

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Life at the Intersection: Community, Class and Schooling

by Carl James

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Reviewed by

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Carl James sets the groundwork for this book in chapter one by examining Canada's troubled communities and drawing on the media's stigmatization of these communities. He then provides that there are opportunities within these communities through a profile of Jane and Finch, an intersection of streets in downtown Toronto that is considered one of the worst in Canada. Jane and Finch is home to approximately 80,000 people, mostly from Canada's fault line of non-Canadian parents or grandparents, and mostly the non-wealthy to poor.

In chapter two, James develops the neighbourhood's profile by elaborating on the media's reporting style and its effects on the community. In chapter three, James describes the public school system and explains how teachers' perceptions and concerns about students have a dramatic effect on these students, and this, in turn, lends itself to how teachers can make a world of difference by understanding the communities they serve. James points to the education system as having a key function in serving the needs of students and the community. This function includes recognizing the importance of belonging and having an identity, providing opportunities for students and the community to return their dues, and digesting the changes on students who internalize the physical, social, and emotional effects of getting out of a community. James stresses the importance that identification and a sense of belonging have on a person. The role of teachers and the

culture they come from in regard to their university experiences is also noted as being vital in understanding this key function.

“Anatomy of a School Shooting,” chapter five, takes the reader through the “good” child from the “troubled” community to the “good” school in a bad area, to policing of schools, to the call to return to Judeo-Christian values and practices, to single mothers, fatherlessness, and broken homes, to mentoring and role modelling, to counteracting the underachievement of boys, and finally to the politics of Afrocentric schooling from idea to realization.

In the final chapter, “Beyond the Intersection Town or Community-Centred Approach to Schooling,” James provides insight into these areas as being more than an intersection—they are home to communities of people. He highlights the idea that community, class, and school are all interrelated, and that the community-centered approach to education is vital to the continued developmental success of the students who belong to these communities.

This book starts off a bit dull, but once James delves into the topic of community and “belonging to” and identifying with a community, the book takes on a life of its own. As a comparison, Robert M. Bone’s book *The Regional Geography of Canada* develops the understanding of Canada as being a country of regions where regional components enable people to have a feeling of identity and belonging. James’s book provides the reader with an opportunity to make and develop the connection to community. It also develops in the reader an interest in looking at the success of the Afrocentric Alternative school in Toronto.

Woodlawn Learning Centre is an alternative high school for students “at risk” of leaving school who have either experienced many of these issues presented by James or could make some connection to what James is saying. For example, James talks about the effects that class, reputation, and media reporting has on a community and presents the concept of policing students—both of which are relevant to the Woodlawn experience. As such, *Life at the Intersection: Community, Class and Schooling* was recommended reading for all Woodlawn staff.

In fact, all educators and community leaders should read this book. It will provide readers with insight into the importance of recognizing beliefs within a community, as well as an awareness of media biases faced in marginalized communities.