The Importance of Considering Multiple Semiotic Resources in the Study of Race Talk

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Talk about race can involve a range of semiotic tools employed to both obscure and convey meanings that serve to perpetuate racial inequalities in society. The dominant group—whites, in the context of the United States—may allude to race without directly mentioning it, but make racist points nonetheless (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Pollock, 2004). To accomplish this, they may use code words or draw upon paralinguistic and extralinguistic semiotic resources.

As a multimodal activity, talk about race is best understood through an examination of the range of semiotic resources—from words to body movements—that constitute it. In this paper I suggest that a combination of two analytic approaches can effectively illuminate this composite phenomenon. One approach is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which exposes the discursive reproduction of power hierarchies through analysis of texts. The other approach is that employed by C. Goodwin and M. H. Goodwin, which accounts for the paralinguistic and extralinguistic ways humans make meaning. I show the analytical power of the combination of these two methods of analysis through the presentation of conversations that occurred in a focus group of white males. These conversations illustrate the ways whites can use a variety of semiotic resources in their talk about race.

1 Theoretical Framework

Below I provide an overview of CDA and the Goodwins' analytical approach, in addition to a discussion of Critical Race Theory (CRT). I demonstrate how CRT can provide a foundation for the two approaches when applied to talk about race.

1.1 Critical Race Theory

Beginning with the understanding that race is a social construct (Omi & Winant, 1994), CRT demonstrates that race is used to create human hierarchies that are the status quo in the United States and affect society on multiple levels (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). On a larger scale, racism forms the foundation of social and economic institutions (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). On a smaller scale, racism is maintained through everyday

Texas Linguistic Forum 53: 50-61
Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Symposium About Language and Society – Austin
April 10-11, 2009

interactions, which can involve "microaggressions," or subtle racial insults that create a hostile climate for people of color (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The driving force behind racism is whiteness, which entails countless benefits for white people. Whites' privileges are akin to wearing "invisible knapsacks" full of beneficial resources that accrue on a daily basis (McIntosh, 1990). These benefits encompass individual property rights, as Harris (1995) argues, and are forces that result in inequitable material realities. The subordination of people of color is the outcome of these practices and an accompanying ideology of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2002, 2004).

1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

CRT works nicely with CDA, which acknowledges language's link to social hierarchies and shows the mechanisms through which this connection occurs. CDA posits that "discourse does not merely reflect social processes and structures, but affirms, consolidates and, in this way, reproduces existing social structures" (Teo, 2000, p. 11). CDA has the capacity to "show the power relations of apparently mundane texts at work" (Luke, 1996, p. 40) and "unpack the ideological underpinnings of discourse" that have become naturalized (Teo, p. 12).

The tenets of CDA merge with those of CRT in scholarship that reveals how talk and other forms of meaning-making are used to perpetuate racism (Wodak & Reisigl, 1999). Augoustinos and Every (2007), in a review of pertinent literature, provide another perspective, arguing that the "in-group" (whites) uses certain patterns of talk to avoid being perceived as racist while negatively judging members of the "out-group" (people of color). For instance, in-group members deny their prejudice both individually and collaboratively. As van Dijk (1992) explains, the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation is part of whites' strategy of presenting themselves in a positive light and functions to mask the inconsistency between official discourses of tolerance and the reality of racism. In presenting their negative views of the out-group, in-group members invoke reason and rationality, avoid using race words, and draw upon the liberal ideology of freedom, equality, and individualism (Augoustinos & Every). In concert, these types of talk function to marginalize the out-group. "It is through everyday language practices, in both formal and informal talk, that relations of power, dominance, and exploitation become reproduced and legitimated" (Augoustinos & Every, p. 138).

