BORDER CROSSINGS: PASSING AND OTHER(ED) STRATEGIC PERFORMANCES OF RACE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND CHICANA/O LITERATURES


Adviser: Sonnet Retman

This project begins with an analysis of racial passing narratives, and considers the ways that the genre provides a useful deconstructive tool to better understand essence-based productions of race and racial authenticity within Chicana/o assimilation narratives. Through their critical exploration of the performative aspects of race, passing novels expose the fissures within these essentialist logics and in so doing they lodge their protest against the conditions under which passing could occur.

I explore the ways that writers and artists have strategically used genre, knowing that readers will approach the text with a set of expectations, only to complicate the narrative while still operating within its formal conventions. This project maps strategic manipulations of genre as the primary tool to produce racial identities or exploit preexisting notions of race and gender with the aim to resist marginalization. I focus on the political discursive practices within both genres that judge passing and assimilation at the level of the individual. Such judgments stem from in-group policing that defines group belonging on the basis of racial or ethnic authenticity, rooted in notions of folk culture.