H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Goldberg. *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America.* New York: Routledge, 1997. xi + 259 pp. $39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-91831-2; $142.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-91830-5.

Reviewed by Adam H. Stewart (Loyola University, Chicago)
Published on H-Judaic (September, 1997)

In a continuation of his earlier work, *Racist Culture* (1993), David Theo Goldberg attempts to apply a "theoretical framework" from that earlier book to a "more popular style and accessible themes (pp. 10-11)." The result is a collection of essays, some of which were published in journals in the last three years, but most of which appear for the first time here. The essays cover a wide array of topics from further discussion of his racial theory to the O. J. Simpson trial to black-Jewish relations. Despite the broad range of topics, Goldberg's analysis remains quite focused as he attempts to articulate issues of power and visibility and how these issues relate to several circumstances.

The first four essays form the basis of Goldberg's conceptual framework that he uses for the final six essays. Perhaps the most important tenets of Goldberg's theories are laid out in his first essay, "Hate or Power?" In this work, he attempts to deconstruct the notion of racism as hateful expression or as an anomaly in a rational society. Viewing racism in this way, he argues, "limits response to the reactive", that is, it excludes from the public discourse those acts of racism which are non-hateful (p. 23). Instead, he believes, we should understand racisms as relations of power, which would in turn allow us to realize how these racisms have permeated our culture.

This idea leads to a sub-thesis that is basic in all of Goldberg's work in this volume: racisms are multiple in their type, expression, intention, and outcome. These relations of power work on more than one level at the same time, and more than anything else, Goldberg attempts to show that any given racialized circumstance is more complex than it appears to be. For instance, in his essay "Between Blacks and Jews," he shows how "changes in the positions, prevailing representations, and perceptions" of blacks and Jewish Americans has affected the tensions between the two groups (p. 129).

Goldberg notes that history of confrontation between blacks and Jews spans a changing history for both groups in terms of class, upward mobility, and nationalism. Respective black and Jewish struggles are often compared to each other, yet he argues that there are important differences in each experience that must be comprehended before tensions between the groups can be blacks and Jews can be understood. Simplification of their "shared" experience has led to misunderstanding as each group has tried to claim a "premium on historical suffering (p. 133)."

Curiously, Goldberg explains the attempt by black leaders to empty the category "Jew," and to understand the word less as "Jewish" and more as "white." It appears that understanding black usage of the word "Jew" in this way may, in fact, contradict Goldberg's original supposition on racism and power. Understanding the inflammatory remarks of black leaders as an emptying of the term is akin to recognizing racism as irrational hate crime. This point aside, Goldberg's work sheds new light on tension between blacks and Jews and can be seen as an important tool in the dialogue to come.

Several other articles in the volume stand as important contributions to race theory. Most notable are Goldberg's investigation of the work of Frantz Fanon from the late 1960s and early 1970s in the article "In/Visibility and Super/Vision: Fanon and Racial Formation," and the application of Fanon's theory in "Whither West? The Making of a Public Intellectual." He suggests in the later article that Cornell West, as a public intellectual, has the choice of being made invisible or adopting a less radical vision to enter the public discourse on race relations. In addition, Goldberg offers and extended critique of Dinesh D'Souza's 1995 book *The End of Racism*, in which he dismantles the author's logic concerning racism and vehemently attacks the "new segregationist" thought as socially irresponsible.

In all, Goldberg provides a landmark work in radical race theory. While his language is certainly not as accessible as he claims, the subject matter is sure to draw a popular audience in search of the latest ideas about writing on race in America.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Adam H. Stewart. Review of Goldberg, David, *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America.* H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. September, 1997.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1257

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.