On Whiteness

Katrina Spencer: Hello, my name is Katrina Spencer, I am the Literatures & Cultures Librarian at Middlebury College. Today is November 10th; it's a Friday. I'm sitting in Davis Family Library with-

Laurie Essig: Laurie Essig. I am a professor of Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies, as well as the Director of the Program here at Middlebury College.

Katrina Spencer: Very good. And I'm also joined by-

Daniel Silva: Daniel Silva, Professor of Portuguese at Middlebury College, and also Fellow at the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity, and the Anderson Freeman Center.

Katrina Spencer: Wonderful. We are gathered here today to talk about whiteness and its manifestations, not only on our campus, but also in the “community,” in the nation, and in the world. Whiteness seems to be picking up a lot of steam when we talk about discussions of [race, difference, otherness, etc.]. For example, in 2014 comedian Hari Kondabolu released an album called [*Waiting for 2042*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db4610744~S2)*.* It is the estimated year in which Americans, or *white* Americans, in the United States, become a minority group. There is a British writer, her name is Reni Eddo-Lodge, and she wrote, [*Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db4622634~S2), this year, 2017. Back in March of 2017, author Charles Murray, who was invited to our campus to talk about his latest publication, [*Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960 to 2010*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db4338794~S2).

 So, more and more people around the world are critically examining what whiteness is, what it means, and how it's an unmarked, and an invisible category that often eludes critical examination. So, I'm going to open up with a series of questions for you all. Don't be intimidated by the amount. Respond at will, in kind, or wherever you feel comfortable starting. So the first question is, is whiteness a global category? Are we here in the United States and around the world examining whiteness critically enough, and quickly enough? In what ways may we be lacking or delaying? And in what ways can we grow?

Daniel Silva: I would say whiteness definitely has a global aspect to it. Very much so in the way it was founded as a category of personhood, beginning with European expansion, we could say. It's always a feat to mark a starting point, but we can start there, and through which a system of representation of legitimate bodies was created around skin color, and became a way to legitimize particular forms of power that have been reproduced by way of narratives pertaining to whiteness, and different intersections of normativity that go into whiteness. So, short answer, I would say, yes, a global category. Not world, *world*wide, but there has been a global impact of whiteness.

Laurie Essig: I would definitely agree with that, and even though the courses I teach center whiteness in the US context, and particularly the post-civil war context, and the creation of the color line. To think about the way in which whiteness structures American popular culture, and then the way in which popular culture circulates the world and shapes everything. So, just to give an example of the way in which whiteness, imagine blackness through minstrelcy and how that became a global phenomenon, or we could even say gangsta rap and how that becomes a global phenomenon that [is] then enacted in Moscow and Beijing as well. So, yes, absolutely a global phenomenon, both because of its origins, and colonialism, and slavery. But also because of U.S. popular culture.

Daniel Silva: Yeah, and within the U.S., I mean, as a nation, itself in particular, [there is an] ideological apparatus that is very much structured hierarchically with whiteness at the top. The way cultural products are consumed and integrated into the mainstream is very much through this white gaze. So, you gave the example of hip hop, how hip hop is consumed by predominantly white audiences, in a way that strips the meanings that were at the core of the product itself by marginalized groups—that would be just one example of a cultural product. So, we see how things are integrated into the gaze of whiteness, but still marked as other, and consumed for particular purposes that often reinforce the normativity of whiteness, normativity as a construction that is enforced on people.

Laurie Essig: Just to give an example, I wrote a book on cosmetic surgery, and the way in which cosmetic surgery reinforces notions of whiteness. I was at these international cosmetic surgery conventions, and interviewing cosmetic surgeons from, say, Iran, who would talk about how the Persian nose needs to be “fixed.” It needs to look like a northern European nose. And how does that circulate through Disney films, through magazines, through Hollywood in general? So, yeah, I think you cannot think of whiteness as being located in the U.S., even if it's important to know how it operates here.

Daniel Silva: Absolutely. Another example with plastic surgery, in Brazil, just to give another geo-cultural location, in terms of rhinoplasties, nose surgeries, a common one is called, and I quote, “the correction of the Negroid nose.” This is yet another example, I mean, I guess we could talk about different geographical contexts and whiteness, you know, further into our session here, but there are manifestations of whiteness as part of dominant culture throughout the world.

