

REVIEW ESSAY

Race matters: Confronting the legacy of empire and colonialism

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Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines, by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang and George Lipsitz (Eds), 2019, California, University of California Press 394 pp., £26.00 (paperback) ISBN 978-0-52030099-6

Education and Race: From Empire to Brexit by Sally Tomlinson, 2019, Bristol, Policy 264 pp., £20.00 (paperback) ISBN 978-1-4473-4584-8

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Introduction

Writing about the United States (US), Bonilla-Silva (2015) has argued that the end of the Jim Crow period (the pre-civil rights era when it was legal to discriminate on the basis of race) did not mean the end of systemic racism or even the declining significance of race. Instead, a 'new racism' emerged in the US. This system or 'racial structure', which is characteristic of the post-civil rights era is 'comprised the following elements:

(1) the increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and practices, (2) the avoidance of direct racial terminology, (3) the elaboration of a racial political agenda that eschews direct racial references, (4) the subtle character of most mechanisms to reproduce racial privilege, and (5) the rearticulation of some racial practices of the past. (Bonilla-Silva 2015: 1362)

Cultural theorists in the UK have also employed the term the 'new racism' (Barker 1981, Gilroy 1987) to describe the phenomenon that emerged in public and political discourse from

the 1970s. This new 'cultural racism' did not entirely displace the racism based on biologically-defined race hierarchies or the doctrine of racial typology (Banton 1969), that was created to justify the exploitation and plunder of colonial lands during the period of European expansion (Fryer 1985). However, the 'new racism' has become the more dominant, acceptable and therefore embedded form of racism in the UK. This 'new racism' frees individuals from accusations of racism because they do not need to subscribe to the belief in race-based superiority/inferiority. Since it draws on sociobiological notions such as 'kin altruism', the new racism naturalises the need to protect 'our own' from cultural 'others'. The theory therefore reverses the charges so that a racist is someone who does not adopt the culture and lifestyle of the 'host' nation (Barker 1981).

Notions of 'cultural difference' enabled successive UK governments from the 1950s and 1960s to pursue racialised containment strategies. This was primarily through a series of restrictive immigration controls but also through education policies such as Prevent (part of the UK's counter extremism strategy) and most recently 'British Values' education. As argued elsewhere (Shain 2013; 2017) these policies have enabled governments to manage and contain dangerous 'others' – the categories of people that are most often, the most affected by the fall out of economic and political change but are at the same time, instrumentalised as scapegoats for the negative impacts of this social change.

We are now entering a new period for race relations in the US and UK. What Gramsci (1971) described as the 'morbid symptoms of the interregnum'¹, can be seen in the revival of populist politics and renewed enthusiasm for nationalist policies across a number of countries as they respond to the impact of the global crash in 2008. Immigrants, those seeking asylum and minorities were the first to be blamed for the failures of flawed neoliberal financialisation policies and the wild speculation that went with it, which most economists now agree caused the crash (Bresser-Pereira 2010; Pettifor 2017). From the UK's Brexit referendum in 2016, the Trump election in 2016, to the nationalist policies pursued by Prime Ministers' Narendra Modi

¹ When in prison in the interwar period, Gramsci wrote a number of essays trying to make sense of the rise of Mussolini in Italy and Fascism in Europe. This term 'morbid symptoms' was used in one of the essays later published as his Prison Notebooks to identify a number of social symptoms that emerged in the transitional phase during which an old order was *already* dying, but a radically different new one was *not yet born*.

in Indian, Shinzō Abe in Japan, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, the minority groups within each nation-state are being blamed for declining living standards. Similar trends have been identified in the Philippines, China and India and in South Africa.

Across European countries, recent elections have seen a rise in support for parties that promote xenophobic nationalism, economic protectionism and anti-immigration rhetoric. There has been a shift to right populism by existing parties in order to win votes (Inglehart and Norris 2016; Dennison and Geddes 2019) in the particularly volatile and uncertain economic and political context following the global crisis of 2008, the effects of which are still continuing – this is the ‘new interregnum’. Political analyses of events such as the Brexit referendum and Trump’s victory in the US election in 2016, and a number of right populist parties’ performances in the European elections in 2019, have noted that a significant proportion of the electorate was motivated to vote for anti-immigration parties not only because of economic insecurity but for long standing reasons of cultural insecurity, racial resentment and a marked hostility to ‘others’, most notably, Muslims and asylum seekers. These sentiments are captured within the *cultural backlash* theory of voting behaviour (Inglehart and Norris 2016²; Dennison and Geddes 2019). Slogans such as ‘Take Our Country Back’ (Brexit, UK, 2016), ‘Make America Great Again’ (Trump election campaign, 2016), and ‘Get Brexit Done’ (UK General Election, 2019), do not mention race but speak to the cultural insecurities of many whites through plugging into a nostalgia for the ‘good old days’.

