

# Whiteness and the Black Fan Imagination: Making Meaning of Whiteness within the Geographies of NASCAR

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.18.2.03>

## Keywords:

Auto Racing;  
Blackness; Southern  
Identity; Whiteness;  
White Space

**Abstract:** This article places its attention on how the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—impact the contestation and negotiation of meaning-making processes in the production and consumption of NASCAR space(s) for Black fans. It was through that vantage point that the participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of whiteness, particularly through an awareness of NASCAR as a White space, how to effectively navigate such a White space, and a contextualization of more recent enactments of whiteness within these spaces. To explore and define Black individuals’ racialized experiences and movements as NASCAR fans from their perspective, this article uses a qualitative approach as grounded in narrative inquiry. Thus, findings demonstrate how Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR, which advances theoretical understandings of how whiteness is perceived and represented in the Black imagination. Informed by Southern regional identity and the navigation of White space, these representations of whiteness as exclusive, fearful, and possessive are made salient through NASCAR’s attachment to racialized cultural values.

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Whiteness can be understood as a system of racialized power that is in a perpetual state of (re)working—accomplished and upheld through several elements such as cultural frames, narratives, symbolic boundaries, and values. In turn, each of these elements works together to maintain and normalize an imbalanced racial hierarchy. That is, whiteness is accomplished through culture, which is oftentimes viewed as the “connective tissues” fused between racial ideologies, practices, and structures (Wray 2014). It is through culture that whiteness is “done,” at which point it becomes important to hone in on culture as an operative lens through which to examine issues of race and racism (West and Zimmerman 1987). The “White space” is one such framework that captures that understanding of whiteness, which suggests that spaces can serve as “areas” where whiteness goes unquestioned and racial oppression is normalized (Anderson 2015). In all, that concept allows for whiteness to be positioned as an embodied disposition, whereby in this sense, culture—such as how we act, believe, and think—is not only a response to but also works to reproduce the systematic modes of separation (both discursive and physical) that exist between Whites and people of color (Anderson 2015).

As it concerns the (re)production of racialized meaning, there is much to be explored regarding how one’s understanding of race and identity is shaped amidst the physical, psychological, and social costs incurred as a Black individual within White spaces—in particular, as it concerns a historically and predominantly White space, such as the physical and discursive spaces associated with the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). That is, mapping the sporting space of NASCAR as “White space” helps elucidate the cultural log-

ics that govern it and how racialized meaning is formed. Enconced within a sporting discourse that has typically been assessed and understood at a hyperlocal level, NASCAR is a sporting body whose aesthetics, culture, and practices have been made both significant and problematic by its Southern dialectics and contingency to whiteness. It is when that “practical” domination of Whites in these spaces interacts with, constructs, and henceforth perpetuates a theoretically entrenched whiteness that a normative sensibility is strengthened and upheld in spaces where Blacks are absent, underrepresented, or outright marginalized when present (Lipsitz 2011; Anderson 2015). In other words, it can be contextually surmised that as a result of that pervasive, rather normative, understanding of whiteness in NASCAR spaces, Black fans are forced to navigate a racialized sporting space that simultaneously perpetuates whiteness as “normal,” and blackness as “other.”

Taken together, there is much to be explored regarding these experiences, as well as the physical, psychological, or social cost of being a Black individual within White spaces, particularly as it concerns a historically and predominantly White space as NASCAR. As such, given that its racialized geographies extend across a multitude of events, locations, scales, and social settings—both on and off the race track—NASCAR is a requisite place through which to explore the subaltern resistance of racially marginalized communities (i.e., Black Americans). Although NASCAR has expanded beyond its southern roots—and recent attempts to distance itself from attachments to a conservative, White cultural nationalism and a related brand of reactionary racial politics in the wake of the 2020 racial unrest experienced throughout the US—it remains to be marked, if not outright stigmatized by past (and present) as-

sociations with personal and institutional-level reports of racism (Lee et al. 2010).

Compounding that further is the fact that since NASCAR's inception in 1948, only a handful of Black drivers have competed at the premier level of the sport, as Wendell Scott and more recently, Darrell "Bubba" Wallace, Jr., have served as the sole two to compete in any significant and sustained manner. Specific to Scott's racing career, NASCAR served as an extension of US society in that it "sought to sustain White supremacy by restricting the movement of African Americans on tracks and enforcing the idea that being a major league driver was a livelihood and cultural identity reserved exclusively for Whites" (Alderman and Inwood 2016:601). Decades later, Wallace has faced similar resistance, albeit less from the organizational body and more so from the sport's contingency of conservative, White fans. The respective stories of both Scott and Wallace are undoubtedly part of a much larger history of the struggles and strides of Black Americans in redefining and refining the terms of their lived experiences and mobility. By extension, so, too, is the experience of the Black fan of NASCAR, who much like their racial counterparts on the track have had to navigate the racialized geographies of "a sport developed primarily by and for White, working-class men [of the South]" (Pierce 2010:9). Likewise, how Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR is a requisite context through which to further observe and make sense of whiteness as it is perceived within the Black imagination.

With that being said, attention should be turned to how the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—have an impact on the contestation and negotiation of meaning-making processes in the production and consumption

of NASCAR space(s). It was through that vantage point that the participants of this study demonstrated a nuanced understanding of whiteness, particularly through an awareness of NASCAR as a White space, how to effectively navigate such a White space (see: Vadeboncoeur 2021 for a detailed examination of "Black placemaking" within NASCAR spaces), and contextualization of more recent enactments of whiteness within these spaces (i.e., in the wake of the 2020 racial unrest experienced throughout the US). Conversations with the participants yielded insight that aligns with hooks' (1992:341) assertion that representations of whiteness are "not formed in reaction to stereotypes, but emerge as a response to the traumatic pain and anguish that remains a consequence of White racist domination, a psychic state that informs and shapes the way Black folks 'see' whiteness." As such, how Black individuals make sense of whiteness, make sense of themselves relative to whiteness, and how whiteness influences their multidimensional experiences—in general, and per the purview of this study, when situated within the realm of sport—requires further exploration. Thus, in providing empirical evidence showing how Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR, I advance theoretical understandings of how whiteness is perceived and represented in the Black imagination.

## Literature Review

It can be argued that whiteness is a prevailing cultural, social, and economic logic that exists within American institutions, social identities, and social relationships (Moore 2007). As a structure of domination, whiteness is most salient when it manifests in interactional spaces, which is "where institutions parameterize interaction, where identities are deployed and accomplished in interaction, and

where meaning through our behaviors is the glue that holds these spaces together” (Brunsmas, Joong Won, and Chapman 2020:9). Moreover, it is through the processes of normalization within White spaces that the interactional work is completed to “accomplish” whiteness and its counterpart, racial exclusion. As such, in White spaces, meaning-making processes that take place there within will determine a position where being White serves as the “default,” while people of color are constructed in opposition as the “other.” As a result, the racialized “other” is generalized into racial stereotypes, which, in turn, are internalized within the cognition of Whites and allow for the perpetuation of race-based discriminatory practices (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2014). Therefore, by spatially normalizing whiteness, blackness is identified as unfit and cultural membership within a given space is “gatekept” (Anderson 2015), all the while a strategy is adopted that ambiguously highlights the “ethos” of said space while downplaying racial matters.

