

BOOKS

Editor's note: This is the first installment of a new feature—reviews of academic books. We hope that this will expose professors and interested students to books which they may be able to incorporate into their classes. The goal is that most of the books will be Canadian. If you have any suggestions, let me know. Look for this icon in each upcoming issue.

Ontario provides examples of bias against minorities/ women Book from Canadian publisher focuses on racism in the workplace

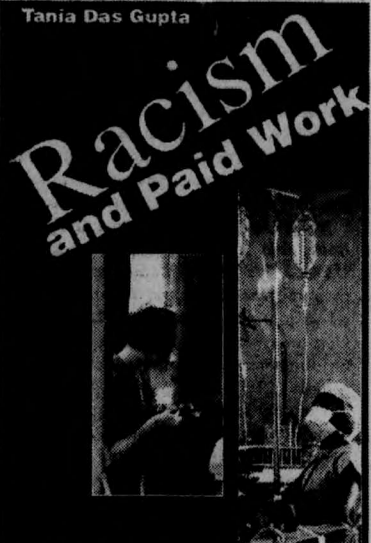
Racism and Paid Work
by Tania Das Gupta
Garamond Press

TETHELO E. CABILETE
THE BRUNSWICKAN

There are many things that illustrate the often subtle differentiations that people focus on when confronted by race, culture, ethnicity and so on. One only has to observe the daily news to see the extremes people will go to when dealing with differences. The religious conflicts in Ireland, sexual orientation intolerance in the United States, language barriers in Canada, ethnic cleansing in Europe; these are but a few examples of the intolerance humanity has for humanity. However, there is a growing attempt being made to understand one another in the world today. Sadly, such overtures of understanding sometimes mask perpetual resentments and discrimination. One aspect of this masking effect can be observed in the workplace and is the avenue of racial discrimination.

Racism remains a common discriminatory practice despite progressive stances within our modern societies. Although racial equality seems to have moved toward the recognition of basic fundamental rights among peoples, racism continues in more indirect ways. Studies in various fields have shown some remarkable points regarding the manner in which racism is perpetuated.

Tania Das Gupta, a professor of sociology at York University, explores the subject of racism in *Racism and Paid Work*. This publication centres around a multi-theoretical paradigm based on



Tania Das Gupta

Marxist theories of production and reproduction, anti-racism and feminist theories. Das Gupta presents a fine sociological study of the implications of racism as it pertains to employment. Her accounts detail cases of conflicts of interest, the class struggles between employers and employees, gender inequalities and racial stereotyping.

The cases examined in *Racism and Paid Work* are from a sample of Ontario workers in the Health Care and Garment sectors of the economy. The examples are based on observations and interviews with workers and on their experiences in their respective employment fields. What is striking in this study is the fact that people of colour, women and other minority workers appear to consistently receive low-wage, dead-end jobs. As Das Gupta states, "we are left with the assumption that women and people of colour are deficient and therefore are naturally suited to the less desirable work sectors."

Various government commissions have shown that adjusted for certain inequalities in qualifications, ethnic minorities and women continue to have the lowest income in Canada. Why?

The suggestion in the study is that racism and sexism within economic relations and managerial methods segregates people and maintains the homogeneity of stereotypes and the subordinate status of various people. Sexism and racism within the economic sphere pursue class/status segregation whereas managerial approaches police the number of minorities within a job, and yet offer lip-service to equality by hiring the token minority worker. Granted, this may seem a very negative view of the Canadian social system. Nevertheless these are concrete examples of a workplace that contains such discriminatory practices.

A few criticisms, however, need to be addressed. First, the study extensively uses Marxist-anti-racist-feminist perspectives of sociology which, while they are good tools of examination, rely too much on conflict theory and class struggles. Social attitudes, socialization practices and cultural differences are not examined in this study. Second, the sample of Ontario workers within two employment sectors limits the study to Health Care and Garment industries within one province. Other job sectors may or may not have similar results and different provinces have larger or smaller racial populations which may equalize employment discrimination. Third, certain racial/gender discriminations have actually decreased and can be successfully changed via the legal system and Human Rights Commissions. However, this is still a well structured exploration of race relations and employment in Canada. The data obtained for this research are recent applications and provide current information on racial-employment structures. Furthermore, Tania Das Gupta's study also suggests possible areas wherein society can benefit from a critical analysis of racism in the workplace.

Cultural criticism levelled at the polarization of ideology in America - Lessons for Canada

The All-American Skin Game, or, The Decoy of Race
by Stanley Crouch
Vintage Books

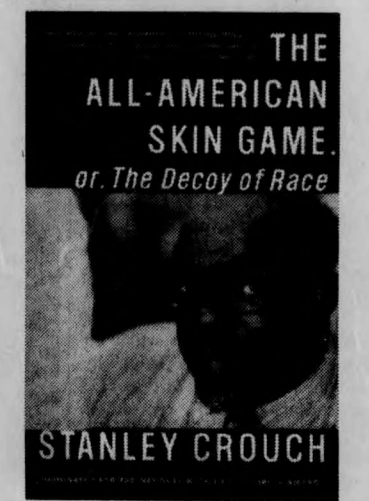
DAMIAN PENNY
THE BRUNSWICKAN

In our politically-polarized age, when every group—from the radical fringes of feminism to reactionary conservatives, from the International Socialists to *laissez-faire* capitalists—has adopted an ideology it feels immune from criticism, it's refreshing to find someone who views the world with an open mind. Stanley Crouch, a commentator for *The Village Voice* and *The New Republic*, is one such author.

