

Poor whites/White trash: a brief survey

Cinzia Scarpino

The 400-hundred-year history of poor whites in the U.S. South has been marked by systemic poverty fueled by structural economic dynamics. Intrinsic to the class discourse is a history of cultural and political stigmatization of white poor by “progressive” white elites, reformists, and liberals. Derided as *rednecks* and *hillbillies* and lumped into the derogatory category of white trash, poor white Southerners have been subjected to classist and eugenic discrimination. Constructed as “dysgenic,” incapable of social betterment, anti-modern, and uneducable by *other* whites, the identity of poor whites is associated with the idea of poverty as an irremediable dysfunction – no small curse in a country founded on the myth of the classless society and infinite social mobility. This introduction touches upon Dolly Parton, *Li'l Abner*, *Gone with the Wind*, Dorothy Allison, Erskine Caldwell, the photo-essay book, J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elogy*, and Arlie Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land*.

Once Upon a Time in Trumplachia: *Hillbilly Elogy*, Personal Choice and the Blame Game

Dwight Billings

The article is a critique of J.D. Vance's widely read but “terribly misleading” *Hillbilly Elogy*. For the most part, Vance – who actually knows very little about Appalachia – writes about the experience of Appalachian migrants to the midwestern United States. Ignoring the well-documented history of the exploitation of the Appalachian region and how capitalism has devastated the communities to which Appalachian peoples have migrated, Vance instead focuses on what he contends are the bad personal choices that Appalachian individuals have made in the face of economic decline. Playing what the article calls the “blame game,” Vance stresses personal choice and responsibility as the factors that account for hardship, a typical theme of neoliberal ideology. In such context, Billings explores the reasons why the book has been so popular. In particular, he analyses the term “Trumplachia” as a badge of the attempt by liberals, influenced by Vance's depiction of the Appalachian region, to blame the 2016 election of Trump to the US Presidency on a false understanding of the Appalachian vote.

How J.D. Vance Won the Left, then the Right

Liam Mayes

In 2016, J.D. Vance published *Hillbilly Elegy*, a memoir of his ascension from rust-belt poverty to Yale Law School. Under Donald Trump's caustic shadow, liberal audiences celebrated the book for its honest description and measured analysis. In 2021, Vance set his sights on a seat in the US Senate and built a successful campaign based on speaking out against what he considered the greatest threats to American prosperity, including the "Biden border crisis," Critical Race Theory's divisive influence, and abortion. During the campaign, liberal media was fixated on the contrast between Vance's measured voice in his memoir and the inflammatory rhetoric of his campaign, and concluded that the thoughtful memoirist had turned into a bigoted monster. Through an analysis of *Hillbilly Elegy's* open disdain for those Vance deemed irresponsible – drug users, the unemployed, recipients of social assistance, among others – as well as his explicit and unyielding faith that persecuting these people would solve otherwise intractable social problems, this essay argues that the dominant

account of Vance's political transformation sweeps the uncomfortable history of his liberal allure under the rug and obscures the force behind his appeal.

Hillbilly Eulogy: contemporary Appalachia in culture and literature

Marco Petrelli

Peculiar people, hillbillies, white trash. In spite (or maybe, because) of the rekindled attention around Appalachia sparked by J.D. Vance's controversial memoir *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016), this region is arguably still represented in the American imagination through old, derogatory, and worn-out stereotypes. As demonstrated by works such as Vance's memoir and James Dickey's *Deliverance* (1970) among others, the contemporary depiction of the Appalachian dweller still suffers from an inherent ambiguity: hillbillies are both symbols of an archaic, pre-modern purity; and "superlative" – as Gabe Rikard writes – examples of anthropological deviance. Focusing on Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God* and Chris Offutt's *Kentucky Straight*, this essay shows how these Appalachian writers adopt diametrical approaches at the hillbilly stereotype to comment upon, and

denounce, the flagrant image of radical alterity projected upon the region by the American mainstream.

