



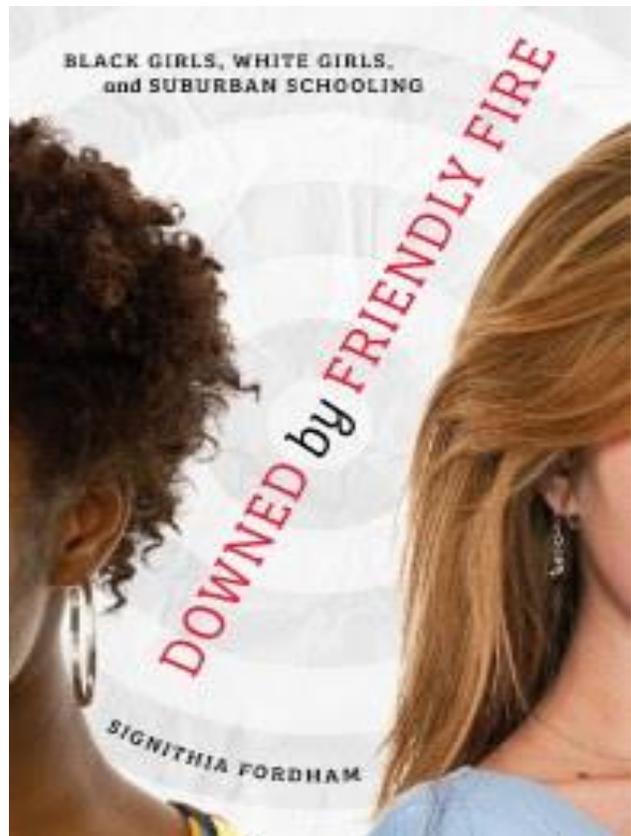
Fordham, S. (2016). *Downed by friendly fire: Black girls, White girls, and suburban schooling*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

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In recent years, the ways in which Black girls experience schooling have gained greater attention. Particularly, the ways in which Black female students are being criminalized and policed by policies, societal beliefs, and social norms that results in their marginalization leading to academic and intellectual delay in schools in comparison to that of their White counterparts is of concern for educators and researchers alike. While there are various anthropological studies that focus on race in education or gender in education, few studies interrogate race and gender dynamics with a singular focus on the educative experiences of Black girls. *Downed by Friendly Fire: Black Girls, White Girls, and Suburban Schooling* provides a provocative and unique way to understanding violence and the ways that it exists between Black girls and White girls in school. Written for both teachers and researchers, Dr. Signithia Fordham has eloquently introduced a phenomenon, symbolic violence, that will resonate with many readers and force a reconceptualization of how violence is viewed,



defined, and the ways in which we respond in schools.

To study Black girls are to study their lived experiences and to center their voices. Utilizing a sophisticated blend of ethnographic and narrative methodologies, Dr. Fordham examines the day-to-day practices of “normality” enacted by female youth in school while interrogating the ubiquities and pervasiveness of female-to-female violence. This review begins with an exploration of the fundamental purpose of the study, information about the participants, and the context of the study. A further look at the central arguments of the author, the study and its impact, and the demand for a different way of schooling is examined. Lastly, demands for change and recommendations for teacher and researchers are offered.

In *Downed by Friendly Fire*, Dr. Signithia Fordham explores the racialized and gender violence that occurs among female youth in suburban schooling. She intentionally and deliberately (re)centers the voices of her subjects through ethnographic narrative accounts of their individual but collective stories as a way to speak to rather than for the girls. Fordham’s study on the gender relations of adolescent youth emerged out of an urgent need to examine the intersectionalities of race and gender and its effects on achievement gaps mediated by this unnamed notion of violence, symbolic violence. While this book is not about individuals or their behaviors, Fordham’s study seeks to interrogate hegemonic femininity and the ways that Black girls experience violence when they do not perform according to societal demands and expectations. Often labeled as aggressive when choosing nonconformity, historically, Black girls in schools are constantly tasked with trying to negotiate their complex relationships between self, situation, subject and audience (Waters & Conway, 2007). Fordham further seeks to uncover how cultural characteristics play a role in the marginalization of Black

female students masked by the essentialism of sisterhood.

Fordham’s anthropological expertise renders her highly qualified to conduct a study of this magnitude with integrity and fidelity. As a prominent researcher and contributor of the framework ‘Acting White’, Fordham continues to advocate and advance the conversations surrounding Black children and their educational achievement. Her research interests continue to include (but are not limited to) race, gender and identity politics. Dr. Signithia Fordham currently serves as an Associate Professor at the University of Rochester where she is working on multiple research projects and manuscripts.

Fordham’s central premise of the book is to expand the meaning of violence using theoretical arguments that privileges words, language, and images. The three theoretical notions of excavation, resuscitation, and rehabilitation of violence provides the medium in which Fordham centers the normality of symbolic violence illuminating the misrecognized ways girls are rewarded and punished for choosing conformity or nonconformity in a hegemonic system of inequality. While highlighting the nonphysical violence that is present but damaging, Fordham calls attention to the everyday practices of masked niceties coined friendly fire.

Divided into three distinct sections, *Downed by Friendly Fire* adds to the public discourse about what it means to be violent and female and what it means to be a successful female in schools today. In chapters one and two, Fordham looks at gender specific violence while arguing that losing is rewarded amongst females. She purports that competitiveness is hidden and masked. It is in this chapter that the author ‘excavates’ race to show that while it is socially constructed, it is a powerful category that brings about potential enacted violence. It is during these chapters that Fordham details the intricacies of the

study and her subjectivities. The second section of the book, chapters three through seven, consists of five condensed narratives of her subjects – 20 teenage female participants. It is through these narratives that Fordham attempts at resuscitation of race is evident. Through the female narratives, Fordham highlights how female aggression, bullying, and competition is often misrecognized in schools because it is not physical violence. While privilege and power accompanies whiteness, Fordham unearths the violence experienced by Black female students masked by niceties enacted by their White counterparts. The third and final section of the book, the conclusion, the author revisits the ethnographic data and presents an argument for the need to rehabilitate our understanding and meaning of violence to include those often misrecognized forms labeled as symbolic violence. Issues of identity are embedded in symbolic violence as females are rewarded for embracing this practice.

We all are constantly developing, redefining who we are. Our experiences, our

schooling, the texts we read, the company we keep are all contributing factors to who we ultimately are in that moment and space. These factors become etched in our beings and shape how we view ourselves and the world in which we interact. It is through these things that we “become”. To lay a solid foundation for our girls and allow them the space and conditions to unapologetically, authentically, and organically become who they are can have profound effects on how they view, progress, interact, and navigate school, relationships, and ultimately their lives.

*Downed by Friendly Fire* will become a text that demands reconceptualization of what we come to know as violence in schools. It requires a closer look at the intersections of race and gender violence while holding one accountable in the ways that privilege and power are enacted systematically. *Downed by Friendly Fire* is a book that I recommend to teachers, administrators, and researchers alike. The criminalization and push out of Black girls in our schools is an epidemic that demands attention and change.

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## About the Reviewer

**Kristy Girardeau** is a third year doctoral student in the Department of Language and Literacy at Georgia State University. Her research centers on Black girl literacies, identity development, writing, and social justice education. As a two-time award recipient of the National Council of Teachers of English teacher of distinction award and executive board member of the Georgia Council of Teachers of English, Kristy's commitment to advocating for and (re)centering the voices of Black girls is evident. Before entering the university, she worked as an elementary school teacher in an international school in Georgia.



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