

ployment, housing and education. Jackson makes these contexts visible, adding to the growing body of literature on immigrants' engagement with other ethnic groups and the broader U.S. society.

Yet, Jackson's societal focus comes with some blind spots of its own. She doesn't in her analysis sufficiently acknowledge the internal debates within whiteness historiography that she refers to in the introduction (7–8), and her image of the U.S. society and its racial discourse can at times be rather homogeneous (it appears that "American" is often used implicitly as a shorthand for "white American"). However, perhaps the most significant shortcoming is the book's lack of transnational sensibility. Jackson discusses well the contexts of Chicago and the U.S., but has relatively little to say about the immigrants' connections to Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. One wonders how nationalist mobilizations in these countries affected the immigrants' thinking on race and nationality. It would be interesting to explore, for example, how Norwegian-Americans' newfound interest in the Norwegian language in the 1920s Chicago – a development that Jackson briefly mentions (149) – was connected to the politicization of language in contemporary Norway. Jackson also leaves unaddressed the Nordic countries' own histories of colonialism and racism, and these histories' implications for Scandinavian ideas on African Americans or eastern Europeans. Engagement with the burgeoning Nordic postcolonial research, and transnational immigration historiography, would have benefited Jackson's analysis.

Despite this methodologically nationalist bent, Jackson's study is a well-crafted and fascinating look at the Scandinavians' relationship with race in the U.S. It breaks new scholarly ground but has also clear contemporary relevance, as racial nationalism and white supremacy have been making a troubling comeback in the U.S. political mainstream. To understand the intellectual and social historical context of President Trump's preference for Nordic immigrants, Jackson's book is a good place to start.

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Philathia Bolton, Cassander L. Smith, and Lee Bebout, eds., *Teaching with Tension: Race, Resistance, and Reality in the Classroom*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2019. 304 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8101-3911-4.

In the United States, the political and social climate about race issues underwent significant changes since the year 2015, when this book was first conceived. While the re-election of Barack Obama at US Presidency in 2012 had reinforced the widespread perception of a “post-racial” America, the events which sparked the Black Lives Matter movement, among others, and the election of Donald Trump in 2016 made the racial tension visible again and gave further relevance to the project embedded in this book. Through a constant dialogue between theory and practice, the book promotes a reflection on the opportunity of *teaching with tension*, i.e., to push the reflection on race out of the comfort zone offered by the widespread African American studies classes included in several academic programs. Therefore, *Teaching with Tension* suggests how students can be made aware of the manifold implications of race in contemporary American society, overcoming the discourse of “color-blindness” fostered by the rhetoric of neoliberal meritocracy and its inherent individualism.

The volume contains, with an introduction and a conclusion, seventeen essays giving account of real teaching experiences in which professors and instructors opened with their students a critical dialogue on racial issues – sometimes facing harsh criticism, actual defamation by alt-right blogs and mainstream TV channels, or even receiving pressure by their academic institutions, which were expected to protect their freedom of research. Some examples of the themes taken on by the contributors include the concept of “whiteness,” the challenge to multiculturalism as a concealed form of assimilation, and the disruption of the “discontinuity” perceived by African-American students between their pre-Civil War history and their present.

All contributors offer a lively account of their experiences, questioning their own identity and putting their own racial bias into the discussion, and draw from classroom activity a discourse embedding rich and subtle pedagogical reflections. They did not fear to enact, when necessary, a “pedagogy of discomfort” in order to break the shield of self-defense built by “white fragility.” This concept, formulated by Robin DiAngelo in 2011, is proposed by several contributors as a critical key and describes the set of attitudes preventing white students from seeing the complexity of the racial issue, denying or not perceiving the mechanisms of marginalization which still put the history and thought of all people of color outside the “default” option, in forced relation to the normativity of (middle class/male) white culture.

In some cases, the reflection was triggered by state initiative or legisla-

tive provisions. For example, the ban on “ethnic studies” in public K-12 schools enforced in Arizona (implying that these studies are divisive and hinder a race-neutral judgment of the individuals) sparked a discussion echoed in several essays. The bill highlighted how far the white-centered idea of American society as a color-blind “land of opportunities” had managed to erase the discomfort and actual violence provoked by racial bias, while many universities promote a policy of difference which remains skin-deep and does not pose a real challenge to actual power structures.

Ethnic studies are, according to the contributors, a powerful instrument to challenge inequality and promote, especially in students and faculty enjoying the privilege of being middle-class and white, a critical perception of their own positioning in American society. However, to achieve these results, instructors must accept a certain degree of *tension* in the classroom – whether the students are female K-5 teachers or inmates of a maximum-security prison. This tension is necessary to avoid that ethnic studies act as an alibi to avoid a profound rethinking of the curriculum, ultimately becoming nothing more than a marketing resource for the universities. The need to recruit new customers has become a necessity for many higher education institutions while, since 1980 to 2015, funding provided by the states to public colleges and universities has dropped from 60% to 12% of the average school budget. Business competition has put pressure on the universities, and many of them emphasize “diversity” in their website and promotional tools while perpetuating traditional and white-centered curriculum and didactics, “peppered” by a selection of Native American, African American or Asian American courses. Therefore, the illusion of post-racism has grown stronger and stronger, before being disrupted – or at least questioned – by Donald Trump’s campaign and victory. Now, most students of color are aware of racial issues but lack analytical instruments to deal with them, while many white students are attracted by self-victimization or by the rhetoric of “reverse discrimination.”

This book offers both a scholarly account of the debate around critical race theory in education and practical suggestions for teachers and professors. Even if it can be proposed as a fruitful reading to all scholars in American studies interested in education, it is all the more interesting for a European reader. The challenges faced by educators in the US are often different from the experience of teachers and professors in Europe, but the pedagogical and cultural problems are mostly the same, and the critical attitude fostered by these essays is of the utmost importance in this phase

of European history marked by the resurgence of the far-right and populisms. Most European universities enjoy full support by the state so that the necessity to deal with marketing is less visible, but neoliberal structures are changing higher education also here, and their subtle action should be the object of careful critical scrutiny. Moreover, in many European countries, the student population is becoming increasingly diverse, but teachers and professors are overwhelmingly white, creating a situation in which the “other” also occupies a lower position in the school hierarchy, a situation that should be considered with full attention by educational policymakers. Bolton, Smith, and Bebout have provided a valuable contribution to American studies in education, addressing crucial questions with an open and reflective approach that can speak to readers from different backgrounds, both inside and outside the academic community.

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Stephanie Li, *Pan-African American Literature: Signifyin(g) Immigrants in the 21st Century*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018. 186 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8135-9277-0.

Narratives of the twenty-first-century immigration from Africa to the United States form an important yet still relatively understudied body of literature. They raise and negotiate crucial questions concerning black identities in flux and the new ways needed to conceptualize them. Stephanie Li probes into these issues in *Pan-African American Literature: Signifyin(g) Immigrants in the 21st Century* (2018). It opens with references to Toni Morrison’s essay “On the Back of Blacks” (1993) and its insight into the white-black polarization of American society. Acknowledging the merit of Morrison’s argument, according to which assimilation into American culture necessitates the internalization of the inferior position of African Americans in society, Li explicates the experience of nonwhite immigrants, especially of African descent, highlighting the relations between them and African Americans. Further, she speculates on how “complete” the assimilation of nonwhite immigrants can ever be under these conditions.

The main focus of Li’s book “is to describe how recently immigrated African writers confront blackness through the history and experience of African Americans while also signifyin(g) on black letters more broadly”