

Homo Redneckus

Redefining White Trash in American Culture

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[Abstract](#)

[Resumen](#)

Key words: Redneck, White Trash, cultural studies.

Palabras Clave: Redneck, Basura Blanca, estudios culturales.

Introduction

"How do you circumcise a redneck? ... Kick his sister in the mouth." This is a joke that one of my students was telling another student in the hallway outside of my classroom. Having been raised in a community that is known more for its ability to raise up sawmill and factory workers than bankers and the other captains of capitalist industry, I found that joke to be offensive, especially coming from an upper-middle class nineteen year old that drives a better car than I do. It disgusts me when I see people make fun of the poor. I am not disgusted because of some altruistic kinship I have with the downtrodden of American society, but because of my being intrinsically connected to those same people. Although my wife and I have managed to break the manacles of abject poverty, sometimes I am still ashamed that my bills far exceed the seven hundred and eighty nine dollar Social Security check that my grandmother raised me on. Sometimes I feel like a class traitor - especially when I hear redneck jokes from upper middle class students and don't say anything about it.

In the winter of 2000, I bought tickets to the "Blue Collar Comedy Tour" and got to hear Jeff Foxworthy tell redneck jokes up close and personal in Will Rogers Coliseum. I also got to hear

Larry the Cable Guy explain that Al Gore lost the election because a handful of rednecks in Dade County, Florida didn't know how to operate a voting machine. I suppose if those same machines were designed to look like video poker or cigarette machines then our political landscape would be looking a whole lot different right now. I enjoyed the show because I was a redneck and it gave me the nostalgic feeling of being on my grandma's back porch cracking jokes with my uncle and cousins. At the same time, I was offended because an obviously (and ostentatiously) upper middle class couple was sitting in front of me laughing louder than I was.

In my academic studies, I quickly became familiar with the term *multiculturalism*. In fact, I had to write a paper on it when I was enrolled in English Comp II. I understand that in this day and age, American society is far too civilized to use terms like "wop, mick, Jap, or spick" because those racially charged terms are hurtful and that society should promote cultural diversity. In the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, that same multicultural society had become extremely sensitized to pejorative terms like "diaper head" and "camel jockey," fearing that Arab-Americans will become the new "racial other" in which society can dump all of its racial hatred on. Oddly enough, my most vivid memory of September 11th comes from me driving to my home at UTA housing after I got off from work: It was 2am and there was a UTA police officer walking around my apartment complex. Curious as to why the police officer was stalking around in the parking lot, I asked him what happened. The officer explained that there were a lot of international students in my building and the administration was concerned that some of the "rednecks" might want to avenge the terrorist attacks so they assigned him to parking lot duty just to make sure that no one got hurt.

Looking back, I can now see that there were other examples of how the "redneck" is marginalized in 21st century America, but it took some homespun wisdom from one of my fellow

rednecks to send me down the path to a cultural understanding - a redneck epiphany. Over the Winter Break, my wife and I went to visit my family in Southeast Missouri. I hadn't been home in nearly five years and had the romantic vision of a nostalgic return to the happy days of my young adulthood only to discover that I was much like Dick Hebdige's *Scholarship Boy*. (One of my friends asked me if it was possible to run a cable to the moon and "ski lift" the necessary equipment to build a colony). My last hope for those thrilling days of yesteryear came with the Saturday night ritual of going to the local roadhouse and drinking beer with my best friend from high school. Joey and I talked about our glory days and caught up on all of the things that we had been doing. He was very impressed with my being in a Ph.D. program and then said, "Well, thank God you didn't turn out to be a liberal."

I was fascinated by his comment - almost insulted. I had always thought of myself as being a liberal person - I always voted for the Democrats in Presidential Elections and almost always voted for the Libertarians for everything else. I was a real "live and let live" kinda guy. "What do you mean *liberal*," I asked?

"Well," he said, "that's usually what happens when people go off to college and get smart - they turn into liberals. They start talking about tolerance and how we're all just a bunch of dumb rednecks for thinkin' the things we think and doin' the things we do. All they talk about is tolerance. I don't really understand this tolerance thing. If you're supposed to tolerate everybody, then why can't they tolerate me? Is the only time intolerance all right is when you are being intolerant of the intolerators? Isn't hating the haters still hate?"

I didn't really know how to answer him. I thought about it for awhile and all of the Jeff Foxworthy jokes, the September 11th memory, and a whole host of other things seemed to bombard my psyche. In a Marxist sense, I suppose I could blame it on my material surroundings

- the empty shoe factory, the abandoned lead mines, the sawmill - *the material means of production*, but somehow I no longer saw all of the incidents that involved the pejorative term "redneck" as being disjointed happenings, they suddenly became a clear and cohesive chain of events that led to an undeniable reality that I wish I could choose to ignore. I left Missouri five years ago to make my mark on the world. I turned my back on my hillbilly upbringing and tried to enculturate myself so that I could, as my grandma says, "be somebody." I was too blind to see that I already was "somebody" and that all of the institutions and social circles that I sought membership in thought that my kinfolk and community were less human than themselves.

I went to Missouri hoping to relive my nostalgic past and was disappointed to find that Heraclitus was right - you can't step in the same river twice. I left Missouri and drove back to Texas mad - mad that I had busted my ass for the last five years just to suddenly discover that I was society's "other." I had spent my entire life feeling somewhat privileged and, at times, somewhat guilty, that I was white. Whenever times got tough, I could always sit back and say, "It could be worse, you could be a minority." Because I had that mentality, it was extremely disconcerting to wake up and find that me and mine are just a bunch of racial *others*. It was much worse than being "pigmentally challenged," we were not racial *others* because of some superficial characteristic of skin color, our lot in life was much worse. We had some cancerous dark spot on our souls that made us rednecks - something that was born in you and could never be overcome - a cancerous dark spot that must somehow be concealed and suppressed - an identity that must be sublimated.

Like Dorothy Allison writes in *Trash*, I, too, believe that me and mine are the "men who drank and couldn't keep a job; women, invariably pregnant before marriage, who quickly became worn, fat, and old from working too many hours... and children with runny noses, watery eyes,

and the wrong attitudes" (vii). Like Barbara Eirenreich, I feel that "sitting at a desk all day [is] not only a privilege but a duty: something I [owe] to all of the people in my life, living and dead, who [have] so much more to say than anyone ever [gets] to hear" (2). Because cultural studies is, as Ben Agger writes, an emerging field that "challenges traditional assumptions of disciplinary scholars who plow the fields of cultural research" and one that "fits a certain intellectual and political agenda" (1), I have a perfect vehicle for fulfilling my duty and giving a voice to those who *have so much more to say than anyone ever gets to hear*.

