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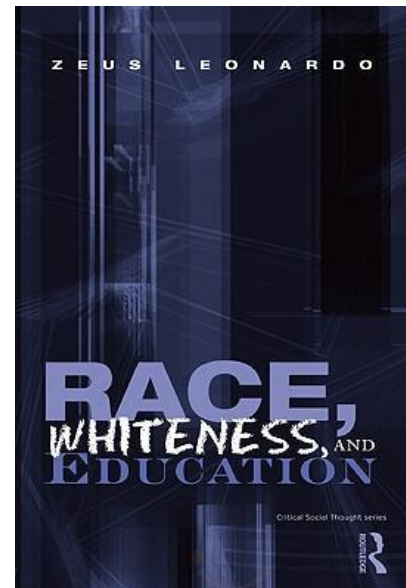
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Reviewed by Kori Hamilton

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Zeus Leonardo, a professor at University of California, Berkley, authored *Race, Whiteness, and Education*. This book is focused on questioning and exposing the concept of “whiteness” and how its construction interacts with race, class, and gender through the lens of Marxist, Critical Race, and Critical Social Theories. The book begins with the author telling the story of his first encounter with racism as a Filipino adolescent and the questions that were raised, from being called Chinese. This event was a catalyst to work, which attempt to portray the true racial experiences of all people. This desire carried him through his doctoral program at UCLA to becoming an Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Studies in Education, at the Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley. He discusses the necessity for educators to be teachers of criticism, because it will



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promote the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge for intellectual freedom for students (p. 15).

Political correctness often treats race as nonexistent or a preoccupation of racist individuals or organizations, rather than something embedded in American culture itself. The conversation about race is a hard, but necessary step to change this country and world from one presenting a “color-blind” discourse while operating an oppressive system. Zeus Leonardo in *Race, Whiteness and Education* finds a creative way to marry the Marxist and race analysis ideology to strengthen one another while maintaining their individual integrity (p. 45). He addresses “whiteness” as an invented social construction that is “nothing but oppressive and false” (p.70). He intends to encourage educators, students and society at large to be more critical of racialization in an effort to dismantle the myth of race so that we can reconstruct society to be without race and the disparities that accompany it.



Zeus Leonardo

Leonardo takes his time laying out the foundation for his position with the first three chapters simply articulating his interpretation of critical social theory, post-Civil Rights race relations and in the US to Marxism and race analysis. The author begins with Critical Social Theory (CST), because it begins with pretense that the targets of criticism are institutional and systematic arrangements (p. 17). CST also introduces oppression as a part of the human condition and differentiates it from misfortune, which is arbitrary, more natural, and indiscriminate (p. 19). The author presents the information for an audience of educators to take back to their students. CST is his introduction to lighting a fire of criticism under educators, which should be passed on to their students who will carry change forward.

The author uses Marxism and Race Analysis to create a common language for *race*. Marxism views race as an ideological distraction from capitalism, because racism is not about race, it is about capital (p. 46). The concept of race as capital, in a society that historically exploits groups of people for economic gain, does not stretch out of the realm of possibility. The Marxist perception of education, that schools do not change economic inequality rather they

reproduce labor relations, reflects today's current education crisis (p. 47). The author then blends Marxism with Race Analysis by reifying the notion that what Marx discusses are all socially constructed systems that should not simply be accepted as reality. The concept of race must be fully disclosed and then reconstructed achieve a society free of racial strife, all of which must be taught to develop generations of critically aware students who are equipped to challenge the construct of race (p. 59).

The introduction of the future of race finds its foundation in a post-race theory. The author explores the notion that when people began to think that they were "white" it sparked the arrival of "race trouble" (p. 62). Race trouble, as the author uses the term, did not simply derive from thought but also from the actions associated with the notion. Leonardo makes it clear that the internal concept of race becomes realized through external social behaviors and institutional arrangements that are embedded so deeply into our daily interactions that the injustice is difficult to recognize (p. 63). The concept of race becomes taboo in an effort to mystify the perception that the oppressed of the oppressors. The false and oppressive concept of whiteness was created as a system of advantage for all whites regardless of social class or gender, and gets recreated by people of color (p. 69). Returning to Marxist theory, the author opines that if education was designed to maintain the status quo, then it makes sense that education provides the foundation for the perpetuation of *whiteness*.