A Lost Hemisphere: White Trash in Caribbean Fiction

Ramón E. Soto-Crespo

This essay argues that the category of trash is an essential component of the global south's cultural production. Critical studies of literature produced in the global south systematically ignore lesser narrative forms when providing their perspective on literary traditions. My essay examines how literary traditions are shaped not only by canonical works but also by an understudied stream of pulp fictions whose narratives are set in the global south. I refer to mid-to late-twentieth-century Anglophone Caribbean pulp novels as "trash fictions" because they have been discarded from studies of Anglophone Caribbean literature. "Trash fictions" are called so for their perceived lesser literary value, or their licentious (trashy) content, but also because they contain white trash characters in their narratives. I analyze two overlooked novels, British Guyanese Christopher Nicole's *Sunset* (1978) and Jamaican Jeanne Wilson's *The Golden Harlot*

(1980), as examples of a trash fiction boom in the Americas.

The Foreign Body: Classism and Gender Stereotypes in the Tonya Harding Affair

Leonardo Buonomo

This article examines the way in which former athlete Tonya Harding was perceived within the world of figure skating and how she was portrayed by the media, especially after she came under suspicion of being involved in the attack against her team-mate Nancy Kerrigan (on January 6, 1994), an event that captured public attention, especially in the United States, as few sport-related incidents had done before. Endowed with exceptional athletic abilities, Harding was often regarded, during her competitive career, as lacking in artistry, an essential component of figure skating. More susceptible to subjective biases than the technical part of the sport (such as the jumps, which were Harding's forte), artistry, in women's skating, has traditionally been conceived of as virtually synonymous with physical attractiveness and conventional femininity. Measured against the aesthetic ideal first popularized by champion-turned-movie star Sonja Henie and later embodied

by American Olympic champions Peggy Fleming and Dorothy Hamill, Tonya Harding was regarded as an anomaly because of her appearance, her powerful skating, and her social class. The almost obsessive media focus on Harding's lower-class background, her dysfunctional family of origin, her muscular body, her style of dress, and her supposedly un-ladylike behavior, makes her story a case-study of classism and gender stereotyping in America.

US Midterm Elections 2022: what kind of white vote for the Right?

Mario Del Pero

The essay discusses the 2022 midterm elections and tries to define which groups were over-represented among Republican voters. Relying on the available exit-polls and comparing the vote with those of 2020 and 2018, the article advances three interrelated arguments. The first is that we need to cross different variables – related to race, income, education, and age – to get a clear sense of which groups now vote predominantly for the Republican party. The second is that contrary to highly popular media narratives, it's not the white working class that is overrepresented among Repub-

lican voters, but the middle and upper-middle class. The quintessential profile of who voted GOP in is that of an over-45 white male, with no college degree and an household income above the average. Third and last: to understand these data we need to look at the long-term consequences of the 2008 crisis and its impact on the traditional white middle-class.

The fragile interpreter: the humanities in the time of trigger warnings

Valeria Gennero

In the US, recent disputes about the literary canon are sometimes seen as a continuation of the *culture wars* that inflamed the last decades of the 20th century. There is however a crucial difference: contemporary debates are no longer propelled by scholars and intellectuals. Thanks to the impact of social media activism, it is now up to students to inspire new protocols and priorities, such as the possibility to be excused from reading texts or authors that could trigger traumatic memories. This essay argues that the compliance with which many American universities have embraced these demands should be examined within the field of

institutional development that Shoshana Zuboff calls *surveillance capitalism*. The dissemination of concepts like *trigger warning* and *safe space* is thus analyzed as a downstream effect of *infocracy*, a digital information regime incompatible with the discursive expression of dissent which is essential to a democratic society.

The detective and the medium: the Other Hollywood and the L.A. neo-noir. From Schrader to De Palma

Antonio Di Vilio

Starting in the Sixties, a series of changes affected Hollywood and the film industry. On the one hand, cinema experienced the crisis of the majors, the explosion of independent productions and the rise of American *auteur*; on the other, we witnessed to the invasion of *porno chic* in theaters.

This study aims to demonstrate how noir, in this postmodern phase, is invested with a dual role: not only it accepts the challenge of representing the violence and contradictions of the pornographic world from an ethical and political point of view, but it also has to show the artificiality of the film product, reflecting on the viewing experience itself. Taking

Paul Schrader's *Hardcore* (1979) and Brian De Palma's *Body Double* (1984) as case studies, I argue that, in these films, the detective's eye – consciously or not – must necessarily look at the world not so much through Hitchcockian binoculars, with which the detective's figure is traditionally represented, but rather through the artificial filter of the film.

"Aye! I lost this leg". But what leg had Captain Ahab lost?

Federica Milone

A working hypothesis based on three legs: the words of the carpenter in chapter 108; the Bible; contemporary etiquette books.