

Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference

by E. San Juan Jr.

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Reviewed by Michael Pozo

Post-Colonial theory examines the aftermath of European colonization from the subjugated perspective. It has been used (among other fields) in the study of Literature to not only destabilize myths about the colonizers but also about the colonized. It holds a strong interest in the belief of the hybrid nature of subjects formed after the initial contact of disparate cultures.

Yet even today in our chic, globally aware society Post-Colonial theory has come under fire. However, its attackers have not been the gatekeepers of the canon but rather those vigilant enough to see the complex history of racism and its subtle transmutations. For many of these critics, Post-Colonial theory is an oxymoron. It is made invalid due to the fact that so many countries are still being victimized, this time at the hands of the so-called "free market".

In his latest book, *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference*, Professor E. San Juan Jr. presents an ambitious and multi-faceted critique of broad social/academic concerns and practices. San Juan challenges those who may feel satisfied with the gains made by and for "minorities" and women in the United States by examining contemporary arguments over Cultural Studies and its academic identity. Racism and Cultural Studies constantly returns to the issues that affect and construct identity by critiquing the centrality race has in the social, political and academic institutions in the United States. Yet San Juan expands his scope to include the ever-urgent state of "Third World" peoples within the discourse of Post Colonial theory versus the reality of displaced communities and present day Diaspora. What is clear (if it wasn't already to some) is San Juan's insistence that much of the abuse and struggles of women and people of color have not ended but merely disguised their appearance and approach.

San Juan takes a Marxist stance in his critique and study. Yet it is a Marxism unfettered by allegiances to any one particular school. First, San Juan looks to Marxism as active social critics and revolutionaries developed it in Europe and the "Third World" over the years. A common critique of Marxism is its failure in arguing all history as determinant on class struggle alone. Instead, San Juan agrees with Amilcar Cabral when he stressed that such a Marxist stance negated the history of the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America prior to the arrival of the Imperialist era. San Juan looks to demonstrate how a type of Marxism could be developed through its various interpretations and implementations (according to particular circumstances) and return it to its original intention, for the benefit of the people.

And so in examining the Marxism of "Third World" struggles, for example, it is done in a manner that pays equal attention to not just the ideological struggle but also the various **human** struggles for social reform. Incidentally, both are coupled as examples of what is often left out of post-colonial studies, which are mainly the contributions of mind and body to the resistance of oppression.

The second aspect of Racism and Cultural Studies is the application of San Juan's Marxist critique towards the United States, the University and the global economy. Within the context of "Third World" ideological and materialist struggles, San Juan offers examples of the many questions still facing women and people of color in the United States. San Juan sees the United States as the only remaining superpower yet with a very silent class/race conflict going on in its midst. As far as the University and Cultural Studies' place in it, San Juan sees the need to be watchful of whose needs are truly being met. In some ways, San Juan sees the University as a place where many ideas like multiculturalism and Post-Colonial theory are being compromised. San Juan points to the scheme of maintaining our "differences" under the flag of a so-called national unity, as a present day example that is true both in and out of the classroom. In this country, the

danger is clearly in becoming too complacent with a cultural "equality" or a fetish love of "differences" while forgetting about the on-going social, political and economical discrepancies that exist.

Lastly, San Juan concludes *Racism and Cultural Studies* with a personal concern. He focuses on the people of the Philippines as a chilling and real example of an uneven "progress" in the global economy. According to San Juan, Filipinos have now become the world's newest diasporic community, joining many others in a growing epidemic.

Racism and Cultural Studies concludes as it began; unfinished. In its critiques of Cultural Studies and racism it reveals the inability for equal recognition of gender and race issues that still exist in our society and its institutions. In its examples of writers, revolutionary action and social movements there is at least reason to believe complacency is not an option for many. *Racism and Cultural Studies* recovers and reshapes ideological methods and social struggles positing them against contemporary national and global concerns. The remaining task is the method for the actual implementation and functioning of San Juan's critiques. Yet E. San Juan Jr.'s latest book offers more evidence that the need for social reform on a global scale, has only begun to ferment.

For further interest: *Working through the Contradictions: From Cultural Theory to Critical Practice* by E. San Juan Jr. Coming Soon.