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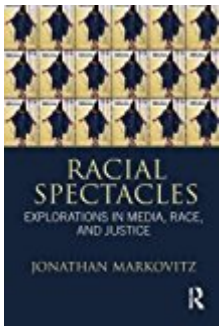

Jonathan Markovitz. *Racial Spectacles: Explorations in Media, Race, and Justice.* New York: Routledge, 2011. 240 pp. $39.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-203-84321-5.

Reviewed by Jonathan Anuik

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Commissioned by Linda Levitt (Stephen F. Austin State University)

Last summer, I happened upon an advertisement for Calvin Klein underwear in a subway station in downtown Toronto. Notably, the male model was black. The billboard did not come out of a vacuum, emerging as a single ad to capture the attention of consumers with disposable income going home from work. Instead, it is part of a longer history of North American obsession with black male sexuality. The advertisement is a racial spectacle, according to Jonathan Markovitz. He argues that "collective memories … help to structure contemporary social identities and determine how various constituencies make sense of racial spectacles as they unfold on a national or international stage" (p. 3). Thus, the national and international contours of race relations inevitably affect my response to the ad. Gender and class shape race as spectacles occur in news media, in fictional and nonfictional depictions of race in movies and on television, and in novels. Markovitz sets out to examine "the ways in which state actors and social movements have constructed narratives of the past" through the use of spectacles and "enlisted these narratives in political struggles," locally, nationally, and internationally. People have deployed spectacles, "mobilized around them," and made them matter, and through all of this, spectacles have influenced "racial formation" and racialization in the United States and internationally (p. 3). However, not all spectacles endure, and Markovitz wants to know why.

As a historian whose scholarly work on memory relies on stories from human participants, I am skeptical of Markovitz's argument that collective memories sustain racial spectacles. I am not sure if analysis of media coverage is adequate to gauge societal responses to spectacles. I am more interested in hearing the voices of those who experience being racialized in their daily lives. I follow "collective memory literature … centrally concerned with the importance of collective memory for individual and group identity" (p. 14). Markovitz enriches my understandings, though. He suggests instead that "analysis of the spectacle," the narrative and the history, "must … con-

sider the ways that imagery is linked to social structures and political power" (p. 4). He eloquently tells readers of his intention to tease out the implications of racial spectacles in lynching, allegations of rape and police corruption, violations of prisoners' human rights, and campus conflicts. It is his argument that every spectacle informs the longer narrative of social justice in the United States. He is interested in "the ways that racial spectacles are made to matter" as people in the mainstream see those who are racialized (p. 3). The spectacle fills in space left vacant by first-person narratives. It says a lot "about common belief systems and social norms." It addresses dominant ideologies under criticism when the spectacle, being "racialized imagery," is first shared with the public (pp. 4, 6). Markovitz warns the reader, however, that the effect of spectacles on public sensibilities depends on race, gender, class, and place. Consequently, spectacles are not always seen the way their creators would like them to be regarded.

It is against this backdrop that the reader enters the first chapter, set in early twentieth-century Alabama, in the southern United States. There, lynching of blacks by whites reinforced racial supremacy in the name of justice. The spectacles associated with the nine African American men (known as the Scottsboro Nine) accused of raping two white women would "challenge the ways in which lynching would be understood and remembered" (p. 10). Markovitz reminds readers that the Scottsboro trial and the appeals, dismissals, and commutation of a death penalty sentence occurred amid a larger shift in the state's economy. At the time of the trial, white citizens were becoming sensitive to critiques of lynching from political and economic leaders in northern states. Alabamian white business leaders required investment from northerners in their business ventures. Consequently, economic forces helped shape the white public's perception of the justifiability of lynching to mete out justice when allegations of African American men raping white women were made. The chapter closes with a lesson for scholars who analyze changes in attitudes among people in terms of race and gender: to question "under what circumstances … [historical sensibilities] come into play, and to what effect?" (p. 14).

The "sense of the past" is not static but is instead influenced by contextual factors that condition memories and their use by people to interpret spectacles and more specifically, "mass media spectacles involving race and gender as they are unfolding" (p. 14). Nowhere is this point more true than in chapter 5, discussing the torture of inmates at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. If the images of the prisoners had been circulated in isolation from antiwar activism and in 2003 instead of 2006, when support for the U.S. war had declined immensely among the public, Markovitz speculates that their effect on public sensibilities with respect to due process and justice would likely have been marginal. Here and in the closing chapter, it becomes clear that social movements precede the media spectacle. Fortunately, the anti-lynching activism, antiracist critiques of the U.S. justice system in the rape trial of Kobe Bryant, antiwar protests, and social justice advocacy on university and college campuses enabled the spectacles to stay in front of the public's view. The release of the images of the Abu Ghraib prisoners occurred amid a political shift in the United States and thus the public outcry that resulted enabled the media spectacles to gain traction and stay current.

