
John Hartigan, Jr. *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. 359p.

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In *Odd Tribes*, Hartigan attempts to understand whiteness and the practices of white people, primarily by means of cultural analysis and ethnography. In Hartigan's words, "what is essential now to the task of making sense of race is an ability to both critique the constructed nature of representations but also to account for the way such racial objectifications operate, with an ear toward the way people work with and make sense of them" (4). For Hartigan, "Conceiving of subjects in terms of culture highlights the performative, relational, and situated dynamics that shape and are often recast by people's interpretations of their personal and collective circumstances. These situated circumstances—as they reflect and combine local and global economic, political, and social flows—often involve ambiguous, even contradictory constructions of meaning" (11). One such ambivalently constructed meaning is whiteness, according to Hartigan. As it explicates these meanings culturally and historically, *Odd Tribes* becomes a provocative, nuanced understanding of whiteness specifically and race generally, and a productive reconsideration of the value and efficacy of cultural analysis.

Hartigan's genealogy of whiteness, specifically the discourses and practices of whiteness, cover social analysis of poor whites in Victorian England through the anxieties of the early American Republic to the Detroit of *RoboCop*—an appropriately broad scope, given the multiple valences and instances of whiteness historically. Hartigan concludes that one engine behind the production of whiteness has been sociological analysis in which race and class were explicitly and are now implicitly "conceptually and perceptually entwined" (40), in that "social scientific images of the poor are generated and consumed as part of the cultural construction of class identities, particularly the self-identity of the middle class" (36). This leads Hartigan to a detailed consideration of eugenics and etiquette as instances of this policing of class lines in the explicitly racial terms of early social science. Because this policing manifests in culture and in the everyday lives of people, *Odd Tribes* is able to alternate between analyses of cultural phenomena—including explications of films such as *Deliverance* and self-identifying white-trash and redneck websites—and anthropological fieldwork, without losing its center of gravity.

Whiteness is a heterogenous set of practices and memes according to Hartigan, kept distinct by a specific kind of policing. Here Hartigan is writing against the current of much contemporary scholarship, but on specific grounds: "treating whiteness in

generic terms,” as a “historically determined ideology of dominance” in the mainstream instance, “disregards the most basic insights about racial identity that have been generated by studies of black racial identity, which demonstrate that...blackness is heterogenous and complex” (26-27). Curiously, a historically determined ideology of dominance enforces the lines of stratification *among* white people. Hartigan’s main example, etiquette, is “a mode of naturalizing social classifications, schemes, and hierarchies, making their importance tangible through the series of restrictions on what can be said or done and linking transgressions of these prohibitions to the viability of the social order” (18). This links anxieties over habits of speech and other marked behaviors to the enforcement of safeguards against perceived social pollution, with consequences for employment, conjugalit, and law. According to Hartigan, “This enduring form of etiquette—one that remains active today in this repertoire of disparaging epithets (imbecile, idiot, and moron) that continues to embellish the charged class distinctions between ‘smart’ and ‘stupid’...derived largely from the eugenics movement” in which middle-class whites were typically invested through the early 20th century (90). It is hardly an accident that “Trash is the label applied when a white social decorum is ruptured” (119), and that Trash has become a validated form of transgressive self-identification.

Hartigan’s positions on culture and cultural analysis follow from these conclusions. “Culture,” for Hartigan, “is a means for naturalizing social orders or ideological structures” (273). While this working definition is clearly intended for application beyond strictly racial questions, the emphasis of Hartigan’s analysis remains the class inflections of race. The construction of space and place is a matter of particular interest to cultural geographers and “ecocritics”; Hartigan uses space as a means of demonstrating culture as a territorializing force: “culture also operates or manifests through various spatializing practices, means of organizing space and localities as meaningful sites” (273). The meaning of these meanings reveals itself with an “attention to place that is fundamental to understanding how whites perceive particular situations and identities to be racial” (255). Methodologically, Hartigan’s only substantial misstep is his assertion that “it is not clear that psychoanalysis has any effective insight into collective processes, especially the intense contests over belonging that are constitutive of social orders” (13). I submit that Lacanians and post-Lacanians as diverse as Deleuze and Guattari, Bhabha, and Zizek have offered substantial insights into such collective processes, particularly in the hegemonic contexts Hartigan is investigating. *