

Essay #3:

Constructing Race in U.S. Popular Culture

Final Draft Due: 5/18/17 (via Safe Assignments)

Assignment:

Music videos provide viewers with visual signs that accompany a song. These signs often communicate the meaning behind the music. Many popular artists have been accused of creating videos that promote sexism and racial stereotyping. Some artists have been credited for using videos in a more “productive” way – to promote messages of tolerance, harmony, and racial and gender equality.

You will choose a music video and analyze it with the following questions in mind: How is race constructed in the video, which signs are present in the video, and how do they work to create a specific idea about race? Who benefits from the constructions of races in particular ways? How does the race of the performer factor into the video (how does he/she interact with other characters of the same or different race)? If the function of the music video is to sell music, how does the video function as an advertisement (what is it selling and how is it doing so)?

For this assignment, you will submit two items:

1. **Letter:** You will perform a semiotic reading of a music video, and write a letter to the musical artist explaining what implicit messages about race are at work in their video. The letter should introduce yourself, describe the video, make a clear statement about the implicit racial message you see in the video, analyze at least three details from the video to support your claim, and provide a counterargument. You should end the letter with a suggestion to the artist about how they should adjust their music video practices in the future. The letter must be carefully formatted and free from sentence-level errors.
 - Letter length: 400 words, minimum
2. **Research:** Imagine that the musical artist you are writing to responds and ask for two sources to learn more about the racial dynamics you discussed in your letter. Compile an annotated bibliography to send them. It should include citations in MLA format for at least two appropriate authoritative sources from the City Tech library or library database. Under each citation, you will include a paragraph that summarizes the source and explains how it connects to the issues you discussed in your letter.
 - Annotated bibliography length: Two citations in MLA format and two paragraphs of 150 words (one paragraph for each citation). Total: 300 words, minimum.