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Teacher or Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Read Chapters 5-8 of *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone

In this week's homework, we will look at the many faces of racial othering through a research article and *Dear Martin*. Then, we will do our own research on the meaning of flags and the merits of affirmative action.

Face Value

Read the conclusion of the following *Qualitative Sociology* article on how Halloween costumes are worn to take on race.

**“Unmasking Racism: Halloween Costuming and Engagement of the Racial Other”**

by Jennifer C. Mueller, Danielle Dirks, and Leslie Houts Picca

**Conclusion**

While Skal (2002) suggests that “tasteless” Halloween costumes might simply represent an extension of Halloween’s historical pranking tradition, it is perhaps more fitting to draw on a different relic from Halloween’s historical tradition – that of departed spirits returning to wreak mischief and even harm. As Bonilla-Silva (2003) documents, the societal norms of the post-Civil Rights era have disallowed the open expression of racial views. In this way, for many, Halloween has become a culturally tolerated, contemporary space for the racist “ghost” to be let out of the box. Indeed, our findings support the thesis that Halloween’s combination of social license, ritual costuming and social setting make the holiday a uniquely constructive context for negative engagement of racial concepts and identities.

While our respondents reflect an oversampling and concomitant overrepresentation of data from the Southeast region of the U.S., nationwide marketing of racist costumes like “Vato Loco” and “Kung Fool,” and local news stories and editorials documenting similar occurrences at universities around the nation suggest that we should not simply dismiss this as a “southern phenomenon.” Additionally, even if this trend is ultimately revealed as uniquely “southern,” that does not discount the need to analyze how it reinforces the racial order. We thus urge future research to investigate if and how such practices vary nationwide, and what such a variance might mean.

With respect to theorizing what activates the cross-racial costuming behavior of our respondents, it is useful to further draw upon the “rituals of rebellion” concept. Interestingly, although the Gluckman and Bakhtinian frameworks should predict the ample use of crossracial costuming among people of color, it is not immediately apparent that students of color use Halloween as an opportunity to create costume performances that subvert the racial and/or social hierarchy. Even in the very few cases where cross-racial costuming among respondents of color did occur, costumes were most frequently

celebrity portrayals, and none appeared to pose an indictment of whiteness per se (as particularly opposed to the clear degradation of blackness revealed). Only one, the African American student said to be costuming as a Haitian refugee, attempted an explicit challenge, offering a quite critical commentary regarding the racial politics of immigration policy. We must recall, too, the more vocal antiracist critiques of students of color toward white cross-racial costuming. To be sure, the relatively small proportion of students of color in our sample limits our ability to fully explore this theme, and future research is needed to examine this phenomenon in greater depth.

In contrast, there does appear to be a unique, ritually rebellious form of performance that occurs among many white students. In the “colorblind” post-Civil Rights era, it has become commonplace for whites to express frustration and resentment toward color-conscious racial remediation programs, such as affirmative action (Feagin, 2000, 2006; Wellman, 1997). Both Bonilla-Silva (2003) and Wellman (1997) document the regularity with which whites employ anecdotal storylines regarding antiwhite discrimination and “reverse racism,” despite the relative infrequency of credible, substantive, and supporting evidence. Similarly, many whites complain of the threat to free speech and censorship imposed by political and social correctness.

Although in truth white students occupy the dominant racial social identity group, we posit that many may entertain if not a sense of “oppression,” at minimum a sense of normative restriction by a social code which prescribes “nonracist” frontstage presentations, and for which racialized Halloween “rituals of rebellion” afford some release. Recall, for example, one white student’s praise of Halloween as “great” because it eliminates the need to worry about racial offense. For those whites who actively endorse the idea that whites are now victimized by the preferencing of people of color (e.g., in employment, admissions, etc.), Halloween may ironically signify a suspension of this imagined “hierarchy.” Considered within the American socio-historical racial context, however, this white “ritual of rebellion” seems almost a harkening back to the Jim Crow period of more overt, often celebrated expressions of racism and white supremacy.

