

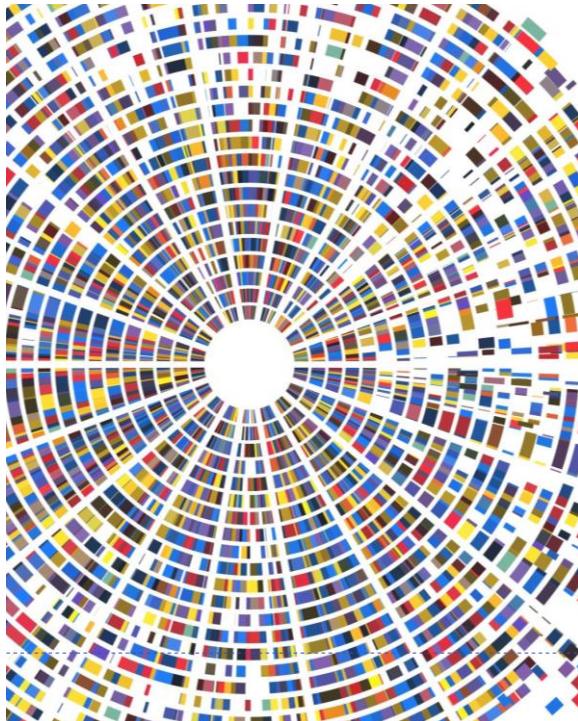
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Trysh Travis, Center for Gender, Sexualities, & Women's Studies Research, CLAS05

05/11/2021

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Getting Your Head Around “White Privilege” and “White Fragility”

Trysh Travis

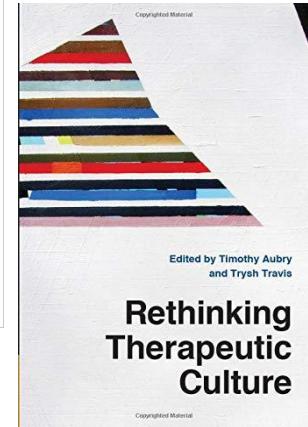
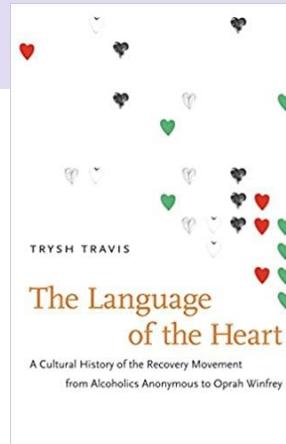


Associate Professor of Women's Studies
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Agenda

- Introduction:
 - Who I Am, Why I Care
 - Definitions
- White People Thinking about Whiteness in the Late 20th C. U.S.
- Using WP and WF
- Doing Anti-Racism
- Conclusion
- Q&A



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Definitions

White Privilege is....

an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

-- Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1989)

White Fragility is...

a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation.

-- Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility”

International Journal of Critical Pedagogy 3(3) (2011)

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A (VERY) BRIEF HISTORY



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White Racism, 1957

Will Counts, Bettman Archive

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The White Establishment, 1967

Getty Images

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In the Heat of the Night (United Artists, 1968)

