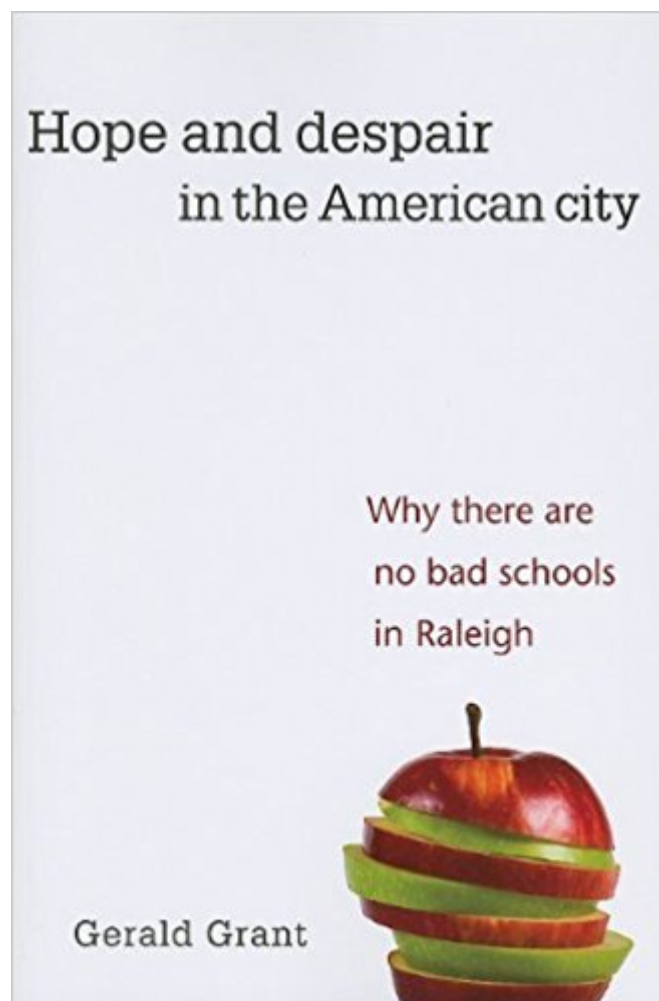




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Hope And Despair In The American City: Why There Are No Bad Schools In Raleigh



Synopsis

In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a 5-4 verdict in *Milliken v. Bradley*, thereby blocking the state of Michigan from merging the Detroit public school system with those of the surrounding suburbs. This decision effectively walled off underprivileged students in many American cities, condemning them to a system of racial and class segregation and destroying their chances of obtaining a decent education. In *Hope and Despair in the American City*, Gerald Grant compares two cities—his hometown of Syracuse, New York, and Raleigh, North Carolina—in order to examine the consequences of the nation's ongoing educational inequities. The school system in Syracuse is a slough of despair, the one in Raleigh a beacon of hope. Grant argues that the chief reason for Raleigh's educational success is the integration by social class that occurred when the city voluntarily merged with the surrounding suburbs in 1976 to create the Wake County Public School System. By contrast, the primary cause of Syracuse's decline has been the growing class and racial segregation of its metropolitan schools, which has left the city mired in poverty. *Hope and Despair in the American City* is a compelling study of urban social policy that combines field research and historical narrative in lucid and engaging prose. The result is an ambitious portrait—sometimes disturbing, often inspiring—of two cities that exemplify our nation's greatest educational challenges, as well as a passionate exploration of the potential for school reform that exists for our urban schools today.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grant (*The World We Created at Hamilton High*) persuasively argues that economically and racially balanced schools are the key to revitalizing declining cities. He compares the problem-ridden public school system of his native Syracuse, N.Y., with the superior schools in Raleigh, N.C., arguing that the disparity exists because the Syracuse school district has remained confined to the core city, while Raleigh merged city and suburbs in 1976, creating the Wake County district. Students are assigned to schools to ensure a healthy mix of children by race and socioeconomic class. Although some parents object to the busing, the majority are reportedly convinced that the results are worth the inconvenience. Whereas nearly half of Syracuse's ninth graders fail to graduate from high school, Wake County students produce high levels of success. Although Raleigh is the prime example here, other Southern schools are similar success stories— a paradoxical twist, as parts of the South, long fiercely resistant to integration, can show the way for struggling Northern cities. The book is a must-read for anyone interested in urban planning, race relations and education reform. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In *Hope and Despair in the American City*, Gerald Grant has written a profound book about American cities and their schools. He combines far-ranging scholarship with lively field research, autobiography, historical narrative, and an expert grasp of demographic data and the winding mazes of legal opinion. The result is a big and ambitious portrait, through the story of two cities, of our nation's greatest educational problems and possibilities for school reform in the metropolitan U.S. today. (Joseph Featherstone, Michigan State University) A penetrating account of two cities and their school systems, one in the Northeast where decline and demographic change have brought difficult problems, and another in the growing South which has turned its socioeconomic challenges into opportunities. Anyone interested in educational reform will have to take account of this valuable analysis of the variable fates of our cities, and their schools. (Nathan Glazer, Harvard University) The book is a must-read for anyone interested in urban planning, race relations and education reform. (Publishers Weekly (starred review) 2009-03-16) Gerald Grant, a professor of education and sociology at Syracuse University, has written a compelling new book— He compares the troubled school system of Syracuse, N.Y., with its thriving similarly sized counterpart in Raleigh, N.C. The difference is that in Raleigh, in 1976, the Wake County Public School system was created to zone the suburbs and inner city together to ensure a continued healthy mix of social classes. (Sandra Tsing Loh New York Times (online) 2009-04-28) The book has the mark of a historian's

