Apologies and apologists: The disavowal of racism and the abjuration of anti-racism in the contemporary United States

ABSTRACT

This article examines the controversy over the hip-hop group OutKast's performance at the 2004 Grammy Awards and the death of Marge Schott, one time owner of the Cincinnati Reds, with a view toward sketching the contours of a new form of racism-colorblindness. Attention is directed at the erasure of racism in fan accounts and then at its containment in what purports to be anti-racist discourse. Media literacy teachers need to equip students with the tools to recognize, engage, and challenge the (re)constructions of racial identities, ideologies, and hierarchies. The teaching of anti-racist media literacy must be rooted in a pedagogy that directs its attention toward the disruption of white supremacy as a structured social system.

In December 2002, at an event marking the one-hundredth birthday of South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, Mississippi Senator Trent Lott lavished praise on the elder statesman from South Carolina. In celebrating his colleague's nearly 48 years in the Senate and his unsuccessful presidential bid as a Dixiecrat supporting segregation in 1948, Lott remarked, "I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all the years, either." Critics were quick to identify the comments that seemed to suggest that the maintenance of segregation and Jim Crow would have ameliorated, if not avoided, social ills attributable to integration and civil rights as divisive, insensitive, and even racist, imploring Lott to resign or the Senate to censure the Republican Majority Leader in the United States Senate. [1]

Four days later, Lott endeavored to reframe his remarks and put the controversy to rest: "A poor choice of words conveyed to some the impression that I embraced the discarded policies of the past. Nothing could be further from the truth, and I apologize to anyone who was offended by my statement." Although his apology did not satisfy his critics who eventually succeed in forcing Lott to resign his position as Majority Leader, it did resonate with many pundits and citizens who felt Lott had not meant to offend anyone and inadvertently misspoken. Even some political rivals, like South Dakota Senator and then Democrat Minority Leader Tom Daschle, offered understanding assessments: "There are lots of times when he and I go to the mike and would like to say things we meant to say differently, and I'm sure this is one of those cases for him as well." [2]
everyday racial discourse in the contemporary United States. In what follows, I want to explore the scope and significance of the disavowal and containment of racism in the contemporary U.S., unpacking the ways in which authors and audiences respond to accusations of racism. To clarify the contours of the discourse of racial disavowal, I juxtapose two incidents that superficially appear to have little in common, but on closer reading reveal the range of strategies employed by audiences to erase racism: the reaction to OutKast's performance at the 2004 Grammy Awards and the death of Marge Schott a month later. Read against one another, the performance of an immensely popular hip-hop group that incorporates stereotypical renderings of Indianness and the passing of the former principal owner of the Cincinnati Reds, arguably best known for her anti-Semitic comments, not only reveal the persistence, if not centrality, of racialized utterances and enactments in public culture, but also highlight a set of rhetorical strategies reflecting and refusing the structural realities of racism. Indeed, what links these seemingly distinct events—thus making them compelling for analysis—is the manner in which they expose the practices and precepts at the heart of contemporary talk about race. [3]

A pair of simple questions, which should be placed much nearer the center of media literacy studies and pedagogies, guides my inquiry. First, how do people (not) talk about race and racism? And, second, what conceptions of racialized social fields materialize in competing (anti)racist discourses? Importantly, the answers offered by both the critical assessments and supportive appraisals of OutKast and Schott, I argue, underscore a propensity to reframe race and racism in such a way that they debilitate efforts to make sense of and work against their material effects. Indeed, whereas the defense of OutKast and Schott repeatedly seeks to erase racism, blunting associated claims of dehumanization, transgression, and injury, critiques of them frequently circumscribe and undermine the effectiveness of anti-racism. [4]

To map the discourse of racial disavowal, I adapted standard qualitative research methods, applying them to the virtual world of Internet discussion forums. Key Web sites were identified through popular search engines Google and Yahoo, as well as hyperlinks between discussion forums. Hard copies of virtual utterances and exchanges were printed and thoroughly reviewed, along with news articles on Schott's death and OutKast's performance. Close reading next gave way to coding: the claims advanced in each comment were coded. Then I analyzed patterns, trends, and anomalies using techniques drawn from semiotic and discourse analysis. Finally, I employed theories associated with critical race and cultural studies to interpret the findings. [5]

