Recall This Book
Episode 122: Derron Wallace, Culture Trap (JP, EF)
February, 2024

Elizabeth Ferry:
Greetings everyone and welcome to another episode of Recall This Book. Today I’m delighted to be here again with my friend and co-producer and co-host John Plotz from the English Department of Brandeis. Hi John.

John Plotz:
Hey Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Ferry:
And we’re especially happy to have Professor Derron Wallace with us. Derron is associate professor of Sociology and Education at Brandeis and he has a PhD from the University of Cambridge, and he is the author of the recently released book, The Culture Trap: Ethnic Expectations and Unequal Schooling for Black Youth, which is out with Oxford University Press and is going to be the topic of our episode today. Hello Derron, and welcome.

Derron Wallace:
Hello Elizabeth. Hi John. So good to be here. And I've been able to have conversations with folks about my work who are sociologists or education scholars or immigration study scholars, but it's such a delight to have a conversation with scholars from different disciplines -- a scholar in English and anthropology. But what is more, it feels like a really special honor to do so with colleagues from my own university. It feels really special, so thank you so much for this.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Well, thank you. And that's really gets at the heart of Recall This Book too.
John Plotz:
I feel like if we knew the Waltham city Anthem, we could sing it now.

Derron Wallace:
John, in my case, only if it's the Jamaican anthem.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Okay, there you go. Okay, so Derron, could we start off by just having you tell us a little bit about the project and the book?

Derron Wallace:
Sure. This project is a cross-national study. The book is a cross-national study of Black Caribbean youth in London and New York City. Since the 1920s, Black Caribbean's have been deemed a high-achieving Black model minority relative to African-Americans. Whereas in the UK context since the 1960s, they've been deemed the chronically underachieving minority. In both contexts it is argued that there's something intrinsic to their culture that produces these outcomes, this culture of success in the US in a culture of failure in the UK. Well, this cross-national study calls into question the significance of culture and spotlights the importance of national policy context and shaping the divergent outcome of the same ethnic group. What I'm arguing fundamentally here is that there's so much about the relationship between culture and structure that's being relegated and simplified to purely being a matter of culture, and that is what I argue is the culture trap. It splinters Black political power. It limits our capacity to understand the full range of structural and cultural inequalities that exist in schools and in society. It is both an epistemological and an analytical limit that we place both in academic discourse but also in popular culture, popular understandings of contemporary social affairs that I'm trying to unpick in this work. There's nothing-- in the tradition of Stuart Hall and Pierre Bourdieu -- there's nothing intrinsic to the culture of Black Caribbeans. I argue in this book or any specific group, frankly, that means success or failure. It's also about the context of reception. It's also about the class dimensions of migration that shapes who
goes where. It's also about the order of Black migration, as I discussed in the book. There are a range of structural, historical and political factors that shapes the reception of a particular cultural group to a national context.

And this is what we often miss in contemporary discussions in education, but also in general discussions about who's successful or who's a failure in society. The impetus for the project, I must add though, and I feel so grateful that I can say this now because the book is done--I had no interest in studying Black Caribbeans. I was actually studying economic development. So much of my work, I went to graduate school to study economics, the economics of education in particular, and I was working as a community organizer and I had a chance encounter, which I described in the opening scenes of the book, with veteran Black Caribbean teacher who was surprised at the time that I was Black Caribbean and studying at Cambridge. And her response to me was when I told her I studied at Cambridge, she said, "And you're Caribbean?" She was very shocked that. And I remember thinking to myself, well, in the US it was a complete opposite to this narrative.

And I recall even from my first year in university, debates between noted legal scholar Lani Guinier and Henry Louis Gates Jr about which particular cohort of Blacks or which types of Blacks were we seeing in the Ivy League. And they were describing at a Black alumni conference, that Black immigrants were disproportionately represented among Black students in the Ivy League. And in particular at that time that Black Caribbeans constituted the largest share of the Black immigrant population among those in the Ivy League. So very, very different policy context and public than the traditional Stuart Hall -- a different representation of the same group. But after I had my conversation with her in community organizing, we used to encourage folks to write down notes with leaders so that next time you meet them, you could remember. I am only sharing this because community organizing shaped my ethnographic sensibilities. For so long, it became an onerous task of documenting everything. It actually was part of my everyday practice as an organizer.

