
Reviewed by Thomas West, University of South Alabama

The problem of the twentieth century, wrote W.E.B. Du Bois almost one hundred years ago, is the problem of the color line. Indeed, from the post-Reconstruction era at the turn of the century to the civil rights movement, the color line was reproduced all too often in the United States in an array of social and political geographies positioning "black" and "white" bodies on "this" side or "that." But in these postcolonial times in which political communities must be (re)constituted in the uncertain, ambiguous, and transcontinental spaces of multiculturalism and globalization, the color line is becoming increasingly less distinct. Issues of race have shifted largely to issues of culture, giving the impression that race no longer informs our ideas of human differences. But as Paul Gilroy notes in Against Race, even though the century of the color line has now passed, at the dawning of the twenty-first century racial hierarchy is still with us. It is precisely at this difficult and complex state of affairs that Gilroy begins his argument against race, an argument finally to disassemble race as a modernist operation of power that delineates and subdivides human-kind by ranking who is more human than whom. For Gilroy, there is no recuperating or redeeming, no readily de- or re-signifying the concept of race; it's versions of difference are far too entangled with the atrocities of modernity: imperialism, colonialism, New World slavery, genocide, fascism. Furthermore, because new ways of imag(in)ing bodies and coding differences are already under way in the biotechnical domain, it is imperative here at the threshold of the twentieth-first century not only to renew critiques of race-thinking but to begin to imagine and articulate post-racial and post-humanist ecologies of belonging as well.

Gilroy admits that the argument against race will be a difficult one to win. On the one hand, the beneficiaries of racial hierarchy do not want to give up the privileges that race continues to confer. On the other, those who have suffered under race and subsequently reconstituted themselves
under its sign share hard-won investments in racial forms of solidarity and community—despite the enduring hierarchies of race. But the elemental problem with race as an expression of raciology—the confluence of an array of scientific and philosophical discourses conferring the “truth” of race—is that it dehumanizes and alienates not only its victims but in less obvious ways its benefactors as well. The pathology of race sets all sides into “a neurotic orientation” that replaces intersubjectivity with estrangement, severely delimiting the common humanity of all by reducing our understanding of species life. Gilroy’s is not an argument to get beyond race by ignoring it but, on the contrary, one to engage in “a wholesale reckoning with the idea of ‘race’ and with the history of raciology’s destructive claims upon the very best of modernity’s hopes and resources.” He hopes that the pursuit of the liberation from race will help in the reconfiguration of a radical non- or post-racial humanism. In order to reconfigure forms of belonging and identity in this way, it is necessary to “disaggregate raciologies” so as to “de-nature” and “de-ontologize” race; ultimately, it is to purge the debilitating concept of race from ideas of “humanity.”

Gilroy’s admittedly utopian project against race hinges on raciology’s present unstable predicament, what he characterizes as a crisis of raciology. Raciology is in crisis, he explains, because “race” has lost much of its common-sense credibility, because the elaborate cultural and ideological work that goes into producing and reproducing it is more visible than ever before, because it has been stripped of its moral and intellectual integrity, and because there is a chance to prevent its rehabilitation. Prompted by the impact of genomics, “race,” as it has been defined in the past, has also become vulnerable to the claims of a much more elaborate, less deterministic biology. It is therefore all the more disappointing that much influential recent work in this area loses its nerve in the final furlong and opts to remain ambiguous about whether the idea of “race” can survive a critical revision of the relationship between human beings and their constantly shifting social nature. (28–29)

The “more elaborate, less deterministic biology” Gilroy speaks of has its pitfalls, however; and it is not entirely clear whether race-thinking will survive the biotechnical revolution in some altered form, even though there are compelling signs that we have begun to let go of the old visual signatures of race. For Gilroy, the crisis demands critical action: we can chance it and stand by as raciological regimes are reconfigured, perhaps
around genomic or gene-centered determinism. Or, we can seize the opportunity to resist this, to see that new technologies of imag(in)ing bodies will help to destabilize those “truths” of race based on morphological and epidermal differences rather than help to reconfigure them around nano-political schemes. Gilroy argues convincingly that the biotechnical and nano-political frontiers of the twenty-first century offer opportunities for challenging older discourses of scientific raciology: “With these symptomatic developments in mind, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that this biotechnical revolution demands a change in our understanding of ‘race,’ species, embodiment, and human specificity.” In other words, we need to ask “whether there should be any place in this new paradigm of life for the idea of specifically racial differences.”