1.3 The C. Goodwin and M. H. Goodwin Approach to Discourse Analysis

Complementing CDA analyses of race talk is the understanding of multiple semiotic resources and conversation analysis supplied by C. Goodwin and M. H. Goodwin (C. Goodwin, 2000, 2003; C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 2006; M. H. Goodwin & Goodwin, 2001). These two scholars demonstrate that talk encompasses paralinguistic and extralinguistic resources, such as prosody, embodied actions, and the material surroundings of the speakers. The Goodwins' approach is nicely illustrated in their studies of elementary-aged girls playing hopscotch and a man with aphasia (2001). In the hopscotch case, they show that the girls make emotional statements through "artful orchestration of a range of embodied actions (intonation, gesture, timing, etc.)" (p. 14). These statements are rendered more potent due to the context of the immediate setting. Similarly, the man with aphasia, who has a four-word vocabulary, constructs meaning through intonation, body movement, and attention to the organization of conversation (p. 13). This scholarship demonstrates the potency of paralinguistic and extralinguistic

resources and points to the situated and composite nature of utterances. Clearly this approach can advance studies of talk about race in that it considers phenomena that are often ignored in other forms of analysis.

2 Methods

I examine exchanges that occurred within the context of a video-taped focus group of white males. I obtained video footage and rough transcripts of the approximately two-hour focus group from an educational research institution, which contracted a market research firm to conduct the group. The contractor recruited white fathers of school-aged children and provided a professional moderator who was also white and male. Conducted in California in Spring 2008, the focus group asked fathers to discuss education in the state and comment on an approach to high school proposed by the research institute. During the focus group conversation, the moderator followed a discussion guide that never asked fathers to discuss race. However, toward the end of the focus group meeting, the fathers were asked to rate messages about the approach to high school, and two of the statements explicitly referred to race. I analyze conversation that occurred before the fathers were asked to rate the messages, when they were instead asked to discuss the positive and negative aspects of public schools in California.

To analyze the data, I employed CDA, specifically following Fairclough's (2003) lead in examining the focus group transcripts and video footage at varying analytical levels. Fairclough (2003) draws upon Halliday's systemic functional linguistics to theorize that "orders of discourse" mediate between language and its social context and are dialectically interrelated. I looked at the semantic, grammatical, and lexical elements of the data and I connected these to discourses. Also, I emulated to some degree the variety of CDA used by van Dijk (1992), who illustrates how racism operates discursively. Finally, I examined the multiple semiotic resources that the fathers used in their discussion, drawing from C. Goodwin and M. H. Goodwin (2001).

I began by watching the video of the focus group several times while following along with the rough transcript. In this preliminary stage of analysis, I noticed that the fathers never mentioned race explicitly, but referred to it obliquely at times for various purposes. I then identified the discursive moments when these oblique references arose and focused my gaze more closely on these. I chose two such moments to analyze in further depth and transcribed them according to the method developed by Jefferson (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). I analyzed how the men used body movements, their material context, and prosody to convey meanings about race. I then used CDA to analyze the selected exchanges, examining how the men's words connected them to larger power relationships. Also, I examined a set of written answers to questions posed in the focus group, comparing them with the men's verbal responses.

3 Results

Below I discuss two exchanges that occurred in the focus group – one between the moderator and a participant named Jim,[1] and another between the moderator and a participant named Don. Both of these exchanges were embedded within a group discussion following an exercise in which the participants wrote answers to this prompt:

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

"Please write down the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the words 'California Public High Schools.'" I begin by examining the discussion between Jim and the moderator, first applying a CDA lens and then analyzing Jim's multiple semiotic resources. Next I discuss the conversation between Don and the moderator, again applying the two methods of analysis.

3.1 Jim and the Moderator

In the exchange between Jim and the moderator, Jim used words, intonation, body movement, and the material context to obliquely index race while comparing schools in his neighborhood to those of a city I call Bay View. The exchange began after the moderator asked Jim how he had responded to the prompt and continued as follows:

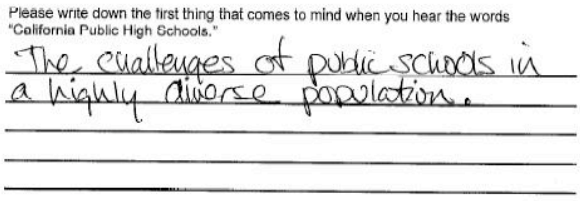
(1)