One of the problems of cultural studies is that the culture studied is often looked at from a detached, almost omniscient viewpoint - a process that theorist Donna Haraway calls "the god-trick." Cultural theorists, like Dick Hebdige, argue that low and popular culture is *interesting* to academics and that "the theory of culture now involves 'the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life'" (7). However, approaches like those of theorists like Hebdige beg the question: "Can an honest inquiry take place when the academy imposes so much of its "high culture" onto the phenomena that is studied?" Of course it would be ludicrous to suggest that an academic doing a cultural study of heroin addicts must first get addicted to heroin to fully understand it, but one must agree that if it were possible to be intrinsically connected to the subject studied that the voices of those *who have so much more to say than anyone ever gets to hear* might be articulated with more cultural authority.

Academics must acknowledge that the fixity of academic inquiry, rhetoric, and language allows for the possibility of diluting the phenomena that is studied. In order to maintain the purity and genuineness of the culture studied, it should, if possible, be done *experientially* so that none of the culture studied will be left on the table. In addition to experiencing the culture, academics should translate that experience to their audience through the eyes, voice, and

experience of the phenomena studied. This paper is a cultural study of a lower working class segment of the American population pejoratively referred to as "rednecks" and "white trash." Not only will this paper provide the reader with an experiential study of rednecks and white trash, but will also allow the reader to experience this cultural phenomenon through the eyes, voice, and experience of rednecks and white trash.

The Myth of Whiteness

"Recently," writes Matt Wray, "a great deal of critical writing has centered around the notion of whiteness and white racial identity" (3). In *Queering the Color Line*, Siobahn Somerville writes "the challenge is to recognize the instability of multiple categories of difference simultaneously rather than to assume the fixity of one to establish the complexity of the other" (5). It is within this *challenge* that, according to Wray, "many works on whiteness call for recognition of the ways in which whiteness serves as a sort of invisible norm" (3). Wray also cites the work of minority intellectuals like Toni Morrison and bell hooks writing that they "have called for whites to reevaluate themselves and their identities" (5) because they, like Dr. Charley Flint, an African-American woman, and Lowell Thompson, an African-American male, who are both members of *The Center for the Study of White American Culture*, believe that whiteness, posited as *the norm*, is "an oppressive ideological construct that promotes and maintains social inequalities, causing great material and psychological harm to both people of color and whites" (3).

For Louis Kushnick, "racism developed as a dominant ideology which is supportive of the capitalist world system. It legitimized the conquest, enslavement, and super-exploitation of people." (191). In addition to the effects that racism has on ethnic minorities, Kushnick writes

"the ideological effects of racism have confused the metropolitan white working class as to the basis of its privileges" (192). For Kushnick (and others), racism is an ideology that prevents the working class from becoming conscious of the common experience that they share and enables the capitalist class to exploit them. By propagating the myth of "white privilege," the bourgeois class duped the white working class into believing that they had non-monetary privileges in society that make them better than the ethnic minorities.

It is through the articulation of these non-monetary benefits that the Jim Crow laws in the American south were put into place. For example, Siobahn Somerville introduces *Queering the Color Line* by summarizing the experience of Homer Plessy, the plaintiff in the landmark civil rights case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In addition to *Plessy v. Ferguson* being the precursor to more than a generation of institutionalized segregation under Jim Crow, it also enabled the status quo to shift the masses attention from socioeconomic factors to those that simply involve the color of skin through the creation of a false dichotomy of black and white. Looking back over the history of America during this landmark decision, one would not easily draw the parallel between the Jim Crow laws and the status quo's trying to mainstream Populism into the political hegemony. Thomas K. Gross pointed out that, "according to Keith W. Medley in his book *We as Freeman*, some faulted the legislation for failing to exclude 'low white people of the worst possible stamp, and the Chinese, both more obnoxious than most colored[s]'" (44). However, if the laws of land were that overt in their discrimination against poor whites, then Populism would not have been so easily assimilated. The Jim Crow laws gave poor whites a pseudo-Marxist *false consciousness* of being better off than African-Americans and other minority groups and being next to last is not as bad as, to use a *hickism* from Whitetrashistan, Missouri, "sucking hind tit."

"Support was given," by the status quo in overturning the Jim Crow laws, writes Kushnick, "in order to direct the black struggle away from class questions and alliances with the left and toward its incorporation into the existing class system" (214). In simple terms, the status quo never really went away, they just switched sides. Instead of promoting white privilege, they began a campaign of multicultural understanding where *whiteness* became a fixed non-racial and non-cultural norm where every other ethnic and cultural experience was posited. In doing so, Kushnick writes that although "the white male working class has been at the top of these hierarchies... its position is hardly a satisfactory one" (215) because "wage increases and full employment are no longer secure" and "jobs for their children, particularly their sons, are disappearing" (215). In addition to these primary benefits, secondary benefits are also being diminished because "educational opportunities for working-class youngsters at every age level are being constricted, and existing social services are being reduced" (215). As the granting of privileges diminishes, the legitimacy of the system becomes endangered, and the system begins to rely on scapegoating to maintain order. In order to debunk the myth of *whiteness*, one must be able to see *whiteness* from a distance and rednecks and white trash are white identities that do not view themselves as this mythical norm of *whiteness* that all of the other racial and ethnic groups posit their identities against.

Rednecks and White Trash as a Multicultural Identity

Wray and Newitz write, "far too often, admission into the multicultural order depends upon one's ability to claim social victimization (5). Social victimization as the litmus test for identity is one obstacle to recognizing that white trash is a distinct subculture that is typically grouped into an all encompassing category of whiteness. Because America is "the land of the free,"

where there is equal opportunity for all, class distinctions in American society are not talked about. In his book, *Equality*, R.H. Tawny writes "the word 'class' is fraught with unpleasing associations, so that to linger upon it is apt to be interpreted as they symptoms of a perverted mind and a jaundiced spirit" (5). Oddly enough, the lower class whites - white trash - often have the "perverted minds and jaundiced spirits" that want to linger on class distinctions in American society.

According to Marx, cultural forms emerge in specific historical situations, serve particular socio-economic interests, and carry out important social functions (1). Seen in terms of the myth of whiteness, multiculturalism is merely an ideology employed by the "ideological state apparatus" of the American education system that shifts the focus of racism from being one of exclusion to one of inclusion. However, this paradigm shift fails to consider that *racism* is an ideological social construct to cover up class distinctions. Just as there is myth of whiteness, there is also a myth of racism. Both whiteness and racism are, at best, distractions to keep the material reality of class-consciousness sublimated. Doug Kellner writes "ideology is a critical term for Marxian analysis that describes how dominant ideas of a given class promote the interest of that class and help to cover over oppression, injustices, and negative aspects of a given society" (2). By defining equality in terms of *opportunity* rather than in terms of *condition*, capitalist America can provide the working class with the *illusion* of equality while it continues to exploit them. Nearly every business, educational institution, and government entity has an equal opportunity clause that reads something like this: "We do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or (pick a euphemism for handicapped)," constantly reminding its citizens that America is the land of equal opportunity. It is only when you drive over to the wrong side of the tracks and see the dilapidated houses and trailer parks that you find

that despite equality in terms of opportunity, there is a big difference in equality if it is defined in terms of condition.

