Review of *Why They Hate Us: How Racist Rhetoric Impacts Education* by Huber, L. & Muñoz, S.

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In *Why They Hate Us: How Racist Rhetoric Impacts Education*, Huber and Muñoz provide a critical analysis of the many ways that racist nativism is embedded into educational policy and practice across the P-20 spectrum. The authors included in this edited volume use varying approaches to educational research to detail the specific manifestations of racist nativism, making this text a useful tool both in terms of content and research methodology. As racist nativism remains an endemic feature of American society, *Why They Hate Us* encourages readers to continue to engage in critical research that exposes the pervasive nature of this phenomenon, while also highlighting the hopes, joys, and dreams inherently embedded within immigrant communities of color. Rather than solely focusing on narratives of victimization, this text challenges readers to believe in the possibilities for resistance, while collectively working toward a more just and equitable future.

From Governor George Wallace’s rallying cry of “Segregation now, Segregation tomorrow, Segregation forever” (Wallace, 1963) to former President Donald Trump’s vicious depiction of immigrants as “criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc.” (Trump, 2015), racist rhetoric is a longstanding feature in our society. Leaders both within and outside of government have used the power of their pulpits to build narratives and shape policy often directly in service of maintaining white supremacy in society. In the foreword of *Why They Hate Us: How Racist Rhetoric Impacts Education*, critical race theorist Daniel Solórzano, invites readers to grapple with the challenges of the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992), while acknowledging the specific plight of undocumented immigrants, many of whom continue to face trials and tribulations due to the ways that “racist nativist patterns adapt in ways that maintain nativist dominance” (p. ix). What follows in this edited volume by Lindsay Pérez Huber and Susana Muñoz is a powerful collection of essays that interrogate this phenomenon by expertly detailing the ways in which racist and nativist rhetoric shapes the experiences of students of color within education systems.

There is an adage that explains that there is “nothing new under the sun”. This concept is painfully illustrated through the first chapter of *Why They Hate Us* by revisiting the extensive legacy of racial hatred and animus toward immigrants in the United States. With each passing generation, forms of exclusionary, anti-immigrant legislation and policies continue to emerge while adopting similar, stale arguments grounded in nativism and white supremacy (Pérez Huber & Muñoz, 2021). In fact, Pérez Huber et al.’s (2008) framework of racist nativism provides a critical lens through which this collection of essays can be understood. Rather than an aberration or series of individual forms of discrimination, this nativist rhetoric furthers the broader racial project of white supremacy by positioning communities of color as perpetually “other”, i.e., non-White. Through subsequent policy and practice, perceptions of racial identity are inextricably linked with citizenship, i.e. access to civil and human rights. This argument is situated in the conceptual lineage of Cheryl Harris’ (1993) theorization of ‘whiteness as property’, whereby whiteness is an elusive, adaptable credential fiercely protected by those in possession to maintain power. While the authors specifically articulate how this practice has resulted in the most recent iteration of anti-Latinx immigration sentiments in the United States, they also note that these exclusionary strategies are a feature of settler colonialism and have been employed against people of color throughout U.S. history. A critical contention that emerges from this text is the recognition that political rhetoric is inherently powerful and is re-
sponsible, at least in part, for shaping common understandings of race, racism, and the very idea of who can claim an American identity.

Although the essays ultimately span the K-20 educational pipeline, *Why They Hate Us* is essentially organized by educational context, with Chapters 2-4 detailing how racist rhetoric impacts K-12 education and Chapters 5-7 offering insights based in higher education. Each chapter provides readers with a deeper understanding of the influence of racist rhetoric in education through critical explorations of students’, families’, and administrators’ collective experiences during the Trump era. Several of the authors thoughtfully draw on the legacy of counternarratives and *testimonios* (Anzaldúa, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994) to highlight the power of resistance, collective action, and agency that communities of color possess, effectively reframing the participants as more than just victims of racist nativism, but also powerful resisters to the racialized status quo in their own right.

**The Impact of Racist Nativist Rhetoric in K-12 Education**

This volume’s section on K-12 education begins with an excellent example of the power of storytelling and vignettes through the introduction to their exploration of the ways that racially charged presidential rhetoric impacted experiences in U.S. high schools. Drawing on the results of their mixed-method study, Rogers and Ishimoto (2021) adeptly explain how President Trump’s racist rhetoric emboldened people to openly commit acts of racial violence in schools often with little to no recourse from educational leaders, which only served to embolden the perpetrators. Unfortunately, this pattern is common among responses to racial violence in schools, as educational leaders often respond to acts of racial violence through lackluster press releases and statements that suggest that the perpetrators are anomalies, rather than representative of the broader sociopolitical context (Bridgeforth, 2021). On the contrary, Rogers and Ishimoto’s (2021) research suggests that these actions are spurred by racist rhetoric, leading to “a toxic environment...that undermines learning, hardens social relationships, and distorts the civic development of youth” (p. 66). And yet, it is important to understand that the children who were the victims of such racial violence and xenophobic hatred within their schools are not devoid of agency.

As Rodriguez Vega (2021) argues in the subsequent chapter, “children of immigrants demonstrate resiliency they can harness in future moments of political repression” (p. 88). Rodríguez Vega’s work employs creative arts methods to collaboratively visualize students’ opinions in the wake of experiencing ongoing racist nativist rhetoric. Through self-portraits, drawings, theater performances, and storytelling (examples of which are embedded throughout this chapter), the collaborators in this study actively “resist the ways their lives are deemed disposable by the Trump administration” (p. 88). This chapter is a compelling case, both related to its substance and arguments, but also in terms of methodology. It expertly portrays how creative arts methodologies can be used not only to better understand the lived experiences of participants, but also to co-construct liberatory spaces that center their needs, fears, hopes, and dreams.