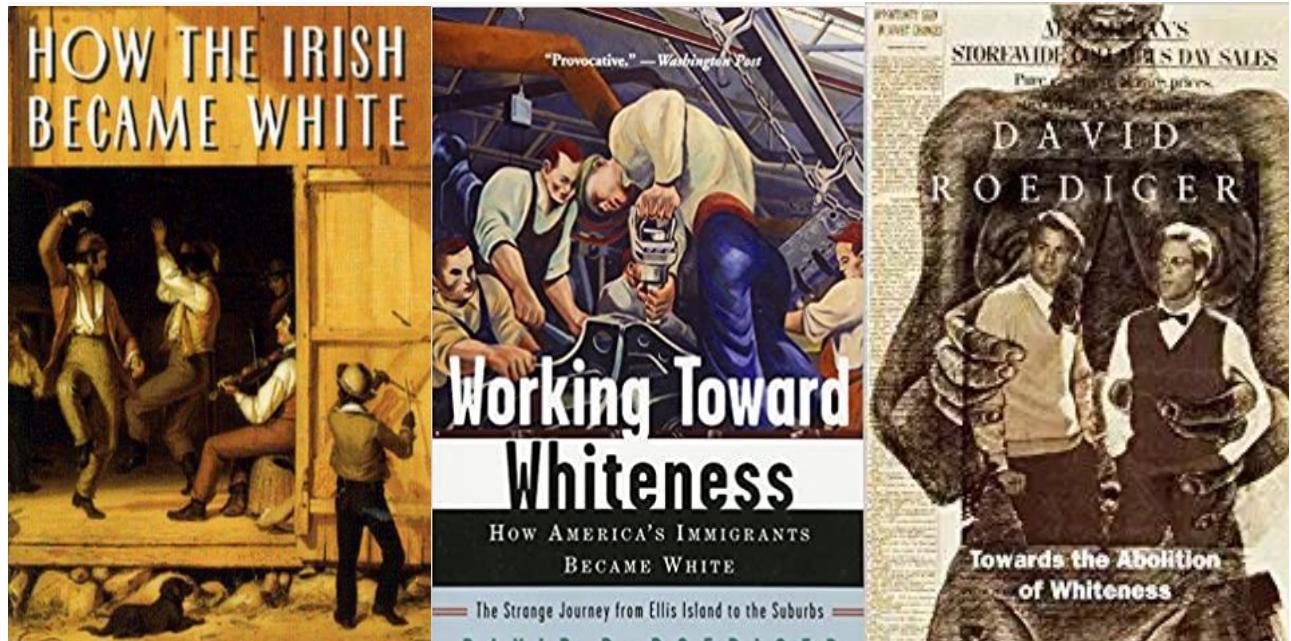
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The White Establishment, West Coast Branch (1969)