Allan Berube knows this inequality all too well and how it relates to the myth of whiteness when he writes "other whites who looked down on us because of where we lived could call my whiteness into question. Ashamed, I kept these and other social injuries to myself, channeling them into desires to learn about how to act and look more white, and to find other ways to move up and out of this life that more and more felt like a trap I had to escape" (33). Berube says they were *calling his whiteness into question*, however, it would be more accurate to say that they were not speaking about his whiteness at all - their concern was class. Annalee Newitz writes "when middle-class whites encounter lower-class whites, we find that often their class differences are represented as the difference between civilized folks and primitive ones. Lower class whites get racialized, and demeaned, because they fit into the primitive/civilized binary as primitives" (134).

Newitz uses the term *racialized* to describe how lower class whites are demeaned. Many theorists in Cultural Studies throw the word *race* around, but few people define what they mean by this nebulous term *race*. Webster's defines the word *race* as being "a family, tribe, people or nation belonging to the same stock" and "a class or kind of people unified by community of interests, habits or characteristics" (1509). Webster's also defines race as "*obsolete*: inherited temperament or disposition" (1509). For the multiculturalist, the Irish, the Italians, the lower Europeans, etc., all fall into this *obsolete* category of race. Their heritage is inconsequential - they are simply *white*. Siobahn Somerville writes that for her, "the term 'race' ... refers to a historical, ideological process rather than to fixed transhistorical or biological characteristics: one's racial identity is contingent on one's cultural and historical location" (7). Somerville also

writes that Turgee's legal argument for Homer Plessy in *Plessy v. Ferguson* "reveal[ed] the existence of a cultural despiration regarding rights in language and the control of language over the social construction of identity" (9). If society allows ideology to control the language and define *race* exclusively in terms of *whiteness* and non-*whiteness*, then it enables the capitalist class to create the illusion of a classless society by redirecting the masses attention away from their material conditions, focusing their attention on the varying degrees of *whiteness* and non-*whiteness*. However, if *race* is defined more liberally, then society can include economic, geographic, and a whole host of other characteristics into the equation that might provide a more holistic view of "a family, tribe, people or nation belonging to the same stock" and "a class or kind of people unified by community of interests, habits or characteristics" (1509). Using this more liberal application, one can easily argue that white trash and rednecks have racial identity and that racial identity is not simply *white*.

Defining White Trash and Rednecks

African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and other *ethnic* groups in America are defined by the color of their skin and/ or their ancestral origins. Comedian, George Carlin, demonstrates how American's "pigeon holing" of identity can get muddy when he asks, "If a white man of English descent living in South Africa immigrates to the United States, is he an African American?" One might also argue that anyone born in the United States who renounces his citizenship and becomes French might be seen as a native American to the average Parisian. Although the labels given to the various ethnic groups in America are just that, *labels*, and somewhat nebulous in their definitions, the label, *white trash*, is even more nebulous and abstract. Because, as Paul Fussell writes, "you can outrage people today simply by mentioning

social class"(15), the economic disparities between the classes is never mentioned in the paper or on the evening news. Because class is "America's forbidden subject," it is more difficult to define white trash than any other ethnic group. After all, the only thing that separates white trash from the Goliath of *whiteness* is their position in American society.

In defining white trash and rednecks, this paper will first attempt to define *whiteness*. Because much of this paper argues that *class* contributes to inequality just as much, if not more than *race* or *gender*, *whiteness* will not be defined solely in terms of ethnicity. "For anthropologists," writes Dolores laGuardia, "the concept of race has no scientific standing. All human beings are members of the same species... In that sense, all human beings are 'created equal'" (241). For laGuardia, race is a social construct. In America, we all have some idea of the *authentic* American. Although many academics who have taken up the multicultural torch have done groundbreaking work in shifting society's focus from Christopher Columbus to the native people that were exploited, from the Puritans at Plymouth Rock to the natives that suffered at the hands of those same God fearing Puritans, or from the Mississippi Colonel to the slaves whose labor sustained his ostentatious lifestyle, there will always be the spectre of the status quo's idea of the authentic American. Anna Quindlen writes that this authentic American is "white and Christian (but not Catholic), ethnic origins lost in the myth of an amorphous past, not visible in accent, appearance or allegiance" (77). Whenever America has a Constitutional issue in the courts, the media interviews countless numbers of experts who reiterate what "the Founding Fathers" must have meant when they wrote the Constitution. Because Americans always revert to the Founding Fathers in Constitutional matters, why not revert to them when it comes to defining *whiteness*? *Whiteness* is the Capitalist Class - the class that the Middle Class believes

they can eventually become if they work hard enough and the class that the Lower Class knows it will never see in a dozen lifetimes.

Now that this paper has defined *whiteness*, it will move on to define *white trash* and *rednecks*. Wikipedia explains that the epithet *white trash* was first used in the 1830's and then, the term was *poor white trash*. Once class became a taboo subject in American society, the word *poor* was simply not spoken anymore. The term, according to Wikipedia, belongs in a category with terms that focus on behavioral characteristics rather than racial ones. The Oxford English Dictionary Online illustrates that even slaves used the term *white trash*: "The slaves themselves entertain the very highest contempt for white servants, whom they designate as 'poor white trash'," who no doubt, must have acquired the term from the wealthy plantation owners - the Capitalist Class. In *Revelation*, Flannery O'Connor writes "Sometimes Mrs. Turpin occupied herself at night naming the classes of people. On the bottom of the heap were most colored people... then next to them - not above, just away from - were white-trash" (491). Dorothy Allison writes, "I originally claimed the label 'trash' in self-defense. The phrase had been applied to me and to my family in crude and hateful ways" (xv). Perhaps the best way to define *white trash* is to just simply define the word *trash*. The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines *trash* as being "That which is broken, snapped, or lopped off anything in preparing it for use; broken or torn pieces, as twigs, splinters, 'cuttings from a hedge, small wood from a copse' (*E.D.D.*), straw, rags; refuse." People who are *white trash* are broken - broken in the sense that, as Paul Fussell writes, the special anxiety of white trash is "the gnawing perception that you're probably never going to make enough or earn enough freedom to have and do the things that you want" (45). Anna Quindlen echoes this desperation when she writes "they send their children to

school with hopes for a miracle, or a job, which is almost the same thing" (78). Allison writes, "we were not noble, not grateful, not even hopeful. We knew ourselves despised" (vii).

