

Labour

Journal of Canadian Labour Studies

Le Travail

Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes



Daniel J. Keyes and Luís L.M. Aguiar, eds., White Space: Race, Privilege, and Cultural Economies of the Okanagan Valley (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021)

Nicole Yakashiro

Volume 91, Spring 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102176ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52975/lt.2023v91.0017>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Yakashiro, N. (2023). Review of [Daniel J. Keyes and Luís L.M. Aguiar, eds., White Space: Race, Privilege, and Cultural Economies of the Okanagan Valley (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021)]. *Labour / Le Travail*, 91, 314–316.

<https://doi.org/10.52975/lt.2023v91.0017>

responsibility for our own inability to escape dominant settler colonial norms, and resolves to *fail better*" (208; emphasis in the original). This, for Barker, is what it means to be a "bad settler." (209) If being a "good settler" involves upholding, overtly or passively, the settler colonial order and ongoing land theft, racialization, discrimination, and erasure, then the bad settler ideal is inherently subversive, a model of decolonization that embraces failure as a form of progress. Quoting Jack Halberstam, author of *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Barker argues that "there is something powerful in being wrong, in losing, in failing ... all our failures combined might just be enough, if we practice them well, to bring down the winner." (208) The concluding chapter applies this insight to decolonization more broadly as a site of individual and collective transformations and affective relationships. "If some settlers choose to attempt to 'become decolonizing,' then settler society," Barker suggests, "is also unwittingly, contestedly, perhaps minutely, and maybe even futilely, pushed toward becoming decolonizing ... I may have to accept my own colonial nature, but settler society must also deal with my decolonizing trajectory." (220)

Overall, *Making and Breaking Settler Space* makes a significant contribution to settler colonial studies, Canadian studies, social geography, and related fields. Although settler colonialism at times appears to be more monolithic and linear than the author intends, which perhaps is unavoidable in a study that seeks to analyze five centuries of history across almost an entire continent, Barker argues persuasively that these processes and the spatialities and identities they produce are just the opposite: messy, dynamic, and paradoxical. This analysis adds nuance and depth to existing interpretations of Canadian and American history and historical geography, while the book's use of

autoethnography and emphasis on affective, unsettling engagements make what is otherwise rather dense subject matter more accessible to undergraduate students and non-academic audiences. Most importantly, this book succeeds in failing to live up to the settler colonial ideal, making it "bad" settler scholarship in the very best way.

LIAM HAGGARTY

Vancouver Island University

Daniel J. Keyes and Luís L.M. Aguiar, eds., *White Space: Race, Privilege, and Cultural Economies of the Okanagan Valley* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021)

WHITE SPACE is a timely contribution to the study of whiteness in Canada. Editors Daniel J. Keyes and Luís L.M. Aguiar have brought together twelve essays that reflect critically on what whiteness means (as an identity, mode of domination, and affect) and how it has been produced and reproduced in the Okanagan Valley on unceded Syilx territory. While whiteness and the relationship between race and place have been well-studied in Canada, *White Space* is distinct for its localized approach. It attends to how the unique "rural-urban" makeup of the Okanagan, a place popular for its leisure and tourism economies, informs the intersections of race, class, and colonialism. Embracing a regional framework, the collection pushes its readers to not only critique whiteness generally but also to consider how it operates in everyday life (in labour, education, housing, commemoration, journalism, and tourism) within the Okanagan specifically. By taking this place-based approach, the book offers readers an accessible, relevant, and necessary reflection on white supremacy in the region.

The book is structured in two parts with essays from sociologists, geographers,

educators, literary and cultural studies scholars, and community organizers. Part 1 considers the Okanagan's historical representations and commemorative workings of whiteness. Bill Cohen and Natalie A. Chambers describe the general "whiteout" of the region and outline the critical role of Syilx knowledge, pedagogies, and histories in disrupting this pattern. In chapters 2 and 3, Daniel Keyes examines two instances of place-naming in the Okanagan – the naming of N-toe mountain and its re-naming as Nkwala, a name concocted by a settler author – to demonstrate how settlers use toponyms to "conceal the complexity that informs this landscape of dis-possession." (86) Taking a more literary approach, Janet MacArthur's piece analyzes "settler melancholy" within the late 19th century writings of Susan Allison to examine how settlers have or have not confronted the violence of colonialism. Part 1 ends with an autoethnographic piece by Audrey Kobayashi, who reflects on her Okanagan past and the erasure of Japanese-Canadian histories there.