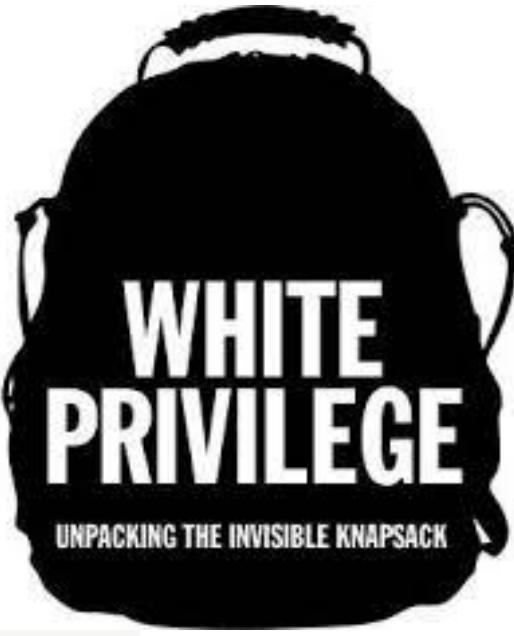
AP News

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Whiteness Studies, 1990s

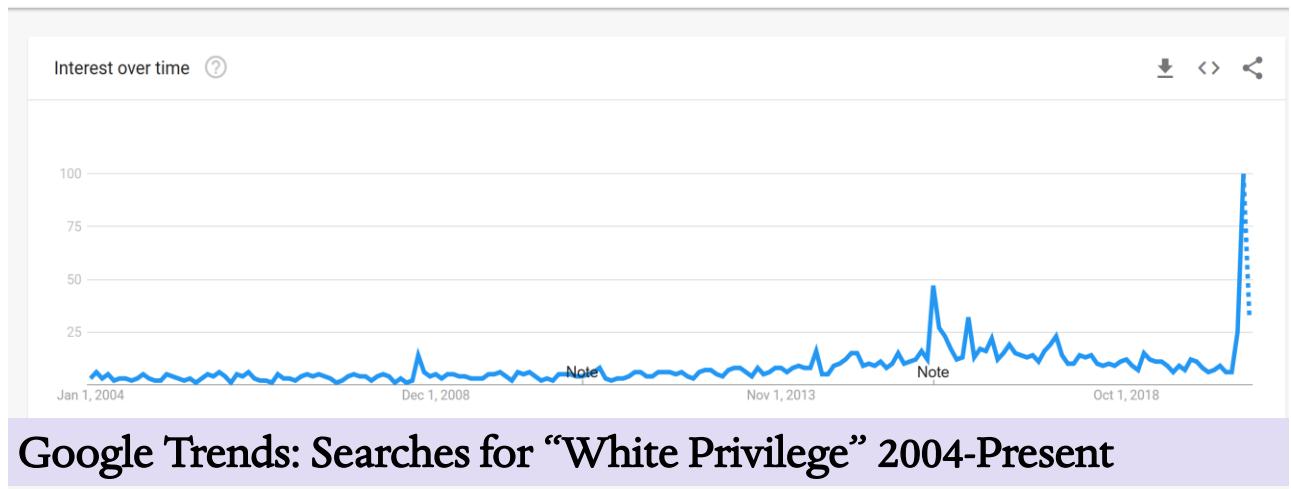
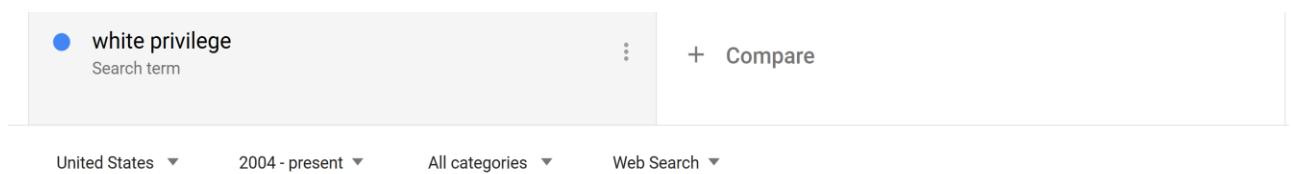
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White Privilege, 1988+

Protest following non-indictment of officer charged in Eric Garner death, Boston 2014

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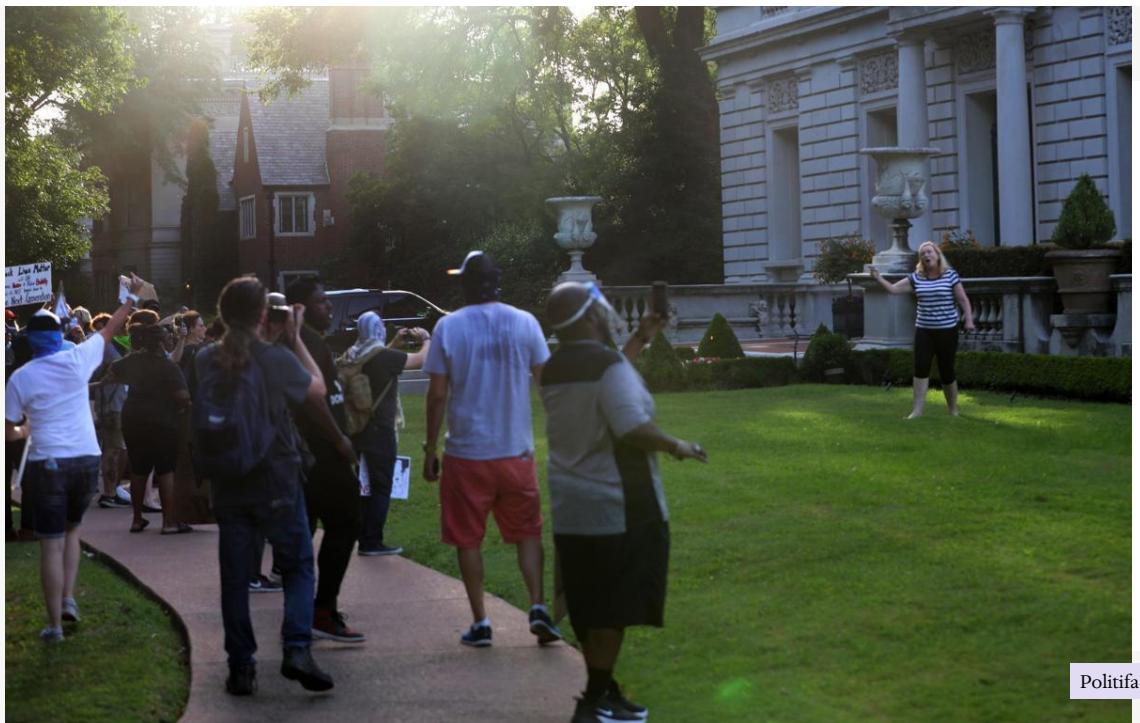
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White Fragility, 2018+