In spite of methodological rigor, my reading in this article is necessarily partial. First, it is meant as a positioned reading of racial politics, an incitement designed to prompt media literacy scholars and teachers to take race seriously. Second, it does not pretend to exhaust the construction of race or the deployment of racism in responses to OutKast's performance or Schott's utterances (see King 2005, forthcoming). And, despite my best efforts, the nature of the Internet ensures that I have overlooked some discussions of OutKast and Schott. [6]

In addition, it is important to acknowledge the differences between the momentary (dis)engagements of racism considered in this article. Whereas the exploits of OutKast became the subject of intense debate online, largely in Internet discussion forums and in the Native press, the mainstream press covered Schott's life and death with great intensity. Hence, examples from the former are largely vernacular, while the analysis of the latter mixes established sources with postings on a community bulletin board. Moreover, while OutKast provoked an immediate reaction, a racial or political crisis of sorts, Schott's death was removed from her racist remarks, and then further distanced by the commemorative moment. Consequently, the kind and quality of material varies accordingly. These differences, as the ensuing interpretation demonstrates, are only superficially meaningful. Indeed, more important are the discourse of racial disavowal that knits together interpretations of these two incidents and the broader networks of race and power they reflect and refuse. [7]

After a short overview of OutKast's performance at the 2004 Grammy Awards and the life and death of Marge Schott, I situate the subsequent analysis. First, tracing the contours of contemporary racism, I locate my approach in ongoing discussions of race, media, and power. Next, I address the effacement of racism central to the defense of OutKast and Schott. Then, I briefly connect mainstream readings that dismiss racism with white nationalist interpretations that amplify it. Against this background, I discuss the critical assessments of OutKast and Schott, underscoring the ways in
which they limit the scope and significance of racism and, by extension, compromise anti-racist action. In conclusion, I outline the implications of this discussion for media literacy studies and sketch the contours of an anti-racist media literacy pedagogy. [ 8]

**Background**

At the 2004 Grammy Awards, the popular hip-hop group OutKast staged their hit song "Hey Ya." Celebrities and industry executives in attendance cheered the performance. Many watching were dismayed and disgusted. Almost immediately, Native Americans watching expressed dismay over the misuse and misrepresentation of indigenous traditions and peoples. In letters to the editor, online discussion forums, and official statements from political and cultural organizations, they noted that in the opening, the group sampled a sacred Navajo song meant to heal veterans, incorporated a teepee as a prop, dressed in garish green attire complete with bright fluffs and feathers designed to "look Indian," danced in a suggestive fashions, and brought a marching band, wearing full headdresses, on stage at the climax of the act. American Indian activists and political leaders called for a boycott of CBS and demanded an apology from OutKast, its label, Arista Records, and the network. Less than two weeks after Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" during the Superbowl halftime show, one might have anticipated a strong public reaction. Unfortunately, save for Native media, online discussion lists, and a handful of articles in the mainstream press, the OutKast outrage and its racialized content received little coverage and all but faded into oblivion (Veran, 2004). [ 9]

In contrast, the death of Marge Schott at age 75 attracted intense media coverage and powerful responses from the public. This is not surprising since Schott, a Cincinnati native, transformed a car dealership and other businesses left when her by her husband died in 1968 into a commercial empire that allowed her to become the first woman to purchase a Major League Baseball team, the Reds, in 1985. During her tenure, she became loved as a woman of the people, celebrated for bringing a World Series title to her hometown. At the same time, her beliefs and behaviors regularly called into question her character and capacity to run a professional sports franchise. She praised Hitler: Everybody knows he was good at the beginning, he just went to far" (What Marge Said, 2004). Later, she was known to possess a Nazi armband and refused to do business with Ticketmaster, purportedly because it was owned by a Jewish family (Hunter, 2004). Clearly anti-Semitic, she held equally dim views of African-Americans and Asian-Americans. In 1996, she said of the latter: "Well, I don't like it when they come here, honey, and stay so long and then outdo our kids. That's not right" (What Marge Said, 2004). Moreover, she described two of her players as "million-dollar niggers." For her remarks, Schott was fined, suspend, and eventually forced to sell all but a minority interest in the Reds. Although her passing received much coverage, very little public commentary or journalist reflection was devoted to issues of race. Indeed, as the following discussion illustrates, many were more than willing to disavow the racism embodied by Schott and OutKast. [ 10]

