

WHO SHALL BE  
EDUCATED?

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# WHO SHALL BE EDUCATED?

The Challenge of  
Unequal Opportunities

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To  
ROBERT E. PARK

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED  
IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH  
THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

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## WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

The American public schools are, in the opinion of the people of the United States, basic and necessary parts of our democracy. We are convinced that they must, and we hope that they do, provide equal opportunity for every child. This means that those at the bottom can compete through education for life's prizes with those at the top. All that is needed are brains, a will to do, hard work, and plenty of ambition. In our faith every aspiring student may not have a marshal's baton in his knapsack, but in his public schooling he does have an equal chance with everyone else for the White House.

This basic belief in the democratic functioning of our public schools is only partly true. This book describes how our schools, functioning in a society with basic inequalities, facilitate the rise of a few from lower to higher levels, but continue to serve the social system by keeping down many people who try for higher places. The teacher, the school administrator, the school board, as well as the students themselves, play their rôles to hold people in their places in our social structure.

If the American faith in the public school as a democratic force is to become less fictional, we must examine the relevant facts and determine what distorts this picture. From such information we can gather the necessary knowledge to act intelligently on the problem of who should be educated. This book is about the school's place in our status system, how it must be improved for democratic living, and what it needs to conform more nearly to American ideals.

In the first chapter several children are seen doing the things they ordinarily do and acting according to their environmental demands. The children belong to higher and lower social levels in their community. The things these children learn, we soon see, are powerfully controlled by their places in the status system. To understand how the status-controls operate in the lives of these children it is necessary to know what each status level is like. We therefore present descriptions of the status systems of southern, mid-western and New England towns. We must know what these learning contexts are and how they act as social mazes for the children's learning in order to understand what happens to children when they grow up in America. The American school



also reflects the socio-economic order in everything that it does ; in what it teaches, whom it teaches, who does the teaching, who does the hiring and firing of the teachers, and what the children learn in and out of the classroom.

The curricula of the secondary schools provide early pathways to success and failure, they operate in a different way on the several class levels, and they are used in a different way by the children of the higher and lower levels. It is apparent that the high-school curriculum is a mechanism which helps perpetuate our class order.

The most significant feature of our status order is the emphasis placed on the social elevators which take the more fortunate up to the social heights and drop the less fortunate to the basement. The chapter on social mobility describes this process. It tells how Americans use such powerful forces as money, talent, beauty, sex, and education to climb from the lower social levels to those higher. The careers of several successful social climbers are analysed to illustrate how this is done. Their lives provide an informational manual of the "Thou Shalts" and the "Thou Shalt Nots" of the American social climber.

The place of the Negro in our society in many respects is like that of the lower-class white. He has many of the same penalties applied to him and is prevented from enjoying many of the same opportunities as the lower-class white. But there are profound differences between Negroes and lower-class whites which have fundamental consequences for the kind of education provided for them. The problem of race relations is becoming crucial. A whole chapter, "The Negro in the American Caste System", is devoted to analysis of how the education of Negroes works in our caste system.

Because Americans are deeply concerned about increasing the quality and quantity of democratic thought and action and because education is at the core of all our hopes and fears for such improvement, in the final chapter, "Who Shall Be Educated?" a set of principles is stated as a foundation for the betterment of educational methods. Concrete proposals are then offered which we believe are necessary for the advancement of democratic education.

THE AUTHORS

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