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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

Angel Park

Patricia Kokinos
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Even though they claim to support ideas for change, people often resist innovations that might disrupt their professional lives. This contradiction seems especially prevalent in public education, where those who try to implement new programs designed to improve children's opportunities to learn often find themselves fighting strenuous opposition. *Angel Park* describes a school district where this kind of struggle results in tragic consequences.

Connie Demetrios returns to her home town in the Northeast to serve as supervisor of English curriculum for the local schools. She narrates a story of political and psychological infighting driven by a self-serving school board president. Joe Clay, the new superintendent brags about grandiose plans for school reform but concentrates instead on cultivating his dapper appearance. His assistant superintendent, Maureen McCarthy, is determined to implement curriculum changes that will help African-American students achieve educational parity with their white classmates. Various supporting characters and plot devices enrich the book's content.

Patricia Kokinos has twenty-five years of experience in public education as a teacher and school administrator. She holds master's degrees in English and educational administration and writes and speaks publicly about the need for educational change.

As the school year starts, Joe and Maureen discuss the innovations in instructional methodology that he wants her to orchestrate. "They agreed on one thing: Cornwall High School could not go on with the obvious academic segregation that was presently in place….What they disagreed about was everything else, especially how to change that situation," the author writes.

Maureen enlists the help of Connie, who discovers a flaw at certain elementary schools that prevents disadvantaged students from learning to read. They devise bold plans to correct the problem. Kokinos explains, "The project of uncovering the real reading scores at the downtown neighborhood schools took on a huge shadow…[Connie] had become convinced, like Maureen, that revealing the truth would set the whole school district free."

The author introduces new chapters effectively by comparing concepts of the wider world to events unfolding at Cornwall High School. She writes, "Chaos theory had already been explained to the public by then as that image of the flutter of a butterfly's wing in China eventually affecting weather events in the Congo. But that rather benign interpretation did not take into account the wild swings from hostility to humble pleading that people at the high school experienced."

The plot unfolds with suspenseful action that holds the reader's interest. However, the book's coda describes the narrator's apprehension and inner conflicts about her place in an educational system that so steadfastly resists change. This conclusion detracts from the story's true denouement and could be shortened for greater dramatic effect.

Readers will enjoy the intrigue of this well-told story that reflects the real problems public school educators face throughout the United States.
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