The *redneck* is most easily described as white trash with an attitude. Jim Goad writes "A redneck, as I define it, is someone both conscious of and comfortable with his designated role of cultural jerk. While hillbillies and white trash may act like idiots because they can't help it, a redneck does it to spite you... In the same way that stubborn mules are often able to make their owners look like asses, the redneck has the troublesome capacity to make ironic sport of the greater public's repulsion/ fascination with him" (84). In many ways, the redneck is very similar to Jose Limon's *pelado*. Limon writes "the Mexican *pelado*...belongs to a most vile category of social fauna; ... a form of human rubbish... Life from every quarter has been hostile to him and his reaction has been black resentment. He is an explosive being with whom relationship is dangerous, for the slightest friction causes him to blow up" (123). According to Charlie Daniels, "what most folks call a Redneck, ain't nothin' but a workin' man." Wikipedia defines redneck as being either a pejorative term or one of pride (depending on who is using it). Typically, when the term *redneck* is used by anyone but a poor white, it is used in a pejorative manner. For example, if a member of the Capital Class (*whiteness*) owns a factory in South Carolina where a group of poor whites work, they are "good country people" or "hard working men and women," but if those "hard working men and women" were to go on strike, then his business would be disrupted by a bunch of rednecks. For the most part, "hard working men and women" become *white trash* and *rednecks* whenever they have agency and exhibit resistance against the status quo. Dorothy Allison echoes this sentiment and illuminates the nebulous quality of *white trash* and *rednecks* when she writes:

What it comes down to is that I use 'trash' to raise the issue of who the term glorifies as well as who it disdains... And of course these days, I feel like there is a nation of us - displaced southerners and children of the working class. We devour paperback novels and tell evil mean stories, value stubbornness above patience, and a sense of humor more than a college education. We claim our heritage with a full appreciation of how often it has been disdained. And let me promise you, you do not want to make us angry (xvi).

The Great White Dope: The Othering of Rednecks and White Trash

As the legitimacy of the capitalist system becomes endangered, that same system must rely on a scapegoat in order to continue its ideology. One of the most obvious ways that scapegoating has manifested itself is through the "welfare to work" programs of the 1990's. According to the "moral majority," the new right, these "welfare chislers" are the reason that middle class America must pay such high taxes. One of the basic tenants of a free market economy is that if left alone, it will generate prosperity for all. Although capital America says that *lazziez faire* should be the law of the land, it doesn't hesitate to prevail upon the government to help bail out the industry when disaster strikes. No one knows how much money the government gave big business in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew or even September 11th, because those statistics are rarely reported and scarcely cited by the media or the politicians. In contrast, nearly every media mogul or politician could provide some figure for the cost of social programs for those less fortunate members of American society. Why do we question our government helping the poorest of its citizens and rarely even pause when it shells out millions to American Airlines and Chrysler. Isn't corporate welfare still a handout? While America has "put an end to welfare as

we know it," it has done nothing to end the cycle of poverty - it has only turned the unemployed poor into the working poor. As Miriam Shulman writes "we throw out anecdotal evidence, mixed with a few facts and figures, and then we all retreat to our preconceived ideas without any empathetic consideration of the other side" (254).

The Oxford English Dictionary Online notes that the word scapegoat originated "in the Mosaic ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. xvi), that one of two goats that was chosen by lot to be sent alive into the wilderness, the sins of the people having been symbolically laid upon it, while the other was appointed to be sacrificed." It defines *scapegoat* as being "one who is blamed or punished for the sins of others" and the example given is, oddly enough, "Country-boys..are patient, too, and bear their fate as scape-goats, (for all sins whatsoever are laid as matters of course to their door,..), with amazing resignation" found in a newspaper in 1824. Cultural critic Jim Goad explains that the redneck and white trash stereotype fits all of the traditional scapegoat requirements: rednecks and white trash have biological differences (buck toothed, inbred, and stupid); geographic and regional differences (rural areas and trailer parks); economic differences (sick, lazy, and dirty); cultural differences (loud, superstitious, and excessive); and moral differences (racist, violent, and alcoholic). (76).

Donna Haraway writes "both science and popular culture are intricately woven of fact and fiction" and that "fiction can be imagined as a derivative, fabricated version of the world and experience, as a kind of perverse double for the facts or as an escape through fanstasy into a better world than 'that which actually happened'" (3). The work of Latour and Woolgar, writes Haraway, was primarily "interested in science as a fresh form of power in the social-material world" and explains that "scientific practice is literary practice, writing, based on jockeying for the power to stabilize definitions and standards" (6). One would be hard pressed to find a better

example of how scientific practice jockeyed for power than the science of eugenics in the 19th century. Siobahn Somerville quotes Francis Galton, the father of eugenics, who:

defined the term 'eugenics' in his *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (1883) as 'the cultivation of the race' and 'the science of improving stock, which ... takes cognizance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable that they otherwise would have had. (30).

Although Somerville's discourse on eugenics focuses on the biological othering of African-Americans and Gays and Lesbians, those same principles were also applied to rednecks and white trash. Matt Wray writes:

Current stereotypes of white trash can be traced to a series of studies produced around the turn of the century by the US Eugenics Records Office... wherein the researchers sought to demonstrate scientifically, that large numbers of rural poor whites were "genetic defectives." Typically, researchers conducted their studies by locating relatives who were either incarcerated or institutionalized and then tracing their genealogies back to a "defective" source (often, but not always, a person of mixed blood) (2).

Somerville writes "the new field of eugenics worked hand in hand with growing antimescegenation sentiment and policy, provoked not only by attempts for political representation among African Americans but also by the large influx of large populations of immigrants" (30). Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. writes " The Anglos often disliked the newcomers, disdained their uncouth presence, feared their alien religions and folkways... W.E.B. Dubois, the

black scholar, testified that when he grew up in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in the 1870's, 'the racial angle was more clearly defined against the Irish than against me'" (9). The double-edged sword of capitalism is that it has no conscience - if left unchecked, it will do anything to make money. Schlesinger comments on this when he writes "however prejudiced white Anglo-Saxons were in practice, they were ashamed to endorse nativism in principle. Equally important, an expanding economy in an underpopulated country required a steady influx of new hands. Immigration alleviated the labor shortage and economic need overpowered moral and aesthetic repugnance" (9).

In addition to the biological othering of white trash and rednecks, there is evidence that they are geographically othered as well. William Byrd II's *Histories of the Dividing Lines Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina* is one example of the geographic and regional marginalization of the redneck. John Miller writes in *Surveying Race: Establishing Boundaries of Colonial American Whiteness* that "Byrd's scathing descriptions of the white settlers he encounters on his Mid-Atlantic surveying mission tend to be uniformly read by critics as scorn by the proud Virginia author for his North Carolinian neighbors" (1) but goes on to propose that "There is a larger racial project occurring in *The Histories*, one that involves more than just the Native American figures, and offers a more thorough explanation for Byrd's disdain for his fellow Caucasian colonists. The aristocratic author and political leader of Virginia is racializing whiteness, creating a white Other in order to affirm his own elite social position and justify his claims to vast new territories in America" (1). Byrd writes:

The only business here is raising of hogs, which is managed with the least trouble, and affords the diet they are most fond of. The truth of it is, the inhabitants of North Carolina devour so much swine's flesh, that it fills them full of gross

humours... Thus, whenever a severe cold happens to constitutions thus vitiated... This has all the symptoms of *syphilis*, with this aggravation, that no preparation of mercury will touch it... This calamity is so common and familiar here, that it ceases to be a scandal... Thus, considering the foul and pernicious effects of eating swine's flesh in a hot country, it was wisely forbidden and made an abomination to the Jews, who lived much in the same latitude with Carolina (17).

