

BOOK REVIEW

***The Colour of Class: The educational strategies of the Black middle classes*, by Nicola Rollock, David Gillborn, Carol Vincent, and Stephen J. Ball**

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Differences in parental involvement, one of the key topics of academic literature on student success for several decades (Epstein, 1987; McNeal, 1999; Fan and Chen, 2001), have been used to explain unequal educational achievement for some time (Jeynes, 2007; Wilder, 2014). Even though schools often see parents as a monolithic group of atomized individuals (Blackmore and Hutchison, 2010; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2013; Baquedano-Lopez *et al.*, 2013) educational scholars pay special attention to structural forces behind such individual differences, with class (Lareau, 2003; Cucchiara and Horvat, 2009) and race (Crozier, 2001; Hayes, 2012) coming to the fore.

The Colour of Class focuses on the advantages and disadvantages that arise at the intersection of race and class. While Black Caribbean middle-class parents in the UK benefit from their economic, social and cultural capital, their choices are limited by race and racism, because 'To be white and middle class is not the same as being Black and middle class' (1). The focus of the study is on home rather than on schools, so instead of adopting the deficit approach to parents, authors are interested in finding out how Black middle-class parents support their children's learning. This work is guided by the following research questions: 1) What is the role of educational histories of Black Caribbean parents in decisions about their children's education? 2) What strategies are used by parents in interactions with educational institutions? 3) How do Black Caribbean parents view the role of race and class in their children's educational expectations?

The theoretical framework of the study is shaped by the intersection of Pierre Bourdieu's notions of family habitus and different forms of capital with critical race theory (CRT). Habitus and capitals are reflected in the emphasis on parents' educational histories and upbringing, with attention paid not only to available capitals but also to their deployment in social interaction and the possible distinction derived in the process. CRT is represented by the socially constructed concept of race used to understand the flexible and often invisible presence of racism and White privilege.

The introductory chapter provides a brief overview of prior research on Black British middle classes and relevant studies on their African American counterparts. The method of data collection, described at the outset, was based on semi-structured interviews with 62 parents (49 mothers and 13 fathers) who self-identified as Black Caribbean, were employed in professional and managerial occupations, and had at least one child aged between 8 and 18. Chapter 1, 'Race, class status and identification' deals with the tension between the Black identity, based on shared history and solidarity, and middle-class privilege, traditionally associated with being White and middle class. White privilege, isolation from Black working-class friends, and exclusion from White middle-class spaces define their experiences. The complexity of their social position is summed up by one of the participants: 'I am middle class by profession, working class by birth and attitude, and African Caribbean by culture, history and social experience' (30). Memories of working-class childhoods made participants ambivalent

about their current middle-class location. They often view middle-class identity as based on individualism and privilege associated with Whiteness.

The rest of the book is divided between Part I, dedicated to 'The Black middle classes and school' (chapters 2–5) and Part II, on 'The Black middle classes and society' (chapters 6–8). Chapter 2, 'Choosing schools: Searching for "the right mix"', highlights dilemmas faced by Black middle-class parents, who want some combination of racial diversity and class exclusivity for their children's schooling. Two main groups of parents are described here as 'academic choosers', who value academic achievement above all and are often ready to pay for private education, and 'social choosers', insisting on the importance of social learning in diverse classrooms. Children of academic choosers often end up in White-majority schools and suffer from bullying, isolation and feeling out of place. Black middle-class children can be viewed as being the 'wrong type' of middle class, but their parents are usually aware of such risks and ready for sacrifices in return for the academic capital available from high-ranked schools. Conversely, social choosers are prepared to handle the dangers of comprehensive schooling, with its lower academic performance, due to benefits in terms of racial and class diversity similar to that of wider society in contemporary Britain. In other words, greater economic, social, and cultural capitals do not shield parents from anxieties during school choice.

