

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

CYNTHIA LEVINE-RASKY (ed.), *Working through Whiteness: International Perspectives*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002, viii + 363 p.

In the ubiquitous binary construction of black/white, the latter continues to present itself, despite its place in recent anti-racism and equity discourses, as a perilous topic. The mention of whiteness, even within the context of critical theory, raises the possibility of its reification. Or, more insidiously, studies of whiteness can be seen to be redemption discourses wherein one's complicity is ignored in favour of the voyeuristic pursuit of tales of oppression as recounted by the (racialized) Other (Ringrose in Levine-Rasky, 302). Fortunately, *Working through Whiteness* avoids these perils. As a timely, impressive collection of papers, this text engages the problematic specter and implications of whiteness as social construct, ethno-racial identity, and site for social inequities. Divided into three sections, the text considers the theoretical, socio-cultural experiences, and pedagogical expressions of whiteness.

Developed as part of the *Interruptions: Border Testimony(ies) and Critical Discourse/s* series edited by Henry Giroux, the text begins with the construction of whiteness as being socially inscribed. "Whiteness is," Levine-Rasky observes, "rather, a social construction emergent from particular sets of contexts taken up by inequitably empowered groups negotiating their way through the world in social relation to each other" (4). Avoiding the perils of making whiteness the focus of this collection without considering how it functions to create hierarchies of privilege, the authors succeed in naming whiteness as a socially constructed, evolving location. Therein lies the possibility for considering how all scholars of anti-racist and equity theory and action may engage and, as the title of this collection instructs, "work through" whiteness as a location for the re-imagining of social hierarchies, confront our complicities arising from whiteness, and consider how social constructions of ethno-racial identities inhabit named and unnamed practices of inclusion and exclusion in such realms as the law, education, governance, and popular culture.

The papers in this collection support the central argument by assuming transnational and inter-cultural positions. Incorporating discussions detailing the experiences and repercussions of whiteness in Canada, Brazil, Venezuela, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom, the text provides a forum for perspectives of whiteness often omitted from the dominant American studies of this topic. Indeed, to date, most of the authoritative

studies of whiteness have been American. Drawing from the foundation established by such contemporary authors as Dionne Brand, George Dei, Sherene Razack, Michelle Fine, Ruth Frankenberg, Audre Lorde, and Peggy McIntosh, this collection is indebted to these authors. The contributors attempt—and succeed—in their efforts to extend the discussion beyond theoretical observations to qualitative studies. Notably, "A Room without View: Social Distance and the Structuring of Privileged Identity" (by Michael Alan Sacks and Marika Lindholm) and "Building a Home on a Border: How Single White Women Raising Multiracial Children Construct Racial Meaning" (Jennifer A. Reich) use interviews to provide multi-layered portraits of experiences of whiteness from the perspectives of colour-blindness, liberal humanism, and critical race theory. Much needed historical contexts, particularly as these are experienced by First Nations and racialized communities, are established in "The Iniquitous Practice of Women: Prostitution and the Making of White Spaces in British Columbia, 1898-1905" (Renisa Mawani) and "The Impact of Whiteness on the Culture of Law: From Theory to Practice" by (L. A. Visano). These authors provide succinct overviews of how the law is enacted by upon the racialized and sexualized bodies of certain citizens. Although the text would benefit from the addition of more tangible strategies for critically engaging whiteness through mobilization, the ideas contained therein offer a starting point for researchers and activists to reconsider ethno-racial constructions and their inequities.

I highly recommend this book for upper- and graduate-level sociology, history, and education students, as well as those interested in the linkages among racial identity constructions, systems of privilege, and social hierarchies. More significantly, though, *Working through Whiteness* alerts readers, as students of ethno-racial identity construction, to the necessity—and personal and political difficulties—of engaging in this type of inquiry. Therein lies the promise of transcending the limiting, albeit familiar, binary constructions against which many identities continue to be defined.

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