Picca and Feagin (forthcoming) have extended Goffman (1959) to theorize and empirically demonstrate the frontstage/backstage dichotomy of white racial behavior, uncovering that whites regularly behave in seemingly tolerant, non-racist ways when in the public frontstage, in contrast to the private backstage, where racist talk and behavior frequently occurs. Significantly, the results of our study suggest that Halloween is a space and time where white backstage behavior emerges, if only for the fleeting holiday moment, in the frontstage. Halloween is illuminating, then, for what it reveals not only of the images of people of color that live in the white mind, but also about the white backstage. In addition, our data refute the idea that whites do not engage in public acts of racism in contemporary society. Indeed, some whites are engaging in nothing less than blackface performances, an inarguable throwback to the ubiquitous minstrelsy of the nineteenth century. While many other whites never step over the “threshold” into blackface, their stereotypical and essentialist portrayals must be charged with a striking similarity. Truly, are not “Ghetto Thugs,” “Project Chicks” and “Niggas” just not-so-distant cousins of “Step-n-Fetchit” and “Mammy”? The characters may be different, but the consequences, if not the motives, are the same.

While some, like Skal (2002), may reduce the holiday engagement of racial concepts to a matter of simple Halloween “fun,” this practice must be viewed within a greater framework. Seemingly playful and innocuous cultural practices, such as cross-racial costuming, should be considered within the sociohistorical and ideological context of the society, as a reflection of dominant group values and doctrines (Wilkinson, 1974). We must put aside the “fun” of costumes, which can distract from the

subtle and not-so-subtle messages conveyed about people of color, and recognize that costumes provide a format for engaging commentary on personal and social values (McDowell, 1985). Indeed, to render people into character pieces, they must already exist as characters in one's mind, and there are many social forces that drive our constructions of race and people of different racial groups toward such ends.

In revealing the ideological role that such costuming can play, and in light of our findings, particularly with respect to cross-racial costuming responses, we must also examine the needs left unfulfilled by contemporary approaches to multiculturalism and political correctness, some of which have become dogmatic. The confused critiques of many students reflect the ways in which we have become a society reproducing what Bonilla-Silva (2003) refers to as "racism without racists." He suggests that research on racism in this color-blind era may lead us away from the idea that mere education will lead to racial tolerance, to question rather what education actually does and does not do and for whom, as well as to the other conditions that may be required for true impact.

Indeed, as Johnson (1997) points out, the social reproduction of racism does not require people explicitly acting in racially hostile ways, but simply those who will uncritically acquiesce in the larger cultural order. While our data indeed reveal the explicit intentions of some students to degrade blackness through costume, the majority of white respondents actively suspended their criticisms or behaved in wholly uncritical ways. It is highly significant that regardless of intention, each of these response "types" share the outcome of reproducing stereotypical racist images, thereby supporting the racial social structure. Even among the minority of white students who journaled firm antiracist objections, few extended their internalized criticisms of cross-racial costuming to offer explicit challenges within their social groups, a social silence that, too, empowers the structure of racial dominance.

This research suggests that at a minimum we must take up Feagin's (2006) call, and locate ways to encourage a deeper critical assessment of historical and contemporary racial oppression, acknowledging both the material and ideological consequences of this structure. Interestingly, the unconventional qualitative methodology of journal-collection not only reveals this need by demonstrating the transformed persistence of racism in the post-Civil Rights era, but also serves as a unique pedagogical and consciousness-raising tool as students reflect on experiences where they might have normally remained non-reflexive.

Rogers (2002) notes that while "Halloween is unquestionably a night of inversion," the holiday's context probably provides little substantial opportunity to actually challenge how society operates in a determined or sustained way – "At its best, Halloween functions as a transient form of social commentary or 'deep play'" (p. 137). With respect to race, we would argue that the holiday provides a context ripe for reinforcing existing racist concepts. In particular, it provides an implicitly approved space for maintaining the privilege that whites have historically enjoyed, to define and caricature African Americans and other people of color in degraded and essentialist ways. At its worst, contemporary cross-racial costuming bores a track deep into history, intimately connecting itself to the ugly practice of American blackface minstrelsy. Ultimately, the white privilege to racially differentiate supports both material and ideological benefits and disadvantages built into the systemic racial structure. In the United States this system has deep historical roots and is well-formulated and ingrained into the everyday rhythms of life. As such, Halloween social commentary which engages race can hardly be described as transient, and actually reflects the dominant racist ideology, coupling contemporary imaging with racist conceptualizations as old as the country itself.