Part 2, on the other hand, focuses on how neoliberalism has shaped whiteness from the 1980s and 1990s into the present. Jon Corbett and Donna M. Senese analyze a series of tourist maps from Kelowna to demonstrate how the region has become synonymous with white "play, recreation, and affluent retirement." (130) Luís Aguiar's piece, too, analyzes local texts to illustrate the "encore" or "smug" whiteness of neoliberalism, wherein "diversity" becomes cultural capital designed to ignore racial and economic injustices (145). Alternatively, Sheila Lewis and Lawrence D. Berg's chapter draws on interviews to document the lived experiences of surveillance and exclusion navigated by urban Indigenous women seeking housing in the Okanagan. Carl E. James' chapter also considers racist strategies of surveillance and management,

but this time as they were deployed against Jamaican migrant workers in the 2000s. Highlighting debates surrounding the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, James demonstrates how local news outlets, regardless of intent, cast Jamaican workers and students as "foreign racial Others." (194) Daniel Keyes' chapter in Part 2 also critiques the news media. Focusing on the concentration of print media ownership under neoliberalism, Keyes contemplates the stubborn inability of media to "challenge hegemonic entrepreneurial whiteness." (239) Delacey Tedesco, on the other hand, focuses on the insecurity of neoliberal whiteness. She frames Kelowna as an "aporetic" site where the city both desires global diversity (and capital) and hegemonic whiteness, making it susceptible to destabilization. Like Part 1, Part 2 ends with an autoethnographic piece, this time by Stephen Svenson, who reflects on his upbringing of "redneck whiteness" in the Okanagan. Svenson traces how, in the context of neoliberalism, white settlers possess an even stronger desire to evade responsibility within the structures of whiteness, capitalism, and colonialism.

Collectively, these essays provide rich ground for critiquing whiteness. At the same time, like many other studies of whiteness, *White Space* falls into common patterns and limitations. For example, methodologically, the book is dominated by discursive analysis. While this work is vital, I found myself asking about the material workings and implications of whiteness. In this regard, Lewis and Berg's chapter on housing stands out as particularly generative. Furthermore, the book's focus on whiteness means that, overall, the distinct experiences of non-white groups – from Syilx people to Japanese Canadians to Jamaican migrant workers – are conflated in binary opposition to whiteness. There are certainly connections across these groups'

experiences, but their differences are just as important for understanding white supremacy's diverse and historically contingent machinations. The book may have benefited, then, from a more robust discussion and framing of racism and colonialism. These are indeed related processes, but they are not the same, and they do not impact all non-white groups the same either. By centering whiteness without including such a discussion, *White Space* also, at times, de-historicizes whiteness as a category and presumes its inevitable hegemony. In this sense, the collection may have been strengthened by a further emphasis on the historical construction of whiteness in both its discursive and material dimensions (including via property, for example) within Part 1. In doing so, studies like this one could remind us that whiteness has always been, as Tedesco describes it, "aporetic" and contingent on the actions and refusals of all types of historical actors. In other words, and without undermining the very real whiteness of the Okanagan, we may see that the region is, in fact, far from a stable white space.

Perhaps the most incisive critique that could be offered comes from within the book itself. In the first chapter, Cohen and Chambers ask: "Is white studies the latest intellectual pastime for a privileged, increasingly multicultural elite that has time to reflect upon and pose critical questions about societal patterns, ideology, and hegemony? [...] Or does it have the potential to contribute to the struggle to collectively free ourselves from hegemony and make a more peaceful, and culturally diverse, world with new webs of relationships?" (40) In my view, *White Space* constructively captures this tension. Although we must consider the stakes of whiteness studies and who these studies serve, the fact that Cohen and Chambers' cogent questions begin the book speaks to the potential of

a collection such as this one. In bringing together diverse perspectives on whiteness, the book creates room for critical conversations. Part 2 also does especially important work. By foregrounding neoliberalism's relationship to colonialism and white supremacy, it underscores the often underexamined entanglements between race and class. Here, *White Space* reminds us that "whiteness subtly maintains and produces exclusions of place," even in a period of presumed global diversity and capital. (9) Moreover, the regional specificity of the volume makes its insights applicable in ways that are not always possible in more general texts. This book is essential reading for academics, undergraduate students, and, really, anyone who resides in the Okanagan Valley.

As someone who lived for a time in the whiteness of the Okanagan, this book gave me encouraging perspectives from scholars and organizers who have done and continue to do critical work there. *White Space* is a valuable addition to studies of whiteness in Canada and offers inspiration to those of us seeking to unpack and challenge white supremacy in local contexts, both historically and in the neoliberal present.

NICOLE YAKASHIRO

University of British Columbia

Esyllt W. Jones, James Hanley, and Delia Gavrus, eds., *Medicare's Histories: Origins, Omissions, and Opportunities in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2022)

IF ONE WERE TO take a poll of what stands out as iconically Canadian, many would respond, "medicare." This collection of 13 essays provides revisionist analyses using the themes of origins or alternative visions, omissions (missed opportunities), and professional opportunities and reactions. As Kathryn McPherson writes in