

Book Review

Racism in the Canadian University: Demanding Social Justice, Inclusion, and Equity

Henry, F., & Tator, C. (Eds.)
Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

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The editors of this volume are distinguished Canadian writers, researchers, and teachers who address varied aspects of racialization and anti-racism in their work. *Racialization* can be understood as (a) imposing on, perceiving, or experiencing a racial interpretation, (b) placing in a racial context, or (c) categorizing or differentiating on the basis of race (Random House, 2009). *Racism in the Canadian University* describes and critiques enduring and current racisms in the academy, and makes a strong case for a deeper understanding of the issues and needed changes to the recruiting and advancement systems in university settings.

Peter McLaren and Rodolfo Torres (1999, p. 47) extend our understanding of racism, placing it in a framework of political, economic or power relations: “the use of the term ‘race’ often serves to conceal the fact that particular sets of social conditions experienced by racialized groups are determined by an interplay of complex social processes, one of which is premised on the articulation of racism to effect legitimate exclusion (Miles and Torres, 1966)”. In their introduction, Henry and Tator (2009) argue that individual, institutional, epistemological and systemic racism in the academy impede social justice, inclusion and equity for Aboriginal and visible minority scholars, echoing McLaren and Torres’ statement.

The instructive introductory chapter provides context for the narratives and research findings about five racialized scholars, whose individual chapter contributions explicate the impact of racism in their lives and the lives of other racialized faculty and students. The book employs narrative inquiry as a methodology for creating knowledge “to illuminate social, political, ethical, and moral dimensions of life and experience that other research approaches cannot” (p. 37).

The book’s organization supports readers’ appreciation and comprehension of the subject, the editorial stance, and the contributing scholars’ stories. The book’s dedication, “to all those who work towards creating an academy that truly embraces and reflects the knowledge, culture, and values of all of its members” (Dedication page) speaks to the perspective of the editors and prepares readers for the subsequent tenor of the text. The editors’ introduction and their beginning chapter on manifestations of racism in the academy delineate the shared theoretical frameworks and themes of the ensuing stories. In these chapters, the editors introduce racism, racialization, and the concept and privilege of Whiteness, and discuss the limitations of liberalism and *political correctness* in addressing racism in university settings. They include a

history of racism in the academy and discuss the importance of critical race theory and critical pedagogy to their analysis, drawing on the theoretical work of Giroux and Freire. The subsequent five chapters of academics' experiences with these concepts actualize the theoretical work presented. The editors' epilogue connects the stories and offers analysis and conclusions of the central arguments presented in the book.

In Chapter 1, Henry and Tator (2009) provide a comprehensive account of manifestations of racism in the academy, including under-representation of racialized faculty, recruitment, selection, tenure and advancement issues, and Eurocentric curricula. The editors discuss significant theoretical perspectives and terms that are central to the chapters that follow. They report that the concept of race is being replaced by many scholars with *the processes of racialization*: "those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities" (Miles, as cited in Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 23). Racialization also includes colonialism and cultural privileging, "through which racialized 'others' are constructed, differentiated, stigmatized and excluded" (Anthias, as cited in Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 23). The authors describe how distribution of power, resources, images and ideas corresponds with membership in racialized groups. They argue that racism in the academy operates with other forms of oppression to create racial inequality.

As the reader develops a comprehensive understanding of racism and its partner, Whiteness, the racialized scholars' experiences are referenced, respected, and analyzed according to that framework. Ruth Frankenberg provides a definition of Whiteness: "a location of structural advantage . . . it is a standpoint or place from which white people look at ourselves, at others and at society . . . and it refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg, as cited in Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 24). Toni Morrison's views on the racialization process and Whiteness shift responsibility to White, privileged people (Morrison, as cited in Henry & Tator, 2009), noting that "White perspectives are considered natural, normative, and essentially raceless" (p. 25). The introductory chapter describes the constructs of racism including everyday and institutional forms of racism, as well as democratic racism and the epistemological and ontological constructs of racism.

The editors' discussion of the role of narrative inquiry in academic research, pedagogy and curricula, and their critique of Whiteness is particularly edifying. For readers who are new to current and foundational literature, language and theories concerned with racism, this is a significant scholarly text, as well as a contributing feature for augmenting appreciation of the subsequent narratives. The authors argue that "narrative inquiry can illuminate social, political, ethical, and moral dimensions of life and experience that other research approaches cannot" (p. 37). The five stories that constitute the remaining five chapters of the book speak to the breadth of the issue, and "create a link between individual experience and broader societal systematic patterns" (p. 37).

