WILLFULL BLINDNESS

a print by
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First and foremost, we deem it necessary to express our gratitude for our professor, Christina Leza, who provided us with an open, insightful, introspective setting for our class through her designing of the course Language of Racism. The content that we were provided with thanks to Christina was invaluable in equipping us with the academic skill set necessary to pinpoint and elaborate upon the many forms of oppression that are so difficult to engage in dialogue about without the proper training and education. Both of the creators of this Zine feel more confident after Christina’s course, which inspired us as people of color and activists (though it is safe to say that this course inspired more self-policing, allyship, and awareness among our White peers as well). This class served to validate the many feelings of discomfort and tension that arise from living in such a culturally and institutionally racist system -- a system so powerful that its toxicity pervades even in a campus as liberal as Colorado College. Because of Christina, we were able to learn about some of the many ways through which racism perpetuates itself and makes itself visible in day-to-day life. Focusing on 1) the deeply entrenched history of racism, 2) the ways through which racism was and continues to be enforced through legal code, language, and implicit biases, enforced through legal code, language, and implicit biases, and 3) the differences between the individual-level overt racism that White culture defaults to when hearing the word “racist” (Folk Theory of Racism) versus the societal level of covert racism that presents itself through historically-and-institutionally-enforced-inequities, microaggressions, cultural appropriation, and colorblind ideology (listing only a few key topics under Critical Race Theory), our class was able to interrogate many of the prevailing forces that oppress People of Color while preserving White dominance.

By virtue of Christina, we present to you our zine, which focuses on othering, community, and privilege, particularly as it pertains to CC culture. Throughout Willful Blindness, you will find original art created by Tarin, with culture jamming and the content from class serving as our main sources of inspiration. Accompanying the graphics are analyses of responses that we gathered via sharing our pieces across campus in a performance art type manner, which we then used to develop potential solutions to racism on campus. In the various sections of the Zine, we further elaborate upon our reasoning, our methods, and our takeaways.
At the beginning of the block, our class as a collective attended the First Monday speaker event, where we had the pleasure of being introduced to Gregg Deal, a member of the Pyramid Peak Paiute Tribe. Gregg is a father, a husband, an artist, and an activist (he is adamant in presenting himself first with the adjectives that humanize him and make him more relatable, as he wishes to be viewed as a normal human being before any of the other labels). Through his struggles as an Indigenous man, his intense solidarity with his people, his artistic ability, and his intellectual capacity, Gregg utilizes artivism (art as social commentary) to critique modern-day American society and its oppression of Indigenous peoples. Gregg’s work relies heavily on an artistic inversion of things that are widely accepted by society, reframing what is deemed normal in a way that interrogates American values and norms by forcing viewers to come face-to-face with uncomfortable truths. This technique that Gregg utilizes is based on a concept called culture jamming, which bridges the necessity of adapting to mainstream media’s form and the urgency of attaining justice by breaking bonds of oppression.

Leah Lievroiuw, Ph.D. in Communication Theory and Research, describes culture jamming as: “a variety of ways in which alternative media allows for juxtapositioning, reconstructing, fragmentation of mainstream media to create radically different messages that expose inequalities, inconsisten-

She continues, “Culture jamming often uses pop-culture form, but turning it on its head to reveal the problematic structures hidden inside. Not a new phenomenon, culture jamming should rather be seen as the continuation of a long tradition of subversions and parodies that vastly precede the internet and new media.”

So often on campus do we see major buzzwords flying around, like inclusivity, community, privilege, diversity and the like, but so often on campus do we see things that reflect poorly upon these supposed values, like the rampant use of the N-word at parties, blatantly elitist comments, perpetuation of othering, and a lack of community dialogue. Bearing in mind culture jamming as witnessed through Gregg Deal’s art in addition to the many issues of racism present on campus (do you remember how shittily Admin handled the White Supremacist email?), the makers of this Zine decided to create culture jamming pieces of our own in a manner that allowed for the interrogation of CC values through a form that was digestible by the CC community. With the image of the stereotypical CC kid in mind -- a liberal, rich, White, outdoorsy kid in Patagonia and Birks (yes, we engaged in conscious stereotyping, which is indeed differentiated from the implicit bias stereotypes that White people paste onto, say, the typical “thug”) -- we decided to culture jam what seems to be universal at CC: Patagonia and
When it comes to Birkenstocks, there is no denying that the footwear is a part of inherently White culture. Birkenstock is a German [White] company that was founded in 1774. After about 200 years of Germans sporting the sandals, a [White] woman in the 1960’s was vacationing in Germany, saw the shoes, fell in love, and decided to bring them back to the U.S. Birks quickly caught on with the [White] Counterculture youth of the time, and soon became synonymous with [White] liberalism and environmentalism (i.e. CC). As proof of Birks being associated with (White) liberalism, we cite a New York Times article: “I can see Karl Rove rubbing his hands together and cackling, "Look at this [White] liberal Birkenstock governor who is going to run against us. Anybody here have any Birkenstocks on?"
While the creators of this Zine both identify as Liberals with an affinity for nature, we wanted to introduce a counter-narrative to Birkenstocks, which tend to be viewed in good light because of the company's ethical sourcing. Regardless of the goodness seen in the company's mitigation of environmental damage and workplace cruelty, you cannot deny that Birks are just ... White. And not just in a "Oh, Birks are for Hippies" kind of way, but maybe in a "Oh, Birks would cost me a 2 week grocery bill and I can't afford them" kind of way. Or maybe even "I can't wear Birks because there is a stigma against outdoor culture in my community // I do not have the means and/or time to go hiking // I will only see White faces if I can go" kind of ways. With this sort of perspective in mind, we chose an innocent looking Birkenstock ad and decided to culture jam it. Tarin made a graphic design piece with a foot inside of a Birks. The foot and the leg of the person is covered in