In doing so, Whites can continue reproducing the normalization of whiteness in spaces, much of which can be applied to the sub-cultural sporting space of NASCAR. There is much to be explored regarding how the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—impact the contestation and negotiation of meaning-making processes in the production and consumption of NASCAR space(s). As already noted, the racialized geographies of NASCAR are embodied across a myriad of events, locations, scales, and social settings, which allow for NASCAR to serve as a point of exploration on the meaning-making processes of Black fans. In other words, how might Black fans make sense of whiteness (or even their White counterparts) within NASCAR spaces? To move in

that direction, I argue that our attention must be oriented towards (a) scholarship that speaks to understandings of whiteness through the “Black lens” and (b) an overview of the historical development of NASCAR’s attachment to a distinctly southern, White cultural identity.

### **Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination**

According to hooks (1992:339), scholarship abounds (particularly within the annals of postcolonial studies) on how blackness is perceived by Whites; however, there exists “very little expressed interest in representations of whiteness in the Black imagination. Black cultural and social critics allude to such representations in their writing, yet only a few have dared to make explicit those perceptions of whiteness.” Nearly three decades later, hooks’ observation remains ever-present within the social sciences, as little scholarship has attempted to explicitly interrogate whiteness and White racial identity from the vantage point of Black individuals (see: Robinson 2014). Although a sole focus on whiteness across academic disciplines is relatively nascent, researchers—in particular, and as noted by hooks, scholars of color—have long since been acquainted with the concept of whiteness.

Du Bois (2007:20) conceptualized whiteness as the constitutive measure against which all else (e.g., people of color) is measured, such that whiteness serves as “the one fundamental tenet of our practical morality.” Much like any other racial category, that whiteness serves to be understood as merely a construct that in its malleability, operates to not only exploit people of color on an ordinate scale for immense profit, but to substantiate that whiteness, alone, is inherently better than blackness. It is in

a similar vein that Fanon (2008) spoke to whiteness as having fundamentally distorted blackness, in that it serves as nothing but a creative representation to be negated in the White imaginary. As such, blackness is a representation created for the benefit of whiteness, serving as a mirror for whiteness to know itself. While Fanon admitted that Blacks may be able to comprehend and learn what is meant by whiteness, he contended that they are ultimately betrayed by the reality of their embodied blackness. According to Baldwin (1984), that is only further reinscribed by how whiteness exists in spite (and without knowledge) of blackness. Thus, hooks (1992:340-341) opined that since whiteness grants White individuals the ability to not “see” Black individuals, it is no wonder that

some White people may even imagine there is no representation of whiteness in the Black imagination, especially one that is based on concrete observation or mythic conjecture; they think they are seen by Black folks only as they want to appear...many White people assume this is the way Black people conceptualize whiteness. They do not imagine that the way whiteness makes its presence felt in Black life, most often as terrorizing imposition, a power that wounds, hurts, tortures, is a reality that disrupts the fantasy of whiteness as representing goodness.

Moreover, hooks (1992:346) argued that by “critically examining the association of whiteness as terror in the Black imagination, deconstructing it, we both name racism’s impact and help to break its hold.” It is in this vein that Morrison (1992) positioned the ethical and moral costs of racism as lying within the White psyche. In speaking on “the gaze of whiteness as the unacknowledged norm,” Morrison (1992:90) advocated for the need to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial

subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served.” Similar to hooks, Morrison argued that whiteness (or rather, being White) is a social position that has gone largely under-examined and as a result, leaving whiteness relatively unexamined ignores the construct (i.e., whiteness) on which race, racism, and racial inequities are founded. It is in this vein that it becomes of necessity to critically examine the spaces, experiences, and spectacles that encompass NASCAR, such that the manner by which whiteness manipulates and contours that sporting space for the benefit of some and to the detriment of others.

### **Tracing NASCAR’s Relationship to Southern Identity and Whiteness**

The subculture of NASCAR “emerged as a powerful moral, political, and economic piece of the social mosaic of the modern-day American South,” as well as a discursive formation and system of subjectification that reflects and (re)produces the socio-cultural context in which it persists (Newman and Giardina 2011:40). As such, in NASCAR spaces, whiteness is not only performed, it is on full display such that sporting spaces have historically offered a popular public space through which to make visible the privileges of being White. Given the socio-cultural, -political, and -historical foundations of NASCAR, these spaces can become places where whiteness is provided power and made normal, while any other identity (or set of identities) is confined to the margins as “other.” It is for this very reason that NASCAR has been criticized as an institution that, from the outset, was utilized as a means to “transmit culture—customs, values, history, and habits—‘across the generations’” (Cohodas 1997:14) of the Southern White collective.



However, to understand the discursive power of NASCAR within this context, how the visibility of hyper-White identity politics and the marking of institutional space have reconstituted “a conceptual space for desperately clinging to the social relations of an imagined past” must be considered (King and Springwood 2001:154). As such, as noted, whiteness is not only performed in NASCAR spaces, it is on full display. However, that display of whiteness is not a natural extension of history, but rather serves as a product of social relations enacted by—and empowered through—the preponderance (or lack there) of racial contestation. However, to better reveal that relationship, we need to know how NASCAR developed its uniquely Southern identity, and more pointedly, has served as an embodiment of reactionary, neo-conservative morality, fear, and attachment to whiteness.

To do so is to make apparent the lengths to which NASCAR as an organization—and by extension, as a cultural space—positioned itself alongside a reactionary White, southern-style conservatism; a relationship that has operated in tandem since its growth in the late-1950s and through recent years. In promulgating close ties to a mythologized, racialized southern US, NASCAR—as a social institution—and the modern sport of stock car racing “benefit[ted] from this myth of its rural roots among so-called southern good ole boys” (Hall 2002:630), whereby propagating the exclusionary practices and conservative values of the South, NASCAR brought to life a contextually significant, yet racialized exclusivity (Newman 2007). In addition to the race-based identity politics that defined NASCAR’s parochialism, it served to be very much intertwined with the cultural fabric of the “Industrial Era” of the South. NASCAR’s southern allure (if you will) evolved out of the South’s admiration and celebration of a region-

ally-based individualistic spirit as mythologized in the outlaw status of the “moonshine tripper,” entrenching itself as

a social space where acolytes of the Rebel South could cathartically race with the specters of their Confederate calling...becoming both the quintessential “Southern sport” and the archetypal site of sporting individualism...It became a celebration of white masculine courage, of capitalist ingenuity, and of Southern tradition (and particularly the traditions of patriarchy and racial exclusivity). [Newman and Giardina 2011:39]

By upholding a more localized distinction, NASCAR carved itself a niche among populations of the working class, White South, especially in the advent of the Civil Rights era and the integration of professional and intercollegiate sports teams. Despite the racial barriers being broken through in the sporting industry more broadly, NASCAR remained an exclusively White sport, whose “sovereignty and isolationism” within the U.S. South

permitted the France family and others inside the governing faction to perpetuate all-white participant, owner, and spectator exclusivity within their sport. Grafted onto a pervasive lynch mob vigilantism, Ku Klux Klan—led public spectacles, and spectacles of political racism of the 1960s South, NASCAR emerged as a distinctly conservative sporting and cultural space during the late civil rights era—one seemingly mobilized to maintain, if not celebrate, the white (supremacist) status quo. [Newman and Giardina 2011:38]

That “all-White exclusivity” extended beyond socio-cultural norms and into the politics of the sport, as NASCAR developed close, working relationships with several conservative southern figures throughout much of its growth in the 1950s and into the late-1960s:

