

A review of *Black Males in the Green Mountains: Colorblindness and Cultural Competence in Vermont Public Schools* by Denise Helen Dunbar (Peter Lange; New York, 2013. 204pp., ISBN 978-1-4331-1761-9) reviewed by Abimbola Akanni (akanniaa@oauife.edu.ng), Department of Psychology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Nigeria.

Denise Helen Dunbar, scholar, advocate, consultant and anti-racist educationist could not have been ingenuously described. The startling boldness and clear-cut approach with which she unmasked racism and inequality in the educational system in Vermont public schools could not have been done other than someone who has lived in Vermont for more than thirty-one years. This is coupled with her 30 years of experience in the field of social justice education. Her choice of title for the book aptly reflects her concern for equal educational curriculum for both white as well as students of color. Living in Vermont has afforded her the privilege of observing the racist attitude of whites that has been institutionalized over a long period of time at the expense of students' of color aspirations for success.

Racism in public schools has been a theme that scholars and public analysts are often careful to openly talk about. But with her wealth of experience, the author professionally painted a fascinating description of Vermont spiced with Green Mountains with its alluring beauty to anyone visiting the place for the first time, in order to craftily present whites' color blindness to racism, against students of color. The book offers an explicit account of the deceptive picture of Vermont, which is quite "vocal in its antislavery rhetoric, as having "a documented history of racism". She acknowledged that the completing the book was by no means a solo endeavour, but a shared process of many years of concerted efforts (p. 3). In the spirit of racial justice, the subject of the book shows how she moved from exposing the consequences of racism to creating the need to identify and respect cultural difference in the public schools.

In a professional manner, Dunbar uses a nuanced qualitative research method to specifically open a discussion on a sensitive but crucial concept – racism. Her presentations describe the synopsis of racism, its continued prevalence, and how to minimize its negative effects on students of color. The book is divided into two parts of five chapters. The first part consists of two chapters that reveal the serenity of Vermont in the picture of the Twenty-first century schools viz-a-viz the realities of the educational system that operate there. Looking through the lens of the critical race theory, a down-to-earth description of the Black males unpleasant experiences were presented.

In the acknowledgement section, the author succinctly describe the numerous sources upon which she relied, including the academic and social justice inspirations at various levels and phase of the write-up. The women of African Diaspora were also acknowledged. The “Bibliography” section concludes the book coupled with the index that serves as a quick link to both the key names and subjects for easy navigation through the book.

The titles of the chapters accurately reveal their contents. The first chapter “Don’t Believe the Hype” exposes the concealed voice of the new face of Vermont, the race based bullying harassment that characterised the black mountains with dots of anti-slavery rhetoric, religious intolerance, bigotry and hatred contrary to the scenic splendour and beauty of the green mountains that seduced her from the very beginning. The next chapter, titled “Does Race Matters?,” chronicles the genesis of racism that was meant to “create a sense of inferiority status in order to oppress and dehumanize blacks” (p. 44). The third chapter, titled “In the Field,” presents testimonial accounts of adults as well as personal perspectives to bring lived experiences to the audiences who need to know. “Voices from the Field” identifies those needs that are still unmet as far as equal opportunity for the students of colour are concerned. She came up with 20 themes that aligned with the 20 domains in the critical race theory. The final chapter evidently admits that the colour line still exists and that “strategic plan to move the district forward in its efforts to making the schools socially equitable” be jointly pursued (p. 144).

My thoughtful sojourn through the pages of the book offered me a sense of deep appreciation of the expertise with which Dunbar pressed home her demand for social equity in Vermont public schools. The five-chaptered book systematically takes the reader through a ride from the deceptive picture of no racism to the appreciation of its existence in Vermont. Dunbar assiduously unearths the depth of racism through scientific technique. Using snowball sampling technique, she sampled the opinions of thirteen Black males who had in one time or the other suffered racism, unjust discipline over non-violent incidents (p. 57). The voice of and the will of the people has spoken by making it clear that racism is a problem in our schools (p. 144)

She convincingly argued that “there appeared to have been an overall lack of respect for students of color, especially related to teachers’ and administrators’ resistance to responding to racial issues” (p. 21). Staff and administrators were not responding timely and in a just manner to bullying and harassment that was racial in nature. This was as a result of “vested color blindness and unconscious internalized bias” that has been imprinted in the psychics of the whites (p. 132).

Besides frankly challenging racism, color blindness and cultural incompetence, Dr. Dunbar challenged the attitudes of administrators and educators even with her own “institutional racism”. She did not limit the scope of her argument to Vermont but also to the entire district. Dunbar opined that educators must start with themselves, examining flawed perceptions, and choose to improve their teaching services. She thoughtfully quoted Murrell, 2002

“Teachers of African American students must be able to understand contemporary educational theory and apply it to their practice while integrating the historical, cultural, political and developmental considerations of the African American experience into a unified system of practice for educational achievement” (Murrell, 2002).

Considering the fact that racist’s attitudes negatively impact on the self-worth and self-efficacy of Black males, the author suggests that strong school leadership that will take ownership of the work needed to get males on courses for success, male empowerment sessions, and culturally responsive schools will enable Black males overcome the dreadful outcomes of racism (p. 167). Having grown up in mixed neighbourhoods where she had white people as both her biological and extended family and was exposed to racism and whites color blindness, she is qualified to exquisitely write this book.