BOOK REVIEW

Title: **Revisiting The Great White North? Reframing Whiteness, Privilege, and Identity in Education (Second Edition)**

Author: **Lund, D. & Carr, P.**

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Reviewed by: **Kim Radershma, PhD Student**

Having spent the majority of my formative years in the U.S., and having only recently returned to Canada to pursue my Ph.D. in Education with a focus on anti-racism and critical whiteness studies, I have found Lund and Carr's books to be extremely useful in helping me detect the pulse of the Canadian heart-rate on race issues.

The editors, Darren Lund and Paul Carr, of both the original edition, *The Great White North? Exploring Whiteness, Privilege, and Identity in Education*, and the new, second edition reviewed in this essay, *Revisiting The Great White North? Reframing Whiteness, Privilege, and Identity in Education*, refer to the topic of whiteness as "highly contested and problematic," much like politics and religion; topics that "are not comfortably addressed openly in polite company" (p. 5). Indeed, to address such a misunderstood and contentious topic is not, as they admit, politically expedient. Yet approaching the topic of race from a deep structural level remains urgent. As an American critical whiteness scholar contends, "the problem of race relations is primarily--but not solely--a white problem" (Allen, 2004, p. 121). It is with this awareness and calling to expose whiteness that the editors undertake a second look at this topic from a Canadian vantage point.

This second edition, consisting of the original contributions from scholars and activists followed by their new responses, is once again organized into five thematic sections. The editors offer a new Forward once again contributed by Sefa Dei, and a new Introduction which addresses some of the changes that have occurred since the first edition eight years ago. The US elected its first Black president, the Canadian government issued a public, formal apology to the Aboriginal people of Canada, Ontario's Ministry of Education released a comprehensive Equity and Inclusive Strategy, are among many other critical incidents that have propelled the national conversation about whiteness and race.

Lund and Carr introduce the purpose of this second edition as an opportunity for each contributing author to "reframe their chapters in light of new understandings and experiences since its original publication" (p. 1). In addition to the intent of the original publication, which was to examine "the multiple perspectives and vantage points on Whiteness in order to challenge the current complacency in the Canadian state and nation, particularly among educators, to address deep-seated inequities and injustice" (p. 3), the second volume asks each of the 20

scholars and activists who contributed to the first volume to again consider: “What does whiteness look like in general, and in Canada, in particular?” (p. 4), and respond to it in a new essay that follows their original contribution.

The editors and contributors tell of continued resistance among Canadians to notions of white privilege based on reactions to their first edition. Here in Ontario, we have seen similar resistance surface. For example, in the past year after the Elementary Teacher’s Federation of Ontario (ETFO) offered an optional training session about white privilege for its members, the Toronto Sun published a piece entitled “ETFO ‘white privilege’ workshop dangerous” in which the columnist repeatedly insisted that white privilege does not exist (Blizzard, 2014). The commentary section of the online edition of the newspaper further iterated this denial.

Within the five themed sections of the second edition, the concept of whiteness is “framed with the notion that Whites are naturally superior over others” (p. 285). In the section “Conceptualizing Whiteness,” Frideres addresses this challenge as one that few teachers have wrestled with; he writes: “As White teachers, there is a tendency to shore up our sense of superiority” (p. 51). More specifically, the superiority that Canadians often perceive of themselves when compared to the US is interrogated as well. There seems to be a deeply seated belief in Canada of what one author calls “Canada the good” (p. 252), a sense that Canada has achieved a true cultural mosaic “versus the traditional American melting pot ideology” (p.198). This veneer of goodness often neglects an accurate illumination of Canada’s “colonial heart” (p. 263). It seems evident that Canadian’s have suffered what Blundell (2010) calls “narrative anesthesia,” as the grand narratives told and re-told among us deny the painful history that has created vast privileges, particularly for white people here in the North. One contributor points to the classrooms as the culprit of anesthetizing the country, claiming “continued failure within Canadian classrooms to provide an integrated history of the different groups in our society in a manner that can truly engage and support the development of a thinking and critical citizenry” (p. 205), while Thésée laments that “there will always be astonishment that [the Black student] is ‘smart,’ like Whites.” (p. 288).

The chapters also examine the ideology of colourblindness evident in Canadian society that contributes to what Thésée calls the “veneer of Whiteness that filters society” (p. 290). Frideres calls this ideology a learned and nurtured refusal to address race that protects the *status quo* and privileges White people” (italics in original, p. 51). Two of the authors, Caouette and Taylor, reveal their findings about the misunderstandings among Canadians about what “egalitarian” means; they discovered that most interpret it as individualistic and profess a belief in meritocracy. In order to counter this deeply held ideology, another contributor, Lindo maintains that “we need to talk about race. We need to make these discussions explicit . . . It is only if we acknowledge that we are not colour-blind, but rather, far too colour conscious that we might have a chance to combat racism” (p. 237). In their combined contribution, Solomon and Daniel agree: “Canadian society continues to regard race as a discourse that should be closeted because of the assumption that the mere mention of the word retards human sensibilities and has the interesting repercussion of instituting feelings of guilt amongst minoritized candidates” (p. 200).

Most of the contributing authors are white, and many of them share their awareness of this fact with honest storytelling of early critical incidents in their lives related to race. The contributing authors who are not white, or “racialized,” provide challenging and insightful suggestions for doing work in the realm of antiracism. Charania contends in his reframing essay

that “advancing anti-racism requires the skills of sharp analysis alongside the ability to work with people from a variety of entry points and politics in the often-fraught conversations of racism and oppression” (p. 267). While James explores who can and should do anti-racism work, he reveals the paradox that whites can be dangerous allies if they do not fully understand how they are individually implicated in racism. Lindberg offers vulnerable, honest, and challenging “Theorums” (as she calls them) to caution and protect those who choose to do the work with advice like, “Institutional change starts with individuals who work in institutions” (p. 84). Donsky and Champion cite Sefa Dei’s (2003) work where the latter asserts: “the question today is not really to ask who can do anti-racist work. Rather it is for each of us to ask whether we are prepared to face the risks and consequences that come with doing such work” (p. 5, cited on p. 247).

The importance of exploring notions of whiteness and unveiling the collective amnesia of Canadians is further underscored by Frideres pointing out that the evidently growing work force of teachers in Canada is made up of mostly white teachers. Frideres notes the drastic “mismatch” between a predominantly white teacher work force and a student population that is increasing in its representation of students of colour and non-native English/French speakers (p. 47). This problematic relationship begs attention to the imagined superiority held by white teachers in Canada.

Ultimately, the authors voices heard once again in this second edition draw continued attention to the issue of whiteness in Canada, as they collectively call for a deep understanding--especially among educators--of what it truly means to be white in Canada.

References

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