well-documented journey. (Tim Simmons News & Observer 2009-05-17) Essential reading not only for his target audience of education reformers but for anyone concerned with the fate of smaller cities.

— Although few know it, we now live with a grand historical irony: Public schools in the South are far more integrated than most in the North, whose cities, especially the 'forgotten' ones, have become ever more doughnutlike. When we consider the failures of busing, we think of the awful mid-'70s wars in Boston.

— Grant's fine book shows there's another way, one keyed to restoring the educational center of metropolitan-wide economic development, if only we can summon the political will to do it. (Catherine Tumber Bookforum 2009-06-01) The author blends his personal experiences with wide-ranging interviews and a dash of research to provide a largely sound analysis of the state of urban education. (Phil Brand Washington Times 2009-05-29) Hope and Despair in the American City is a rare policy book: brief, personal, and flat-out persuasive. Comparing the catastrophically bad school system in Syracuse, where he lives, with the astonishingly successful one in the North Carolina capital, the author quickly alights on a convincing explanation for the disparity. (Daniel Okrent Fortune 2009-06-08) In this perceptive and important new book, Gerald Grant tells a modern tale of two cities—Syracuse, New York, and Raleigh, North Carolina—that took starkly different approaches to improving schools and communities.

— What is astounding—and profoundly disturbing—is that education reform at the national level has basically ignored the type of findings so powerfully outlined in Hope and Despair in the American City. (Richard D. Kahlenberg Washington Monthly 2009-09-01) Something extraordinary has been happening in the [North Carolina's] schools over the past few decades, and the best guide to this experiment is an important new book by Gerald Grant.

— He found that the single biggest factor determining whether you do well at school or not isn't your parents, your teachers, your school buildings or your genes. It was, overwhelmingly, the other kids sitting in the classroom with you.

— If a critical mass of them are hard-working, keen and stick to the rules, you will probably learn.

— Within a decade, Raleigh went from one of the worst-performing districts in America to one of the best. (Johann Hari The Independent 2009-10-16) Gerald Grant's short book tells [its] story very well. It is that rarity among policy tomes: a page-turner. The political calculation that Richard Nixon made in 1971, when he nominated William Rehnquist to the Supreme Court, was borne of his desire to keep Southern and suburban white voters out of the hands of George Wallace and his populist racial appeal—and it saddled America with a Supreme Court whose decisions in the 1970s, specifically on school desegregation, proved evil.