And I realized quickly, I went back, spoke to my friends, spoke to people in the neighborhood about what was going on, and they said, "Yeah, this has been going on for decades. How did you not know?" And I was like, "Well, it's the opposite where I'm coming from. I didn't know this." I leafed through every sociology book I could find, Black studies, history textbooks, and I could not find a text that could speak to these divergences in representations across two different national contexts. And so kicking and screaming, I decided I would write this book and now it's out, and I'm elated it's out.
Elizabeth Ferry:
Well, it's ironic because you're critiquing the notion of culture and yet you were drawn into it. You weren't going to study culture and then you were, right?

Derron Wallace:
Yeah, absolutely.

Elizabeth Ferry:
And you were drawn into it.

Derron Wallace:
Absolutely.

Elizabeth Ferry:
So in some sense it trapped you as well, I suppose.

Derron Wallace:
Yeah, absolutely. I wouldn't say it trapped me. I would say it captivated me.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Okay, fair. Yes.

Derron Wallace:
It really lured me in and invited me to think through a problem that I was seeing playing out from a deficit standpoint in the UK context, right?

Even more recent reports like the Sewell report, which came out just about a year and a half ago. Tony Sewell is a policy advocate and he was asked to write this report basically on the state of race in Britain. And he made a couple of really strong claims about Britain that race was no longer a key issue, that it was far more equal in Britain than across Europe, that the greatest accomplishments can be seen in education. And he goes on to say the major exception, these are Black Caribbean people who... He himself is Black Caribbean. That's the latest iteration of that narrative. But I can think others where this rehearses regularly, particularly as exam grades come out and consistently Black Caribbean students fall to the bottom, that this narrative around culture gets reasserted as the rationale for their achievement.

John Plotz:
Are there other international comparandums, I guess maybe France and America with Vietnamese Americans? I don't know what the other cases would be, but I'd be interested to know how you thought about these other cases where you get divergent perceived outcomes in different of the same immigrant group.

Derron Wallace:
So nothing conclusive. There's been some anecdotal evidence to suggest that how particular groups fare varies across context. So there have been some reports about particular groups of Asians not faring as well in say Australia as the United States. But it's part of what I hope to think about later and it's part of why I theorize the culture trap the way that I do. Because what I want to think about the case of Black Caribbean with specificity and depth, the theoretical argument I'm making far exceeds the case of Black Caribbean. And there are other groups around the world, which, I think is what your question gestures towards John, are also experiencing this as well.

John Plotz:
It definitely does, and I like the point that you're making about it being in a variety of contexts, but I was also specifically pulling on something that I think both Elizabeth and I were interested in, which is the notion of what I think you call direct versus indirect settler colonial contexts. So I was thinking about-

Elizabeth Ferry:
Primary and secondary, maybe.

John Plotz:
Primary and secondary, thank you. But instances where people are coming to what is perceived as the "mother country" as our colleague Howie Kam studies, Vietnamese francophone literature and Vietnamese literature in America, and it's like an interesting, the comparison that even might line up in interesting ways.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Yeah. And to me, so one of the things that I really love about the book is the way that you include the... Well, in the first place, just to say very clearly, it's such a striking case where you have these very divergent situations, but both of them are attributed to culture. In one place they succeed, in one place they fail relatively speaking, and in both cases it's attributed to culture. So it really allows you to push on the implications of the culture concept and the ways in which it gets wielded so effectively. The thing about the primary and secondary that I wanted to ask you about because it really speaks to this, you have sections where you talk for instance about, and please correct me if I'm mischaracterizing this, but that in some ways the educational system in the Caribbean, at least in the British Caribbean, is not only extolling the British system as the best of the best, but also modeled after it and somewhat like it, right?

