Anthropology & Education QUARTERLY

Tough Fronts: The Impact of Street Culture on Schooling. L. Janelle Dance. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002. 188 pp.

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Tough Fronts, an ambitious, book-length adaptation of the author's doctoral dissertation, reports on "one year spent hanging out with urban students in school-based settings" in Boston and Cambridge, MA, when she gave "street-savvy students my undivided, scholarly attention" (p. 3). The title term refers to the demands that "street culture" makes on Black, male adolescents to present "*postures* of toughness" to their peers, their teachers, and the outside world (p. 2).

Using an ethnographic, critical studies-based approach, Dance strives to counteract what she sees as prevailing "elite and lofty" scholarly depictions that "eclipse individual agency" and, using an "essentialist gaze," find urban Black Americans "essentially inferior, or mainstream, or victims, or virtuous, or oppositional" (p. 17). Dance identifies her overall purpose as the shedding of new light "upon claims, theoretical and descriptive, about why some public schools re-create, whereas others level, inequality" (p. 9).

The first two chapters review contrasting sources of knowledge about urban students, the "expert" points of view of traditional scholarship and the more recent, presumably more authentic work that attempts to restore agency to its subjects by documenting and analyzing street-based "postures forged by social marginalization" (p. 33). The book's second section presents the perspectives of "street-savvy students" (p. 10) first in overview, then in the terms of social and cultural capital as seen through a small group of such students, then through a detailed portrait of one student, Malcolm, with whom the author developed a special relationship and whose story she sees as illustrative and exemplary. The third section presents solutions, examines broader implications, and makes suggestions for both social and educational policy changes.

Dance has attempted to write to a broad audience, and three strengths of the book are its useful—though slightly dated—glossary of "street-savvy terms," its parallel listing of "social science terms and concepts," and its annotated bibliography of Effective Schools and Critical Theory (pp. 149-154). These elements will be especially helpful to graduate students in urban anthropology, sociology, and education. Many readers will also find great appeal in the central portrait of Malcolm in the context of his

neighborhood, his "boyz", his schools, and one gifted teacher who saw through his "tough front" and found ways to reach him.

At a deeper level, Dance's approach left me with some serious reservations. I was troubled by the constant, naïve identification of "urban" with Black, male, and "gangsta," and of Black with African-American. The scholarly usefulness of simple racial identifications is increasingly questioned, particularly in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and public health, and the reality of urban classrooms, in Boston and elsewhere, encompasses a growing diversity of student origins. For recent arrivals from Asia, Central America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and elsewhere, issues of language and culture are central to success in urban schooling, but those concerns are largely absent here. For native-born Latino and Asian students, and Black but not African-American students from Haiti, Cape Verde, and Jamaica, the racial/ethnic equation can play out quite differently from that of African-Americans. And of course half of urban students are female. The world portrayed in *Tough Fronts* is real, vivid, and important to urban education, but it is by no means the only world, and the book's credibility would have been enhanced by greater acknowledgement of this fact.

A scholarly attempt to construct the world of schooling from the point of view of the urban student is admirable and necessary, and must be applauded. Dance's engaged critique of existing scholarship is also thought provoking. Her own research conclusions, however, rest on an extremely limited base, even for ethnographic work—in many cases on the experiences of a single student, Malcolm, with whom she formed a close and protective relationship. The solutions and recommendations arising from this approach include sound but hardly innovative insights: for example, that the students under study greatly benefited from mentoring by caring adults, exemplified here by the work of the Paul Robeson Institute for Positive Self Development at Northeastern University, and that the media frequently vilify urban students by presenting distorted, violence-saturated images of their lives. Similarly, the recommendations for educators are admirable but hardly new: teachers should get to know and value street savvy students in their classes, and learn about their ethnic cultures and the "complex realities and constraints of their inner city lives" (p. 146); and educators should approach statistics on urban crime with skepticism.

For readers familiar with the worlds of urban education, anthropology, or sociology, this book will reinforce much of what they already know, particularly if they favor a critical studies approach. For students, particularly graduate students, or for those new to these fields, the book has much useful material and raises important questions without breaking new ground in answering them.

Anthropology & Education QUARTERLY
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