**CULTURE JAMMING IN CONTEXT PART 2**

All of the culture jam art is illustrated in White, and the piece filters over the original ad. A caption below reads, "By wearing Birkenstocks, you can fit in with the other kids who claim to be liberal environmentalists, while also othering those who already feel excluded from the outdoors and perpetuating White culture through the marketplace."

The Zine creators then went out and asked people around campus to first look at the original ad and to share their thoughts on it, whatever those thoughts may have been. We find a very interesting dichotomy that occurred in terms of answers. Out of the 7 White participants, 6 of them commented positively on the ad ("ooo, pretty colors; reminds me of the outdoors; it's appealing; reminds me of my own Birks") whereas 1 of them commented negatively, explaining, "it's not appealing, it's just promoting an exotic White girl." In terms of the 3 participants of Color, all of them commented negatively, and all of them brought up Whiteness ("I see White feet; I think of White fragile femininity; I own this nature"). When shown the culture jammed image, 5 out of the 7 White participants agreed with the message being conveyed ("holds truth; makes me not want to buy Birks; I agree wholeheartedly; it's accurate"), whereas two of them argued on the contrary ("not everybody holds this ideology; these are good quality sandals; objects don't define who we are"). Conversely, when the 3 PoC participants were shown the culture jammed piece, they all agreed ("this is indicative of CC's campus; you may be outdoorsy, but you're still controlled by capitalism; I like the rebranding").
We repeated this same process with the same rationality for a Patagonia ad. While Patagonia isn’t as old as Birkenstock, it definitely has the same White, Liberal, outdoorsy culture associated with it. Tarin made another piece of graphic art, again using White as the only color. This time, the image depicted the following: a Patagonia jacket with money signs embroidered onto it, a line scratching out where the original ad states “environmental + social initiative,” a new phrase below the line that says “white exclusivity initiatives,” and a statement below the jacket that reads, “wear patagonia to show that you care about the outdoors, liberalism, and Whiteness.” Tarin then filtered this piece over the original image, resulting in a culture jamming piece.
When we went around asking people to examine both the original Patagonia ad and the culture jamming ad, response patterns essentially mirrored those that we observed among the Birk ad participants. 6 out of the 7 White participants had positive reactions to the original Patagonia ad ("it looks like retroadventure film; hippie activist; the clouds convey openness; the road less traveled; adventure"), and the other White participant -- who happened to be the only White Bridge Scholar participant -- said, "they're using the outdoors to sell clothing, but it doesn't make sense because there are no clothes in the ad." 5 of the 6 PoC participants had negative reactions to the original ad ("it's for rich people; expensive and White; dry; Whiteness; a storm is brewing; Patagucci; White!!!" [the participant asked that I add exclamation points]), and the other PoC had a positive reaction, describing a "very clean, open space."
Patagonia
Tryna phony-ya,
"With our bullshit
u can save the ozone yuh
Wear all this shit and the hippies you’ll bone, yuh"
So now here you are,
all their products u ownuh
All the people -- you’ve shownuh
you are a liberal owna
Down w the envirozonuh

But then u poke in a hole, gape
And u dont remember to sew, nay
So down the garbage it go away
And then with your money you go replace
because of the brand you are savin’ face

Socially below you -- a sad face
Down in the valley they vacate
Up to the mountains they fixate
“Yes I will climb this thing one day
When all of my pennies I’ve saved away
Add up to outdoors gear One day i’ll pay
And just like white folk, I’ll fit in this place”
THE MIRROR

In addition to the culture jamming project, the Zinesters also created a performance art piece in an attempt to force people to self-reflect and be cognizant of their roles as individuals within a racist system. In class when we interrogated the notion of blindness within the term "colorblindness" (what White people try to claim when they attempt to say that they don't racially discriminate or stereotype) we determined that colorblindness is literally not possible given implicit biases, unless one actually did not have the ability to see. Claiming colorblindness is a modern tactic used by White people in order to distance themselves from the acts of racial oppression that comprise their culture. In a more colloquial sense, this can be viewed as turning a blind eye. With this in mind, the Zine creators postulated that a meaningful, introspective art piece designed to combat racism could involve something incredibly meta -- looking at yourself in the mirror while reading a first person monologue written onto the mirror, thus physically having to see both yourself and the words in front of you,
SELF-INTERROGGATING
- LOOK INTO THE MIRROR