1	Jim:	I just said the challenges of public schools in a highly diverse population.
2		*((reading voice, looking at paper))*
3	Mod:[2]	uh huh and why why is it a challenge with (that)
4	Jim:	***we:ll*** ((*moves head*)) I just I I think you know ((*spreads hands apart*))
5		they the schools run the whole gamut of
6		(0.7)
7	Jim:	from the worst place [you know ((*moves left hand to the left*))
8	Mod:	[mm huh
9	Jim:	in Bay View where there's nothing ((*jerks left hand upward*)) on the walls
10		((*hand like a stop gesture*))
11		except a worn out chalkboa:rd=
12	Mod:	=uh huh
13	Jim:	to you know another pla:c:e like where ***I*** live y'kn-hhh ((*laughter*))
14		((*moves right hand to the right*))
15		and it- it's really pretty good ((*moves both hands up*))
16	Mod:	uh huh
17	Jim:	and new
18	Mod:	uh huh
19	Jim:	and there's you know stuff ((*both hands out*)) for kids to loo:k at
20	Mod:	uh huh
21	Jim:	(and) activities
22	Mod:	uh huh
23	Jim:	and all that
24	Mod:	okay
25		so a really wide range
26	Jim:	a wide range
27		yes

[2] "Mod" refers to the moderator.

In this exchange, Jim began by responding to the moderator's request for his answer to the prompt. He then read his written response, which is shown in Picture 1.

Picture 1:



The moderator then asked for clarification, which led to an extended response comparing the schools in Bay View to those "where I live." When Jim finished his narrative, the moderator ended the exchange with the summary statement, "so a really wide range."

3.2 A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Exchange with Jim

The application of a CDA lens to the exchange between Jim and the moderator shows that Jim was engaging in positive self- and in-group-presentation, as described by van Dijk (1992) and Augoustinos & Every (2007). He accomplished this by carefully choosing his words when alluding to race in order to convey his point without directly stating it.

First, Jim backed off from the directness of his written response to the prompt. His first move in the exchange was to read verbatim what he had written: "The challenges of public schools in a highly diverse population." This statement seemed to imply that there was a causal relationship between the "diverse" population and the "challenges of public schools." After that, in line 3, the moderator asked, "Why is it a challenge with (that)?" With the prospect of talking about race looming, Jim launched into a comparison of schools, putting the blame not on the "diverse population," as would be expected by the framing of the first statement, but on the material inequalities between schools. In this seeming shift in his argument, Jim avoided further mentioning race, a strategy that shielded him from potentially appearing to be racist and allowed him to present himself in a positive light.

From here, Jim used the place name "Bay View" as a code word to index people of color. The fact that this lexeme was used in this capacity is evident because it followed Jim's statement about the "diverse population" and the moderator's question, which deictically referred to the same noun phrase. The demographics of Bay View support this assertion: 2000 census data[3] indicate that 35.1% of the Bay View population is "Black or African America," 21.9% is "Hispanic or Latino" of any race, 23.5% is white, and 15.1% is "Asian."

Jim used the lexeme "Bay View" to draw a comparison between schools serving students of color and those serving white students. After stating that schools "run the whole gamut," he framed a hypothetical school in Bay View as the opposite of a hypothetical school in his own neighborhood. He began with a description of the "worst place" in Bay View. In line 15, he compared this to the area where he lives, where "it's

[3] For confidentiality purposes, a citation for these data can not be provided.

really pretty good." The adjectives he chose – "worst" and "good" – created an opposition, between the two locations. Next, in line 19, he described the school in his neighborhood as a place where "there's…stuff for kids to look at," an utterance that directly opposed the description in lines 9 through 11 of the Bay View school, where "there's nothing on the walls except a worn out chalkboard." Following this, in lines 21 and 23, he said the school in his neighborhood has "activities and all that." This is interesting because it does not directly contrast with the information given about schools in Bay View, but its inclusion implies that there are no "activities" in Bay View schools. Through these comparisons, Jim was able to avoid directly mentioning race while positioning himself as a resident of a privileged neighborhood.

3.3 Using the Goodwins' Approach to Analyze the Exchange with Jim

Analyzing the exchange between Jim and the moderator through the lens provided by the Goodwins provides a fuller picture of the strategies he used to avoid directly discussing race and present himself in a positive light. First I draw upon the conversation analysis aspect of the Goodwins' approach in order to examine Jim's hedges, and then I focus on the paralinguistic and extralinguistic semiotic resources he used.

