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Wiggan, Greg & Walrond, Jean T. (2013) *Following the Northern Star: Caribbean Identities and Education in North American Schools*. NY: Nova Publishers.

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Focusing on Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Greg Wiggan and Jean Walrond seek to map the experiences of Caribbean heritage people in North American schools. They ask if multicultural policies are truly catering to these relatively new migrants. In other words, is the Canadian educational system truly multicultural? Are so-called multicultural policies helping people of Caribbean heritage deal with the challenges of migrating to a new environment? Most importantly, are they allowing Canadians from the dominant racial group to understand and welcome the new migrants, especially since they are Black migrants from the Caribbean? Finally, they

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investigate how Caribbean people relate to the Canadian educational system. Naturally, to better understand this relationship they begin with a historical account delineating the formation of Caribbean societies and the importance of education in these respective societies.

For Wiggan and Walrond, Caribbean history is divided into four main periods, namely the pre-Columbian era, when indigenous people still lived throughout the region, the plantation slavery era, the colonial period, and the postcolonial era. According to Wiggan and Walrond the vast majority of Caribbean people were denied education during plantation slavery. Throughout the colonial period, which varied in style and length based on the islands/territories' rapport with the colonizer, education embodied the key to success. In fact, for many people whose ancestors had been enslaved, it literally was the second door to their freedom. Yet, as Wiggan highlights with insightful biographical information, very few people could materialize such dream. Transitioning into the postcolonial era, Wiggan and Walrond demonstrate that failed government policies and poverty spurred migration to the West, principally to the United States and Canada. Hundreds of thousands of Caribbean people migrated to cities like Miami, Toronto, New York, and Boston, where they cherished educational opportunities, which were not available at home (the authors acknowledge the Caribbean migration to Europe, but chose not examine the intersection between Caribbean migration and education in Europe, as the project would become too ambitious).

Thus, Wiggan and Walrond ask how educators can serve this relatively new population, particularly when multicultural educational policies are in their infancy, or most of the time, absent. They suggest that "Caribbean perspective on education in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada elucidate themes that are meaningful for teacher pedagogy, student achievement, and the identity development of Caribbean individuals in Canada and the U.S. (Wiggan and Walrond p. 54)." But before delving into the matter, Wiggan and Walrond contextualize the Caribbean migration to Alberta, essentially asking how the migrants fare in this society and how they navigate the North American White-Black dichotomy. They find that most Caribbean migrants are more class and color conscious than race conscious, a phenomenon affecting their

behavior and work ethic in Canada. Moreover, they highlight that most Caribbean migrants confront tougher hurdles than working class Canadians, as they often lack the social networks which they enjoyed in the Caribbean. Finally, after conducting a series of interviews Wiggan and Walrond conclude that Caribbean migrants see educational opportunities as a way to climb the social ladder.

Edmonton, Alberta appears to be an interesting site of study. As reflected by Canadian multicultural policies, educators in this city made concerted efforts to address issues of racism, discrimination, and ethnic diversity. Through what seem to be symbolic gestures, they encouraged students and parents to share aspects of their culture in designated school days. Yet, despite efforts to address issues of diversity, Wiggan and Walrond suggest that anti-Black racism still plagues the society; Black students face a number of problems, including being criminalized, preferred for their athletic potential, and perceived as intellectually unprepared. In what is perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of their book, Wiggan and Walrond shed light on the ways in which Caribbean parents help their children navigate these treacherous waters. They use interviews, which are well structured and rich with fresh information about Caribbean "integration" into the educational system. As a general rule, they point to the fact that Caribbean parents are highly influenced by their Caribbean educational background, where the process of learning is public, communal, and familial. Thus, in Alberta, Caribbean parents become strong advocates for their children, often encouraging school teachers and administrators to reconsider biased assessments. For instance, Wiggan and Walrond describe a Caribbean mother's relentless effort to prove that her child had been misdiagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, a common pattern in Euro-dominated North American school districts.

The last chapter is very informative and offers strategies for improving the educational landscape— teachers, administrators, and curriculums—a process which trickles down to the students and ultimately leads to stronger performances and a better appreciation for the host society. First Wiggan and Walrond advocate for decolonizing the educational system. Used both

figuratively and metaphorically, for Wiggan and Walrond decolonization means transcending Eurocentricity, particularly in the social sciences, albeit not exclusively. Logically, moving beyond Eurocentricity opens a window unto the world, heightening students' global awareness, which is crucial for the wellbeing of a multicultural society in the global age. Finally, inspired by the Caribbean culture of education, Wiggan and Walrond advocate for a more inclusive-style pedagogical approach, where parents, members of the community, and teachers collaborate to educate and uplift children.

Though Wiggan and Walrond's diagnoses and remedies to improve the educational system are invaluable, the book could benefit from the work of Puerto Rican scholar Ramon Grosfoguel, who in the company of a few Latin American scholars discusses the multiple dimensions of colonization and decolonization. For Grosfoguel "Colonial does not refer only to "classical colonialism" or "internal colonialism," nor can it be reduced to the presence of "colonial administration." Grosfoguel uses the word "colonialism" to refer to colonial situations enforced by the presence of colonial administration such as the period of classical colonialism, and, following Quiano, [he uses] "coloniality" to address "colonial situations" in the present period in which colonial administrations have almost been eradicated from the capitalist world system. By "colonial sitations" [he means] the cultural, political, economic and sexual oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant ethnic/racial groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations."[1] Most importantly, Grosfoguel and Quiano focus on the intersection of coloniality and knowledge production, a theoretical approach that would strengthen Wiggan and Walrond's theoretical approach.

Moreover, Wiggan and Walrond's analysis is limited to Caribbean people from the former British colonies. Referencing the experiences of Spanish speaking

[1] See Ramon Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality" *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World,* 1No. 1 (2011), p. 14.

Caribbean migrants in North America might be ambitious, but a perspective on Haitian migrants in Montreal would certainly enrich their study. Are these Black migrants in French speaking Canada facing the same challenges as their counterparts in Alberta? All in all, Wiggan and Walrond offer an excellent study of the challenges people of Caribbean heritage face in Canada, particularly in the educational system. Wiggan and Walrond's *Following the Northern Star: Caribbean Identities and Education in North American Schools* is a powerful book offering insights to improve multicultural policies and the quality of the educational system in Canada. They achieve this task by drawing examples of successful educational models from the Caribbean, a culturally hybrid region which is mostly comprised of people of African descent, ironically the very people who are often depicted as a social problem in North America.

About the Reviewer

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