Katrina Spencer: Speaking of plastic surgery, so we've got others as well, one that I just found out about today. So I knew about the double eyelid surgery. But now there are some people, I think, in East Asia who are attempting to make their lips more thin in order to sort of mimic more white European features. I never heard about that until today.

Laurie Essig: Well, capitalism will always invent products to sell us, whether it's white supremacy or patriarchy or both in one.

Katrina Spencer: So, question group two: Is whiteness a stationary, codified category? How might it change depending upon where you are and who you're with? How might it change based on who is speaking and who is listening? What do you anticipate whiteness will look like in 50 years? Or 100?

Laurie Essig: Whiteness is definitely neither a stable nor a codified category. So, just to locate it in the particular space of the United States and the post-civil war period, the reason the color line was the problem of the 20th century, as [W.E.B.] DuBois told us, is because it was so unstable as to who would be on one side or another. So, those fights have been happening since that moment, right? Since Plessy v. Ferguson and beyond, as to who was going to be colored and who was going to be white. We can see that in terms of how the Irish became white after World War II, Jews and Southern Europeans became white, and Eastern Europeans. But those were always slightly unstable forms of whiteness. We can see that now with the rise of anti-Semitism in the U.S., and with this particular white nationalist, and moment, and politic that Jews are increasingly outside the category of whiteness.

 Are poor whites part of the category of whiteness, in particular “white trash”? We see that term being created with the Eugenics movement, but even earlier, the term that was used among colonial Americans was white offal, which is the part of the animal you can't eat. So, they were just there to fertilize the ground and to die, basically, with their labor. But they weren't fully human. So I think whiteness has always been an unstable category. I think we can see it with whether people from the Middle East are part of it, whether people from Japan are part of it, and how that's going to change and be navigated over time is never clear. But that it's unstable is.

Daniel Silva: Yeah. And deployed, oftentimes, for different reasons. For example, you mentioned Eugenics, and something that occurred in the Americas more or less at the same time, in order to whiten the population, was the incentivizing of European immigrants from Southern Europe, from Eastern Europe, whose whiteness was on the border, culturally peripheral whiteness, but still put into the narrative of, “Okay, we need to whiten our countries.” This occurred not only in the U.S., [but] Brazil, Colombia, all across the Americas. So, there were still privileges afforded to those on the cusp of whiteness, like being able to join a union, or being able to get a bank loan, that were privileges not given to people of color, especially those of African descent, in the U.S., in this case. So, the objective of achieving national whiteness sort of hindered on, okay, now you can have these privileges because you're whiter than what we want to escape from. So, with whiteness, with the goal of achieving whiteness, there's also a concomitant escape from blackness, in the Americas. I don't know; it is ambiguous, and that's part of its advantage, I would say. If that makes sense.

Laurie Essig: Yes. I think its instability makes it all the more likely that people will engage in the project, what David Roediger calls “[*The Wages of Whiteness*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db1354173~S2),” right? So, if you can get paid in the wages of whiteness, which I think we saw very much in the last political election, presidential election [2016], is that people were paid in the wages of whiteness who weren't actually benefiting from the current economy or any economy that we can imagine the current congress coming up with. But, the benefit from being white, that, we definitely see. But that is unstable, and certain groups are always on the edges is also clear.

Daniel Silva: Right. Another related issue is with immigration into different spaces, again just using the U.S., what is whiteness in the U.S.? And what are the intersections between whiteness, country of origin, and language? So, if you are white, of Latin American descent, which is my case, you are not really white *here*. You're put into another ethnic category. In different data collection, I've seen it broken up differently, “white,” but also then a category of ethnicity, and these things are... It's interesting how they work in tandem sometimes, or not in tandem. But it's something that a lot of white, or at least people who claim whiteness but are from locations that are geographically non-white in the U.S. imaginary. It leads to a lot of confusion. Like, in my community, there were a lot of recent Latin American immigrant groups, and there was always this struggle, and in my family as well, “Oh, what do you mean we're not white? 'Cause we're white back where we came from, but here we're not.” What does that mean? That, coupled with, if you grow up in, I don't know, let's say “inner city America,” where you're in the prison pipeline already, how does that also compound? So, it's never really rigid, I guess, but its consequences are very visceral.

