

BOOK REVIEWS

Bush, M. (2004). *Breaking the Code of Good Intentions: Everyday Forms of Whiteness*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 302 pp.

Melanie E.L. Bush offers a compelling and controversial picture of student and staff attitudes, perceptions, and misconceptions of race and whiteness in America. At the largest urban university in America with over 200,000 students, Bush engaged over 600 participants in a mixed method study employing survey, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. This book demonstrates the connection between mainstream thoughts/perceptions based on race, structural inequities, and justification for the status quo. According to the author, evidence from this study demonstrates that public discourse and critical discussions of race and race relations improve our understanding and actions toward human rights and equity.

In my view, this book is an important read for any public servant, but especially those in education, law enforcement, health care, and government. While the text clearly engages those interested in equity, social justice, and race relations, it is also an example of a well crafted mixed methodological study and can be helpful to graduate students and others interested in research design and methodology.

Throughout a series of chapters exploring the status quo, racial classification, Americanism and patriotism, poverty, discrimination, and privilege, readers gain a clear picture of the current attitudes and understandings of race at the Brooklyn College CUNY campus, but also across America. Bush frequently supports her finding with similar race-based research conducted by other noted scholars in the field, the *Washington Post*, and the *National Opinion Research Centre*, thereby enhancing the validity and broadening the scope of her findings.

Several clear findings emerge from this research. First, whites frequently believe that equality has been achieved or that opportunities are so extensive that grievances about racism are now unjustified (p. 236). Second, whites can find discussing racism and whiteness uncomfortable, dangerous, or somewhat unnecessary, but when engaged in this research they felt appreciative of the learning experience, and wanted a place where they would not be attacked for their ignorance or beliefs (p. 242). Finally, education and critical discussions of race play an

important role in exposing race mythologies and fostering an equitable multicultural and multi-racial society.

The focus groups and interviews also revealed some eye-opening experiences for whites especially when the participants identified contradictions in pan-ethnicity, meritocracies, color-blindness, and explanations for the status quo. Bush refers to these opportunities and noted incongruence between theory and reality as "*cracks in the wall of whiteness*" – an opportunity for education to shift dominant narratives and corresponding imagery (p. 220). This is perhaps the book's greatest contribution to the field, namely, the demonstrated opportunities for powerful cognitive development and enabling a sense of social responsibility and agency.

Bush exposes several race mythologies and engages the reader with frightening statistics of racist attitudes, which serves to educate both the reader and participants, and also illuminates the necessity of doing so. However, as in most statistical research, she runs the risk of over-emphasizing the generalizability of findings and, in this particular study, she also comes dangerously close to stereotyping culture, language, ethnicity, and gender within the categories of race she defines, including the following: United States born white, foreign born white, United States born black, foreign born black, Asian, and Latino. Inevitably, greater emphasis is placed on white identity as it is the dominant paradigm and is placed under the microscope for this study. Another limitation of her research is in her sole analysis of the American context. It would be useful to extend her study into other national settings for some comparative global data; as an example, Canadian statistics and research on whiteness, racism, and multiculturalism corroborates much of Bush's key findings and can be explored through the works of Carr and Lund (in press) and Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell (2005).

Bush's work is timely and relevant as racism in the 21st century has taken on more subtle social and institutional manifestations. As an educator, Bush takes the tone of an informant, creates a safe place for discussion, and demonstrates the success and importance of reshaping public discourse for improved human rights and ethnic relations. On the whole, I would highly recommend this text for any student, scholar, or community activist with an interest in the salient issues of race, whiteness, and social justice.

REFERENCES

- Carr, P. & Lund, D.E. (Eds.). (In press). *The great white north? Whiteness, privilege and identity in education in Canada*. Rotterdam, NL: Sense.
- Solomon, P., Portelli, J., Daniel, B., & Campbell, A. (2005). The discourse of denial: How white teacher candidates construct race, racism and "white privilege." *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8, 147.

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McWalters, G. & Sheldon, W. (2005). *The Canadian Student Financial Survival Guide: A Comprehensive Handbook on Financing Your Education, Managing Your Expenses, and Planning for a Debt-Free Future*. Toronto: Insomniac Press.

This is a fully comprehensive book aimed at high school students who are planning for post-secondary education. It is written to be widely accessible and is organized around relevant chapters that include planning, budgeting, paying for education, accommodation, day-to-day choices, credit, getting a job, and financial planning. The appendices and figures also contain useful information.

The title is catchy and draws the student reader to pick up the book. Inside, there is good common sense information on accommodation, making lifestyle choices, budgeting, and credit. It includes an entire chapter on student loans, but very little information concerning specific scholarship sources or other sources of educational funding which is disappointing. Registered Education Savings Plans, loans, and the option of part-time work are mentioned and discussed with enough detail to help students weigh their alternatives.

Even for the high school audience, the book strikes one as common sense, particularly when it comes to the life skills advice it offers. The financial information is readable, thorough, and useful for students embarking on their post-secondary preparations. Readers will not likely find fascinating new revelations, but it is a readable, practical introductory financial guide.

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