After demonstrating how the dietary practices of these proto-white trash rednecks makes them inferior to aristocratic Virginians like himself, the noble Colonel Byrd moves on to the clothes that these poor redneck savages wear:

There is but little wool in that province, though cotton grows very kindly, and, so far south, is seldom nipped by the frost. The good women mix this with their wool for their outer garments; though, for want of fulling, that kind of manufacture is open and sleazy. Flax likewise thrives there extremely, being perhaps as fine as any in the world, and I question not might, with a little care, be brought to rival that of Egypt; and yet the men are here so intolerably lazy, they seldom take the trouble to propagate it (21).

Byrd goes on to describe the terrain of North Carolina:

It had one beauty, however, that delighted the eye, though at the expense of all the other senses: the moisture of the soil preserves a continual verdure, and makes every plant an evergreen but at the same time the foul damps ascend without ceasing, corrupt the air, and render it unfit for respiration. Not even a turkey buzzard will venture to fly over it, no more than the Italian vultures will over the

filthy lake Avernus, or the birds in the Holy Land, over the Salt sea, where Sodom and Gomorrah formerly stood (22).

Here is Byrd's depiction of the white trash morality:

What little devotion there may happen to be is much more private than their vices. The people seem easy without a minister, as long as they are exempted from paying him. Sometimes the Society for propagating the Gospel has had the charity to send over missionaries to this country; but unfortunately the priest has been too lewd for the people, or, which oftener happens, they too lewd for the priest. For these reasons these reverend gentlemen have always left their flocks as arrant heathen as they found them. Thus much however may be said for the inhabitants of Edenton, that not a soul has the least taint of hypocrisy or superstition, acting very frankly and above-board in all their excesses (29).

Byrd also demonstrates how these ruthless savages would rather live and die in their own filthy uncivilized terrain than to join Byrd's civilized society (the Great State of Virginia):

The line cut William Spight's plantation in two, leaving little more than his dwelling house and orchard in Virginia. Sundry other plantations were split in the same unlucky manner, which made the owners accountable to both governments. Wherever we passed we constantly found the borderers laid it to heart if their land was taken into Virginia: they chose much rather to belong to Carolina, where they pay no tribute, either to God or to Cæsar. Another reason was, that the government there is so loose, and the laws are so feebly executed, that, like those in the neighbourhood of Sidon formerly, every one does just what seems good in his own eyes (32).

Miller writes: “Not only does Byrd's book describe the marking of the border between the Virginia and North Carolina colonies, it also depicts the defining of boundaries in white America along economic, political, and social lines” (1). The geographical distinction of William Byrd’s *Dividing Line* really doesn’t work any more. After all, even the most rural areas of America has a McDonald’s and a Wal-Mart. However, if one looks beyond the mere geographical constraints of Byrd’s book, one could argue that Byrd considers the state of North Carolina to be a *state of mind* as well as a state of the Union. Miller writes: “By establishing this prototype for 'white trash,' Byrd emerges in comparison as the true savior and leader of the young colonies” (1).

The economic differences between white trash, rednecks, and the status quo are typically dismissed by the status quo. The Capitalist Class uses a "blame the victim" philosophy for writing these people off. In order for the Capitalist Class to have workers to exploit, it must keep those same workers in economic uncertainty and does so by limiting the resources available to them and preventing them from rising above their class. “One class gets the sugar and the other class gets the shit” writes Paul Fussell, Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. “It is not enough to succeed,” writes Gore Vidal, “others must fail” and the failure to move from one class to another is a hallmark of the white trash experience. In order to join the ranks of the respectable middle class, one must learn to speak Standard White English fluently and eat, dress, and even think differently. Most theorists think that this concern is exclusive to minorities, but it even applies to whites. One slip of the tongue, one slight indication that you are not a part of middle class America and it's all over for poor white trash.

In *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich writes “low wage workers are no more homogenous in personality or ability than people who write for a living and are no less likely to be funny or bright” (8). Postmodernists would argue that if we, as individuals, are not a *tabula rasa* at birth,

then we are dangerously close to it. The Capitalist Class insists that white trash and redneck culture *breeds* poverty because they are lazy, stupid, or base. The poor have a culture all their own that is at odds with the middle class culture and it hinders their success. It is not something to be embraced or even practiced but must be eradicated if the poor are to be uplifted into the middle class. Everyone has “equal opportunity” in America so if you’re poor then it must be your fault. However, as Ehrenreich points out “in poverty, as in certain propositions in physics, starting conditions are everything” (27). If you are the minority poor, then society believes that you will become self-supporting if given a chance. However, that poverty theory doesn't apply to white trash and rednecks. Since white trash and rednecks are white, there is no excuse for their being poor in the land of "equal opportunity" and their poverty must be their own fault.

The facts of poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance are hard to ignore. However, blaming the victim seems to be society's cure for this statistical anomaly. In 1854, while attacking the justifications of slavery, Frederick Douglass writes "ignorance and depravity and their inability to rise from degradation to civilization and respectability, are the most unusual allegations against the oppressed" (129). Douglass explicates his belief that nurture overwhelms nature and that it is a faulty social environment that leads to poverty, crime and injustice. However, instead of doing something about the poverty and injustices in rural areas, society only uses them as scapegoats. As Goad writes, “the redneck reminds them of what they used to be... and were lucky enough to escape... In white trash, rich whites see the crude Norse demons they like to think they’ve civilized out of themselves (33). Edward Abbey comments on this when he writes “I thought of those who do the world’s work, and are never paid enough, and never will be, and rise, and are beaten down, and always lose in the end” (1). Barbara Ehrenreich drives the ten penny nail into the heart of the class “othering” that goes on in America when she writes: “Work is supposed to

save you from being an “outcast” ... but what we do is an outcast’s work, invisible and even disgusting. Janitors, cleaning ladies, ditch diggers, changers of adult diapers – these are the untouchables of a supposedly caste-free and democratic society (117).

The white trash aesthetic is possibly the most pejoratively cited aspect of the white trash experience in America. Goad writes, "Being white trash in America is mostly perceived to be a personal attitude rather than a socioeconomic situation. It is thought to be a choice rather than a predicament" (38). Because it is "thought to be a choice," society feels that it is something that must be overcome and eradicated. However, because class is the forbidden subject in America, it fails to consider that the white trash aesthetic is based on the material conditions of the white trash people. Gael Sweeney writes, "we know White Trash Culture when we see it. Rather than defining a people or a class, although both are implicated, it is an aesthetic of the flashy, the inappropriate, the garish" (249). The white trash aesthetic is the shock and awe of Porter Waggoner in sequined country and western shirts, a fat Elvis in diamond studded jumpsuits and a monster truck the size of a small office building. Jose Limon writes, "The Mexican macho... is a humorist who commits *chingaderas*, that is, unforeseen acts that produce confusion, horror, and destruction. He opens the world; in doing so, he rips and tears it, and this violence provokes a great sinister laugh... the humor of the macho is an act of revenge" (127). The Mexican macho and the American redneck have that in common, they both "rip and tear" the world, only multiculturalism celebrates *chingaderas* and frowns upon the redneck saying, "Hey, watch this shit."