Leonardo discusses the implications of *whiteness* within the white community, the discourse that the community uses when talking about race, and the apparent ignorance that the white community operates under. White discourse stems from the idea that whiteness is a myth and not a reality, except for when *whiteness* or the affiliation with the group is beneficial to the individual. "Ethnic whites", such as the Irish who were fleeing from religious and cultural persecution, embraced "whiteness" to gain social promotion in America. This ability to pick and choose *whiteness* motivated by a want to appear non-racist, rather than actually desiring to end racism is a convenience people of

color are without (p. 117). Therefore the discourse surrounding *whiteness* is riddled with discrepancies and inconsistencies, because the only true way for a white person to fight racism is to get at the undercurrent of their own perception of self. One must critically analyze her perception of self and the true historical framework that gave her the advantages that one often pretends are not there. One must then be willing to denounce one's *whiteness* (p. 105), openly admit the systematic disadvantages for people of color, and be ready to engage in the uncomfortable conversation with people of color with this new lens (p. 89). People of color must follow similar steps, because when they refuse to give in to sociological knowledge of race, they perpetuate their own oppression (p. 117). After these steps are taken the groundwork for change is in place.

The author holds fast to the belief that we all have to buy into the hard truth about our reality in order to reconstruct a society void of race. He looks to policy as a prime example of how *whiteness* dominates society. The author discusses No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as “an act of whiteness” that continues to enable *whiteness* as a system of privilege and regards racial disparities as regrettable outcomes of “group competition, uneven social development or – cultural explanations for inferiority” (p. 127). The author presents a strong argument citing the years of failed implementation to support it. He frames NCLB as a “presume-to-be-fair system” authorizing *whiteness*, which affirms students of color as failures (p. 136). Leonardo is clearly uncomfortable with NCLB and the lack of consideration for the reality of racial disparity in the U.S. The fact that NCLB presumes that children of color have the same opportunities as whites and that the law was motivated by color-blindness makes it *whiteness* turned into policy, which will ensure the continuance of racial structures (p. 142). There must be an awakening among all people to embrace the notion of *whiteness* and invest in eradicating it from society.

Leonardo concludes with a juxtaposition of DuBois *Souls of Black Folk* with *Souls of White Folk*. He categorizes *whiteness* as an indicator of privilege that is now global (p. 168). He

implores both teachers and students, using neo-abolitionist pedagogy, to dismantle the discourse of whiteness and disturb their codes (p. 169). He asserts that *whiteness* is not only a U.S. problem and that it must be addressed and broken down across nations. His solution for whites who are strongly committed to eradicating race is to “commit race treason,” which places whites at a crossroads of recognizing the loss of the incredible advantage of white privilege coupled with the slow gain of the elimination of the concept of race. The ultimate goal is to abolish race altogether, which will come at high cost to all parties involved. *Whiteness* is the measure by which all people are judged and judge themselves, without this constructed basis of oppression all people must recreate their self-identity and perception, which as grand as it sounds, will be a difficult task.

The author boldly addressed an issue that most people wish to ignore. He laid out the text as a ladder in which each chapter built on the next. By constructing a text that begins with creating access to theoretical framework expands the audience body, because he creates the prior knowledge necessary to grasp the big picture he is trying to present. There were a few instances of repetition when he would say “in other words” or “that is” followed with a statement for clarification purposes that did not allow the reader to construct their own interpretation, however those instances support access for a more diverse audience. The text read almost like a novel with the typical plot structure beginning with an introduction and ending with a resolution. Obviously, Leonardo was not able to address every issue of *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, but that did not seem to be the intention of the book. He succeeded in beginning a fresh discourse on race by asking hard questions while presenting an even more difficult reality accompanied with possible solutions.

About the Reviewer



Kori Hamilton is a PhD student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Arizona State University. She taught secondary English in Watts, CA for five years. Her interests lie in educational access and equity, Art education and generally in helping children of color to be their own advocates for better education.

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