

REVIEWER:

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BOOK REVIEW

“FAULT LINES: A PRIMER ON RACE, SCIENCE, AND SOCIETY”

Authors: Jonathan Jansen and Cyrill Walters.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a review of the book “*Fault Lines: A primer on race, science, and society*” by Jonathan Jansen and Cyrill Walters. The book was originally published in March 2020 by African Sun Media. The 302-page book is divided into seven sections that consider different topics and social prejudices occasioned by race and racial thinking. Professor Jonathan Jansen is a distinguished scholar, author and leader of the Academy of Science of South Africa. On the other hand, Cyrill Walters is a renowned scholar with special interests in leadership and institutional theories. The ensuing segment dissects fundamental views expressed in the book and deconstructs key themes addressed therein.

2. REVIEW OF KEY ISSUES

In this book, the authors take on some of the most difficult questions about society, science and race in the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa. The authors successfully demystify the historical background of coloured race-prejudice (which gained root in various fields including genetics, politics, sociology and theology) and highlight the ethics in racial science. There have been many fallacies about race and diseases, racial thinking in universities and the relationship between genetics and eugenics, in helping to define various groups of humankind. The book offers a good mirror that reflects the lingering effects of race and racism in the world. The book commences by arguing that there is no biological or scientific basis for race, rather, the race is a social construct to serve a political agenda. Based on the racial realist view, the authors agree that while race lacks a biological basis, people experience race daily, making it real in its consequences. Sociology and realism scholars agree that humans are one race. The minor genetic variations amongst humans are caused by environmental differences within which people have lived over a long period. The authors raise a valid argument that instruments



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used to measure race have been skewed by their social and psychological bias of both their users and their developers (Smith, 2005). For example, Eugen Fischer's eye and hair colour charts used to measure the race of the archaeological skulls were invented and popularised by pro-Nazis in Germany, who were so incongruent in their racial perspective, that their instruments were meant to reinforce their philosophy and social orientations.

The race was produced in the "measurement mania" period when scientists (anthropometry) began to establish various ways of measuring race and by doing so, they gave validity to the idea that "*humans could be divided into different groups*". The book contends that the primary contribution of the historian to the issue of race is showing that "race" was not always there as a naturally occurring phenomenon but was created by humans and given intellectual justification by scientists. This view is backed by the 1950 UNESCO statement that said that "race was a social myth". This statement has been supported by different studies that have shown that there was no cultural or biological basis for the race (Chin, 2004). Jansen and Walters link the source of racial ideologies to the political motives of the time they were born and the scientific period that helped to reinforce those ideas. For example, during the "eugenics era", the idea of miscegenation emerged from German scientists who argued that mixed marriages and sexual union between white and black would breed an inferior race. These scientifically flawed ideas easily integrated into the society because it gave political leaders of the time "intellectual ammunition" for propagating their social ideologies, the outcome being genocide (of the inferior race) and enactment of laws that prohibited mixed marriages.

There are various social, theological and intellectual contracts upon which the idea of inferior races emerged. For example, the authors cite revelation by Juliana Claassens, a theologian, that the Hebrew term for incest was loosely translated to mean "a child born to parents from different races", providing theological justification for political construction of "coloured" people, who were treated as outcasts (just like the children born from incest). The extent to which a minor, theological or social "outlier" ideology could permeate the walls of the social, speaks of the social structure of the period in which it diffused to be part of the society (Chin, 2004). In this regard, the authors cite the politics of disgust as the primary fault line in as far as racial and race ideologies are concerned. For example, in South Africa, the "poor white problem" (where white Afrikaans were considered a threat to ideas of white supremacy and purity) necessitated a legal need to prevent "*degradation of the white race*".

While the book makes a strong and compelling argument about the genesis of the "need to segregate", based on the poor white problem, the authors do not address the idea of the already existing "white supremacy and purity" at the time. For the white-Afrikaans to be deemed less-white, there was already an existing social construct that demarcated the behaviours and ways of living of the whites and what was expected from "other races" (Connor, 2017). Even though, the authors may have pointed the "poor white problem" as the source of the need for legally separated from coloured by the whites, instead of the catalyst of the already existing problem, they have a strong school of thought that indicates the point in time at which the already simmering disgust for coloured found a "fault line to spill over" (Snowden, 2003). The authors, for example, contend that to further minimise the likelihood that the white would mix with the coloured, coloured people were cast as disgusting which led to the description of the coloured people as "aggressive, pitiful, disrespectful, drunk, unhealthy, oversexed and intelligent". This created a strong background upon which mixed marriages were outlawed. Studies carried out about the coloured people (most of which were carried out by the whites) were, therefore likely to continue with the tradition of institutional research, that was skewed against the black (Katz, 2006).

The tradition of institutional research on people of colour, according to the authors, has also played the primary role in stereotyping and prejudice against gender and disabled people of colour and perceived “inferior” who have substantively been regarded as objects of disgust. For example, the book cites coloured women as an example of objects for special treatment. A social image of degenerate women of colour was a historical by-product where past stories such as a Khoisan Woman, in the story of Sarah Baartman, was presented to the whites (mainly the Europeans) as a freak due to her large buttocks. The book further argues that coloured women (in sport science) are affected by various oppressions and disadvantages that include gender, race, social class, sexuality, and disability, all at the same time, which over time resulted in their social identities – as coloured, poor women. Historical injustices, oppression, and disadvantages faced by various groups in society (mainly the people of colour) accumulate over time to create a certain dominant lifestyle, character and personalities, which are then used to define and reinforce historical ideologies that led to the prejudices in the first place (Kleg, 2003). For this reason, the authors are correct in their conclusion that research on the issue of race is not objective. The objectivity of the research is affected by the existing distorted body of knowledge (mainly created by the whites), the researchers themselves (the majority of whom are white), and historical factors (that have led to people of colour being economically and socially weaker than whites due to unequal distribution of resources).

3. CONCLUSION

Jansen and Walters make compelling arguments that race is not real, but a social construct that helped to further political ideologies, and that intellectual knowledge (both directly and indirectly) has been used to create, propagate, maintain and reinforce the ideas of the existence of different human races. Instead of providing solutions, the studies have reinforced the idea of the human race making people of colour, particularly coloured women and disabled people of colour, experience the actual race prejudice. The book concludes that while it is important to recognise the harmful politics of race, it is challenging to “unlearn race” based on the current methods of learning, teaching and living. Even with the innovative curriculum at universities, it is difficult to unlearn that race is not only learnt in school but also society in general.

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