But what is the cultural nostalgia for? And what role does education play in feeding it? These questions are at the heart of the two books under review and are discussed in the sections that follow.

² According to the *cultural backlash* thesis, the surge in votes for populist parties is not just an economic phenomenon but in large part a reaction against progressive cultural change. The ‘silent revolution’ theory of value change holds that the extraordinarily high levels of existential security were experienced by the people of developed Western societies during the postwar decades brought about an intergenerational shift toward post-materialist values, such as multiculturalism, generating rising support for left-leaning parties and other progressive movements advocating human rights, equality and environmental protection, (Inglehart and Norris 2016)

The books have also been published in the era of ‘Black Lives Matter’, the activist movement (founded in the US in 2013, following the acquittal of the killer of Trayvon Martens), that campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people and the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire in a central London tower block in June 2017, which caused the death of 72 mainly black and ethnic minority residents as a result of cost-cutting by the local council. In 2018, the Windrush scandal was exposed, revealing the extent of the British government’s policies of wrongful deportation of black citizens. In the context of these and similar campaigns and movements, it should be possible to talk about openly about race and the legacy of empire and colonialism. However, while such campaigns and movements highlight the ongoing racial injustices, there continues to be a stubborn refusal on the part of institutions across both the US and UK to *see* race in these tragedies.

This is despite the stark evidence in the US of ongoing racialised disadvantage and discrimination in virtually all areas of life. From being more likely to be educated in high poverty areas, to dropping out of school, to being homeless, Black, Latino and Native Americans experience worse outcomes than whites in America. For example, 1 in 13 African Americans of voting age is disqualified from voting because of a criminal conviction – this rate is more than 4 times higher than for the rest of the US population. African Americans are nearly 6 times more likely than white people to be imprisoned and make up around 1 million of the total 2.3 million prison population. African American boys and men are 2.5 times more likely than whites to be killed by police use of force in the United State. Latino men and boys, black women and girls and Native American men, women and children are also killed by police at higher rates than their white peers (Edward, Lee and Esposito 2019).

In the UK, where racialised minorities are currently referred to by the acronym BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic), labour market discrimination is particularly marked for people identifying as BAME but racialised inequalities persist in almost every social field (Khan and Shaheen 2017). The Lammy review conducted in 2017 for the British Ministry of Justice, found that while black people account for 3 per cent of the UK population, they make up 12 per cent of people in prison. More than 50 per cent of the inmates held in prisons for young people in England and Wales were from a BAME background putting young people’s imprisonment at ‘American’ levels of disproportionality. Lammy (2017) also found that

BAME adults are 81% more likely to be sent to prison for an indictable offence at the Crown Court, even when not-guilty plea rates are taken into account.

The books under review offer an important contribution towards understanding why this stark picture of inequality remains so despite the US claiming to be 'post-racial' and the context of the UK having vacated its former colonial territories.

Arguments: the legacy of empire and colonialism and the re-making of race

Both books have race in their titles but differ in scope, coverage and approach. *Education and Race* is sole-authored by a UK-based academic with an established record of researching the history of education policy and race. *Seeing Race Again* is co-edited by four leading scholars based not only in different universities in the USA but also working across a range of disciplines including Law, Political Science, American Studies, Ethnicity, Race and Migration and Sociology and Black Studies. The lead author is Crenshaw who is well-known as one of the architects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and also for coining the term *intersectionality* (Crenshaw 1989). However, the books have a common focus on how racism continues to shape material outcomes for black and racialised minorities in the US (*Seeing Race Again*) and in the UK (*Education and Race*) and the role that education plays in the process.

Education and Race focuses on 'the imperial and post-imperial ideologies, policies and immigration legislation over the period from Victorian times to the present'. It seeks to expose 'an education system which, despite attempts at multicultural and anti-racism education, left untouched a 'whitewashing' of the past and the post-imperial values of empire' (7). Tomlinson notes that explanations for the 2016 Brexit vote, trade wars and anti-immigrant and race hostility must start with the British Empire, especially in the later 19th century, 'when power, wealth and dominance were concentrated in a white world' (*ibid*).

While Tomlinson does not use the concept, her book is a very good illustration of what Gilroy (2005) refers to 'Postcolonial Melancholia' – or a repeated failure to let go of Britain's imperial

past. Writing in defence of multiculturalism in the context of 9/11 security politics, Gilroy argues that this melancholia has obstructed the process of working through the legacy of colonialism which explains the ongoing hostility and violence directed at immigrants and racialised 'others'.

