

Black Racialization and Resistance at an Elite University

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Black Racialization and Resistance at an Elite University

by rosalind hampton

University of Toronto Press, 2020, 215 pages

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Black Racialization and Resistance at an Elite University offers an in-depth study of the ways in which systemic racism is embedded within postsecondary education as well as the strategies of resistance enacted to both confront and disrupt these unjust, colonial racist logics. While examining a combination of archival material, contemporary policy documents and interviews with past and present students and faculty, hampton focuses on racist practices within McGill University in a manner that shows how McGill's practices are part of a larger pattern of institutionalized racism. The book includes a prelude, a conclusion and 6 chapters which clearly convey that the systemic racism rooted in the founding of McGill University is also routed through the network of postsecondary institutions that are permeated by the broader goals and aims of sustaining western colonialism within postsecondary education as well as Canadian culture and society. To put it differently, hampton's study of anti-Black racism at McGill University invites readers to critically examine the ongoing role of racism within contemporary university policies and practices across Canada while attending to the broader historical legacies of western colonialism.

One of the key insights that hampton explores is how racism continues to be encountered and experienced under the current hegemonic influence of neoliberalism in postsecondary institutions. Relying upon firsthand accounts from research participants, hampton presents ample of evidence of how racism intersects with classism and sexism in complex ways and in a manner that illustrates how unbalanced relations of power continue to disproportionately impact Black students and faculty. The lack of Black faculty and a limited emphasis on programs, curricula and courses that foreground the contributions of Black scholars, researchers, and histories of racism within the Canadian context are just a few of the factors that are understood as contributing to the ongoing ‘whitewashing’ of universities like McGill. These erasures, silences, and outright exclusions in conjunction with the extolling and privileging of narratives of whiteness are indicative of the ways systemic racism continues to persist even as universities such as McGill release policies which indicate a commitment to equity and diversity. These narratives are integral to each chapter and play a central role in conveying the ongoing need to continue to confront racism in its many guises and iterations while also seeking new mechanisms and strategies of resistance.

Along with the counter-stories shared through the voices of participants, hampton engages in a critical reading of the archives as well as present day policy making practices and pronouncements. It is this critical reading that enacts its own resistance while also foregrounding the ways past and present community and grass roots organizing have been resisting the hegemony of whiteness and the anti-Black racism of elite universities. For instance, chapter 3 examines archival evidence from the McGill Daily as indicative of strong counter movements and organization within the Black Power movement of the 1960s. This chapter demonstrates the important and significant role of resistance in contesting and refusing the hegemony of whiteness as the one and only story shaping postsecondary education. Similarly, chapter 6 offers a sharp critique of the current neoliberal university agenda while also demonstrating that there remains a wide chasm between the neoliberal optics that portend to value equity and diversity and the ongoing pervasiveness of racism. hampton applies critical insights and concepts from Ahmed’s work to showcase how, in the current neoliberal iteration of the university, committee work is more spectacle than substance, where it is often the case that, “committees serve to block action by becoming the action themselves” (p. 141). Chapter 6 further outlines the cyclical process of reforming committees that ultimately seek to manage discontent while sustaining hierarchal racial relations. In this sense current university policies continue

to place a great deal of onus on the individual to seek redress for racial injustices while also avoiding institutional responsibility and the needed transformative steps to begin to disentangle both policies and practices from its western colonial roots of white privilege.

Readers will have the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of key historical figures such as James McGill in developing and sustaining systemic racism. This book also conveys the ongoing struggle over the last century in the work of Black student organizations and faculty to tangibly and in every other way knock James McGill and the hegemonic story of whiteness off its pedestal. hampton illuminates how, until recently, James McGill's life story and legacy was weaved through and integrally embedded into university life; extolled and privileged while the contributions of Black students and faculty within the academic community have been minimized and erased.

Since the publication of this book, student activists and faculty have continued the struggle of resisting the anti-Black racism so pervasive in our post-secondary institutions. One of the most recent impacts of these actions has been the removal of the statue of James McGill from the McGill university campus. While symbolically important, the removal of this one statue, represents the need for more counter-stories like the ones hampton places in the foreground of her work.

In sum, this book offers readers a close examination of how the hegemony of whiteness continues to reform and sustain itself within this post-secondary institution, while also tracing strategies and practices of resistance and refusals of anti-Black racism. This book will be of interest to anyone seeking a greater understanding of the deep entanglements of systemic racism within universities while also showcasing key methods and strategies intended to disrupt, disentangle, and transform socially unjust policies and practices. This book also makes clear that anti-Black racism continues to shape teaching and learning experiences negatively and tangibly. Thus, hampton's work demonstrates the need to continue in the work of confronting racial injustice by contesting the onto-epistemological privileging western colonial logics.

Reference

Hampton, R. (2020). *Black racialization and resistance at an elite university*. University of Toronto Press.