Employing a targeted focus on the ways that racist nativist rhetoric often ultimately manifests in legislation and policy, Valdivia et al. (2021) then argue that these policy decisions, most notably former President Trump’s attempted repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) federal program, directly impact the schooling experiences of immigrant students and families, as well as the teachers and school administrators who serve them. Drawing on interviews with high school educators and undocumented students and classroom observations in schools with significant immigrant populations, the authors’ findings detail “heightened feelings of fear and uncertainty among undocumented students [due to] increased instances of bullying among peers” (p. 103). As in Chapter 2 of this volume, the authors argue that perpetrators of racist nativist violence have been emboldened by former President Trump’s rhetoric and educational leaders regularly choose objectivity and neutrality in response, “given concerns about how some conservative parents may respond” (p. 103). As the previous chapters indicate, these experiences are prevalent throughout the K-12 educational system, which necessitates a continued exploration of how racist nativist rhetoric shapes the experiences of students in postsecondary education.

**The Impact of Racist Nativist Rhetoric in Higher Education**

In Chapter 5, Serrano (2021) begins the investigation of racist nativism in higher education by describing how community college students are impacted by anti-immigrant/anti-Latina/o/x rhetoric. The unique feature of this contribution is the way that the author situates their research on the experiences of a student who “is a transborder or transfronterista, a person who lives
navigates both Mexico and the United States concurrently and frequently experiences border crossing” (p. 121). The oft-contested sociopolitical context along the border between the United States and Mexico is regularly discussed in political discourse (Abi-Habib, 2021), which makes it an interesting focus alongside the context of community colleges, often heralded as equitable, open access institutions. However, through reading Serrano’s (2021) work, I am left with the question of open and accessible for whom? And in what ways? This is particularly important considering the chapter’s descriptions of the racist nativist violence that transborder community college students face as they commute to and from the institution. The unique trials detailed in this chapter highlights the need for further research on the ways that colleges and universities can design policies to better support transborder students as they continue their pursuit of higher education.

The subsequent chapter continues to center the experiences of undocumented and immigrant students at colleges and universities as Gomez et al. (2021) examine students’ racialized experiences in higher education. Like previous research on racism in higher education in the Trump era (Andrade, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2018; Stokes, 2021), the authors clearly explain that the candidacy and subsequent election of former President Trump influenced a rise in racial microaggressions on college campuses. While the concept of racial microaggressions is not new in higher education research, this chapter explores a specific type of microaggression, racist nativist microaggressions; defined as “systemic, everyday forms of racist nativism directed toward People of Color automatically and unconsciously (Pérez Huber, 2011)” (p. 144).

The final chapter preceding the book’s conclusion is an incredibly interesting contribution that illustrates the intersection of religious othering and racist nativism. Along with his depiction of Latinx immigrants as criminals, former President Trump’s rhetoric toward Muslim immigrants during the 2016 presidential election was equally disdainful. Hassan et al. note that former President Trump sought to ban Muslim immigrants from the United States just “seven days into his administration” (p. 162). While the other chapters in this volume largely engage in questions of race, racism, immigration, and citizenship, Hassan et al. add necessary complexity with a testimonio of resistance by a Black Muslim refugee navigating a historically white institution in the United States. This critical work illustrates the intersection of anti-Blackness and anti-immigrant ideologies in higher education that can position Black Muslim students in a perpetual state of “contingent inclusion” (p. 169), whereby Black Muslim students experience religious othering in Black spaces that are predominantly Christian, while also experiencing anti-Blackness in Muslim spaces. And yet, despite these challenges, the author of the testimonio in this chapter frames her Blackness, Muslim faith, and refugee status to pointedly resist the impacts of racist nativism and to refuse to be labeled as a victim. It is reminiscent of the K-12 students in Chapter 3 who used creative arts to emphasize their agency and resilience.

Conclusion

Why They Hate Us: How Racist Rhetoric Impacts Education is an accessible and relatively brief edited volume that will provides readers with a strong foundation in understanding the ways that racist nativist rhetoric influences educational policy and practice, which in turn, shapes the experiences and outcomes of immigrant and undocumented students. The text was impeccably organized and would be a welcome addition to most graduate courses with a focus on educational inequities. It could also provide helpful insights and considerations for students and researchers in search of examples of interesting critical research methods, particularly Chapter 3 with its focus on creative arts methodologies. Lastly, almost every chapter offered implications for future research, policy, and/or practice, leading this text to be more than just a description of racist nativism in education. Instead, readers will find clear and concrete suggestions for how to continue this work in a society where racism is an underlying presence.

To return to the foreword of this volume, it is important to recognize the adaptive nature of the ideology of racist nativism by foregrounding the permanence of racism, and by extension, racist nativist realism. After reading this text, my main hope is that future research related to the impact of racist rhetoric continues to interrogate new adaptations of these concepts in policy and practice, even as the political rhetoric appears to be more supportive of immigrants. While former President Trump unequivocally centered his presidential campaign and subsequent presidency in xenophobic, racist, fearmongering rhetoric, many of the immigration and deportation policies that he implemented are still in effect under President Joseph Biden (Kumar, 2021). The tone and ferocity of the message may have shifted, but in many ways, the underlying ideology of racist nativism remains as active as ever.
References


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