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Racial Caribbeanization: Origins and Development

Introduction

This book identifies, and engages with, an analysis of racism in the Caribbean region, contributing further to the *Mapping Global Racisms* series and an empirically based theoretical reframing of both the racialization of the globe and the evaluation of the prospects for anti-racism and the post-racial. The 30 contemporary territories of the Caribbean and their differing colonial and post-colonial contexts provide a highly dynamic setting that urges a reassessment of the ways in which contemporary processes of racialization are working. This book seeks to develop a new account of racialization in this region, and many established arguments, propositions and narratives of racial Caribbeanization are challenged in the coming chapters. As Basil Reid has argued in his debunking of 11 myths of Caribbean history (2009), over 7,000 years of complex human history preceded the arrival of Europeans in the 1400s, and the old story of ferocious, cannibalistic Caribs pursuing peaceful Arawaks across the islands ‘endlessly repeated in history primers and magazine articles’ (Hulme and Whitehead, 1992: 3) is largely rejected.

Racial exterminations, exploitations and separations are central to the making of the Caribbean, and so is mixedness. We are all mixed. So what is to be made of debates about ‘racial and ethnic mixing’? We all possess mixed ethnic and cultural heritage, and racial groups are a scientific fiction, so the notion of racial mixing is itself misleading. We all have common African ancestry (as confirmed by the Human Genome Project 2007 study ‘Genetic Anthropology, Ancestry...
Therefore, the fundamental nature of racial and ethnic mixing is known but not widely accepted. The marking and making of ethnoracial mixing provides one of the core registers through which the peoples of the contemporary Caribbean are portrayed and brought into social and political being. The Caribbean is characterized by some of the most complex interactions between previously divergent populations, from the extensive Mesoamerican migrations in pre-Columbian times onwards (Moreno-Estrada et al., 2013). The dilemmas and directions of historical and contemporary debates about what work whiteness, blackness and mixedness do in the Caribbean context is a central theme here. Through this Caribbean triad the power of racialization and its long reach is held up to critical scrutiny.

The Caribbean is a complex context and this book cannot do justice to all parts, peoples and places, although it does aim to establish and interrogate some key overarching regional relational racial dynamics and processes, together with attention particularly to the insular, rather than mainland, Caribbean, and a set of selected case-study contexts, including Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Racial Caribbeanization is the process of ethnoracial domination of this region rooted in European colonialism, which encompasses the conquest and genocide of the Amerindian peoples, the enslavement and exploitation of Africans, the use of indentured labour, and the embedding of racial and ethnic hierarchies in post-colonial, post-independence contexts. The interrogation of this process is the central focus of this book. This chapter introduces the Caribbean region and identifies the origins and development of racism and processes of racialization. First, aspects of indigeneity, indigenous groups and the colonial experience are examined. Second, the complex shaping of structures of racial hierarchy across the Caribbean is examined together with the exterminationist and segregationist logics of successive regimes and their operation in the context of plantation slavery and colonialism. Mapping out the diverse range of contexts and the ways in which differential patterns of racialization have been embedded, the chapter provides a thematic and relational account of these processes. Connections with processes of racial Europeanization and racial Americanization are examined, as well as links with other significant contexts, including India and