

Not Qwhite Name Calling in Appalachia

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Redneck, hillbilly, cracker... it is all name calling. While most would agree that name calling is inappropriate and immature social behavior, it is not enough to simply say that it is so. We must look beyond the hurtful and yet sometimes playful preadolescent language game of "name calling" and closely examine the more crucial language game of "name calling" that exists within the larger context of the politics of language. If, as Wittgenstein insists in "The Philosophical Investigations," the different uses of language operate like different sorts of games (Wittgenstein, html), we must understand the rules and objectives of this name calling game. We must ask ourselves "what's in a name," "who gets to do that naming," and, perhaps the most important question, "what power relationships exist among those who are named and those who get to do the naming?"

What's in a name? What is the significance of a word? For Paulo Freire, the name and the word are very significant because "human existence cannot be silent nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist humanly is to name the world" (Freire, html). According to Freire, one cannot truly be human unless they are willing to take part in the naming of the world. In addition, one cannot truly be human unless one is doing the naming and is not merely the named. Pejorative terms such as "redneck" and "hillbilly" are problematic in that they are both self-referential and appropriated by others. In order to fully understand how the politics of language functions

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"A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose."

— Gertrude Stein

in terms of power, we must not only do a genealogy of the terms, but must also do a genealogy of *naming* itself.

In contemporary society, the improvements in the technological tools that we use to shape the world around us have blinded us to the value of the technologies of power that exist in language itself. Carl Jung, in *Healing the Split*, commented on this phenomenon when he argued that in a modern technological society, words were stripped of their *numinousness*. For Jung, in modern terms, concepts like “physical matter” have stripped terms like “Mother Earth” of their numinous connotation (275). These discursive formations are further stripped of that same numinous by becoming clichés such as “It is not nice to fool Mother Nature.” Jung borrows the term *numinous* from the theologian, Rudolph Otto, who coined the term to describe what is *wholly other*. This idea of a *numinous* connects to author of *Language and Myth*, Ernst Cassirer’s assumption that “the essence of each mythical figure” could be “learned from its name.” For Cassirer “the notion that name and essence bear a necessary and internal relation to each other, that the name does not merely denote but actually is the essence of its object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in the name – this is one of the fundamental concepts of mythmaking consciousness” (3). It is within this mythmaking consciousness that the *numinous* takes on the flesh and bone of meaning and becomes words.

Ernst Cassirer sets up a methodological principle based on the “doctrine of the intimate relation between names and essences, and of their latent identity” (3). In Cassirer’s analysis, the “spirit of myth” functions as a “living and immediate conviction” that can be used as “a postulate of reflective procedure for the science of mythology” (3). While “name calling” cannot necessarily be seen as mythology in the classical sense, there is a great deal of “myth” that stands behind any term that *names* a group of people and uses that *naming* to essentialize or stereotype that group of people. Just as our own *names* help to define who we are, our collective names also contribute to the shaping of our identities. Although Cassirer was not specifically speaking about the kind of naming discussed here (name calling), he does illustrate the importance of the name:

For even a person’s ego, his very self and personality, is indissolubly linked, in mythic thinking, with his name. Here the name is never a mere symbol, but is part of the personal property of its bearer. And the name may even acquire a status above the more or less accessory one of a personal possession, when it is taken as a truly substantial Being, an integral part of its bearer (50).

One of the most striking scenes in the television miniseries *Roots* takes

place near the beginning of the film when the overseer whips the main character, Kunta Kinte, repeatedly and asks “What’s your name?” For Cassirer, “the unity and uniqueness of the name is not only a mark of the unity and uniqueness of the person, but actually constitutes it; the name is what first makes man an individual” (51). While Haley admits that his genealogy is a *faction* (a fiction based on historical fact), this visual representation in the film is similar to Olaudah Equiano’s resentment of being named Gustavus Vassa by his oppressor, Captain Pascal. The “owner’s” practice of taking away the identity of slaves by naming them demonstrated the power that the “owner” had over his “property.” These examples illustrate how the oppressor uses the power of language to *name* the oppressed individually; however, we must admit that there is an equally powerful and insidious project going on when the oppressor names an entire group of people rather than just naming them individually. For mountain folk, those names are redneck, hillbilly, or cracker. Words may seem to have lost their *numinous* in our advanced technological society, but language still functions as a technology of power just as it always has.

