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Book Review: *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Education, Discipline, and Racialized Double Standards* by Nancy A. Heitzeg

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# BOOK REVIEW

***THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE:  
EDUCATION, DISCIPLINE, AND RACIALIZED DOUBLE STANDARDS***  
BY NANCY A. HEITZEG  
PRAEGER, 2016. VII + 178 PAGES  
\$48.00 (HARDCOVER)  
ISBN 978-1-4408-3111-9

While education is often positioned as a site of protection and peacebuilding, education policies inspired by the policies of the war on drugs have repositioned US education as a site that both violates human rights and perpetuates injustice. In her book *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Education, Discipline, and Racialized Double Standards*, Nancy A. Heitzeg highlights the effect on education of adopting war on drugs policies. Heitzeg explains how zero-tolerance policies copied by education systems under the guise of promoting school safety have led to higher rates of suspension/expulsion and higher dropout/pushout rates for youth of color, thereby exacerbating racial disparities. The harsher punishments imposed by these policies have tended to funnel young Black and Brown youth out of the education system and into the school-to-prison pipeline, thus creating what can be understood as a human rights crisis in US education.

In this book, which offers an introduction to the school-to-prison pipeline in the United States, Heitzeg illustrates how the results of a war on drugs policy that involved policing and punishing Black and Brown students became institutionalized in the US education system. The book is organized into three sections that detail how the pipeline came into existence, how it operates today, and how some are pushing back against the zero-tolerance policies borrowed from the war on drugs. To illustrate the consequences these policies have for today's students of color, each chapter begins with a vignette of a student's personal experience with the school-to-prison pipeline. These vignettes describe the wide-ranging ways Black and Brown students are pushed out of education.

Heitzeg explains that education policies incorporating zero tolerance do not distinguish between serious and nonserious behavior and that students are punished equally for unequal behavioral issues that range from dress-code infractions to weapons violations. Drawing from a growing body of research, Heitzeg argues that the current era of "colorblind" racism masks racial inequality in education by denying that school systems are a mechanism of social control that has a disparately negative effect on students of color. She details how abandoning certain civil rights era efforts, such as desegregation and equitable funding, combined with education

practices such as high-stakes testing and zero-tolerance policies, have converged to create a school environment that pushes underperforming students of color, mostly from underresourced, segregated urban schools, into the penal system.

Heitzeg describes how race serves as the unnamed indicator for controlling young Black and Brown lives in both war on drugs policies and zero-tolerance education policies through decisions to criminalize and medicalize. Policies and practices in society and in school produce racialized and discriminatory results. Labeling, stereotyping, and using coded language that positions White as normal and Black as “other” criminalizes young Black and Brown men. As the prison industry became a mechanism for removing unskilled labor from the market and for profiting government agencies and the private sector by providing the unpaid labor of inmates, criminalizing people of color increased dramatically to fill the demand. She explains that, while middle-class White drug users are tracked into drug-treatment programs, Black and Brown youth are pushed into prison. She argues that this disparity left over from war on poverty policies has created a double standard in today’s school systems, whereby Black youth are more likely than Whites to be diagnosed with an intellectual disability or behavioral disorder and thus to be tracked into special education or remedial learning programs. The result is a segregated education setting focused on behavior management rather than on the academic achievement of students of color, which is often the prelude to entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

As one volume in Praeger’s *Racism in American Institutions* series, this book provides an understanding of how racism, couched in post-civil rights era colorblind policies and practices, is the foundation of the school-to-prison pipeline. Yet the book does have some limitations. As it offers a broad understanding of the problem, it draws from general theoretical and historical information. It lacks rich ethnographic examples and offers only limited data analysis, and as a result the general concepts and themes are repeated throughout. A reader already familiar with the school-to-prison pipeline might come away wanting more information and analysis. Despite its limitations, however, this book is relevant and timely for education in emergencies scholars, in that it highlights the protracted crisis of the school-to-prison pipeline and its destruction of justice and human rights in the US education system.

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