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Carter, Julian B. 2007. *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*. Durham: Duke University Press. \$79.95 hc. \$22.95 sc. ix + 219 pp.

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Early in his book *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*, Julian B. Carter poses the kind of methodologically self-conscious question that has appeared in nearly every work of “whiteness studies” in recent years: “Why do we need another representation of whiteness in conversation with itself?” (44). Carter’s question echoes the anguished soul-searching that whiteness studies scholars have engaged in ever since the field’s 1990s heyday, in which the valid critical project of “making whiteness visible” is nonetheless seen to risk reinforcing the white privilege that the field seeks to challenge.

If *The Heart of Whiteness* does not completely avoid such methodological tripwires—more on these in a moment—it is certainly not held back by them. On the contrary, this complex, richly textured book reaffirms the ongoing value of carefully researched, theoretically informed historical scholarship on American whiteness. In particular, it offers a powerful example of the productive new directions taken by scholars participating in what might be called the sexual turn in whiteness studies, or, perhaps more accurately, the racial turn in queer theory. As a queer theorist and historian of sexuality, Carter makes use of queer theory’s challenge to heteronormativity in order to “elucidate normative meanings of whiteness” (158). In the process, he makes a significant contribution to the intertwined history of race and sexuality in America.

Carter’s central aim in *The Heart of Whiteness* is to chart the emergence of the concept of “normality” in the early twentieth-century United States. For Carter, discourses of the “normal” in this period were in fact covert means of enshrining whiteness and heterosexuality as twin cornerstones of what it meant to be a socially acceptable American. Carter shows that while upper-crust Anglo-Americans in the Gilded Age used relatively explicit racial language to trumpet what they saw as the superiority of white civilization, the normality discourse that emerged in the ensuing decades became increasingly “race-evasive” (154); that is, it tended to express white superiority in the race-neutral terms of monogamous, heterosexual marriage in a way

that made such lifestyles seem universal to all. This evasiveness enabled whites to think of themselves as inclusive, egalitarian, and loving, while avoiding accountability for the very real forms of exclusion and inequality that normality discourse fostered.

Carter anchors his argument in often brilliant analyses of three sets of print materials that gained wide circulation between 1880 and 1940: medical literature on nervousness, marital advice manuals, and sex education guides for schoolchildren. In his first chapter, Carter argues that discussions of neurasthenia in the Gilded Age tended to construct “whiteness as weakness” (72) in a way that paradoxically reinforced belief in white superiority. While the recurrence of “nervousness” among elite Anglo-Americans suggested their inability to cope with the demands of a rapidly modernizing society, doctors who diagnosed this condition also tended to characterize nervousness as a sign of heightened sensitivity absent from less “civilized” populations.

Carter next examines popular marital advice manuals that sought to address the so-called “marriage crisis” of the early twentieth century. Noting that life in the machine age was hampering sexual intimacy between men and women and driving up the divorce rate, the manuals preached the value of a self-disciplined adherence to monogamous sexual fulfillment that could enable white civilization to perpetuate itself. While the literature prescribed mutual pleasure between husband and wife (symbolized by the simultaneous orgasm) as the key to this enterprise, Carter shows that even this seemingly progressive vision masked lingering power hierarchies between men and women, and between whites and other racial groups.

In his final chapter, Carter reads sex education literature in much the same way, arguing that training in “the birds and the bees” served as a way not just to teach schoolchildren about sex but to indoctrinate them in the “normal” virtues of monogamous heterosexuality that educators saw as essential to the perpetuation of the white race. Carter is particularly adept at uncovering the strategies of verbal indirection that these educators used to advance their agenda; while they talked candidly about the dangers of venereal disease or the biological processes of lower-order animals, they avoided speaking openly about the actual human sexual experience itself for fear that such detail might encourage students to seek out what Carter calls “extracurricular instruction” (145).