In this volume of cultural criticism, Crouch takes a rather pragmatic approach, and is not afraid to barbecue some sacred cows along the way; that's evident as soon as he calls Malcolm X "the Elvis Presley of race politics, a pop black power icon mistaken for a serious thinker." The common theme throughout this collection of essays is that the increasing ethnic and ideological polarization of America will have dire consequences for democracy; a free society is about diverse groups learning from each other, ultimately combining their various traits into a single, common experience.

This sounds like a defense of the American-style "melting-pot" approach we Canadians are so quick to damn, yet Crouch undoubtedly has a point when he attacks these recent trends. A jazz critic as well as cultural commentator, Crouch uses jazz music as a metaphor for American democracy—various individuals bringing their own distinct skills, interplaying

with each other, in a form of music that values improvisation. An African-American, Crouch sees his people as an integral part of the American melting pot, rather than peripheral outcasts.



STANLEY CROUCH

This is a rather provocative thesis, and the author does not shirk from criticizing contemporary black culture. He dismisses those who talk of a mythical African homeland, noting that Black Americans have been greatly changed by the culture of America, the direction of which they have themselves influenced. Crouch hardly sees this as a betrayal of his race; indeed, he feels that the goal of the Civil Rights movement was to make his people full participants in American society, rather than to leave it behind. So goes the first part of the book, which

consists mainly of political commentary. Subsequent sections deal with contemporary literature, music and cinema, which may seem to be a curious direction for the book. His insights into the books, films and recordings, however, is influenced heavily by the political views outlined in the first section and help him to refine his thesis. In an essay titled "Toward a Cinematic Language Democracy" he calls for films reflecting the diversity of African-American culture, claiming that "(t)o sellout to nationalist politics of skin tone is to do a disservice to our movement." In a book review, he notes that "ours is a time in which the conventions of 'blackness' encourage the simplifying of human experience in the interest of a half-baked 'unity'. Even when Crouch writes about things I know little about, such as jazz music, such insights keep his reviews interesting.

I do have a few complaints. His prose, though often witty and memorable, can be quite dense (this book is clearly aimed at the *New Republic* crowd rather than, say, *Daily Gleaner* devotees.) As well, many of the propositions he puts forth are never expanded upon; I really wanted him to explain why Malcolm X should not be taken seriously, but he never does.

Still, this is a compelling and important work. This especially goes the concluding essay, in which he compares our varying ideological groups to a character in Dumas' *The Man in the Iron Mask*, who imprisoned his identified twin in a metal disguise so they would not be recognized as twins. "In our time," he writes, we prefer to hide the whole form of the opposition, not just the face. The twin is so heavily closed in from head to foot that mobility is impossible. We then walk around this stationary figure and point out all of the things we don't like." Is there a better summary of our present political discourse?

New fiction novel takes a relentless look at dysfunctional family

The Shadow of Desire
by Rebecca Stowe
Pantheon Books

MARY ROGAL-BLACK
THE BRUNSWICKAN

The question of how our parents influence our lives and ourselves can be a fascinating one. Messages, explicit and implicit, received by young children can effect a variety of aspects of their adult lives, from the way they handle relationships, to self-image, to emotional stability. Rebecca Stowe explores this dynamic with painstaking detail in her second novel, *The Shadow of Desire*.

Stowe's central character, Ginger Moore, writes academic biographies for a living. She researches the dead focusing on women who never quite made it, trying to discover what prevented them from achieving their potential. "I was obsessed with a very specific type of woman. One who seemed to suffer from a certain type of paralysis. Women who had all the equipment—the brains, the talent, the skill, the desire, the ambition, the leisure, and the money—to accomplish as much if not more than the men in their lives but who could not, for some reason, do."

Ginger is convinced that she will be one of

these women but not because of the oft-blamed patriarchy; she has been emotionally crippled, we discover, by her alcoholic mother. A trip home for Christmas provides the evidence as Ginger and Cease, her intensely self-destructive brother, takes turns blaming their mother, while Ginger turns inward, examining episode after episode of her past and how each aspect of her relationship with her mother has brought to bear on her adult life.

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It is a painful process, in part because of the very vivid portrayal of a dysfunctional family. "I can see it's going to be another fun-filled day at Chez Moore and I suddenly wish I hadn't given up smoking, that I too could do something to self-destruct. Christmas fills us all with self-pity, but it's worst for Virginia, since it was supposedly her job to create the happy family we all so grievously mourn, her only job and she fucked it up." Stowe is adept at dissecting events and the feelings that accompany them; each moment has its meaning and most also have their corresponding effect on Ginger's actions as an adult.

This is perhaps the other thing that makes

The Shadow of Desire so painful: the relentlessness of the main character's self-examination. Reading the novel is akin to being a fly on the wall while an unhappy and sometimes dull person reworks their life story for their therapist. I felt myself wishing that Ginger's narration included something more, some spark. Perhaps the lack of such a spark was intentional on Stowe's part, however, because the narrator often laments that her mother is right when she

accuses Ginger of having no heart. She has repressed her emotions, her reactions to people so much that she feels she has become incapable of living in the full sense of the word.

The dreary relentlessness of her narrative may be a reflection of the real Ginger, because Stowe does demonstrate a witty ability to observe and recreate: "Being born at the tail end of the Baby Boom has its advantages and disadvantages. One knows what's coming but by the time it arrives it has been explored, discussed, serialized, TV-movie and talk-showed to death, to the point where it hardly counts as an experience of one's own. It seems somehow fraudulent, barren, meaningless."

In the end, Ginger's own restrained battle against herself and her mother is interesting. If the novel is more tell than show, perhaps that is a reflection of a woman's desire to express everything, to make her experience real. While it isn't a walk in the park, it has its illuminating moments.



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