



RETHINKING RACE, TROUBLING EMPIRICISM

University of California, San Diego  
Crítica Monograph Series

SPRING 1999

Herman Gray	Foreword: Troubling Empiricism
Douglas Hartmann and Roderick A. Ferguson	Introduction: Rethinking Race
Rohyn Wiegman	What's New(s) About Whiteness Studies?
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John A. Berteaux	Multicultural Citizenship, Group Rights, and Race

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Proceedings of a conference held  
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at the  
University of California, San Diego

co-edited by  
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### Editorial Policy

CRÍTICA is an interdisciplinary refereed bilingual journal that serves as a forum for critical analysis of Chicano/a and Latino/a theoretical, ideological and historical issues. The journal seeks to develop the essay form and to reach a broad spectrum of readers in the humanities and social sciences. The journal will solicit essays on a wide variety of cultural topics including literary criticism, communications, history, art, sociology, linguistics, political science and drama.

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## Acknowledgments

The interdisciplinary conference, "Rethinking Race, Troubling Empiricism," held at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) in 1998, owes its existence to students. It was a student event—conceived, planned, organized, and realized by graduate students from UCSD. Most paper presenters were undergraduate or graduate students from the host campus and its sister campuses in the University of California system. And the majority of those in attendance were students as well.

In 1997, Roderick A. Ferguson and Joann Ball, graduate students in UCSD's Department of Sociology, began discussing how to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *The Death of White Sociology* (Ladner et al. 1973). They were gradually joined by other graduate students—John Berteaux, Laura Choe, Anthony Freitas, Douglas Hartmann, Maria Martinez-Cosio, Shannon McMullen, Jeannie Powers, among others. These students formed the core group that worked to develop the intellectual agenda of the conference and whose labor brought the event into being. This volume is as much a product of their efforts as it is of ours.

When this group of collaborators and co-conspirators went looking for help, they found it in abundance among the cadre of race specialists on the faculty at UCSD. Ivan Evans, from the Department of Sociology, and Jonathan Holloway, from Ethnic Studies, were among the first UCSD faculty members to endorse the embryonic idea. George Lipsitz, chair of Ethnic Studies, not only supported the idea, he pushed the core group to think more concretely about what kind of event would be appropriate to their interests and objectives. Another Ethnic Studies faculty member, Ramón Gutiérrez, director of the UCSD Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, initiated regular monthly meetings with Ferguson, Ball, and Holloway to chart, plan, and coordinate the event. Professor Lisa Lowe, from the Department of Literature, took the lead in promoting the conference around the region and in recruiting the high-profile scholars who made appearances and presentations at the conference. During the conference, each of these scholars also played a role. To them, for all their efforts, go our thanks.

Other specialists on race and ethnicity from UCSD served during the conference as discussants or panel chairs: Stephen Cornell (Sociology), Paule Cruz-Takash (Ethnic Studies), Gerald Doppelt (Philosophy), Vicente Rafael (Communication), Jane Rhodes (Ethnic Studies), and Rosaura Sanchez (Literature). A select group of scholars of race—Ann duCille (UCSD), David Theo Goldberg (Arizona State University, Tempe), Neil Gotanda (Western State University College of Law), Herman Gray (UC Santa Cruz), Bennetta Jules-Rosette (UCSD), and Robyn Wiegman (UC Irvine)—also presented papers. To all these colleagues go our thanks.

We especially owe a debt of gratitude to our colleague, Joann Ball, whose talents as co-chair for the conference paved the way for this volume. We also thank Patricia Rosas for the grace and rigor that was an indelible part of her editorial assistance. This project is all the richer because of her dedication.

We also gratefully acknowledge the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, the Sociology Department, the Office of the Dean of Social Sciences, the African and African-American Studies Research Project, and the Cross Cultural Center, all at UCSD, for their support in sponsoring the conference.

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## Introduction: Rethinking Race

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The articles contained in this special edition of *Critica: A Journal of Critical Essays* were selected from among papers presented at an interdisciplinary conference, "Rethinking Race, Troubling Empiricism," held at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) in 1998. This event was designed to stimulate critical thinking about the role empirical, social-scientific research plays in the various strands of race theorizing that have recently emerged and proliferated throughout the American academy. The goal was to bring humanist scholars and social scientists into dialogue—or even common cause—with one another with respect to the study of race. Conference participants took on this challenge in sections devoted to globalization, American society, the mass media, identity politics, the question of "whiteness," sociology, and social theory itself. During a final plenary discussion, "Passion and Praxis: Sustaining Race-Critical Work in the Academy," participants were encouraged to connect ideas and draw out their broader political implications.

