

Book Review

The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society

Frances Henry, Carol Tator, Winston Mattis, and Tim Rees

Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, Canada, 1995. 355pp.

ISBN 0-7747-3255-5

Reviewed by Patricia E. Stevens

The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society is a compelling text that, with each chapter, draws its readers into a deeper understanding of racism and its destructive effects on the lives of individual Canadians and Canadian society as a whole. With direct and coherent prose about the entrenched system of White domination, the authors construct an argument about racial bias and discrimination that is at once eminently readable, unflinchingly honest, and deeply moving. Unlike so many books about multiculturalism that aim to instil an appreciation of difference but obfuscate the consequences of prejudice and exclusion, *The Colour of Democracy* focuses squarely on the social construction and maintenance of racism.

Frances Henry, Carol Tator, Winston Mattis, and Tim Rees examine "a central ideological struggle in Canadian society: The conflict between the image of a country with a strong and cherished tradition of democratic liberalism and the reality of persistent and pervasive inequality based on colour" (p. 6). They assert, "While individuals, organizations, institutions, and the state vigorously deny the presence of racism, it flourishes in this liberal democratic country, deeply affecting the daily lives of people of colour" (p. 6). With an unerring commitment to lay bare this contradiction, these four authors collectively bring to bear conceptual acuity, academic wisdom, and organic knowledge of the mechanisms that keep racism alive and well. They define clearly their terms and explain with uncanny insight the myths and misperceptions that feed racist ideas and behaviours. By incorporating a comprehensive literature from Canada, Britain, and the United States, they tell the repressed history of racism and expose its cultural and ideological roots. Through a series of case studies, they analyze the deep-seated

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resistance to anti-racist change in organizational culture, policies, and practices, uncovering methods commonly used today to maintain the status quo of racial subordination. The heart of the book is found in eloquently written chapters about how racism affects policing, the justice system, human services, education, the arts, media, and government. With bold and forceful brush strokes the authors paint an ornate picture of the multiple manifestations of racism in current Canadian society. Their argument culminates in strategies for ending racism that hold hope for the future.

Much more effectively than comparable cultural diversity texts, this book elaborates emotions, beliefs, and practices across societal institutions that sustain differential advantage for dominant-race people. To their immense credit, the authors honour the complexity of racism, demonstrating throughout their treatise how inequitable race relations are affected by interlocking systems of domination including sexism and class oppression. *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society* would serve well as a cornerstone text for any curricular offerings on cultural diversity and health, culturally competent nursing care, and social and health policy. Its value as a tool for education, consciousness-raising, and organizational change crosses disciplinary and national boundaries. It should be essential reading for Canadian, British, and American nursing scholars who practice, do research, administer programs, or teach future generations of nurses, because with knowledge, clear-sighted vision, steadfast critique of racism in all its shapes and sizes, and strategic anti-racist actions, we can help make a world less conditioned by misery, exclusion, animosity, and the politics of deceit.