

Global Media Journal

German Edition

Book Review

Race and Media: Critical Approaches

Lori Kido Lopez (ed.) (2020): Race and Media: Critical Approaches. New York: New York University Press. 344 Pages. ISBN: 9781479895779

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To cite this article: Valdivia, Angharad N. (2021). Review: Kido Lopez, Lori (2020): Race and Media: Critical Approaches. *Global Media Journal – German Edition*, 11(1).

Race and Media: Critical Approaches offers an unparalleled, inclusive, and intersectional collection of original research presented by 22 scholars in four sections and twenty chapters. This book is unique in its scope and to my knowledge there is no other book on the market that addresses studying race and media like this book. Focusing on a wide range of media through the classic media studies categories of production (“producing and performing race”), representation (“representing race”), and audiences (“consuming and resisting race”), this collection also adds a section on “digitizing race” as digital cultures are so often all of the other categories combined. Moreover, Race and Media highlights the research of a diverse group of scholars whose work deserves wide recognition singly and as a group. Too often our field largely relies on a small set of foundational scholars, many of whom never really wrote about media, thus ignoring the excellent work produced by scholars such as every contributor to this book. In sum, Race and Media is a clarion call to the maturity of this field—we now have foundational, second, third, and fourth generation media scholars whose work on race cannot be ignored.



The book begins with a brief yet powerful section “On Terminology.” Lori Kido Lopez explains that authors were “allowed to choose their own terms.” Given the extensive debates within and between ethnic and racial categories about names and terms, this section sets the tone for a relational, respectful and heterogeneous collection. As well, this section proves to be an invaluable resource to any students and scholars not schooled in the culturally dynamic area of race and media studies. In the introduction Kido Lopez courageously cuts to the chase: US media are racist and let’s begin to see how. Chapters are brief, easy to read (no doubt the result of careful editing on the part of Kido Lopez), and helpfully articulated to keywords in media studies. This book has been edited to be accessible to undergraduate readers, and also provides a tremendous resource to scholars in the area of race and media.

Although difficult to attempt, this book makes a valiant effort to include a broad range of US racial and ethnic categories. While consciously focusing on US racial formations, there is the unavoidable and occasional reach into other countries and diasporas. Both Wolock’s “Diaspora and Digital Media” and Brady’s “Media Activism in the Red Power Movement” expand into Canada to trace the centuries old flows from South Asia and indigenous communities whose nations pre-exist the national border. As well, the book features chapters on media and African Americans, Latinas/os/x, Indigenous populations, Asian Americans, mixed race peoples, Afrolatinidades, and Arab Americans. The readings do not treat these as static categories. Indeed, one of the strengths of this book is the insistence by all authors that within the ethno-racial categories they write about, there are further nuances. For example, both Castañeda and Báez remind us of the need to attend to Afro-Latinas/os/x and indigeneity in Latina/o Studies research. Similarly, Okada covers a wide range of Asianities in her excellent chapter on independent media. Chapters on issues that address race and media generally, as Jason Kido Lopez’s contribution on “Branding Athlete Activism” and Sturgis and Joseph on “Visualizing Mixed Race and Genetics” provide a backbone to understanding contemporary iterations of visibility and ocularity of race in neoliberal cultures.

The book includes work on television, in which Beltrán’s historical work on Latina/o TV provides a taste of her forthcoming book entirely on this subject and Feng’s work explores the concept of the burden of representation which applies across the board of race and ethnicity. Always welcome is the work on radio and listening as a method of analysis written by Casillas and Stoeber. Legacy media such as film and documentaries (Okada and Villarejo), and news (Clark) are examined alongside work on podcasting (Florini), digital gaming (Land and Gray), Twitter (Maragh-Lloyd), and intersectional digital distribution (Christian). Issues of fandom (Noh), consumption mosaics (Báez), participatory culture (Zidani), and resistance (Gray) speak to the need to include audiences as part of our analytical framework.

The book contains a healthy combination of overview chapters (e.g. Báez), methodological histories with an illustrative case study (e.g. Beltrán), new research (e.g. Casillas and Stoeber), and innovative semi-auto-ethnography (Villarejo). I

especially love the editor's decision to use a robust combination of emerging and canonical scholars, thus demonstrating the richness of the field. I only hope the fields which this book informs will make use of such a valuable resource instead of lazily going back to readings which fail to address the complexity of the contemporary race and mainstream media in the US.

I am personally glad for the chapter on Marie Kondo by Noh, especially as it includes the Barbara Ehrenreich controversy that I have been teaching in my classes. In fact, there are many chapters here that help me in my research and teaching. I value highly a chapter that systematically, theoretically, and methodologically identifies what "mixed" actually composes in brief accessible strokes (Sturgis and Joseph). Likewise, the Casillas and Stoeberl chapter on sonic racism in the Zimmermann trial is amazing in scope (if not incredibly frustrating in terms of what it meant for the outcome of the court case). Feng's chapter on the burden of representation historicizes the concept while anchoring it through Asian American television. I appreciate its conclusion: it cannot please anybody.

In sum, this is a book that was put into use in the classroom and in my research as soon as it arrived. I recommend it most highly not only to race and media scholars but to all scholars of media because media studies needs to be carried out intersectionally, and this book provides a template for that task.