Jim's first hedge occurred immediately after the exchange began, when he, in line 1, said, "I just said the challenges of public schools in a highly diverse population." Prefacing his utterance about race with the term "just" served to lessen its impact. The moderator then asked for clarification, which was followed by several hedges in line 4. He began this utterance with "well," and then said, "I just I I think you know." The repetition of "I" and the inclusion of the mitigating words "just" and "think" signaled that he may have understood the moderator's request for clarification as a challenge, and wanted to avoid appearing to be racist. Later, in line 13, Jim hedged and laughed when discussing "another place like where I live." Right after implying that he enjoyed relative privilege, Jim said "you know," and cut himself off by laughing.

Jim's intonation and embodied movements also served to support his efforts at positive self-presentation. In his response to the moderator's request for clarification in line 4, Jim used a rising and falling intonation when saying "well." This may have been an attempt to convey that his meaning was evident. His embodied movements served to bolster his point about the opposition between the school in Bay View and the school in his neighborhood. When describing the two schools, he spread his hands apart, using his left hand when discussing Bay View and his right hand when discussing his own neighborhood. By using his body to convey part of his meaning, he was able to better avoid fully discussing the connection between the comparison of schools and his earlier statement about the "diverse population." This avoidance, in turn, allowed him to better present himself positively.

3.4 Don and the Moderator

The exchange between Don and the moderator also demonstrates the benefits of combining CDA with the Goodwins' approach. Like Jim, Don used a variety of semiotic resources to present himself positively. Unlike Jim, Don also presented racialized others negatively. The exchange began when the moderator asked Don how he had responded to the prompt.

(2)

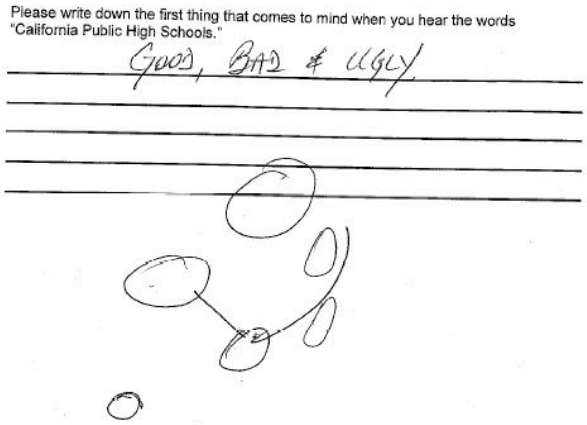
1	Mod:	what did you get Don
2	Don:	I just put good bad and ugly?
3	Mod:	g-hh ood bad and ug-h ly
4		so a real wide range? ((*spreads hands*))
5	Don:	ah::m ***well*** k h the area ***I*** live in ((*shrugs*))
6		I notice the good the bad and the ***ug***ly.
7		[ah::
8	Mod:	[and what's what's the good
9	Don:	[you know
10	Mod:	[and what's the
11	Don:	few ( ) there's good high schools=
12	Mod:	=uh huh
13	Don:	and uh-
14		so I live in Pineville[4]
15		((*moves right hand from lap; begins to draw on a paper in front of him*))
16		but I'm in the Fairwinds School District=
17	Don:	uh huh
18	Participant1:	huh huh ((*laughter*))
19	Don:	so y'know you got Banks High School
20		and you got uh and you got uh: Jefferson Middle
21	Mod:	uh huh
22	Don:	but if you're over ***he:re***=
23	Mod:	=uh huh
24	Don:	where we ***used*** to live
25		you have uh y'know my son's uh t Johnson [Elementary]
26	Mod:	uh huh
27	Don:	his middle school's Crestview Middle School ((*stops drawing*))
28		he's
29		((*jerks hand to the right and pen flies from hand, hitting a can of soda*))
30		woops ( ) ((*reaches for pen*))
31	Participant2:	easy
32	Don:	and there's no ***way*** he's goin ***there***
33	Mod:	why
34	Don:	cuz Crestview Middle School ***sucks***
35	Mod:	and and and [help- help me with
36	Don:	[(and) that leads to ( )
37	Mod:	these terms this is a great school and this sucks.
38		what's the difference.
39	Don:	the ***name***? of it. ((*rising and falling intonation; shrugs shoulders*))
40	Mod:	uh huh and what=
41	Don:	=(the) ***peo***?ple ((*rising and falling intonation*))
42	Mod:	uh huh what kind of peo- what do you mean
43	Don:	the ***peo***?ple ((*rising and falling intonation*; *shrugs shoulders*))
44	Mod:	uh huh
45		(0.7)

[4] All proper nouns except "Bay View" are pseudonyms.

