



HAL
open science

Ruth Carbonette Yow, Students of the Dream: Resegregation in a Southern City

Nicolas Gachon

► **To cite this version:**

Nicolas Gachon. Ruth Carbonette Yow, Students of the Dream: Resegregation in a Southern City. *Transatlantica. Revue d'études américaines/American Studies Journal*, 2017, 1 / 2017, s.p. hal-01944764v1

HAL Id: hal-01944764

<https://hal.science/hal-01944764v1>

Submitted on 4 Dec 2018 (v1), last revised 12 Jul 2019 (v2)

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Ruth Carbonette Yow, *Students of the Dream: Resegregation in a Southern City*

Nicolas Gachon

REFERENCES

Ruth Carbonette Yow, *Students of the Dream: Resegregation in a Southern City*, Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2017, 272 pages, ISBN 9780674971905, \$ 39.95, £ 31.95, € 36.00

- 1 With eloquence and passion, Ruth Carbonette Yow presents a challenging picture of school integration in the United States in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Her work adds to the growing scholarship on the issue of resegregation, the re-institution of segregation after the court-ordered desegregation in the 1960s. It was in the late 1980s that researchers really began to identify a distinctive trend toward resegregation in American public schools, a trend that has intensified steadily into the 21st century. Over the years scholars have studied and measured the tendency of white residents to "gerrymander" (Chang, 2017) the borders of school districts integrated by minority families out of fear of "a decrease in property values and school quality" (Kridel, 2010, 744). While a number of works have taken a comprehensive approach to explore the quagmire of race relations in the United States (Chang, 2016), others have adopted a more quantitative approach (Qiu and Hannah-Jones, 2014).
- 2 *Students of the Dream: Race and Inequality in the Resegregating South* stems from Ruth Carbonette Yow's research on historical desegregation, contemporary resegregation, and the future of integrated schooling in the City of Marietta, Georgia. The Marietta City School district was established in 1892 with two main high schools: Marietta High School for white students, and Lemon Street High School for black students. In the late 1960s, the

Marietta City School System merged the two schools, allowing all students in Marietta to attend Marietta High School. The specificity of *Students of the Dream* lies in the more than one hundred interviews conducted over a two-year period with white, black, and Latino graduates across five decades, as well as with teachers, coaches, school board members, education activists, and city officials. *Students of the Dream* is almost a longitudinal study in the sense that the arc from desegregation to integration and resegregation is traced at one same high school over sixty years. The desegregation and resegregation of Marietta's schools is examined through lived experiences, in an approach that melds ethnography and oral history. As stated by Ruth Carbonette Yow herself, "[t]his book is an 'ethnographic history'" (16).

- 3 *Students of the Dream* opens with an introduction that sets the intellectual framework of Yow's research around the issue of school integration: "[t]hrough the history of one Southern city and its flagship high school, [the book] explore[s] integration's role—past, present, and future—in shaping students into citizens who demand more of their schools, their communities, and by extension, their democracy" (5). Yet "just as the rumbling of the Civil Rights Movement shook the foundations of [segregation] in the 1960s, so too does resegregation threaten to unmoor the Marietta High of the twenty-first century" (9). From that standpoint, the book seeks "to look to the desegregation of Marietta high in 1964 and trace its trajectory toward resegregation in the twenty-first century" (9).
- 4 After the intellectual framework provided by the book's introduction, chapter 1, "Blue Devil Pride: Marietta Football in the Long Integration Era," sets the real-life context of Ruth Carbonette Yow's study of resegregation through the case Marietta High School. It is arguably the real introduction of the book, based on the interviews of numerous black and white graduates about the importance and meaning of football culture in the desegregation process: "[f]ootball had always been an arena for negotiating identity and status, and after desegregation, black players had a stake in that formerly all-white social calculus at MHS" (25); "[w]hite graduates testify that football built bridges across race and class difference, even as they insist that there were no difference to bridge" (26). In that sense, such testimonies as that of coach James "Friday" Richards, whose "life and career follow the arc of integration" (20), are very significant. Coach Richards "spent all but six years of his adult life at Marietta High School; a black graduate of 1972, he returned to coach at MHS in 1979 and served as head coach from 1995 until 2010" (20-21).
- 5 Chapter 2, "Fifty Years of 'Freedom': School Choice and Structural Inequality in Marietta High Schools," deals with the period extending from 1954 to 2004 and focuses on the issue of school choice, which Ruth Carbonette Yow describes as "a last-ditch attempt at evading Brown", denouncing the fact that "[s]eventy-five percent of school districts in the South adopted freedom of choice plans in the mid-sixties because such plans followed the letter of the law but led to a mere trickle of black students into white schools" (43). The chapter comprises two case studies: that of West Side Elementary, one that illustrates the fact that "[c]hoice as a dominating ideal in the school system and in [American] culture naturalizes the prioritizing of the individual over the group, the family's interests over those of the community" (56), and the success stories of Latino graduates at Marietta High School (Diana Rios, who was admitted to Kennesaw State University, and Lauren Garcia, who ended up at a private university in Kentucky). Yow describes how all "minority" students are impacted by the desegregation dynamics in spite of the supposedly desegregating force of school choice: "[a]lthough high-income families bring much needed resources,

they also want public education on their terms—that is, tailored around the interests of their children rather than those of a diverse group of students” (63).

