

The Omission of Anti-Semitism in Anti-Racism

by Carole Ann Reed

L'auteure discute des différentes façons de percevoir les questions de race et de racisme et elle analyse l'impact de ces vues sur la position qu'occupe l'antisémitisme dans les projets

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antiracistes. L'auteure démontre comment différentes interprétations de questions essentielles au sein du discours antiraciste ont encouragé l'exclusion d'une conscience antisémite dans ces projets.

Anti-racism, like the multicultural agenda it critiques, is an umbrella term encompassing different, sometimes conflicting viewpoints. Although the anti-racist critique began in Britain, it has also emerged in Australia, Canada and, to a much lesser extent and more recently, the United States. However, it was in Britain, during the eighties, that anti-racism flourished and the full flowering of anti-racist theoretical work took place. It was during this time period that Chris Mullard did much of his work including *Racism in Society and Schools: History and Policy and Practice*, and *Race Power and Resistance*. Barry Troyna wrote *Racial Inequality in Education* and with Jenny Williams, *Racism, Education and the State*. Work by P. Gilroy, P. Cohen, R. Jeffcoate, J. Nixon, A. Sivanandan and H. Carby also appeared at this time and contributed to the unfolding anti-racist dialogue.

Within this body of work there are many different, sometimes conflicting views of the anti-racist project.

Two identifiable trends in this work which are important to distinguish are what I call broad-based anti-racism and narrowly-focused anti-racism. Work which I would classify as narrowly focused anti-racism includes the work of C. Mullard, G. Brandt, H. Carby and the earlier work of A. Sivanandan. Work I would classify as broad-based anti-racism includes the work of B. Troyna, J. Williams, B. Carter and P. Cohen. It is im-

portant to first identify and then explicate these two visions of anti-racism because each has a different interpretation of the central issues within anti-racist discourse and, in my opinion, it is the gap between the two views that has abetted the omission of anti-Semitism from anti-racist work and added to a confusion about anti-Semitism's place within the anti-racist project.

Broad-based and narrowly-focused anti-racist viewpoints differ in at least four areas; the conceptualization of race and racism, the focus of anti-racist education, the role of the state and its institutions (including schooling) and the role of the black community in the anti-racist struggle.

Narrowly-focused anti-racism

According to the narrowly-focused view, the moment racism entered human history exposes its cause and defines its nature. Hence, much significance is given to the generative moment of 1492. In 1492 Columbus "discovered" the Americas with their abundant natural and human resources. The motivation for the birth of the ideology of racism was to make the monetary exploitation of the newly discovered lands and especially their peoples morally palatable. Thus,

the most easily recognizable distinction between the "New" and "Old" World peoples was given a hierarchical social signification—that is, those with lighter skin colour from the Old "civilized" European World were inherently superior to the darker skinned inhabitants of the New "untamed" World. Thus the idea of race and the history of racism is linked to the primary exploitable difference between First and "New" World peoples' skin colour. To narrowly-focused anti-racists this generative moment and the colonization that followed it was of paramount importance in the formation of race relations. Brandt, for example, maintains that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

can be seen as a crucial moment in the overt articulation of the racialization and of relations in Europe as a whole...Black people became objectified as property...and as human capital at the hard end of trade, industry and colonization (7).

Brandt then goes on to explain how colonialism and its mirror image, imperialism, fostered patterns of contact and exploitation that fossilized into the practice of racism. "It was in the colonial situation that the vocabulary and the culture of racism acquired [its] systemic form" (19). The history of racism that is acknowledged and shapes the concept of race is the history of imperialism, the history of the "conquest" of the New World and the system of plantocratic slavery that was used to exploit the New World's rich resources.

Because primarily Africans were used as slaves the physical signifier of skin colour is seen as the elemental form of racial division. Although connections of racism to other equity struggles is acknowledged, the focus on the understanding of a struggle

against this history of racism remains central. Brandt does make the statement that links to other struggles must be made, however at no point in his book, *The Realization of Anti-Racist Teaching*, does he explicate how they should be made, or how other equity issues impact on the anti-racist struggle. This particular view of anti-racism, represented here by the work of Brandt, is characteristic of the narrowly-focused anti-racist viewpoint.

Broad-based anti-racism

Broad-based anti-racism shares with narrowly-focused anti-racism a determination to examine racism and the institutionalization of racism in society.

However, it differs considerably from narrowly-focused anti-racism in its determination to forge links with other social justice agenda, its definition of racism, and its view of the history of racism. To broad-based anti-racists, race and racism cannot be abstracted from the broad political, historical, and social processes of society which have institutionalized unequal power. According to Barry Troyna and Jenny Williams, the focus of anti-racism is a broadly conceived equal opportunity strategy which embraces but does not subsume racism.

