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Book Review: CRT and Social Studies Futures

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Abstract: This book review examines the new work from editors Amanda E. Vickery and Noreen Naseem Rodriguez’s *Critical Race Theory and Social Studies Futures: From the Nightmare of Racial Realism to Dreaming Out Loud* which explores the often contentious relationship between Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the status quo of social studies education before moving into the Afrofuturism practice of ‘freedom dreaming’ with visions of what the field can and should be. The authors in this volume do an excellent job applying a variety of lenses grounded in Critical Race Theory to the social studies and critiquing the field from within as they continue to hope, dream, and work toward more equitable classrooms and outcomes in various K-12 contexts.

Bringing together an impressive collective of authors, Amanda E. Vickery and Noreen Naseem Rodriguez’s *Critical Race Theory and Social Studies Futures: From the Nightmare of Racial Realism to Dreaming Out Loud* explores the contentious relationship between Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the status quo of social studies education before moving into the Afrofuturism practice of ‘freedom dreaming’ with visions of what the field can and should be. Framed around Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) application of CRT to education, without rehashing the foundational theory, this volume of the “Research and Practice in Social Studies Series” speaks to a knowledgeable audience and allows the

authors space to dive right into applications and implications of CRT within the social studies. Moving beyond the white-black binary, the editors compiled an extensive collection of perspectives across “Crits,” each lending its unique lens and intersectionalities to social studies’ history, present, and futures. The book is well organized into four parts which establish the problem within the field, situate it in classrooms, provide examples of possible practice, and suggest what the field could be. Vickery and Rodriguez do an excellent job accomplishing their stated goal of elevating the voices of scholars of Color and their coconspirators as they seek to usher in a new generation of social studies

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researchers and educators working against the field's white supremacist groundings.

Referencing Langston Hughes' ponderings over what happens to "A Dream Deferred," Part One opens with a strong critique of these groundings, calling out the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and the College and University Faculty Assembly (CUFA) for their failed leadership in regard to race. A history of ignoring internal challenges lead to the departure of members such as Gloria Ladson-Billings demonstrating the resistance of these academic institutions to shed their race-neutral policies (Busey, Ch. 1). Examinations of NCSS position statements (Duncan & Murray-Everett, Ch. 2) reveal a refusal to focus on race, except as one of many diversity factors, obfuscating its centrality to advancing more equitable social studies education practices. A review of recent historiographies of the field indicates a failure to mention the work of scholars of Color, such as the important contributions of LaGarret King, or continue to segregate their contributions even in the post-Brown vs. Board era (James-Galloway, Ch 3). Yet despite the declared shortcomings of NCSS and CUFA, many of the authors in this volume, including Vickery and Rodriguez, represent a new perspective on the leadership potentials possible from NCSS/CUFA as they seek to reform from within and provide a new direction to the role these organizations could play as they supply guidance to scholars and teachers in the field.

In Section Two, "Racial Realities in Classroom Spaces," the problem is

situated in more classroom-based issues, which reveal the racialized experiences of students and the conscious and unconscious ways in which the social studies have upheld white supremacy, as well as, the moves some teachers make against it. Exploring conceptions of citizenship in relation to race, spanning early childhood (Templeton & Harvey, Ch 4; Falkner, Ch 5) through secondary classrooms (Shatara & Kim, Ch 6; Donzo, Ch 7), reveals that students of all ages are acutely aware of race (Eberhardt, 2020), challenging the "age-appropriate" argument put forth in much of the current anti-CRT rhetoric (Bailey & Drenon, 2023) and dispelling the notion that insistence on colorblind ideologies fosters a sense of belonging when in reality it serves only to tacitly endorse white supremacy (Boutte, 2008; Faulkner, Ch.5). Templeton and Harvey (Ch. 4), illustrate that the racialization of black bodies can start in daycare centers even before formal K-12 schooling, demonstrating just how early students can be exposed to experiences that begin their racial formation (Omi & Winant, 2014). While many of these situations will be familiar to critical educators, these chapters provide additional context and bring a broader range of voices to this racial conversation. Exploring CRT from its offshoots of LatCrit, AsianCrit, DisCrit, QueerCrit, and TribalCrit, in addition to BlackCrit, provides important nuance and intersectional perspectives that have been lacking within the social studies and the vignettes provided offer the many ways race is understood and experienced by K-12 teachers and students.

