How white is your white?

On the lack of colour in the Bernardo/Homolka affair.
It may seem an odd take on a trial whose reputation has served it up, in consistently terrifying and horrific details, the life, times and murderous activities of those two white devils, Gary and Armin. And how they lived around the streets of Vancouver. But the public now, when you consider how the media have dealt, or not dealt, with the issues of race and ethnicity as they relate to this trial.

Bernardo and Homolka. The names rank of "ethnicity" in the way in which the word has come to be defined in Canada: all those who are white but not Anglo-Saxon or French. The white ethnics. In multicultural Canada there is a sense in which ethnicity has become the presence of the white ethnics, while Africans, Asians and First Nations remain the sole occupants of the land and race. Bernado and Vincent are the only two non-Indians to have revealed themselves as black, but they have had their day. In other words, over and above ethnicity, whiteness is in much such a construction as blackness, and both can be located in specific historical, socio-political contexts. One of the most pervasive effects of the construction of whiteness in the New World was the projection of all negative characteristics onto the other - first the Native then the African. Whiteness, according to David Roediger, in Towards an Abolition of Whiteness, then becomes not as much a culture, "but precisely the absence of culture. The emptiness and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on what one can hold back." (imaginative reconstruction from the Batemans text.)

"Girl you know what ethnic group dem two white devils belong to?"

"All I know is dem white -"

"But don't Bernardo and Homolka sound foreign to you?"

"Damn right - as foreign as some of those African names I hearing."

"Child, you notice how no matter how foreign and strange white people does be, nobody making dem out to be different."

The names Bernardo and Homolka are far more "foreign" sounding and "different" than Clancy Gayle, Lawrence Brown, O'Neill Grant, Black men, who, in 1994, galvanized media attention and public discourse around issues of race and crime. Bernardo decided to, and one day did, change his name to the less foreignersounding Teane; he and Homolka refused to live in Toronto because of all the immigrants and crime. Yet there has been no exploration of these issues (except when it relates to rap music...but more of that later). Where are the outlets to send these individuals back to where their DNA originated? Around the time of Clancy Gayle's arrest, I recall one CFRB reporter advocating that Canadian citizenship be revoked in cases where the crime was serious enough. By any standard, the crimes carried out by Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo qualify. Further, in the imprisonment and treatment of Japanese Canadians during World War II, there exists more than sufficient historical precedent for the revocation of Canadian citizenship and "separation" of individu-

It was their blood and ethnicity that determined what happened to the Japanese. It was their race that excluded Canadian birth and citizenship. Issues of origin,สถาบัน, and citizenship dominated and shaped the public discourse around the arrests of Lawrence Brown, O'Neil Grant and Clancy Gayle, and established Canada as a space of purity and innocence that was somehow contaminated by the presence of black and "foreign" people. These issues have been notably missing in the case of Bernardo and Homolka. Although we all have been left with is a mysterious woman and a man who longed to be a white rap musician.

What ethnic groups do these two little-colored-brown little-white criminals belong to, any-who? Since the trial, most newspapers have emphasized the fact that the two have what others have called a "mixed" background. In fact, if you回去 to the beginning of the story and look at the family trees, you will see that Bernardo and Homolka share a common ancestry in their father's side and Anglo-Canadians from his mother's. The name Homolka sounds Eastern European. Nothing, however, has been revealed about this woman's ethnic background. As with the other strange communities to which such couples belong, none has been called on to explain how it is going to control this type of monstrous crime by its members. Neither is the white community (is there a such thing?) or the various ethnic communities called on to explain how they have produced such monsters. Where are the calls for the control of black crime, particularly sexual crime? The silence surrounds all the more loudly because it has been addressed or broken.

