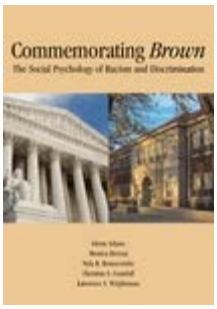
PsycCRITIQUES
July 23, 2008, Vol. 53, No. 30, Article 1



Twenty-First-Century Discrimination: It's Not Your Grandparents' Racism

A Review of

Commemorating *Brown*: The Social Psychology of Racism and Discrimination
by Glenn Adams, Monica Biernat, Nyla R. Branscombe, Christian S. Crandall, and Lawrence S. Wrightsman (Eds.)
Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008. 269 pp. ISBN 978-1-4338-0308-6. $69.95

doi: 10.1037/a0012436

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The growing diversification of the United States highlights the need for increased understanding of racial and cultural differences and how these differences impact intergroup relations (Sue & Sue, 2003). Along with this increased diversification has come increased controversy and dialogue about issues related to culture, racism, and discrimination. For example, Johnson (2001) suggested that to better understand and reduce discrimination, European Americans need to acknowledge that such constructs as White privilege are real and have real consequences. Additionally, Swim and Stangor (1998) suggested that conceptualizing racism and discrimination from the target's perspective would increase our understanding.

However, the burgeoning dialogue regarding these matters has not resulted in greater understanding; rather, we are witnessing an ever-increasing division in mainstream American society over issues of discrimination and oppression. As psychologists, we are in optimal positions to positively influence this discourse.

As indicated by the volume's editors, *Commemorating* Brown: *The Social Psychology of Racism and Discrimination* examines the role that psychology played in the historic case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Throughout the text, the various contributors provide numerous examples of how data from psychological research influenced the *Brown* decision. Additionally, the reader is provided a history of how the *Brown* case came to be. As the authors contend, the *Brown* decision was viewed as a mechanism for social justice and social change. And, as implied by the title of the volume, the authors suggest that we commemorate, rather than celebrate, the *Brown* decision largely because recent actions (e.g., Proposition 209 in the state of California) have served to undermine and nullify the efforts of the *Brown* decision, intimating that the aims and objectives of the case have not been achieved.

My experience of reading edited volumes with multiple contributors has been mixed. Though many texts are very well written, others contain chapters that vary in quality and often lack a coherent thread. This was not the case in *Commemorating* Brown. The common link among the chapters is clear: The field of psychology bears some responsibility in combating racism and discrimination. The volume explicates an agenda that is meant to inform and shape the discussion of racism and oppression by questioning the status quo.

As a starting point, the text does a good job of describing prevailing models of racism and oppression early in the volume so that the reader has some context for the agenda that will be expounded upon later. After a thorough discussion of these models, the various contributors present research from the past 20 years on issues such as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and aversive racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) that have begun to challenge our thinking regarding matters of racism and oppression. However, though the social-psychological research

that has emerged over the past two decades has been influential, the authors posit that many of these theories have not begun to permeate everyday dialogue.

In their discussion of why much of the recent research has yet to inform lay comprehension of these matters, the editors note that prevailing models of racism and oppression tend to view these issues from the perspective of the dominant group, a sentiment echoed by a number of other researchers (e.g., Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1994). One chapter in particular champions the notion of a paradigm shift such that social-psychological research examines issues of racism and oppression from the target's perspective. As Swim and Stangor (1998) suggested, a thorough understanding of issues related to racism and oppression will not be achieved unless the perspective of the persons being discriminated against is considered.

In addition to adopting the target's perspective, the editors encourage the reader to take a sociocultural approach to examining issues of racism and oppression. For example, prevailing models might argue that racism is an individual phenomenon, in that it is a problem seen only in disturbed individuals. However, as Jones (1999) and Greene (2003) have suggested, racism and oppression are cultural phenomena that are deeply rooted within the fabric of mainstream American society. The editors of this text expound on this notion and identify that cultural racism is not limited to mainstream American society; in fact, racist oppression is (and has been) evident in other countries and cultures as well.

Readers who are relatively unfamiliar with the literature on racism and oppression will find this text informative. The various contributors define and address concepts germane to the discussion and experience of racism and oppression and propose an agenda whose aim is the fulfillment of the ideals set forth by the *Brown* decision. While the text is edited by social psychologists, the information contained within the chapters of this text would be of considerable utility to counseling, clinical, and educational psychologists as well.

The information contained within this volume has tremendous implications for other groups in addition to psychologists, particularly teachers/instructors and school administrators (those persons for whom the *Brown* case had direct relevance!). For instance, school administrators and policy makers would do well to aggressively recruit and diversify their teacher pool and to staff underfunded (and often predominantly minority) schools with better qualified teachers. When sufficient resources are disproportionately allocated, it communicates a very clear message to students and their parents that the expectations for student success are low. Also, given that teachers represent one of the earliest socialization agents, it is important that they reflect on their own biases so that they do not inadvertently promulgate and reinforce previously held stereotypes. Moreover, teachers can also encourage cross-cultural interactions in an effort to reduce or eliminate racist assumptions.

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