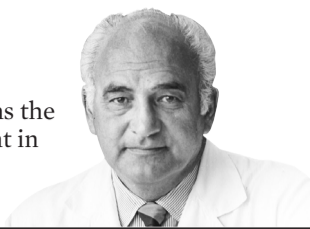


1957

**Project Vanguard:** A launchpad explosion of Vanguard TV3 thwarts the first United States attempt to launch a satellite into Earth orbit.

1967

**Adrian Kantrowitz** performs the first human heart transplant in the United States.



1969

**Altamont Free Concert:** At a free concert performed by the Rolling Stones, eighteen-year old Meredith Hunter is stabbed to death by Hells Angels security guards.

1971

Pakistan severs diplomatic relations with India, initiating the **Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.**

# Whiteness have always depended on blackness

*Despite criticisms and epistemological dangers, the future of whiteness studies remains hopeful*



TOP  
4  
TWEETS

01



Kerala's aviation sector is undergoing a revival. After a 3 year long hiatus, Calicut International Airport(CCJ) has become fully operational with the arrival of a wide-bodied aircraft.

@CMOKerala

02



...I am a Tariff Man. When people or countries come in to raid the great wealth of our Nation, I want them to pay for the privilege of doing so. It will always be the best way to max out our economic power. We are right now taking in \$billions in Tariffs. MAKE AMERICA RICH AGAIN

@realDonaldTrump

03



SCOOOP: Understand PM Sand Chief Whip are discussing a new amendment to Meaningful Vote with Brexiteers today, which would provide a 'parliamentary lock' on the backstop, meaning it cannot be entered into without consent of MPs. Hoping this concession can win over backbenchers.

@PaulBrandtTV

04



Congratulations @EliudKipchoge for winning the 2018 IAAF Male Athlete of the Year Award. Your dominance in the marathon has not only propelled you to the history books of icons, but has also ensured Kenya remains a world leader in Athletics. We are very proud of you.

@UKenyatta

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)



NASRULLAH MAMBROL

Whiteness studies investigate the parameters of white racial identity, locating its scope and function in systems of representation. This field of study takes as its founding premise the constructed nature of identity, a poststructuralist concept heralded by race theorists who argue that race itself is not a natural or biological category but rather a social construction given meaning through historical contexts. Whiteness Studies gained academic prominence in the 1990s after minority theorists such as Toni Morrison and bell hooks challenged white critics to examine their own 'racial' speaking position instead of solely focusing on the 'Other'. The rise of multiculturalism and the pluralisation of 'the canon' did much to further whiteness studies; as ethnic traditions gained visibility and strength, many critics questioned why texts written predominantly by white male authors had never been treated as 'white' texts but rather as 'universal' texts representing all people. This tendency of whiteness to occlude or erase markers of particularity is now recognised as one of its characteristics. Investigations in the field have spread from feminism, labour history and literary studies to cultural studies, psychoanalysis and beyond.

Whiteness studies also locates its historical origins in the first and second wave of Anglo-American feminism which, with its failure to attend to racial identity, enacted its own racial ideology. Instead of locating themselves as middle-class white women, activists and academics tended to focus on gender as the only significant axis of identity. In the early 1980s, women of colour such as bell hooks, Barbara Christian and Norma Alarcon among others protested widely, showing how racism pervaded the (white) women's movement that took as its primary subject, in its early years, the oppression and plight of (white) domestic housewives. Adrienne Rich suggests that early white feminists suffered from a type of 'white solipsism - not the consciously held belief that one race is inherently superior to all others, but a tunnel-vision which simply does not see non-white experience or existence as precious or significant' (1979, 306). French feminists, of course, were guilty of the same oversight. The privileging of gender as the initial site of op-

pression found its way into feminist psychoanalysis in which white feminist theorists argued that all other oppressions, such as race and class, find their origins in the recognition of sexual difference.

In the mid to late 1980s, white academic feminists responded in part by trying to build coalitions with women of colour or by shifting their attention from texts written by white women to those authored by minority writers. Such moves unfortunately left unexamined whiteness as a speaking position and inadvertently reactivated traditional hierarchies in which the 'Other' either became responsible for educating whites about the nature of her oppression or once again became the object of investigation. The real work on whiteness did not take place until writers such as Marilyn Frye and Peggy McIntosh sought to give voice to the nature of whiteness and white privilege. Frye offered what is now considered common sense to whiteness theorists. McIntosh outlined the contents of an 'invisible knapsack' of 'skin-colour privileges' benefiting those phenotypically white - again reminiscent of Du Bois's wage - including varied images in greeting cards, dolls, toys, etc. to curriculum materials, welcoming attitudes in middle-to upper-class neighbourhoods, wide representation in courts of law and police forces, and easy access to simple items appropriate for one's group such as hair care products and 'flesh' colour bandages (1990).

