

Catherine Larochelle, School of Racism: A Canadian History, 1830-1915

Author(s)

Hernandez, Gian-Louis

DOI

[10.52230/WQSI4570](https://doi.org/10.52230/WQSI4570)

Publication date

2024

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Journal of Australian, Canadian & Aotearoa New Zealand Studies

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[Link to publication](https://doi.org/10.52230/WQSI4570)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hernandez, G.-L. (2024). Catherine Larochelle, School of Racism: A Canadian History, 1830-1915. *Journal of Australian, Canadian & Aotearoa New Zealand Studies*, 4, 234-235.
<https://doi.org/10.52230/WQSI4570>

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ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/JVON5553>

Catherine Larochelle, *School of Racism: A Canadian History, 1830–1915*

Gian-Louis Hernandez

To cite this book review: Catherine Larochelle, *School of Racism: A Canadian History, 1830–1915* by Gian-Louis Hernandez, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 4 (August 2024): 234-235, <https://doi.org/10.52230/WQSI4570>

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Catherine Larochelle, (Translator S.E. Stewart), *School of Racism: A Canadian History, 1830–1915* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2023), 304pp. Paperback. C\$31.95. ISBN 978-1-7728-4053-7

In education, as in any other field, ideas continually re-emerge in different guises. The work *School of Racism: A Canadian History, 1830-1915* written by Catherine Larochelle and translated by S.E. Stewart traces the history of racial conceptualization from a pedagogical standpoint and illuminates how knowledge systems implicitly and explicitly construct race to maintain the Canadian state. Larochelle analyzes textbooks used predominantly in the French-speaking region of what is now known as Canada to reveal the subtle yet powerful dehumanizations of non-White Others. Beginning with an introduction in which the author situates her own experiences with the French-Canadian education system, the work describes contemporary stereotypes that find their basis in historical conceptualizations of Otherness.

Chapter 1, entitled 'The Theories of Otherness' outlines the framework upon which the author's lucid analysis is built. Incorporating historical and contemporary theorists like Emmanuelle Levinas, Stuart Hall, and Sara Ahmed, Larochelle presents the storytelling of difference, or what she calls 'narrative alterity' (p. 22) to illuminate how the Self/Other dichotomy manifests in the data collected through thorough archival work. This chapter establishes the distance between Self/Other (i.e. between the Canadian child and non-White individuals) by clarifying the relationship as one outside embodied encounters. After all, as Larochelle insists, the transmission of this racial knowledge takes place in a classroom, where the contact between White children and idealized Others is mitigated through the textbooks.

The second chapter, 'Other Societies: Imperialist Knowledge and Orientalist Representations' solidifies the relevance of the Canadian context within a community of Western countries. Starting from the establishment of a Western Identity (p. 43), Larochelle highlights the necessity of education within a nationalist framework. A particularly strong point in this chapter – and throughout the book – is how it highlights synergies between racialized and gendered oppressions. The author notes that gendered ideas of society heavily influenced how race was conceptualized in textbooks. Overall, the concept of the (gendered and racialized) Other forms an educational tool for the orientalist construction of the national Self.

Chapter 3, 'The Other-Body, or Alterity Inscribed in the Flesh' centralizes the body in conceptualizing racialized Others. Drawing examples from textbooks in which the physicality of Black, Indigenous, Chinese, and other groups of people were described as fundamentally different from the White body, the author constructs a powerful case for the transmission of racialized knowledge. Indeed, as Larochelle states, 'These texts, and to a certain extent the schools in general, were not obliged to explain the system of racial classification; the textbooks were obliged to transmit knowledge' (p. 122). The unspoken nature of race was an undergirding force in the educational development of the population.

No account of the history of the territory now called Canada would be complete without an analysis of the area's relationship to Indigenous peoples. Chapter 4 'The Indian: Domination, Erasure, and Appropriation' provides insight into how the Canadian education system facilitated understanding of native peoples' subjugation for the advancement of the Canadian nation-state. The role of the 'imaginary Indian' featured prominently in the texts and emphasizes the historical erasure of the representation of Indigenous peoples in the scholarly literature (pp.

168-171). This important section brings light to the power of education as part and parcel of the colonial project.

Chapter 5, 'The Other Observed or "Teaching through the Eyes"' illuminates the impact of visibility on understandings of race and racism. As a scholar who relies on visual methodology, I appreciated Larochelle's adept implementation of visual methods. The importance of visuals must be highlighted as 'learning through images was as important as being taught through what was written' (p. 250). In drawing on the fascinating (and to a contemporary eye, shocking) visuals being used to teach, the text emphasizes their place in understanding race.

In what is perhaps the most compelling section, chapter 6, 'Of Missions and Emotions: Children and the Missionary Mobilization,' the author unpacks the structured and structuring role of affect in the maintenance of racial hierarchies. She uses Ahmed's complex theorizing of emotion to illuminate the weaponization of children as a colonial tool. In this dynamic, children were often used to highlight the 'need' for White, Christian civilization. This section emphasizes the role of emotions in the development of the conceptual 'White Saviour' and links it to the present day. To close, the author returns to the personal by situating herself in historical discourses that shape contemporary thought around race and racism. I found the transparency with which she linked her own story to the book's message a strong reminder that the personal and political intertwine.

Gian-Louis Hernandez, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences