

**Critical race and whiteness studies: What has been, what might be
(Editorial)**

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Published

2019

Journal Title

Critical Race and Race Studies

Version

Version of Record (VoR)

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CRITICAL RACE AND WHITENESS STUDIES JOURNAL

INAUGURAL EDITORIAL

Critical race and whiteness studies: What has been, what might be

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Editorial

After a hiatus of several years, *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Journal* is re-emerging. We do so in recognition of the exceptional scholarship the Journal has produced in the past with [writers](#) like Nicoll, Moreton-Robinson, Randell-Moon, Riggs, Watson, Ahmed, Heiss, and countless others providing incisive renderings of the social cartographies, discursive and non-discursive manifestations of race, which have parsed new ground. We acknowledge the important impact the Journal and its contributors have made to social practice and debate worldwide, and the ‘large shoes’ consequently sitting before us. The Journal, then, is returning to engage in debate and efforts that have aimed to ameliorate the effects of racism and interrupt the reproduction of race and racialised hierarchies. Yet the passing of time not only serves to remind us that there remains much to do if this is to be achieved. Within the contemporary geopolitical environment, these concerns loom somewhat larger and more pressing than they did only a few years ago. The Journal is returning in the midst of the ‘post-truth’ turn, with the politics and contestations of knowledge production often being imbued with covert – if not overt – racialised underpinnings.

Knowledge production has, of course, always been riven. The knowledge economy links with geopolitical power “growing out of the deep history of imperialism” (Connell et al, 2018, p. 42). The very fact of ‘global coloniality’ (Tlostanova, 2015) with its extant impulse for epistemic violence and ontological othering reminds us that there has never been a golden era with respect to race relations. We recognise this reality while simultaneously watching in horror as spectacle, bravado and celebrity triumph over ‘truth’ (Roberts & Becker, 2017), and while structural modes of violence deepen daily amidst this spectre. Alongside the rise of the Right and ‘whitelash’ populism globally (Gusterson, 2017), race critical scholars might have more to unpick and

contest than ever before, but in the face of these developments, social critique alone is sorely inadequate.

Added to this, formal avenues for engaging in scholarly work of a critical nature are closing down. The transformation, or rather, deformation of higher education under the sway of neoliberalism means that academic courses are increasingly considered valuable insofar as they are marketable (Blackmore, 2014; Thornton, 2015). Courses or topics less amenable to industry partnerships; for instance, the humanities, social sciences, ethnic and racial studies, critical animal studies, gender studies, arts, and education, are starved of funding while those academics and their subject areas that question power are most at risk (Cowden & Singh, 2013). Universities are encouraged to develop a technically-trained yet docile citizenry rather than critical thinkers with social consciousness and the resolve and capacity to resist (Giroux, 2013). In this way, neoliberalism systematically dismantles the will to critique, making our work on the academic fringes, “literally a global struggle for the mind in a context where there is an erasure of consciousness and sociality” (Lemmens as cited in Smyth, 2017, p. 42).

Like other Western democracies, Australia is deeply tied to the foreign policy interests and dominant logics of US imperialism.¹ In multiple complex ways, this means that backstage-racism reconfigured as frontstage-logic, is now insinuating itself into the ideological crevices of our everyday lives with force. According to Kapoor (2013), a major channel for these processes occurs at the crossroads between state securitisation and the reproduction of discourses of post-racialism. Via this route, ‘racial neoliberalism’ (Kapoor, 2013) first sees race expunged from the state under the rhetoric of post-racism. Ongoing legacies of colonialism are wiped from the public ledger while mechanisms of state violence and repression (i.e. fortified domestic anti-terrorist policies that are deeply regressive) are enacted to ensure the steady flow of capital and commodities via borders that must synchronously halt the flow of human bodies as a necessary ‘safety precaution’ (Patel, 2017).² Amidst these tensions, race is invoked “to silently reference those who threaten the fiscal wellbeing [...] or the social security of the nation” (Goldberg as cited in Cameron, 2018, p. 94) under ‘race-free’, state-sanctioned rhetoric that vindicates the overtly racialised laws, structures and populism to follow.