Laurie Essig: Right. To give the opposite example, my family are Russian Jews. Jews are not white within the Russian context of race. But, here, completely white, no matter how strong your Russian accent is, right? No one would have ever thought my grandmother wasn't white because of her accent. So, right. So that's what we mean by unstable categories, and you can move locations and be white in one country, and not white here, or white here and not white in another. That very instability is what makes white people anxious. I do think that that is the anxiety, right? You can get kicked out.

Daniel Silva: That's part of it, yeah.

Laurie Essig: You can get kicked out.

Katrina Spencer: We will absolutely be talking about white anxiety in about two more questions. Question set three: Why have you chosen to incorporate whiteness into your areas of research and teaching? What are the implications of centering whiteness as a focus of study?

Daniel Silva: [To Laurie] You first: you've written a lot more about it.

Laurie Essig: So, I actually come out of Queer Studies, and when I was a young lesbian mother, a straight, white, cisgendered man said to me, “God, I hope someone is studying that.” From that moment on, I decided I would *not* do Queer Studies, but study heterosexuality. So I've been teaching a course on heterosexuality for about 22 years. Then, after I started the course on heterosexuality, I thought, well, I want to teach about whiteness. So I've been doing that for about ten [years], and just this year, I'm teaching a course on men. So, I've kind of got white men and heterosexuality as the trifecta of making that which is unremarked upon remarked upon. I'm actually... which is not to say that I don't see the dangers of centering any of those categories, and the dangers of not focusing on groups that are much more marginalized. I totally and completely respect that work, I think it needs to be done more. Which is my way of saying, please let us have Africana studies here at Middlebury; please let us have Latino/Latina studies here at Middlebury. But, I felt like my role in academe could be making that which is unremarked upon remarked upon, which is why I do it.

Daniel Silva: Yeah. I think there's something to be said about the importance of studying hegemony, and its profound impact on society and the different positions from which we experience hegemony. I mean, whiteness, for me, was always, I don't know, an interesting thing in that where I grew up there weren't many white Americans, except for my teachers in public schools. Problematic to say the least. But I would see whiteness on television, and see the construction of normativity placed onto particular forms of whiteness, so if you think sitcoms. What is mainstream? It was always white. Sometimes, I don't know, jokes were made at the expense of cities like mine. I remember an episode of *Friends*, if you guys don't know the show, I mean ...

Laurie Essig: Everybody knows the show.

Katrina Spencer: I know the show. I know the show. I've seen it once or twice.

Daniel Silva: I don't know if our audience will know the show.

Katrina Spencer: Yes, they'll know the show. I think.

Daniel Silva: I mean, we're getting up there in age.

Laurie Essig: They can Google it.

Daniel Silva: Yeah. So, I remember seeing this when I was young. These white, young adults living in the city, and they made a joke about my city, Newark, New Jersey, and one of them was like, “Oh, let's do something dangerous and crazy. Let's go to Newark.” I was like, “Wow. Wait, I'm from Newark. So, it was one of the many moments in which I saw that the place where I'm from is “the other” to this mainstream, normative space. From then on, even though I didn't come into direct contact with whiteness and white America, it was still something, something of like a curiosity. Then I went to college, my first time outside of Newark, and living amongst white Americans in college dorms, and being called ethnic slurs to my face. I was like, “Oh, this is also, I guess, part of being white in the U.S.” One thing led to another and I started making the connections between whiteness, and where I'm from, and how one was built on top of the other, and it just became a topic of inquiry. Not only academic, but personal. I think, it's personal to all of us, right?

Laurie Essig: Yes.

Daniel Silva: At least it should be.

Laurie Essig: All research is personal.

Katrina Spencer: Word. All right, so I want you guys—you all—to talk about white anxiety. It seems to be a cultural phenomenon, gesturing towards worry, fear, insecurity, and it's attributed to white cultural groups. What are the sources of the sentiment? Is it justified? Is it justifiable? Is being a member of a minority group inherently threatening? If so, how, why? Should it be? Should it not be?