Goad acknowledges that "Working Class amusement is always too much. It operates from an Overdose Aesthetic" (130) and Sweeney concurs, paraphrasing Bakhtin:

the carnivalesque inhabits the space that counters and subverts institutions of authority and repression, the dominant hegemonies of Church, State, and, in capitalist democracies, Industry. The pleasures of the carnival are subordinate pleasures: unruly and lower class, vulgar, undisciplined. During carnival, the working class are not working; they are out of their place and out of line (254).

For Sweeney, "carnival is a place of laughter, bad taste, loud and irreverent music, parody, free speech, bodily functions, eating and feasting, a place where excess is glorified" (254). It is through the white trash and redneck need for carnival that America gets dirt track stock car racing, honky tonk juke joints, the glitter of Las Vegas, the cult of Elvis and pornography. Goad comments on this traditional depiction by writing: "A whole vein of human experience... is dismissed as a joke, much as America's popular notions of black culture were relegated to lawn jockeys and Sambo caricatures a generation or two ago" (16). Granted, some would argue that the world would be a much better place without WWF Wrestling, NASCAR, and the Jerry Springer Show - obvious consequences of the white trash aesthetic, but these experiences are only those that are co-opted and commodified by the Capitalist Class and light years different than an old fashioned hayride, a dirt track stock car race, or a night on the town at the *daintz* at the Armory with your Saturday night girl.

Unfortunately, the co-opting of the white trash culture has done more to reinforce white trash stereotypes than it has to demonstrate that it is a culture worth exploring. Siobahn Somerville writes "they argued that blacks were an 'incipient species,' holding that there had been no racial progress or intellectual development of blacks in recorded history, and that, by the tenants of natural selection, blacks remained biologically inferior" (24). Now, take out the word "black," insert the word "redneck" or "white trash" and read the sentence again. Instead of it sounding

like some antiquated scientific claim from the nineteenth century, it sounds more like the underlying message of *The Jerry Springer Show*. Unfortunately, *The Jerry Springer Show* is both a carnival for the white trash and a commodification of its aesthetic that reinforces the stereotype. Springer's depiction of white trash is not surprising because the media has gone out of its way to reinforce the white trash stereotype. One only needs to turn on the TV news and see that the reporters go out of their way to find the dumbest people they can to interview whenever tragedy strikes. Many theorists, including filmmaker, Michael Moore have explored the media's role in reinforcing racial stereotypes, but white trash are the one stereotype that never seem to get mentioned in their work.

Jim Goad writes, "the major media have never been concentrated in places where cotton grows. The redneck ethos, by and large, has been propagated by those with absentee ownership in rednecks' cultural heritage" (86). The fact that *The Jerry Springer Show* is filmed in Chicago only substantiates this claim. One only needs to watch the television show *Cops* to see how the redneck is depicted in the media. Filmmaker Michael Moore talks about the television show in his film *Bowling For Columbine*, pointing out that minorities are constantly being chased through the streets, slammed down on the ground, and arrested on national television, but fails to see that when the producers of the show aren't busy reinforcing society's stereotypes about minorities, they are showing a redneck being arrested for domestic violence in a trailer park. In contrast to the media depiction of poor whites committing crimes on *Cops*, Barbara Eirenreich comments on the lack of positive messages about the poor working class in popular culture:

When I watch TV over my dinner at night, I see a world in which almost everyone makes \$15 per hour or more, and I'm not just thinking of the anchor folk. The sitcoms and dramas are about fashion designers or school teachers or lawyers, so

it's easy for a fast food worker or nurse's aid to conclude that she is an anomaly - the only one, or almost the only one, who hasn't been invited to the party (118).

When everything else fails to other white trash and rednecks, society can always fall back on the white trash and redneck morality to provide a reason to hate them. After all, they are such easy targets: they are violent, chemical dependent, and racist. White trash violence is the direct result of their material conditions. Robert Hunter writes, "they lived in God only knows what misery. They ate when there were things to eat; they starved when there was lack of food. But, on the whole, ... they swore and beat each other and got drunk" (1). Angel Price cites Jack Kirby's *Media-Made Dixie*, a book that challenges W.J. Cash's "savage ideal" of the redneck in *The Mind of the South*. Kirby writes:

The savage ideal included a few occasionally endearing Southern traits: hedonism ("hoggishness in enjoyment"), extravagance (particularly in language) good-old-boyism, physical bravery, loyalty, patience in suffering. But mostly the "ideal" encompassed the 'darker phases': militant ignorance and anti intellectualism; brutal, violent racism; xenophobia; self-righteousness and blind defensiveness. Thus the low state of high art, the Negro-lynching and Ku Kluxery, the suspicion of anything foreign, the incredible claims to superiority by the most impoverished of Americans. Cash's was a South acting upon distorted folk memory and visceral response alone (1).

Cash turns white trash and rednecks into caricatures who like to fuss and fight, focusing on the darker side of the white trash experience. However, if one were to look at the harsh realities of white trash and rednecks - the sawmills, the factories, the manual labor - then one might see how the material conditions of their existence contribute to their behavior. Racism, itself,

contributes to the anger of white trash and rednecks. Allen Berube writes "the world itself was coming apart around me, yet I blamed myself for not working hard enough to keep my part of the bargain. 'You had only one chance to get out and you blew it' I remember thinking at the time, still missing the truth that, for both me and my parents, the bargain itself had been a lie" (36). If you spend most of your life working in a factory where you are nothing more than a warm body, then after a while, how can you see yourself as being anything more than a body. Why not do as Lynryd Skynryd's keyboard player, Billy Powell, says and "Live Hard, Die Young, and Leave A Good Looking Corpse?"

Because of the Capitalist Class trying to manipulate the working class in America, racism always seems to come up when anyone mentions white trash or rednecks. Oddly enough, it is the working class whites and not those belonging to the elite Capitalist Class that are typically credited with the invention of slavery. Timothy Lockley writes, "the daily life of the non-slaveholding white population in the antebellum South is generally underrepresented in current historiographic trends" (58). Lockley goes on to add that "some members of the white elite evidently believed that any racial mixing would foster an alignment between African Americans and the white non-elite against the established order" (68). It is this threat of alignment between poor whites and African-Americans that the Jim Crow laws were put into place. By utilizing Caesar's rule of "divide and conquer," the Capitalist Class was able to maintain its position in the South after Reconstruction. The tagline of the film, *Beloved*, based on Toni Morrison's book, "the past has a life of its own," has a cultural significance to poor whites as well as African-Americans because they are made the scapegoats of that same *past*. Gael Sweeney writes:

Poor Black and White Trash are linked together in an almost symbiotic relationship of enmity and necessity while attempting to survive the poorest states

in the nation. In the mainstream media, racism among Poor Whites and other rural, lower-class rednecks is seen as universal, endemic, and inbred, erasing the origins of secret societies such as the Ku Klux Klan among privileged elites in the South of the Reconstruction (251).

