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City Kids: Transforming Racial Baggage

reviewed by Maryann Krikorian - July 05, 2017

Title: City Kids: Transforming Racial Baggage
Author(s): Maria Kromidas
Publisher: Rutgers University Press, Piscataway
ISBN: 0813584787, **Pages:** 196, **Year:** 2016
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Maria Kromidas *City Kids: Transforming Racial Baggage* is a reflective book. The theoretical paradigm contextualizing the text addresses an existing gap in the literature that limits our understanding of theorizations of racial formation. Kromidas describes an ethnographic research study designed to investigate the variability of learning race and the struggles that permeate it while considering the perspectives of children. The book is divided into five chapters representing themes that emerged from the meaning-making process of data analysis. The following are thematic foci specific to children and their participation in race making within the text: a) Navigating urban space; b) Building friendships and consuming pop culture objects; c) Laboring in school; d) Being subject to the schools disciplinary apparatus; and e) Enacting sexualities. The author highlights early stages of human development that may extend scholarship where literature is limited, broadens the understanding of the politics of race, and prompts practical implications for the field of education.

A review of the literature indicates how occurrences of race formation emerge from interactions and traditional practices of everyday life. Kromidas frames the text by discussing the ethos of cosmopolitanism as a way to manifest how children playfully and innovatively engage in dialogue concerning contradictions of race. She defines the cosmopolitanism of children as, constructed & meaningful & internalized in embodied knowledge & gleaned through experience ... and externalized in practices, social relations, and coercive social facts (p. 22). Through this particular ethos, the researcher depicted five racial struggles suffused in the everyday lives of her ten and eleven-year-old participants. The significance of the study aims to broaden the understanding of race and culture with respect to the early stages of lifespan development. The author writes, our humanity is always at stake when race is the question (p. 1). Understanding how children learn about race calls to mind the intricacies of human understanding with intentions to preserve human interconnectedness. The critical perspectives represented in the text may benefit areas of social science by diversifying the epistemic ideologies that ground existing social theory pertinent to race and culture.

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Each chapter represents empirically supported findings that de-familiarize race, problematize race, and enact alternatives with a shift in focus toward how children reproduce and transform it. Kromidas explores the ethico-political aims of her research, within a specific setting with a particular youth demographic, to discover how children make meaning from varied accounts of race. First, the author articulates two interrelated ways of learning race: (1) multisensory experiences of navigating urban space, and (2) spatial struggles of belonging in urban space. Then, she highlights how children engage in the practice of cosmopolitanism through poetic and political behaviors. Next, the author emphasizes how institutional politics and contexts of schooling significantly affect racial meaning making. Subsequently, she suggests how the process of learning race includes learning racism. Lastly, she draws attention to sexuality by revealing how the exploration of sex may lead to the development of subjectivities beyond the notion of race. As a result, Kromidas research supports findings that suggest how accounts of race may serve as sites where race is naturalized and brought to life. The text may inspire educators to reorient their praxis in pursuit of critical consciousness and experiential learning.

A strength of the text is the voice and positionality of diverse children narratives supporting the work. Based on long-term labor force projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, people of color are foreseen to become the majority in the United States. In addition, racial and ethnic demographic trends in the United States are increasing in complexity with a more fluid set of categories (i.e., multi-ethnic). With that in mind, it is essential to invite all children to dialogue about the construction and deconstruction of knowledge impacting race formation and other forms of hierarchy in western society. For that reason, researchers should consider expanding the dialogical space with the inclusion of historically marginalized voices to ensure investigated phenomena authentically represents all types and levels of human development. Unpacking dominant culture narratives, in pursuit of a multicultural perspective, may provide a more robust understanding of racial formation that has the potential to lead toward positive learning outcomes and student wellbeing in school settings.

In qualitative studies, the concept of relationality is closely examined to account for conceivable power dynamics between researchers and researched. Kromidas transparently calls out the weakness of her text by acknowledging the power differential between adult and child and how that may have influenced the trustworthiness of the study. She intentionally describes her methodological approach to be one of surrender, a methodology of intellectual love. She writes, surrender entails giving the most precious resource in the process of fieldwork, time, and its representation in the product, space (p. 14). In this way, the ethnographer builds rapport to reduce participant bias. As a result, Kromidas interactions with participants manifested into fluctuating, collaborative, and growing relationship dynamics. She openly admits to the limitations that may exist in her methodology of choice, but more importantly reminds the reader to appreciate the methodologists ability to enable a politics of knowledge rooted in relationality, joy, and love (p. 17). In view of that, the relative nature concerning the social construction of difference is better suited to a more personal methodological approach. To date, work on racial formation specific to childhood studies is scant and social science researchers may consider developing this area of study further.

Ultimately, *City Kids: Transforming Racial Baggage* is an inspirational read highly recommended to a wide range of social scientists across disciplines and educators at both the PK-12 and post-secondary levels. Kromidas honors the humanity of children by arguing that childhood is a strategic stage of human development that may inform, and more imperatively, transform scholarship and the politics of race. Her insightful, counter-hegemonic, and critical approach to theorizations of race formation may appeal to a wide range of populations differing in profession, age, socioeconomic, race/ethnicity, sexuality, religiosity, gender/gender identity, and/or geographic

origin. More specifically, educators would find such a text relevant, in part due to the childrens abilities to critique the social construction of race, as well as identify reasons to broaden the dialogical space with a particular focus on advocacy. In summary, a more inclusive approach honoring the experiential knowledge of children challenges readers to re-conceptualize the social construction of difference and its role in the school setting. The power behind the narratives of children may inspire educators to reconceive teaching and learning as a sacred art where wellbeing, self-actualization, and empowerment is necessary prior to engaging in the profession (hooks, 1994).

References

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