But I think it's also there's this way in which you give the opportunity to talk about colonialism as something that is very relational, more relational than people think about it sometimes. It really matters that Caribbeans in New York for instance, have the position of immigrants who are not part of already
a colonial context. Whereas in Britain, they're colonial subjects who are out of place. Or what do you think about that?

Derron Wallace:
Yeah, that's one of the chapters I almost threw out of the book.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Well, I'm glad you didn't.

Derron Wallace:
I'm so glad I didn't, on the advice of families that were part of the study, my own family and mentors. I wanted to have a clear conversation in that chapter about a really key point that I think challenges traditional immigration studies work. And that is, when we think about cross-national work, we tend to think you can compare those people often immigrants or the children of immigrants in the two host societies within which they find themselves. And the main point I'm trying to make in that chapter is that you cannot possibly understand the experiences of Black Caribbeans in either London or New York City unless you are understanding their perceptions of the whole society from the homeland. It therefore means we no longer have a two-way comparison. We have a three-way comparison. The larger point right then is you can't understand any immigrant by simply focusing on their experiences in New York, Miami, Paris, Amsterdam.
You also must relationally understand both the circuits of power that shaped their migration to that context, but also their perceptions of that city context, that new whole society from the homeland. And that brought me to the analysis of colonialism's impact. A lot of what I'm thinking about now is what I regard as the educational legacies of empire, the ways in which long after the constitutional collapse of dominant post-colonial regimes, we can start to think our colonial regimes, pardon me, and this march into independence as it were. We can think about how through the structure of schools, what we teach, how the schools are structured, how teachers extol a particular nation state or its schooling and how it imbibes the sense of belonging and even
being as it were in a form of colonial power, but still sustaining at an effective level that colonial relation.

I want to take that in my work and hadn't seen much of that to date. So you're absolutely right, Elizabeth, in the work I pay attention to the fact that Black Caribbeans who went to the United Kingdom were primary subjects of British colonialism even before they went to the United Kingdom as immigrants. Whereas Black Caribbeans who came to the United States were secondary subjects of US settler colonialism. Both the differences in the types of the different structures of these colonial relations and the order in which they fall matters tremendously for the status and their representation in the nation state.

What I'm trying is, again, something that you think you can simply dismiss as a matter of cultural is profoundly historical, deeply structural. And I also want to make the claim because sociologists went through this in the late 60s, 70s, this rejection of culture that you gestured towards as well, Elizabeth, following the Moynihan Report and a host of other reports that really were advancing rather pathological views on Black families in particular. And so the critical scholars were distancing themselves from that narrative. What I'm trying to do in this moment is I want to take culture so seriously as to understand it so deeply, that I must engage with its relationship to structure.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Exactly.

Derron Wallace:
It's main culture. It's actually to take it so seriously as this understand how, not just the meaning making around it, but how it's framed and understood and structured in a particular context. So that's my mode of engagement in relation to culture, and I hope that engages.

Elizabeth Ferry:
What it seems to me is that's where your legacy or the legacy of Stuart Hall and Pierre Bourdieu and I would posit Antonio Gramsci, right?
Derron Wallace:
Yes, they're both connected.

Elizabeth Ferry:
People who argue that there is no division between culture and structure, or history for that matter.

Derron Wallace:
How has the culture track been constructed? What role has the state and its actors played in its development and sustenance over time? And so the points you're lifting up, Elizabeth, makes me think about how in the 1960s, and this will be relevant for the contemporary moment, following the passing of a whole slew of civil rights acts in the mid 1960s, you conservative pundits drew the case of Black Caribbeans to say, we didn't need affirmative action. Here was this new cohort of Blacks and look at them based on economic output, home ownership, educational team. They were thriving, we don't need affirmative action. They were arguing because this group just had the right cultural stock as it were, and motivate them towards success.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Which is also an argument saying that the U.S is really not racist, right?