This pattern of overt racism mobilised under a guise of post-racism in ways that secure ‘white’ neoliberal capitalism is currently playing out across a range of Western contexts – for example, the US, UK, continental Europe and the Antipodes (Cameron, 2018). In Australia, the consequences for First Nations peoples are dire and numerous. Put simply, and notwithstanding that there are members of the Indigenous community in Australia that are not in favour of constitutional reform (see for example Behrendt, 2014; Liddle, 2016; McQuire, 2016), it is difficult to mount (ongoing) cases for recognition when issues relating to race are purportedly resolved. This very logic gave substance to the extraordinary argument, given voice by right-wing Australian media commentator, Andrew Bolt, and reiterated by Australia’s then leader, that the Uluru Statement from the Heart (Referendum Council, 2017) – (a call for First Nations Voice to be enshrined in the Australian Constitution) – represented ‘a plan to divide us

¹ Among many examples is Australia’s decision to join the US in voting against the UN Human Rights Council’s push for an independent inquiry into the deadly shootings of Gaza protestors by Israeli forces in 2018 (Remeikis, 2018).

² With an astonishing example of this playing out at the US border where children, separated from families, were detained in cages (ABC News, 2018).

by race' (Bolt, 2017). In a sleight of hand that cast First Nations peoples as greedy and irreverent, Bolt maintained, "*they* already have a voice. Like the rest of us, they can vote for representatives in Parliament. What they really want is *more* say than everyone else, based on their 'race'" (emphasis added).

Amidst this toxic milieu that invisibilises white supremacy by framing it as normalcy, it is unsurprising that non-white peoples (and to a lesser albeit important extent, their allies) across the West are finding it ever more difficult to inhabit spaces of higher learning characterised by intensified levels of structural violence. In the US, Hamer and Lang (2015, p. 902) illustrate that "far from operating outside neoliberal arrangements, the university has mirrored and reproduced them." Indeed, scholars across the globe are emphasising that the neoliberal university is toxic and reproduces racialised harm (see for example, Chatterjee & Maira, 2014; De Genova, 2014; Falcón et al., 2014; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2016).

CRAWS Journal is located consciously within this web: we are an open-access journal situated on the outskirts of official journal ranking systems given our commitment to the democratisation of knowledge in advance of social justice. At the same time, as a disparate team of editors located in different parts of Australia, our feet are also planted firmly within the maelstrom of neoliberal academic life. We acknowledge that our efforts to decolonise are being carried out in largely 'white' institutions on lands never ceded by First Nations Australians (Moreton-Robinson, 2011). We begin with this awareness in mind as vested notably in our alignment with the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association ([ACRAWSA](#)): an independent, incorporated, professional association for scholars, students and activists researching in the inter-disciplinary field of critical race and whiteness studies, that respects the existence of and continuing rights deriving from Indigenous sovereignties in Australia and elsewhere. In this sense, the Journal is international in scope and content, and welcomes diverse approaches to the study of race and whiteness that both inform *and impel* the collective project of dismantling racial hegemony.

There is more than one way to challenge racial inequality, and we simply cannot wait for a one-size-fits-all solution to the racialised (and other) harms that neoliberal capitalism, authoritarian populism and new managerialism are engendering, which unavoidably implicates the world of academic research and writing. Thus far, the broad field of critical race and whiteness studies in which we are collectively involved has equipped us with profoundly sharp tools for identifying and examining race in its diverse manifestations. Moving forward, we take up the collective task of exploring the question: '**what now' do critical studies of race and whiteness have to offer** in light of the state of affairs we have started to chart in this editorial?

Contributors to this inaugural issue contend with the same question. Alana Lentin expertly explores the complexities of doing decolonial work inside colonial academies on colonised land. She elucidates how the creeping of 'race realism' and 'not racism' into public acceptability, is not merely being driven by ego-fuelled political spheres or the echo chambers of social media. Highly regarded universities and scientific journals are enabling and legitimating such claims, meaning, in Lentin's view, that scholars of race and whiteness can no longer "theorise on the backs of the racialised without committing to the fullness of their lives" (this issue). In short, academics of race and whiteness need to get a lot braver and go a lot further and if the grounds of racial inequality are to be changed.

Deidre Howard-Wagner similarly contends that a critical race and whiteness studies approach forces us out of our comfort zones, committing us to a larger struggle. Howard-Wagner draws on the decade of research she has undertaken investigating the *rationalisation* of racial power through state institutions in ways that repeatedly eviscerate Indigenous rights while privileging white interests. Howard-Wagner's work is a compelling example of the analytic power of a critical race and whiteness lens, particularly with respect to the Indigenous policy landscape in Australia, which has been most successful at securing the White nation's 'dominant order'.