### The Death That Wasn't

The inspiration for the conference came about during the 1996–97 academic year, when Joanne Ball and Roderick A. Ferguson, then second-year graduate students in sociology at UCSD, started thinking out loud about commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *The Death of White Sociology*. That volume, edited by Joyce Ladner in 1973, is a remarkable collection of research and writings on African-American life in the post-World War II period. It contains contributions from sociologists, including Nathan Hare, E. Franklin Frazier, Bob Blauner, David Wellman, and Andrew Billingsley, as well as from intellectuals who had long-standing interests in the discipline, such as Ralph Ellison, Kenneth Clark, and Charles Hamilton. Ball and Ferguson recognized that the discipline still tends to think of race as an unfortunate aberration, a simple demographic variable, or a problem that can be reduced to other social forces, such as class. Sociology, they believed, would be well served to be reminded of Ladner's long-forgotten volume.

Ferguson and Ball began shopping the idea around to fellow graduate students at UCSD and quickly found a group of interested collaborators. This core realized that they did not want just to call attention to Ladner's unusual volume and its spectacularly failed prediction. They were also interested in reopening the question of "white sociology" itself and

sparking a discussion of possible alternatives to it. Ball and Ferguson and their colleagues were convinced that this theme was provocative, timely, and substantial enough to build a meaningful intellectual event around it.

### A Conference Comes to Life

Douglas Hartmann, who at the time was completing his dissertation in Sociology at UCSD, took on the task of drafting the statement of purpose and intellectual agenda. His initial idea, reflected in his contribution to this volume, was a conference that would compare and contrast the critical-theoretical framework embodied in the work of Joyce Ladner and her colleagues with more conventional social-scientific models. This would serve as a base from which to explore how these two very different approaches to the study of race relate to one another and to ask if and how they informed, supplemented, complemented, and/or contradicted each other. Packaging a conference along these lines seemed particularly apropos, as scholars across the American academy—in disciplines as traditional as History, Literature, and Law and departments as recently emerged as Ethnic and Cultural Studies—had begun to recognize and systematically elaborate race-based critical themes.

As Hartmann consulted with Ferguson and others in the core group, they came to focus on one specific side of that relationship; that is, on the implications of placing a critical theory of race at the center of social theory and social-scientific practice. Gradually, the Ladner volume was de-emphasized in an attempt to avoid its tendency toward essentialism and its exclusive focus on sociology. The first formal draft, then, proposed a conference with sessions that would review current usages of race as a category of social analysis and cultural critique and examine how those usages differed from established popular and social-scientific understandings of race; establish the theoretical foundations of such scholarship; situate it in a broader social and historical context (with a special emphasis on identifying seminal thinkers in the tradition and the changing social conditions to which they spoke); and consider future directions for race-critical research and theory, and its potential impacts upon conventional racial knowledge.

As this proposal was circulated and discussed, global, comparative, and transnational perspectives were also built more explicitly into the agenda, and there was an effort to incorporate praxis across the proposed panels as well. Interestingly, it was this desire to attend to more practical, political concerns that led organizers to directly confront (or “trouble”) the materialist, empiricist presuppositions of conventional popular and social-scientific understandings of race and of social life in general. In spite of these changes, however, the emphasis on what Hartmann and Ferguson came to call “race-critical scholarship” remained constant, providing a focal point for the conference, as well as a way to dramatically expand its audience and appeal. Framed in this broad, interdisciplinary fashion, the project began to grow, taking on not only a much wider variety of topics and questions but also a diverse collection of willing collaborators.

These contributors, collaborators, and co-conspirators had another important and positive impact on the intellectual substance of the final event. They created a firmer and more consistent consideration of the interactions and intersections of race with other dimensions of social stratification and categories of cultural critique, such as gender, class, nation, and sexuality. Work on gender and in feminist theory was particularly salient in this respect. Some of this was for the usual empirical and political reasons. But there was something else. Many who participated in this planning process and in the conference itself were coming to suspect that race and critical-race theory is to social theory in the 1990s what gender and feminist theory was in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

### Contributions to This Volume

Interdisciplinarity is reflected in the articles that compose this volume. On the one hand, they are diverse in the themes they highlight, the questions they put forward, and the disciplinary contexts from which they originate. Yet, at the same time, they all share the attempt to think about race in ways that typical social-scientific approaches and popular discourses do not allow. Thus, all the essays are suspicious of the supposed objectivity of racial knowledge. That suspicion entails casting a critical look at the technologies that produce racial knowledge, whether they be academic disciplines, laws, media, national ideologies, or educational institutions. From different institutional and theoretical contexts, each article attempts to rethink the contours and origins of racialization and, by doing so, trouble empiricist assumptions about race.

In “What’s New(s) about Whiteness Studies?,” Robyn Wiegman analyzes the emergence of whiteness studies and relates that emergence to the persistence of white hegemonic authority. Arguing that the authority of contemporary whiteness operates within a “register of dis-affiliation from white supremacist practices and discourses,” Wiegman problematizes whiteness studies as a site that—despite its intentions to the contrary—reconfirms the hegemony of whiteness in a period shaped by downsizing within the university and characterized by the erosion of affirmative action policies within the academy.