Answer the following questions on “Unmasking Racism” and chapters 5 to 8 of *Dear Martin*.

1. What is the authors' main conclusion?

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2. What are whites rebelling against through cross-racial costuming?

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3. How does whites in cross-racial costumes harken back to Jim Crow?

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4. What is the authors' attitude towards whites in cross-racial costuming?

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5. In what ways is racism reproduced?

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Dear Martin

1. Out of all the members of the “Equality Brigade,” why is Justyce “naturally” the thug?

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2. How is a Yuppie/Politician or Surfer Dude a negative stereotype? Use your prior knowledge and own research (if need be) to answer this question.

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3. In which contexts is Justyce an outsider?

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4. Who presents the more persuasive argument on affirmative action, Jared or SJ? (You do not need to be politically correct and select SJ's). Explain.

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5. What arguments does Manny make for Justice to date SJ?

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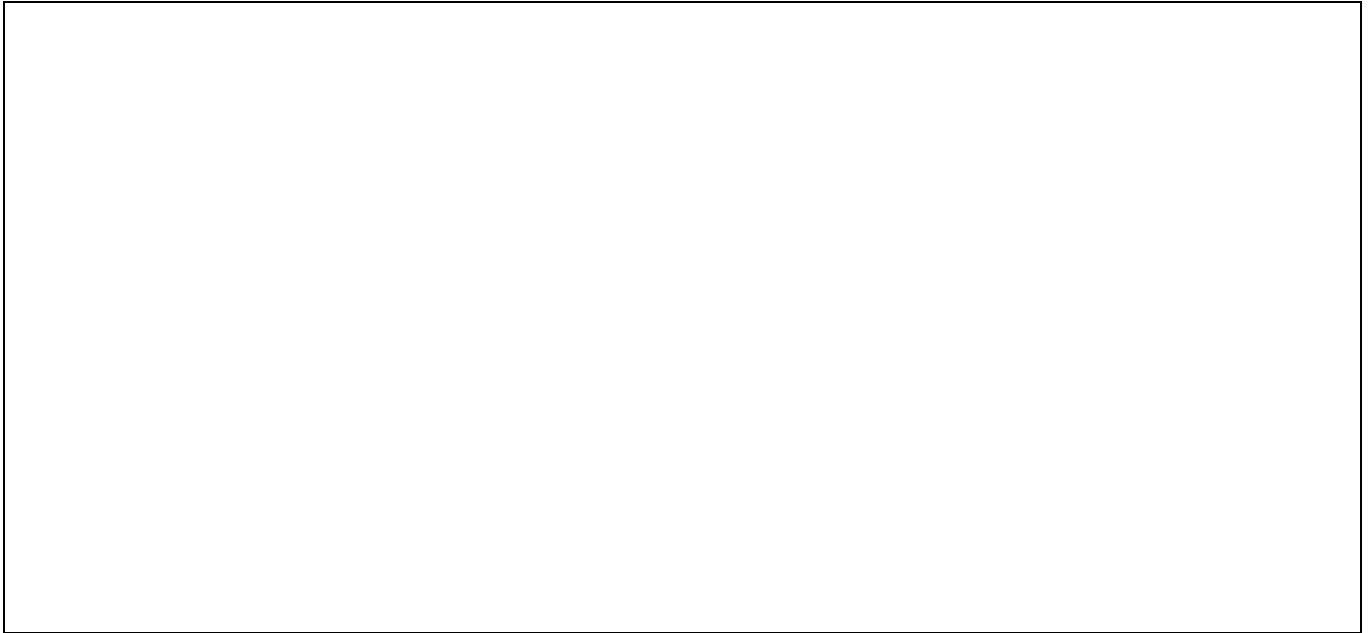
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Vexillology

Vexillology is the study of flags. In the space below, draw or paste an image of a country's flag that strikes you. You may select a flag of a province/state or city, but keep in mind that you will need to do research on the meaning of the flag's symbols and colours to answer a short answer question.



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Affirmative (In)action

Conduct research on the arguments for and against affirmative action *in education*. List at least 8 *substantial* points for each column in the chart below.

Arguments For Affirmative Action	Arguments Against Affirmative Action
<div>_____ / 4 marks (0.5 marks each)</div>	<div>_____ / 4 marks (0.5 marks each)</div>