Since Cassirer has grounded his methodological principle in myth and since Jung sees a power in mythical language that is not apparent in a modern technological society, perhaps we should turn to a mythology to help explain the power of *naming* within the politics of language. The ancient Israelites believed that their god, Yahweh, spoke the universe into existence: “By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth” (Ps. 33:6). Yahweh said “Let there be light, and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). The ancient Israelites understood the power of language because it was through language that Yahweh created the world *ex nihilo* or out of nothing. In addition, the ancient Israelites believed that there was so much power in knowing the *name* of the gods that they could not say it because knowing the name – being able to *name* the gods – in the ancient world would give mortals power over the gods. That is why the term Yahweh is used. Essentially, it means “I am that I am” (as explained in Exodus): “And God said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14).

After creating the heavens and earth, the birds in the sky and the creatures on the ground, Yahweh then “in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27) “And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Because Yahweh “spoke the universe into existence,” “created man and woman in his own image,” and “gave them dominion over every living thing that moves on earth,” Yahweh also gave them the imagination to “name” those living creatures they had dominion over.

These “naming rights” are important (in a mythical sense) because, according to Cassirer, “whatever has been fixed by a name, henceforth is not only real, but is Reality. The potential between ‘symbol’ and ‘meaning’ is resolved; in place of a more or less complete congruence between ‘image’ and ‘object’ between the name and the thing (58). Essentially, even the ancient Israelites could understand how reality was socially constructed through the practice of “naming.”

Now that we have established the importance of the name and answered the question “what’s in a name,” we must move on to the question, “who gets to do the naming?” While Cassirer and Jung fail to identify who gets to do this naming and the ancient Israelites only suggest that “man” (whatever that might mean) has dominion over the earth and all of the animals that walk upon it, a careful reading of Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, and Gayatri Spivak would suggest that historically the dominant classes are those who “name the world” and that because the oppressed – those of us hill folk who are subalterns – do not get to participate in a dialogue of that naming, we are relegated to the subordinate role of being the named and as a result are denied our humanity. Not only does this dynamic – the relationship between the named and those who do the naming – resonate in terms of the politics of language, but is also the foundation of the allocation of resources in terms of economics.

For the most part, mountain folk – rednecks and hillbillies – identify with our culture because of our inability to relate to the dominant groups around us and their cultural capital. As a result, redneck culture emerges as a site of identification. This is a lengthy subconscious process that functions as a result of our internalizing that which is meaningful to us. Following Althusseur, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusseur 109) and “Ideology has material existence” (Althusseur 112). In addition, “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (Althusseur 115). Althusseur complicates Marx’s understanding of the relation between the base and superstructure in his concept of “ideological state apparatuses.” These ideological state apparatuses are often very disparate (ISA’s include religion, family, culture, education, etc.), however, according to Althusseur, they are unified by subscribing to a common ideology in the service of the ruling class. Althusseur writes “To my knowledge, no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses” (Lenin, 98). Hill folk name calling often occurs when we transgress against the behavioral norms of the dominant classes. When we cease to act “white,” they call our whiteness into question by naming us “other.”

What is particularly striking about many of the terms used to describe hill folk is that we often wear these names like a badge of honor. As Dorothy Allison

explains, we “claim our heritage with a full appreciation of how often it has been disdained” (xvi) – we are comfortable with the rest of the world thinking of us as Montgomery Ward Snopes – “a son of a bitch’s son of a bitch” (Padgett, html). One of the burning questions here is how can words like *redneck*, *hillbilly*, and *cracker* be both badges of honor as well as markers of difference and shame? How can these words function in one context for those who do the *naming* and in another context for those who are the named? In addition, we must ask “Who owns these words” and “who gets to decide what these words signify?”