Laurie Essig: So I think there's always been white anxiety. I mean, we can see the ways in which minstrel shows, or the re-appropriation of minstrelcy from African Americans into Irish American culture became a sight of white anxiety. There were often racial riots after particular minstrel shows in New York City, etc. So I think white anxiety has always been around, in part because it is an unstable category, and yet it comes with so much privilege. I do think that white anxiety has become ramped up in recent years. I think that that is both a function of white people, but I also think it's a function of a particular political regime, and a particular news medium, particularly right wing talk shows on the radio, and right wing news shows that take this anxiety and turn it into resentment.

 So I think what people are feeling is scared and anxious. That makes sense. The effects of globalization and trickle down economics have been that most Americans are poor. The vast majority of Americans are much poorer than they were in 1980; the vast majority of the world is poorer than it was in 1980. There is environmental collapse happening. I think it makes sense for people to be anxious. I think part of what has happened is that anxiety has been turned by some fairly cynical actors. I don't mean individual actors, but institutions, into white resentment, and white entitlement, in particular ways. Not that different than the way, say, the early [Tammany Hall](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/d?tammany+hall&searchscope=2) democratic politics did with Irish whiteness.

 But, it's quite clear now that what has happened is a huge portion of white Americans. I think the number is 55% according to an NPR poll, believe that they, personally, face racial discrimination. I mean, that's really shocking, given the statistics, and the facts. Right? But we don't live in a factual world anymore. That's part of the cynical transformation of our news media, and our political culture, and our academic culture. So, we can't even talk about the facts. What we can talk about is the effect, the feeling, of being screwed by the system. Sorry, I have a lot to say.

Katrina Spencer: No, no, of course.

Laurie Essig: He used s friends, so I feel like I can ...

Katrina Spencer: Yes, yes, please.

Laurie Essig: So, yeah. So I think what we're seeing is both anxiety, that makes sense. I think everyone should be a little bit anxious about now. That being translated into resentment and entitlement. That's really dangerous. I mean, I really think we use the word fascism too often, but I think what we're looking at is a white nationalist movement that is easily morphing into fascism.

Daniel Silva: Yeah. White resentment, like you said, becomes part of the expression of it. White anxiety has always been a part of the making of white power, and white supremacy. So, I feel like even behind the whitening policies, and the Americas of the turn of the 20th century, late 19th century, even before that, you see this needle, we need to reproduce the white majority. We need to continue to reproduce our own power, if not, it'll slip away and we'll lose everything. Because you're placed into that idea of whiteness, one of my theories to it, and that's the reality. Whiteness as the reality, and if it doesn't come with that, that set of privileges and power, then it just crumbles. So I think there's always this need to re-inscribe it, reproduce it, always grasping for its claims, even though they're not ... I don't know, palpable. But, always re-inscribing the supremacy of whiteness. Yeah.

Laurie Essig: [Michael Kimmel](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=kimmel+michael&searchscope=2) has this term, “aggrieved entitlement” about whiteness, I like that term. I think it can also be used for masculinity in particular ways.

Daniel Silva: Oh, yeah.

Laurie Essig: But that sense of, “I deserve something, and I'm not getting it, so I'm going to take it.” I think that that has been, that is there, and I'm not excusing white people from that aggrieved entitlement, but I do think it's been cynically manipulated in particular ways.

Daniel Silva: Yeah.

Laurie Essig: That's not unrelated to hegemonic masculinity.

Daniel Silva: Oh, no. Not at all. Yeah. The entitlement is part of that building of whiteness, and the whiteness into which individuals are placed as subjectivities: “I'm white, so I'm supposed to achieve this, this, and this. If I'm not, then, damn it, someone else is to blame, and it's not going to be the power structures as they are, it's going to be the scapegoats that are usually used, people of color.”

Katrina Spencer: [ironically] I'm laughing.

Laurie Essig: And Jews.

Daniel Silva: And Jews.

Laurie Essig: And women.

Daniel Silva: Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely. It's intersectional. We have to make that clear, yes.

Katrina Spencer: So we had another visitor on our campus following [Charles [A.]Murray](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=murray+charles&searchscope=2)'s visit. His name is [George Yancy](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=yancy+george&searchscope=2). He visited our campus Spring 2017 to talk about the fear of the black body. I know that he writes about whiteness quite a bit. I want you all to tell me new information about who this person is. Yeah, and maybe what we should know about him, in terms of whiteness, if there is anything you'd like to add.

