

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Matthew W. Hughey, *White Bound: Nationalists, Antiracists, and the Shared Meanings of Race*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012, 286 pp., \$24.95 paper (9780804776950)

Whiteness studies have emphasized the importance of recognizing the heterogeneity of racial categories. While this is certainly an important lesson, it is at the same time crucial to remember that “white actors” (p. 13) are linked by transposable hegemonic social norms that to some extent cut across heterogeneous differences. This is central to the argument of *White Bound: Nationalists, Antiracists, and the Shared Meanings of Race* by Matthew W. Hughey, a book which compares two seemingly conflicting all-white activist groups in the United States and finds surprising similarities in the thinking of their members.

More specifically, Hughey’s book is a comparison between the *Whites for Racial Justice* (WRJ), an organization built to challenge racial inequality and white privilege, and *National Equality for All* (NEA), a white nationalist association which challenges society’s disregard for “white rights” and argues in favour of racial segregation. This comparison is based on ethnographic research conducted over a year in which Hughey spent at least one day a week with members of both organizations. While his analysis does highlight the diversity of opinions held by members of the WRJ and NEA, especially concerning issues like racial segregation, the majority of the book’s nine chapters are spent investigating the strong resemblance in the racial thinking of members of both organizations. Hughey argues that these resemblances demonstrate the centrality of “hegemonic whiteness” for the thinking and behaviour of white Americans, even those on seemingly opposite ends of a political spectrum. As Hughey puts it, “While there is no question about the political differences and individual heterogeneity of white actors in an array of settings, it is important to recognize that certain forms of whiteness can become dominant and pursued as the ideal” (p. 13).

Hughey supports his argument by unpacking several similarities underlying the claims of members of both the WRJ and NEA including the propensity to claim “white victimhood” (chapter 5), to take a paternalistic attitude towards racial minorities (chapter 6), to cite a desire to appropriate “nonwhiteness” (chapter 7) and, finally, to trivialize know-

ledge that is coded as “nonwhite” and deemed confusing or inaccessible to “whites” (chapter 8). The book makes several contributions to the study of racialization and whiteness, two of which will be outlined in this review.

First, the book offers readers a way of conceptualizing the binding nature of hegemonic whiteness while simultaneously paying respect to the heterogeneity of political opinions held by white actors. The book finds that white actors do indeed hold a diversity of political opinions, but at the same times notes that hegemonic whiteness governs how they, irrespective of differences in opinion, perceive identity and a number of political issues. While it would be problematic to claim that “white American” is a homogeneous identity category, it is sensible to claim that white Americans likely share a number of ideological positions, especially concerning racial privilege and inequality. Hughey points to a variety of examples of these shared ideological positions including the belief that racial minorities do not face significant disadvantages because of systemic discrimination. Of particular interest is the tendency among white Americans to dismiss nonwhite disadvantage by claiming “white victimhood” via “sympathy narratives” or “demotion discourses” (Chapter 5). In Hughey’s research, sympathy narratives were most commonly used by members of the NEA; they argued that affirmative action policies had granted people of colour unfair socioeconomic advantages. Demotion discourses were more commonly used by members of the WRJ; while claiming support for affirmative action in the abstract, they also told stories of white individuals being disadvantaged by affirmative action policies. Neither group made note of the structural disadvantages faced by racial minorities, suggesting a very similar understanding of racial inequality. Hughey’s analysis suggests that, while different in form, members of both organizations are “bound” by a tendency to diminish the disadvantages faced by racial minorities as well as a desire to highlight the alleged disadvantages faced by white Americans, sometimes aiming to make the claim that white actors experience disadvantages that are equal to those faced by of “people of color” (p. 80).

Second, this book adds empirical support to arguments about the limits of conceptualizing “racism” as the work of bigots and the related importance of recognizing a larger ideal of hegemonic whiteness that informs how white Americans think about race and inequality. Hughey draws on the works of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (p. 10) and Tim Wise (p. 12) to argue that one of the most significant barriers for antiracist organizations today is the inclination among white actors to propose that the United States has entered an era of “racial egalitarianism” (p. 10) and that racism is therefore no longer a significant social problem. This

thinking tends to trivialize racism by likening it to the work of “bad apples” (p. 8) who do not speak for American society. Hughey’s work challenges this trivialization by pointing to a larger cultural schema of hegemonic whiteness and structures of white privilege that extend beyond the bigotry of isolated individuals. In doing so, *White Bound* re-focuses its readers’ attention towards social structural systems of white privilege while also highlighting the troubling ways that “egalitarian” discourses are used to deny the enduring significance of racism in the United States.

While Hughey’s book makes a strong contribution to the study of whiteness, its focus on *all-white* organizations, particularly the WRJ, leaves some questions unaddressed. Thus, to conclude, I would like to offer a suggestion for further research based on Hughey’s “white bound” concept. In particular, future studies could ask if and how white antiracists in *multiracial* organizations are (un)able to distance themselves from hegemonic whiteness. This would allow for an examination of how white Americans remain white bound in racially diverse environments and/or add to the study of how white Americans code their white bound thinking when in the presence of “others.” These studies could also ask questions about the relationship between hegemonic whiteness and racial minorities and, considering the cultural assimilationist pressures, examine if and how nonwhite activists can be white bound.

In sum, Dr. Hughey’s *White Bound* has much to contribute to the study of racialization and whiteness. It will be a particularly useful read for those studying discourses of “white victimhood”/“reverse racism.” I also highly recommend the book to those studying the tendency to deny and/or minimize the significance of racism in the United States.

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