
I started my summer readings with David Roediger's *Working Toward Whiteness,* I was intrigued by the single blurb on the cover of Roediger's book, supplied by the Washington Post, "provocative." Well, I didn't find it terribly provocative—how's that for a provocative statement?

This doesn't mean I didn't find it a competent and readable history. It was. However, the concept of "whiteness studies" as a way of breaking the prevailing understanding of whiteness as a "norm," and the journey of Southern and Eastern European immigrants from "dark white" to "white" is not new to me. As a Californian, maybe, and a product of an historical moment concerned with ethnic origins, the sheer diversity within the category "white" has long been quite evident to me, and the origins and arrival times of various ethnic groups, along with the difficulties they faced--these stories have been with me since childhood. On top of European ethnic groups, California is also home to many Asian and South Asian ethnicities, "Black," African and Caribbean ethnicities, and several indigenous groups as well. In the 70s and 80s, there was a lot of "roots" searching, and this phenomenon trickled down to schooling.

Added to this, I'm also aware that we're not living in a post-ethnic society for those deemed "white." While, on a form, a Croatian-, an Italian-, and an Irish-American may all select "white," that doesn't mean that there aren't people out there calling them "guinea," "mick" and who knows what else. There are. I've met them. And there are plenty of folks who still equate "Jew" with race or ethnicity, even though I do my best to make it clear that Judaism is a religion, and I feel strongly that that there are no "ethnic" Jews. And these things equate to a mild (or not so mild) racism, even if your term of choice is "ethnic." Some evidence (in an amusing and palatable form) can be seen in Gilbert Hernandez's comic *Love and Rocks: A Rock 'n' Roll Headache* from '89.

So it's not that I disagree with the premise of the book—Roediger is on the mark when he's speaking historically about transformations in ethnic groups arriving and living in America, and the parallel path of African-Americans, who did not have the benefit of being able to change race. But I would argue that only in some settings have certain groups effectively changed race. Another point that Roediger discusses, though it's not his main point, is the arbitrariness of the term "race." As I understand it, it is an unscientific term at best, and at worst it is a manipulation of perception. Percival Everett puts this quite well in *Erasure* when the character Monk talks about why society has deemed him "Black." If I felt an historical evaluation of the term "race" was the primary point of the book, and if it were written in the style of Frantz Fanon, then perhaps I would have called it "provocative."