**Race, media, and power**

My reading of the disavowal of racism builds upon an increasingly sophisticated literature that concerns itself with the articulations of race and power in media worlds. Not only have earlier studies of stereotyping (e.g., Stedman, 1982) given way to more complex conceptualizations informed by ongoing dialogues in cultural and postcolonial studies, as well as developments in critical race, post-structural, queer, and feminist theories, but the fundamental positions animating the field have shifted as well. [ 11]

To begin, race is not as a natural fact, but a social construct. It is a production, emerging from the work and play of situated human actors. Its precise means and meanings change over time, reflecting specific social struggles and cultural stagings. As Fields (1990) suggests: "Nothing handed down from the past could keep race alive if we did not constantly reinvent and re-ritualize it to fit our own terrain. If race lives on today, it can do so only because we continue to create and re-create it in our social life, continue to verify it, and thus continue to need a social vocabulary that will allow us to make sense, not of what our ancestors did then, but of what we choose to do now" (p. 118). Media texts not only inscribe, adapt, interpret, and invent much of the social vocabulary through which audiences come to know and understand race, but they also unfold as powerful and pleasurable sites within which social subjects can utilize, negotiate, and apply this vocabulary to craft identities and communities. [ 12]
A number of scholars have reframed the media as teaching machines that inculcate audiences, instructing them in the significance and use of key terms, common sense explanations, and discursive strategies (Giroux, 1999; McLaren, 1999; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). As Giroux (1999) observes, such popular pedagogies "inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values, and ideals [as] more traditional sites of learning such as public schools, religious institutions and the family" (p. 84). [13]

Following Hall (1997), critical engagements with media worlds conceive of representations of difference as signifying practices that reflect, extend, and, under the right circumstances, challenge racial hierarchies. They probe the ways in representations of difference produce meaning. The circulation and consumption of racial representations actively constitute racial meaning and the broader racialized social order. Activating race has redirected media analyses away from stereotypes toward stories (Denzin, 2002), spectacles (King & Springwood, 2001; McClintock, 1995), discursive fields, most famously Orientalism and Eurocentrism (Said, 1978; Shohat & Stam, 1994; see also Goldberg, 1990), ideologies of identity formation (Ferguson, 1998; Hall & duGay, 1996), and practices of consumption (Chin, 2001; Manning, 1998). Binding these studies of race, media, and power together is the interrogation of racialization, or processes of making, using, and doing race. [14]

The reconceptualization of race has inspired a rethinking of its connections to power, frequently abbreviated as racism. Racism must not be confused with prejudice; it instead must be understood as domination. It is not simply that whites lack knowledge or have bad attitudes; racism refers to a system of social relations, a set of structural inequalities, cultural forms and ideological norms—all rooted in racialized conceptions and categories. Moreover, rather than an aberrant, extreme, or antiquated feature of the American experience, racism is understood as normal, everyday, and ever-present. In short, it is all-pervasive in American institutions and ideologies (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999). And as Stuart Hall reminds us, racism must be grounded, understood as constructed and conditional: "Racism is always historically specific. Though it may draw on the traces deposited by previous historical phases, it always takes on specific forms. It arises out of the present-not past-conditions. Its effects are specific to the present organization of society, to the present unfolding of its dynamic political and cultural processes-not simply to its repressed past" (quoted in Gilroy, 1990, p. 265). Racism is both ideological and institution, involving much more than individual intention, ideas, or attitudes. [15]

Notwithstanding the above, racism has become increasingly slippery. In the absence of overt markers, racism is often difficult to both define and locate within contemporary discussions. Despite the unwillingness or inability of commentators, pundits, politicians, journalists, and everyday citizens to come to terms with the persistent presence of race and racism, scholars have crafted critical frameworks, noteworthy for the sophistication they bring to bear upon the reconfigurations of racism in post-civil rights America (e.g., Ansell, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003; Brown et al, 2003; Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003). The deployment of colorblind language and emphasis on "not seeing any color" does not reflect American reality because "racial considerations shade almost everything in America" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 1). Despite these arguments and the vast amount of statistical data illustrating racial inequality, individuals and institutions explain away "the apparent contradiction between professed color blindness, and the United States' color-coded inequality" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 2). Embracing a variety of lenses and rhetorical strategies, whites are able to rework America's contemporary racial reality to legitimize notions of colorblindness, freedom, equality, democracy, and America. The increasing visibility of entertainers of color, the supposed changes in artistic possibilities, and the adoration America has for Denzel Washington, Jay-Z, Halle Berry, and Will Smith is posited as evidence of racial progress and colorblindness. Popular culture, thus serves as the evidence for post-civil rights progress and the hegemony of America's colorblindness. [16]

