

Rhetoric of Race Relations

Reaction Paper Prompts

September 3

Bosmajian challenges the traditional adage “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names/words will never hurt me.” We know, on the one hand, that language is symbolic, and “constructed.” If a word is intangible, can it really hurt? Is Bosmajian overstating the significance of words? Defend Bosmajian or the old adage and give reasons.

September 10

Many women I know, especially those attending protestant churches, often complain about the lengths to which churches have gone to make references to God gender-neutral, to make hymns gender-neutral, and so forth. Many of these same women are the most fervent opponents of the use of gender-neutral words academically. If Bosmajian’s hypothesis is correct, that much of our traditional languages subordinates or “infantilizes” women, why do you believe there is such a political divide on this issue among women? Is there a justification for the opposite of Bosmajian’s position.

September 17

Building on the work of Nakayama and Kriek, and Crenshaw, Moon and Flores present the contrasting views of two camps in “whiteness” scholarship. One camp holds that we should study whiteness to unmask it and steal its power by removing its invisibility. The other camp says “whiteness” is a threatening ideology that needs to be abolished. Both from a critical and a social standpoint, which is a more practical or workable perspective?

September 24

Burke describes a system by which Hitler was able to use language to demonize and justify horrific acts that we could not have previously thought humans were capable of. Think about parallels in contemporary society—not necessarily with the impact of death. Can this model help us to understand any contemporary instances of defining an “other?”

October 8

Critical race theory encompasses a broad range of key tenets. Which tenet do you feel most useful informs our discourse about race? Alternative, answer the question: “Is critical race theory helpful or hurtful in the search for solutions to problems in race relations?”

October 15

Lawrence's perspective on the first amendment would suggest that any racist speech could potentially be considered illegal—or at least not protected by the first amendment. This would mean, among other things, that racist comments by comedians, racist comments by traditional minority groups, and comments that might inadvertently be racist because the user doesn't understand their language. Answer one of two questions. Does this misconstrue or over-expand Lawrence's intent? Is such a broad application appropriate or practical?

October 22

In order to conduct his analysis, Nakayama must assume some stereotypes about gay men, certain ethnic groups, etc. He argues that this is necessary because of the ideological power of some of these terms. Does the author contradict himself by framing his arguments, particular arguments about homosexuals and heterosexuals, stereotypically. Does he reinforce the problems he's trying to combat?

October 29

Entman hypothesizes that the appearance of Blacks as anchors, some human interest reporting, and general sentiments about racist views have falsely created the impression that racism is no longer a problem. Do you agree with this sentiment? If you've been exposed to urban news, is that the impression you have gotten from it? If not, do you get this impression from other forms of media, such as sports coverage, programs like "The Cosby Show" or the growing presence of African American entertainers in music, TV, and movies?

November 5

You will be watching *Do the Right Thing* in class. After watching it we will discuss your reactions to the film and we will want to be as personally introspective about how we feel about the actions depicted in the film.

For the purposes of this reaction paper, focus on the arguments made by Cooper and the methodology used to reach the conclusions reached. Are her conclusions generalizable? Are there risks associated with drawing the kinds of conclusions drawn here?

November 12

If, as Williamson suggests, a trial acts as a symbol to help us satisfy our own need for redemption, are we actually perpetuating the continuation of racism by the way we handle the trial and publicity of hate crimes? If we were to diminish publicity, would the problem get worse? Posit a "way out" of this dilemma.