NASCAR's first so-called superspeedway opened in 1950 in Darlington, South Carolina, with Gov. and Mrs. J. Strom Thurmond there to celebrate the occasion. In the track's early years, Bob Colvin managed it with a particularly racist tone...In order to create his largest and fastest track, the Alabama International Motor Speedway in Talladega, France developed a close relationship with notorious Alabama governor George C. Wallace. Wallace at one point assured France that he would "do anything...to help make this project possible in Alabama." (In 1972, France chaired Wallace's presidential campaign effort in Florida.) In 1969, France named the rigidly conservative South Carolina politician L. Mendel Rivers NASCAR's commissioner. Rivers lauded France's hospitality on many occasions during the decade and called him "the best fellow on earth." [Hall 2007:272-275]

Thus, by the end of the 1960s, it was no surprise that by "successfully weld[ing] together tough-minded business tactics and conservative politics... the organization was in tune with the South and roaring toward America's future" (Hall 2007:275). While many sports organizations throughout the continents of Europe, North America, and South America were in the process of transformational shifts towards democratic systems then, the "golden era" of NASCAR remained tethered to commercial spheres productive of a cultural, political, and social order as filtered through a political structure of individualism and exclusivity (Hall 2002). That is, NASCAR subculture became "more than a site of motorhead amusement—it had emerged as a powerful moral, political, and economic piece of the social mosaic of the modern-day American South," as well as a discursive formation and system of subjectification that reflects and (re)produces the socio-cultural context in which it persists (Newman and Giardina 2011:40).

In all, when coming into contact with(in) the White spaces of NASCAR, it may come as no surprise that Black individuals navigating those spaces link concepts of distrust, fear, and/or trepidation with the representations of whiteness there within. Thus, seeking a more nuanced understanding of how whiteness makes its presence felt in the experiences of Black NASCAR fans is imperative. To do so is necessary to not only critically examine the representations of whiteness within the Black imagination more broadly but also to offer Black individuals within a historically and predominantly White sporting space (i.e., NASCAR) the opportunity to share their experience, as well as deconstruct and make sense of it. As noted by hooks (1992:345), Black Americans

still feel the terror, still associate it with whiteness, but are rarely able to articulate the varied ways we are terrorized because it is easy to silence by accusations of reverse racism or by suggesting that black folks who talk about the ways we are terrorized by whites are merely evoking victimization to demand special treatment.

Taken together, the objective of this study is to extend the scholarship on the representations of whiteness in the Black imagination by providing a platform to and henceforth exploring how Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR.

## Method

Participants' narratives were examined through critical, feminist, and symbolic interactionist lenses as operationalized within a methodological approach known as critical feminist narrative inquiry (CFNI). From a CFNI perspective, narratives are

considered to be storied spaces. Such an approach to narrative analysis emphasizes the agency of social actors, who are viewed as experts of their respective social worlds. That is, “as agency is enacted in response to rules, routines, territoriality, and reflexivity, the interactions between storytellers and the personal, historical, social, structural, and ideological contexts of their life are explored,” whereby the scrutinization of “the forces and conditions that enable and constrain social actors’ identity, choices, decisions, successes, and challenges [allow] storied spaces [to] be sites of conformity, contest, resistance, defiance, and/or emancipation” (Pitre, Kushner, and Hegadoren 2011:263). In all, a narrative-based approach can allow stories to reveal the social worlds, agentic understandings, and performed realities of the very people who shared them in the first place.

Participants responded to an advertisement posted in an online social media fan group that serves as a virtual space for Black NASCAR fans to share personal experiences, news stories, and engage in a general discussion on matters relating to the sport of NASCAR. Individuals could participate in the study regardless of gender identification and if 18 years of age or older. Specifically, participants needed to (1) consider themselves a fan of NASCAR and (2) racially self-identify as Black or African American. Sixteen individuals inquired about the study, however, three did not follow up to schedule an interview. Thus, a total of 13 individuals were interviewed, 12 of whom identified as men and one as a woman. It should be noted that the terms “Black” and “African American” are used interchangeably in this article, which is in alignment with the participants’ perspectives that both “Black” and “African American” were appropriate terminologies to racially identify them. The terminology “Black” was explicitly used in this article’s introduction since

each of the participants noted that their racial identity (i.e., Black) was more salient than that of their ethnic identity (i.e., African American). Moreover, the terminology “Black” is a more encompassing categorization, which allows for a diversity of experiences—in a socio-cultural and -historical sense—to rise to the surface. Ten participants were married, six of whom had children with their spouses (either one or two children). While each participant was born and raised in the US, seven presently reside in the Southeast, two in the Northeast, two in the Midwest, one in the Southwest, and one in the West. Participants were between the ages of 22 and 61 (average age of 44). Nine participants were finishing or had completed an undergraduate or graduate university degree program, whereas two had a technical diploma. Occupations represented amongst participants included city manager, machine operator, insurance administrator, entrepreneur, and student (two participants indicated that they were retired—one from an executive finance role and the other from the military).

Initial e-mail conversations served to provide information and clarify any questions or concerns about the study. Individuals who chose to participate identified a date and time that was most convenient for their respective schedules to interview. Before each interview, participants were provided with an informed consent form stating that they would be interviewed on their experiences as Black NASCAR fans. Moreover, participants were informed of their right to decline participation at any point in the study, as I considered informed consent to be a continuous process and was steadfast in reminding each participant of their agency to refuse to answer, skip, or transition away from questions with which they did not feel comfortable engaging. Data collection utilized a semi-structured interview format,



which is an established method of data collection within qualitative methods to allow participants to share their experiences, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs. Out of respect for the time of the participants and spatial availability, interviews were conducted by way of either telephone or video communication. Concerning the contextualization of a broader experience for participants, the interview protocol included questions and follow-up probes to conjure related discussion.

Initial interview questions were developed by drawing on themes as identified from the existing literature on space, race, and sport, which were henceforth developed into an interview guide. Thus, the interview guide was constructed in such a way that it would provide early insights into how participants perceive their experiences as fans of NASCAR, as well as provide flexibility for self-identified topics to be raised when and where it was appropriate. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service (I reviewed each transcript following the audio recording to verify accuracy). To add credibility and trustworthiness to the collected data, I provided each participant with a copy of their interview transcript to review and as a means to conduct preliminary member checks. Additionally, to best preserve their respective communications styles, I only edited certain phrases or words that might compromise anonymity for the participants. Any personal identifiers were removed before transcription and pseudonyms were given to each participant.

Most interviews lasted around 1.5 hours, but a handful were 2 to 2.5 hours as participants shared in great depth their respective stories. In total, interviews resulted in over 1,300 minutes of participants' narratives. Narratives were analyzed through mul-

multiple constructions and reconstructions, as well as through a process of de- and re-contextualization of the interviews to identify any similar attributes and prominent differences that would offer nuanced insight into the particular experiences of each participant. As such, analysis began along two lines of inquiry. First, I wanted to gain an understanding of the holistic sense of Black fans' experiences and the relative significance given to individuals and events in their lives. And second, I wanted to critically assess the various forces that influence the level of trust, agency, and voice exacted within their storied spaces. Moreover, narratives were examined to understand the context of Black fans and the relative power said context places on their agency, that which became salient through their accounts of interpersonal interactions and decisions (un)made within their particular social contexts. That is, these interaction-based stories were examined to locate the manners by which the power of ideology (i.e., meta-narratives), and the routines and rules embedded within social structures, might have worked to enable or constrain agency. Additionally, counter-stories were examined, which are narratives where participants' reflexivity (as informed social actors) allowed them to practice agency to resist and/or subvert the oppressive circumstances or environments within which they are located.

