

**Benjamin B. Ringer and Elinor R. Lawless. *Race-Ethnicity and Society* (London: Routledge, 1989) xvi, 239 pp., \$14.95 paper**

The heritage of European colonization in the “New World” left a legacy of dualism for the contemporary nation-states of South, Central, and North America, according to Ringer and Lawless. As a major focus of their work, their “duality thesis” contends that European colonists constructed a society modeled in their racial, religious, and national image, resulting in the formation of a lasting colonial plural structure with a permanently established elite. Racial and ethnic groups emerged first as sojourner colonizers and then formalized their relationship with the establishment of colonies and the creation of racially segmented and subjugated societies. Dominant ethnic/racial groups promulgated policies and enacted legal-normative codes and controls that vitally affected the life chances and circumstance of the various ethnic and racial groups already within the territorial boundaries of the society or newly entering groups.

This interrelationship became the cast for emerging contemporary nation-states throughout the New World. For example, the Spanish conquest had a lasting impact on racial and ethnic relations in the nation-states of present-day Latin America, and English colonization impacted on racial relations in the United States. In the case of the English, the authors note that they created a society whose institutions were molded in their racial, religious, and natural image. Their focus was on a type of self-governance for the people, but which excluded all people of color.

Ringer and Lawless’s duality thesis is grounded in a social psychological theory of perceptions that identifies how a racial or ethnic group comes to be defined by others and, in turn, how it chooses to define itself. The authors highlight the “We-They” character of race and ethnicity as developed by the sociologist Peter I. Rose. According to Rose, the character of racial groups is determined by a set of internal dynamic forces that serve to establish and maintain a group’s distinctive “we-ness,” while perceptions and definitions by external groups serve to shape and designate a group’s “they-ness.” Both are interrelated and are needed to define the unique characteristics of an ethnic group.

This book highlights the development of “they-ness” with the political-economic order of society. Ringer and Lawless criticize past psychological and social psychological research that has only focused on “they-ness” as a root cause for racial and ethnic conflict. These works treat ethnic and race conflict as a product of attitudes, stereotypes, or simply interpersonal relations within the social order. Instead, they argue that the interplay between race-ethnicity and the structures of power, and the perceptions of they-ness, are essential dimensions in the study of racial and ethnic relations, mainly because such perceptions are most likely to be translated into actions and policies that vitally affect the life chance and circumstances of subordinate ethnic or racial groups.

According to Ringer and Lawless, the duality thesis provides an alternative approach for examining America’s treatment of racial minorities, and challenges

three conventional premises in the field. It maintains that: 1. The treatment of racial minorities in America is qualitatively different from that experienced by white immigrants. 2. That racism is built into the very foundations of American society, and not a mere aberration. 3. That America's experience with minorities offers an international comparison with other white European groups, where expansion, conquest, and settlement is a normative process in the adaptation of duality. Such is the case for countries such as Australia, South Africa, and Latin American countries. Accordingly, a major objective of this study is to provide a general model for the comparative analysis of race and ethnic relations in societies that are products or influenced by five centuries of European expansion.

According to this reviewer, the most important contribution of this work is that it underscores the fact that legal and political sanctions related to racial and ethnic relations do not occur in a vacuum, but rather, are representative of a larger cultural and social milieu that represent an integral part of the existing status quo. Simply stated, racial and ethnic relations emerge out of a social context that is created and supported by a legal and political framework. In addition, this reviewer appreciates the thorough discussion and analysis provided in chapter one of the internal and external characteristics related to the social construction of race and ethnicity.

This work begins with an interesting social psychological theory of perceptions as a premise for understanding racial and ethnic group formation. Through the book, it purports to integrate this micro foundation with a macro perspective for understanding racial relations, but unfortunately never fully develops this linkage. Instead, it develops a duality thesis that simplifies the implications of this micro-based theory upon macro racial relations. A concluding chapter that resolved the tensions raised by the duality thesis would have made for more thorough analysis. Hence, the work ignores the historical insights raised by the duality thesis and its application for resolving contemporary racial relations.

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**A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward, Jr., eds. *Redefining American Literary History*. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1990) iv, 406 pp., \$45.00.**

The collection by Ruoff and Ward stands within the canon discussion in American literary history, which it briefly recapitulates, placing itself in the multiculturalist camp. The first section of the four-part book can perhaps be called programmatic in just this sense: It points out how much has been overlooked among writings produced in America, and it tries to develop rationales according to which such exclusion might be rectified. Much space is here taken up by questions that concern the material and practical side of research and teaching: anthologies, MLA sessions, and the like. Much is program rather than execution, and in many instances the approach—in accordance with the