- 6 Chapter 3, “Some Kinds of Blue: Tracking at Marietta High,” exposes tracking, i.e., the assigning of students to a curricular track, to argue that “[t]here is perhaps no greater betrayal of the legacy of *Brown v. Board of Education* than educational disenfranchisement of black students in order to make desegregation more palatable for whites” (74). Tracking is described as “a mechanism that bestow[s] further advantages on already privileged, high-achieving students and condemn[s] low-income minority students to the academic dregs,” as “a regression to the unequal opportunities of the pre-*Brown* era” (75). This dimension is illustrated by the story of Tiffany Turner’s family in a section entitled “The Jim Crow Present” (78-65), then in “Betraying Brown to Staunch Resegregation: The Paradoxes of the [International Baccalaureate]” (85-101). Ruth Carbonette Yow is very critical of the International Baccalaureate: “[a]t Marietta High, the tracking of high-achieving white students may be detrimental to community, but the tracking of struggling students of color threatens community *and* the success of the student” (91). The International Baccalaureate, a United Nations-endorsed curriculum, “was brought into existence in Marietta to stop white flight,” in the words of Ken Sprague, a teacher interviewed by Ruth Carbonette Yow, who “assesse[s] the IB program as yet another disenfranchisement of Marietta’s black students” (87). The title of the final section of Chapter 3 gives fuller sense of the advocacy inherent to Yow’s work: “Contemplating the Master’s Tools: Curriculum, Community, and What the IB Could Be” (101-113).
- 7 Chapter 4, “The New Integrators: Latino Students,” relies on “Latino Students’ Visions of Revisions of Citizenship” (130) to show how politics in the United States has failed the integration progress: “[t]he Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind Act and President Obama’s Race to the Top [...] have their parallel in neoliberal economic policies of deregulation, privatization, and contraction of the social safety net”; “market-oriented education reform—embodied in federal policies and flourishing across in local districts—does not prioritize the struggles of marginalized students or the formulation of creative and progressive policies that might bring them greater justice and opportunity” (119). This final chapter contains stern condemnations of what is presented as the under-achievement of political institutions in the United States: “[i]t is through the ‘stolen’ benefits of public education that undocumented children discover the meaning of citizenship, like a photographic negative—taking shape in the dark room of classes, clubs, sports, and college applications—that proves for certain their place outside the frame” (137).
- 8 *Students of the Dream* ends with a conclusion entitled “Reclaiming Brown: Integration Is Not a Policy Goal - It’s a Movement” (153), calling for a collective endorsement of the integration issue: “[r]esegregation is a numerical, demographic reality in Marietta and many other cities and suburbs across the county. Resegregation is also a cultural movement, a kind of test in a test-obsessed era, for communities and for schools and city leaders”; “[r]esisting resegregation is about memory as much as about school reform policy” (153).
- 9 *Students of the Dream: Resegregation in a Southern City* is a must-read for anyone interested in the complex issue of racial integration and desegregation in the United States, and in American public education at a time when non-white students outnumber whites nationally in public schools. The book is well-written and Ruth Carbonette Yow’s perspectives are all the more interesting as she herself grew up in Cobb County, Georgia,

and watched the shifts he describes from afar as a private school student. The advocacy inherent to the book never verges on the polemical. The book is first a foremost a fascinating research work whose study of the arc from desegregation to integration and resegregation through the lived experience of young people in classrooms, extracurricular activities, sports, etc. is extremely telling.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHANG, Alvin, "School segregation didn't go away. It just evolved," *Vox*, 27 July 2017, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/7/27/16004084/school-segregation-evolution> (last accessed on February 1st, 2018).

CHANG, Jeff, *We Gon' Be Alright. Notes on Race and Resegregation*, New York (NY), Picador, 2016.

QIU, Yue and Nikole HANNAH-JONES, "A National Survey of School Desegregation Orders," ProPublica research, 23 December 2014, <http://projects.propublica.org/graphics/desegregation-orders> (last accessed on February 1st, 2018).

TALIAFERRO BASZILE, Denise, "Resegregation of School," in KRIDEL, Craig, ed., *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies*, Thousand Oaks (CA), Sage, 2010, 744-745. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412958806.n392>, last accessed on February 1st, 2018.

INDEX

Subjects: Recensions

AUTHORS

NICOLAS GACHON

Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3