Derron Wallace:
Precisely. Fundamentally, [they are arguing that] this is not about race. It's both about dismissing this weighted category of race or anti-Blackness in particular. But just to say it comes down to a fundamental matter of one's inner beliefs and drives, a drive as it were, which just fundamentally limits history once again. And what shapes the presence and experiences of Black folks in the US up until that point. Right.
John Plotz:
So can I actually use that? This is an ignorant question, just desperately trying to remember the way the rhetoric of the Moynihan Report in the original report and then how it was taken. But could you just tell us more about that phrase, culture of poverty? Because one of the things I really like about your work, Derron, I think Elizabeth also likes it, this notion that race, class, gender, and then the triad plus this possibility that culture exists as a shadow category there. But the phrase culture of poverty, and you should correct me if I'm wrong, the way I remember it with the Moynihan report, it's almost as if the word culture there has a bit of a shifter effect where it's attached to poverty as if what's being perpetuated is the endemic nature of being poor. Do you see what I mean? Rather than it being a separate category, which is certainly a way of deflating or deflecting Marxist class-based critiques, instead of seeing poverty as something that's an attribute of a class system, you see it as like in here-

Elizabeth Ferry:
If people just read to their kids more then...

John Plotz:
Exactly.

Derron Wallace:
Precisely. And then which groups get represented as having that culture of poverty. I think that's the part, right? Yes, on one hand there's this loose, open-ended category that is the culture of poverty that can be attached to any group finding themselves steeped in poverty. But we know owing to the structures of American society disproportionately who those people are, and more than that, we know the media's commitment to this repeated representation of those groups as being the ones in poverty. So there's this-
John Plotz:
So does culture just become a cover... Oh, sorry, go ahead.

Derron Wallace:
It's fundamentally racialized, to your question. So we attach the culture of poverty, yes. Though we know it's theorized as being relevant to a whole host of groups. It's seen as a representation of Black people in-

Elizabeth Ferry:
Right, exactly.

Derron Wallace:
And that's fundamentally the problem. So on one hand when you read the texts, John, you may appreciate it's about interpretation on one hand, but you could also argue that it's about its deliberate slowness as it were, its capacity to encode multiple meanings that allows it to have traction in the public political discourse. But at the same time, in popular culture, media representation allows us to reinforce dominant deficit perspectives of a particular, not to be a class group, but a racialized group.

John Plotz:
So apropos of interpretation, this comes to one of the things that I think is so interesting in your work and where you're crisscrossing this question of ethnic expectation and the culture trap in a couple of different ways. So that sleight of hand move you're describing there has to do with a general public that is set up to receive something that is putatively race neutral but actually racialized. But you also have a set of arguments about the internalization of ethnic expectation. That is the way in which these culture traps aren't just categories by which neutral data is interpreted for the benefit of
Policymakers. You're also talking about how this hits people's lives, school children especially. Can you say more about that? Is that where the rubber meets the road? That is when people come to get inculcated into the notion that they're culturally marked in one way or another?

Derron Wallace:
Yeah. Thanks so much for that question, John. I think it's at least one point where the rubber meets the road and it feels significant. Because in internalizing these logics at different junctures, for me the rationalization about why that logic has traction is what I find most fascinating. So folks who genuinely say they work hard, but what might have allowed you to work hard. So again, this quiet but significant weighted presentism that shapes our understanding of even Caribbean success here. And I uncovered this, in the book, [that] in the 1920s, immigration policy necessitated that only those highly proficient in English language were allowed migration from the Caribbean, then becomes a code for recruiting the middle classes and the elites to come to the United States. But rather than being represented as middle-class, Black Caribbean people, they're simply seen as it's Caribbean culture. That is what I refer to as a secret life of social class. Classes shaping the quality of representation we see of a particular group in a national context. When teachers think that this is just a matter of culture when social class is playing such a profound role and they're not able to see it in some cases, that's when it hits me the most. What I also found most moving in the context of doing this ethnography was just how much young people saw. I was floored. I spent a lot of time as a user working with young people, but I walked away with a really clear sense that young people are savvy political actors, whether they have the vote or not. And they're able to recognize structural and cultural inequalities that were sedimented and regularized for teachers. And at least in the last chapter of the book, which I think is where a lot of things come to a head, the class clown becomes the teacher's chief critic, challenging him on what he describes as you are using our culture against us. Those are his words. The kid who opens up the book making fun and having this interaction with this teacher.