However, Bonilla-Silva (2003) conceives of colorblindness as a racial ideology that supports and extends the racialized order of things. Like all ideologies, colorblindness works because it offers a set of frames, or interpretive building blocks, to explain (away) race and racism. Specifically, he suggests that whites employ four frames: (1) abstract liberalism, an ethos blending individualism, a rhetoric of equality, and choice; (2) naturalization, or the assertion that "racial phenomena ... are natural occurrences" (p. 28); (3) cultural racism, the appeal to culture to explain difference; and (4) minimization, or efforts to reduce or dismiss the continuing significance of race and racism.

My reading of public readings of Schott's passing and OutKast's performance parallel Bonilla-Silva's fourth frame of
minimization. However, my concern is not simply that individuals minimize or downplay discrimination and other forms of racialized power. Instead, I want to suggest that the disavowal of racism is more totalizing, seeking not simply to contain, but erase the articulations of race and power in the public sphere. [17]

Colorblindness blinds Americans to the realities of white supremacy as both an historical force and a social condition. White supremacy is best understood as a set of ideological and institutional arrangements that has structured U.S. society past and present, endowing Euro-Americans with privileges and advantages on the basis of their skin color. Whereas white supremacy formerly demanded “self conscious” schemes and explicit hierarchies (such as eugenics and scientific racism), as well as unapologetic restrictions and legal prohibitions (on citizenship, immigration, and race mixing for instance) (Fredrickson, 1981), today the defense of white power hinges on denial and deflection that locate racism in the past or within “fringe” or “extremist” movements (including the white nationalists discussed herein), while recoding racial rhetoric in the languages of diversity, cultural difference, and the key words of the mainstream civil rights movement (i.e., reverse racism). [18]

Although OutKast’s performance and Schott’s utterances offer clear interpretations of racial and cultural differences that are linked to the power to claim and name, fans and journalists invoked a number of common sense understandings to excuse, if not erase, racism. In the following sections, I offer an overview of these ideological maneuvers. [19]

In memory of Marge Schott
A local website, available at [http://frontier.cincinnati.com/comments/threadview.asp?threadid=31](http://frontier.cincinnati.com/comments/threadview.asp?threadid=31), was established immediately after Schott’s death. Here, nearly 200 fans and community members posted almost exclusively positive reflections about the former businesswoman. Few communities members were willing to speak ill of the recently deceased. Of the 183 comments on Schott at this site, less than 8% dubbed her a racist. Instead, comments described her as one-of-a-kind, a “gutsy lady,” a generous philanthropist, and an entertaining character who made going to a game fun and affordable, a compassionate woman who cared for children and her community, a spunky role model for women in business, and an outspoken, genuine, and candid person not fully appreciated by the media, Major League Baseball, or the nation. They frequently rendered touching portraits of the former owner and what she meant. For instance, James Jared Taylor III wrote that “I will always remember Marge Schott when I was helping my mother with the Indian Hill Fourth of July Parade in 1995. I remember helping Marge, Schottzie [her Saint Bernard], and a driver get their red convertible in the parade line. Yes, she called me “Honey”… . She gave me World Series to remember in 1990, which I listened to on the jammed freeways in L.A. Despite her offensive remarks she gave great things to Cincinnati and kept us smiling.” [20]

Four strategies appear most frequently: humanity; positive outlook; nostalgia; and honesty. Billy Blaylock found Schott’s “politically incorrect” utterances to be “foolish moments,” which we all have in the course of our lives. Gina Moore comes to a similar conclusion: “We all grow, change, and make mistakes. She was ‘a real person’-nothing fake about her.” Likewise, Don Caldwell noted: “I understand that she had her shortcomings, but who doesn’t?” Invoking a Christian frame, Scott Robb implored: “We can all forgive Marge for her mistakes, but let us never forget her kindness.” Finally, Jason Kibby, encapsulating the views of many praised the fallen owner: “God bless you Marge … . You showed a human side so desperately lacking in a world of out-of-control political correctness.” “General Lee” touched upon the same themes in a manner that could, at best, be described as impolitic, at worst as virulently racist: “The passing of Marge Schott marks the end of an era and the silencing of a singular voice shining out from the olive-drab world of Politically Correct errand boys, minority ass-kissers and hypocrites. Her bon mot “Million Dollar-Nigger” will live on, if only in jealous whispers among those too yellow to call a spade a spade. She will be sorely missed … here’s hoping that you don’t wind up in “Nigger Heaven” watching short reels of Amos ‘n’ Andy” ([http://www.fuckedsports.com/archives/001554.html](http://www.fuckedsports.com/archives/001554.html)). In a telemediated world of superficiality, perfection, and spectacle, her authenticity, imperfection, ordinariness, and fragility made Schott special to these fans. [21]