Throughout the research process, verification strategies were implemented to ensure that the data were both reliable and valid (Morse et al. 2002). Due to the integration of narrative research with that of a critical, feminist ontological and epistemological disposition particular attention was provided to methodological coherence as an intentioned commitment to give voice to Black fans' experiences in a context where visibility is not typically the norm and to do research "for" Black fans rather than "about" Black

fans. As such, participants from several contexts and experiences who possessed intimate knowledge of the phenomenon were sought. Narratives were analyzed in a dialectical and iterative manner, which included the use of memos that outlined both analytic and interpretive decisions made, as well as the exploration and modification of emergent theoretical ideas resulting from successive data verification. Specific emphasis was placed on the situation of participants' agency and experiences within their everyday embodied circumstances, as well as accounting for my positionalities relative to the participants. For instance, concerning my gaining access to participants, I needed to be particularly mindful of considerations to be made as a researcher of intersecting privileges. To do so, I made initial contact with the social media fan group administrator to introduce myself, the nature of the present study, my intentions for the study moving forward, and provide an appraisal of my personal (and professional) intentionality as a self-identified White scholar seeking the personal experiences of individuals who self-identify as Black or African American. Since my objective was to curate a space for individuals with marginalized racial identities to share their lived experiences, I wanted to acknowledge and embrace my subjectivity as part and parcel of that portion of the research process.

## Findings

As the participants shared their perception(s) and understanding(s) of whiteness, three overarching themes rose to the surface. First, they offered representations of whiteness as exclusive, fearful, and possessive, which they noted were informed, in part, by Southern regional identity and the navigation of White space. Second, participants discussed representations of whiteness as becoming salient

through NASCAR's attachment to racialized cultural values, demonstrating their awareness of (White) NASCAR culture. Third, participants offered their perceptions of Whites, particularly within the purview of how White fans continue to feel as though their local identities are becoming increasingly disenfranchised within a rapidly diversifying sporting space. With that being said, participants' narratives relating to these respective themes are explained in further detail in the sub-sections that follow.

### Realizations of Whiteness: Regional Identity and the Navigation of Southern Whiteness

Southern regional identity is grounded in the cultural and historical differences rooted in chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the resulting organization of space, place, and individuals there within the South. As a result, regional identity is inherently racialized, always being shaped and reshaped according to the norms prescribed by social and political institutions alike (Robinson 2014). Processes of regionalization reinforce and reproduce racialization in ways that root Black American identity in the South. In short, region subsumes differences of class, gender, and sexuality among African Americans in service of one racially authentic Black identity. The relative impact of these processes has, in part, shaped how the participants make sense of and navigate the day-to-day racialized geographies within which they are located.

For some of the participants, their conceptualizations of race and racial interactions were ingrained at an early age from family, the likes of which, I argue, may have been informed by intergenerational collective familial memories of "Old South" racism. For instance, David (entrepreneur, age 36) discussed how growing up in Virginia influenced his percep-

tion of his racial identity. David shared that his understanding of blackness and what it means to be a Black individual was instilled upon him and his siblings at an early age; however, in doing so, he suggested that “being Black” was not only taught but a reflection of lived experiences:

I was taught it... you know, my mom, she was big on us [David and his siblings] being connected to who we are. My uncle was always deeply connected to who we are in talking about that [being Black]. It was taught and then, also, learned at the same time. There’s only so much you can be taught. At some point, you have to take the initiative yourself to start digging into it some more.

Here, David reflected on how he has drawn on regionally ingrained wisdom about race and racism, which he has been able to situate to best engage and navigate the racialized aspects of society. David mentioned that he descends from a lineage of individuals who faced not only enslavement but the ills of Jim Crow as tobacco farmers, which he acknowledged has contributed to his family’s “collective memory” of a stigmatized and traumatic set of lived experiences in the American South.

There’s a lot of good people in the South. Friendly, laid back, slow pace of life... lots of good things. But, being Black in the South also comes with its share of challenges. Between being racially profiled in many places that you go to having your run-ins with law enforcement for no reason.

That notion of “collective memory” has helped shape many African Americans’ attitudes and perceptions of the South and its related cultural attachments, such as that of NASCAR. According to Finney (2014:53), collective memory refers to how a particu-

lar group of individuals remembers the past, and as such, is “used as a cognitive map to orient people’s present behavior,” as well as “offers the opportunity to engage people’s ideas, imaginings, and feelings about the past as a way of understanding how memory informs present actions and planning for the future.” Much like those shared by David, these historical narratives shared by African Americans are shaped by the collective (and individual) “remembrances” that allow for families and communities to be bonded—in this case, by 250-plus year history of chattel slavery, Jim Crow laws, and resultant subordination and oppression. Despite changes in the South’s ethnic, political, and social landscape over time, a relatively uniform Southern White identity endures in attitudes and public culture (Reed 1986), wherein the Black collective response to this reality—whether through resistance, self-improvement, or other means of expression—is truly a reaction to the “White gaze” embedded there within (Finney 2014).

It is in a similar manner that William (project manager, age 52) discussed how growing up in Arkansas influenced his perception of his racial identity, which he viewed as a relational construct. Additionally, William reflected on the impact that race has on his everyday life, suggesting that the concomitantly fixed and fluid nature of the race has made difficult work of navigating the realities of race:

I’m a Black man because that’s the way people see me, and that’s the way people are going to treat me. So it’s important that I maintain a certain decorum when you’re confronted with situations, such as in the workforce. You know, that’s really where your “blackness” comes into play, is more prevalent. When you’re around family and friends, that’s not an important issue, but when you’re at work, there’s certain

things that you can do, certain things you can't do. Some things you can say, some things you can't say. Because they will get perceived negatively, automatically.

As a result of that difficult balancing act, William's discussion lends credence to the reality faced by many African Americans, such that it may become increasingly difficult to locate racial discrimination with certainty, leading them to draw on "tools that allow us to see what [Whites] say, or even do, into their very hearts," to determine whether White individuals (with whom they encounter) are, in fact, racist (Jackson 2008:87). That is particularly true for Black southerners, whose historically intimate interpersonal contact with Whites requires a sophisticated system of negotiation and has resulted in enduring theories of White individuals' behaviors. Thus, participants claimed to have "figured out" White individuals because of that regional-based experiential and epistemological position, gained over generations of proximity to Whites.

That is, despite their experiences with racism in its varied iterations, participants, especially those who were either raised or had parents raised in the South, largely saw themselves as "not worrying" over race. In conversations about their perceptions of race and racism, that overarching narrative was surprisingly consistent across age and class groups. As such, participants could always point to an embodied culprit, a real-life perpetrator of racism, even in structural contexts. They refused the notion of paranoia, taking comfort in what they saw as a known quantity—White racism.

