

Yale University

## **Workshop in Urban Ethnography**

Spring 2013

*Abstract*

### **The Invisible Weight of Whiteness: The Racial Grammar of Everyday Life in America**

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Racial domination, like all forms of domination, works best when it becomes hegemonic, that is, when it accomplishes its goal without much fanfare. In this presentation, based on the *Ethnic and Racial Studies Annual Lecture* I delivered in 2011 in London, I will argue there is something akin to a grammar—a racial grammar if you will—that structures cognition, vision, and even feelings on all sort of racial matters. This grammar normalizes the standards of white supremacy as the standards for all sort of social events and transactions. Thus, one can talk about HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities), but not about HWCUs (historically white colleges and universities), or one can refer to black movies and black TV shows but not label movies and TV shows white when in fact most are. I use a variety of data (e.g., abduction of children, school shootings, etc.) to illustrate how this grammar works and highlight what it helps to accomplish. I conclude that racial grammar is as important as all the visible practices and mechanisms of white supremacy and that we must fight its poisonous effects even if, like smog, we cannot see how it works clearly.

2/4/13