The result of the spectacle is enhanced media coverage. In the case of the Scottsboro Nine, not only news coverage but also fictional and nonfictional representations were created. However, merely identifying the representation of spectacles in art, music, novels, and documentaries is not enough. What is missing throughout the book is a raced, gendered, and class-based analysis of the uptake of such works inspired by the spectacles, instead of just their mention. Markovitz

comes close when he places Scottsboro against the O. J. Simpson trial, from 1994 to 1995, to disrupt the grand narrative "of national progress in race relations" (p. 43). He speculates that "references to the case are likely to carry different sets of meanings, and to provide different cues about how to understand contemporary events, for audiences relying on different media sources" (p. 48). I would like to know, though, if engagement with different media sources, from CBS to Fox News to the African American press, is conditioned by gender, race, and class? Would Fox News reporters draw comparisons between the Simpson trial and cases of lynching in the U.S. South? Is any coverage of the social movement behind the spectacle beneficial? The media coverage of the Bryant case pitted rape shield proponents, who were predominantly white feminists, against antiracist justice activists speaking from a longer history of lynching. The conflict leaves this reviewer to wonder at the interpretations of the narrative behind Bryant's mug shot photo, as published on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. If an individual read only the feminist press or only the African American press, I imagine that the interpretations would likely differ and thus the effects of the spectacle on memories of race and gender relations likely conflict.

The problem is aggravated by Markovitz's engagement with the databases of newspapers and Web sites holding media coverage. For example, when he discusses the Rampart case in chapters 3 and 4, he sets out to test the media coverage of the revelations of police corruption in the Los Angeles Police Department. Markovitz relies on databases with international holdings of newspapers. He focuses on articles of 250 words or more. He does not, however, question why newspapers in certain cities and countries (e.g., in Philadelphia [especially from 1999 to 2000] and Ottawa, as well as in Australia) seem to dedicate greater space to coverage of Rampart, providing more detail than newspapers from other nations and jurisdictions. When discussing the Bryant case, he identifies a media obsession with black male defendants in cases of alleged sexual deviance, yet I would have appreciated substantial discussion of the places where local newspapers and television shows were particularly fascinated with the case. Markovitz comes close early in the chapter on Bryant (chapter 2), when he discusses the Central Park attacks in New York City, sharing the tragic consequences of mistaken identification of youth of color by police as responsible for the attack on a jogger. Throughout the chapter discussing the spectacles of the Bryant case, particularly the mug shot, he cites coverage by *New York Times* reporters. Is the reason for the *Times*'s interest in the Bryant case because of the recent attack in the city? If the objective is to understand how spectacles fuel social movements, then it is necessary for Markovitz to connect local cues in the narrative of race relations with the Bryant case. Doing so not only disrupts this grand narrative of progress in race relations, but also shapes local race, class, and gender relations as depicted through media coverage of spectacles. The question requiring dedicated attention, possibly in another chapter, is: do local memories of race, class, and gender conflicts affect whether a spectacle sticks with people in the long term?

Careful reflection on the availability of media sources through databases would enrich the analysis in chapter 3, on news coverage of the Rampart scandal. In this chapter and in chapter 4, investigating Hollywood's appropriation of the scandal, Markovitz debunks the myth of the "monster" tale. It is a myth perpetuated by apologists for police brutality who insist that spectacles produced from violent encounters initiated by officers are the result of a few "bad apples" or "monsters" working at the lower levels of law enforcement (p. 81). In both chapters, Markovitz criticizes such journalistic interpretations and the subsequent fictional depictions that flow from such coverage for isolating these incidents from a longer and troubling narrative of racial injustice in the United States. Instead of helping social movements,

the artistic works actually stabilize the grand narrative of progress and equality that those at the top of law enforcement seek to uphold, especially in their own internal reviews of police officers' misconduct.

