

Scholarly Collection: Call for Contributors

Working Title: *Calling it by its Name: Analyses of White U.S. Literature*

For years, Whiteness studies and critical race scholars have argued that one of the first steps to dismantling White supremacy is to explicitly name Whiteness. However, unlike other U.S. literatures, White-authored-texts remain persistently disconnected from racial categorization. Accordingly, Whiteness largely continues to operate invisibly as a supposed objective universal in the U.S. literary canon—as it does in U.S. society more generally. Our hope for this edited collection is that, by beginning to examine how Whiteness manifests in White-authored-texts, we will encourage interventions working to de-center these texts from their position as the standard from which other literatures deviate. Additionally, we are convinced a literary and systemic awareness of Whiteness (as being at least as useful a marker as any other racial category) will help foster a more productive conversation about intersections between constructed identity, literature, and systems of racial power.

In this project, we are looking for contributions theorizing how White U.S. Literature might be outlined and/or be better understood as a product of a particular racial lens. We understand a single collection cannot fully attend to the complexity of this topic. However, there is real value in building off work done by writers—including Valerie Babb, Stephanie Li, Toni Morrison, Aldon Lynn Nielsen, and Nell Irvin Painter—who recognize the dangers of leaving Whiteness unseen and unspoken. This edited collection, then, seeks to continue the conversation by calling further attention to strategies White U.S. writers utilize to maintain or dismantle constructions of White racial identity and power. Put simply, we aim to produce a collection that further illuminates how Whiteness is constructed and to what end those constructions are employed.

We are open to a wide range of writing styles, views, and topics; but we are conceiving of a collection that utilizes traditional chapter-length essays, shorter “quick take” essays, and interviews, all to name and analyze three main categories of White-authored identity:

Removed Whiteness: Contributions in this category will name and illustrate strategies White U.S. writers use to render Whiteness invisible and, therefore, disconnected from violent racial legacies. The texts embracing this kind of White identity position their perspectives, characters, and environments as isolated from patterns of racial/colonial violence. Whiteness and its logics, though, remain present even in the absence of an explicit racial focus, and contributors in this section will examine how various logics of Whiteness persist in color-evasive White US literature that attempts to be removed from any racial considerations.

Romanticized Whiteness: If a White character’s or speaker’s race is not rendered invisible, then it is often presented as something that is overcome through some kind of racial triumph. In these texts, the central White characters or speakers transcend the usually obvious racist elements in their environments. According to this logic, the United States’ racial story is understood as a clear battle between good and evil, with most decent White people firmly aligned on the side of good. Contributors in this section, then, will examine how White-authored-texts romanticize racial history and license White people to imagine themselves as innocent despite maintaining and benefitting from inherited systems of racial violence.

Reflective Whiteness: The final section explores White-authored literature offering an alternative to texts reifying White, U.S. identity as either invisible or ascendent. Contributors in this section are tasked with introducing and examining texts grappling with Whiteness as

something deeply embedded both in the individual and in larger systems. While avoiding the romanticized accounts in the previous section, this segment seeks to explore what a White identity looks like that is dedicated to the destruction of what George Lipsitz calls a “possessive investment in whiteness.” As such, these texts achieve a greater sense of self- and systemic awareness through their excavation of White U.S. identities and interiors. There are, of course, no easy solutions, yet we are convinced literature can do more than reveal social and ideological problems. The closing section, then, seeks to offer pathways towards a healthier understanding of racial identity that is linked to liberatory action.

Contributors might explore any of the above categories through analyses of the following:

- An examination of a particular author or poet
- An examination of a particular text or series of texts
- A juxtaposition of multiple texts or writers
- An introduction to teaching strategies and/or reading conventions for the critical analysis of Whiteness in White-authored-texts
- An interview with an author, literary studies scholar, or other stakeholder who can speak to intersections between literature, critical Whiteness studies, and lived experience
- An examination focused on how logics of Whiteness are maintained without the imagined presence/authority of non-white characters or speakers
- An examination of how White writers use non-White characters or speakers to defend and/or define brands of White identity

Editors: William P. Murray – Tennessee Wesleyan University, author of *Dangerous Innocence: White Men, Mass Culture, and the Southern Outsider's Appeal, 1960–2020* (LSU Press 2024) and Ryan Sharp – Baylor University, author of *Another Throat: Twenty-First-Century Black US Persona Poetry and the Archive* (UNC Press 2024)

Information about Deadlines & Guidelines for Submissions: Please send abstracts of 500-750 words and brief bios to Ryan Sharp (Ryan_Sharp@baylor.edu) and Will Murray (wmurray@tnwesleyan.edu) by **December 15th, 2024**. In your email, let us know whether you would prefer to submit a traditional chapter-length essay (6,000 – 8,000 words) or a shorter essay (1,500 – 3,500 words). While we hope to fit each work into one of the three categories listed above, we are also interested in pieces that might resist, reject, or work between the conceptions of Whiteness we have identified. Contributors will be notified in February that their work has been accepted, and first drafts will be due in October of 2025. The collection has already received interest from a university press, and we plan to secure an advance contract before full-length submissions are due.