The first 2 of the 9 substantive chapters in *Education and Race*, set out to offer something of the history of empire which Tomlinson argues is missing in British schools:

Most white British, including the supposedly well-educated, know little about the Empire their grandparents were born into, which post Second World war turned into a Commonwealth of some 53 nations, 31 of these with fewer than 3 million people. They also know little about the often brutal processes of decolonisation and the reasons for the arrival of immigrants from the Caribbean, the Asian subcontinent and other post-colonial countries. (1)

Chapters 1 and 2 explore how overseas colonialism and internal (within the UK) colonialism served to establish the superiority of white Englishness. The following 7 chapters travel historically, from the 'height of the British Empire, from early 1900s to 2018, 'when it became clear that Brexit had increased hostilities towards racial and minority ethnic groups and migrant workers, raising sharp questions about national identity' (1) .

Each chapter includes a list of significant events which are then elaborated to address the role of education policy in responding to the ideological positions of governments and key policy makers of the time. Inevitably, as Tomlinson shows, this was a process of struggle; the policies that were eventually implemented represented a compromise between different, often competing, agendas within the government of the day. She highlights instances when it seemed that progress was being made in terms of acknowledging the deeply embedded nature of race and racism within the fabric of British society. One example, discussed in chapter 6, refers to the incoming New Labour (NL) government's commissioning in 1997, of the MacPherson inquiry into the racist murder in 1983, of Black London teenager, Stephen Lawrence. The report published in 1999 was initially considered to mark a watershed moment for British race relations. However, in the context of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan, the goals of addressing racial inequality were abandoned. Not only this, but Blair's NL government reworked colonial stereotypes of 'backward', 'untrustworthy', 'dangerous others' to justify wars abroad and to manage and contain racialised minorities, domestically. The book makes for depressing reading when we consider how unwilling successive governments have been to confront the demons of empire.

Tomlinson does not offer a theory for *why* it was the case, other than ignorance and racial arrogance, that successive governments have failed to reckon with the history of empire. However, *Education and Race* does offer extensive detail to illustrate how the twisted narrative of empire has been kept alive and how it underpins contemporary education through the project to promote a mythic set of British values.

Seeing Race Again is a collective endeavour that brings together the work of academics from across the disciplines of psychology, law, music, sociology, literary and gender studies, to examine the racial histories and colour-blindness within and across their respective fields. Building on the work of the 'Countering Colorblindness' project which was established in 2008, 'out of an effort to aggregate knowledge about our racial past to illuminate how the legacy of white supremacy continue to shape contemporary racial disparities', the book offers an invaluable interrogation of the contradictory role of academia in reproducing and covertly defending racial hierarchy across the disciplines.

The core argument of the book is that higher education, like most institutions is now formally organised around the 'untested assumption' that colour-blindness operates on the basis of fair and just principles and practices (2). Racial and other injustices are typically only framed as problems if they are seen to infringe the colour-blind ideal. As a political project, US colour-blindness, like British cultural racism, is derived from a seeming naturalness and inevitability so that '[p]eople *with* problems become identified *as* problems'. Those who call out social inequality are castigated for drawing attention to the issues (3).

The book is organised in three parts with five essays in each section. Essays in the first part address concepts used within the disciplines to obscure race privilege such as merit, market, choice, neutrality, and innocence, as well as 'the different modes of racialization (ie through

indigeneity, blackness, foreignness, white victimhood) that mask and sustain racial domination' (21).

While Colorblindness purports to be a recent invention, Lipsitz' chapter shows it to be 'the manifestation of a long-standing political project emanating from Indigenous dispossession, colonial conquest, slavery, segregation, and immigrant exclusion', when it was deployed 'to achieve racist effects without having declare racial intent' (21). Reviewing the political and intellectual forces that led to the emergence of CRT in the late 1980s, Crenshaw considers how legal scholarship and legal education in the post-civil rights era 'embraced a gradualist strategy of integration premised on the assumption that colorblind meritocracy stood outside of the economy of racial power'. Discussing her own battle within Harvard, she elaborates how meritocracy then 'became one of the central tropes deployed to demobilize and disavow challenges to racialised structures of power within the law'. Had It not been for a comment made by the Dean of Faculty, Crenshaw and other graduate students would not have even realised that a decision to drop a race-focused course was discriminatory.

