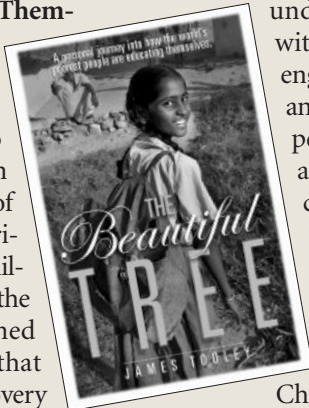


BOOK ALERT

The Beautiful Tree: A Personal Journey into How the World's Poorest People Are Educating Themselves.

James Tooley (CATO Institute).

James Tooley, the eminent British scholar who introduced the Western world to the thousands of “six dollar a month” private schools that serve millions of poor families in the third world, has penned an important book that recounts his own discovery of these schools, why they’re important, and what lessons might be drawn from them.



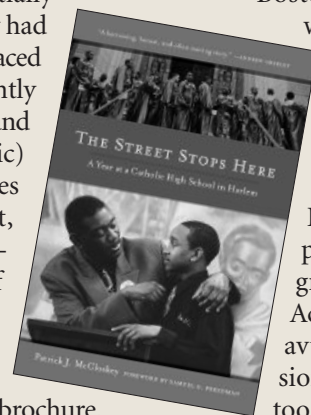
Most educators, international development experts, and aid organizations assume that education for all but the rich can only be provided by government, especially in poor regions. Tooley proves them wrong and isn’t afraid to note the failure of public schooling in many such places. With the World Bank documenting that in vast tracts of India on any given day, one public-school classroom in five has no teacher present, parents craving an education for their kids must look to other providers. In India, but also in China, Africa, the Philippines, and beyond, Tooley found private entrepreneurs educating enormous numbers of children at modest fees that are within the reach of most families, and in schools that typically best the government’s offerings in integrity, efficiency, and quality. “In the fissures of crumbling public education systems,” he writes, “a vibrant and confident education industry is beginning to emerge. It is serving the poor as well as

the rich. It is bringing much higher standards than appear possible under public education. And with judicious support, it can engage to meet the needs of all, and can innovate through competition to improve teaching and learning and expand the curriculum, in ways that are unimaginable under public systems....My hunch...is that the educational enterprise will go from strength to strength in India and China, and in Africa too. And if for India, why not for us?” Why not, indeed?

The Street Stops Here: A Year at a Catholic High School in Harlem.

Patrick J. McCloskey (University of California Press).

With inner-city Catholic schools closing by the dozens due to financial pressures, this timely book offers a vivid reminder of what is being lost. Journalist Patrick McCloskey spent the 1999–00 school year embedded at Rice High School, an all-boys school in Harlem whose initially white student body had long since been replaced by the predominantly African American (and mostly non-Catholic) young men it serves today. The result, unlike many in-the-trenches accounts of high-performing urban schools, will not be confused with an advertising brochure. McCloskey candidly, if empathetically,



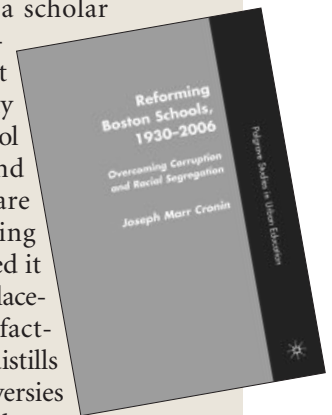
describes the challenges the school faces and its occasional failures alongside its undeniable successes. But no one who reads his book will remain untroubled by news that yet another Catholic school has shuttered its doors.

Reforming Boston Schools, 1930–2006: Overcoming Corruption and Racial Segregation.

Joseph M. Cronin (Palgrave).