What is the colour of black? Why does the colour of power - physical and economical - the colour of fear and, at times, loathing. From the perspective of many black people that is. Similarly, the colour of black, from the perspective of many white people, is also the colour of fear, loathing and threat - simplistically physical. What makes the experiencing of these two social colours different, however, is that in whites people control the production of images of black peoples. The latter lack similar control over the portrayal of whites and for the most part own themselves. Further, integral to being socialized as a black person is the acquisiting of a sensibility to how one is seen through the eyes of white people - what W.E. Du Bois described as "second hand" or "doubt-consciousness" that only allows you to see yourself "through themediation of the other world." Black people bear constant witness to the fear and loathing in which they are held. From the smallest act of existence, literally drawing away from them in fear or disgust, to the much larger picture of the primarily neg-ative representation of Blacks in the media. Blacks see their blackness represented back to them in unwholesome, unpalatable ways.

It is uncanny, however, for white people to experience or even see themselves as white - they just are-sort of witness their whiteness as a representation of negativity. Everything around them compels them to see otherwise. One of the most memorable scenes in Spike Lee's movie Malcolm X is of the optimistic moment when the young Malcolm, sitting in the prison library, understands how the meanings of the words black and white bear witness to the lived experience of black.

"Blackness" is highly visible to Blacks and all those upon whom it impacts negatively - but while simultaneously invisible. Invisible because, in a society steeped in racism and eurocentric ideology, white and whiteness becomes equated with normality, while in others, primarily negative for white people as well remain remarkably visible to all those who care to look. Integral to the inverting, escalating and exploiting of the peoples and lands of Africa, Asia and the Americas was the ideology of white supremacy. Yet no out of touch with reality is the ideology and practice of whiteness, that in 1992 the United States, Canada and other handsomed nations were held on or "celebrating" the 50th anniversary of Colombo's "discovery" of the New World. That this "discovery" meant genocide for Native peoples seems not to matter to the celebrations.

The essence of whiteness is its invisible link and unannounced access to power, accompanied by an inability to counteract being threatened in any way. The backlash against affirmative action policies both in Canada and in the United States bear overwhelming witness to this. "By giving special attention to other races," Andrew Hacker writes in The Nation, "affirmative action [should] be done by whites. Thus for the first time, Caucasians were made to feel they no longer came first...they had a taste of what it might be like to be black...they haven't experienced the...experience." In pretending whiteness doesn't exist, that normal equals white, the power of whiteness grows exponentially. It metastasizes. It also
In all the copy written about him, the only time Paul Bernardo is identified as white is when his desire to be a “white rap artist” is reported. For the record, it should be noted that despite the (for many, unsavoury) lyric of gangsta rap, no rap musician has kidnapped young girls, raped them, killed them, and cut them up.

The point here is a simple one: because of the veil of protection that whiteness (and to some degree class) offers its devotees and disciples, Paul Bernardo was able to walk around raping and murdering children and women for much longer than should have been possible. Contrast this with the passionate enthusiasm, anger, and violence exercised in the policing of Black people. On the streets. In their neighbourhoods. In their homes. And often for minor offences, or no offences at all. Consider the number of Black people shot by the police. Some, like Lester Donohue and Albert Johnson, in their homes. Then consider again, Paul Bernardo.

Not only does whiteness become a shield against wrongdoing, as described above, but in the use of narratives, Blackness is reduced to numbers and statistics. The story of how to understand Bernardo’s psychopathic personality, there is also an insidious telling of whiteness. In suggesting that it is only through rap that we come to understand Bernardo’s crimes, the media fosters an image of whiteness whose qualities of innocence, wholeness and purity are contaminated only when they come in contact with Black life, in this case rap music—when it is inhabited: “white kids were eating the stuff up.” Once again Blackness is pathologized: it becomes the contaminant of whiteness-Bernardo himself—as well as the only way into his disturbed mind. White movies made by white producers, featuring white actors and white themes which he also cannibalized and twisted from, apparently had no effect on him.

Similarly, in the sole reference made to gangsta (Toronto Star)—the allegation of Bernardo being a male hustler in the Bayview area of Toronto—gangsta is pathologized. What the reader is then left with is the intact white, heterosexual, middle-class male whose contact with gangsta is black and pornographic in the kingdom of whiteness—these are interchangeable pathologies—contaminated him and turned him into the killer he became.