Although born and raised in New York City, James (retired finance executive, age 61) has lived and worked throughout the Midwest and South for sev-

eral years, and in the process has come into contact with the types of "Old South" racism that has informed other participants' understandings of whiteness and White racism. However, James—much like the participants who have a familial connection to the South—acknowledged having to navigate an American society that has historically worked to restrict and regulate his movements as a Black individual, which has meant moving through spaces that uphold White America, the costs of which are an unavoidable subjectification to White racism:

When you go to the [NASCAR] races, the fact of the matter is there's still racism that you're going to encounter at the track. But, the fact is, I encounter that if I go to the store. So it doesn't bother me in part because I have a lifetime of dealing with it. I've got numerous techniques to deal with it. So it doesn't really faze me because I know how to deal with it.

That is, having had close encounters and interpersonal contact with Whites has required James to adopt a rather sophisticated system of negotiation that has resulted in enduring understandings of White individuals' behaviors. James knows what White behavior is and when to anticipate it. Moreover, knowing that behavior and its level of pervasiveness allows him and others to protect themselves, as well as to move freely within geographies such as NASCAR despite the relative proximity to White racist behaviors and sentiment:

There are some that are going to accept you and welcome you with no questions asked. But, there's still going to be a large portion of that fan base that does not want you there. And the good news is, we as African Americans are saying, "Okay, you don't want me there? That's fine. But, I'm still coming. I'm still going to sit at the table. It's your issue, not mine anymore."

Here, by suggesting that the onus is now on Whites to accept the diversification of cultural spaces such as NASCAR, James hints at the increasing class-based and racialized anxieties held by many White Southerners. Robinson (2014:16) argued that Black Southerners are aware of the fact that “[White] Southern identity is the performative and ideological glue that holds contemporary American whiteness together as a distinct and superior culture, rooted in ideals synonymous with the highest national and Western principles.” In accounting for that reality, some of the participants demonstrated an ability to categorize White individuals within the collective notion of whiteness rather than in an individualized sense. That is, by understanding the oppressive nature and omnipresence of whiteness, some of them did not feel the need to necessarily care about or manage the beliefs or impressions of Whites. As noted by James:

You think about anything in America, and there’s a racial component to it no matter what...I have the right, like anybody else, to enjoy the sport [NASCAR]. Now, the fact is that there are people who enjoy it, but don’t enjoy being around people that look like me. Well, that’s not my problem, but that’s their problem. And too many of my ancestors fought and died for the right for me to enjoy life on my terms, and that’s the way I’m going to do it.

As a result, participants such as James understand the pervasiveness of whiteness—particularly through and as embodied by institutions attached to Southern whiteness, such as NASCAR—and, as a result, hold a relatively stable perception of whiteness and how to navigate it accordingly. For James, by maintaining that approach, he has been able to maintain interpersonal relationships with White individuals:

We have to begin to educate ourselves and become a little more willing to new lived experiences...one of the things I did when I became a vice president, I would take my leadership team to events where they were the minority in the room. And it was not about making them uncomfortable but about building their awareness of what it’s like for African Americans when they’re the only ones in the room. Because, in fact, most of my leadership team, actually, all my leadership team was White. But, most of them had never experienced being a minority in a room because they’ve always been the majority in the room. So I would take them to events where the majority of the audience was African American. And the other reason for doing that, too, is for them to provide a different perspective against their stereotypes, their conscious and unconscious biases about African Americans to see the community in a much broader lens. I’d say some people embraced the experience for what I intended it to be. Others simply did it because I was the boss. And that’s fine. I knew I was not going to convert everyone, but if I got one person to open up and just see things a little differently, it would help. Except for some, it did. It changed their perspective because they saw it differently, and they now have an understanding, or, you know, having experienced what it’s like for an African American or even a female when they’re the only ones in the room.

While he does not wish to manage impressions or believes wholesale race-based change is to come, James understands the importance of building a certain level of awareness—not only for those Whites within their social circles but also and more importantly, for his cognizance. That notion of personal cognizance was understood and shared by other participants, particularly relating to their understanding of Whites, which is expounded upon



in the section that follows on their level of awareness of a distinct (White) NASCAR sporting culture.

### **Racialized Awareness of (White) NASCAR Culture**

Within the purview of NASCAR, the participants have taken notice of how White fans have responded to more recent efforts at diversifying the sport, stated commitments to racial justice, and the rise of conservative populism under the Donald Trump presidency. For Chris, the presence of the Confederate flag and related paraphernalia has served as one of the few, albeit prevalent, reminders of the sport's history and the racialized sentiment that is actively embraced by some White fans in attendance at races:

The only time I really think about it [racism] is when I see the Confederate flags and because that's kind of a striking thing to see in this day and age. So when I drive in [to the race track] and you see them at the campgrounds as you drive through, you're thinking, "Okay, what's the logic behind that? What's going on there that they're still flying this thing?" You know, I was in Florida for most of the 80s, and I told all my friends when I lived in Florida that even to this day, the South is still upset about the outcome of the Civil War. But, back then, it was even worse back then, in the 80s. But, when I go to a race, that doesn't even cross my mind, it really doesn't. It hasn't crossed my mind in a very long time about that. Now, I haven't been to a race this year [in 2020] to see what the thought process is for some people who are still going as far as how I might be perceived after the Bubba Wallace thing and... I see some of the postings and that kind of stuff on Facebook and I'm like, "Really? You people are still upset about this? Is this really going on?"

But, that's not going to deter me from going to races. That's... no. I've never felt any sense that I needed to not be somewhere when I'm at the track.

Chris argued that as NASCAR has taken a more active stance against the Confederate flag in recent years, the response(s) by disgruntled fans is akin to an unwillingness to accept change and the present socio-cultural realities of the country. For instance, Marie mentioned that as more and more race tracks moved to ban the Confederate flag from their facilities in recent years, she noticed that the flag and related paraphernalia were becoming more prevalent in areas just outside of the race tracks. Likewise, with NASCAR's decision to ban the Confederate flag from all sanctioned events and properties in the summer of 2020, Marie felt as though this had only pushed those who embrace the flag and its meaning to respond in alternative forms:

Usually, when I go places that I know not many Black people or brown people are there, I play this game with myself... count the Black people as soon as I get there. So in 2018, when I went [to a NASCAR race], I went, "Oh my God." You know, they [other Black people] were everywhere, and they weren't working there, but they were fans. And I thought, "This is really cool. It's getting better"...last year [2019] was a little less welcoming. We saw a lot of "Trump 2020" signs up, and by that point, they [the race track] had banned the Confederate flag. I noticed in the distance you could see the vendors that were there selling stuff... they were outside the track, so they had their Confederate flags up and the Trump signs. So it was a little more unnerving.

Similarly, Chris mentioned how for many conservative, White NASCAR fans in the advent of the Trump presidency, paraphernalia that demon-

strates support for Trump and his politics have taken on shared symbolic meaning with that of the Confederate flag. In other words, Chris posited that

They're one in the same as far as I'm concerned. I could be wrong, but that's my perception. In that environment... in the NASCAR environment, I would say that one has taken the place of the other. It's like, "I can't put up a Confederate flag? Well, I can put *this* up, and that'll suffice." You can kind of figure out... you're telling people where you're at. They're practically interchangeable...they're practically one in the same. And it's interesting that that has come up this year, that all this has kind of culminated in one year here...But, do I think there's a definite link between the two, between the "MAGAs" and the Confederate flags? Oh, without a doubt. I don't think there's any doubt about that. And I don't think anybody is trying to hide behind that being a doubt. They almost wear it [Trump paraphernalia] with a badge of honor, so to speak, and that's just how it is. But, it is what it is. That's where we're at.

