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Book Review

Beyond bad apples: Teacher education for police-free schools, by Hannah Carson Baggett, Harvard Education Press, 2026, 224 pages, \$35.00, paperback. ISBN 9798895570395.

Review by: Lauren Midgett, *University of Connecticut*

Persistent calls for the radical reimagining of school safety, underscored by the visible harms of school-based law enforcement, have generated urgency around the role of teacher preparation in disrupting carceral systems. Meeting this moment requires educators to confront and unlearn “carceral logics” (Baggett, 2026, p. 1), deeply embedded assumptions that equate surveillance and punishment with safety. For preservice and early-career teachers, this task is particularly complex, as they must navigate both their own socialization into these logics and the institutional realities of schooling. In *Beyond Bad Apples: Teacher Education for Police-Free Schools*, Hannah Carson Baggett (2026) positions teacher education as a critical site for intervening in the school-prison nexus, arguing that preparation programs can cultivate abolitionist approaches to discipline grounded in relationality, care, and accountability.

The book is organized into seven chapters that blend scholarly analysis with narrative and practice-oriented contributions. Its structure reflects a deliberate effort to democratize knowledge production, incorporating case studies, co-authored chapters with teachers and youth justice scholars, and reflective activities designed for use in teacher education contexts. This multiplicity of voices, which span from preservice teachers, K–12 students, to veteran educators, strengthens the text’s commitment to centering those most directly impacted by school policing while also offering concrete entry points for pedagogical application.

A key contribution of the text lies in its historical exploration of policing in schools. Baggett traces the roots of school-based law enforcement to early 20th-century efforts to manage so-called “juvenile delinquency,” as well as to suppress student activism during desegregation.

By connecting this history to more recent justifications, such as the “War on Drugs” and fears of school violence, the book exposes how dominant narratives of safety obscure the harms inflicted on students who are routinely oppressed. This historical framing effectively destabilizes the possible perceived inevitability of school policing.

Central to the book’s argument is the positioning of teacher education as a site of both complicity and possibility. Baggett contends that educators often function as de facto agents of the carceral state through practices of surveillance, discipline, and referral. In response, the text calls on teacher preparation programs to move beyond training based in carceral logics and instead engage preservice teachers in sustained critical reflection on their own beliefs about safety, authority, and student behavior. This intervention is a significant shift from much of the existing

literature, which tends to focus on policy reform or student outcomes rather than the pedagogical formation of educators themselves.

Importantly, the book does not stop at critique but offers a range of alternatives to policing grounded in abolitionist frameworks. These include practices of transformative justice, community accountability, and relationship-centered approaches to conflict. The inclusion of end-of-chapter tools, such as reflective exercises prompting educators to audit their own disciplinary assumptions or analyze school-based data, provides tangible strategies for translating theory into practice. At times, however, the text could further elaborate how such practices might be sustained within the structural constraints of teacher education programs, including accreditation requirements and high-stakes accountability systems.

By bridging abolitionist theory with the everyday practices of teacher preparation, *Beyond Bad Apples* (Baggett, 2026) offers a necessary intervention in the scholarship of the school-to-prison nexus. The book's primary strength lies in its uncompromising focus on disrupting carceral logics, as Baggett reframes school policing not merely as a policy issue, but as a pedagogical problem rooted in how educators are trained to interpret and respond to student

behavior. In doing so, Baggett extends critical conversations within the field by examining how these logics are reproduced through routine instructional practices; yet, the tone remains generative, emphasizing what educators can build rather than only what must be dismantled, providing readers with actionable pathways forward.

This book will be particularly valuable for teacher educators, preservice teachers, and educational leaders seeking to align their practice with commitments to abolition, equity and justice. Its central contribution lies in its insistence that transforming schools requires more than removing police; it demands a fundamental rethinking of how educators are prepared to understand safety, authority, and care. Ultimately, Baggett's work challenges the field to confront whether teacher education can continue to operate within carceral paradigms while claiming to support the well-being of all students.

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