

False Starts: The Segregated Lives of Preschoolers

Casey Stockstill

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Sociologist Casey Stockstill's *False Starts* exposes how racial inequality in the US begins in preschool.

Stockstill spent two years observing the daycare provided by two top-ranked preschools in Madison, Wisconsin: a public Head Start preschool and a private preschool. Launched in 1965, Head Start was created with the intention of providing affordable, high-quality daycare and health check-ups to children from low-income families. Today, it enrolls more than one million children each year and works to create equal opportunities with the purpose of eradicating poverty. Still, against the backdrop of the checkered history of daycare in the US and contextualized within state-of-the-art sociological research on the development of young children, racism is revealed to have affected access to daycare from the beginning. Indeed, Stockstill shows that preschools continue to uphold socioeconomically based racial segregation.

This is a thorough account of the history and current state of US preschools. The case studies are conducted from the perspective of the children, adding credibility to the results. And the historical background makes the labyrinthine course of events easy to understand. Further, through the efficient use of juxtaposition, the disparities between the two preschools are demonstrated. Most children at Head Start schools are children of color affected by systemic racism; in contrast, most children in private preschools are white and from financially secure families. And the health check-ups provided by Head Start hide a racialized claim: parents of color are believed unable to provide their children with adequate care. As a consequence, Stockstill suggests that the premises of Head Start, combined with the psychological effects on children growing up in poverty, entrench racial and socioeconomic inequities rather than combat them.

False Start is an enlightening study of the promises and obstacles of US preschools.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (November / December 2023)

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