McKay, in the only chapter that draws on empirical research findings, powerfully demonstrates how Native Americans continue to be 'legitimately' racialised. Through examples such as celebrations of Columbus day and 'playing Indian' this racism has become normalised and institutionalised. Other chapters in this part of the book evaluate the politics of affirmative action and the legacy of Obama's term in office which was widely hailed as a 'post-racial' moment for the US. Crenshaw in her second chapter, discusses how it was anything but this, serving instead to extend the project of colour-blindness and support the right-wing backlash which paved the way for Trump's election in 2016.

Essays within the second and third parts of the book explore the exclusionary methods that are used to reproduce dominance of white supremacy through the disciplines and the possibilities, using the disciplines' own methods to revitalise them.

Methods: strategies, practices and policies that sustain white supremacy

The books contain many rich examples of the methods that sustain white supremacy including the operation of apparently race and power-blind discourses such as merit and opportunity. In *Education and Race*, Tomlinson highlights the role of elite institutions in keeping alive notions of a mythic 'superior British way of life':

'British values', imbued with nationalism, militarism and racial antagonism, were filtered down from public schools to secondary and elementary schools through an imperially oriented curriculum, textbooks and juvenile literature that reflected entrenched beliefs in the superiority of white people and a distant foreignness. (25)

Tomlinson cites numerous examples of speeches that were delivered in the public schools, communicating ideas which informed the textbooks and teaching materials of the day. These ideas and beliefs included, for example, that black and brown subjects were naturally inferior and that God was in favour of white supremacy. The academy was also implicated the promulgation of these myths since many of the textbooks were written by men who had attended the public schools and were now at Oxford and Cambridge.

British public schools were therefore instrumental in constructing the dominant narrative of empire that justified the demonising of black subjects. The heads of public schools including JEC Weldon, the head of Harrow school (1885-1898) played a key role in this process. Weldon who was himself educated at Eton and Cambridge stated that 'the boys of today are the statesman and administrators of the future, in their hands is the future of the British Empire.' (34). He believed in the moral superiority of white people to govern racial inferiors. Significant then, that he taught Churchill who 60 years later, was thought to have considered using the slogan 'Keep Britain White' in the 1955 British General Election. HH Almond, the Head of Loretto School in Edinburgh (1862-1903) also lectured on the divine governance of nations claiming that 'God's purpose for the British was to guide British history', and that 'the major purpose of public schools was to 'create neo-imperial warriors' (34).

These attitudes and beliefs have continued to linger within British Institutions, in part due to conveyor belt of individuals from elite schools into the key positions of power across politics,

law, business, culture, and the military. A recent study focusing on the Clarendon schools³ has found that 36 (67 %) of the UK's 54 prime ministers, were educated at one of the 9 elite Clarendon schools. Today, the alumni of these schools are 94 times more likely to reach the British elite than are those who attended any other school (Reeves, Freedman, Rahal 2017; Martin 2019). While marginally less powerful today, the schools remain largely unchanged and therefore the ideas about empire will still be firmly ingrained in the current establishment.

With reference to the academy in the US, *Seeing Race Again* explores the 'theoretical frameworks and methodologies that serve to naturalise and disavow pervasive and continued forms of racial discrimination' (153-4). This part of the book also demonstrates the way 'that colorblind constructions mobilized in academic disciplines come to influence and circulate within other fields, including legal arguments, public policy and social movements (*ibid*).

One of the mechanisms is the way in which colour-blind research paradigms incorporate, rather than entirely exclude, race-related topics. Kajikawa's chapter illustrates this point effectively through an analysis of the way that classical music is given prominence in most music schools even though it accounts for less than 1% of music consumption worldwide. She highlights that music schools exclude or relegate anything that threatens the status of classical music, which is essentially a celebration of the work of a small group of elite white European and American men. This 'possessive investment' is argued to be part of a distribution of resources and rewards that privileges whiteness and dismisses its alternatives.

Focusing on feminists critiques of intersectionality, Barbara Tomlinson highlights the methods used within feminist scholarship to privilege white women and their experiences as the locus of feminist authority. She demonstrates how white feminists managed to appropriate the work of intersectionality for their own ends, 'muting its antiracist core and diminishing scholarship by Black women as rationally and ontologically deficient'. (154)

³ The Clarendon schools (Eton, Harrow, Westminster, Winchester, St Paul's, Merchant Taylor's, Shrewsbury, Rugby and Charterhouse) were declared as the 'Gold standard' of independent education. The Clarendon report published in 1864 was led by George Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon (1800-1870) who had land in Jamaica and a vested interest in empire.

