

# A Good Investment?: Philanthropy and the Marketing of Race in an Urban Public School

Amy Brown



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Select students and teachers worked the room at a fundraising event for a New York City public high school Amy Brown calls College Preparatory Academy. It was their job to convince wealthy attendants that College Prep, with its largely minority and disadvantaged student body and its unusually high rate of graduation and college acceptance, was a worthy investment. To this end, students and teachers tried to seem needy and deserving, hoping to make supporters feel generous, important, and not threatened. How much, Brown asks, does competition for financing in urban public schools depend on marketing and perpetuating poverty in order to thrive? And are the actors in this drama deliberately playing up stereotypes of race and class?

A Good Investment? offers a firsthand look behind the scenes of the philanthropic approach to funding public education—a process in which social change in education policy and practice is aligned with social entrepreneurship. The appearance of success, equity, or justice in education, Brown argues, might actually serve to maintain stark inequalities and inhibit democracy. Her book shows that models of corporate or philanthropic charity in education can in fact reinforce the race and class hierarchies that they purport to alleviate.

As their voices reveal, the teachers and students on the receiving end of such a system can be critically conscious and ambivalent participants in a school's racialized marketing and image management. Timely and provocative, this nuanced work exposes the unintended consequences of an education marketplace where charity masquerades as justice.



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