The focus here is on wider forms of oppression....Blacks, women, gays, the handicapped form discrete but component groups within a more general equal opportunities strategy (121).

Broad-based anti-racism is based on the convictions that racial inequalities are inextricably linked with and reproduced in conjunction with other forms of oppression and secondly that change will more likely be effected if alliances with other groups are formed (122, 123). The understanding and deconstruction of race and racism are central to the anti-racist task but racism cannot be viewed as autonomous and must not

be given primacy over other forms of oppression. Not only is the primacy of racism in the anti-racist struggle different to narrowly-focused and broad-based anti-racists but the definition of race and so the shape of racism also differs. To define race, many broad-based anti-racist writers use the concept of racialization. Robert Miles defines this concept as a "political and ideological process by which particular populations are identified by direct or indirect reference to their real or imagined phenotypical characteristics in such a way as to suggest that the population can only be understood as a supposed biological unity" (qtd. in Troyna and Williams 3).

Skin colour is one signification that has been used but so have other significations, for example, the eye shape of Japanese and Chinese people and the supposedly distinctive noses of Jewish people. Racialization has taken place over and over again with different victims and varying degrees of victimization and resultant unequal treatment. According to Troyna and Cashmore, "this is a world-wide historical pattern; it seems to recognize no boundaries nor time limits" (20).

The use of this concept of racialization impacts on the definition race. This shift in the definition

but the political desire to categorize segments of humanity and accord differential treatment to certain categories or groups of people. Not only is the biological signifier not the common denominator of racism but other attributes such as stereotypical cultural traits, religion, language, country of origin can also be used to racialize a person's identity. Hence race can include such non-biological concepts as language (e.g. in Canada in the linguistic struggle between the French and English, the French were racialized—thought about, spoken about in racial terms—by the English (see Berger), religion (e.g. Jews in Nazi Germany and more recently I would argue that Muslims have begun to be racialized in North America and Britain), nationality (e.g. the Japanese during the Second World War and more recently again in the United States), and behaviour (the traveling peoples during the Second World War and again more recently in Germany and East Europe). All can and have been used to racialize groups of people and accord them discriminatory treatment.

This view of racism, as a historical and political project that has focused on different victims at different times, impacts on the broad-based anti-racist conceptualization of the history of racism. As we have seen, according to

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of racism—from this history of black oppression to the politically motivated process whereby shifting targets of victimization are focused on for unequal treatment with race ideology used as justification—is central to the different perspectives of narrow and broad-based anti-racism. The essential generator of racism is *not* the biological signifier (e.g. skin colour)

narrowly focused anti-racism, the history of race and racism is fused with the history of slavery and colonialism and skin colour is central to the idea of race. According to broad-based anti-racism, the history of slavery is an important chapter in the history of racism and skin colour has been an important signifier of race but there are other equally important chapters

in the history of racism and skin colour is but one signifier of many that have been used to racialize groups of people. Other important chapters in the history of racism include the Nazi period in Europe, the eugenics movement in the 1920s and 30s, and the caste system in India, the imperialism of Japan, etc. The process of racialization has taken place throughout human history and has many victims and many variations. No one

The gap between the two visions of anti-racism

Thus there is a gap between these two trends in anti-racist writing and in this gap there has arisen much confusion about the place of other ethnocultural equity struggles, especially the place of anti-Semitism in the overall anti-racist project. To those who accept the narrowly-focused anti-racism and its definitions of race, the place of anti-Semitism is problematic. This view tends to treat anti-Semitism as a kind of ethnic prejudice and does not acknowledge the place of anti-Semitism in the

history of racist discourse. The ideology that propelled the Holocaust and the Holocaust itself is not viewed as emanating from and itself shaping European racism as it does not deal with issues of anti-black prejudice or plantocratic slavery. Thus, it is not included in the anti-racist agenda. On the other hand, the definitions and vision of broad-based anti-racism do allow for anti-Semitism to be seen as a form of racism and be included in the overall agenda.

However, although there is no theoretical inconsistency for broad-based anti-racist writers to deal with anti-Semitism, there has been little momentum to deal with it. Barry Troyna, Jenny Williams and to a greater extent Philip Cohen mention anti-Semitism in their writings but with the exception of Cohen, very little space has been accorded to the history of anti-Semitism, its place in racist discourse, the preponderance and tenacity of Jewish stereotypes and the relationship of the fight against anti-Semitism to other anti-racist education projects. Although the gap between the two anti-racist views goes some way to explaining the confusion around and the resultant omission of anti-Semitism in anti-racist writings, there are other possible explanations for this omission.