Where there are so much mothers, as in the case of Karla Homolka, only mystery remains. There being no recognition that whiteness exists and as much a construction as Blackness, there can be no pathology in what does not exist. The media—the white media—cannot understand how Karla Homolka might be the logical creation of a culture that has lodged materiality and individuality at the centre of all human activity. A culture that instills in girls and young women the desire for the perfect man, the perfect marriage and the perfect house, and which has created an environment in which girls, women and children of both sexes are at physical risk; a culture in which women, despite being tax-paying citizens, cannot fully enjoy their environments for fear of being raped and/or murdered. A culture of whiteness that, in hierarchizing cultures, peoples and gardens, attempts to build an identity on what one can’t see and on what one can hold back.

Consider the refusal of Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo, descendants of immigrants themselves (as is everyone in Canada save the First Nations peoples), to live in Toronto. Why? Because there were too many immigrants—read Mexicans and Asians. People of colour. Black people. And too much crime! In the easy assumption of this couple from hell, that they were superior to dark-skinned peoples, to be found that absolute and insidious expression of whiteness. Under European colonization, buttressed by racism and white supremacy, the most lowly white person, the most deprived white person, could go out to the colonies and immediately assume a position higher than that of an African, Indian, Chinese or Native person of greater moral standing, higher education and a better socio-economic standing. This ideology of whiteness has meant that
Hers is a case of whiteness melded to gender. The result? A Teflon princess to whom nothing sticks. Not even a murder rap. The media have described her as mysterious—the archetypal mysterious woman—even compared her to the Mona Lisa!

The most corrupt and debauched white pastor in South Africa could assume greater rights, respect and treatment and consider him or herself better than any African. Whatever their standing in their communities. Whiteness has meant that the most uneducated redneck could pull rank on the most educated Black person in the U.S.A. or Canada. Today in the United States, for instance, it means that African Americans are far more often legally murdered by the state for killing a white person than whites are for killing blacks (or other whites). And finally, whiteness means that Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo after raping, depending, killing and dismembering young women could think themselves better than the thousands of hard-working, desk-skinned immigrants to Toronto whose moral stature is in no way inferior to theirs.

Make no mistake about it, this trial has also been about whiteness. But because it has been allowed to remain invisible, whiteness remains unchallenged.

The role of videocassette in this and two other recent crimes elucidates how Blackness and whiteness function differently. Although the videos presented graphic evidence of the Los Angeles police beating Rodney King, the jury chose to believe that Rodney King, because he was Black, was still the aggressor and that the police were "protecting" themselves. In the case of Karla Homolka the jury and public were encouraged to disregard the graphic evidence that she was a full participant in the crimes against the young women and believe that it was all an act on her part— that she was being forced to do what she did—the way the L.A. police in the Rodney King case were being forced by factors we did not and could not see to believe in the way they did. Homolka's excuse is that she was being abused, the L.A. police's that Blacks are aggressive and physically violent. In neither case were these external factors visible on video, but their suggested reading of these videos call into question the edifice that seeing is, indeed, believing.

Like the L.A. police defendants and his wife, Paul Bernardo also urged the jury to disregard what they saw on the tapes and conclude that although he appeared to be in control of much of what was happening on the tape, he did not actually kill Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy.

Consider for a moment the videotape released around the time of the Just Desserts ribbons to assist the police in their search for the perpetrators. Blurred, inaccurate and indistinct, but startlingly clear in its representation of young Black men. All young Black men. The public, as judge and jury, were encouraged to believe they could see what was in fact not visible—a clear representation of the faces of those young men: they were not asked on the collective identity of young Black men in Toronto. All of whom became guilty by virtue of being Black. In the high visibility of Blackness the absence of detail becomes infallible; in the low visibility of whiteness, the plumes of detail immortal.

