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Felix Kumah-Abiwu



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Recognizing Race and Ethnicity: Power, Privilege, and Inequality

AUTHOR: FITZGERALD, J. KATHLEEN

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**REVIEWER: FELIX KUMAH-ABIWU
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY, OHIO**

The problem of race and its related issues of power, privilege, and inequality have for centuries occupied a central place within the public discourse of America. Although racial progress has been made within the past few decades, race continues to be a dividing force/source of tension within the United States. In addition to the ongoing issues of race and race relations, the scholarly focus on the study of race appears to be shifting from the traditional boundaries of the so-called "racial problem" of minority groups to white privilege and its connection to race dynamics. This is where Kathleen Fitzgerald's book on *Recognizing Race and Ethnicity: Power, Privilege, and Inequality* becomes important as a new addition to the existing works on race relations in America.

The book is well-researched and written in a clear and logical manner. It also serves the dual purpose as a textbook for students and a useful resource for the general public. Given the difficult nature of the national dialogue on race and racial inequalities, the author's underlying objective of stimulating an "honest rather than superficial conversations about race" is relevant and timely (p.15). The book is divided into four parts with in-depth analysis of the topical issues. The main topics are further divided into sub-topics and examined in twelve chapters. For brevity purposes, this review will focus on the four main parts (central themes) rather than the twelve chapters.

Part one of the book explores the conceptual underpinnings of race and ethnicity. Drawing on relevant scholarly works, especially from the field of sociology, the author defines race as "a group of people that share some socially defined physical characteristics, for instance, skin color, hair texture, or facial features" (p.9). Like other scholars, the author reminds readers of how race is a social construction rather than a biological reality, regardless of the fact that the definition of race refers to physical appearance. Unfortunately, the Eurocentric construction of race into categories where whiteness or Eurocentric values/ethos were defined and elevated as the "universal norm," while other groups (e.g., African descent) were defined/framed as "others," represent what could be described as the beginning point of the endless racial problems in our modern world. Part one also examines other relevant/emerging topics such as white privilege and its connection to race. Other issues such as race/wealth accumulation and scientific racism, a concept that perpetuates white supremacist ideas over other groups were also examined (p.71).

Part two focuses on the history of race relations in the United States. In this well-analyzed section, the author examines the manifestation of racial hierarchies by exploring the history of the slave trade, slavery, and its negative consequences on the dignity of African people who were forcefully brought to America. The resistances against oppression by African-Americans such as Harriet Tubman among others were discussed (pp.105-133). Part two's discussion of the post-Civil War era and the racial exclusion practiced through the Jim Crow laws and the struggles against such oppressive laws were also examined. In addition to African-Americans, the discussion in this part of the book focused on the struggles by other racial minorities such as Native Americans, Latino/a Americans, Asian Americans and other groups. The author's integration of similar global perspectives on racial struggles has broaden/enhanced the scope of the analysis. Of particular interest to also underscore is the discussion of the civil rights movement/other non-violent groups and the centrality of Dr. Martin Luther King's role in the legislative victories of the 1960s.

Fitzgerald's persuasive analysis of the critical issues in part three is also compelling. Issues such as the systemic inequalities that have plagued the American society deserve mention at this point. Systemic or institutional inequalities in education, healthcare, and socio-economic spheres were examined. The debate over race and crime/criminal justice system and the war on drugs also received thorough analysis. With regard to education, for example, the author did an excellent work by drawing on relevant historical cases of disparities experienced by African Americans as well as other minority groups for the analysis (pp. 215-340). Another important aspect of the race discourse is the negative imagery of "blackness" that is deeply rooted in the consciousness of many Americans. As Fitzgerald argues, most Americans still live in racially homogenous communities and the images of racial/ethnic "others" they are often exposed to are "disproportionately from popular culture rather than from personal experiences and interracial interactions" (p.347). Given the intractable nature of race dialogue in America and the rising incidents of racial conflicts in the so-called post-racial era, one wonders how race relations would look like in the next few decades.

Part four examines the contemporary issues of race and ethnicity in America. The idea of racial integration through arenas of interracial relationships, multiracial families, biracial/multiracial identities, sporting activities and other useful areas were advanced as critical venues for racial cooperation. As revealed in the preceding review, Fitzgerald's book is essentially a "one stop masterpiece" that has boldly taken on the "giant elephant in America's room" called race for honest discussion. There is no doubt that the book will be very useful to readers in broadening their understanding of the race issue.

Nonetheless, the book has few drawbacks worth noting. First, while the author acknowledges the shift in scholarly focus in the sociology of race/ethnicity from those "disadvantaged by societal hierarchies to those privileged by societal hierarchies" (p.xiii), one would expect these emerging issues to be extensively examined in few more chapters beyond chapter two (pp.37-65). Second, race is a major problem in America which shapes all aspects of the society. From a scholastic standpoint, the book appears to have achieved its goal of providing students and instructors with an innovative textbook that addresses the existing issues/new topics in the study of race/ethnicity in America. On the contrary,

other readers with strong policy flair will be left with little or no concrete policy ideas/suggested options in dealing with race/disparity issues in education, health, and socio-economic spheres.

Another drawback worth noting is the author's use of the terms subordinate and dominant groups. The author indicates how sociologists (p.9) often use the terms (minority/subordinate groups), but I find the use (p.346) of the term subordinate as pejorative and needs be discontinued from use. The term subordinate evokes/reinforces the images of lesser or inferior, which was actually the hallmark of racial categorization in the first place. The use of the term minority might be ideal. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald's book is a significant addition and a great value to the existing literature on race and ethnicity in America.