

## ABSTRACT

### POLYCULTURAL THEORY: LIBERATING COMPLEXITY IN AMERICAN TEXTS

Most twenty-first century scholars accept race and ethnicity as social constructions. However, the realities left behind from the belief in biological racial and ethnic differences—prejudice, discrimination, violence toward “the other”—remain as shadowy cornerstones of the American social fabric. To shed light into the shadows, Vijay Prashad and Jeffrey Partridge offer the critical lens of “polycultural theory.” I analyze the use of polycultural theory within a collection of essays, then extend Partridge’s work, applying the concepts of polycultural theory to analysis of popular cultural production as well as literary production. As a result, I find that polycultural theory can be applied broadly in scope in order to help eradicate prescriptive determinants of racialization, to promote egalitarian readings of American texts, to liberate ownership and construction of individual and collective identities, and to recognize that we are always becoming who we are. As Americans we are all polycultural.

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