The term *redneck* can be traced back to 17th century Scotland to the National Covenant of 1638 and its sister document, the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643. These documents were religious and political documents that formed a treaty of alliance between the Covenanters of Scotland and the Parliament of England during England’s civil war with Charles I. What is central in these documents (at least for the Covenanters – those proto-rednecks of Scotland) is their rejection of episcopacy (bishop’s rule) and their insistence upon the more democratic traditions of their own Church of Scotland. According to legend, many of these Covenanters signed these documents in their own blood and began wearing red pieces of cloth around their neck to signify their solidarity with the Church of Scotland and the term *redneck* became slang for a Scottish dissenter. Many of these Scottish dissenters were relocated from the Scottish lowlands to Ulster during the 17th century and then later migrated to North America throughout the 18th century (Fischer). Because many of these Scots-Irish and Scots finally settled Appalachia and the South, the term *redneck* was brought with them from Scotland and persisted along with many of the other cultural practices and markers of the Scots and Scots-Irish.

Another popular explanation for the term “redneck” is that it is derived from those laborers who had a red neck caused from working outdoors in the sun over the course of their lives. Some historians trace this term back to 17th century Virginia because European indentured servants were sun burnt while working in the fields. While the previous explanation of the origin of the word, *redneck*, can be linked to dissent or resistance, this explanation of the term has a clear connection to the exploitation of labor in 17th century Virginia. This exploitation of labor extracted from the poor whites of England and Scotland is directly connected to the enclosure movements that took place as a consequence of the establishment of private property in England and, because of this connection to private property, can also be somewhat connected to the first machinations of capitalism that sprung up after the Middle Ages (Fischer).

The term *hillbilly* is similar to terms like *redneck* and *white trash* in that it, too, is a pejorative. While *redneck* can be seen as a sociohistorical term that is

connected to resistance, *hillbilly* is a term that marks those who come from remote and rural areas. Because the First Families of Virginia owned much of the valuable Tidewater land along the coast and us down and out rednecks had to fend for ourselves out on the frontier, *hillbilly* can also be seen as a class specific term in that it describes those who farmed the poorer land beyond the pale. While rednecks can be seen as people who reject or resist assimilation into the dominant culture, a *hillbilly* is more “innocent” in that the *hillbilly* has no knowledge of a dominant culture to reject.

The term “Hill-Billies” first appears in documents from 17th century Ireland and is connected with the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 where Protestant King William III, Prince of Orange, defeated the Roman Catholic, King James II. Many of those who served in William’s army were Ulster Scots who Catholic supporters of James II referred to as “Hill-Billies” and “Billy Boys.” Not only were these terms a part of the cultural equipment that immigrating Scots-Irish from Ulster brought with them to America – that is, not only was this term self-referential – but it is believed that the term “hillbilly” was also used by occupying British soldiers to refer to the Scots-Irish that occupied the frontier regions of the Appalachians in the 18th century (BBC, html).

Just as the terms redneck and hillbilly can trace their origin to the Scots-Irish and are markers of social class, the term cracker also shares a similar race specific and class specific origin. The term “cracker” finds its origin during Elizabethan England and was used at the time to describe a braggart. The Middle English word “crack” means “entertaining conversation” and even in contemporary times, folks still “crack” jokes. The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines the term crack or craic (a Gaelic spelling) as being associated with “fun, enjoyment, abandonment, or lighthearted mischief; often in the context of drinking or music” (html). In this context, one could associate this term with a working class or peasant amusement – Rabelaisian carnivale. In Shakespeare’s *King John* (1595), Austria asks “what cracker is this... that deafes our ears/ With this abundance of superfluous breath?” (Act 2, Scene 1, Line 150), illustrating how it was used in the late 16th century.

