

Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews

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White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism

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Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews 2006 35: 402

DOI: 10.1177/009430610603500437

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://csx.sagepub.com/content/35/4/402.citation>

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education. But those seeking a sustained social analysis of how neoliberalism operates in the United States may wish to look elsewhere.

White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism, by **Roger Hewitt**. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 176 pp. \$29.99 paper. ISBN: 0521520894.

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In the summer of 2001, Britain experienced its worst bout of civil unrest and “rioting” for sometime. These events took place in the formerly industrial (but now economically sedentary) northern towns of Bradford, Oldham, and Burnley and initially involved white and British-Asian youth before escalating and pitting the latter against the full machinery of the police. From this period, the words of a far-right protagonist group, the British National Party (BNP), which proved instrumental in exploiting what had been an uneasy settlement between ethnically segregated and economically impoverished communities, remain uppermost in the mind. As regional organiser of the BNP, Steve Smith told the media “we have had multiculturalism imposed on us for too long, and the indigenous population is being sidelined by the politically correct politicians who are running the country” (*New York Times* July 4, 2001). Indeed, this crude opportunism seemed to be giving voice to a perception that ethnic minorities were afforded special treatment at the expense of white residents. As one local resident put it: “Asians always seem to jump the line ahead of whites . . . I am not racist but if they come to our country they should abide by our rules and not get houses over us” (*ibid.*).

Drawing upon empirical data from a London context, Roger Hewitt’s timely contribution *White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism* explores how such perceptions might come to pass. By examining the “borderline” between “the reasonable concerns of white non-powerful groups and the racialisation of those concerns” (p. 17), Hewitt suggests that this type of “politics of resentment” need “not come from people who would ever have voted for racist political parties” (p.

55) and, indeed, is not driven by a racism that carries familiar an ideology witnessed in biological or cultural racism. It is instead, argues Hewitt, disparate, confused, inconsistent, and yet embedded within dense generational and spatial networks that both encourage and perpetuate it.

Couched in a comparative historical analysis of public policy philosophies towards integrating ethnic minorities in Britain, the U.S., and Australia, the book explores, in the author’s words, “the narratives of daily life that shows the larger historical dialogue at work” in “backlash” politics, something that is best understood as a symptom of “a disparate set of responses to equality discourses as they unfolded from the 1960s to the present” (p. 4).

After general and historical introductory chapters which outline the movement from conceptions of equality that informed the civil rights movement to those at work in the practice of anti-racism and policies of affirmative action, the book switches to a ethnographically informed micro-sociological account of “narrative and counter-narratives” in what Hewitt describes as “boundaries of legitimate disclosure” (chapter 4). This specifically includes a discussion of Roland Adams, a 16-year-old African-Caribbean boy murdered by a gang of white youths, as well as the immediate political responses to it by local communities, not least the apparent defensiveness of white communities to the accusation of a general, localised racism being attributed to the area. This story becomes an increasingly familiar one as Hewitt goes on to discuss the racism on working-class London estates where a second, more well-known murder of another African-Caribbean boy, that of Stephen Lawrence, also takes place.

The discussion of spatial elements and the rich ethnographic data in this work are real delights and for that reason alone it ought to be read by student, teacher, commentator, and legislator alike. In the end, however, Hewitt largely offers a class-thesis that filters everything through an increasing neo-liberal encroachment into state-supported programmes of anti-racism and multiculturalism. Although he fairly seamlessly weaves this narrative through his analysis of the U.S., Canada, and Britain, the important and defining differences of each context risk being lost where a familiar tale of economic exploita-

tion leading to resentment, competition and—in the end—an unwitting racialization negates the contradictions and complexities of multiculturalism. Moreover, it strikes me as astonishing that a book on multiculturalism in Britain makes no attempt whatsoever to engage with the presence—discursive or real—of British-Muslims within it. The author may well have very good reasons for this, but it is simply not clear *why* the biggest protagonist group—in terms of numbers and issues (be it economic marginalisation, political integration, or public scrutiny) are entirely omitted. Of course such a discussion would also have to address the further role of other pernicious racisms—not least anti-Muslim cultural racism and Islamophobia. And I think this is where the Right/Left dualisms in Hewitt's thesis may become less sturdy, given how the French-style radical secularism of Britain (evident in some quarters of the Right and Left) deplores the presence of Muslims in the public sphere, disingenuously claiming that it has nothing to do with racism whilst sometimes drawing on and deploying the same racialised discourses. That said, Hewitt's central concern is not lost: that we need to go and look at specific lived experiences of Multiculturalism if you wish to make effective interventions—a position that explains the empirical setting in London.

Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present, by **Ellen Reese**. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005. 355 pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 0520244621.

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The welfare backlash that ended federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1996 grew out of a century of waxing and waning opposition to support for single mothers. Historians and social scientists have vividly portrayed the debates that preceded the national welfare program, as well as the federal workfare pressures that accelerated from the sixties and seventies through the present. Amid her careful synthesis of research on the history of welfare opposition, Ellen Reese's own research illuminates an underexplored era of opposition—the late for-

ties' and fifties' state-level incursions on welfare for single mothers. Reese's documentary investigation of state welfare politics in this period, and her multivariate analysis of state characteristics associated with successful welfare incursions, are a valuable contribution to the historical sociology of welfare. They add analytical depth and coherence to the longer history Reese recounts in *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present*.

Reese starts the book with a portrait of the impact of the 1996 welfare reforms, including accounts from her own interviews with low-income single mothers. She then previews her arguments about the long assault on the AFDC safety net. She proposes that mid-century state-level backlashes created new legacies of mandatory work requirements and racist images of welfare claimants to supplement older anti-welfare themes. Fifties' state alliances of conservative and low-wage employers and white working and middle classes prefigured later national politics that would integrate economic interests in cheap labor and tax cuts, racial and anti-immigrant resentments, and conservative family values, to successfully target the federal welfare safety net. The remainder of the book supports these arguments with primary-source data on fifties' history and secondary sources, most of them critical of welfare reform, to recount the latter period.

After World War II, changes in fertility and births outside of marriage, along with federal welfare rules, fueled the expansion of welfare rolls. States with powerful farm interests, large populations of blacks, and mounting fiscal constraints witnessed unevenly successful cross-class efforts to restrict Aid to Dependent Families. Reese compares welfare backlashes in Georgia and Kentucky, two southern farming states that needed low-wage agricultural workforces, and where politicians appealed to racism to justify restrictions. Both states passed restrictions rather than end welfare, because farmers needed a labor force that survived between agricultural employment seasons. Reese shows how the more thorough planter domination of the political economy in Georgia facilitated a rash of welfare restrictions, while in Kentucky's more variegated political economy, small farmers and unionized coal miners resisted many restrictions, and a large white welfare population limited the effec-