reason for this statement is that the policies that are meant to increase student access are also interpreted as limiting access elsewhere. Money remains a centrally discussed issue and austerity has reappeared as the new central reason for cutbacks and usually results in limited fund-

ing to those who need it most. More than one author in the volume is critical of “merit-” based approaches to funding (such as those based on standardized test results) because they replicate social inequalities that make minorities struggle to keep up with tests they are set up to fail (Chapter 7, “Potential or Peril: The Evolving Relationship between Large-Scale Standardized Assessment and Higher Education” by Catherine L. Horn) or rising tuition (Chapter 4, “Can Minority Students Afford College in an Era of Skyrocketing Tuition” by Donald E. Heller).

Aside from its “fresh-water shock” in the form of some harsh realities (the equity gap hasn’t changed in most areas and has gotten worse in others) this book has much to provide for those interested in promoting inclusivity and issues of equity in higher education institutions. Not only does it provide research questions that are still unanswered for interested graduate students and researchers it also provides some policy directives and administrative plans for equity-focused leaders.

One of the most provocative chapters is the conclusion of the text. Here, Patricia Marin and John T. Yun present a model for higher education policy leaders that focuses on making inclusivity an essential part of school strategic plans. They argue that such plans must also include analytical and evidence-based forms of feedback (pp. 201–203). They also suggest that many policies are contradictory and discuss a horizontal policy analysis that not only reveals these contradictions but also makes the way for more positive change (pp. 206–209). Pointing out the root inadequacy of many institutions is to do more than stick words that sound like equity in mission statements. Marin and Yun argue that

[i]nstitutions claiming to have a compelling interest in a diverse student body sincerely care about racially/ethnically diverse campuses, that they believe in the importance of using race/ethnicity to achieve their goals, and that the efforts made to defend this ability indicate just how critical this is to higher education. (p. 204)

Taking its measure from the title, *Higher Education and the Color Line* does focus on the various lines, mostly quantitative as well as those found in case law. Researchers and interested readers looking for qualitative studies will find few such studies, and those that do appear are a bit thin in their focus. In Chapter 6, for example, the authors examine programs that retain and support students of color, but these programs are narrowly focused in their contexts and may not be as widely applicable as the authors might hope. Of interest to Canadian readers, Chapter 5 addresses the issue of differences in opportunity for students attending 2-year colleges that are either public (community colleges) or private (occupational colleges). Here the authors extol the private sector for many of the fundamental attributes that many Canadian colleges already have – blocked class time tables, co-op placements, advisors for students, and finally, active advisory boards that focus on getting students jobs (p. 113).

Comprehensive reference lists at the end of each article provide up-to-date information, statistics, and theories on inclusivity current to 2004. While much has changed in the North American landscape in the last 9 years, many of the issues presented in *Higher Education and the Color Line* remain topical and current to researchers and professionals working in education. Finally, the suggestions that some of the authors present bring a more practical focus to a topic that has been only theoretical discussion for far too long. 🍁