Confronting the accreted remains of race also includes the ethical prospect of coming to terms with the glamour of fascism—its continuing allure to local neo-fascist groups and ultra-nationalist politics—as well as the continuing impact of fascism’s cultural revolution on contemporary culture in general. Race, of course, has a disturbing historical relationship with fascism, a rather vicious collusion resulting in theories of racial hygiene: race + fascism = genocide. But Gilroy’s primary concern in confronting fascism is how populist cultural technologies pioneered by the Nazis during the fascist revolution continue to inform contemporary cultural politics. The success of Hitler’s stardom and the “specularization” of the will of the Nazi movement depended on the effective use of emerging communicative media and visual culture: film (Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*), political rallies and speeches, state ceremonies, iconography (the swastika), uniforms, posters, radio, and so on. In Nazi Germany, the totalizing of political celebrity and national identification was carried out with all the ingenuity and zeal of a highly effective advertising campaign. The result was unprecedented national identification and unification in a time of economic decline and social dissolution. The political spectacle, or “specularization” of politics, pioneered during the fascist revolution, Gilroy notes, continues at work to this day in mainstream media-politics in democratic contexts. Not only do such aesthetics of politics figure significantly in the glamorization of fascism to neo-fascist groups, but they also serve as effective means to market and sell political agendas without the troubling intricacies of democratic processes—discussion, deliberation, and debate.

Truly groundbreaking is Gilroy’s study of how the legacies of the cultural technologies of fascism have found their ways not only into
contemporary culture in general but into black culture, particularly rap and hip-hop. His study of "revolutionary conservatism" is indispensable for the ways in which it illustrates just how complex racial cultural politics have become. "Revolutionary conservatism," in the case of some rap and hip-hop, is a kind of "packaged pseudo-rebellion": conservatism represented by largely misogynist, pro-capitalist, and pro-nationalist themes tied to revolutionary attitude and posturing. This is not a legacy of fascism strictly in its ideological sense but, rather, in its cultural posturing and militaristic overtones—in the ways that it sells rather conservative agendas as revolutionary, rebellious, and transgressive. In much the same way that Nazism identified itself as the very whitest culture that provided the measure of which all others would be evaluated, rap and hip-hop, says Gilroy, identify themselves as the very blackest cultures and not simply as black cultures among many. The point of this intriguing line of interrogation is that if "ultranationalism, fraternalism, and militarism can take hold, unidentified, among the descendants of slaves, they can enter anywhere."

Reconfiguring identity and belonging around post-racial thinking also involves confronting the multifarious ways that race and nation work together to form "pure" identities based on territoriality. Against Race extends Gilroy's work on race and nation found in The Black Atlantic, in which the figures of African diaspora and transatlantic cultural exchange, for example, pose significant challenges not only to fictions of national and racial purity based on ideas of rooted or territorial belonging but also to the official modernisms of nationality. The realities of diaspora require a rethinking of the connections between identity and territory, and he uses the figure here, much like Stuart Hall, to play the realities of hybridity against myths of authenticity. Diaspora and cosmopolitanism further require thinking about belonging and identity in ecological rather than strictly territorial terms: "Diaspora provides valuable cues and clues for the elaboration of a social ecology of cultural identity and identification that takes us far beyond the stark dualism of genealogy and geography."

The point is that the ideas of movement, trans-location, and displacement—so much a part of social transformation—can provide an alternative to the sedentary nationalistic poetics of soil or blood.

Gilroy's utopianism certainly leaves him open to charges of just how to get to this highly desirable post-racial ecology of belonging. But in the spirit of good activist critical theory, critiques are not simply critiques but assaults on the rhetorics and discourses that inhibit intellectual progress. We begin to imagine post-racial ecologies of belonging not by ignoring
race; we can’t leave it behind—it continues to drag behind us like the
weight of so much chain. Simply put, the legacies of raciology and race
need to be confronted and worked through—and then cast off. Renounc­
ing race and destabilizing raciology’s power to constitute the “truth” of
race is to move toward what Gilroy calls “planetary humanism” or
“strategic universalism”: “As we leave the century of the color line
behind, we need self-consciously to become more future-oriented.” We
might characterize such post-racial and post-humanist ecologies of
belonging, somewhat unwieldily, as post-racial/post-humanist human­
ism. This clearly isn’t a return to humanism but a move toward a post-
humanism refigured thorough a critique of race’s positioning in human­
istic discourse, of race’s role in defining “humanity” and creating a
system of infra-humanity (who is more human than whom) that subdi­
vides species belonging. This is far cry from indifferent liberal platitudes
that “we are all the same on the inside” and spineless injunctions to “just
get along.” Raciology’s ability to sustain the ontology of race should not
be underestimated and cannot be ignored, even in these times in which the
sign of race seems to be fading. This is precisely the time, Gilroy argues,
to renounce race and rooted nationalism altogether as the basis for
identification and belonging and to imagine a post-racial, radically
refigured “planetary humanism.” Against Race is a wide-ranging and
impressive study of the sociology of race whose importance lies in its
ability to help us resist raciology’s grip on our thinking and to imagine a
“heterocultural, postanthropological, and cosmopolitan yet-to-come.”

Smoke and Mirrors: The Hidden Context of Violence in Schools and
280 pages).

Reviewed by Claude Mark Hurlbert, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

I started to read Smoke and Mirrors shortly after the destruction of the
World Trade Center last September. It was difficult to read a book about
violence in the shadow of the horror of that day, so I put it aside for
a week. The week was followed by others. When I finally picked
Smoke and Mirrors up again, I found that the authors in this collection