Laurie Skrivan, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

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Politifact

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Summary

- 1950s: There are white racists
- 1960s-70s: There is a white power structure
- 1980s-90s: Whiteness (and its privileges), like blackness (and its disadvantages), is socially constructed
- 1990s-2000s: All white people benefit from the “unearned advantages” of whiteness
- 2010s: White privilege insulates white people from thinking about race, such that when they can't avoid doing so on their own terms, they freak out.

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DIAGNOSING “WHITE PRIVILEGE” AND “WHITE FRAGILITY”

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Working with White Privilege

Diagnosis & Symptoms

- ❖ “An invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day.”
- ❖ Examples:
 - I can be with people of my own race most of the time
 - When I look at mass media, I see many people of my own race in diverse roles
 - I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty sure I will not be followed or harassed
 - I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them

Follow-up

- ❖ “Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in Women’s Studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, ‘Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?’”

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Working with White Fragility

Diagnosis & Symptoms

- ❖ “The reduced psychosocial stamina that racial insulation inculcates in white people.”
- ❖ Example “fragile” responses to the reality of white privilege:
 - Indulging in emotional incapacitation such as guilt or “hurt feelings”
 - Anger
 - Defensiveness
 - Silence
 - Withdrawal

Follow-up

- ❖ “It is critical that all white people build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race.... White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people.... Talking directly about white power and privilege...is in itself a powerful interruption of common (and oppressive) discursive patterns around race.”

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DOING ANTI-RACIST WORK

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Anti-Racism

Diagnosis and Symptoms

- ❖ “Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.... Antiracism is a powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity and are substantiated by antiracist ideas.”

-- Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Anti-Racist* (2019)

Follow-up

- ❖ Admit racial inequality is a problem of bad policy, not bad people.
- ❖ Identify racial inequality in all its intersections and manifestations.
- ❖ Investigate and uncover the racist policies causing racial inequality.
- ❖ Invent or find antiracist policy that can eliminate racial inequality.

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One Step at a Time

A Personal Journey

1. I have come to admit that I am powerless over my addiction to racism in ways I am unable to recognize fully, let alone manage.
2. I believe that only a power greater than me can restore me in my humanness to the non-racist creature as God designed me to be.

[Racists Anonymous](#)

A Political Project

1. We admit our collective history is rooted in white supremacy — and that racism has made our national and personal lives unmanageable
2. We come to believe that racism is more than individual behavior — but is a complex system much greater than ourselves.

["12 Steps for the Non-Anonymous Anti-Racist"](#)

Irina Erickson & Caitlin Johnson

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A heads up, that a poll slide and a Thank You slide was added to your CXUF presentation 😊 Smiley

Additional Bibliography

- ❖ Cotter, Holland. "Adrian Piper: The Thinking Canvas"
- ❖ Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*
- ❖ Roediger, David. *Toward the Abolition of Whiteness*.
- ❖ ---. *Working Towards Whiteness*



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Poll: Rate this session

- Excellent**
- Good**
- Neutral**
- Needs Improvement**

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**THANK YOU
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