difference. Thus the nature-culture divide becomes the dualist framework within which the book roughly situates popular conceptions of race.

Beginning with a critique of race as a form of exclusion, a measurement of difference, and more generally as an unwarranted mode of sociological profiling, the author moves through a rigorous investigation of the ways in which race is understood, talked about, and likewise silenced by dominant cultural norms and social etiquette. The sociological study comprises interviews and questionnaires conducted with university professors and their students at four universities (all situated in the northeast United States), as well as analysis of racial narratives in secondary-level textbooks. The aim of the study was to reveal how students and their teachers respectively think and teach about race.

The book reports some interesting findings: in secondary education, for instance, the views of race that are published in the textbooks used for teaching are not those views transmitted directly from ‘ivory tower’ scientists to the public; rather, it is the publisher’s editors who generally control what makes it to print. Broadly speaking, though, social-constructivist makings of race are rarely taught at secondary level, with biological definitions prevailing.

The author reports a sharp distinction at university level, where ‘social’ scientists tend preferentially to employ constructivist definitions of race, with ‘hard’ scientists relying more on essentialist constructions. Despite this variation, a consensus against racial essentialism was voiced amongst most university students, with students generally favouring an understanding of race as ‘culture’, and constructivist viewpoints often being defined negatively against biological determinations, inculcating the mind-set that constructivism makes race ‘not real’. Accordingly, the author reports the important finding that students felt the need to adhere towards ‘political correctness’ in their conversations about race, claiming ‘that because racial essentialism might be dangerous’, it ‘therefore cannot be true’ (p. 157).

What the book does not do, however, is talk about how Africans, Caribbeans, so-called ‘mixed races’, or other immigrant groups in the United States think about race. This is to say that the book does not talk about how the ‘concept’ of race varies across cultures, or even outside of the United States. The author therefore gives little consideration to the possibility of a multiplicity of meanings of ‘race’, subject to
local variation with meanings being taken up variously (or not) across differing social and historical settings. In so doing, an essentialist semiotic of ‘race’ is inadvertently reinscribed, reifying ‘race’ as a transhistorical thing to be apprehended unitarily. In this regard, the study is not very anthropological, and interested readers here may find the analysis dull and under-theorized. Indeed, the discussion makes heavy use of a nature-culture binary to describe the ways in which the category of race is lent meaning. The author makes no attempt to interrogate this strained dualism, crucially not recognizing that ‘scientific facts’ – the rudiments of biological essentialism – can also be considered to be ‘socially constructed’ knowledge, poorly reconciling her findings with the wealth of related social studies of science.

Contrary to the suggestions of the book title, then, the study doesn’t so much address the way ‘scientists’, as circumscribed authorities, think and teach about race. Rather, it situates the often-silenced polemical definitions of race (divided between social constructivists and biological essentialists) within the contemporary doxa of the US academy, perhaps pointing towards deeper roots amongst the broader middle classes of the United States. Though this is a major limitation, narrowing the scope of the book significantly, it still does well to satisfy its stated goals, and the reader is left with a solid sense of the range of ideas that are commonly deployed on university campuses to explain ‘race issues’ as societal facts.

In conclusion, then, researchers working on race in the United States should certainly read this book. Readers seeking a more anthropological and wide-ranging introduction into the topic of racial politics, however, might look elsewhere.

Ian Vincent McGonigle University of Chicago