



Martis, Eternity. (2020). They Said This Would Be Fun: Race, Campus Life, and Growing Up. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

Reviewed by: Athena Moukhaiber, MacEwan University

“They Said This Would Be Fun” by Eternity Martis is a compelling and moving memoir that explores the reality of racism in Canada. Martis shares her experiences as a young black woman attending a predominantly white university in Canada. She explores the overlooked realities and emotional toll that people of colour face daily. Her honest and expressive writing style draws readers in and makes her book relatable and entertaining. The book provides an eye-opening understanding of the different forms of racism and draws attention to the precautions black people must take to survive both socially and physically. Through a recount of her personal experiences, statistics, and real-life events, Martis explores themes of racism, sexism, and misogyny, the complexities of intersectionality, and the importance of community in fostering resilience. While the book offers an essential perspective on important topics, its reliance on repetition disrupts the flow at times. Nevertheless, Martis' work holds the power to challenge perspectives and spark meaningful change in the readers' understanding of race and identity.

Drawing from her own experiences and other examples, Martis explores the many dimensions of racism, such as white privilege, microaggressions, and systemic and deep-rooted racism. The book draws attention to the daily practices a student of colour must partake in to feel

safe or accepted in a predominantly white space. Martis effectively depicts white privilege and analyzes the dismissal of poor behaviour when displayed by a white person, in contrast to the extreme reactions that people of colour are subject to. One striking example that Martis shares is the case of a white professor at the University of Texas San Antonio who called the police on a student for simply putting her feet up on a chair. The student, who was merely “doing what all students in hour-long classes do,” faced disproportionate repercussions for the minor act (Chapter 2). The author also points out the microaggressions committed by her fellow students. She explains how students would avoid sitting beside her in class and on public transit. Martis identified one student, Megan, who was hostile and spiteful toward her. Megan “took notes” when Martis made mistakes and shared her false gratitude for education on race by stating, “Before this class, I thought that natives ran naked in the bushes” (Chapter 2). Megan's ignorant comments, though perceived as harmless, served as reminders of the deep-rooted racism black people continue to face today. Martis also addressed forms of racism that went beyond innocuous displays of ignorance. Only less than fifteen years ago, Martis experienced multiple malicious encounters in college, including derogatory terms and threats of violence. She witnessed white supremacist posters, heard her partner being called a racial slur, was told to go back to her country, and faced a white man’s threat to beat her. Her recounts of these intense and vile acts highlight the hateful stereotypes toward people of colour embedded in our culture and create shock and empathy in readers.

Through the author’s dating experiences, social observations, and supporting statistics, “They Said This Would Be Fun” effectively captures women's realities in college and beyond.

Martis explores the struggles of being a young woman navigating a world rife with misogyny and sexist attitudes. She addresses her personal experience with partner violence and unfair gender expectations. With her first boyfriend, Joshua, Martis endured physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Joshua shamed Martis for her clothing choices, threatened to, and hit her, raped her while she was intoxicated, and manipulated her by threatening suicide if she left him. As rape culture encourages women to do, Martis dismissed much of his behaviour as that of a “typical teenage boy.” Martis’ honesty invites female readers to connect with her story. It offers male readers a critical understanding of the realities of partner abuse and the damaging societal norms that perpetuate it. According to Statistics Canada, women are “six times more likely to experience partner violence” than men the same age. In her book, Martis recalls several cases of female college students who have died at the hands of partner violence, demonstrating the severity and prevalence of this issue within this demographic. Martis also describes dating a traditional man named Amir, highlighting his sexist beliefs and the double standards that define their relationship. In this relationship, Amir restricted her freedoms, and she took on “emotional and domestic labour.” Amir did not want her to go out but did so himself because he believed “there [are] just things men could do that women shouldn’t” (Chapter 4). Martis uses Amir’s expectations as an accurate representation of the misogyny rooted in society.

Another central theme in the book is the concept of intersectionality, which examines how people with overlapping marginalized social identities are further subject to discrimination and obstacles in life. The book discusses how her race, sex, and age contribute to some of the author’s negative experiences in life. However, Martis also notes the unique realities of those who

experience those identities simultaneously. Martis presents evidence of disproportionate rates of violence referencing Statistics Canada, which reports that “young women between the ages of twenty and twenty-four have the highest rate of experiencing intimate partner violence” (Chapter 4). She also explains that “women of colour and women with disabilities experience disproportionate rates of violence” (Chapter 8). When those social categories overlap, a person is subject to even higher rates of violence, which produces a unique experience. Martis shares her personal experience with intersectionality, focusing on how Black women, including herself, are treated differently when sexually assaulted compared to white women. Black women are labeled primitive and sexual, while white women are symbols of purity, provoking more empathy and believability from society. These stereotypes negatively affected her experience and that of many other black female victims.

Eternity Martis addresses another theme in her book by effectively demonstrating the value of community. She emphasizes the challenges that arise from feeling misunderstood or isolated, highlighting the vitality of finding understanding among those shared experiences. As a fellow South Asian, Martis felt connected to Sunil through their shared culture, which gave her a sense of belonging. However, Martis recalls even Sunil tokenizing her, commenting that she was also black despite their similarities. Martis felt that, with Sunil, her “brownness was negated by her blackness” (Chapter 2). Martis also reflects on her family’s inability to understand her experience as a black woman, deepening the isolation. Martis speaks about the heavy burden of racism and its effects on physical and mental health. Martis discovered a black women's history course, introducing her to a like-minded group. Martis discovered a Black women’s history course that

introduced her to a like-minded group. She reflects on this as a vital outlet during her struggles, perhaps offering the reader hope and relief toward the end of her memoir. This collective of women, who shared Martis' experiences, gave her a sense of belonging and sisterhood (Chapter 9). These women serve as a positive representation of resilience in marginalized communities, and their impact strengthens the book's overall message.

Eternity Martis presumably wrote this book to remind the world of the prejudicial hate against minorities and women that still exists. The academic audiences interested in reading this book include scholars and students studying critical race theory, gender studies, or education. Martis candidly recounts her experience with racism at various levels. Additionally, the book entails statistics and anecdotes about misogyny and the female experience, making it a valuable resource for examining gender, sexism, and intersectionality. Finally, those in education hoping to study and work in academic environments should indulge in this book to gain new perspectives on marginalized students' diverse and complex experiences. Although this work is a powerful memoir with a meaningful message, its repetition sometimes dilutes the emotional impact. Martis often relies on real crime statistics or anecdotes from across Canada to advance her argument. However, the abundance of examples presented in succession may lose the reader's attention. Distributing these statistics more evenly throughout the memoir and using more concise language could improve the book's delivery.

“They Said This Would Be Fun” is an effective and engaging exploration of racism, sexism, intersectionality, and the essence of community. Eternity Martis' memoir provides a relatable and authentic telling of the overlooked oppression students of colour continue to face in

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Canada. The book is valuable for anyone hoping to gain a new perspective. Although its repetition may affect the book's flow, it remains an impactful memoir. Martis ultimately challenges readers to confront biases and become aware of society's prevalent stereotypes and prejudice.