No one has a better feel for the political history of the Boston schools than Joseph Cronin, a scholar and administrator who has spent a lifetime acutely observing the school system’s life and times, fully aware that its governing committee treated it mainly as a job-placement firm. His fact-packed account distills the racial controversies of the sixties and concludes with two full chapters on Boston’s teachers and their union with the following assessment:

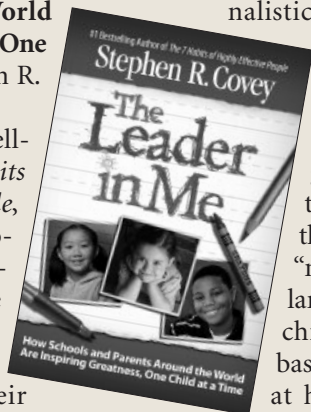
“Teacher negotiations generally retard the pace of urban school reform.” The book’s best line exemplifies the dry humor sprinkled throughout: “New Boston school custodians were paid as much as teachers and grew better paid with seniority.” Accordingly, the tone is more an avuncular chronicle than a passionate critique. Cronin has seen too many education disasters over the decades to become too disturbed



about Boston's current situation. "The Boston schools have work to do but are on the path to revival," he assures us, not very convincingly.

The Leader in Me: How Schools and Parents Around the World Are Inspiring Greatness, One Child at a Time. Stephen R. Covey (Free Press).

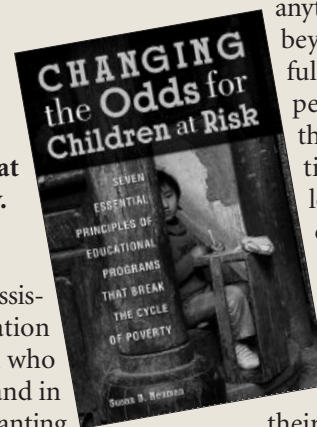
Steven R. Covey, best-selling author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, wrote this book to promote the efforts of principals around the globe who are preparing children for the 21st century by organizing their schools around Covey's "7 Habits," a sort of accidental comprehensive school-reform model created by fans. This book tells the story of the first such school, launched by Muriel Summers, an elementary-school principal from North Carolina. Summers believes (as does Covey) that factual knowledge is no longer the key to success, and that the 21st century will reward those who are creative and have strong people skills. She wanted to run a school that would teach kids what Covey calls leadership: taking responsibility for their actions, working with others more effectively, managing their time more efficiently, and doing the right thing. Summers surveyed teachers, parents, and the local business community and found that these basic life skills were what everyone most wanted kids to get out of school, not academics, so she changed



the theme of her school to leadership, 7 Habits-style. Summers's school (like the other leadership-themed schools described in the book) is a funny mix of progressive (lots of teamwork and decisionmaking activities) and paternalistic (students learn catchy songs emphasizing the 7 Habits and keep notebooks, graphs, charts, and diagrams showing their goals and the progress they are making toward them). Like the founders of "no excuses" schools, Covey laments the fact that today's children are not learning basic character and life skills at home or in church. But while today's high-achieving schools for low-income students (Knowledge Is Power Program [KIPP], for instance) are passionate about cultivating both character and traditional academic skills, schools built around the 7 Habits are focused on training confident kids who are good at planning, goal setting, and decisionmaking.

Changing the Odds for Children at Risk: Seven Essential Principles of Educational Programs That Break the Cycle of Poverty.

Susan B. Neuman (Praeger Publishers). Susan Neuman is a former assistant U.S. secretary of education in the Bush administration who has enjoyed a bit of fame (and in some circles, infamy) for recanting her support for No Child Left



Behind. In this book, as in other venues, she argues that not only is that law an imperfect piece of legislation, but its target is off the mark. If policymakers really want to close achievement gaps between rich and poor students, she writes, they should stop focusing on schools and start paying attention to what happens before children ever get to kindergarten. "Good schools can go a long way toward helping poor children achieve better, but the fact remains that educational inequity is rooted in economic problems and social pathologies too deep to be overcome by schools alone." Such rhetoric will cheer fans of the "Broader, Bolder Approach to Education," a manifesto published last year by the liberal Economic Policy Institute, which Neuman has signed and promoted. But the book itself doesn't so much argue against school reform as highlight promising interventions for the under-five set, from prenatal care for poor mothers to rigorous preschool programs. As such, it doesn't offer

anything particularly fresh, beyond Neuman's cheerful (and sometimes compelling) descriptions of the best of these initiatives in action. There's a lot of do-gooding going on, no doubt, but nobody (including Neuman) has figured out how to bring these programs to scale and maintain their efficacy.