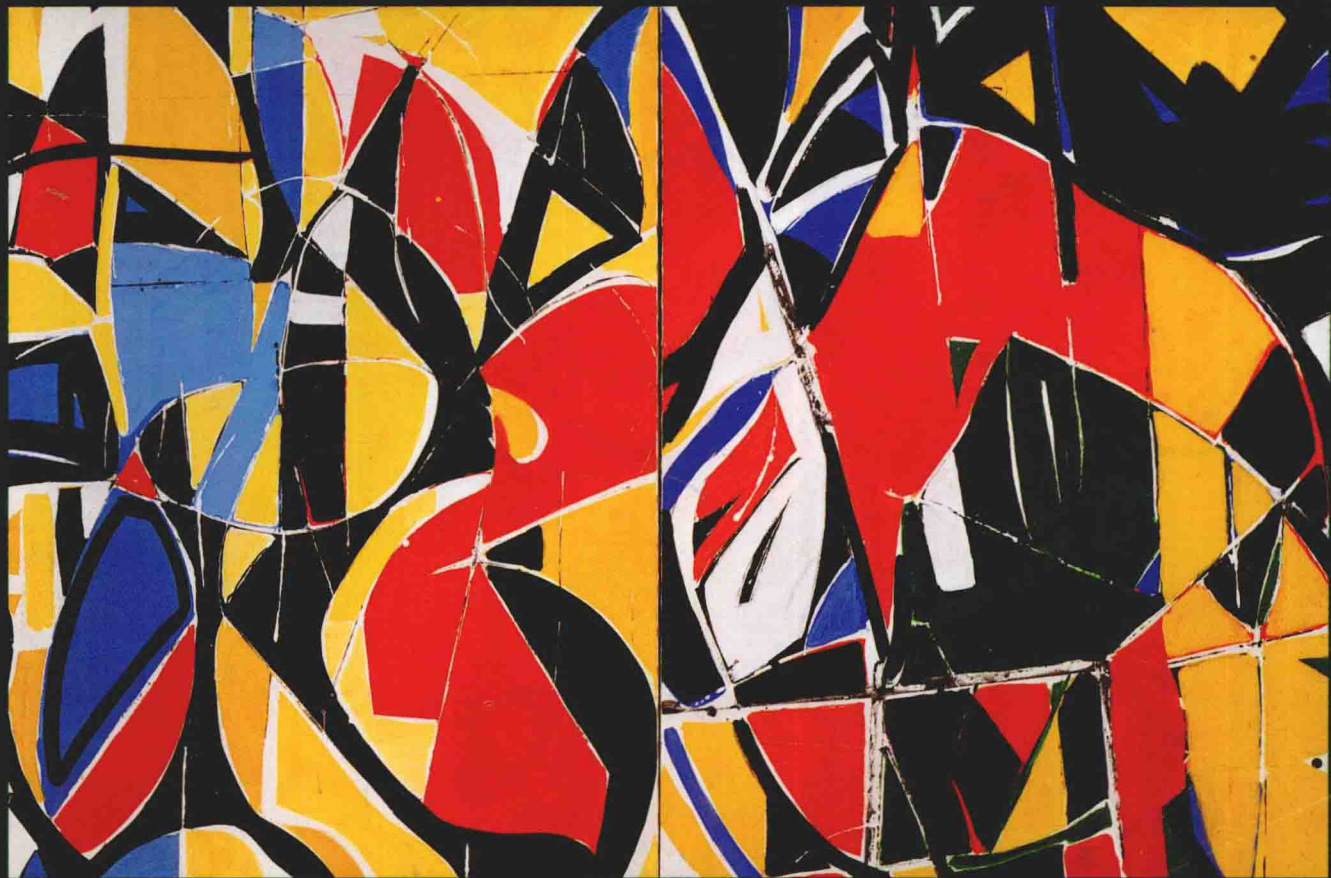


RETHINKING THE COLOR LINE

READINGS IN RACE AND ETHNICITY



CHARLES A. GALLAGHER



RETHINKING THE COLOR LINE

Readings in Race and Ethnicity

Charles A. Gallagher

Georgia State University



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Preface

It is difficult to think about life in America without directly confronting issues of race and ethnicity. Reflect for a moment on how recent events and trends both dominate and alter American social and cultural life: a black Texan is tied to the back of a pick-up truck and dragged to his death by racist whites; the rejection of affirmative action measures in California creates a national dialogue on the extent to which the racial “playing field” is level; tougher immigration laws are called for by politicians, while U.S. farmers and agribusinesspeople discuss institution of a new *bracero* farm labor program; the media lumps young Asians—a very small part of the U.S. population—into the hip category “Gener-Asian X”; a rash of African American church burnings shocks the nation, although Colin Powell, Denzel Washington, Michael Jordan, and Tiger Woods are consistently voted among America’s most celebrated and respected people; and white suburban teenagers continue to be the largest consumers of rap music, yet racially motivated hate crimes have increased on campuses throughout the country. The readings in *Rethinking the Color Line* will allow you to examine the contradictions of race and ethnicity and prepare students to live in an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse society.

