

BOOK REVIEW

Sean P. Hier, Daniel Lett and B. Singh Bolaria, eds. 2009. *Racism and Justice: Critical Dialogue on the Politics of Identity, Inequality, and Change*. Halifax: Fernwood. ISBN: 978-1-55266-301-1
Paperback: 34.95 CAD. Pages: 269.

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In *Racism and Justice*, editors Sean Hier, Daniel Lett and B. Singh Bolaria have collected together 14 essays (plus an Introduction), divided into three sections ('Essentialism, Identity, and Difference,' 'Racism, Inequality, and Change,' and 'Multiculturalism, Anti-Racism, and Justice'). Each of the three sections is prefaced by a strong introduction, along with very useful summaries of each individual essay that follows. The essays themselves are short and contain only the most basic references and few footnotes. The best word to describe this collection is *eclectic*. Drawing on scholars from Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, the anthology offers essays on a wide range of topics, from the Sydney Cronulla Beach riots (Jock Collins and Carol Reid), to Jim Crowism and lynching in the United States (Meir Amor), to the 'geneticization of identity' (Robert Carter) to the politics of public apologies and racial redress (Graham Dodds). Equally eclectic is the range of political and sociological viewpoints represented in the anthology, from critical realism (Adam Molnar), to debates with Orientalism (Peyman Vahabzadeh), to an ethics of infinite possibility and its implications for solidarity work (Mohamed Abdou, Richard J.F. Day and Sean Haberle). This wide-ranging and eclectic nature of the book is both its strength and its weakness.

According to the editors, *Racism and Justice* has two general goals. The first is to 'critically assess the current state of knowledge about racism, justice and social change in Canada and beyond' (17). In this, the collection is a clear success, producing a lively debate about how to conceptualize race and racism as well as how best to confront it. For example, the opening two chapters immediately draw the reader into a debate about essentialism or the idea that there is some core essence that defines discrete groups of people. The first essay, by Rita Dhamoon (25-41), draws on critical race theory as a form of 'post-essentialist social critique' in order to force new considerations of how we come to know what we think

we know about race. This essay is followed by Alicja Muszynski's defense of essentialism, or at least a caution against going too 'post-al' (42-53). For Muszynski, it is 'ironic that just as landmark gains are realized for previously excluded groups, academics have deemed that their status as groups is no longer relevant, in effect pulling the rug out from under them' (47). It is rare for an edited collection to invite such divergent opinions, especially on something so personally, as well as politically, relevant to so many of us. This is more than an academic debate: it is a political tension that has clear implications for social activism and the conceptualization of justice.

But, this political tension also leads to a somewhat uneven read and it is difficult to find a narrative thread or political project in the book. This problem reflects back on the second goal of the anthology, namely to confront the challenges of a 'post-racial' order. By 'post-racial,' the editors do not mean 'racelessness' but, instead, a 'future-oriented politics of possibility...that simultaneously confronts the forces of continuity and change' (9). Post-raciality centres on a paradox in which a 'social-justice infrastructure' that has enabled dramatic social change coexists with the persistence of racism.

It is not clear that this paradox is either as new or as complex as the editors suggest. The essay by Charles Ungerleider, tellingly entitled 'Racism, Justice, and Social Cohesion in Canada' (173 - 188) seems the only evidence that there even exists a 'social-justice infrastructure' from which the paradox would unfold. Ungerleider offers a whiggish history of anti-discrimination practices in Canada, from a problematic past of interning Japanese citizens and barring Jews entry as they fled Nazi Europe to a more sunny contemporary situation where many forms of structural racism have been eliminated through the sheer political will of the Canadian state. Ungerleider places great importance on the fact that Canada was an early signatory to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and from which time the institutional infrastructure designed to confront racism and to equally distribute citizenship rights has grown progressively and, seemingly, satisfactorily. While we must continue to fight racism where it rears its ugly head (as in the aftermath of September 11, 2001), Ungerleider nonetheless concludes that Canada is distinct in the world for embracing such a diverse population and managing, through this institutional infrastructure, to maintain a functional social cohesion.

This kind of essay is odd in a collection dedicated to racism and justice, and its inclusion seems to simplify, rather than complicate, the debate about contemporary forms of racism or, even, post-raciality. And,

many of the other contributors do not seem to share in the idea that we have arrived at a post-racial moment. For example, in one of the stronger essays in the collection, Alana Lentin (189-206) takes as obvious the fact that Western states assume a 'Janus-faced attitude' (205) toward racism, so that they are both the enforcers of anti-discrimination policy and culpable in ongoing and systemic racism. Lentin offers a very different history of the formation of international anti-racist policies, arguing that the focus of UNESCO policies on cultural difference has depoliticized racism and allowed modern states to be both racist and anti-racist at the same time. Her focus is on the resultant anti-racist organizations to emerge in Western States and she offers a neat categorization between those organizations that are state-oriented (appealing to the state to fulfill its promise of true democratic citizenship) and those (more radical, if less successful) that set themselves against the state itself. The work of these various anti-racist groups, along with their differing degrees of popular and institutional legitimacy, argues Lentin, plays an important role in defining what constitutes racism to begin with.

Given its focus on sociological knowledge about racism and the debates that the collection welcomes - as well as the ones that it will no doubt engender - *Racism and Justice* is a good choice for any sociology course that wants to draw its students into the field and offer them some rich theoretical and empirical materials from which to form their own views. Certainly, the book will encourage readers to engage in 'critical dialogue on the politics of identity, inequality, and change' --- as the editors hope it will.