

Book Review

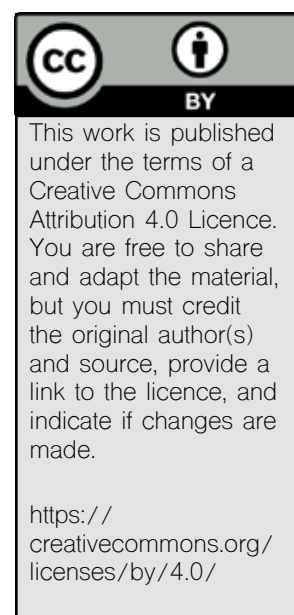
Jane Cabbage (Ed.), *Critical Race Media Literacy: Themes and Strategies for Media Education*
Routledge, 2022; 238 pages

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It seems both timely, and in some ways, inevitable, that media literacy scholars should seek to think about the relationships between critical media literacies and critical race theory. As this book's introduction outlines, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement as a force for change both online and in real life means that issues of race are currently most likely to be played out on social media. This volume seeks to capture the cross-disciplinary encounter between media education, critical pedagogy, activism and cultural studies, because, its editor argues in her forward, it is within this interplay that a kind of 'roadmap' for critical race media literacy can be discerned. Such a roadmap is much needed for both scholars and students of media literacy, and as such the intention of the book is to be welcomed.

There are a very diverse range of perspectives, texts and approaches taken by the book to identify the 'themes and strategies' of the title; and this is undoubtedly one of its strengths; whichever aspects of media education you are interested in – pedagogy, curriculum, textual analysis, industrial practices, students with special needs – there is a relevant essay here. Indeed, this breadth allows for the reader to get a good sense of where the work of critical race media literacy can be usefully done and the way that it is likely to be an important aspect of any media educators work, whether they work in a school, university or other educational setting.

A few examples of this utility, in particular stand out. Evans-Zepeda, Alemán and Castañeda's account of the way that the re-imagined US drama *Party of Five* might be used to explore Latina/o/x identities presents educators with a very simple but powerful set of activities.



These activities entail both critical race readings of the text with some media literacy outcomes, and then harness these themes to a wider social justice agenda. Perhaps most importantly of all, their work acknowledges that this kind of pedagogy maybe difficult in terms of the way that it centres minoritised perspectives, particularly if one is working with white students. This is a valuable reminder of both the challenge, and the necessity of this kind of work. Similarly, the chapter written by Flores-Koulish and Madigan, about enhancing basic skills instruction for students with learning differences, by introducing them to both issues of representation and critical thinking demonstrates the power that media education has to unpack the complex issues of curriculum, pedagogy and educational need that exist in 21st century schools. Finally, Weinhold and Fisher Bodkin's chapter about using *Saturday Night Live* as a text to access critical understandings of race is in many ways a classic piece of textual analysis pedagogy, which media educators around the world will recognise. What makes it innovative though, is its way of using a mainstream TV sketch show to explore, specifically, the ideas of Whiteness and White Fragility which underscore a good deal of liberal media output. In common with Evans-Zepeda et al.'s chapter, the denouement of the chapter sees the tension inherent in middle-class, often white, academics writing about these issues as a potential problem, emphasising, as it does, the distance between white privilege and minoritised disadvantage. All these three chapters (and many others in the collection) offer both clear theoretical insight into issues of critical race media, alongside practical, pedagogical and curricular guidance. The book's helpful mix of scholarly perspective, professional enquiry and practical know-how will be of great appeal to many teachers, academics and media educators more generally, and it is this usefulness that will mean the book will probably warrant a readership outside North America, where its editor and many of its authors are based.

It is this last point that leads me to two small criticisms of the book – which I hope help prompt further discussion and research in this area. Firstly, the structuring of the book sometimes means that the reader is left to work hard to make connections which might have been assisted by some grouping or theming of the essays into distinct sections. For example, both the opening essay, by Jane Cabbage, along with the chapters written by Stevenson et al., and Bill Yousman provide really useful historical and political context to the wider themes and strategies for critical race media literacy identified by the book. These might have been grouped together at the opening to allow the reader to ground their understanding of some of the projects and interventions discussed in other chapters within those specific socio-historical landscapes. Secondly, with the exception of the chapters written by Gordon Alley Young and

Runchao Liu – about discourses of French national identity in the Eurovision Song Contest and ethnic rock music in China, respectively – the book is very focused on North America. In some ways this is only to be expected, given that both critical race theory and the Black Lives Matter movement arise from the interaction of North American activists and academics with pressing issues of race and racism in the North American legal and criminal justice systems. However, not all international readers will be familiar with the education systems, texts and interventions presented in the book; it would be interesting to see perspectives on critical race media literacies from a wider range of countries and contexts here, and I am hopeful that the book will prompt other scholars to take up the call to arms that the book sets out. All media educators should be thinking about critical race issues within their work, and the book provides a perfect opportunity to explore some vibrant and innovative ways of doing this.