

## Book Reviews

*The Great White North? Exploring Whiteness, Privilege and Identity in Education.*

Paul R. Carr and Darren E. Lund (Eds.).

Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2007, 244 pages.

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Most anti-racism educators are familiar with the body of literature that examines students' and teachers' resistance to critical self-reflection relating to White privilege. Those whose work explores resistance to anti-racism education understand it to be at least in part an intellectual maneuver that results in the failure of White students and teachers to engage with their own racial identities. In this edited volume, Carr and Lund create an opportunity to extend the work relating to the pedagogy of anti-racism education. They do this by interrogating how educators' failure to engage in critical self-reflective practice runs the risk of their being complicit in perpetuating racist structures, including the institutionalization of White privilege.

One of the pedagogical challenges faced by anti-racism and anti-oppression educators is how to address Whiteness both conceptually and as an embodiment of a certain set of privileges. *The Great White North?* provides the reader with a series of reflections and empirical research that taken together constitute a framework from which the educator may begin to formulate conceptual and pedagogical responses to taken-for-granted epistemological standpoints. Their framework provides anti-racism educators and scholars with a fresh perspective on reformulating curricula and teaching practices that might then challenge the misrepresentation of sites of education as "peaceful and harmonious" (Charania, Chapter 16, p. 211).

Carr and Lund (2007) have selected works that reflect classroom experiences and philosophical reflections that begin to address the question "How does Whiteness function both in general, and in the Canadian context in particular?" (p. 3). The book is divided into five sections: Conceptualizing Whiteness; Whiteness and Indigenous Peoples; Deconstructing and Developing White Identity; Learning, Teaching and Whiteness; and The Institutional Weight of Whiteness. In total there are 17 chapters, of which 15 are by Canadian scholars. It is important to note that two of the contributors are community activists. Each chapter concludes with a set of questions for reflection. These will be useful for teachers practicing in a range of contexts from the university classroom to informal, community-based environments.

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Many of the contributors use postcolonial theory as a starting point from which to trace and explore Whiteness and how it contributes to structural racism. Although a great deal of the book relates particularly to preservice teacher education, it is also relevant for those working in social justice movements or in community education.

Several themes predominate in this work, three of which I highlight. The first deals with making Whiteness visible through what Solomon et al. (chapter 12) refer to as “critical Whiteness studies” (p. 163). The second theme relates to the problem of, and possible responses to, unexamined complicity. That is, this theme addresses how to support the conscientization of White (and racialized) students, teachers, and policymakers so that they might become aware of how meritocracy and liberal notions of individualism enable the perpetuation of structural inequity and racism. Finally, various contributors examine the myth of Canadian multiculturalism. These thematic strands are woven together to demonstrate that there exists in Canada a commonsense (in the Gramscian understanding of that term) understanding of Whiteness as the norm. *The Great White North?* is concerned with revealing the relational and structural mechanism that perpetuates the invisibility of Whiteness and with providing both analytic entry points and pedagogical possibilities for researchers and teachers.

James (chapter 9) points out that the residue of White colonialism has resulted in White students, educators, and policymakers avoiding and evading the marginalized presence of racialized Others because they fail to view Whiteness as a racial order, thereby precluding a raced analysis of White people’s success. According to Frideres (chapter 3), “Whites do not recognize or acknowledge their unearned racial privileges because Whiteness operates by being invisible, so ubiquitous and entrenched as to appear natural and normative” (p. 45). A corresponding lack of historicity—both in the public school classroom and in Canadian society in general—has made it difficult for anti-racism educators to excavate White subjects’ identity formation (Berry, chapter 1). The importance of revealing the embodied and enacted nature of Whiteness is echoed in virtually every chapter of the text and constitutes a powerful unifying theme. Frideres says, “As long as White people are not racially seen and named, they function as the human norm” (p. 44).

According to Carr and Lund (introduction), Berry (chapter 1), Frideres (chapter 3), James (chapter 9), and Solomon et al. (chapter 12), the persistence of White invisibility in classrooms, institutions, academic disciplines, and government educational policies is also made possible by the myth of meritocracy and liberal notions of individualism. Both appear to underpin students’ (and teachers’) beliefs that they have earned their success solely through hard work and ability. This allows for a problematic decentering of race that James and Solomon et al. discuss at length. The net effect is that White students, and those in authority in educational contexts who also may enjoy White privilege, are able to bracket the effects of racialization through an intellectual sleight of hand whereby they point to their own capacities to overcome barriers imposed on them by virtue of their sex or class. Thus they bypass racialized Others’ claims to encountering barriers imposed through structural racisms. James references White students’ protestations that any privilege accrued to them due to their

Whiteness is uninvited, thereby relieving them of any complicity in perpetuating structural inequity. The norming and bracketing of Whiteness and race facilitate individual and collective denials of the presence of structural racism and therefore of its effects.

The third theme that threads its way through *The Great White North?* is a discussion of the myth of Canadian multiculturalism. Berry (chapter 1) says that race “disappears into the great Canadian national, rather than racial, identity; and that it has been erased by the discourse of Canada’s cultural mosaic and liberal multicultural discourse” (p. 23). The eclipsing of race and valorizing of culture, both of which are endemic in Canadian multicultural policies, serve to excuse Canadians from confronting our colonial past and the lingering effects of that past in the form of White privilege and institutionalized racism. These authors claim that far from mitigating problematic essentialisms and binaries, multiculturalism not only glosses over them, but also perpetuates their existence.

If there is one gap in this volume, it is the absence of any discussion of the concept of difference. Understanding how problematic forms of differentiation are embedded in structural forms of inequity is important for revealing power relations that permeate identity binaries. Difference often entails dominance, and systems of dominance require the preservation of orders of difference. References in the book to problematizing identity essentialisms could have been expanded to include possibilities for ways to engage with the concepts of difference and differentiation in an anti-racism educational context. However, despite this gap, *The Great White North?* constitutes an important contribution to the field, particularly for those who struggle with how to make Whiteness and its effects visible to our White students, our colleagues, and those who develop educational policies on equity and curriculum development.