

ANTI-RACIST STRUGGLE

Cultures of Anti-Racism in Latin America and the Caribbean. Edited by Peter Wade, James Scorer, and Ignacio Aguiló. London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2019. Pp. 220. \$32.00 paper; \$26.00 e-book; free pdf.
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The image of Latin America and the Caribbean as “race paradises” lingers in the popular imagination and even in some academic settings. This book offers a powerful rebuttal of that stereotypical depiction by engaging with the prevalent racism that has historically permeated the region, which its editors and authors interpret as a product of long-standing colonial and postcolonial practices of domination and inequality in the global world order.

That analysis alone would make this collection of essays a worthwhile contribution. But this book’s authors go beyond addressing the roots of racism to tackle a potential cure—anti-racism. In this they are inspired by two questions: What are the ways in which art (cultural expression and performance) can play important roles in anti-racist struggles? And (in spite of the book’s challenge to the presumed exceptionalism of the region), are there specific factors in the racial formations of Latin America and the Caribbean that can help us advance these struggles? The authors respond to these questions from the viewpoints of a number of disciplines: anthropology, cultural studies, ethnomusicology, film studies, history, international relations, social communication, and Latin American, Hispanic, and Caribbean Studies.

The book is composed of an introduction and eight chapters, all written in an accessible manner suitable for scholars and advanced undergraduate and graduate students. In their very comprehensive introduction, Wade, Scorer, and Aguiló state that the specific conditions of the region are worth exploring in connection to its long history and high degree of *mestizaje*. They argue that *mestizaje*—broadly understood as the racial and cultural mixing of African, European, and indigenous peoples characteristic of Latin American and Caribbean histories—can create “a lived experience in which racial conviviality and elements of racial democracy *co-exist* simultaneously with racial hierarchy and racism” (4, emphasis in the original). Latin America and the Caribbean are particularly fitting for this exploration because, while the entire region shares a history of conquest, colonialism, nation-building, racism, and multiculturalism, the history and its lived experiences vary from country to country and are by no means homogeneous.

Contributors acknowledge the long and productive anti-racist struggle in the region, spearheaded by cultural expression, throughout the twentieth century. This legacy provides a framework for the cases presented in this volume, wherein contributors propose new ways to think about anti-racist work in Latin America and the Caribbean. Authors discuss identity politics, racist imagery, discourses about race, and anti-racism laws in Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru, as well as indigenous filmmaking in Latin America and conceptual art in the Caribbean. Thus, they cover a

large segment of the region, from its largest country (Brazil) to a country that has been relatively less studied (Bolivia). Because visual racism has been ever-present in Latin America and the Caribbean, several chapters in the book analyze the tensions and ambivalences present in racist imagery, which tends to be either dismissed as harmless or elevated as an example of the presumed innate tolerance of the region.

One of the book's essential contributions is that the authors of its individual sections all state that anti-racist work cannot—and should not —be carried out only by racialized groups, but also by their non-racialized allies. Hence, empathy and affection emerge as key anti-racist statements. The contributors also propose that if we look at *mestizaje* as a process neither dominated by whiteness nor one whose desirable outcome is whiteness, it can contribute to broad anti-racist alliances.

Likewise, the authors recognize that today's so-called "post-racial societies" tend to place greater emphasis on class inequities, to the detriment of attention to racial inequalities. The logic for such behavior goes as follows: because there is no institutional racial segregation, there are no major racial problems. Nonetheless, all the contributors recognize in their chapters how impossible it is to separate racism from discrimination in terms of class, gender, and sexuality. The larger objective of the book is to invite the reader to consider how the lessons of anti-racism in Latin America and the Caribbean have relevance far beyond those regions—precisely because racism and racial conviviality continue to co-exist there. This duality tends to obfuscate the damage that racism produces.

The book is a timely contribution to the study of the role that the arts and cultural expressions can play in discourses about anti-racism and its practice. Even though work abounds on racial and ethnic relations and racism in the region, this book offers important insights into topics that have not been explored in depth, such as the role of art in anti-racist work and the role of affect in the construction of solid alliances that traverse racial boundaries. As a whole, the contributors in this volume illuminate how racist legacies can be transformed and reappropriated, how notions of blackness, whiteness, indigeneity, and mixedness can be expressed through art, and how people can engage in anti-racist work to foster affective encounters between racialized and non-racialized bodies.

The contributors recognize that these cultural expressions can easily be co-opted by elites, the market, or the state, and watered down to harmless forms of multiculturalism. In spite of all of this complexity and ambivalence, this book bets on the value of cultural expression and performance in furthering anti-racist work.

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