Employing his own critique of hegemonic discourses as they are rearticulated within the discipline of sociology, Douglas Hartmann in “Toward a Race-Critical Sociology” considers how conventional sociology has often deployed race in “uncritical and atheoretical” ways. To counter this, Hartmann calls for a sociology that regards race not simply as a demographic variable but as an “independent and irreducible social force.” Such an intervention is important because empiricist understandings of race have traditionally eclipsed understandings of race’s autonomy. Hartmann’s article reminds us that the “uncritical and atheoretical” deployment of race is often the very mechanism by which academic disciplines reinscribe hegemonic whiteness and undermine minority communities.

In similar fashion, Roderick A. Ferguson in “The Lack that Desires: Du Bois, Sociology, and the Negro Problem” investigates the taken-for-granted status of race in W.E.B. Du Bois’s sociological writings about the Negro Problem. Reading the discourse of the Negro Problem as a sociological discourse that racializes African-Americans as beings that lack rational agency, Ferguson illustrates how Du Bois participated in that racial production. Turning to Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, Ferguson argues that this text critiques sociology’s investment in the Negro Problem. Du Bois’s critique, according to Ferguson, is made on the grounds that the discourse of the Negro Problem produces racial knowledge about African-Americans. The article concludes by claiming *The Souls* is a sociological text that encourages sociology to reflect on its participation in the production of racial knowledge.

Looking at how race operates as an untheorized and therefore organizing feature in Gay and Lesbian Studies, Linda Heidenreich in “Reflections on Euro-Homo Normativity: Gay and Lesbian Studies and the Creation of a Universal Homosexual” addresses the construction of a “white heterosexual norm” in Lesbian and Gay History. Arguing that class and race often function as unmarked categories in representations of the “homosexual experience,” Heidenreich calls for gay and lesbian scholars to interrogate the ways in which queer scholarship invests in whiteness by using the experiences of white gays and lesbians as the basis of queer historiography.

Turning to media as a tool for the dissemination of racial knowledge, Jennifer Ridenhour-Levitt in “Constructing Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in a Globalized Context: The Mail-Order Bride Trade” looks at how women from Asia, Latin America, and Eastern

Europe are "marketed over the Internet as ideal wives for men living in North America and Western Europe." Situating representations of these women in mail-order-bride advertisements, Ridenhour-Levitt analyzes how race and gender intersect in that industry's commodifying regime. By questioning how the marketing of mail-order brides responds to and is informed by pre-existing racial discourses, Ridenhour-Levitt's article questions the very objectivity of racial knowledge, despite its apparent visibility in Internet advertising.

Addressing the relationship between racialization and assimilationist ideology, Bud Mehan, Lea Hubbard, and Irene Villaneuva in "Forming Academic Identities: Accommodation without Assimilation among Involuntary Minorities" study an "untracking program" in San Diego, California, called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Educational experts have long realized that one of the reasons working class and minority students perform so poorly in academic institutions is because of the mismatch between the cultural capital of schools and life-worlds and worldviews of these students. Schools, to put it in terms of the present volume, are clearly racialized institutions. From this, many social scientists go on to argue that in resisting basically white, middle-class norms students of color actually (if ironically) perpetuate their own racialization and exacerbate the racial inequalities thought to automatically go along with race. Mehan and his co-authors see things somewhat differently. For them, racial identities are not inherently opposed to ideals of educational achievement and upward mobility but can be constructed around and put in support of these ideals—thus the notion of "accommodation without assimilation." The AVID program is just one example of how this can work. It is also a somewhat broader illustration of how racial inequalities can be subverted and transformed on the terrain of race, not by rejecting race as a category but by embracing it and re-envisioning its meaning and practice. Finally, their work is also an example of how empirical scholarship guided by a critical theoretical orientation can be used to rethink race and our understandings of how racial change is made.

In "Multicultural Citizenship, Group Rights, and Race," John A. Berteaux troubles how liberalism positions identity as the point through which race and citizenship intersect. Drawing primarily on the work of Will Kymlicka, Berteaux analyzes the tension between liberalism's claim to universality and the material existence of racialized ethnic minorities who are typically represented as the antithesis of that universality. If the citizen-subject is that identity which embodies the universal claims of the nation-state and if the racialized identities of people of color are represented as the antithesis of that identity, then that theory becomes the point around which racial identities are formed and contested. For Berteaux, the exclusion of racialized ethnic minorities from representations of the citizen inspires a rearticulation of racial identity and a questioning of the universal claims of liberal political theory. This rearticulation and questioning challenges the stability and authority of liberalism as a means of racialization.

The articles in this volume compel us to reimagine academic scholarship and its possibilities for yielding some truth about our racial predicaments. While seeking to define the epistemological limits of scholarship with regard to racial knowledge, these articles map out new possibilities for critical analyses of race and representation.