



Review: [untitled]

Author(s): Stephanie Hemelryk Donald

Source: *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan., 2003), pp. 68-69

Published by: [American Sociological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3089854>

Accessed: 23/11/2010 23:10

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=asa>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



American Sociological Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Contemporary Sociology*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

There is considerable need for a serious exploration of the causes underlying America's popular obsession with conspiracy theory. Unfortunately, this book does not even come close. To the contrary, in so insistently abstracting the problem from its sources, *Conspiracy Nation* stands to amplify rather than clarify or alleviate the circumstances it claims to examine. For this, we owe those who participated in crafting it no debt of gratitude, whatsoever.

Accent on Privilege: English Identities and Anglophilia in the United States, by **Katharine W. Jones**. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001. 284 pp. \$69.50 cloth. ISBN: 1-56639-900-9. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 1-56639-901-7.

STEPHANIE HEMELRYK DONALD
University of Melbourne, Australia
sbdonald@unimelb.edu.au

Someone shouted that we were all English. Why were we running? The English don't run . . . And so it went on. Having fled in panic, some of the supporters would remember that they were English and this was important and they would remind others that they too were English, and this was also important, and with renewed sense of national identity, they would come abruptly to a halt, turn around, and charge the Italian police.
(Paxman 1999:247)

Accent on Privilege succeeds in painting a miniature of life in the United States for an extremely small sample of British residents. Unfortunately, the characters in this portrait are only slightly entertaining while the conclusions and arguments are not remarkable for use on a wider canvas.

Jones contends that her work explores the phenomenon of English national identity abroad. In practice, she offers a sample of 34 English people living in the northeastern United States, extrapolating a banal level of self-description from them over a series of interviews. The vast majority of this sample were from the relative affluence of the southeast of England, or were Oxbridge, or at least tertiary, educated and most were from identifiably middle class or cosmopolitan back-

grounds. The exceptions to this profile while moderately interesting, were very few.

When discussing Englishness, this demographic privileging makes the interview results predictable and without purchase. Yes, the English are deemed to have a cute accent, and the posher they are the more they sound as though they have stepped out of a Jane Austen-inspired television series. That seems to be the main contention of the book. It is an argument that could be made rather more briefly, or one that could usefully draw on the literature of cultural transfer and fragment sociality in a wider context of English migration and postcolonial nostalgia.

This lack of context is my main contention with the book. The Englishness of a small number of people is placed in relation to absent others in the United Kingdom with little explanation of how their self-presentation in the United States mirrors or diverts remarkably from their behavior or their privilege at "home." It is likely that the domestic privilege that they have left behind them would be unnoticed by all but the most self-consciously political. And sure enough, many of the interviewees' comments reflect on a particular kind of arrogance that reports as racism in some English attitudes. One man suggests that, as he is not ghettoized in the United States, he is more open to assimilation than other groups and is, therefore, not an immigrant. Another suggests that it is unreasonable for his children to undergo tuberculosis testing, as he and they are not from a "third world country" (pp. 74–75). Absolutely irritating stuff, and Jones is right to pick up on this, but she does not run with it in any recognizably English direction. She suggests that these English interviewees feel that on the one hand they are over-privileged in the United States because of their voices and their cultural capital, while in legal matters in relation to migration, they are not privileged enough. Could not this argument be turned on its head, and the argument made that this book itself mirrors the confusion that Americans deal out in relation to the British, cossetting them while applying regular border protection strategies. Has Jones just discovered that while the U.S. state is fierce in the articulation of its sovereignty, its citizens are prone to racist identifications of white middle class English as worthy of their favor, while other English people might not be so regard-

ed? The most pertinent response to this material might be, not that the English have a confused sense of identity, but rather that this particular group is confused that their privilege as white is supported by the American mainstream in general, but not to the degree of assimilation that they would prefer.

The book also mainstreams a descriptive project, aiming to define Englishness in ways that intersect with a larger discussion on national identity. Jones notes that the English respondents negotiated the heritage model of Englishness in conversation with her, as they doubtless are constrained to do in respect to the limited projections of Englishness available in film and television. However, the discussion is not opened out to examine the issue of the heritage industries in the 1980s and 1990s, and how they drew on precisely the experience of people's lives in her sample. A great number of Oxbridge educated people do have access to the rolling green plains of England, they have a working memory of such places, and they have the social capital to get back there as a reference point for the construction of a continuing identity marker. A great many other English citizens and expatriates may not, and the differences between experience, nostalgia, and dominant visual ideals must be explored if this section is to make any useful sense.

I write this review as a "blown away pom" myself, an English migrant in Australia. I approached this book with anticipation that those experiences that sit across migrant communities, as well as those that separate them by reason of class, language, or expectation, might be illuminated. I found a small description of a small segment of the English abroad, and very little examination of how migration could be further theorized as a transitional space, nor how the condition prompts indeterminacy, multiple allegiances, and a decentered sense of permanency. Most disappointing was the refusal in the book to encounter Anglophilia within the American psyche. It is a rather similar, if differently expressed, phenomenon of denial to the whinging pom trope in Australian media and popular culture. Tells us a whole lot more about you than me, mate.

Reference

Paxman, Jeremy. 2000. *The English: A Portrait of a People*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press.

Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and the Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South Africa, by **Diana Wylie**. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001. 319 pp. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-8139-2047-7. \$18.50 paper. ISBN: 0-8139-2068-X.

DARYL J. GLASER
University of Strathclyde, UK
d.j.glaser@strath.ac.uk

Diana Wylie argues that discourses around nutrition (and malnutrition) have participated in the rationalization of white power in South Africa. She shows how white politicians, bureaucrats, and researchers attributed the poor health of black Africans to their supposedly lazy and unscientific ways (especially with regard to farming) or to the unavoidable pains of adjusting rural people to urban environments and diets. This dominant account, she argues, deflected attention from the political causes of black poverty (such as low wages and land dispossession), absolved the state of responsibility for African welfare, and "explained" why Africans were not ready to take their full place in the white world. Wylie joins other recently influential radical scholars in foregrounding the ideological rather than material bases of power, and in underlining the role of Western science in justifying white dominance and subordinating indigenous knowledge. She also adds to a growing literature that takes seriously individual agents and their world views and that, in the South African context, stresses the role of paternalism and cultural essentialism (as opposed to crude biological racism) in ruling ideology. In a familiar sounding conclusion to such accounts, Wylie warns the postapartheid black elite against joining their white predecessors in privileging modern over traditional knowledge.

The book is an interesting and readable contribution to a genre that has, for all its limits, filled gaps in the analysis of South Africa and helpfully encouraged critical scholars to take seriously people and their ideas. Its case studies cast an informative light on the way that a number of mainly white actors—Native Affairs Department administrators, missionaries, doctors, urban social researchers, and mine managers—han-