By the 1760’s, the term was used to refer to Scots-Irish settlers in the American South. A letter to the Earl of Dartmouth reads: “I should explain to your Lordship what is meant by Crackers; a name they have got from being great boasters; they are a lawless set of rascals on the frontiers of Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, and Georgia, who often change their places of abode” (McWhiney, xiv). The 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines cracker as being a term of contempt for the “poor” or “mean whites” (in the British vernacular, the word “mean” is a term for those living in poverty. It is important to note that this implies the opposite of a “gentleman”). *Brittanica* traces the usage of this term back to the

American Revolution and, in contrast to the term cracker being a term that is exclusively applied to and associated with the Scots-Irish, suggests that it is derived from the “cracked corn” that those poor or “mean whites” ate. This thesis on the origin of the term is supported by the sociologist, Horace Kephart in *Our Southern Highlanders* who writes “As the plantations expanded these freed men (formerly bond servants) were pushed further and further back upon the more and more sterile soil. They became ‘pinelanders,’ ‘corn-crackers,’ or ‘crackers.’”

Kephart’s analysis is an example of how these terms have changed over time to mark or name people differently. Initially, these terms were used to mark or name people as an ethnicity. Over time, these terms moved from being markers of ethnicity (that were likely self-referential as well as pejorative) to being markers of material conditions that suggested rustic and/ or impoverished ways and means of living. In more contemporary discourses, these terms do not conjure up images of ethnicity or material conditions, but instead conjure up images of a people who are morally and culturally bankrupt. Essentially, redneck hillbilly crackers are not redneck hillbilly white trash crackers because of ethnicity or social class, we hill folk are redneck hillbilly crackers because of our lifestyle choices. Because we have a choice – a choice between being redneck hillbilly crackers and being white people – it is our own fault that we are treated like the Rodney Dangerfields of Whiteness. It is our own fault because we made that lifestyle choice and self-selected as the creepy uncle all by himself in the corner of the kitchen during the Whiteness holiday party.

While class is what is really meant when this naming takes place, Whiteness is an ideology that diffuses class antagonisms, so it cannot use that referent when it “names” these particular others and must do so metaphorically. For example, in *Sunset Trailer Park*, Allan Berube writes “other whites who looked down on us because of where we lived could call my whiteness into question. Ashamed, I kept these and other social injuries to myself, channeling them into desires to learn about how to act and look more white, and to find other ways to move up and out of this life that more and more felt like a trap I had to escape” (33). Annalee Newitz also speaks of how the term redneck operates metaphorically when she writes “when middle-class whites encounter lower-class whites, we find that often their class differences are represented as the difference between civilized folks and primitive ones. Lower class whites get racialized, and demeaned, because they fit into the primitive/civilized binary as primitives” (134).

In this sense, Newitz is speaking to the idea that whiteness is somehow connected to the philosophical concept of “modernism” and the social and ideological consequences of the industrial revolution. As society moved into a more “modern” ideological framework, localized or rural cultures were devalued and discursive practices evolved into technologies of power and systems of knowledge

that sought to legitimize these values. Because industrial manufacturing relied on discursive practices that gave legitimacy to systems of value that were best suited to an economic calculus, many older systems of values were delegitimated because they were not useful to capitalism. While academia embraces many of these delegitimated cultures, often with the support of the ruling class, they only do so after these cultures no longer pose any threat to capitalism; after the possibility of resistance is no longer an option.

Because us hill folk are associated and associate themselves with whiteness and are only talked about “metaphorically,” we often fall through the cracks of the multicultural sieve and the preservation and reclamation of our history and culture is lost. This oversight is the result of us hill folk not seeing ourselves and not being seen as a race or an ethnicity. If race is defined as being “a family, tribe, people or nation belonging to the same stock” or “a class or kind of people unified by community of interests, habits or characteristics,” (Webster, 1509) then we certainly fit that definition. While many who subscribe to the material constructions of race would be uncomfortable with us hill folk being called a race, those who subscribe to the idea that race is a socially constructed ideology should be comfortable with that definition in that we are different from the normative parameters of Whiteness and that through this difference, a rearticulation of the meaning of race (Winant, 40) can take place.