In the first chapter the authors include discussions on critical race theory, critical pedagogy and the manifestations of race in the academy. Henry and Tator (2009) describe research findings from their study of academics and their perspectives on racism in the academy. Respondents reported extreme dissatisfaction with recruitment and selection processes in Canadian universities. Another significant finding was participants' reporting that only particular kinds of knowledge, that is, Eurocentric, are validated and valued in the curriculum. These identified issues and their related findings and discussions provide a compelling link to the following five narratives.

Audrey Kobayashi explores systematic barriers to equity for academic women of color. She finds that the small number of women of color who are present in the academy experience racism through deeply entrenched systematic discrimination. The impacts of Whiteness on definitions of racialized academic women are identified as denigration, deflection, exotification, and guilt, creating marginalization in all of its facets for the women. Kobayashi contends that, in addition to developing new policies and equity programs, academics need to take on racism, which extends from “the scarcity of bodies of colour . . . to deeply personal experiences of exclusion” (p. 73).

In Chapter 3, the late Patricia Monture, a member of the Mohawk Nation, draws on her own negative experiences in the academy as well, to argue for neutralizing the power of Whiteness rather than only working towards equity for racialized and excluded others. She describes her battle over her tenure, and the disconnection between established standards, process and curricula on the one hand and Aboriginal perspectives and valued knowledge on the other. For example, universities have limited criteria for recognizing contributions of their scholars which puts racialized faculty at a disadvantage, as much of their valuable academic writing and support is directed toward their community rather than to peer-reviewed journals.

Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar provides an interesting look at the lives of a small group of Caribbean students through their reported Canadian university experiences as well as their lives and responsibilities outside of the university context in Chapter 4. It is the only study in the collection that focuses on university students. Several students reported making valuable connections at university, particularly social connections within their own cultural group, and reported that incidents of racism were infrequent. Her findings are not as significant as the other contributors in supporting the argument that institutional racism is an issue. Hernandez-Ramdwar suggests that undergraduate students do not have an awareness or understanding of institutional racism, and cites Carl E. James as having similar findings in his studies with Black youth.

In his chapter, James decries the lack of diversity represented in university faculties. He critiques university policies developed to change the status quo and discusses problems in implementing them to bring about racial diversity in faculty. He argues that as long as those in power “remain convinced of its neutrality, universalism, openness, fairness, objectivity, racelessness, colour-blindness, and public good, then it is unlikely that racial diversity will result” (p. 150). James draws on related minority scholar literature and on his own experiences working in the area of affirmative action. He maintains that change can be achieved only if there are fundamental changes to the academic structure and its culture of Whiteness, which is generally not recognized by those in power. He argues that faculty members of minority races need to be seen as scholars who can offer alternative insights and knowledge based on their scholarship, experiences and pedagogical approaches to their colleagues and students. Too often they are seen merely as representatives of diversity, and have multiple expectations and extra responsibilities placed on them. He describes how institutional racism works: “It is embedded in the policies and discourses, the stereotypes and biases, the assumptions and practices that are rooted in the collective psyche of members of the institution” (p. 134). James’ chapter is rich with references to the literature on minority scholars.

In Chapter 6, Enakshi Dua reviewed university diversity-related policies and mission statements and interviewed staff in human rights and equity offices in 37 Canadian universities. Like James, she found that her informants reported administrative unwillingness, and that structural racism stands in the way of implementing policies developed to address racism and

create greater equity.

Although the authors identify areas for change, the book does not include examples of strategies that have worked well to bring about change, or new directions in progress, nor do they suggested possible alternatives to the present system. It would have been a constructive addition to the book if the authors could have included recommended best practices either in Canada or internationally.

The strength of this book, which goes beyond the value of the research and ideas presented by the authors, is the wealth of acknowledgements and references to other scholars' work in the field of racism. This book would be a useful text or recommended reading for any course in Aboriginal, Indigenous, or Canadian Studies, Sociology, or Education. The first chapter provides important information for university administrators and faculty who have limited knowledge and understanding of the issues of racism that affect their work and the lives of their faculty and students. For students and researchers interested in narrative inquiry or critical pedagogy, the text and praxis provide insight and a model for research. In spite of the complexities of the subject, the book is accessible, and is well-written and well-organized. It provides scholarly evidence for the editors' claims, supported by the more personal voices of the five contributing scholars, that there is a need for fundamental changes in the academy to actualize principles of social justice, inclusion and equity.

References

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