Others tired of the pessimism they found in media coverage. M.A. Justice asked, “Why must we always dwell on negative aspects of someone’s life when they pass? Let’s remember all the good times Mrs. Schott brought us, and be thankful for her kind heart.” And, Tyumber Monfort, rather than thinking of topics like racism and anti-Semitism,
took a more upbeat approach: "I choose to remember the good times!" Accentuating the positive is certain to keep ugly and impolite talk about things like race, discrimination, and genocide from entering into public discourse. [22]

The longing to think of Schott in positive, human terms runs parallel to the nostalgia expressed by many other fans. Melody Snow did not agree with what Schott said, but she found her charming and redeeming nonetheless: "Her 'mistakes' in public speaking were simply a reflection of the era she was raised in. Political correctness was not for her, and I liked her for that reason." And, "although I did not agree with her earlier cavalier use of negative ethnic language," Michele Harvey suggested, "Marge Schott was an icon from another age." Iconic, yes, but intimate and familiar. As another poster noted, "She reminded me of my grandparents, soft and gentle, but not politically correct, yet filled with wisdom and kindness."

More importantly, Schott was a trace of past lingering in the present, unfettered by the niceties of polite racial discourse. Together, these elements allowed John Quigley to celebrate and expunge her remarks: "She grew up in a different era and never learned to accept the political correctness that exists, but I believe cared for all of her players, regardless of their color." Unburdened by political correctness, Schott could be championed as a hero of the (white) people, an honest spokesperson in a time of perceived censorship and over-sensitivity. As Jay W. Robinson remarked: "Babe, you were pretty much right on the money all along. We were just too timid to admit that you were right, simply out of fear of 'what would the neighbors say.' Jennie agreed: "So what if she said what she was thinking … more people should … there would be more honesty in this world." [23]

Journalists worked just as hard as fans to excuse Schott's understandings of race. Their assessments and descriptions of the former team owner eerily echo those made by residents of Cincinnati. She was variously "outspoken" (Teaford, 2004), a "charming eccentric" who committed "gaffes" (Goldstein, 2004), "a colorful and controversial figure," (Vinella, 2004), a character and "one of a kind" who "Like most of us meant well, Even when it seemed she didn't" (Gordon, 2004). For the nationally-known New York Times columnist Ira Berkow (2004), Schott was "a controversial national figure" who made "intemperate and awkward remarks" that showed she "was profoundly ignorant in her use of language," as if she were "from another age" or "cloistered in a cave." Newspaper reporters also invoked the specter of political correctness to limit the consequences of her comments. Or, in the words of Bob Hunter (2004), in an era inundated by political correctness, her candor could be admirable." [24]

Journalists and fans alike recoded Marge Schott. Erasing the racist content of her character, they preferred to remember an unreal, unblemished version of her and, likely, of themselves. As W. Hamilton put it: "It would be easy to hate Mardge [sic] Schott. I ask Cincinnati not to give her a pass for her comments, but to hate some of her words, but love her. I hear some of the same hurtful words from my own family, but I don't stop loving them." In the end, fans and journalists can reclaim Schott only if they disavow her racism through appeals to nostalgia, character, and the perils of political correctness. [25]

**Defending OutKast**

In the immediate aftermath of the 2004 Grammy Awards, fans and critics debated the significance of OutKast's performance. Numerous discussion forums centered on whether the act was offensive, disrespectful, or racist. In response to these accusations, supporters of the hip-hop group offered a number of overlapping arguments. They invoked five key ideas to disavow claims of racism: intention; sensitivity; significance; pride; and style. [26]

Fans of OutKast repeatedly rejected the application of racism to the performance through the invocation of intention. The band had not meant to hurt, defame, or misrepresent indigenous peoples, so it was inappropriate to make such accusations. Izzy's comments were typical: "What is wrong with you people??? OUTKAST never meant to offend anyone, yet they are being accused of being offensive, I don't understand it …. To the people who are offended, do you really think that OutKast said "let's offend people"??? Come on leave them alone, they are an amazingly talented band, don't ruin it for them for a simple mistake" (http://colorblind.typepad.com/the&lowbar;colorblind&lowbar;society/2004/02/who&lowbar;is&lowbar;really&lowbar;o.html).