Laurie Essig: He's really important, and I think people should read him. I'm a little interested in George Yancy's notion that all white people are racist, and all men are sexist. I find this a slightly problematic construction. I've seen it used by administrators on college campuses, for instance. It's a way in which, the impulse is good, right? For white people to take account of the white privilege that accrues to my body, the way in which I operate in the world, and how that affects me. But if all white people are racist, and all men are misogynists, it doesn't allow me to distinguish between, say, Donald Trump as not being a feminist, and Justin Trudeau. Right? I mean, I can't actually figure out what the differences are.

 So while I find his call for all white people to sit with the idea that we're all racist, and all men to sit with the idea that they're all misogynists, it also harkens to older feminist debates for me. For instance, [Andrea Dworkin](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=dworkin+andrea&searchscope=2)'s work on [*Intercourse*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db1520788~S2). That was the name of her book, where she makes the claim that all heterosexual sex is rape. Right? So, this was a woman, who was married to a man, by the way, so that's one of my favorite things about it. But, I found that that claim troubling when I read it as a college student. I find this claim troubling too, because it excuses us, in some ways, of our racism. If we're racist, and there's no way not to be racist, or there's no way not to be a misogynist, then I don't actually have to do the work.

 I actually want to say I love that George Yancy is asking people in the New York Times, which are mostly people like me—white and educated and with all sorts of capital—to sit with our white supremacy and our racism. But I also want him to allow us the responsibility to work on it, and to not be the same sort of racist that, you know, David Duke is…right? So, I find something troubling about this move, and I've seen it used in corporate and academic administrations to kind of excuse behavior that I find really troubling.

 I actually want to take responsibility for my white privilege and the way in which I operate in a system of white supremacy to be anti-racist, in the same way that I expect the men in my life to be feminist. So, although I love his work, and everyone should read his work on the white gaze, I find that a troubling political move. Not from a bad place, but one that relieves us of responsibility in a particular way.

Katrina Spencer: The way that I understood it, or what I took away from his talk was the idea that, ‘let white people accept within themselves that they are inherently racist after having been immersed in our societies that are white supremacist. But also to commit to anti-racist acts and behavior in order to sort of proactively combat what is sort of within our pores, and within our genes at this point.’

Laurie Essig: Yes. I'm just saying, I think his intentions are completely good. I think that that can sometimes lead to a fatalism. That is, that doesn't call people to account for being anti-racist, or feminist. Right? It sort of, I mean, yes. We live in a white supremacist culture, all of us are affected by that. We live in a completely misogynist culture. All of us are affected by that. But in the same way we can do the work to be feminist women and feminist men, we can do the work to be anti-racist white people, and anti racist black people, and anti-racist Latinx people. So I feel like there's a way in which we all swim in that soup, and that toxic stew of white supremacy, and misogyny, and hating poor people, and all the stuff that we get from our culture, and our politics, and our religions. Right? But I don't actually find it a useful political tool to name all white people racist, and all men misogynists.

Daniel Silva: I think we need to take it as a call to go further, and sort of what you're hinting at as a call to self interrogate, and question how our subjectivities came to be within this culture. Then, in doing so, sort of learning to unlearn what we learned. If that makes sense. That takes, not only self inquiry, but also questioning our institutions that we've grown up in, the curricula we've grown up in in schools, our popular culture, and it's dissemination, it's consumption. I think it's a call to dig as deep as possible and hopefully come up with some answers as to, and that's the optimist in me. 'Cause it's a very small optimist.

Laurie Essig: I think that's how people use it. I know that's how he intends it. I truly believe that's how he intends it. I have seen it misused as a kind of fatalism.

Daniel Silva: Yeah. Yeah. That's, yeah. That's something to be aware of.

Laurie Essig: The same thing happened in those early feminist 1979 book by Andrea Dworkin, you know, saying all men are misogynists because this is the culture we live in, and therefore, no heterosexual sex can be without violence and rape, basically. Right? Yes, it can. Yes it can. Men can be as feminist as women, and women can be as misogynist as our president. Right? I think the same goes in and around race. We all know that skin color in and of itself is not sufficient for doing the work of being anti-racist.

Daniel Silva: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Questioning those power relations in our everyday lives. The example of heterosexual sex, there is a usually, in many cases, a differential in social capital and power, and so it leads us to think about that, at least, as we engage.

