



Street Life: Poverty, Gangs, and a Ph.D.

Victor M. Rios

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Victor Rios grew up in Oakland, California in a single parent household, in poverty and on welfare. He joined a gang at the age of thirteen and by age sixteen he had dropped out of school and had been incarcerated several times. Having witnessed the tragic murder of his best friend by gang rivals, Victor hit a critical juncture in life at which point he made the decision to transform. With the support of educators and mentors, Victor redirected his attitude towards life, and returned to school to eventually acquire a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. Dr. Rios uses his personal story, and 10 years of research experience, to discuss how personal and institutional "illusions" contribute to academic failure. He speaks about how society gives young people little choice but to use their "attitude" to solve their problems and how this strategy often leads to detrimental consequences. He discusses practical pathways to transformation relevant to the lives of students. Dr. Rios speaks about his own personal transformation by taking advantage of the support that teachers and programs provided him and discusses how these efforts can be replicated. This book is written to speak to a young adult audience—those young people who live on the margins, who are often assigned texts that do not represent their lived reality, their struggles, or their experiences. Educators and youth workers can use each of the short chapters in this book as tools for discussing complicated social issues like abuse, youth violence, delinquency, fatalism, opportunity, stratification, poverty, resilience, college, positive role models, healthy choices, and personal transformation.

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