"Navaphoec Doll" concurred: "I would like to say 'great job' on the Hey ya! performance! Despite my Apache/Navajo background, I thought the performance was good in a hilarious way. Don't get me wrong, I am traditional and still..."
speak my native tongue; but times have changed … . Racism exists everywhere and everyday, but was this performance ‘intentional’? I don’t think so … let’s start with the old John Wayne movies…or the ‘Boston Tea Party’… . We all have to move one … . SERIOUSLY!” (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=6837). And, according to “cece,” OutKast was simply “Careless about outfits." Besides, she continued: "We need to grow up and keep it moving" (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=60146). In short, although effect is undoubtedly more important for racist discourse, fans argue that, because OutKast had not intended to be racist, they are not racists. [27]

For many supporters of the group, it was not OutKast who was in the wrong, but those who were offended. In fact, numerous fans suggested that (American Indian) viewers were too sensitive. Valhalla mean-spiritedly asserted: "Talk about bitching over nothing. These stupid, drunk Indians don’t seem to realize that if it wasn’t for Hollywood and pro-sports, no one would even know or care, what an Indian is" (http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=117034). On a discussion list devoted to American Indians and sports, "Columbia&lowbar;city" suggested: "IT [sic] seems like natives just look for something to bitch about … i mean college mascots … and stuff … they just want to cry around … just let it go!” (http://www.ndnsports.com/forums/topic.asp?TOPIC&lowbar;ID=5049). An anonymous poster agreed: "ALL I HAVE TO SAY IS THAT ITS TOO BAD WE ALL BECOME SO DAMN SENSITIVE IN THIS COUNTRY, EVERYONE PLEASE GROW UP! WHY DON’T WE ALL (THE WHOLE COUNTRY) STOP TRYING TO FIND THE NEGATIVE IN EVERYTHING … IF ANYBODY HAS EVER LISTENED TO OUTKAST THEY WOULD KNOW THAT THEY ARE ANYTHING BUT RACIST, RELAX!" (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=6798). "komatkeray69" indicated that the mature thing to do was make better choices, as if misrepresentation and discrimination were simply a matter of personal preference: "I think people take things too seriously … . It’s all just entertainment. If you don’t like what you see… change the channel. If you don’t like what you hear … don’t listen. If you don’t like the way something tastes … Don’t eat it. How simple is that?" (http://www.indianz.com/TalkingCircle/MessageBoard/topic.asp?TOPIC&lowbar;ID=5233). Invoking the ongoing War in Iraq, "British and Proud of it" sought to put a happy face on the issue: "In these times of war and unrest someone is just trying to have a little fun LIGHTEN UP" (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=6837). Whether said with a smile or out of disgust, such assertions blame those victimized by racism for their condition, treatment, and experience. [28]

Still other posters argued that there were many more important issues in Indian Country. For instance, "Big Nomics" encouraged American Indians to stop "complain[ing] they were portrayed the wrong way" and instead direct their attention to real issues plaguing their communities, such as "drugs or gang violence" (http://pub12.ezboard.com/fpoliticalpalacefrm21.showMessage?topicID=223.topic). Likewise, "Yoka the Koka" remarked: "I think personally that we as people, Americans, or otherwise are too concerned with defending something silly as a certain 'look' or 'heritage'" (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=60146). "moses" grounded this rather abstract retort in his own experience, "WHEN I CAN GET MY UNCLEs [AWAY] FROM THAT ALOCHOL AND ALCOHOLISM THEN I'LL WORRY BOUT OUTCAST" (http://www.ndnsports.com/forums/topic.asp?TOPIC&lowbar;ID=4646). "pomowariorwoman" spoke with more resignation: "Native people have attempted to erase these stereotypes for a long time now, and I'm not going to worry about trying to convince them to see us in a certain light. I'm living my light the way I want to, and this just doesn't seem important to me that's all. If those who are offended by it do something to make them feel better, that's okay too. Either way, the show is over" (http://www.indianz.com/TalkingCircle/MessageBoard/topic.asp?TOPIC&lowbar;ID=5049). By limiting racialized social problems to drugs, alcoholism, and gangs, they trivialized efforts to achieve social justice and equality. [29]