Although the media has seized on a U.S. Census Bureau figure that predicts that by the year 2060 whites will be outnumbered by Asians, blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians, this rather simplistic demographic forecast misses the conflicts, contradictions, and cultural convergences that currently define race and ethnic relations in the United States. *Rethinking the Color Line* is designed to

help make sense of how race and ethnicity influence aspects of social life in ways that are often made invisible by culture, politics, and economics. This theoretically informed, empirically grounded reader uses a social constructionist perspective to frame and define the concept of race and ethnicity in the United States. The selections should stimulate conversation in the classroom and allow students to think through solutions to what often seem to be intractable problems. As a pedagogical strategy, this text raises a number of questions in the part introductions that guide students through the readings by providing an overview of how each reading is conceptually linked to the others. Each part introduction ends with “Questions to Frame Your Readings,” which ask students to compare and contrast each author’s position.

It was important to me that my students be exposed to the classic paradigms in the study of race and ethnic relations in the United States. However, just as important was my desire that students be exposed to and explore new theories and paradigms that were challenging, supplanting, and redefining the classic race and ethnicity “canon,” which itself changes over time. The biologically based, pseudo-scientific assumptions that defined and guided race and ethnicity scholarship for much of this century have been debunked, discredited, and discarded. What has emerged in the last 30 years are competing narratives of what race and ethnic identity mean and the social pressures that shape those meanings. Post-colonial, post-modern, post-ethnic, class-based, or primordialist perspectives each claim to elucidate how race and ethnicity shape identity construction, gender, political economy, and geo-politics. The modern idea

of race and ethnicity has been, and continues to be, thoroughly rethought.

The readings in the first part of this text provide students with the theoretical framework and analytical tools they will use throughout the book. Students come to understand what is meant by race and ethnicity as a social construction. The news, situation comedies, MTV, the racial topography of neighborhoods—each become subjects for sociological scrutiny. *Rethinking the Color Line* allows students to learn how race and ethnicity influence life in ways that many students routinely take for granted. It has been my experience that a majority of students who read these articles internalize a version of the “sociological imagination” that forever changes how they understand race and ethnic relations. Raising consciousness about how each of us influence and in turn are influenced by race and ethnic relations is an explicit goal of this book.

Over the last decade I have had the luxury of testing a large and varied number of readings on hundreds of students in dozens of race and ethnic relations classes at large public universities as well as small, elite liberal arts colleges. The readings in this book represent the final outcome of classroom “hits and misses.” I have used classroom experiences, the results of examinations, and how easily students were able to integrate the readings into research papers to gauge (1) the extent to which the reading contributed to students’ understanding of a particular theory or concept, (2) if the reading was intellectually engaging, and (3) if it lent itself to active learning in the classroom. If a reading could pass these hurdles in at least three of my classes, then it made it into this book. Teaching at both public universities and private colleges also provided me with the opportunity to observe how students from different regions, class backgrounds, and racial and ethnic identities reacted to the assigned readings. The articles speak to,

challenge, and find common ground among students from racially, ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse backgrounds. *Rethinking the Color Line* is a response to my students’ calls for a book that was user-friendly but did not sacrifice intellectual or theoretical rigor.

This book has been designed to be relevant for students on an individual level while also helping them understand that race and ethnic relations are embedded in the institutions that structure their lives. The readings require students to constantly negotiate the tensions between individual agency and the often determining constraints of social structure. The common thread that links these readings is the ongoing debate about the relationship between agency and structure. It is this conceptual framework that will allow students to think about race and ethnicity in fluid rather than static terms.

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This reader would not have been possible without the input of those who have engaged me in long discussions about race and ethnic relations over the last ten years. I am indebted to: Richard Alba, Amy Ansell, Sam and Linda Chororos, Kevin Delaney, Richard Delgado, James Dievler, Woody Doane, George Dolph, Tom and Maria Gallagher, Henry Giroux, Noel Ignatiev, Charlie Jaret, Magali Larson, George Lipsitz, Jeff Livesay, Joane Nagel, Jennie Randall, David Roediger, Carmen Saia, Stephen Steinberg, France Winddance Twine, Mary Washington, Howie Winant, and Bill Yancey. Thank you all for showing me the way. Thanks also go to Serina Beauparlant, my talented and patient editor at Mayfield.

Alexia Chororos, my partner, is always two steps ahead of me figuring out how the idea of race and ethnicity is constantly being reshaped, refashioned, and rearticulated by

politics and popular culture. Thank you for sharing.

This book is dedicated to our newborn, Sophia Mary Gallagher. May the need for you to be part of the struggle for racial and class equality not be as urgent.

My thanks go to the following reviewers who provided suggestions about the form and content of this reader: Richard Alba, State University of New York at Albany; Marcia L. Bellas, University of Cincinnati; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, University of Michigan; Ashley Doane, University of Hartford; Jennifer L. Eichstedt, Humboldt State University; Emily Noelle Ignacio, Loyola University of Chicago; Marcia Marx, California State University at San Bernardino; Samuel M. Richards, Pennsylvania State University; Garry L. Rolison, California State University at San Marcos; Deidre

A. Royster, University of Massachusetts at Amherst; Gary Sandefur, University of Wisconsin at Madison; Anna M. Santiago, Wayne State University; and Scott Sernau, Indiana University at South Bend.

I welcome any comments, suggestions, or criticism concerning this reader. Please feel free to contact me about which readings work, which do not, or readings I might include in future editions. Please send any comments directly to me. I look forward to your feedback.

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