We went out to the Arc and bought a decorative mirror that we repurposed for the project. After taking the obstructive decor off of the mirror, we were left with a cracked, rugged looking piece of furniture. We decided that this messy aesthetic was perfect since it could represent ideas including the shattering of certain realities, the broken system itself, and the undesirable reflection seen when critically analyzing oneself. On top of the mirror, Tarin wrote out five profound, relatively loaded statements that we decided were applicable to CC kids in general, ourselves included: 1) I perpetuate cultural and cognitive racism through my lack of self-policing implicit biases. Through my inability to empathize with the unknown, I engage in a process of othering; 2) By being in my social clique, I limit my own horizons and prevent the expansion of my worldview and my appreciation of multiculturalism; 3) I am aware that because of my privilege (economic, social, or ethnic), society by default places other people below me; 4) I recognize that while my intentions may be pure, the institutions that be still promote a racist environment that I further through my complicit lifestyle; 5) Racism still exists because of people like me.

When we engaged with campus and presented our art, we had people hold the mirror up to eye level and read all of the statements. After they had time to reflect, we asked, “Do you disagree with any of the statements on the mirror?” Regardless of whether or not they disagreed, we asked them to explain their rationale (i.e. “Why do you feel inclined to agree with these statements?” or “Why do you disagree with that statement?”) Participants overwhelmingly agreed with all of the statements, typically citing privilege, small social circles, and cultural/institutionalized White domination. Participants who disagreed had a broader array of answers, though people in disagreeance only disputed particular statements as opposed to all of them. Rationale for disagreeing included: feeling like their social cliques were not limiting by nature; the notion that as a Black person engaging in colorism, one isn’t generating racism but is rather navigating in a racist society; and that the statements “may be true,” but “no one should give up what they have for what someone else did” (a Zinester favorite). Next, we asked the participants when it is in day-to-day life that they are cognizant of or reflect on the sort of statements that were on the mirror. Responses typically included when racism is brought up in the media, when racist discourse among community members goes unchecked, and when in proximity with those who are more marginalized -- which are all overwhelmingly reactive as opposed proactive. We then asked respondents if they could foresee any sort of feasible solutions to the issues presented on the mirror, whether they be personal, institutional, or cultural. A majority of answers to this question involved the individual engaging in more open conversations about privilege, Whiteness, and racism, speaking up when racism is visible, and self-educating.
Through analyzing the differences in responses for the self-interrogation piece and the culture jamming pieces, we found that when it comes to talking about the issues, participants are more comfortable with critically analyzing coded objects that are associated with a culture, as opposed to being critical of the people who give those coded objects meaning.

The mirror addresses the folk theory of racism in that it is based on the individual, and that solutions which many of the readers come to end in self-reflection, education, and self-policing. The two culture-jamming pieces are representative of critical race theory because they take something that goes unquestioned among White elite culture (the sporting of expensive outdoorsy clothes) and interrogates it, highlighting the means by which privilege allows for the culture to exist, and the ways that culture itself inherently engages in othering.
My engagement with both this Zine and the Language of Racism course has yielded some of the most telling and significant experiences that I have had on Colorado College's campus. The class has allowed me to further reflect on my position in a racial, ethnic, and communal context, and this project has revealed to some extent how deeply the fear and cyclical nature of racist discourse runs. Growing up as a first-generation child was easier for me than it is for others like me in that I attended private school from Kindergarten through Senior year. My parents, coming from Pakistani and Indian backgrounds, immigrated from Kenya and Singapore in pursuit of the infamous American Dream: work as hard as possible so that the next generation has it easier. This is a "dream" that works well for some, but does not take into account the hierarchy of economic, social, and political statuses which separate people on a racial level. During my years in private school, I had the privilege of frequently visiting my extended family in Singapore, Kenya, and London, which I only began to reflect on and appreciate during my Senior year of high school after life-changing events.

Throughout the entirety of my life I had to deal with instances of covert and overt racism: mock Indian accents, "allah hu akbar," and other forms of what my peers would deem "rational-racism" through "humor." My whole life I actively created boundaries between words and meaning, trying to bear in mind that my peers were not intentionally trying to harm me, solely because I did not want to discuss the real issue which was affecting not only me, but also the many others like me who faced racism in all of its forms on a day-to-day basis. It was not until my brother got called a "sand N-word" and was severely beaten by two white men that I began to really think about my perpetuation of racism through my lack of self-policing/reflection, and my lack of engaging in conversations about racism.

For me this magazine addresses the silence around the topics of racism, privilege, and othering in the communities that I identify with. This silence fuels confusion, anxiety, anger, and thus racist actions and discourse -- whether covert or overt. At this point the silence is deafening, and we all need to speak up in order to listen and be heard.
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