Pride is a fourth argument used to rebut the arguments of those who were critical of OutKast’s performance. The assertion is that, knowingly or not, OutKast was embracing and celebrating indigenous peoples. "Icebound17" declared: “People it is 2004, don’t take everything so offensive. If anything, he was given props to Native Americans” (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=6798). Similarly, "aplife4ever" asserted: “Calm the hell down! People here are writing about how Andre 3000mocked the indians, but he didn’t. He didn’t come out saying, ‘Hey look at me, I’m an indian and this all we do!’ Instead, I you should be proud that he chose to pick the
indian culture" (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=6798). For these fans, OutKast demonstrated its respect for American Indians. According to "Not offended," they "put Native on the map . . . . Dre and Boi respect natives. We think that Dre should say thank you instead of saying sorry" (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=6798). [30]

Finally, defenders of the group invoke style to disavow racism. "MVPrincss" asserted that the performance was not intended to be racist, but reflected the unique style of OutKast, who were trying to "give a new and different type of performance" (http://216.120.155.25/Boards/phpbb&lowbar;arista/viewtopic.php?t=6837). "djjayr" underscored the importance of artistic freedom: "If they knew anything about Andre 3000, they'd know he is very articulate and dresses very wild and crazy. He's performed his number several times wearing different outfits but yet still keeping the color green, like the theme of his music video. He an artist!" (http://pub12.ezboard.com/fpoliticalpalacefrm21.showMessage?topicID=223.topic). Clearly, fans of OutKast believe that one can detach style from race. [31]

Although there are important contextual differences between the defense for OutKast and the adoration for Schott, they both disavow racism. Whereas those mourning the passage of Schott stressed her humanity, positive outlook, nostalgia, and honesty, those defending OutKast tended to emphasize intention, sensitivity, significance, pride, and style. Each of these strategies acknowledges the possible or perceived impropriety of Schott's utterances and OutKast's performance, but denies the veracity of racism, thus undermining efforts to establish discrimination, maltreatment, and injury. For all intents and purposes, supporters of Schott and OutKast lament the passing of what they perceive to be a better, more open, and more authentic era, where people responded rationally and talked openly about race. The discourse of racial disavowal explains away racism as well as the racialized social fields it struggles to describe through individual agency. Character (Schott's honesty and humanity, OutKast's style) and an authentic self (nostalgia, mistakes, intentionality) trivialize the sociality and historicity of racism. Any movement toward equity and inclusion is dismissed as an example of political correctness. [32]

**Trivializing anti-racism**

I now focus on those readings of racism that turn attention away from the social and concentrate on the individual to illustrate how anti-racist practice can work against itself. In an editorial in the New York Daily News, Kenneth Jacobson (1996) of the Anti-Defamation League asked: "Why the big deal about Marge Schott?" He suggests two answers. First, Schott is ignorant. She does not know the facts about Hitler or understand the causes and consequences of his actions. Second, Schott's comments reflect and reinforce deep-seated hatred, which Jacobson describes as a disease, which, if not caught early, manifests itself in violence. He thus encourages Major League Baseball and contemporary American society in general to take action against Schott: "Those who purvey hatred but also do 'constructive things' . . . resemble a large glass of clear water into which one drop of poison is injected; resulting in the whole glass being poisoned." On the one hand, Jacobson argues against the effort by fans and the media to reclaim Schott as a kind-hearted, though outspoken, philanthropist. On the other hand, he reduces racism to the individual level, that is to say, he argues that racism is the result of individual ignorance. Accordingly, he loses sight of the fact that racism and racialized domination is systemically inscribed throughout society. [33]