Whiteness tends to be 'subsumed into other identities', much like Hughes' equation of whiteness with 'American standardisation'; whites tend to identify themselves according to nation, region, gender or class, etc. rather than race so that the explicit characteristics of whiteness studies whiteness disappear behind the definitions of the 'norm'.

Coincident with Morrison's breakthrough in literary analysis was David Roediger's innovations in labour history. While Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* followed Alexander Saxton's *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, it made a more lasting impact on the field. Roediger refuses traditional marxist tendencies to privilege class over race, an act which erases the relational and integrated nature of the terms. He rejects the simplicity of earlier split-market labour theories which located fault with the ruling class for the promotion of racism. Roediger also makes a considerable contribution to interpretations of black minstrel-



While anthologies, panels, special issues and articles reveal an ardent enthusiasm to eradicate 'white skin privilege', their very existence may have the opposite effect in the academy.

sy. He argues that the popularity of minstrelsy in Northern cities in the early 1800s signalled a desire for a 'preindustrial past' which blacks represented. Driven by a capitalist regime that modern north american criticism and theory required more and more regimentation in daily living, white labourers turned to blacks to express their own desire for spontaneity. Roediger's work finds later comment in texts which more completely address the changing face of minstrelsy and the anxieties which surround white working-class masculinity.

Such early work on whiteness has resulted in a burgeoning of whiteness studies such that critics no longer separate race from gender or class. Advances have been made across the spectrum, most notably in gender and cultural studies. The meanings of white femininity have found critical comment, from histories on the construction of white womanhood during the suffrage, abolitionist and women's movements to contemporary investigations into the meaning of whiteness for white women in today's world. To a far greater extent, however, white straight masculinity

has attracted critical attention, with particular emphasis placed on a culture of white male victimhood which has emerged in response to advances in feminism, civil rights and economic changes that have disempowered the working-class white male since the 1950s. Reactions against affirmative action and gay rights legislation have helped fuel an image of white heterosexual manhood as under siege. Critics have tracked this image through the popular press, film and the predominantly white men's movement of the 1980s, unpacking the ways in which white masculinity is constructed as multivalent and contested. For example, in his inaugural study *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*, Fred Pfeil challenges the belief that white straight masculinity is a 'single, monolithic category... shot through with violence, megalomania, instrumental rationality, and the obsessive desire for recognition and definition through conquest' (1995, viii). He suggests it functions as a 'dialectical co-construction whose on-going identity is at least partially dependent on the very forms and modalities of femininity it seeks to dominate and control' (ix). He argues that like other identities, 'the modalities of white straight masculinity are multiple, and/or riven by contradictions and fissures, and and/or subject to flux and change' (x). Such advances in gender and race theory throw in question any easy opposition between races or genders and highlight the limits of multiculturalism. If all identities result from historical change, varying according to social context, it becomes difficult to maintain the oppositions that gave birth to whiteness studies as an area

of academic study.

While anthologies, panels, special issues and articles reveal an ardent enthusiasm to eradicate 'white skin privilege', their very existence may have the opposite effect in the academy. In 1997, Howard Winant charged that studies that aim to 'abolish whiteness' may actually preserve the category in order to transcend it. Most representative of such studies was Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey's activist/academic journal *Race Traitor*, an early 1990s series republished as an anthology in 1996. The authors sought to move beyond academic meditations on whiteness to actions individuals could take to 'abolish' the 'white club', 'which grants privileges to certain people in return for obedience to its rules' (1996). Winant's charge find its echo in criticism of the rise of whiteness studies which suffers, many argue, from a certain narcissism, or willingness to dwell on racial subjectivity by those who are 'white', redirecting academic attention once again from margin to centre. Such an appropriation of margins offers white critics a new opportunity to enter the multicultural fray, having found a sanctioned enterprise for hawking academic wares on the marketable topic of race.

Despite such criticism and epistemological dangers, the future of whiteness studies remains hopeful. While many critics have investigated the ways whiteness depends on blackness for definition (either through contrast or appropriation of cultural forms), several now acknowledge the ways whiteness functions antithetically or multiply in relation to a range of other ethnic identities. The cultural studies arena has exploded with varied interrogations of whiteness in the popular media, from Rush Limbaugh talk shows to country music. In addition, critics working within gay and lesbian studies are helping shed the light on the long association of white maleness with heterosexuality. Finally, interesting work has emerged which looks at whiteness as a series of performative acts, whether that be in ethnographies, in which women of colour assume a white masculinist gaze in order to critique it, to the performance of whiteness on stage as a deconstructive act. The inventiveness of such strategies for 'seeing' whiteness bodes well for a future that may be textured and rich, one which moves beyond analyses of United States culture as vested completely within black and white dualities.

(Nasrullah Mambrol is an academician and blogger.)