So for me, culture has its power, not simply in the meaningful theorizations we may advance in the quality of works we may produce. It has profound implications in schools and society because it shapes teacher and student dispositions who we are and what we believe about ourselves and what's
possible. It therefore has implications for democracy. It therefore has implications for even social welfare and who we believe deserves or not. It's a case for a whole host of larger points about how society is structured and who's deserving and who's not.

John Plotz:
Can you say more about that? I love that point about the awareness. It almost reminds me of the Lukacs argument about reification and the class consciousness of the proletariat, where he basically says that you need to be in the position of the proletariat in order to have the correct structural understanding. Because a lot of times I hear that argument run. Forgive me if I'm using this phrase wrong, but there's a category called "stereotype threat." The notion that people are basically stigmatized and set up for failure because they're imagining what the expectation is for them. And that I think understands, let's say school children, let's imagine it for that case as disabled by these cultural predispositions. But the thing you just said was you see the kids in that situation as actually having an angle on it. They have some traction.

Derron Wallace:
They have some traction, and it isn't universal. They don't always have it. It is situational, it's contextual. And often when they are most disadvantaged by the structures of power. So when you flip the case, these Black Caribbean students, when they're celebrated in New York and African-Americans are being put down in schools, they don't see that. That is not as concerning to them. But when their teacher starts to use their culture as what the sociologist Diane Ray regards as an ideological whip, as a way for getting them in line, they see that and want to resist it. More than that, as I bring up in the gender chapter, and this was peculiar for me as well. In a cross sectional study, you often expect to say things are different, things are different. But in that chapter on gender, I was like, wow, that actually what the Black Caribbean boys are experiencing in both London and New York is the same.
And what the Black Caribbean boys in London and New York are experiencing is the same. And I can unpack this a little bit [but] I want to stay germane to the point you're making or the question you posed, John.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Yeah, but just say a little more about that because it was so interesting.

Derron Wallace:
Yeah. So let me make the point first, and I'll use examples. The boys did not recognize how the general concern about Black boys being a beleaguered party, this underachieving group needing all this help, how it afforded them levels of privilege in school, they didn't see it. In fact, when you read the book closely, I was very forthright in saying there were moments where I was in conversation with these girls and they're like, "You don't see it. How could you not see it?" I was like, maybe you're just like, let's dig a little bit deeper. And I was greeted with eye rolls and neck rolls and why my own male privilege growing up in a Caribbean context meant that I too had benefited from this, and I didn't see it despite my own political consciousness. I'm using that as an example to say again, what are the moments when we see and we don't see structural and cultural inequalities? And that isn't peculiar to young people. It isn't peculiar to Black Caribbeans. I could talk about our own faculty. I could talk about the wider society and local community. I could talk about the middle, middle-class is moving into working class neighborhoods and when it's okay, Black middle-class people moving into Black working class neighborhoods and when it's recommended versus when it's gentrification. These are the nuances I wanted to lift up in the book. Because you were asking about before, Elizabeth. Yeah, I found that in the latter part of the book, I focus on three cultural logics that Black Caribbean students use in pursuit of success, distinctiveness, deference, and defiance. And I can say more about each of those, but the one most relevant is deference. It's this ideological investment in good behavior and comportment as being relevant to one's success. And what I learned in the context of pursuing this work and write about in the book is that it was profoundly a gendered ideological frame and that the rewards were starkly different for boys and girls.
So in a context in both London and New York City where Black boys were deemed to need policy and social support to aid in their academic achievement, those boys then were praised for, they experienced what I call complimentary deference or deference for the sake of receiving praise. They got praise for just showing up to class on time, raising their hands on occasion in class. In one case, just guessing an answer to a question, this kid was beating his chest because he was proud. The Black Caribbean girls on both sides of the Atlantic were not praised because of their behavior. They practice what I call compulsory deference. And they did not receive praise by virtue of behavior because they're supposed to be differential. They're girls, it's a compulsive formula. That's what girls do, you fall in line. And so they could only receive praise through high academic achievement. And this was true in both national contexts.

