

Beyond Hate: White Power and Popular Culture by C. Richard King and David J. Leonard (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014. 200 pp. \$31.96. ISBN 978-1472427465).

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In *Beyond Hate*, C. Richard King and David J. Leonard present a critical, virtual ethnography that examines the relationship between popular culture, media, and white supremacy. Their efforts center on the exploration of the intersections of white power and popular culture in the virtual world as articulated in the context of the contemporary United States. In specific, King and Leonard explore how white nationalists come to utilize the digital realm of popular culture as a clarion call to cleanup a society “polluted” by the rise of nonwhite populations, the proliferation of liberal ideology and to the supposed demise of the traditional white family. The authors trace how white supremacists use virtual, public forums, like blogs, chatrooms, and websites, to construct the boundaries of a white community full of virtuous, cultural warriors. Moreover, *Beyond Hate* examines how participants in these spaces labor to incorporate these ideas into a meaningful and legitimate part of the public sphere.

After a short introduction on the popularization of white power, the second chapter presents a provocative thesis: past research and popular media have framed white power in ways that prevent the understanding of the complexity of race and power. The authors argue that the bulk of previous scholars have neglected to study white nationalists as more than deviants or ideologues, effectively blinding them to a view of the white supremacist and nationalist projects as a socio-historically grounded practice and reaction to sociological shifts in society. It is within this critique, that while true is a bit overstated (King and Leonard ignore many of the prescient works on white nationalism that have emerged in the past decade), that the authors lay out their approach to the study of white power. Drawing from the “new racism” perspectives, they contend that white power movements now embody three (sometimes overlapping) forms: (1) they are persistent, (2) they are resurgent, and (3) they are veiled.

The third and fourth chapters of *Beyond Hate* explore music and television in relation to the consumption practices and ideologies of white supremacists. Chapter three explores what the authors call “white power rock.” This genre and style of music has, the authors contend, become “a space for community, for disseminating the grammar, tropes, and narratives of white supremacy, and for cultivating a white nationalist worldview” (29). While white power music has declined in popularity and acceptance, it continues to function as a tool for recruiting members into white supremacist

movements. In chapter four, the authors concentrate their attention on the role of television and how white supremacists view and understand the content presented in television programming. King and Leonard explain how white supremacists view television as a threat. To these white supremacists, whiteness is portrayed in a negative manner, and any chance of promoting a pro-white stance is crushed under the combined weight of multiculturalism and political correctness. Moreover, white nationalists tend to understand television as a multifaceted threat, in terms of: (1) anti-white television controlling interests, (2) anti-white television content, and (3) the overall and implicit guiding ideologies of these representations.

Chapter five offers an exploration of the interpretive readings of Hollywood films by white nationalists, culled from websites, blogs, discussion groups, and other content found on the Internet. King and Leonard maintain that one of the dominant themes utilized by white supremacists is the framing of Hollywood movies as anti-white propaganda, focusing on the alleged distorting of history and “natural” racial hierarchy alongside the promotion of “racial-mixing.” This theme is repeated two chapters later in chapter seven, whereby white nationalists are revealed to frequently understand video games as a threat to white dominance because of their supposedly multicultural and morally-corrupt ideologies. However, the authors also explore a series of video games produced by white supremacists produced to recruit new members to the white power movement.

Next, chapter six explores the intersection of white power and sports. King and Leonard argue that white nationalists often focus on the supposed natural criminality of black bodies, endangerment of white femininity, and yet again, the role of popular culture as “anti-white” propaganda. The chapter drives home the point that white nationalists see sports coverage as a potential site whereby white supremacist and nationalist ideologies can be promoted and where they are most likely to find resonance with the public: “sports. . . unfold as a fundamental, and often unrecognized, domain for the forceful reiteration of white power ideologies” (108).

Lastly, chapter eight examines social media as tools for recruitment and virtual boundary formation. White nationalists stress the importance of the future of the Internet in their recruiting efforts and toward the creation of a virtual community that extends beyond national and state borders. The authors argue that the use of social media has also fostered an essentialized white racial identity and sense of pride in the creation of this new virtual community. This essentialized identity stems from framing white nationalists as the consummate victims of a new racial order turned unnaturally on its head.

The authors conclude with an analysis of the 2012 murder of six Sikh

men in Milwaukee at the hands of a white nationalist. King and Leonard argue that popular media nearly always frames white nationalists as “deranged lunatics” and explain how these portrayals do not fully represent (and may actually obscure) racism in the United States. King and Leonard also explain that white nationalists are obsessed with popular culture and partake in the consumption and production of it. For these reasons, the authors argue, it is important to study the relationship between white power and popular culture because, “without an understanding of it we cannot grasp the complexities of white nationalism or their place in a broader field of racial discourse” (166).

The authors attempt to take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of white power through cultural studies, media studies, anthropological, sociological, and literary techniques. This broad-brush investigation has payoffs but, as constructed, may have come at the expense of specificity; many recent studies within particular fields—most notably sociology—have already examined the mainstreaming attempts of white power and the victimhood identity politics of contemporary white nationalism. Without deeper engagement with the extant empirical and theoretical corpus and lacunae in the aforementioned scholarly fields—and larger scholarly discourse—we were left wondering what specifically new *Beyond Hate: White Power and Popular Culture* affords. So also, the lack of an overt plan and guide for methodological decisions, coupled with seemingly mismatched analysis whereby society-wide generalizations about white power are drawn via non-representative techniques and data, generate more questions than answers.

Those critiques notwithstanding, we are sure that many readers unfamiliar with white power (in both its supremacist and nationalist variants) will learn from *Beyond Hate*. The continued allegiance to a liberal model of “hate” qua cognitive, individual-level, prejudice distracts from understanding the operations of racism as systemic, banal, and normative—a key aspect of how white power normalizes itself and appeals to those that would join its ranks, even under the best of intentions. Through their critique, King and Leonard show that “these conversations and the Internet in general have been fundamental to the growth of a white nationalist movement, and that the panics induced by conversations about contemporary popular culture, and conversations about themselves, serve as a foundation for these imagined virtual communities” (10).

NOTES

1. Reviewer Bianca Gonzalez-Sobrino is a PhD student in sociology at University of Connecticut, and reviewer Dr. Matthew W. Hughey is a Visiting Scholar with the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia University and Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Connecticut, where he serves as Affiliate Faculty in the Africana Studies Institute and the American Studies Program.