

Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos

By Juliet Hooker

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In 1845 two thinkers from the American hemisphere - the Argentinean statesman Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and the fugitive ex-slave, abolitionist leader, and orator from the United States, Frederick Douglass - both published their first works. Each would become the most famous and enduring texts in what were both prolific careers, and they ensured Sarmiento and Douglass' position as leading figures in the canon of Latin American and U.S. African-American political thought, respectively. But despite the fact that both deal directly with key political and philosophical questions in the Americas, Douglass and Sarmiento, like African-American and Latin American thought more generally, are never read alongside each other. This may be because their ideas about race differed dramatically. Sarmiento advocated the Europeanization of Latin America and espoused a virulent form of anti-indigenous racism, while Douglass opposed slavery and defended the full humanity of black persons. Still, as Juliet Hooker contends, looking at the two together allows one to chart a hemispheric intellectual geography of race that challenges political theory's preoccupation with and assumptions about East / West comparisons, and questions the use of comparison as a tool in the production of theory and philosophy.

By juxtaposing four prominent nineteenth and twentieth-century thinkers - Frederick Douglass, Domingo F. Sarmiento, W. E. B. Du Bois, and José Vasconcelos - her book will be the first to bring African-American and Latin American political thought into conversation. Hooker stresses that Latin American and U.S. ideas about race were not developed in isolation, but grew out of transnational intellectual exchanges across the Americas. In so doing, she shows that nineteenth and twentieth-century U.S. and Latin American thinkers each looked to political models in the 'other' America to advance racial projects in their own countries. Reading these four intellectuals as hemispheric thinkers, Hooker foregrounds elements of their work that have been dismissed by dominant readings, and provides a crucial platform to bridge the canons of Latin American and African-American political thought.

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Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos By Juliet Hooker Bibliography

- Rank: #625692 in Books
- Brand: Hooker Juliet
- Published on: 2017-05-01
- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 6.30" h x 1.00" w x 9.30" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 296 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Hooker has made a remarkable contribution to our understanding of the discourse on race in the Americas by bringing the works of four of the most important theorists of race and difference into conversation with each other for the first time. Hooker has given us a seminal analysis of key similarities and differences in the development of scientific racism and racial thought in the Western Hemisphere, from debates about slavery before the Civil War and the legalization of de jure segregation in the latter half of the nineteenth century, to the rise of eugenics in the twentieth century. This is an original contribution to scholarship, required reading for every student of the history of race and racism, redefining what should properly be understood as 'American Studies.'"
--Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University

"In this groundbreaking book, Juliet Hooker traces the simultaneous development of racial thought across the United States and Latin America. With theoretical precision, Hooker innovatively juxtaposes the ideas of Frederick Douglass and Domingo F. Sarmiento, and W.E.B. Du Bois and José Vasconcelos. Her 'hemispheric' perspective allows us to read 'familiar' theorists in ways that yield new and important insights. This book is of utmost importance to not only the scholarship on African-American political thought, but the political thought of the Americas. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the theory and practice of race and politics in the Americas. *Theorizing Race in the Americas* should not be missed."
--Michael Dawson, The University of Chicago

About the Author

Juliet Hooker is Associate Professor of Government and African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas-Austin. She is the author of *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*.

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