In addition, this reinterpretation of race can be done without impeding class alliances (Winant, 49). Finally, Newitz’s suggestion that Whiteness is racialized is only done so by those who are not rednecks. While Berube talks about his whiteness being racialized by others, this racialization involves one being named by others. Malcolm X writes that “a race of people is like an individual man; until it uses its own talent, takes pride in its own history, expresses its own culture, affirms its own selfhood, it can never fulfill itself” (html). Therefore, we hill folk cannot effectively “name the world” until we see ourselves as being racialized within the ideological social construct of Whiteness.

Since the 17th century, there have been times when us hill folk have *named* ourselves redneck hillbilly crackers self-referentially – there have been times that this *naming* has been a name of our own choosing. For example, one popular theory about how the name *redneck* came to be associated with us rural folks comes from members of the United Mine Workers who, like those Covenanters of Scotland, tied red bandanas around their necks to signify their solidarity in the early 20th century (Giardina). Like those rednecks from Scotland, these rednecks were rednecks as an act of resistance – working class resistance to the oppressive labor conditions of a mechanized modern world. While folks from the South have not always been sympathetic to the American Labor Movement and at times have been

downright hostile toward organized labor, there is a very strong strain of resistance to authority and oppression in us rednecks (whether that oppression comes from a centralized Church of England or the central authority of those who owned both the means of production and the vehicles of consumption in Appalachia).

The more contemporary cultural phenomenon of the “Blue Collar Comedy Tour” is another example of how we are *naming* ourselves. Jeff Foxworthy, Bill Engvall, and Ron “Tater Salad” White use the self-deprecating humor of us redneck hillbilly crackers to engage us in a Rabelaisian carnivale in comedy clubs and on cable channels across America. In addition, Larry the Cable Guy, another member of the “Blue Collar Comedy Tour,” not only engages us on the stage and on television, but has also enjoyed considerable success in feature length films. As a result of his success, phrases like “Git her done!” have worked their way into the lexicon of most of the Southern citizenry (even if we don’t like saying it). In addition, comedian Lee Roy Mercer, famous for the catch phrase, “I’ll whoop your ass!”, has developed his comedy around what I would consider to be the Appalachian past time – NASCAR racing. On his latest NASCAR comedy album, the band, “cattleAxe,” a group marketing themselves as the NASCAR band, performs the song “American Redneck.”

Charlie Daniels, a fellow country music artist, also uses these terms self-referentially and claims that “what most folks call a Redneck, ain’t nothin’ but a workin’ man” (Bultman, 5). While some would argue that these popular culture depictions of rednecks are just simply that – popular culture depictions – one must remember that us hill folk are much more inclined to write a song about our politics (whether it be “16 Tons” by Tennessee Ernie Ford or “Okie From Muskogee” by Merle Haggard) than we are to engage in an academic or scholarly argument about those same politics. In addition, one must remember that self-deprecating humor is also an enormous part of any working-class discourse.

While many scholars would overlook these popular culture representations or consider them to be unimportant, this is a discourse in which us hill folk use to name the world; this is a discourse that we feel comfortable with and that we feel that we have control over. However, this is also a discourse that is a discourse of Rabelaisian carnivale. It is a discourse of self-deprecating humor as well as a vehicle in which we can “get our drink on” and “daintz” the night away. The politics in songs like “Okie from Muskogee” by Merle Haggard or “Lord Have Mercy on the Workin’ Man” by Travis Tritt are explicit, but these political messages get lost in the shuffle of a Texas Two Step. In order for this kind of music to be real protest music, Dick Clark has to say “I’ll give it a nine for its politics but you really can’t dance to it” on Bandstand and that is simply not going to happen.