Carter’s discussion of these materials certainly does not make for light reading; his prose will no doubt strike some readers as a bit heavy on jargon. But he presents his argument in a way that is authoritative, helpfully signposted, comprehensively footnoted, and even occasionally entertaining. Acknowledging his debt to Foucauldian discourse analysis—which holds

that the assertion of normality is in fact an “exercise of power” (25)—Carter devotes much of his book to analyzing discursive texts that are unlikely to be familiar to contemporary readers, but which have nonetheless exerted a shaping influence on American life. And while Carter hangs many of his claims on semi-hazy “discursive associations” (85) between his key thematic categories (as opposed to establishing clear cause-and-effect relationships), this associative style actually works to the book’s advantage. Indeed, one of this study’s strengths are the lively connections that Carter makes to various ancillary texts—a Joan Crawford film, for example, or a pair of iconic nude statues called “Norma” and “Normman”—that deepen the impact of his thesis.

As far ranging as Carter’s arguments are, however, it should be noted that the book’s near exclusive focus on discourses of white heterosexual normality does generate certain limitations. In the first place, because so many of the sources that Carter discusses are, in the apt words of one editor, “transparently absurd” (viii), our potential responses to this material are rather overdetermined. As a result, a faint sense of predictability begins to creep into the latter portions of the book.

A related, and perhaps more significant, challenge for Carter is that the book’s emphasis on “normal” texts does at times lend the study a somewhat insular quality. To his credit, Carter is acutely aware that in choosing to focus on “the comparatively claustrophobic subject of normality’s internal descriptions and definitions of itself,” he runs “the risk of appearing to participate in the marginalization and epistemological disqualification of non-normative subjects” (18–19). And he justifies this choice deftly, arguing that analyzing normality “from within” is the most effective way to “make whiteness speak its own name” (19), and that to limit analyses of race and sexuality solely to “people of color and homosexuals” (26) would be reductive in the extreme.

Still, the omission of any oppositional perspectives—save, of course, for Carter’s own—on discursive materials that Carter repeatedly describes as “claustrophobic,” “solipsistic,” “self-involved,” and “narrow” (18) does drain at least some of the dramatic urgency from the otherwise compelling story that *The Heart of Whiteness* tells. As a result, scholars and teachers interested in how non-white, non-heterosexual writers and citizens grappled with the overwhelming power of normality discourse in this period might do well to read Carter’s work alongside other recent interdisciplinary studies of race and sexuality that position black and queer perspectives closer to the center of their investigations: among them Siobhan Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line* (2000), Mason Stokes’s *The Color of Sex* (2001), and Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black* (2004), all of which Carter, again to his credit, cites in his voluminous endnotes.

Despite these issues, Carter's book remains a valuable contribution to our understanding of how seemingly innocuous discourses can in fact prop up what Carter rightly calls an "unjust social order" that continues to exist in America today (160). Incidentally, Carter shares this progressive aim with Robert Jensen's almost identically-titled *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege* (2005), a slimmer volume that calls more directly for the kind of anti-whiteness activism that Carter's book only gestures toward.

If the recent election of the nation's first African-American president offers a glimpse of a promised "post-racial" America in which whiteness may no longer be such an all-encompassing norm, Carter's book provides a strong reminder that heteronormative whiteness still retains a defining, if often invisible, power in American life. One hopes (perhaps against hope) that the important ideas contained in this volume will somehow find their way into the hearts and minds of the people who have the most to learn from them.

Clough, Patricia Ticineto, with Jean Halley,
eds. 2007. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the
Social*. Durham: Duke University Press. \$84.95
hc. \$23.95 sc. xiii + 313 pp.

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To the numerous turbulent and productive "turns" of the 1990s, Patricia Ticineto Clough adds the advent of the "affective turn," which she sees as an expression of "a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory" brought on by transformations in the economic, political, and cultural realms (1-2). In tracing the genealogy of affect in her introduction through Deleuze and Guattari to Spinoza and Bergson, Clough establishes affect as "potential bodily [and] often autonomous responses" (2); different from emotion, which reflects in part the product of meaning-making processes, affect exceeds consciousness: it refers to pre-