Laurie Essig: Which was her intention. Absolutely.

Daniel Silva: But we can't fall into the fatalism.

Laurie Essig: Right. I know that George Yancy does not want us to. I am not in any way implying that. I have Seen that misused as, well, I can't help myself. I just am sexist because I'm a man. It's like, nope, that's not good enough. Just like I can't say, oh, I'm just racist because I'm white. That is not good enough. Right? I have to do the work. It's a process. Right? It's never a finished work. But I have to work every day at being anti racist, and being feminist. It's not like that just, you know, because you're a woman you just get to be a feminist. That takes work to get rid of misogyny.

Daniel Silva: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Did we talk about the fear of the black body?

Katrina Spencer: Not on this recording. Yet.

Laurie Essig: Yes, we should talk about that.

Katrina Spencer: Would you like to do that?

Daniel Silva: Sure.

Katrina Spencer: Please talk about the fear of the black body.

Daniel Silva: I mean, yeah. It's one of the ways in which the black body has been deployed as a symbol of white supremacy, and for the reproduction of white supremacy. The black body as a sight of various forms of abjection, whether it be sexual quote unquote deviance, or gender non conformity, and attributing all of these things, constructing them as negative and throwing them onto a body that is already perceived as abject because of the color of its skin becomes a part of the symbology, the symbolism of white hegemony. This is a body to be not only feared, but because it's feared, it is a body that is exploitable, it is a body that is to be marginalized, and at the same time, it is a body that is to be sort of a discursive sight of eradicating these ills and constructing normativity. That's a lot.

Laurie Essig: No, it's not a lot. It's exactly right. I do think this is where history is quite interesting. Because post-civil war US history is very much about the abjection of the black body, right? How do you enforce Jim Crow? You enforce him in a variety of ways. I mean, you create the black male beast, you create black men as a sexual threat to white women, who then deserve to be lynched, right? And you circulate those lynchings through spectacle, both through post cards, through telegraphing the stories around the nation. You consolidate whiteness around this threat of the black male body. But, at the same time, and something I think that is not common and on enough, you construct black women and black children as incapable of feeling pain, right? As incapable of feeling, incapable of being raped, right? Incapable of being exploited.

 You see that circulated as well in a variety of ways, whether it's the “hoochie mama” stereotype, that's also played out in the minstrelcy, the Jezebel stereotype, but also images of black children used in advertising as being eaten by an alligator to sell the cigarette. “Oh, that's so funny.” Or you think about something like Little Rascals, where the black children literally have food names, because they're consumable, and if you ... [Tavia Nyong’o](https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/links/essays/pdfs-docs/RacialKitsch.pdf) writes about this, about how they have to go through all this pain, and the pain is the site of the humor for both white and black children watching that show, right? That's the other interesting thing.

 Of course, that carries through to today. Why a black child in a hoodie is seen as a threat, and killed, and that's seen as self-defense. Why we can't look at, there was a recent study about how black women are undertreated for pain in the American medical system. I mean, this affects every aspect of any black American's life. And that's the kind of work that needs to be done, is to talk more about how these historical antecedents shape the screwed up experience that black people have in this culture and how it is that white people can assume it's okay. Right?

 They can assume it's okay because there's, you know, over a century of popular culture in their heads saying, “Well, oh, they don't feel pain. Ha ha, that's funny. Right?” That's the big ugly truth of white supremacy is that it's based on these lies about black bodies. Not just the danger of black men's bodies, which people are more familiar with. But, the incense to pain of black women and children.

Daniel Silva: Yeah.

Laurie Essig: Okay, that was depressing. Whiteness is pretty depressing, actually.

Katrina Spencer: It's tragic. It is what it is.

Laurie Essig: Yeah, it's tragic.

Katrina Spencer: So I'm going to combine these last two questions, which are what are the thinkers and works significantly contribute to the study of whiteness? What else should we know about this topic?

Daniel Silva: I mean, whiteness, I think whiteness needs to be studied through many different disciplines, many different vantage points, to look at how it has been elaborated over the centuries. So, I would recommend post-colonial thinkers, post-colonial feminists, post-colonial queer theorists, that also look at the intersections of whiteness as not only skin color, but whiteness as other forms of normativity, whether it would be able bodiedness, or gender expressions, sexuality. All the way, that look at craniologies of whiteness. We're supposed to name names particularly?

