



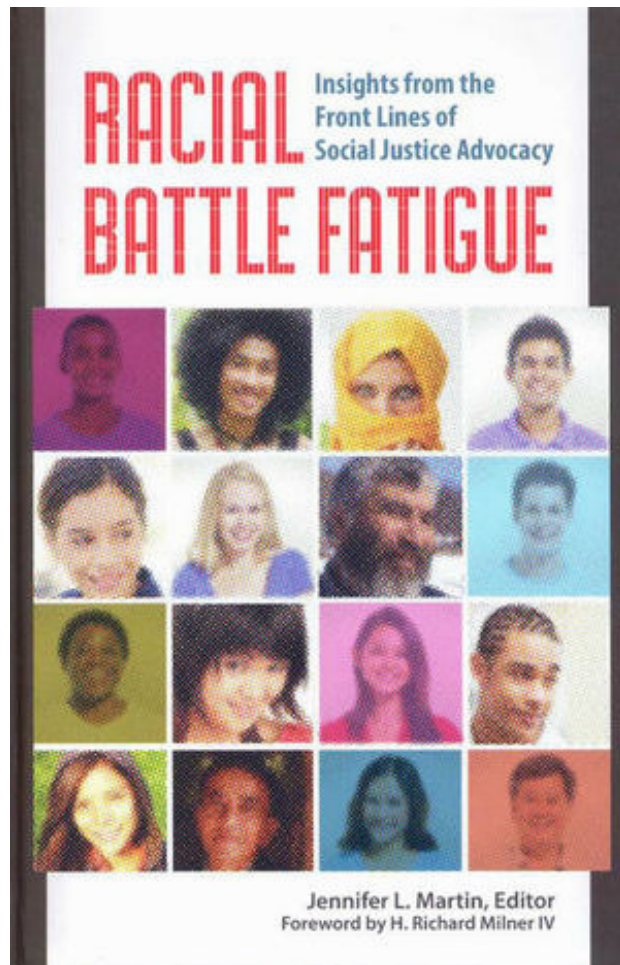
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'Racial Battle Fatigue' an invaluable resource

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"Racial Battle Fatigue: Insights from the Front Lines of Social Justice Advocacy," edited by Jennifer L. Martin. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger (An imprint of ABC-CLIO). 302 pages, \$58.



“Educators must be empowered to speak the truth of the reality of schooling, and their institutions must support them in these endeavors,” Jennifer L. Martin asserts near the beginning of “Racial Battle Fatigue: Insights from the Front Lines of Social Justice Advocacy,” her new edited treatise on the challenges facing people of color in higher education. “If these needs are not met, we must ask ourselves the questions: What is the purpose of schools? And what is the purpose of education in a democratic society? The acknowledgment that inequities exist is a fundamental part of this process; if we do not sound our voices, we are complicit in the inequities that abound around us.”

So begins this wonderful primer on the challenges facing members of underrepresented groups as they seek to navigate the often choppy and unforgiving waters of academia. If you are not a person of color, chances are you have not had to endure the trials so eloquently captured by the courageous contributors to this immensely enlightening testament to the perseverance of the human spirit in the face of hurdles many

among our ranks have never had to endure. What distinguishes Martin’s chronicle from similar efforts, however, is her definitive focus on what can be done to help those most affected by the subtle atrocities recounted by these front-line warriors in the war against racism overcome the impediments put in their way – and use them to their advantage in the struggle for academic and personal credibility.

Martin is an assistant professor of education at the University of Mount Union, a private college in Alliance, Ohio. Before assuming her current role, she spent 17 years in public education, 15 of those as chair of the English department at an urban alternative high school for at-risk students. Her previous publications include editing the two-volume series “Women as Leaders in Education: Succeeding Despite Inequality, Discrimination and Other Challenges.” Her current research interests include bullying, harassment, social justice and culturally responsive leadership practices.

A total of 30 contributors authored or co-authored the 19 chapters that comprise “Racial Battle Fatigue.” The book is constructed in three major sections: “Theory and Narrative,” “Battles Still to be Waged” and “Pedagogy and Practice.” Among the diverse and talented set of writers who lent their experience and expertise to the effort is Samantha M. Ivery, who is completing her doctorate in higher education and student affairs at Indiana University. Ivery completed her master’s degree in student affairs in higher education at Western Kentucky University. Together with three colleagues in the doctoral program at IU, Samantha wrote “Yes I Am Smart: Battling Microaggressions as Women of Color Doctoral Students.”

“The ways in which we coped with our dehumanizing experiences were manifold,” the four women explained. “Internally, we utilized one another, family members and community members to handle the deleterious experiences we encountered. We wrote emails to one another, participated in Sister Circles, vented to our partners and leaned on our advisers/mentors. Controlled responses included isolation from students and faculty that harmed us, avoiding spaces certain colleagues frequented, and removing ourselves from toxic environments; i.e., the classroom. Externally, we responded with our research and scholarship.”

Another chapter I found especially intriguing was “Effective Gender Activism: An Exercise in Marginalization,” by Wendy Murphy, an adjunct professor of sexual violence law at New England Law Boston. Her résumé includes a year as a visiting scholar at Harvard Law School; in addition to maintaining her law practice, she also co-directs the Women’s and Children’s Advocacy Project under New England Law Boston’s Center for Law and Social Responsibility.

“The unapologetic purpose of my work is to irritate the system and make people uncomfortable with how the law works when victims suffer needless indignities and violations of fundamental rights,” Murphy writes. “After decades of creative lawyering as an ‘activist academic,’ I’ve become bolder because I’ve learned that I can’t be effective if I’m worried about offending people.

“People will not long respect a legal system that incentivizes violence against women and produces inequality in the name of justice,” she writes. “Lawsuits rooted in constitutional and civil rights can serve as a kind of quality-control device – one that naturally elevates the conversation about violence against women to a higher plane while inspiring all judges to be more mindful of the impact of their rulings on the safety and equality of women as a class.”

“As educators, we are demonized by politicians and the media and demoralized by claims that our schools and universities are broken,” Martin concludes. “This is an elaborate ruse. If we allow our eyes to adjust to the harsh and painful realities, we realize that schools and universities are the battlegrounds of cultural wars and hegemonic fears that our country is changing.”

“Racial Battle Fatigue” is an invaluable resource; the tangible recommendations and advice it contains provide a roadmap for negotiating the inauspicious circumstances that often confront people of color at all levels in education. It could also be instructive to those who work with these individuals; i.e., a wake-up call for those of us who have never been submerged in the kind of venomous and dehumanizing environment many of our colleagues have had to contend with for most of their lives. Walking a mile vicariously in someone else’s shoes does tend to precipitate a measure of empathy. I recommend it highly.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*