Other considerations

Geoffrey Short has commented on this omission of anti-Semitism in his article "Combating Anti-Semitism: A Dilemma for Anti-Racist Education." According to Short, "anti-racists appear to have eschewed any interest in anti-Semitism" (37). He argues that this is the result of a combination of causes. The first explanation he offers is that many anti-racists are under the impression that anti-Semitism is no longer the problem it once was. He quotes R. Jeffcoate who writes that anti-Semitism is "almost but not quite, a nightmare of the past" (39).

Although this unawareness of the persistence of anti-Semitism may have been possible/understandable in the early and mid-eighties when much of the theoretical work on anti-racism was being done, I do not think that this lack of awareness could as easily persist today. After the recent media coverage of the rise of the new (old?) Right and neo-Nazism in Europe (especially in the newly reunited Germany), and the rise of anti-Semitism within the ultra nationalist parties in Russia, the longevity and vigour of anti-Semitism can no longer be overlooked or viewed as a relic from the past. Anti-Semitism is not only alive and thriving in Europe, it has again become an alluring and dangerous outlet for alienated youth both in Europe and North America. If anti-racist writers were perhaps unaware of this phenomenon on the early and mid-eighties, this unawareness can no longer account for any continued omission of anti-Semitism.

Another explanation that Short offers for the omission of anti-Semitism is that given the anti-racist movement is primarily a left wing movement with a politically left wing/socialist economic analysis, it is possible that the "historic links between anti-Semitism and the left" (40) may have influenced this omission. This possibility, that the neglect of anti-Semitism is a sin of commission not omission must be considered and "put on the table." Asking anti-racists to

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chapter in the history of racism is seen as the definitive moment.

Summary

In the anti-racist literature some writers, whom I have labeled narrowly-focused anti-racist writers, view the struggle against racism as the central focus of anti-racism, see the history of racism as shaped by the history of colonialism, plantocratic slavery and the history of the oppression of black people. The idea of race is in turn shaped by this history and skin colour is seen as the primary signifier of race. Other anti-racist writers whom I have called broad-based anti-racists see the focus of anti-racism as a broadly based equity struggle which names and attempts to deconstruct racism but only as part of a larger attempt to redress all inequalities and emphasizes the links between all equity struggles. The definition of race that informs this school of anti-racist thought includes the concept of racialization and emphasizes the political will to set apart or racialize, groups of people for various reasons including supposed biological features and cultural features. The physical signifiers of race are seen only as one of many signifiers of race and are not seen as of paramount import.

examine ourselves for remnants of racism puts us in an uncomfortable and unaccustomed position but if the movement is to remain vigorous then this rigorous honesty and willingness to examine ourselves is imperative and is no more than we have asked others to do.

Lastly, Short thinks that the anti-racist emphasis on the power dimension within racism plus the perception (and stereotype) that Jews are a powerful group within society, has led to the impression that Jews are not victims of the same kind of racial disadvantage as other minority groups (40). The racial disadvantages that anti-racists focus on are the economic and educational disadvantages that other racial minorities, especially black minorities suffer from. The victims of anti-Semitism, do not, today in North America or Britain (countries from which the anti-racist critiques emerged) suffer from economic or educational disadvantage because of their heritage. In fact, the dilemma that Jews present for anti-racism is thrown into particularly sharp relief because they are widely perceived as powerful and advan-

taged (41). This issue needs to be problematized within the anti-racist framework and used to complicate the anti-racist view of discrimination and marginalization. The Jewish community may be in a relatively secure economic place but in the past, in Germany in the 30s for example, this place of privilege did not protect them but in fact was used to make them a target for societal exclusion and racism. Their privilege was used to marginalize them and target them for discriminatory treatment, economically, educationally and finally target them for imprisonment and death.

These variations in the history of discriminatory practice need to be taken into account by the anti-racist framework and used to acknowledge the many guises that racist behaviour can adopt. Because Jews do not fit in to the anti-racist framework should not be used as a reason to exclude the particular kind of racism that they can be the targets of. Instead, anti-racists must consider their theoretical framework and constantly fine tune it to accommodate the changing shapes and multifaceted nature of racism and discriminatory behaviour.

Conclusion

Anti-Semitism presents a challenge to anti-racism. Given its theoretical framework and its more plastic view of race, racialization and racism, the broadly based vision of anti-racism is better able to respond to that challenge. The reappearance of virulent anti-Semitism in the newly invigorated Right and in today's alienated youth movements, as well as the appearance of ethnic cleansing which uses ethnic/cultural backgrounds as grounds to exterminate whole populations, give an urgency to the need to problematize all forms of racialization and discrimination in the anti-racist movement. Failure to do this condemns the movement to fractionalism and to being outpaced and outmoded by complicated and fast changing historical and social events. In my opinion, the ability of the anti-racist movement to account

for and accommodate the ever-changing shape of racism as well as the many historical forms of racism and discrimination such as anti-Semitism will determine the efficacy and longevity of the movement.

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