Katrina Spencer: If you'd like.

Daniel Silva: It's so hard to think of names on the spot.

Katrina Spencer: You will.

Daniel Silva: Yeah.

Laurie Essig: While you think of names, I love what you said about post-colonial, because it's a real lack, as an American and somebody who knows way too much about the post-civil war period, but knows very little about the global circulation. But, I would say pay a lot of attention to people who pay attention to black women and children, because I do think some of the best work is being done around that. I think of Robin Bernstein's book, [*Racial Innocence*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db2940565~S2), which is about the ... It's about a lot of things, but one of the most interesting things she does in there is she talks about Raggedy Ann dolls, and how those represented the imperviousness to pain of black children, right? Ann and Andy. Also lynched bodies, right? So white children playing with these.

 I think it's really important to pay attention to children's culture. Both historical and contemporary, right? Pay attention to Disney, because it's teaching your kids lots of lessons about race, and gender, and sexuality. So, I think those are, you know, I don't need to just mention one person. There's so many good things, I think Grace Hale, [*Making Whiteness*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db1545939~S2), which is about how whiteness was actually formed post-civil war. One of the best chapters in there is on [*Gone with the Wind*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db4084768~S2). Everybody should watch *Gone with the Wind*, if you want to understand how northern whites began to identify with southern whites around the fantasy that slavery was happy, that's a great movie to get it figured out. So, I think, yeah, pay attention to pop culture, pay attention to the global and the particular grittiness of US culture, because then that gets circulated globally. Anything James Baldwin ever wrote.

Daniel Silva: Oh yeah, absolutely. Yeah. [James Baldwin](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=baldwin+james&searchscope=2), [Audre Lorde](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=lorde+audre&searchscope=2), [bell hooks](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=hooks+bell&searchscope=2), [Gayatri Spivak](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=spivak+gayatri&searchscope=2).

Katrina Spencer: Okay.

Laurie Essig: I think everybody needs to read [*The New Jim Crow*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db2827478~S2).

Daniel Silva: Absolutely. Yes.

Laurie Essig: Everybody needs to watch the documentary 13th [by Ava duVernay], is that what it's called?

Katrina Spencer: Yes.

Laurie Essig: Everybody needs to pay attention. I think it's actually more about paying attention, because even if they're watching South Park, they're going to learn a lot about white supremacy, and race.

Daniel Silva: Oh, yeah.

Laurie Essig: If they just start paying attention to the unmarked categories of whiteness, I think they'll learn a lot.

Daniel Silva: Absolutely. There are many readers in whiteness studies. One of the top of my head is called [*Postcolonial Whiteness*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db4458376~S2), it has a very global ... It's an anthology of essays pertaining to different parts of the world, and how whiteness circulates and structures in different locations. It's, the editor is Alfred Lopez.

Laurie Essig: I just have, I would be remiss if I didn't mention one more book that I think everyone living in the US, or everyone concerned about this political moment in the US of white supremacy needs to read. That is called [*Angry White Men*](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/record%3Db3358477~S2), by Michael Kimmel. He's spent a lot of time with people who would be supporters of this current political regime, and how they got there. How their insecurity became transformed into anger.

Daniel Silva: Yeah. We didn't talk much about the very false narrative of color blindness. But, there are many books on that. [Tim Wise](http://biblio.middlebury.edu/search/a?SEARCH=wise+tim&searchscope=2) jumps out as one name. He's written many books. Yeah. I mean, off the top of my head it's hard.

Laurie Essig: Right. There's ... Go. Yeah. Get our syllabi off ...

Daniel Silva: I know, yeah.

Laurie Essig: Off the website.

Katrina Spencer: Right. So we are going to have probably most of these texts that you guys have mentioned included on the display. That will go up on December first. So that's going to be good. I'm hoping that everything is going to be linking to the blog post where you have also made recommendations about different readings. So, with that, thank you so much, Laurie, for being here. Thank you so much, Daniel.

Daniel Silva: Thank you. It's a pleasure.

Laurie Essig: Thanks for having us.

Daniel Silva: Thank you so much.