Shifting toward current practices that demonstrate what CRT-informed social studies looks like in classrooms, Section Three, “Possibilities of Praxis,” provides examples of teachers implementing humanizing curriculums and anti-racism instructional practices. Emphasizing counternarratives (Vasquez, Ch 8), Youth Participatory Action Research (Garcia et al., Ch 9), and cultural citizenship education (Jones, Ch 10), the authors offer ways for students to engage with social studies beyond limited and harmful master narratives as well as make and value connections to their own lived experiences. Drawing on humanizing practices from Ethnic Studies (Villarreal, Ch 11) and immigrant community organizing (Tirado & Monreal, Ch 12), powerful examples are provided of how the field can pull from its less traditional spaces to reconceptualize citizenship and inclusion as marginalized groups work to reshape communities. This section is valuable for practitioners seeking tangible ways to enact more racially conscious approaches to their teaching. It provides impactful yet attainable entry points for teachers seeking to challenge and problematize singular fact-presenting curriculums that devalue other ways of knowing through inquiry, action, and solidarity (Magill & Rodriguez, 2021).

The fourth and final section of the book, “Dreaming of Social Studies Futures,” is perhaps the most important, where the focus moves into the realm of ‘future dreaming’. Framed by the Afrofuturism practice of freedom dreaming, which requires peoples historically oppressed by white supremacy, colonialism, and the

transatlantic slave trade to find ways to dream and imagine themselves beyond subjugation, the authors provide aspirational visions of where they hope the field of social studies education can move as they work toward dismantling white hegemonic norms and creating space for centering and elevating diverse voices.

Daring to ask questions such as how we can decolonize schooling and value indigenous children’s experiences as we reconsider our relationship to Land (Turtle Island Social Studies Collective, Ch 13), how can we teach the fullness of black women’s lives so that their multidimensional lives are celebrated instead of given a reductive “icon” status in the curriculum (Mitchell Patterson, Ch 14), how can Quare theory push us to more intersectional understandings of race and the queer experience (Wargo, Ch 15), and how can the U.S. confront the violence of its imperialist past in Asia and navigate the racialized experiences of Asian-Americans within their simultaneously excluded yet “model minority” status (An, Ch 16), the authors envision a future of anti-racist social studies education. The flaws in current social studies practices could not be made plainer than when a student exclaimed their surprise that Harriet Tubman was real and not just a movie character (Mitchell Patterson, Ch 14, p. 164-165). When the few token black people in the standardized curriculum are presented only for their superhuman actions, we all lose their humanity and our own. A future where black women are seen as whole and human should be the least we can ask for. To this end, in a powerful closing chapter,

Shanks and Hall (Ch 17) offer a black feminist approach to economics education and in so doing remind us to dream with our eyes open because “the work of liberation is not just in dreaming but in doing” (p. 192).

The scope and breadth of this book are both a strength and a limitation. By covering so many “Crits” and angles into the problems and potentials of CRT in the social studies, it provides an accessible and valuable entry point for practitioners or graduate students to begin to ground their understandings in research. With this audience in mind, Sections Three and Four could have benefited from the inclusion of additional explicit examples or sample lesson plans illustrating the potentials of CRT-informed social studies instruction. Conversely, more well-versed academics may find many of the topics presented familiar and that the broad range limits the depth of new understandings.

Throughout this volume, the concept of coconspirators is emphasized. This is a reminder that this cannot and should not be the work of scholars and teachers of Color alone. The problems exposed and futures envisioned require collective action. The timing of this book is no coincidence and adds to its already considerable significance. On top of the historical challenges that scholars, teachers, and students of Color have faced from within the field, and the white normative culture they have been situated within, the recent spate of anti-CRT bills making their way through state legislatures heightens the necessity for organized opposition to these policies and

demands definitive race-centered leadership from NCSS/CUFA. Through compelling research and storytelling, this volume reminds us that the relationship between CRT and the social studies is uneasy but not irreconcilable. Vickery and Rodriguez choose to end with a renewed focus on hope. Not a blind hope, but a radical hope, and it is through this radical hope that these future dreams, one day, become reality.

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