And so what we're seeing there is that in this attempt to support boys, they're gendering this low gendered expectations for Black Caribbean boys on both sides of the Atlantic, where they're easily praised and the praise is supposed to be an attempt to sort of support their advancement, but it actually helps to keep them back. The girls on the other hand, who in their everyday social life wish to be praised for showing up on time or participation, get none of that. It's only through the pressure of high academic achievement that they're able to garner those rewards. And I wasn't even able to see that. It was completely revelatory for me because I could now look back on even my own educational experience and see where I had benefited from the same thing relative to young women and girls who were far much smarter than I was. But my good behavior was rewarded and I was encouraged, right?

John Plotz:
Whereas, as you're describing it's not exactly a benefit, right? Because if the effect of it is a negative payoff because-

Derron Wallace:
I would say. But it's both / and because at least in real time immediate reward is that the teacher is recognizing that student, that boy in a way that she or he or they would not recognize a girl for the same.
John Plotz:
Right.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Right.

Derron Wallace:
In real time, particularly in the context relationally among students, they can recognize that something is different there. Even though over the long haul it helps to limit. It’s putting a cap on behavioral expectations for Black Caribbean boys. Because boys will be boys, they’re going to be silly. They’re going to run around, they’re going to be unruly. And again, that’s not unique to just Black Caribbean boys or-

Elizabeth Ferry:
No-

Derron Wallace:
I can name a whole host of boys.

Elizabeth Ferry:
It reminds me a lot of parenting expectations, for instance, of both my husband and I had full-time jobs when the kids were little and we shared the caretaking. And he would say this himself, every time he did anything, it was like, "Oh, it's so incredible. He's such a great dad." Whereas I was always very much on the teetering margin of acceptability.
Derron Wallace:
I have come to learn, this is more on the personal side, but my partner and I, my wife and I, because she's very diplomatic and very incredibly thoughtful. But if you want to upset her very quickly, begin praising me for basic parenting. Oh my God.

Elizabeth Ferry:
I know, right?

Derron Wallace:
She loses it. And she reminds me, this is her words. "This is your reasonable service. You're not doing anything extra, nothing that's worthy of praise. We are doing this together." But it's again, another case, another example of how that very gendered logic travel across time and space and across a whole host of cultural groups. And these are some of the dynamics that could quickly get dismissed or relegated or simplified to merely being a matter of culture that I wanted to see how both race, gender, and social class shapes the representation of cultures across context and across topics.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Right. That's fantastic. So maybe this is a great moment to shift to our Recallable Books section of the episode. And Derron are you ready? What do you have for us?

Derron Wallace:
Yeah, there are a few pieces that come to my mind. Can I name at least three? Is that okay?

Elizabeth Ferry:
Yeah.

Derron Wallace:
So one that's had a profound impact on me is Bernard Coard's *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-normal*. It is the text that then shaped Steve McQueen's, at least the fourth episode of Steve McQueen's *Small Acts* focused On education. And interestingly, Bernard Coard is a Brandeis alum. He's also from the Caribbean, and he did his work in the very area I wrote this another-

John Plotz:
Really, that's amazing.

Derron Wallace:
Well, aside where we connected afterwards. I was like, this is uncanny. It felt like the very calling because he was pushed to write that book based on community actors who's saying, if you are in these schools seeing what's happening with our kids, you need to write this. And that's precisely what happened to me when I described the differences across the two national contexts. Members of my community, "If you can't find a book, you need to do it. I need an answer, you should tell me."