The challenge that we face in terms of *naming* the world through this kind of discourse is that while we do name the world, we do it within the confines of

the Rabelaisian carnivale and while carnivale has within it the capacity to suspend the social order, it does not have within it the capacity to change the social order. While us hill folk might do as Toby Keith says, “get drunk and be somebody,” come Monday, we’ll all just be Brooks and Dunn’s “Hard Workin’ Man” again. The Blue Collar Comedy Tour, NASCAR racing, and Country Music provide a safety valve in which we can let off steam and, at the same time, name the world, but it does not provide us with a “pressure cooker” to use as a vehicle to facilitate some political change and transform our world. Essentially, The Blue Collar Comedy Tour, NASCAR, and Country Music are amusements that the oppressor will tolerate so long as we show up to work on Monday morning ready to be exploited. We can be weekend rednecks serving in the reserve army of the Nation of Appalachia, but when push comes to shove, the only army we really belong to is the industrial army of American capital.

In addition to these popular culture representations of words like *redneck*, *hillbilly*, and *cracker*, there have been some attempts by us to name the world for ourselves. For example Dorothy Allison writes:

What it comes down to is that I use ‘trash’ to raise the issue of who the term glorifies as well as who it disdains... And of course these days, I feel like there is a nation of us - displaced southerners and children of the working class. We devour paperback novels and tell evil mean stories, value stubbornness above patience, and a sense of humor more than a college education. We claim our heritage with a full appreciation of how often it has been disdained. And let me promise you, you do not want to make us angry (xvi).

Allison’s warning that “you do not want to make us angry” suggests that we are quick to come to violence – we will become Montgomery Ward Snopes, a “son of a bitch’s son of a bitch,” – if push comes to shove. We are willing to violate those unwritten rules of decorum and show you how “the cows eat the cabbage” if we are pushed far enough. We may not have much and we may not look like much, but we will resist much. Our whole identity is tied up into the act of resistance. Cultural critic, Jim Goad, echoes the sentiments of Dorothy Allison when he writes:

A redneck, as I define it, is someone both conscious of and comfortable with his designated role of cultural jerk. While hillbillies and white trash may act like idiots because they can’t help it, a redneck does it to spite you... In the same way that stubborn mules are often able to make their owners look like asses, the redneck has the troublesome capacity to make ironic sport of the greater public’s repulsion/ fascination with him (84).

Goad’s definition of rednecks posits the redneck as being hill folk with attitude – a rustic identity that not only transgresses the “normative behavior” of Whiteness, but one that does so knowingly and willingly. Therefore, hill folk can be seen as a kind of rural identity that not only does not identify with the normative behavior of Whiteness but one that also does not self-identify with the normative behavior of Whiteness. This is precisely where the category of Whiteness as it applies to those poor whites that exist within what Kirby Moss calls “the paradox of privilege” is most problematic and breaks down. This is precisely where the material conditions of social class complicate the socially constructed categories of race.

One of the common threads that run within all of the descriptions of rednecks is “work,” illustrating the economic underpinnings of both of the terms. David Roediger writes, “the phrase working man speaks at once... of a class identity and of a gender identity. But its actual usage also suggests a racial identity, an identification of whiteness and work so strong that it need not even be spoken” (19). This racial identity that, according to Roediger, doesn’t need to be spoken is an integral part of nearly all metaphorical descriptions of rednecks and at the same time, the relationship of class to race and ethnicity that these descriptions suggest illustrates the “paradox of privilege” (Moss) that separates rednecks from whiteness. Constance Perin writes that “a culture’s silences are the most familiar to its members” (Moss, 5) and Goad’s assertion that the redneck identity is somehow connected to resistance, illustrates how rednecks are communicating what they consider to be “familiar” – they are trying to “name the world” (Freire) within the confines of a cultural construction (Whiteness) whose privilege is dependent upon the silence of that same familiarity.