Although white trash and rednecks are typically accused of being violently opposed to African-Americans, it is the Federal Government, city slickers, and Northern Whites that the White Trash Nation is most opposed to. John Dollard writes "There has been a long history of bitter and aggressive men going into the South from the northeast, and the newcomer is appropriately classified at once" (34). Dollard quotes Thomas Page who writes, "no statement of any Southern white person, however pure in life, lofty in morals, high-minded in principle he might be, was accepted. His experience, his position, his character, counted for nothing. He was assumed to be so designing or so prejudiced that his council was valueless" (35). Just as many feminists say that they have to "fight the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* everyday," white trash and rednecks from the South believe that they have to fight the Civil War everyday. Many Civil War historians argue over whether the Civil War was fought over slavery or States rights and that fight will probably go on and on for more generations. Based on my experience, the white trash and rednecks of the South and the Midwest fight it everyday just because they resent a central authority telling them what to do. In fact, some of those same historians argue that Harry S. Truman agreed to rebuild Europe after World War II because of his grandmother's hatred for the Yankees during Reconstruction. John Crowe Ransom writes in *Reconstructed But Unregenerate*:

It is out of fashion in these days to look backward rather than forward. About the only American given to it is the Southerner, who persists in his regard for a

certain terrain, a certain history, and a certain inherited way of living. He is punished as his crime deserves. He feels himself in the American scene as an anachronism, and knows he is felt by his neighbors as a reproach. Of course, he is a tolerably harmless reproach. He is like some quaint local character of eccentric but fixed principles who is thoroughly and almost pridefully accepted by the village as a rare exhibit in the antique kind. His position is secure from the interference of the police, but it is of a rather ambiguous dignity (I).

Ransom was referring to the Southerner in the early twentieth century, but one could easily take out the word "southerner" and replace it with "white trash" or "redneck" because it demonstrates that the cultural group defined as "white trash" or "redneck" operates within a larger American social structure. Ransom writes: "Progress never defines its ultimate objective" (8) and it is within this abstract notion of *progress* that the redneck differs from mainstream society. The redneck is too busy just trying to create some kind of stability in his life to be concerned with progress. According to Paul Fussell, "at the bottom of the working class, the low prole [redneck] is identifiable by the gross uncertainty of his employment (49). In modern terms, *progress* in an economic sense is usually associated with *automation* and that association for the redneck leads to unemployment. No wonder they are so skeptical of anything done in the name of progress.

Redneck racism is, metaphorically, a kind of sibling rivalry - a cry for help. Goad echoes this cry for help when he writes: "when they [liberal society] talk about 'equality,' it's phrased strictly in racial and gender terms, as if white males ever had true equality among themselves, as if the white-male experience in America has been one uninterrupted vanilla holiday" (46). Goad is implying that poor white trash and rednecks are crying out "what about me" wanting that same

liberal society to throw them a bone. Countless social studies have been done on troubled children that were treated badly at home, but no one seems to recognize that the redneck is the red headed stepchild in America's little thatch hut in the global village.

Like other ethnic groups, white trash and rednecks have also been oppressed, but their oppression is a little subtler than a water fountain marked *Colored*. When "separate but equal" ceased to be the law of the land, the rich found other ways to segregate themselves: First Class accommodations, country clubs, five star restaurants, and a host of other private spaces. Think about it - when the public space was no longer something to be controlled by the elite, they simply built their own. America was the land of capitalism, so there was no crime in charging a hundred dollars per plate if people were willing to pay for it, and they would be willing to pay for it, if they didn't have to sit by any blacks, Hispanics, or, as Medley put it, "low white people of the worst possible stamp, and the Chinese, both more obnoxious than most colored[s]" (44). Black and white may be, as Tourgee put it, "cultural fictions," but Winston Groom tells you how the cows eat the cabbage when he writes "the color of money is neither black nor white, but green" (283).

In recent history, white trash and rednecks have been blamed for opposing desegregation. Oddly enough, it was a riot in Boston, Massachusetts, not one in Alabama that commanded so much attention in 1974. As Peter Jennings writes in *The Century*: "In Boston... the argument over school busing reached a frightening impasse... when a federal judge imposed a desegregation plan upon Boston's schools... the glue that held the city together began to come undone" (443). Jennings reported that one irate mother said "If they can tell you where to send your kids to school, they can tell you anything" (443). Jennings goes on to add that "the working-class Irish felt betrayed from all corners, for the church, supporting the courts, refused

to allow people to enroll their children in Catholic parochial schools... and some of Boston's mostly Irish politicians stood in support of the integration plan" (444). Jennings points to another ugly side of the issue in his book when he writes "it grated upon the city's blue collar community that the elite ranks of the city's population were those pushing hardest for integration, the very people who would always remain buffered from its effects" (445). He goes on to add "Why was it, they asked, that progressive experiments had to be carried out on the backs of the poor?" (445).

The citizens of Boston echoed a sentiment felt by those of the South since reconstruction: nearly all of civil rights legislation that was passed fell squarely on the shoulders of the working class. When America was busying itself with Manifest Destiny and Imperialism, the "white man's burden" was left up to America's aristocracy, but when it came down to civil rights and integration, then the "white man's burden" made a giant belly flop onto the shoulders of the working class. The white trash that rioted in Boston weren't nearly as angry with the African-Americans who would be attending their school as they were with the rich whites who said that their kids had to be sent across town to go to school. White Trash and Rednecks aren't nearly as angry with minorities for taking advantage of affirmative action as they are with the fact that they are still unemployed. This phenomenon begs the question, "Have any studies been done on how affirmative action and the various other civil rights laws have affected those who actually oppressed minorities? Richard Cohen writes "'Forced busing' to achieve racial balance in the schools had proved bitterly divisive and contributed to white flight from public education" (283). Moreover, to make matters worse, most of the business relocated to the suburbs as well, turning what once was a nice neighborhood into a slum.

Furthermore, rednecks today aren't as angry at the immigrants who want to come to America to live as they are with the corporations that will continually cut their wages until their jobs are lost to those same immigrants. Redneck racism is misplaced anger - In fact, I do not think it would be too much of a leap to say that all of the lower class racism is misplaced anger. When you're all just a bunch of mutts circling around the fat cat's dinner table waiting for them to drop a few scraps, you'll turn on your fellow mutt before you'll bite the hand that feeds you; and when it comes to the biological imperative - earning a living - were all just a bunch of blind squirrels trying to get a nut. Oddly enough, one of the ways that the status quo keeps the lower classes in line is to promulgate bickering among the lower classes. This Orwellian concept of "some animals are more equal than others" keeps the lower classes focused on their differences instead of focusing on the poverty that they all hold in common. Louis Kushnick writes, "until the working class creates its own consciousness and culture, it will continue to be unable to advance its own interests" (216). Americans can do this by "rediscovering the democracy that died when white workers accepted racism and racial privilege" (216).

