



**Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society.** Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Linda C. Powell, and L. Mun Wong, eds. New York: Routledge, 1997. 366 pp.

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*Off White* collects studies of whiteness from primarily two fields, psychology and education. The studies document the characteristics of whiteness but also reveal that “whiteness demands and constitutes hierarchy, exclusion and deprivation” (p. viii, emphasis in original). The editors—Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Linda C. Powell, and L. Mun Wong—and chapter authors see the fields of psychology and education as more than expressions of whiteness. Psychology and education both constitute whiteness and work to insure that privilege and exclusion are embodied in whiteness. Put another way, these disciplines do more than order knowledge—they order race.

The focus on whiteness is, of course, welcome antidote to studies of people of color. All too often, white scholars’ analyses of race assign to people of color the characteristics that whiteness demands: low status, social isolation, and resource inadequacy. While we have long been concerned about blaming the victim, we have not fully come to terms with how much whiteness victimizes. These studies also deobjectify structural analyses. The studies in this volume imply that the theoretical construct of social structure must be interrogated. Structure is not a faceless, personless entity. Rather it is the white way to avoid responsibility for what the white way creates. When we understand whiteness, we have embodied and subjectified structure: Power, thy name is white.

There is an irony that is acknowledged by the editors. When whites analyze whiteness they do so as an expression of whiteness. Yet the chapters in this book give me hope that whites can make inroads even with this irony. People of all colors working together, working critically, and working conscientiously, as in this volume, are productive ways to proceed.

The book is divided into five sections. In “Theorizing Whiteness,” the chapters expose the whiteness in blackness, in psychology, in sex and gender, and in white political movements. The chapters are provocative and articulate, and it is somehow chillingly appropriate that Howard Winant’s chapter ends the section. The white racial projects he discusses remind us to be careful that whiteness does not appropriate the study of whiteness for white supremacy politics.

Section 2 contains studies of the authors’ own institutions. They have bravely turned whiteness back on itself. The editors note that there is some personal jeopardy attached to



these efforts. The chapters show the everydayness, the pervasiveness of whiteness in the institutions the authors work in, but the sense of jeopardy that these chapters promised seems unduly subdued. I know for some of these authors the jeopardy is very real, but the analyses the authors employ push this too far from the readers' attention. For me, the power that is whiteness would have been better revealed by keeping the personal jeopardy more centered.

Section 3, titled "Living Whiteness," is a collection of essays that expose the workings of whiteness in adolescents, adults, the working class, teaching, and the struggle to become nonracists and antiracists. Again these chapters demonstrate the pervasiveness of whiteness and its connection to the denigration of others. They also provide pedagogical moments. I saw myself repeatedly and unflatteringly. I also saw ways for me to begin to address my whiteness.

The media is exposed in section 4. Using a cultural studies lens, the authors of these chapters push readers to refocus on the term *media*. What the media transmit, construct, and represent is whiteness itself. The adage has come to be true: the medium is the message (of whiteness).

How are whites to overcome the pervasiveness of ourselves? The last section of the book offers a variety of takes on one essential lesson: Whites will have to collaborate with people of all colors, people who are committed to antiracist activism, and people with power whom we might not like—but in whom we must foster change. The full volume itself is consistent on this lesson. We must see whiteness in ourselves and in others. We must work together to figure out the productive ways to reduce the power of whiteness. We must also critique the project as it proceeds. For, as the editors worry, interrogating whiteness runs the threat of reifying it, dislocating antiracism as the central project. This cannot be allowed.