It is in this vein that the contemporary spaces of NASCAR remain problematic such that they continue to harbor a level of group solidarity in response to the present social narrative surrounding progressive ideologies and mainstream acceptance of diverse communities, much in the same manner that "symbolic properties of the Confederacy were evoked [in the 1960s and 1970s] to represent the backlash politics of defiant early Civil Rights-era Whiteness, and thus interpellated the White individual with a more visual orientation and with more corporeal desires" (Newman 2007:266-267). As noted by participants, many White fans have been "forced"—by virtue of the more progressive stances taken by NASCAR as an organization—to embrace and undergo an internalization of South-

ern culture and identity. For the participants, they have observed the waning presence of the Confederate flag become reified and replaced through the symbolism of Trump-related paraphernalia. As such, I interpret that observation and therefore argue that the Confederate flag—by way of the embracement, performance, and posturing of Trump-related paraphernalia—remains a relevant symbol of an imagined, conservative, and exclusionary ideology, as well as retains a certain level of power within what, in many regards, continues to be a divisive sporting culture. Moreover, Chris noted that

[NASCAR is] a very White Republican sport in the sense that the owners of the cars are huge money makers. So I've always felt like that was a very Republican sport...and that's what you're going to still have. The roots are always going to be there. The roots are never going to go away because that's where this whole thing started. So I think that's what is going to be the case.

While Chris suggested that the "roots" of NASCAR will never cease to be a part of the cultural discourse of the sport, Brad argued that this "recovery movement" has indeed placed NASCAR in a precarious position. According to Brad, NASCAR is at a juncture where they could either remain limited by a cultural attachment and introversion to its localized roots or "actually realize that, 'You know what? We were making a very small segment of people way too comfortable for far too long.'" For many White fans that remain attached to these roots, Brad suggested:

I think [NASCAR and their support of Bubba Wallace] embodies things that they either don't want to accept... there's NASCAR fans that are racist, they

don't want Black people there, they don't like Black people being around, and when this guy [Wallace] comes into their living room, essentially, and basically tells them like, "You guys are racist. Stop being racist." They're like, "No, we like this. We kind of like this sport because we can be ourselves here." So I think to some of them he represents the fact that they can no longer be as comfortable as they want to be in open society.

That perceived level of discomfort for White fans, as expressed by the participants, has not necessarily phased them in their continued fandom of the sport, nor has it come as a surprise. That is, much of these assessments and perceptions of Whites' reactionary attitudes and behaviors have been forged through their navigation of White spaces throughout their life course (the many nuances of which were discussed in the prior sub-section). Likewise, my participants understand the "possessiveness" of Whites over space and the "fear" that can ensue when said space is perceived to have been "dispossessed." As such, the following sub-section details my participants' perceptions of Whites, particularly within the purview of how White fans continue to feel as though their local identities are becoming increasingly disenfranchised.

### **White Fear, White Possessiveness, or Something In-Between?**

In what he denoted as "White fear," Kovel (1984) argued that Whites typically project their fears—a racialized anxiety over potential resistance from marginalized and minoritized groups—onto Black individuals, which allows them to reject blackness and Black bodies more broadly. According to Kovel, most Whites are socialized from a young age to associate blackness (or Black individuals, that

is) with danger, ignorance, or the unfamiliar, such that those who are on the receiving end of White discrimination are seen as outsiders that are to be discriminated against, excluded, and/or marginalized. Taken together, the participant, Greg (City manager, age 59), encapsulated that all in what he believed to be the crux of White Americans' beliefs and behaviors towards issues of race and racism. To begin, Greg offered the following framing:

When things have always been a particular way, then you don't recognize it as a privilege, if it always has been. But also, when you clearly accept... I'm pausing because I do measure my words, I definitely try to measure my thoughts so it comes out right. The United States of America is a very capitalistic and individualistic country. We don't share anything well and we don't really, as a general culture across the board, think about where or how our wealth came from. With the American ideal of manifest destiny, you know, "This is ours. This is our birthright." Most people don't think about what it actually is, don't even think about how removing Indians from their land and essentially marching them... you know, essentially killing off thousands of a culture, the systematic killing of Indians. We don't think about how much generational wealth that is just grounded in now. It was produced off of slave labor. It's way easier to not think about it at all than to think about historically what happened or how you and your family actually became as you were, and not even thinking about that most people were immigrants. You know, there aren't too many of the Caucasians who were actually Native Americans.

It is at this point that Greg shifted his focus to what he believed to be one of the primary motivating emotions driving White Americans' approach to issues of race and racism:

There's probably an inherent fear, and hear me on this one because I may say this wrong, but there is an inherent fear of if the non-dominant culture had the means and treated the dominant culture like the dominant culture treats the non-dominant culture, they'd be scared shitless. Do I need to say it more plainly? There is now a significant part of the culture that almost says, "We have to maintain this. We are very scared of losing this." Because if Caucasians got treated by Blacks or whomever with the same values and mores that the Whites used to treat Blacks, they wouldn't want to trade places. You know, one study [asked] how many of you [White participants] would want to trade places with African Americans and hands don't go up. Well, there's a reason why.

As argued by Greg, it is emotions such as fear that have informed and thusly, allowed Whites to structure their particular worldviews on any number of cultural, economic, political, or social matters to safeguard their accumulated privilege(s), if you will. According to Greg, as an individual with a particular set of structural advantages, "you'd feel differently about social discussions. You probably feel differently about medicine, Medicaid, Medicare, et cetera. You'd feel differently about food stamps, et cetera. But, that's part of the capitalistic society... that it all depends on who has the capital." Based on countless experiences across his lifetime—both personally and professionally—interfacing with White individuals has allowed him to process and develop his understandings on how not only Whites but also he, as an individual, perceives matters on race and society more broadly. As it concerns that notion of "White fear," Greg and other participants were keenly aware of its implication within the culture of NASCAR. For each of the participants that expressed that awareness, they believed that many White NASCAR fans feel as though with calls for

the diversification of the sport in recent years, their culture is being challenged and outright threatened. That is, many White fans may perceive NASCAR as a sporting space that signifies, to them, much more than sporting leisure, but a subculture reflective of the socio-cultural mosaic within which they are located. For Greg, he understands that particular "culture is being challenged," which he believes has only been amplified in recent years:

I saw enough of the posts within [the online community] or other posts that say... you know, Bubba Wallace, who actually has taken the stones to make some comments and actually share what he feels and what he believes. And you can tell that there has been backlash by some. And really, I think as a nation we give too much credence to the fringe. But, you know, your [average White] NASCAR fan is probably going to be more close to the fringe anyway... you know, kind of a little bit further right [politically]. So it's [NASCAR culture] probably going to give you a fairly good representation of the right or the fringe right. And so, there are people who definitely feel like, "Okay, you're messing up my Sunday now. You're making me think like a human being. You're making me acknowledge things that I would rather not think about. I'd rather just go drink beer, and now you're making me think of nooses and Black/White." A lot of [White] people are like, "I don't want to think about that. I don't want to interface with that on my Sundays at all, or I really don't want to interface with that any day. You're bringing my history to my face, and I don't want to deal with that. I would prefer not to deal with that."

Here, Greg makes the connection between NASCAR culture and right-wing conservatism to suggest that many White fans who subscribe to that socio-political linkage do not want to be made uncomfortable in what they believe to be "their space."