The Emancipation Declaration of the White Trash Nation

We hold these truths to be self-evident: All of humankind is created equal but society does its best to change that from the moment of conception. Healthcare for the poor is disastrous - from the lack of prenatal care for those who have yet to be born to the lack of adequate geriatric care for those who are approaching death. Working class bodies are not the bodies of GQ and Mademoiselle, in fact, they are not bodies at all - they are raw materials used to manufacture goods and then thrown on the slagheap of industrial progress when they are no longer useful to society. Working class bodies are commodified, taken to the marketplace, sold, used up and then

become trash - hence the term *white trash*. Poverty, unlike wealth, is not concentrated among white people and could serve as a starting point for healing the racial divisions in America. Like most poor whites from rural areas, I joined the Navy in an effort to escape the manacles of poverty. Although there were some racial skirmishes during my tour of duty, a lot of my fellow sailors also gained some cultural understanding. Aside from having to rely on one another and perform as a team, I would like to believe that this cultural understanding was also the result of sailors and their families experiencing equality in terms of condition as well as opportunity.

All humankind is created equal, but humankind becomes unequal because of competition. As Doug Kellner points out "in a competitive and capitalist society... human beings are primarily self-interested and competitive by nature... idealizing human or social traits like individuality and competition...are elevated into governing conceptions and values" (2). Peter Rothberg writes "some observers trace the huge disparity of incomes in our society to a winner-takes-all philosophy ... managers at the top of the economic chain become billionaires while their temporaries work for minimum wage without health plans" (227). Douglas L. Wilson writes "how could the man who wrote "all men are created equal" own slaves?" (127). A better question would be, "How can a country that says it is founded on an egalitarian philosophy that challenged the privileges of a hereditary aristocracy force so many of its citizens to bow and scrape to the pampered few?" As long as multiculturalism thrives, then public attention will always be shifted away from class and onto race and gender and the high-minded rhetoric of the Constitution will never be reconciled with the actual behavior of government and industry.

Delores laGuardia writes "nations look in the mirror of their history to understand who they are... however, what they see in the mirror of history is shaped by the agendas of those who do the writing" (121). Look in the mirror of history and see if there are white trash and rednecks

staring back at you. Because of the myth of whiteness, the Barney Fifes of America have been lumped in with the George Washingtons. Because of multiculturalism, "much current writing takes into account the point of view of the conquered, the dispossessed, the enslaved" writes laGuardia, and yet, one could easily argue that white trash and rednecks have been conquered and dispossessed. Where is their history being written and who is writing it? Dan Chamberlin writes "there is a veritable mini-industry devoted to identifying social subsets, like African-Americans on the theory that correct labels will foster self-esteem or pride" (292). These "mini-industries" do more to promote the commodification of ethnicity than they do to promote any kind of real understanding. Multiculturalism is nothing more than polite imperialism - let's all go eat Thai food and engage in cultural diversity. The unspoken undertones of multiculturalism are almost funny, if they weren't so dangerous - Anime from the one's who brought you Toyota. Folklorico from the makers of the burrito. Multiculturalism commodifies other cultures and reduces them to cultural kitsch and consumer schlock. Lets not forget that multiculturalism is manufactured from the ones who brought you racism.

The terms *diversity* and *multiculturalism* are often interchanged and thought by many to mean the same thing, however, they are as different as night and day. Arturo Madrid writes "diversity, from the Latin *divertere*, meaning to turn aside, to go different ways, to differ, is the condition of being different or having differences in an instant of being different" (89). The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines *diversity* as being "the condition or quality of being diverse, different, or varied; difference, unlikeness" and one of the examples of how it has been used is "unity does not exclude diversity "nay more, without diversity there can be no true and perfect unity," a quotation from 1885. *Diversity*, by its own definition, is something that is not a standard - something that is not codified and then taught as an *ism*. Diversity resists the homogenous

discourse of the Capitalist hegemony. For Madrid, "diversity introduces complications, is difficult to organize, is troublesome to manage, is problematical" (89). If American society were to actually practice diversity, then there would be no multiculturalism simply because no one could agree on what *multiculturalism* is supposed to be by virtue of their diversity. The fact is that Jefferson wrote "All men are created equal." He did not write "all identity politics are supposed to be equal, but some are more equal than others depending upon their ability to sway public opinion in their favor." This nation, if we even believe in any of the tenants it was founded on anymore, is a nation of people - of individuals - not groups and if we get back to seeing people as just that - people, then we'd all be much better off. I have a dream that one day I will be judged on the content of my character and not the color of my neck.

One could argue that my emphasis on respect for the individual runs counter to my Marxist perspective on class. Although Marxism emphasizes the group and not the individual, it does not necessarily do away with the individual entirely. Roland Barthes writes "along each utterance... off-stage voices can be heard" (21) implying that within each individual, there is a whole host of other factors that enter into the discourse as well. Joseph Harris writes "one does not *first* decide to act as a member of one community rather than some other, and *then* attempt to conform to its (rather than some other's) set of beliefs and practices. Rather, one is always *simultaneously* a part of several discourses, several communities" (19). If you believe that the humanity of a society can be judged on how active all of its citizens are in participating in its institutions, then you will have no choice but to invite white trash and rednecks to sit down and join you at the academic dinner table. Hand me a plate and pass the gravy.

Jim Goad writes, "multiculturalism is a country club that excludes white trash. It's refusal to view terms such as 'white trash' and 'redneck' as race-specific and class-specific lends itself to a

mountain of contradictions" (22). In this paper, these contradictions were brought to light. Rednecks and white trash fit all of the criteria for a "racial other" and many of the same theories and theorists used to establish the diversity of other cultures was used to illustrate the unique culture of the redneck. Goad writes that these theories and theorists "willingly understands the economic imperatives behind urban street gangs but not rural moonshiners; it embraces Crips and Bloods but not the Hatfield's and McCoy's" (22). We can only hope that in the future, these phenomena unique to the redneck experience are explored by academia.

White trash or rednecks (whichever pejorative term you prefer) seem to have fallen through the cracks of the multicultural sieve and have become a politically correct *other* that is too powerless and poverty stricken to do anything about it. For the redneck, racism is a red herring; classism is at the core of the problem. Paul Fussell writes: "Karl Marx is the prophet of the proles [rednecks], even if most of them don't know it" (46). Ultimately, I would like to see class trump race in America's ideological identity. That would probably lead to equality not merely in terms of opportunity, but equality in terms of condition. When that day comes, I will happily march beside my fellow proles and sing "power to the people," but as long as the Capitalist hegemony promotes its multicultural ideology, I have no choice but to "sound my barbaric yawp" and boldly proclaim "I'm trash and I'm proud" so for the time being, "I am redneck, hear me roar."

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