

## **Editorial: Post-racial Imaginaries – connecting the pieces**

In the deluge of the 'posts' that have littered the critical scene over the last three decades, 'post-race' has arrived quite late in the day. After the endless sparring over the meanings of the 'post', the 'post' in post-race seems already politically inadequate and theoretically dated. But perhaps its untimeliness is an opening up of a critical space to rethink race and racism in contemporary thought and politics?

It's emphatic that the post-racial should not mean 'post-racist' – in fact most committed anti-racists have tended to dismiss the term as problematic to the contemporary struggles for racial justice. Even with liberal commentators there is a recognition of the continual presence of racism, though its overcoming is only a matter of time for them. Nonetheless, for those with a more radical anti-racist persuasion, if it is not about an overcoming of racism then why is the post-race concept to be invoked at all, given that it appears to signify that we have moved beyond race and racism in some way or another?

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To posit the post-racial suggests some form of periodisation. (Compare with the ideas of periodisation inherent in notions of the post-modern or post-colonial for example). But while racism has been recognized as a modern social oppression it has remained either relegated as epiphenomenal, especially in relation to class and the economy, or comprehended as just one of many identities and differences in a pluralised field of multicultural democracy and social-cultural theory. In contrast, the post-racial can be understood as an attempt to re-examine race as integral to wider historical, social and political change, and not just marking a point solely in the history of race and racism. It introduces a 'historicity' to race that has rather remained implied (or invisible) in the various attempts to name contemporary transformations in modernity. Counter-intuitively, post-race can offer the possibility of the return of racism as a 'master-narrative' in conditions of its critical disavowal.

Unquestionably, the Obama presidential victory was a significant event in the history of race in the USA, and to global race politics. As a result the specter of 'moving beyond' racism inevitably informs scholarly as well as popular discussions of race. The Obama event is a, if not, the symptomatic exemplar of how 'post-raciality' now over-determines discourses of racialization and racism. Arguably, while post-race is not explicitly articulated, it acts as the discursive frame for race talk now; a sort of 'racial unconscious' that structures the political, social and theoretical struggles over race and racism. Like it or not, debates about multiculturalism, 'colour-blindness', diversity, whiteness, globalization, anti-racism, institutional racism, racist violence, hate speech etc. are in one way or another framed by an underlying politics of post-raciality. If this is really the case, we need to begin to make some sense of the term – what it may mean, how prevalent is it, what is its politics...how it works.

darkmatter journal has been committed to understanding what is at stake in the contemporary configurations and mutations of race. Our original call for papers for this special issue highlights the specific aims of the journal in addressing the 'post-racial imaginary':

Increasing reference to the notion of 'post-race' is suggestive of an emergent discursive framework in critical approaches to race and racism. 'Post-race', 'post-racial', 'post-black', and associated ideas, are being mobilized in various theoretical, cultural and political discourses to describe new racial formations. Post-race requires us to question in new ways the precepts of race thinking, positing the end of race as a point with which to think racial futures. The imprecise nature of much 'post-' talk means there has yet to be a rigorous

assessment of the significance of post-race and its cognate terms, beyond simple endorsement or dismissal.

This two-part Special Issue provides the beginnings of an attempt to delineate the complex demarcations and mobilisations of what a focus upon 'post-racial imaginaries' may (or may not) productively generate. The richness of the enquiry, its contestations and the scope of the contributions collected for the Issue elaborates the claims that the 'post' in post-race is about the critical affirmation of proliferations of racism in a contemporary neoliberal order that claims to have gone beyond the racial.