It is in a similar vein that James offered a contemporary contextualization as to how these sentiments of “White fear” and “culture is being challenged”—as expressed by White NASCAR fans—are ever the more heightened given the saliency of issues relating to race and racism within the national dialogue:

I think the typical fan base is threatened, but I think it goes back to the divide that exists in this country today. That fan base is... the majority of them are Republican. The divide that exists today, politically, I think it makes it harder for them to be able to change. The only thing I can call this negativity that divides us...it's not about agreement. It's more about respect and civility, but I think the current political environment, the current racial and economic divide that exists in America will make it harder for that traditional fan base to become more accepting. Because right now, they have no reason to because there are people out there who are validating long-held beliefs that exist in terms of racial identity as a country.

As witnessed through the accounts of Greg and James, many right-leaning White fans are feeling increasingly validated in their beliefs that fans of color are a threat to their culture, as enacted within NASCAR spaces. However, the question can be raised as to whether White fans perceive fans of color and NASCAR's diversity and inclusion efforts as legitimate threats, or is that simply a pretext for not wanting to confront how elements of their sub-cultural space—or that of American society as a whole—might be implicated within discourses of historical marginalizing and oppressive practices? Whichever the motivation, the underlying notion here remains constant. That is, many White fans believe that they are entitled to these respective spaces, whether physical or psychological and are free to

move in and out of them without challenge or obstruction, particularly from other individuals—that being, people of color.

However, for that reality to occur—that being, for Black individuals to be able to move freely within the geographies of NASCAR—James admitted that “it's going to take some time for the [White] fan base to adjust and evolve.” With that being said, James argued that:

I think the NASCAR community will evolve much quicker than the fan base...And in some ways it's no different than what's happened in other sports, right? Baseball, you know, with Jackie Robinson. The baseball players themselves evolved much quicker than the fan base. It took the fan base a lot longer to come on board. Football was somewhat the same. Basketball, even golf... you think about Tiger Woods and his impact. History says the fan base will evolve, but it just will take a little longer.

James touched on something, here, that other participants brought up in our conversations, which is the belief that the NASCAR community (i.e., those associated with the organization itself such as executives, officials, drivers, team members, etc.) have evolved or is on the trajectory towards evolving in a more progressive-oriented manner, whereas the predominantly White fan base has not or will be relatively slow to match pace. That is, while James offered his critical assessment as to why White fans are feeling threatened, he was not completely doubtful in that evolutionary trajectory of the NASCAR fan base. For James, he feels as though there may be several White fans who may be more progressive in their viewpoints on issues of race and racism, but for a particular set of reasons (e.g., family and friend influence, political leanings, regionality) may



choose to either remain silent or even outright “perform” an oppositional identity:

I suspect there’s peer pressure in that [White fans not supporting NASCAR’s stance on racial injustice and efforts to diversify the sport], too. Because you may have people in there who are extremely supportive of what’s going on, but because of the family dynamics or even their neighborhood dynamics, they’re not going to come out and publicly say that or express that. It reminds me of a scene from the movie *42*, and I think this was the scene where the Dodgers were playing Cincinnati. Pee Wee Reese went over and put his arm around Jackie Robinson, but in that scene, the crowd all of a sudden started to boo. And this young [White] kid, he looks around watching all the adults boo Pee Wee Reese and Jackie Robinson. He looks around and it’s not that he wanted to boo Pee Wee Reese, who’s his hero, but he looks at his father. He’s looking at all these other adults. And he finally just goes, “Well, I guess this is what I should do,” and he starts booing. I think you have that inside the NASCAR fan base that happens to be White. I don’t think everybody is like that, but I also believe people who might come out and [want to] be more supportive, they’re not because they’re that little kid watching everybody else boo, and they’re not about to go against the broader community.

It appears that James is touching on the power of socialization processes, the very likes of which affect White Americans across a myriad of identity sources. According to Feagin (2010), White Americans (un)wittingly operate under what he conceptualized as the “White racial frame.” This concept serves to demonstrate how the institutionalization of whiteness in and through American society normalizes a certain way of thinking and living that is rooted in the histories, perspectives, and interests

of Whites, while also marginalizing and devaluing those of the racialized “other.” From a young age, that racialized framing of society is ingrained through everyday socialization processes and interactions as fostered in familial and other social settings. It is the constant repetition of aspects of that frame in everyday interactions that allow for it to reproduce spatially and temporally. As such, this allows many Whites to adopt elements of their personal, racialized framing, and perform them within the very social settings from which they were derived. For that matter, Feagin (2010:94) indicated that in “literally millions of these kinship and friendship networks negative stereotypes and images of Americans of color are regularly used, refurbished, and passed along—from one generation to the next and one community to the next.” Thus, James’ example of the White child from the movie *42* holds up as an “in real-time” moment of adopting this dominant racialized frame from those in their network of White family, friends, and peers.

However, whether this holds up in regards to present-day White NASCAR fans who inhabit social networks with fellow Whites harboring more negative racialized framings of society and racial minorities is merely a topic for conjecture. Nevertheless, that is not to understate James’ assessment. Rather, this is to highlight the fact that James, through his observations, made a critical assessment on the spatial dynamics of whiteness—that being, how socialization processes can take root and metastasize within various spaces to uphold an overarching racialized frame—and applied it to a phenomenon that exists within the NASCAR fan base. Space has been argued to be a relational concept in that it does not exist except in relation to experiences, ideas, objects, and time (Harvey 2006). Moreover, Harvey (2006:121) suggested that space, in a relational sense,

is “contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects,” the likes of which can be an important aspect of human social practice and relationships. As it concerns the spatial dynamics of whiteness, the participants took note of the relational implications of space and the human practices inscribed there within—in particular, they demonstrated an understanding of whiteness as fearful and possessive in relation to a perceived spatialized “encroachment” of blackness.

## Discussion and Conclusion

As a result of a pervasive, rather normative, understanding of whiteness in NASCAR spaces, Black fans are forced to navigate a racialized sporting space that simultaneously perpetuates whiteness as “normal,” and blackness as “other.” With that being said, this study placed its attention on how the spatial boundaries, practices, and separations—as structured by whiteness—impacted the contestation and negotiation of meaning-making processes in the production and consumption of NASCAR space(s). It was through this vantage point that the participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of whiteness, particularly through an awareness of NASCAR as a White space, how to effectively navigate such a White space, and a contextualization of more recent enactments of whiteness within these spaces. Conversations with the participants yielded insight that aligns with hooks’ (1992:341) assertion that representations of whiteness are “not formed in reaction to stereotypes, but emerge as a response to the traumatic pain and anguish that remains a consequence of White racist domination, a psychic state that informs and shapes the way Black folks ‘see’ whiteness.” Thus, this study demonstrated how

Black fans make meaning of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR, which advances theoretical understandings of how whiteness is perceived and represented in the Black imagination.

While White individuals usually avoid what are considered to be predominantly Black spaces, Black individuals are required to navigate predominantly White spaces as a result of their racially marginalized and minoritized existence (Anderson 2015). As it concerns the participants, many shared that they believe their understanding of White people and whiteness is due in part to their lived experiences—both personal and professional—having existed within and moved throughout predominantly White spaces. However, based on the personal background of the individuals I spoke with for this study, to say that their understanding of White people and whiteness is a result of navigating White spaces is an incomplete assertion. Rather, for the participants, the navigation of White space is a practice that is mediated by a regional-based experiential and epistemological position developed from either personal or familial connections to Southern regional identity. Thus, it is that understanding of Southern regional identity that has informed their respective knowledge of Whites, White racism, and whiteness more broadly.

