

Critical perspectives on teaching in the southern United States, Tori K. Flint, and Natalie Keefer, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020, 258 pp, \$49.16, hardback

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Teaching social studies in the South requires particular strategies because of the particular history of racism and oppression in the South. These issues must be at the forefront of planning and execution. *Critical Perspectives on Teaching in the Southern United States* supports educators and educational researchers in understanding the unique educational issues of the South and offers ideas for tackling the issues and empowering students. While the book provides a good look through the lens of the educator, it could have painted a more vivid and detailed picture by including representation from more students and more areas of the South. Though not as fully formed as it could be, this volume describes the historical underpinnings that explain the current conditions that students and their teachers face in the South. It also reveals the experiences of educators doing the work of critical pedagogy.

The editors and contributors primarily argue that the South's unique historical experience with oppression creates a unique contemporary educational experience. They come to several overall conclusions. First, students should be empowered to critique the status quo. Second, students' cultural identities and backgrounds should be valued and included. Third, educators need training and support in order to successfully empower students. Flint and Keefer support their arguments through the voices of (mostly White) educators in the field. However, this compilation neglects the perspectives of students in the field and fails to sufficiently cover areas of the South outside of Louisiana.

The editors, Tori K. Flint and Natalie Keefer, curated this collection of critical and transformative voices. While both are assistant professors at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Flint's focus is literacy and early childhood education, and Keefer focuses on social studies education. As a former preschool and elementary school teacher, Flint brings her knowledge and research experience in the area of early childhood education. She combines her experience working with young learners with her background in language and literacy to examine educational issues through a critical lens. Keefer has written extensively about social justice in education. This experience adds further perspective and helps to structure the book.

Flint and Keefer frame the book in the theories of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault. These theorists are associated with the Frankfurt school's promotion of liberation through the empowerment of the individual. Where Gramsci concentrates on institutional control of people's minds, Foucault examines the element of physical control. The theories are applied to investigating educational research and practice that centers on removing institutional control while strengthening individual self-determination, rights, and freedoms. Not only does this work look at educational structures and institutions, but it also critiques and explores methods, practices, and lessons and their potential for liberation or oppression.

There are 14 chapters and multiple contributing authors in this collection. The editors divided the book into four parts. Educators and Educational researchers contribute chapters to each section that critically examine Southern education. The first part, *Sociohistorical Foundations*, provides a historical context for Southern education. The second part is entitled *Reflections from the Field*. The contributors to this section focus on the experiences of educators. The chapters in the second section report on critical pedagogical experiences using a combination of self-reflection, interviews, and observations. The third part, *Pedagogy and Content*, reports on critical classroom methods and strategies. It includes examples and analysis of curriculum content and techniques that have been implemented. The final part, *Borders and Boundaries: Language, Immigration, and Identity*, ties in the critical examination of the more recently pressing issues related to perspectives on immigrant families, culture, and language in the classroom and the effects of those perspectives on student experiences.

This book very capably establishes the necessity for critically examining the pedagogy of the South. They set up the historical context to explain the distinct repressive experiences of students, teachers, and residents of the South, connecting the colonial period, to reconstruction, to today. The editors and contributors do a good job of providing insight into the experiences of both teachers and

teacher educators. Though race is central to the South's history of institutional control and injustice, this book adds the element of cultural identity, especially as it relates to immigrant students. Although they thoroughly explain issues and problems, the work also implies solutions that can be further investigated in future research. Going forward, this book should inspire future exploration of culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining pedagogy in the South.

While students in the South suffer the burdensome weight of the legacy of slavery and subjugation, more research is needed on how the rich culture of African American students may be used to promote their empowerment and liberation. The authors point to educational theorists such as Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings. As these theorists suggest, the minoritized students' voices and perspectives should be central to social justice education research. Minoritized students should be provided the space to describe how they experience teaching strategies and methods. According to critical theory and critical pedagogy, which frame the book, these students must be empowered to determine and assert what they believe is best. However, there is very little input from any students. Most of the chapters tell the story of education in the South from the view of teachers and teacher educators. Even if the book is about teaching in the South, a critical pedagogical perspective must let the students speak of their experiences.

There are autoethnographies and self-reflections that are based on mostly White educators in the field. Just one chapter includes a Black teacher educator who uses the autobiographical technique of *currence* to liberate herself within an oppressive academic environment. This is the only counter-narrative that is included. Also, the editors teach in Louisiana. This explains why many of the contributing educators describe conditions in Louisiana. However, the title suggests that the book will give a depiction of more than one Southern state, city, or town. The experiences in Alabama, Mississippi, and North Carolina will vary and certainly differ from those in Louisiana. As a matter of fact, the experiences in different towns and neighborhoods within these states will differ. White educators in Louisiana cannot tell the whole story of teaching in the South.

Educators, educational researchers, future educators, and historians can benefit from the contents of this collection. Southern students will benefit from the preparation and support of their teachers which can be fostered by this book. However, the book would have been fuller and more empowering if it had been more representative of more of the people at the center of the story.