Damien Riggs then turns our attention to the disposition of the researcher. Reflecting on his own journey as a white, cisgender, gay Australian man, father and scholar who was introduced to critical race and whiteness studies by Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Riggs establishes the lasting influence of this field on his work and world. Critical race and whiteness studies gave him 'tools through which to see the whiteness' inherent in his work on sexualities, in much the same way that critical animal studies now enables Riggs to unmask human exceptionalism at work in the standard narrative of human kinship. Riggs' careful imbrication of these lenses provides a platform for appreciating how the work we do inside universities necessarily colours all other aspects of life, including our relationships and the ethical 'actions' we are subsequently compelled to take, for example in response to racism or animal abuse.

Not dissimilarly, Catherine Koerner adopts a whiteness lens in advance of radical compassion. By unearthing Charles Darwin's unheeded observation that evolutionary development in fact depends on compassion as a fundamental impulse of all creatures, Koerner highlights how First Nations peoples have practiced this wisdom all along. Koerner offers that critical race and whiteness scholars can draw on ever widening circles of compassion to re-orient our past understanding and present mindful embodiment for a fiercely compassionate future.

Taking up the call for a 're-energising' of compassion and solidarity amongst intellectual workers in the field of critical race and whiteness studies, philosophers Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos explain how 'minimalist thinking' may return us to 'simple truths' for breaking the hold of colonised imaginaries in academia, such as the simple truth that whiteness enacts 'the other' *out of being*. At a time when corporatising universities can, by their nature, vindicate a whole new wave of denial of Indigenous sovereignties, Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos call upon the guardians of Australian philosophy departments to acknowledge the simple truth of *their* 'occupier' being, and in so doing, help to renew the unfinished project of decolonising Australian philosophy departments.

Kalervo Gulson draws our attention to the emergent and growing correlation between computation and race. Computation describes techniques and tasks that are done by computers, using algorithms and data. Computation enables quantification of everyday life and is increasingly deployed to animate systems that are making important decisions about multiple areas of social and political life. When these 'systems' are nonetheless inflected by racial bias – for example, bias in the sense that computer engineering is an overwhelmingly white, male profession, or bias in the form of extant racial representations in the online world – then the way in which computation is likely to 'create' our future worlds is an area into which critical race and whiteness studies ought to intervene.

Media studies scholar Holly Randell-Moon then demonstrates the productive relationships Indigenous sovereignties can bring to her disciplinary field. By exhibiting how screens function as walls that include and exclude particular identities, knowledges, histories and worldviews, Randell-Moon offers an incisive case for how decolonising approaches to media studies as well as the consumption of media can be used to 'screen in' Indigenous sovereignties.

Finally, David Roediger leaves us with a compelling two-fold argument. Firstly, he contends that while radical optimism of Gramscian nature has long been the 'go to' of academics attempting to negotiate times of crisis, 'pessimism' is an equally legitimate response. Pessimism, Roediger suggests, can 'breathe fresh air' into radical thought. Echoing the words of Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos, Roediger then puts forward that 'repetition' of 'basic truths' is also something that we can, should and ought to deploy as critical scholars of race and whiteness; for instance, the repetition of basic truths concerning what racism is and how it operates, for the benefit of students and society. In other words, perhaps it is time we got the word 'out there', as clearly and forcefully as the Right has long managed to do.

Contributors to this inaugural issue offer energy, ideas and direction. They have taken up the call to 'rethink' critical race and whiteness studies during present times, and highlight that we have the tools, thus we must use them. At a time when far-right commentary and racist hate speech are too easily infiltrating public and political life, and when criticisms of the latter are too often passed off as 'overreaction' or political correctness,³ rather than drop our guard, overlook our small transgressions, or remain complicit with racial inequality through manifold forms of inaction, now is the time to put critical race and whiteness studies back to work with integrity, heart and rigour. We thank our contributors to this inaugural issue and welcome new contributions to the Journal that inform our collective work moving forward, in big and small ways.

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³ As was the case in Australia when supporters of crossbench Senator Fraser Anning dismissed criticisms of his inflammatory first Senate speech, which consciously co-opted the Nazi regime sentiment 'final solution' (SBS News, 2018).

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Author/s:

Schulz, S; Vass, G; Moodie, N; Kennedy, T

Title:

Critical race and whiteness studies: What has been, what might be

Date:

2019-06-01

Citation:

Schulz, S; Vass, G; Moodie, N; Kennedy, T, Critical race and whiteness studies: What has been, what might be, CRITICAL RACE AND WHITENESS STUDIES, 2019

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