Moreover, many of the participants—whether directly or in so many words—hinted at the increasing class-based and racialized anxieties held by many White Southerners, whose vision and versions of the South are challenged by an increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the region and the nation at large. As a result, individuals’ performative investments in Southern identity, as everyday identity practice and as a commercial product, are resurging. That is, the “Old South” continues to

persist in the region's White suburban enclaves, as much as it exists in the oft-stereotyped "backwoods" of low-income and poor Whites. Moreover, an undeniable history of racism, sexism, and social class exclusion has and continues to operate within the day-to-day experiences of many Southerners, whereby the centrality of that Southern knowledge-power dynamic is located within a more pronounced, visible (and empowered) White center. In the context of the South—such as through the social practices of institutions such as NASCAR—the performativity of racialized representation offers a return to a cultural politics of the normative power of whiteness. The process of normalization manifests itself through several core institutions in the South, such that sport and leisure formations have contributed to an interconnected universe underpinned by White supremacist ideologies (Newman 2007). It is in this line of thought that the symbolic manifestations of racism are propagated and performed by Southern Whites, as are found to appear in the practices—both discursive and physical—within NASCAR spaces.

Here, the participants engaged the stakes of emergent phenomena, similar to what Newman and Beissel (2009) argued to be a "recovery movement" within the social institution of NASCAR. Staking their claims within Joe Kincheloe's theoretical framework, Newman and Beissel (2009:519) suggested that a movement had "been produced and wielded through social institutions that privilege dominant, if not monolithic, formations of whiteness, patriarchy, jingoistic nationalism, proselytizing Fundamentalism, heteronormativity, and consumer capitalism to iniquitous social-political ends," the likes of which gained momentum through the paleoconservative shift under the George W. Bush presidency and therefore, placed

NASCAR upon a pendulum between (trans)national expansion and the preservation of traditional, localized culture. Fast-forward nearly 15 years, we are presently in the wake of the Barack Obama and Trump presidencies, the former "producing" a reactionary right-wing nationalism that allowed for the latter's ascent and subsequent tenure. The level of reactionary sentiment that was prompted by the Trump presidency can be looked at as a more recent "recovery movement" that has witnessed an outpouring of resistance among many conservative White fans who feel as though NASCAR is abandoning their localized, conservative Southern (read: White) cultural sensibilities.

It is in a similar vein that Feagin and O'Brien (2003), in their study on the racialized perspectives of elite White men, found that while many of their participants understood the benefits attached to whiteness, they believed societal shifts were trending towards a "shortchanging" of White Americans. That is, they felt the advantages associated with being White were "slipping away as the society becomes more multicultural and multiracial," allowing them to "express concern, fear, or resentment that they are having to, or might soon have to, give up some of the substantial privileges that Whites have been historically afforded" (Feagin and O'Brien 2003:78). Although attributed to the commentary of upper-income White men, much of that was likewise suggested by Feagin and O'Brien to apply to the sentiments of White Americans, in general. For some Whites, by linking their perceived social position with the view that Whites' access to certain resources and status is deserved privileges, it is no wonder that many may believe that these privileges are becoming lost in an ever-diversifying social landscape. Rather than acknowledge their advantages, these individuals are convinced

that it is Americans of color, particularly African Americans, who seem to have significant, even, unfair, societal privileges...and thus believe that they [Whites] are now victims or scapegoats in regard to racial or related social problems for which they do not feel personally responsible. [Feagin and O'Brien 2003:81]

An underlying assumption, here, could be asserted that with continued societal progression on social issues and further interracial contact within NASCAR spaces, an “evolution” is likely to occur such that the geographies of the sport are less socio-politically polarizing and more harmonious for all engaging there within. However, as argued by Brown and colleagues (2003), while sporting spaces can (in theory) provide the conditions through which racial attitudes are positively acquired, interracial contact may produce a negative interaction. In other words, generalized contact alone is not a sufficient intervention to ensure that positive racial attitudes are realized and that negative stereotypes and prejudicial behaviors are eradicated. Moreover, within these spaces, Whites are likely to separate their interactions in a contact situation from their beliefs on broader societal issues of race and racism (Brown et al. 2003).

Given that the subculture of NASCAR “emerged as a powerful moral, political, and economic piece of the social mosaic of the modern-day American South,” it likewise serves as a discursive formation and system of subjectification that reflects and (re) produces the socio-cultural context in which it persists (Newman and Giardina 2011:40). As such, in NASCAR spaces, whiteness is not only performed, it is on full display such that sporting spaces have historically offered a popular public space through which to make visible the privileges of being White.

Thus, when coming into contact with(in) the White spaces of NASCAR, it may come as no surprise that Black individuals navigating these spaces link concepts of distrust, fear, and/or trepidation with the representations of whiteness there within. As was found within the larger project from which this study is located (see: Vadeboncoeur and Bopp 2021), participants mentioned that NASCAR needs to reassess how aspects of their culture require reform, which they argued will require a level of intentionality that has yet to be adopted by the organization. Likewise, the participants were aware of and attuned to the fact that manifestations of racism are multidimensional, and as such, there can be no single answer to racism, which means that simply positioning oneself against racism is in no manner to be conflated with being anti-racist (Gillborn 2006). That is, for NASCAR to progress and break its racialized stigma within the Black imagination (a) they need to transform aspects of their culture to be more inclusive and (b) they must endeavor to intentionally listen to, engage with, and understand the communities (and associated issues pertinent to these communities) from which their Black fans derive.

In all, this study centered its attention on one particular understudied population of individuals, and in the process, demonstrated how Black fans make meaning of and navigate the machinations of whiteness within the geographies of NASCAR. That is, by focusing sole attention on the Black NASCAR fan, I believe that helps deepen our understanding of the practices and processes that entrench whiteness within the everyday space of sport—and in turn, the everyday, racialized experiences of Black individuals within said sporting spaces. That is, there is much to be explored regarding these experiences, as well as the physical, psychological, or social cost of being a Black

individual within White spaces, particularly as it concerns a historically and predominantly White space as NASCAR. As such, given that its racialized geographies extend across a multitude of events, locations, scales, and social settings—both on and off the race track—NASCAR is a requisite place through which to explore the subaltern resistance of Black Americans. Although NASCAR has expanded beyond its southern roots—and recent attempts to distance itself from attachments to a conservative, White cultural nationalism and related brand of reactionary racial politics

in the wake of the 2020 racial unrest experienced throughout the US—it remains to be marked, if not outright stigmatized by past (and present) associations with personal and institutional-level reports of racism (Lee et al. 2010). As a result, it stands to reason that until NASCAR effectively, efficiently, and earnestly addresses issues concerning its racialized culture—and in the process, takes the time to understand their Black fan base—efforts to expand their reach will likely remain stifled by an inability (and/or possibly, unwillingness) to transform a self-limiting, “aging” culture.

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## Citation

Vadeboncoeur, Joshua D. 2022. "Whiteness and the Black Fan Imagination: Making Meaning of Whiteness within the Geographies of NASCAR." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 18(2):48-71. Retrieved Month, Year ([http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive\\_eng.php](http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php)). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.18.2.03>