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### Review of Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship

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*Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship*

Clif Stratton

Oakland: University of California Press, 2016

288 pages

In *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship*, Clif Stratton bridges two fields of American history that are rarely in conversation: U.S. empire and American schooling. Until recently, historians have kept these topics separate; histories of American education rarely reach outside geographic boundaries, while U.S. empire studies only allow schooling to have a bit part in the overall narrative. Stratton's work opens an overdue dialogue between the two histories to illuminate how schooling and empire work in tandem. He argues American schools in the U.S. and in overseas colonies created "multiple unequal paths to 'good citizenship'" which benefited U.S. economic imperial goals both at home and abroad (1). Schooling and empire were intimately bound, according to Stratton. As he writes, "Rather than treat colonialism as a process tangential to or apart from public schooling in the United States, it needs to be understood as a central ideological, narrative, and organizational force in schools at home as well as abroad (7)."

Where Stratton locates colonial schooling is one of the most innovative contributions in *Education for Empire*. With a time period focused on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, overseas territories might be expected to be the only sites of schooling analyzed. However, Stratton enlarges the definition of colonialism to examine education on the West Coast with Asian immigrants, black education in the South, European immigrants in New York, and Mexicans in the Southwest, in addition to Hawaii and the Puerto Rico. These inter- and intra-national comparisons of imperial schooling allow Stratton to make an argument about how

education worked to solidify white racial nationalism at the turn of the century, allowing some groups in and leaving others outside the path to citizenship.

The case studies are the heart of *Education for Empire*, yet Stratton curiously chooses to open with a discussion about curriculum and the role of geography, history, and civics in creating the notion that the U.S. is not a colonizing nation. Though this chapter is interesting, it does not strengthen the argument and could be the beginning of another study focused solely on the topic of colonial curriculum and its role in defining citizenship. The next chapter delves into schooling segregation wars in California against the Chinese and Japanese, which allowed white Californians to strengthen the “bonds of white nationhood” in the early twentieth century (77). Next, Stratton analyzes the Hawaiian schooling for Asian immigrants who were not excluded, as in California, but endured vocational education that sought to create a workforce suited to plantation labor (106). Stratton effectively connects to black southerners’ schooling experience in chapter 4, as industrialists and leaders of the New South used manual education to limit African-Americans economic and social mobility (126). These examples are contrasted with the path set for European immigrants in the East, however. Schooling for these subjects, though still hegemonic, sought to Americanize Southern and Eastern Europeans into white citizens (147). Finally, Stratton compares the effects of schooling on the populations in the American Southwest and Puerto Rico. Stratton argues, “While both groups possessed legal claims to either birthright or naturalized citizenship, the full exercise of citizenship generated through public education remained elusive,” tempered by economic imperial concerns (187).

*Education for Empire* is truly innovative for bringing these case studies together to bridge the fields of education and empire. Scholars and educators looking to understand how colonial schooling projects have impacted national identity in the past and present will find Stratton’s

balanced approach useful. He illuminates both sides of the narrative very effectively, focusing not only on the U.S. schooling imposition but also colonial subjects' reaction and resistance to domination in education. *Empire for Education* suggests a mutually constitutive force between U.S. schooling organization and colonial expansion, but more can be done to unpack the historical connections and flows between the metropole and colonies. Like Stratton, scholars in this field can continue to bring these two topics together by more closely examining the reciprocal impact empire had in building the American system and organization of schooling in the twentieth century. *Empire for Education* is an important step in uncovering the colonial haunting still present in our current education system today.