



From Dispossession to Overdetermination: A Contemporary Racial Semiotics

Monday April 19th, 2021 3:30pm-5:00pm (PST)

Krystal Smalls



Krystal Smalls is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics (with affiliations in African American Studies and African Studies) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her work specifically concerns discourses and practices that constitute Blackness, anti-Blackness, and anti-anti-Blackness. Smalls' work has been published in the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *Transforming Anthropology*, and *Language and Communication*. She is working on her first book on the semiotics of contemporary Black Diaspora in the lives of young Liberians and is conducting research with her cultural community, the Gullah/Geechee of the South Carolina lowcountry.

Jonathan Rosa



Jonathan Rosa is Associate Professor of Education, Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies, and, by courtesy, Anthropology and Linguistics, at Stanford University. He is author of *Looking like a Language, Sounding like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad* (2019, Oxford University Press) and co-editor of the volume *Language and Social Justice in Practice* (2019, Routledge). Rosa's work has been published in scholarly journals such as the *Harvard Educational Review*, *American Ethnologist*, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, and *Language in Society*, as well as featured in media outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, NPR, and Univision.v

This presentation considers how semiotic approaches to the analysis of race, racism, and racialization challenge conventional assumptions about the dynamic relationship between signs and contexts. Smalls analyzes the entextualization, decontextualization, and (re) contextualization of "the Black body" in digital space as a practice of body-snatching. She considers how, when we begin to map the semiotic fields in which anti-Black multimodal contextualizations transpire, we are best served to call in Black theorists, current and past, who attend to the materiality of gendered race and to the peculiarity of Blackness. Rosa tracks recent incidents that have come to be viewed in relation to racial and linguistic profiling, showing how bodies, practices, and materialities are racialized in multiple, often contradictory ways depending on the institutionalized modes of perception through which they are apprehended. Whereas racial and linguistic profiling are often understood as problems centered on discriminatory behavior at the individual level, Rosa focuses on the institutionalized processes that shape and often overdetermine individual construals of profiled entities. The broader goal is to draw on semiotic perspectives to understand and contest endemic societal hierarchies that race, racism, and racialization serve to (re)produce.