Chapter 3, 'Parents' aspirations and teachers expectations', explores the effect of teachers' low expectations on Black students' achievement. Even though racism is no longer as overt as it was in 1960s–80s, when the book's parents themselves were growing up, teachers now are usually happy with Black students if they cause no trouble, so there is no push to get the highest grades. Black boys are especially placed under increased control and are often viewed as disruptive, dangerous or not academically focused. Chapter 4, 'Race, class, disability and "special educational needs"' tries to explain why Black students are overrepresented in the 'behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties' section of special needs classes. If middle- and upper-class Whites with learning disabilities are offered accommodations, similarly labelled students of colour are routinely taught in segregated classes. At the same time, Black middle-class parents have the class-based tools to read about disability issues, use their networks of professionals, and follow up with schools when problems arise. Nevertheless, in cases of racist bullying schools respond by finding deficit in Black children, suggesting that they might suffer from a learning disability. Even professional parents have a hard time ensuring their children receive appropriate support – for example, an individual education plan. Chapter 5, 'Parents' engagement and involvement in schools', is one of the most informative in the book as it provides strategies that parents use to ensure their children's success in schools. As far as Black parents are often misrecognized (Black and middle class is seen as an unusual combination) they have to apply more 'concerted cultivation' to produce similar academic results. One mother even decided to give up a teaching career to raise her three children, which was obviously helped by her husband's professional job and class resources. Most parents are active in monitoring their children's academic progress, often speak about school and aspirations, participate in parent–teacher associations and arrange extra tutoring. Such practices are not new, neither are they typical of Black parents only. Based on prior literature, including Lareau (2003, 2011, 2015) these are middle-class resources. Parental involvement is spread on a continuum from being 'determined to get the best' and 'watchful and circumspect' to 'those with a fighting chance' and 'hoping for the best'. Interestingly, parents who are more comfortable about being labelled middle class have more control over their children's experiences and show higher aspirations compared to others, who give more freedom for children to choose.

Chapter 6, “‘Making up’ the healthy Black middle-class child’ and Chapter 7, ‘Strategies for survival: Managing race in public spaces’, shift focus to more family- and community-based strategies. Parents were found to foster a positive Black identity and encourage ethnically mixed friendships. Understanding of Black history and injustice are elements of Black identity, which are reinforced by the awareness that there is still no level playing field and that persistence in achieving goals is paramount, regardless of racism. Class resources such as accent and comportment help to resist racism to some extent, but this approach is not unproblematic. While confident middle-class parents consider the ‘Queen’s English’ as proper speaking, working-class Blacks frequently label it as selling out. The book ends with Chapter 8, ‘Continuity and difference across three generations’, which outlines the historic changes in the way Black middle-class parents and their children navigate the education system in the UK. Migrants of the first generation, who arrived in the 1950s and 60s, trusted schools and did not expect institutional racism, because of their unfamiliarity with British education. Respondents in this study belong to the second generation, who came of age in the 1980s. They moved from working class to middle class and now inhabit White spaces. Despite higher social mobility they suffered from low teachers’ expectations and othering. Growing up in twenty-first-century Britain, the third generation is represented by the participants’ school-aged children. They are more confident and have a greater sense of entitlement than their parents, but are sometimes naïve or colour-blind regarding their position in the diverse British population.

In the ‘Conclusion: A colour-blind future?’, the authors situate the Black middle class between the White middle and Black working classes. A distinctive feature of Black middle classes is the value they attach to the ‘moral capital’ (solidarity, memories of working-class experiences) and suspicion of Whiteness as associated with individualism and privilege. They often deploy different forms of capital, but barriers of race (such as teachers’ expectations or reluctant school response to their queries) make their capital less valuable because it is not recognized and accepted by Whites.

The Colour of Class makes two significant contributions to the debate on parenting and inequality, both of them rooted in the intersection of race and class. First, where Lareau viewed class as the key determinant of parenting styles across races, authors of this book highlight the interplay between race and class and show that for Black middle-class parents concerted cultivation serves not only as a social reproduction tool, but also protects against racism by fostering academic achievement and strong Black identity. Further development of the notion of concerted cultivation lies in the fact that it is used both for transmission of the kind of cultural capital valued by dominant groups, and for the disruption of negative stereotypes about Black students.

Second, despite the almost universal embrace of middle-class parenting practices as the most useful for academic achievement, parents who were not born White and middle class have reservations about such practices due to their own identity. Torn between middle-class advantage and Black solidarity, participants in the study exemplify the fact that not all middle-class parents unquestionably endorse individualism and a strong sense of entitlement.

These contributions to the understanding of the race/class intersection in education, concerted cultivation among non-White middle class parents, and the complexity of middle-class belonging, themselves point to lines of future research. It could be fruitful to go beyond the book’s descriptive approach and look at the possibility of using concerted cultivation for social justice and the empowerment of all minority students. Moral capital can also contribute to solidarity among such marginalized groups as the White working classes.

The Colour of Class closes a major gap in research on classed-based parenting and educational inequality by putting the spotlight on the intersection of race and class. This well-written and dynamic book will be enthusiastically welcomed by researchers and graduate students in the field of educational inequalities, minority schooling, and anti-oppressive education. Teacher candidates' understanding of diverse classrooms will also be enhanced by the book.

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