46	Mod:	the other students
47	Don:	the people.= ((*falling intonation*; *nods*))
48	Mod:	=okay
49	Don:	°yes
50	Mod:	[and what
51	Don:	[so the other students [(meaning) ((*pointing to the map*))
52	Mod:	[uh huh
53	Don:	the parents of the other students ((*continues to point to the map*))
54	Mod:	okay=
55	Don:	=the culture of the people. ((*raises hand over the map*))
56	Mod:	uh huh okay
57	Don:	yeah
58	Mod:	and and that more than the: teacher:s or the curriculu:m: or::
59	Don:	it all goes hand in hand ((*moves head from side to side*))
60	Mod:	okay (alright)
61	Don:	so you know it co:mes from the ((*points to map*))
62		it comes from the home right (here)
63	Mod:	okay

At the beginning of this interaction, Don responded to the moderator's question by reading what he had written: "good, bad & ugly." (See Picture 2.)

Picture 2:



Then, over the course of several turns, the moderator asked Don to elaborate on his statement. This prompted to Don begin a narrative in which he named and evaluated schools in his neighborhood while drawing a rough map of their locations under his written response, as can be seen in Picture 2. After this, the moderator again requested clarification, to which Don replied in line 39 with the noun phrase "the name of it." After Don responded to the moderator's next two questions with "the people" in lines 41 and 43, the moderator then suggested a possible meaning, "the other students." Don confirmed this by repeating "the people" in line 47. After this, the moderator persisted in seeking clarification, leading Don, in lines 51, 53, and 55, to point to the map he'd drawn as he said, "So the other students, the parents of the other students, the culture of the people." The moderator then asked, "And, and that more than the teachers or the curriculum or?" Don replied in line 59, "It all goes hand in hand." Don finished the exchange in lines 61

and 62 by again pointing to the map and saying, "So you know it comes from the, it comes from the home right here."

3.5 A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Exchange with Don

Applying CDA to the exchange with Don clearly illustrates how he used positive in-group and negative out-group presentation strategies, in that he conveyed his racist discourse while protecting himself from appearing to be a racist.

One of the ways Don accomplished this was by comparing schools and locations. In lines 14 through 16, he framed this comparison with the utterance, "So I live in Pineville, but I'm in the Fairwinds School District." Grammatically, this comment set up an incongruous relationship between Pineville and the Fairwinds School District through the use of "but." Don did not explain the significance of the relationship, but another participant responded to the utterance with laughter, showing a level of understanding. From here, Don listed the names of two schools, and then said, "But if you're over here," which was followed by the naming of another school, Crestview, where, he asserted, there's "no way" his son will attend. In this way, Don implied that the first two schools listed were good or average schools in comparison to Crestview, which Don said "sucks" in line 53.

In the comparisons, Don was careful not to name racial groups, but referred to them nonetheless. Like Jim, he used the names of locations, such as school names, in place of race terms for people of color. A visit to the website of the school district Don mentioned reveals that the middle school that "sucks," Crestview, enrolls 66.98% "Hispanic or Latino" students and 16.82% white students, while the other middle school he mentioned enrolls 74.31% white students, 15.43% "Asian" students and only 5.73% "Hispanic or Latino" students.[5] The racial indexicality of these place names was confirmed toward the end of the exchange, when Don, in lines 51, 53, and 55, responded to the moderator's question about why schools differ by saying, "The other students, the parents of the other students, the culture of the people." Here, the word "culture" clearly referred to race.

In Don's comparisons of schools and his subsequent explanation, he negatively evaluated people of color while casting himself in a morally superior light. Don's "culture" comment implied that a schools' quality is a function of the race of the community it serves. This racist deficit discourse was further apparent when the moderator asked Don three turns later about the possibility of teachers and curriculum playing a role in the quality of a school. Here Don partially accepted these additional factors through his utterance in line 59, "It all goes hand in hand," but subsequently contradicted the idea by saying, "So you know it comes from the, it comes from the home right (here)." In this way Don returned to his deficit discourse. In contrast, he positioned himself as the norm in contrast to the "other students" and "the parents of the other students" who, he implied, deviate from normality. His lines referring to "the home" served to underscore this point in that they suggested that racialized others are bad parents while he is a good parent.