Experts have opined at length on the early of women indulging in crimes such as Homolka's and Bernardo's. The only explanation we have had for Karla Homolka's behaviour is that she was batttered. And though there have been experts who have said that her abuse—whatever its extent—doesn't sufficient to explain her behaviour, the image of Karla Homolka remains one of an abused woman—victim.

At the time of writing, there has been no challenge from the women's movement to the use of the Battered-Wife Syndrome in her case. Only recently recognized in law, this defence has been used to explain why women kill their abusers. Not to excuse the rape, torture and murder of young women. To have this defence used to explain away Homolka's participation in these crimes makes a mockery of the work done over the years to have this defence recognized in law. Why the silence?

Despite her statements, homophobia, sexism, or some fundamental level the image of Karla Homolka remains strangely untouched, and whiteness once again becomes a shield and is shielded. Here is a case of whiteness melded to gender. The result? A Teflon princess to whom nothing sticks. Not even a murder rap. The media have described her as mysterious—the archetypal mysterious woman—even compared her to the Mona Lisa. While there is no little signalling in this description, it also serves to protect her image as a white woman. She may be a sadist, she may have had young girls to their deaths, she may even be a murderer, but she is bright. No dumb black this, but in the top 10% of the population in intelligence. If this doesn't undo (and it won't the nonsense about high IQ scores guarantying anything, I don't know what will. She has been shown to be fairly, tough and resilient under cross-examination. Now contrast the image of the Menes Mona Lisa with a penchant for Saddam with that of Audrey Smith, the Jamaican woman who complained about being strip-searched by the police in public. Based on recent "analysis" and "research" by the likes of Phillippe Rushton and Herrnstein and Murray of Bell Curve fame, we know her IQ to be sub-normal. Rose of Mann is the Toronto Star confirms this. Audrey Smith is telling the truth because her "simplicity...just sits there like a lump on a log..." And as for mystery—the only one is why this Black woman from Jamaica was sitting on a bench in the Parkdale area late at night. That mystery has now been resolved by the investigating panel's report with its strong suggestion that Audrey Smith was a drug pusher. No drugs were found on Audrey Smith and the issue before the panel was whether she was stripped in public. Not whether or not she was selling drugs. Karla Homolka, the "pathetic" blonde with the "pouting" bolster lip, is a woman who "felt at ease with men... men always seemed to find her most believable." Audrey Smith case the other hand is "bizarre" and "lumpy" (66 Manen again).

That Audrey Smith has been treated shabbily is beyond denial: She has come to Canada on many occasions to seek justice, only to be returned to Jamaica without having her case heard. She has been summarily stopped at the airport in Jamaica in this way for years. She has gone to Canada and told that the Immigration Department would refuse to allow her to enter Canada because she was misquoting someone else. Her reputation has been slandered. Audrey Smith has not raped, tortured or killed young girls. Audrey Smith is Black. And where whiteness reigns, her skin becomes a marker of guilt. Even when she has committed no crime. Conversely, even when the most heinous crimes have been committed, whiteness becomes a shield, offering protection and safety. (Despite the Paul Berndorfs, the Gilford Oxens, and the Karla Homolkas, the most enduring image of the criminal, which has greatest currency today in Canadian society, is that of the Black male. The Berndorfs remain black white rap artists, the Hornekas intelligent Mona Lisa with pouting lips who feel at ease with men.

Contrary to recent reports that there are too many Chinese in Marshon, too many Jews practicing law, medicine and accounting and, of course, too many immigrants, what Canadian society is suffering from—ever since the first white settler arrived here—is an excess, an excessence if you will, of whiteness. Until and unless we "attack whiteness as a destructive ideology" and "focus political energy on exposing, demonizing and demeaning the particular ideology of whiteness," as Rodolpigha write, Vilenica, Aiana and First Nations people—the Others as postmodernists do so aptly named us—will continue to carry the disproportional load of dynamics in this society. In the meantime, as my mother says, "after what does white people doing to Black people during slavery time, noth ing surprising me about what does white devils doing today."