One of the characteristics that the redneck identity shares with the ideological social construct of whiteness is that neither identity posits itself as a racial or ethnic identity. While Barbara Ehrenreich illustrates how Whiteness is seen as being a normative identity when she suggests that many whites think of themselves as being ethnically neutral and that because they are white, they are hovering somewhere above the fray in terms of their ethnicity, (Ehrenreich) and, according to James Webb, those Scotch-Irish who were originally the proto-redneck identities, are not likely to see themselves as ethnic subjects (Webb, 8), there is still a discursive undercurrent that runs through all of the pejorative terms applied to those poor whites who exist within the paradox of privilege (Moss). Whether we are called rednecks, hillbillies, peckerwoods, crackers, lint heads, bumpkins, or anything else, we are separated from Whiteness in that we exhibit non-normative behavior. If we conformed to this “normative behavior” and fit within the parameters of whiteness, then there would have been no exigence for the hegemony’s naming us in the first place. Because pejorative terms like redneck and hillbilly exist within

the discourse in the first place, it only stands to reason that there must be some difference between us and the parameters of what it means to be white.

This marked difference – the hegemony’s need to name this group of people – is why all of these terms are essentially the same (in terms of being pejorative terms and racial epithets), even though they often conjure up different images when they are used. For example, the word bumpkin conjures up the image of an identity that resembles Gomer Pyle while the term redneck conjures up a different image entirely. Throughout my own work, I often use many of these terms interchangeably and in the same sentence. I do this to illustrate that although these terms are epithets and pejoratives, they do not bring the reader to rage or disgust or even pity the way other racial or ethnic epithets might if they were written in their place. By illustrating how these charged terms are viewed by readers as being perfectly neutral and acceptable, I hope to provide a metacognitive example of just how invisible us subalterns (Gramsci, Spivak) really are.

The nexus where all of these terms describing poor working class whites intersect is that when anyone except for a poor working class white uses a term like redneck or hillbilly, they are using a racial epithet that calls their Whiteness into question. Berube says they were calling his Whiteness into question, illustrating that he and his family, because of their economic situation, existed outside the “normative behavior” of Whiteness. They were a discursive anomaly within the social construction of Whiteness that illustrated the “paradox of privilege” (Moss). While one could argue that these other whites weren’t making it perfectly clear what race or ethnicity it was that Berube and his family were, his family was most certainly not white.

Whiteness differs from other racial and ethnic constructions because it is an identity that is defined by “what it is not”, is “ethnically neutral” (Eirenreich) and, according to Webb, culturally does not acknowledge itself as an ethnicity while debating social issues (Webb, 8). Because the categories of race, class, and gender are often portrayed and seen as mutually exclusive categories, the redneck identity is not often seen – after all, how do you posit Whiteness against Whiteness? In his book, *Working Toward Whiteness*, David Roediger suggests that America’s immigrants are “in between Whiteness” in that they have yet to move from poor urban centers to comfortable middle class lives in the suburbs. However, Roediger’s conclusions are based on and revolve around an urban population from the industrial North. Surely a culture evolving from the agricultural rural South could not have developed in the same way. In contrast to Roediger’s hybrid identity of “in between whiteness,” rednecks are, to coin a term, “not qwhite.”

Because those of us who are not qwhite are seen and see ourselves as being white, we exist within the “paradox of privilege” and because we see ourselves

as being a part of the dominant white power structure, we reinforce the very structure that oppresses us and prevents us from “naming the world.” Moreover, because we are seen as a part of the dominant white power structure and as a result, an unconscious and unquestioned racial line is drawn between the terms “poverty” and “working class” (Moss), those of us who are not qwhite remain an invisible ethnic group in American society who are “without lobbies of [our] own [and] put forward no legislative program. As a group [we] are atomized. [We] have no face, [We] have no voice...” (Harrington, html). One central problem in terms of articulating a not qwhite identity is that there is no marked difference between those who are and historically have been a part of America’s hegemony and those Scotch-Irish proto-rednecks who are not qwhite, nor is there a comprehensive methodology in which to engage in a critical study of what it means to be not qwhite in America... At least not yet.

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