Elizabeth Ferry:
So Derron, say the title again just so we can hear it.

Derron Wallace:
Elizabeth Ferry:
It's such a striking title.

Derron Wallace:
Yeah. Oh, and it's striking because going back to arguments about the state, I use the US example around affirmative action. Well, in the late 40s, 50s, 60s, into the 70s, the British government disproportionately labelled Black Caribbean students as, and I quote educationally sub-normal, that was a language of the state. That is how we produce the representation of a particular cultural group and sustain that over time. This isn't just about what people are thinking or believing. The state plays a role in structuring these representations.

Back to other books, I'm thinking too about Bernadine Evaristo's, *Girl, Woman, Other*, a really just very provocative book that I think is so well done. I enjoy that. The other, I just want to lift up, which falls slightly outside of that tradition, this is a book written by a scholar, a sociologist of Southern studies, I think you would say. He's a scholar called B. Brian Foster is at the University of Virginia. His book is called, *I Don't Like the Blues: Race, Place and the Backbeat of Black Life*.

For me, it is my favorite ethnography of 2021 by far. There is a text where that is so steeped in southern culture that both in the language, the attention to detail, the theorizations that are being advanced, the quantitative data brought to bear was just a level of sophistication I so appreciated. I read parts of the book and there are moments where I would just throw the book on the floor. I was like, I can't believe you just said it. The prose were so lush that it's poetry and it's sophisticated empirical analysis. I love it.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Oh, great.

Derron Wallace:
I don't know Brian personally, but we crisscrossed at ASA, at the American Sociological Association this summer and I set to find him, "This is what I think of your work, and I've been telling other people, but I need to tell you to your face. This is a really good book." So those are the three that come to my mind.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Wonderful.

John Plotz:
That's great. That's fantastic.

Elizabeth Ferry:
And those will all be there on the website so that people can look them up. So I have a couple of things. One is, John might laugh, it's either Anthony Trollope or Michel-Rolph Trouillot with me. It's pretty much goes back and forth between the two. So in this case and essay, a difficult essay, but brilliant, by the late anthropologist, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, which is called Idea Culture, which is about the culture concept in the United States. One thing that Trouillot is really, really has a really light touch with is the life of concepts and the ways in which concepts change and how concepts and words are not the same thing that you might have the same word, but the concept is changing and has different kinds of histories. And we really see that with culture.
And he talks about the ways in which the concept of culture in a Boasian tradition in anthropology was really developed, not perfectly and certainly ways that are of its time, but quite pointedly to intervene in a conversation about race as an anti-racist project. And the ways in which that shifted to the use of culture that you're documenting where culture is actually a way of avoiding talking about race. And race comes in through the back door in a sense. So really fascinating essay, not one of the ones that is normally read by Trouillot. So I think a really good one. And then the other thing I was going to suggest, and if we had more time or maybe later over drinks or something, I
want to ask you, because you were a little reticent maybe on this, how you felt about this, but...The Wire, the TV show, The Wire.

Derron Wallace:
But it wasn't me, it was the participants in the study.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Sorry?

Derron Wallace:
So you're saying I'm reticent, I wouldn't say it's necessarily me, it's the participants in the study and what they were-

Elizabeth Ferry:
No, you said something about The Wire. You have it as a representative, if I understood you right, of a certain representation of the ways in which the US educational system treats Black students. And I'm just curious how you think about that. For instance, there are other, and now I'm going to forget the name. I think it's a Stand and Deliver is the name of the movie, the other movie that you describe in that.

Derron Wallace:
Lean on Me.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Lean on Me. Yeah.
Derron Wallace:
But I think what I'm trying to say is, it's participants who are bringing these up, and I've be a good interviewer saying, "Well, don't you realize, or what do you think this actually represents? Do you think this is actually what's happening?" Do you see what I mean?

Elizabeth Ferry:
That's fair.