[5] In order to maintain participants' confidentiality, I do not provide the names of the schools or the school district, nor do I cite the school district's website from which I gathered these statistics.

3.6 Using the Goodwins' Approach to Analyze the Exchange with Don

Using the Goodwins' lens provides further insight into the conversation between Don and the moderator. I use this approach to examine the conversational strategies Don employed to avoid directly mentioning race. I then discuss his prosody, embodied actions, and deictic references to the map he had drawn.

For much of the exchange, Don and the moderator engaged in subtle a back-and-forth struggle characterized by Don's use of short noun phrases. Don's cryptic replies of "the name of it" and "the people" alternated with the moderator's requests for explanation in lines 39 through 50. During this phase, both interlocutors persisted in their conversational aims: to avoid explanation, for Don; and to probe for details, for the moderator. Here Don's vagueness suggests that he was unwilling to elaborate on a theme that could have made him look racist in the eyes of the moderator and other participants.

Don combined these short noun phrases with a rising and falling intonation signaling that the moderator should have understood Don's meaning. The pairing of this intonation with a short noun phrase occurred three times in three conversational turns. In line 39, Don responded to the moderator's question about why schools differ by uttering, "the name of it," employing an intonation that rose sharply at the word "name." An almost identical form of prosody occurred when Don replied to the next two requests for clarification with the words "the people." Here the first syllable of the word "people" marked the topmost point of the intonation. In these instances, Don used rising and falling intonation to frame his utterances as known knowledge, a strategy that helped him avoid further explanation of his racist notions.

In addition to intonation, Don used embodied actions—shrugging in particular—to make meaning. The noun phrases described above twice accompanied shrugs. In the first instance, in line 39, Don shrugged as he said, "the name of it." Four lines later, he shrugged as he said, "the people." These shrugs, in concert with the brevity of his words and his intonation, enabled Don to convey that the moderator should understand his racist discourse without further explanation.

Don's deictic reference to the map worked in tandem with his veiled assertions of shared understanding. Don drew this rough map, shown in Picture 2 above, as he listed the schools, and then later pointed to it twice when responding to the moderator's questions about why the schools differed. In lines 51, 53, and 55, Don began to elaborate on his initially offered short noun phrases with the utterance, "So the other students, the parents of the other students, the culture of the people." As he said this, he repeatedly pointed to the map until he said "the culture of the people," at which he raised his hand above the map with his fingers spread. In lines 61 and 62, Don pointed once to the map with his pen while uttering, "It comes from the, it comes from the home right (here)." By pairing the map-pointing with references to the families served by schools that "suck," the map became a deictic substitute for the racialized others to whom Don referred. In constructing this non-verbal reference, Don relieved himself of the burden of fully explaining his racist discourse.

Texas Linguistic Forum 53: 50-61
Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Symposium About Language and Society – Austin
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4 Discussion and Conclusion

The above analyses demonstrate the possibilities of combining CDA and the Goodwins' approach to discourse analysis. This composite methodology allows for added insight into the operation of the dominant group's talk about race, specifically the way positive self- and in-group-presentation and negative other-presentation is realized. In the data presented here, CDA illuminates the ways the participants relied on place names to index race and framed differences in school quality relative to their positionality. It also sheds light on the racist discourse Don used to contend that a school's quality is a function of the race of the students and community it serves. The Goodwins' approach indicates that the men used a range of semiotic resources to buoy their efforts to present themselves positively and others negatively. Jim used hedges to mitigate the meaning of his words and body movements to stress the opposition between schools. Don used short noun phrases to avoid looking like a racist and intonation and his map to help him convey his racist discourse.

As outlined in the theory section above, CRT demonstrates that systemic racism exists, while CDA shows that this inequality is in part maintained and reproduced through discourse. This understanding suggests that a powerful methodology, such as the composite one I have presented, is needed in order to better comprehend talk about race. The combination of CDA and the Goodwins' approach can illuminate the way this talk functions and point to possibilities for disrupting racist discourse.

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