— Grant points out over and over again that the true achievement of Raleigh and of the other metro-school metros is much more about integrating the social classes than it is about

race. (Bruce Fisher Hartford Courant 2010-02-28)

This wonderfully readable book examines the history and sociology of schooling through the lens of socioeconomic integration/segregation. This book is entirely suitable for any college class or community book club concerned with issues of diversity, housing, schooling, or the politics of education; it should be required reading for anyone even contemplating a run for school board. The lessons of Syracuse and Raleigh are still with us today, even if they are largely ignored. An important book that deserves a central place on the shelf of any policymaker, planner, or educator.

Interesting to look up what happened before, what has happened since, with the people mentioned in the book. We need a county-wide school district in Wilkesburg, Allegheny County, PA. I have to re-read the book and think carefully about what's a necessary condition, if not a sufficient condition for "no bad schools."

There are already 7 positive reviews here, mostly worth reading. This book brings up some important and fundamental issues and says intelligent things. It is worth reading. I worked on a Model Cities Education program in San Francisco in 1970 when busing was going on. Busing changed all sorts of things, including our program. It was very unpopular for many reason among many people but it did some good things. It was not the total solution. One brilliant analyst proposed creating large schools in central locations which would replace the need for busing. This was not done. Any attempt at making major improvements in education is I believe a somewhat futile effort. The education system, like the criminal justice system and the health care system reflect the society as a whole with its characteristic problems, inequality, injustice, and incoherence. These systems of symptoms and will not be improved until the general society is improved or changed fundamentally. I am not talking about socialist revolution but a fundamental increase in fairness and equal opportunity and decrease in discrimination and all of the barriers to fairness and equal opportunity. We won't have any real progress in any sphere until we can eliminate the essential corruption at the heart of our society and economy. There are many good people working in the education field and good work being done and this should be continued simultaneous to general efforts to improve our whole society. Good books and other information on education can be found here: mwir-education.blogspot. I create educational websites, Midwest Independent Research.

The city of Syracuse, NY -- as distinct from its lovely suburbs -- provides a small-scale picture of the

social pathologies that beset so many American cities of the Northeast and Midwest. It has an economically depressed urban core, crime-ridden neighborhoods with houses abandoned and vacant, and a school enrollment that is largely poor and minority with low graduation rates and weak performance on standardized tests. Syracuse bills itself as environmentally advanced, the "Emerald City," yet its common council refuses even so cost-free an improvement to its urban environment as banning unsightly billboards along the interstate highways that slice through the city. But that is a small problem compared to the failure of Syracuse schools to educate and graduate its students, a deficit that nearly forces middle-income families with children to live in the suburbs. How did Syracuse and so many other northern cities reach this state of educational (and urban) decay? In contrast, Raleigh, NC has for decades been economically thriving and, most relevantly, successful with its schools, which have high achievement and graduation rates for black as well as white students, for poor as well as middle-class students. Is Raleigh's success a simple consequence of its economic growth? Apparently not since other southern cities with similar growth have not had the same educational success. Professor Grant shows convincingly that much of Raleigh's success stemmed from its willingness to integrate its schools over the entire metropolitan area, city and suburbs. Sociologists of education know well that changing the culture of a school, from ghetto to middle class, is the most important element in school success, in teacher satisfaction, and in producing successful graduates. And the best way to do that is to mix minority students into a predominately middle-class student body. Since urban residence patterns remain segregated by race and economics, this necessarily means busing, a solution some reviewers of this book find unappealing. No doubt there are costs to school integration, but Grant's comparison of Raleigh to Syracuse shows that the benefits are substantial.

Hope and Despair outlines the obstacles that stand between two school districts: Syracuse and Raleigh, and the historical moments that have developed to create the differences. There were two things I really took away from the book that resound in me:¹ The theory of the doughnut hole. Once thriving cities like Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo have had their wealth and populations redistributed to the outskirts, leaving low-income residents that do nothing to maintain or contribute to the cities. Am I generally speaking? Yes, but I also believe the fault falls partially to the cities who cannot seem to organize enough efforts to train the left over population, and drive out the cancers that seem to fill it. Grant claims that socio-economically balanced schools would, and have, cured such cancers.² Socio-economically balanced schools vs. racially balanced schools. This just makes sense. From having grown up in a low-income neighborhood, and school district, I know that it was

not the color of the skin that held some students back. Overall, it was a short book with a great comparison worth reading about. I enjoyed it also because it hit close to home.

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