Other essays in the book explore the role that paradigms of research have played in constructing minority communities as deficient. Gordon's chapter for example, argues that large-scale research studies of patterns of academic attainment have contributed to the construction of pathological accounts of children of colour and their families. Instead of accounting for with the ways in which the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities impacts students of colour, the findings of these studies have been used to responsabilise black children for their 'failure'.

Agendas of change: resisting and countering race-blindness in education and beyond.

Crenshaw *et al*, argue that:

The historical conditions of conquest slavery, indigenous disposition, apartheid and attempted genocide from which every traditional academic discipline emerged require a thorough vetting of these legacies. For these established disciplines to be revitalised, we must reckon with these histories. One cannot simply diversify the existing disciplines without such a reckoning. And while we believe the disciplines possess modes of analysis and methods of enquiry that can allow us to understand and mobilise against racial subordination and hierarchy, we know that the university is once again becoming a central site of social and political struggle.(xvi)

These arguments, taken up in the final part of *Seeing Race Again*, speak directly to the social and political struggle expressed in movements for racial justice such as 'Decolonising education'. These student-led movements call for the institutional structures of higher education to be dismantled. Inspired by the South African 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign which was directed towards the removal of a statue of British Coloniser, Cecil Rhodes, at the University of Cape Town in 2015, similar campaigns emerged in Britain in 2017 (eg 'Rhodes Must Fall Oxford', 'Why isn't my Professor Black?' and 'Why is my Curriculum White?'). The campaigns have been concerned to expose the legacies of empire, colonialism and slavery that underpin the institutions, their disciplines, policies, curriculum and practices. Similar campaigns emerged in the US, India and Australia.

Both books speak to these decolonising movements which are still in the process of agreeing what decolonise means and how it must be achieved. *Seeing Race again*, in particular, offers theoretical and pedagogical insights into how decolonising might happen. For example, Reynolds' essay introduces the concept of 'conceptual impoverishment' which refers to a patterns of 'learned outcomes that distorts the way people understand and make meaning of the world they inhabit'. He argues that when 'denied access to specific information, students formulate belief systems that fail to account for the significant role that race plays in structuring opportunities and outcomes like doing math with all the variables, one's best efforts will never render the correct proof (354).

In terms of remedying this situation, there needs to be a reckoning with racial injustices of the past. This cannot simply involve insertions of work by scholars of colour without addressing issues of pedagogies and methodologies. As Felice Blake in her essay in the volume, argues:

It isn't enough to include texts by historically aggrieved populations in the curriculum and classroom without producing new approaches to reading. Scholars like James Lee demonstrate how such inclusion without attention to the histories and structures of oppression justifies the organized abandonment of underrepresented communities. (309).

Other essays similarly question the policies and politics of diversity within universities which produce a managerial or 'colorblind multiculturalism'. This often prioritises targets of insertion, inclusion and representation over a genuine engagement with the structures of oppression. Applying this to the curriculum, Blake argues that including oppressive histories alone is also insufficient if the histories of resistance are also not included. There are parallels here with Doharty's (2017) observations of the teaching of Black History to Key Stage 3 pupils (ages 11-14) in English schools. Since the teaching of black history is not a curricular requirement for schools in England, the schools that do teach it can seem to be offering it for progressive reasons. However the methods observed by Doharty included role-plays of slave auctions which she argues involved re-enactments of 'black victimhood and white superiority' (Doharty 2017:122).

By decontextualizing the slavery lessons from the histories of oppression and resistance to slavery, schools can leave students conceptually impoverished while also producing a false empathy (Delgado 20012 cited in Doharty 2017) with the narrative of slavery.

Some final thoughts

Neither book offers a substantive conclusion chapter. Tomlinson states that this is because the current chapter has not yet conclude: the final outcome of Brexit was unknown by the time she completed the book and we also do not know what will happen to Trump. What is known however, is that both the UK and US are in a period of significant decline and that race has proved to be a valuable resource in the 'new interregnum'.

The books make an invaluable contribution to current debates at a time when the right populism is on the rise again. However, we also live in a time when which when resistance is building through, for example, community led campaigns such as 'Black Lives Matter', Grenfell United and Windrush and student led movements such as 'Decolonising'. These campaigns and movements bring race firmly back onto the agenda and show signs of hope in the ongoing battle to confront the legacy of empire and colonialism and continuing ideologies of white supremacy.

There are, inevitably, some gaps in the books: Tomlinson, as I have stated, does not fully address the why question of the longing for empire while *Seeing Race Again*, could perhaps have said more about the impact of 9/11 security politics on US higher education. However, the books are extremely timely and welcome additions to current debates on making race matter. They will no doubt be referenced widely in interdisciplinary conversations focussed on challenging new racisms in education.

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