Tristan Ahtone (2004) offers a more elaborate demonstration of the racism as ignorance argument. Ahtone sees in the OutKast performance "a shining example of one thing: stupidity." Although he rightly surmises that the elements of Indianess incorporated into the show were reflective of common sentiments about indigenous peoples, he suggests that "if there had been one functioning brain among anyone involved in the decision making process," it would have come off differently. The ignorance and lack of critical thinking displayed at the 2004 Grammy Awards reminds him of "another example of how bad behavior stems from stupidity": the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Rather than understand the complex intersections of materiality and ideology, he dismisses the KKK as emerging from "backward stupidity." Drawing a rather biting analogy between OutKast and the KKK, Ahtone reduces racism to underdeveloped and uncivilized individuals who lack common sense and basic knowledge. For him, greater education and awareness is the way to repeat future incidents of this kind. [34]

Both Ahtone and Jacobson individualize the terrors and traumas of racialization. In so doing, they also trivialize it.
Racism is about much more than a lack of maturity or even a lack of education. It is a set of attitudes and arrangements, dispositions and discourses, and ideologies and institutions that together structure rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and identities. To be sure, education is vitally necessary, but if we believe that education alone will suffice to eradicate racism, then we are forgetting just how ingrained racism is within our social and cultural systems. To make individuals the locus of anti-racism activities is to neglect the myriad ways in which societal structures, at every level, are steeped in racist premises and principles. In other words, in expending all our efforts to erase racist attitudes within individuals, we overlook the debilitating and endemic racist features of economic and political life. We are losing sight of the forest for the trees. [35]

Indeed, racism is an ideology, not an individual failing or an idiosyncratic perspective. As Jackman (1994) reminds us, ideology "is a political instrument, not an exercise in personal logic" (p. 69). Ahtone and Jacobson demonstrate the dangers associated with reducing racism to knowledge, feeling, and character. The act of individualizing and psychologizing the social processes and conditions of racialization encourages an appeal to a therapeutic anti-racism (i.e., the correction of ignorance through education and treating hate as a disease). But this interpretive framing not only misconceives of the place of race and racism in the "normal" state of affairs, but also dashes efforts to undo racism. [36]

On (not) apologizing: Notes toward a conclusion
We are perhaps in a better position now to return to Trent Lott. Just as his apology diverted attention away from the structures of power, the (dis)engagements with racism associated with the OutKast outrage and Marge Schott's death countered accusations of racism through appeals to common sense categories validated by colorblindness. And as Lott endeavored to hold onto old-style racism in the present, those who supported Schott and OutKast energized new racism through a language that equated racialized power with the thoughts and feelings of individuals. Even anti-racist assessments limited the scope and significance of race by individualizing racism, thus reducing its systemic features to the (deviant) individual who needs either therapy or education. [37]

What can we learn from all this? Simply put, it is not enough to teach pluralistic and superficial tolerance, because such understandings of diversity too often dovetail with dominant interests and ideologies. Rather, anti-racist pedagogy demands at least four inter-related undertakings to expose the intersections of signification, power, and race. First, teaching against racism means teaching about racialization, not simply race. That is, we need to equip students with the tools to recognize, engage, and challenge the (re)constructions of racial identities, ideologies, and hierarchies. Second, the teaching of anti-racist media literacy must be rooted in a pedagogy that directs its attention toward the disruption of white supremacy as a structured social system. Third, this type of media literacy must be comparative, stressing the ways in which human communities, social problems, cultural norms, corporeality, identity, possibility, pleasure, and privilege have been racialized differently for Euro-Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanic Americans. Finally, anti-racist pedagogy can make the biggest difference when it teaches and passionately joins the key conflicts of the day. [38]

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE
C. Richard King is an associate professor in the Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies at Washington State University. His research concentrates on the racial politics of culture. He is particularly interested in the forms of memory, representation, identity, and sovereignty animating Native American and Euro-American relations. He has explored these themes in the context of expressive culture (museums, tourism, and sports) and political struggles (indigenous activism concerned with representation, naming, and history). He has written extensively on the changing position of Native Americans in post-Civil Rights America, the colonial legacies and postcolonial predicaments of American culture, and struggles over Indianness in public culture. His work has appeared a variety of journals: American Indian Culture and Research Journal, Journal of Sport and Social Issues, Public Historian, and Qualitative Inquiry. He is also the author/editor of four books, including Team Spirits: The Native American Mascot Controversy (a CHOICE 2001 Outstanding Academic Title) and Postcolonial America. He is presently completing work on Telling Achievements: Native American Athletes in Modern Sport and The Encyclopedia of Native Americans and Sport.

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