



Book Review

Confronting Institutionalized Racism in Higher Education: Counternarratives for Racial Justice (2022)

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Ramdeholl, Dianne with contributions by Jaye Jones. (2022) *Confronting Institutionalized Racism in Higher Education*. Routledge

For those wishing to take a deep dive into the harsh realities, professional and emotional impact, and complexities in challenging racism within the academy, *Confronting Institutionalized Racism in Higher Education* will not disappoint. Its subtitle, *Counternarratives for Racial Justice*, provides a hint of what awaits its readers: a powerfully candid, often scathing series of structured “truth telling” conversations among a group of distinguished racialized faculty representing colleges throughout the United States. Pulling no punches in its collective indictment of a system that was originally designed for “rich white men”, the author summarizes each topic of discussion throughout the text. In doing so she highlights important and provocative talking points that collectively underscore two key messages of this book: that a complete restructuring of the current system, not reform, is necessary to create spaces of justice and equity for racialized faculty, and that the ongoing struggle for permanent change must be waged for the long-term benefit of new and future faculty of color. The author fully utilizes the Critical Race Theory (CRT) tool of counternarratives in the form of structured first-person dialogues that offer readers exceptional clarity in assessing the extent of racist inspired microaggressions, as well as damage through gaslighting and marginalization encouraged or condoned by institutions of higher education.

In its opening chapter “Speaking Truth to Power, readers are offered first-hand accountings of the formidable challenges and real perils facing racialized faculty who dare to eradicate institutionalized racism within the academy. Topics include how Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) faculty are typically seen as inferior to their White colleagues and held to different standards; how notions of “color-blindness” support status quo pro racist ideologies, and how institutions need to acknowledge the many valuable contributions from faculty of color that add richness to the student learning experience and the culture of the academy. The chapter then seamlessly segues into further discussions that offer disturbing but insightful accountings of disrespectful confrontations faculty of color have with White students; deceptively false reliance upon the recent development of diversity equity and inclusion departments within our nation’s colleges; and an examination of the unfair challenges awaiting racialized faculty seeking tenure

or promotion. The author also dedicates a section that addresses the challenges and logistics for faculty of color wishing to make safe and secure spaces inside the institution where they can collectively strategize and mentor: the creation of a racialized faculty caucus.

While *Confronting Institutionalized Racism in Higher Education* also gives sound perspective on well-known systemic challenges impacting faculty irrespective of race or gender (how workload capacity frequently surpasses student scholarship as an administrative priority; everchanging policies involving tenure; and great advice on self-care each come to mind), the book is arguably a bold intersectionality of CRT and critical feminism. In each discourse, all the distinguished faculty interview participants sharing their thoughts and experiences are female BIPOC scholars. Readers, especially scholars/activists, may find themselves continuously assessing their unique positionality in identifying with some of the institutional challenges covered in the text. This reviewer, for instance, easily related to a number of salient points raised by the author and participants, including their questioning the true objectives of colleges offering cosmetic, superficial solutions to deeply rooted issues of institutional marginalization, e.g., the “illusion of inclusion”, and campus acknowledgments of ethnic holidays.

Having said this, many of the references made throughout the book suggest that they were profiling four-year colleges with minimal representation of racialized faculty. As a tenured full-time faculty member at a public urban community college where over 25% of the full-time faculty are Black or Hispanic with faculty, staff and students representing over 133 countries, I would have welcomed a bit of discussion on the unique challenges facing racialized faculty teaching in institutions with similar profiles. More importantly: Dr. Cornel West’s poignant resignation letter to Harvard Divinity School resonated deeply and provided strong closure to the book’s well-researched chapter focusing upon the many racial disparities connected with tenure and promotion. Being a Black male professor, the powerful missive underscored how much I would have appreciated the author having at least one representative of both my race and gender included in these important discussions. Notwithstanding the foregoing, readers will find *Confronting Institutionalized Racism in Higher Education* a welcome and valuable literary contribution that offers a powerful voice and perspective to one of the most controversial and misunderstood topics within academia.



Dr. John R. Chaney is an Associate Professor for the City University of New York. Born and raised in Harlem, Professor Chaney received his Bachelor’s degree from New York University and a Juris Doctor degree with honors from Brooklyn Law School. He is widely recognized as a leading authority in developing productive agency collaborations with community and faith-based organizations, including Prison Fellowship, to provide transitional resources for individuals returning from incarceration. The former director of Criminal Justice programs for City University of New York’s LaGuardia Community College where he currently teaches, Professor Chaney was also a member of the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office’s executive staff and served as a state-appointed coordinator for the Division of Criminal Justice Services’ County Reentry Task Force. Professor Chaney has provided technical assistance for the Criminal Justice section for the American Bar Association; the ACCES-VR division for the New York State Department of Education; Nevada Workforce Connections; and for Uganda Prisons Service in East Africa. His work in reentry has received formal recognition from the New York City and State legislatures and is featured in the documentary *Counterstories: After Incarceration*

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