

5-1-2018

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Recommended Citation

Mislan, Christina and Carley, Robert F. (2018) "Race, Class and Media: An Introduction," *Democratic Communiqué*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/democratic-communication/vol27/iss2/1>

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D E M O C R A T I C C O M M U N I Q U É

Race, Class and Media: An Introduction

Cristina Mislán and Robert F. Carley

Mislán, Cristina and Robert F. Carley (2018). Race, Class, and Media: An Introduction, *Democratic Communiqué*, Vol. 27. 2018 pp. 1–3.

In attempting to re-ignite an academic journal that remains particularly important within the conjuncture of today's political and societal upheaval, we present a special issue for the *Democratic Communiqué*. With more recent social movements around the ongoing issue of state-sanctioned violence and police brutality—not to mention the more recent (and diverse) student-led social movements against gun violence across the United States—have produced a re-centering of the intersection between race and class in mediated discourses.

Here, pedagogical interventions into the ever expanding capitalist machine of our current media landscape and the ongoing prevalence of police brutality against black Americans—while in this issue the killings of black American males are centered, they do not supersede killings against brown and black women—in urban localities are further explored. In calling for an intervention into the ever increasing police state—not necessarily new in a state that has encroached itself upon those it pillaged in its creation of a slave economy—, this issue comes at critical moment that can offer us a way to make space for what historian Robin D.G. Kelley (1990) has called the “black radical imagination.” As many political, and critical and cultural theorists have already conjectured, we write not to provide an “objective” or detached examination of society's ills, but to provide a “broader narrative, that larger context, to inform the specific struggles for social justice” (McChesney, 2016, 4012)—or to put it as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016) does in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation: how “can we get free in America?”*

The special issue begins with a transcript of Deepa Kumar's keynote lecture at the Union for Democratic Communications 2016 Conference, “Troubled Waters,” that took place on September 29-October 1 2016, in Detroit, Michigan. In this talk, Kumar discusses the prospects and pitfalls for critical left-intellectuals today and the necessity of carrying on the struggle to democratize the university. Kumar frames academic freedom both historically and within the dynamics of political economy to demonstrate that it is a moving target, constantly under assault by elite fractions of society including university administrators who extoll it as a principle and relegate those who use it in the spirit of democratic contention, threat, and challenge to the margins. Kumar asks us to consider the margin as a space through which to foster alliances and build solidarity; a constituent space in which one must begin to perceive themselves and from out of which critical thought emerges.

Emil Marmol offers an intervention into today's media conglomerated landscape, in “Alternative Media as Critical Pedagogical Intervention Against Neoliberalism and Racism.” Marmol underscores the ways in which mainstream corporate and public media continue to marginalize racialized and working class communities. In calling for a critical literacy intervention, Marmol argues for the importance of alternative media and its promises for providing critical pedagogies in mass communication education.

In “Bizarre Dissonances in Baltimore”: Class and Race in the Color-Blind Discourses of Police Violence,” Michael Buozis analyses the ways in which mainstream news coverage “shape[d] the discursive construction of race” in the reportage of protests and police officers' trials in West Baltimore, in the aftermath of Freddie Gray's murder (by police officers). Here, Buozis offers insight into the intersections of race and class discourse, arguing how class “is used to negate or obscure issues of race,” thus pitting discourses of race and class against each other—rather than illuminating how state violence against brown and black communities highlight the ways race

and class inevitably intersect. As Buozis suggests, “color-blind language need not obscure the material realities of injustice.”

Doug Tewksbury’s article “Networking #Ferguson: An Ethnographic Study of Ferguson Protesters’ Online-Offline Community Mobilization” examines what some scholars have called the enmeshing of online and offline politics. Tewksbury’s article, thus, analyzes the role of social media in affectively connecting protesters during the emergence of the well-documented Ferguson Movement—where the raced *and* classed dynamics (albeit not always obvious) of St. Louis, MO emerged into the national spotlight. Here, drawing from an ethnographic study, Tewksbury argues that in the aftermath of the murder of Michael Brown (also enacted by police officers) in Ferguson, MO, “participants found that using participatory media as a connective, discursive space to share information established grassroots counter-narratives to mainstream media accounts.” Furthermore, this “sharing created affective connections that built strong ties within the community, ties that both encouraged and rewarded offline mobilization and knowledge-sharing.”

In releasing this special issue around the same time as the annual conference for the Union for Democratic Communications in Chicago, IL, we hope that the discourses and realities around the intersections of race and class will remain a theoretical and practical priority for communications scholars.

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