Derron Wallace:
I didn't want to bring these up. But yeah, there's also another movie in the UK context, Sidney Poitier where he's this Guyanese headteacher who gets recruited into Britain in the 1960s.

John Plotz:
Mr. Chips or something.

Elizabeth Ferry:
*To Sir, with Love.* There's that.

Derron Wallace:
To Sir, with Love.

John Plotz:
To Sir, with Love, right.
Derron Wallace:
And so seriously, no one was talking about a culture of property among the white working classes at the time and how these students were-

Elizabeth Ferry:
No, it's true.

Derron Wallace:
... poorly behaved and how they needed to recruit this teacher. But that's, as you say Elizabeth, perhaps for another time and over drinks first.

Elizabeth Ferry:
So to me, the difference between The Wire and a lot of those films is that it's has a much more Bourdean notion of how, it's certainly representing schools in certain ways, and I think that would be a good conversation, but it doesn't have the heroic narrative that you see in a lot of these things. It's much more, everybody's playing the hands they're dealt, they're all quite complex actors. And that's what I love about it. So that it has this degree to which its notion of culture to me aligns a lot more with what I see in your analytic frame, not your description of how the concept of culture is working in your ethnography. So I'm a fan, so that's my recallable.

Derron Wallace:
We should try to teach a class about The Wire, which I think colleagues have done at other universities, but I don't know if you've seen Top Boy, which has become-

Elizabeth Ferry:
I love Top Boy.
John Plotz:
What is Top Boy? I don't know what Top Boy is.

Derron Wallace:
Yeah, folks cruelly regard to it as the UK's Wire. And so it's-

Elizabeth Ferry:
It's really, really good. I haven't seen the last season, but no, it's great.

Derron Wallace:
I watched it a couple of weeks ago when it came. But yeah, John, you should watch it and then we can have a quick conversation about it for sure.

John Plotz:
That sounds great.

Derron Wallace:
Exactly.

John Plotz:
I'm excited.

Derron Wallace:
I'd be remiss if I didn't mention at least one text by Stuart Hall, and I'll close this piece, The Fateful Triangle by Stuart Hall, Race, Ethnicity and Nation,
based on lectures he gave at Harvard. I found to be really, it's among his lesser-known works, but I think it's just so rich in its theorization of race, ethnicity, and the nation state for the reproduction of structural and cultural inequalities. And so I don't think we've, at least in sociology, there's been this awakening over the past eight or so years in thinking through the relevance of Du Bois as a sociologist, as a number-crunching sociologist. And as I say this, their historians sitting down, shaking their head saying, we've known this the whole time.

Sociology has finally coming to this moment, or US sociology has finally coming to this moment. And what I argue, what I strongly believe is just as Du Bois has been brought into the center of us sociology, I think Stuart Hall deserves the same in British sociology, and that he too ought to be taught as part of the canon. Instead, he gets relegated simply being a matter of cultural studies that isn't necessarily cultural sociology. And we know the very disciplinary boundaries, cultural studies, the challenge in the first place, and to draw on the tools of literature and of art and a film that sociology in and of itself couldn't provide. And so for those reasons, I think this text is one I'd recommend to anyone interested in cultural studies broadly or to cultural sociology specifically.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Fantastic. Okay. Well, always good to end with Stuart Hall. So I just want to thank you Derron so much for taking the time. And thanks to John and thanks to our listeners.

Derron Wallace:
Thank you Elizabeth and John. I've enjoyed this. Thank you.

Elizabeth Ferry:
Wonderful.
John Plotz:

It's mutual. Recall This Book is the creation of John Plotz and Elizabeth Ferry. Sound editing is by Khimaya Bagla, and music comes from a song by Eric Chasalow and Barbara Cassidy. We gratefully acknowledge support from Brandeis University and its Mandel Center for the Humanities. We always want to hear from you with your comments, criticisms, or suggestions for future episodes. Finally, if you enjoyed today's show, please forward it to five people or write a review and rate us wherever you get your podcasts. Thanks for listening.