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Today, it is virtually impossible to read a newspaper or watch the television news without seeing expressions of racist ideas and practices, whether in terms of the rise of white supremacist movements in the United States, neo-fascist movements in Europe, or "ethnic cleansing" in what was once known as Yugoslavia. This explosion of ethnic and racial unrest across the globe has paralleled a resurgence of scholarly research on new forms of racism, racial conflict, and shifting meanings and definitions of race. Drawing upon a vast array of literature and multidisciplinary perspectives, British sociologists John Solomos and Les Back have written a book that provides a wholesale overview of recent debates on race and racism in Western societies, especially Europe and England. The authors offer a critical examination of an array of work on the social construction of race and racism, the impact of class, culture, and gender on manifestations of racism, changing meanings of race in popular culture, and the role of anti-racist challenges and movements in Europe. The book not only provides an excellent introduction to a variety of excellent work now being done across disciplines, it also includes insights that, in exciting ways, challenge the existing orientations of those already working in the areas of race and racism.

Solomos and Back survey a great deal of scholarly literature to interrogate existing theoretical perspectives and explain the salience and tenacity of race and racism in contemporary societies. One central argument concerns the conceptualization of race and the need to situate contemporary debates within a shifting political, social, and cultural contexts. Specifically, Solomos and Back argue that contemporary manifestations of race and racism are historically contingent and context dependent. That is, racial symbols and racial movements surrounding, for example, the Clarence Thomas nomination, the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, or the O.J. Simpson trial in the United States involve a politicalization of racial signifiers that are located within processes of social regulation, collective identity formation, and state policies. Thus, historical and contemporary meanings of race and racism are plural, complex, always changing, and expressed through coded signifiers such as culture, gender, and class.

Another central theme in *Racism and Society* is the rejection of unitary or simplistic definitions and meanings of race and racism. As Solomos and Back recognize, contemporary manifestations of racism are not just due to overt prejudice or discriminatory intent. Racial inequality manifests itself through diverse elaborations that can produce a racial effect independent of conscious intent. For example, in the United States, struggles over affirmative action, race-specific urban programs and policies, fair housing, and the dispersal of low-income government-subsidized housing are coded within a individualist or cultural logic. As a result the opponents of these forms of government action and policy can claim, as Solomos and Back argue, that they are not prejudice or racist but are merely interested in protecting a privileged way of life that they have worked hard to achieve. The issue of color or race is irrelevant to their arguments insofar as they accept individualist explanations of social mobility and inequality.

It follows from the above insights that a particular racist discourse must be situated in the contexts surrounding its dissemination. This means, as Solomos and Back put it, "irrevocably crossing the analysis of racism with other social relations," (p. 27) such as those surrounding gender, class, or culture. This implies that race should not be viewed as a fixed transhistorical category whose meaning is the same in all social contexts. Race should be viewed as a flexible category that shapes, and is shaped by, social inequalities of class and gender in an interlocking system. Using the case of urban poverty and the "underclass" in the United States, Solomos and Back show how race, class, and gender inequalities are reinforced by racist practices and policies of the U.S. federal government while racial inequalities and prejudices are perpetuated by sexism and class exploitation. Such an approach seeks to uncover the meanings of racialized identities and inequalities, whether they manifest themselves at the local, national, or international level, without attempting to prioritize one classification over another. This means moving away from generalized approaches in favor of connecting local manifestations of race, racism, and racial inequality to wider public discourses and local and global level processes. Solomos's and Back's discussion of the "underclass" in the United States (Chapter 4), multiculturalism and popular culture (Chapters 5 and 6), the British news media (Chapter 7), and Nazism and the racial state (Chapter 7) offer excellent examples for understanding the complex and changing nexus of race, class, gender, and culture in Europe, and to a lesser extent the United States, in the post-World War II era.

A central implication of the author's argument is that social identities and inequalities based on race are not automatic and simply imposed on passive and unsuspecting individuals and groups. Solomos and Back

emphasize that racial inequalities and identities are the outcome of intense political struggles and conflicts in which racial minorities play an important and active role. Recent examples such as the mass furor over migrant labor in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, and the resistance of Bosnian Muslims to Serbian aggression in the 1990s symbolize the tensions and contradictions that underlay the politics of racial identity and inequality in contemporary societies. Thus, the authors argue and show that although racism may involve clear and simple images, it is by no means stable or without tension and contestation. On the one hand, the salience and tenacity of racism as a set of ideas and political practices lies in the ability of selective social groups to provide stereotypical images of racial minorities which are simple and seemingly unchanging and at the same time able to adapt to the changing social and political context. On the other hand, viewing race, racism, and racial identity as flexible and constantly shifting in meaning helps to move beyond the limitations of existing approaches that reify racial minority communities as static and unchanging political collectivities. As Solomos and Back recognize, there is the need to confront the reality that there are quite different and distinct racisms and identities that are constructed and reconstructed through time and space by social action and political challenge.

Overall, Solomos and Back are to be commended for their original and thoughtful analysis of existing theoretical and historical accounts on race and racism in contemporary societies. I must admit, however, that I felt disappointed by the authors' passing and cursory mention of a number of important debates on race, racism, and racial inequality in the United States. First, Solomos and Back present short and unrelated discussions of white supremacist movements in the United States. Second, the authors give only a brief mention to some of the most recent and innovative theoretical developments in the sociology of race in the United States. For example, nowhere are American resource competition theories (nor their proponents) mentioned even though Solomos and Back acknowledge in their final chapter that a central assumption of their approach is that "categories such as race and ethnicity are best conceived as political resources" that "are used by both dominant and subordinate groups for the purposes of legitimising and furthering their own social identities and social interests" (p. 207). Third, I would have liked to have seen more discussion of the newest race research in the United States that focuses on how racial residential segregation reinforces prejudiced attitudes, minority scapegoating, uneven metropolitan development, and geographical patterns of investment and disinvestment in American cities.

Racism and Society is an analysis largely limited to the subject of race and racism in Europe, especially England, and insufficient attention to the United States is not a major lacunae of the book. Solomos's and Back's text adds significantly to the broader knowledge concerned with race and racism worldwide. Scholars from a variety of disciplines will find much useful discussion of contemporary and historical debates and developments surrounding the social construction of race and racisms, role of culture and gender in meanings and definitions of race, and the role of anti-racisms in Europe. Ideally, the book would be a welcome companion to others in an advanced undergraduate course or graduate seminar on the historical and comparative dynamics of race and ethnicity.