Despite attempts on the part of the commanders to feed the "bad apple" myth to the press, the grand narrative of progress in race relations fell off the tracks in the Rampart patrol district. Local newspapers and media outlets throughout the world relied instead on the stories of those affected by and those critical of police brutality. As people shared their stories, and academics and advocacy groups leveled criticism at the "bad apple" approach to disciplining misconduct, it became clear that there was a "contaminated orchard" in local and federal public service, spanning police departments and justice and immigration institutions at the national level (p. 86). Markovitz questions why the spectacle of Rodney King, beaten by police officers in 1991, and the subsequent Rampart investigations in the 1990s, covered predominantly in print newspapers because of the absence of visual imagery, touched off major campaigns to arrest police corruption in Los Angeles and, hopefully, throughout the United States. Why did the public now want to know more about the "contaminated orchard?" Why were media outlets now receptive to "systemic critiques" of U.S. public services, instead of letting the government officials "set the agenda for debate" (p. 93)? Similarly, why did the media keep its slots open to the above stories throughout the 1990s and early 2000s?

Do gender, race, and class relations, situated in a place, affect journalists' and reporters' interests and engagements with incidents happening outside of Los Angeles? This question needs to be answered if Markovitz is to comment effectively on the effects of Rampart on collective memory in a global context. Trials are "highly publicized" because of race, gender, and class, especially in cases involving a sports celebrity like Bryant, but if I juxtapose Bryant's trial with Rampart, then it is clear that only certain city newspapers take regular interest in the two cases. Perhaps the reason why Philadelphia's newspapers stayed interested in cases involving race relations is because of the city's own race relations history or because Bryant grew up in Philadelphia, a fact that is not mentioned by Markovitz. Editors consider readers' interests, based on local and "long histories of struggle by social movements and state actors over meanings of categories of race and gender" (p. 50). In Philadelphia, reporters and journalists read "various segments of the … public" to determine newsworthiness, anticipating interests based on past struggles involving "race, gender, and justice" (p. 51). It is in this space where interviews with local activists and those who are racialized become an asset to a study like Markovitz's. The analysis of the Hollywood productions based on Rampart, in chapter 4, needs greater attention to the lenses of race, gender, and class. What is known of viewers of the movie ***Training Day*** (2001) and the television show ***The Shield*** (2002-08), the two productions that he investigates as fictional spectacles of Rampart? This question is, unfortunately, not tackled by Markovitz but is crucial to understanding how spectacles stick and reshape race relations in the United States and the world.

Gender, race, class, and place situate spectacles. Cultural forces hold the patch of the spectacle on a blanket of humanity made of the multicolored threads of gender, race, class, and place. The durability of the fabric and its threads determines if the spectacle patch stays on the blanket and is viewed by the subsequent generations. If the blanket covers a viewer, then seeing a half-naked black man while waiting for the subway is more than a turn-on to a product, but is instead part of an obsession with the black male body. In this case, the black man is earning a living off the public fascination with his body. It is ironic that ignorance of the longer history can also sustain spectacles. If the viewer immediately rejected the advertisement because of its dehumanization of

the individual in the name of economic gain, then perhaps the spectacle would also fade. What results is a paradox. Spectacles must be upheld by damning histories unknown to the general public. To advance antiracism education in the Western world, we, as educators, need spectacles to address the longer histories of racial injustice with students and to disrupt the grand narrative of progress in race relations. The longevity of the spectacle is sometimes threatened also. Perhaps the greatest test of the spectacle is its reversibility. In time, it may fade, if race relations improve locally and globally.

Markovitz needs a clearer discussion of power. Throughout ***Racial Spectacles***, he suggests that the spectacles have come to reside in spaces of public viewing, whether it is the lynching postcards in museums, or the theaters screening Hollywood dramatizations of police brutality. What he fails to address is, who has the power to frame such exhibits? Similarly, who has access to viewing these exhibits? The economic and social capital (i.e., educational attainment) of the viewers and the directors and curators can mute the voices of those who are affected by racial injustice in contemporary society.

These caveats aside, Markovitz deserves credit for tapping the collective memory held in spectacles and for a sophisticated analysis of the social movements behind them. He tells readers how the spectacle sits as a patch on a multicolored blanket of race, gender, and class relations. If sewn on by strong social movements, the spectacle endures. Similarly, the spectacle can be upheld by the public as a base to promote education. ***Racial Spectacles*** has a broad appeal. Despite the absence of contextual information, I recommend the book for scholars interested in collective memory and also for antiracism educators and activists. It charts theoretical ground for closer case studies of race and racialization in the United States and the Western world, especially those examples referred to by Markovitz.

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