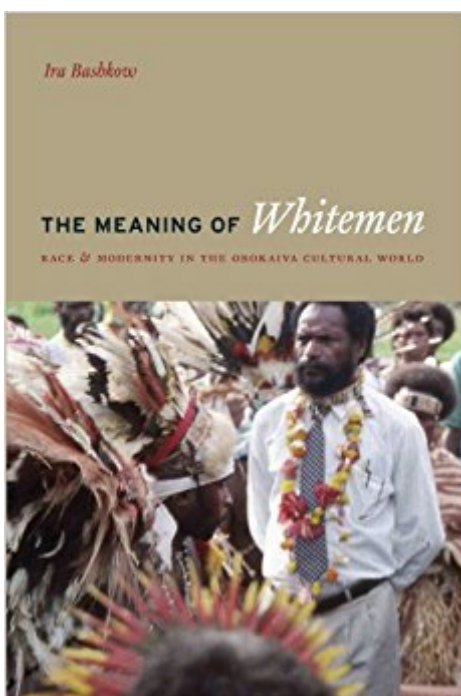


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# The Meaning Of Whitemen: Race And Modernity In The Orokaiwa Cultural World



## Synopsis

A familiar cultural presence for people the world over, the whiteman has come to personify the legacy of colonialism, the face of Western modernity, and the force of globalization. Focusing on the cultural meanings of whitemen in the Orokaiva society of Papua New Guinea, this book provides a fresh approach to understanding how race is symbolically constructed and why racial stereotypes endure in the face of counterevidence. While Papua New Guinea's resident white population has been severely reduced due to postcolonial white flight, the whiteman remains a significant racial and cultural other here—not only as an archetype of power and wealth in the modern arena, but also as a foil for people's evaluations of themselves within vernacular frames of meaning. As Ira Bashkow explains, ideas of self versus other need not always be anti-humanistic or deprecatory, but can be a creative and potentially constructive part of all cultures. A brilliant analysis of whiteness and race in a non-Western society, *The Meaning of Whitemen* turns traditional ethnography to the purpose of understanding how others see us.

## Book Information

Paperback: 328 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; 2nd Paperback Edition edition (July 17, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0226038912

ISBN-13: 978-0226038919

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #59,268 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #182 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Ethnic Studies #301 in Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Anthropology #427 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Anthropology > Cultural

## Customer Reviews

"We are one of the others. Deconstructing the ancient sociology of in-group versus out-group, this finely observed and brilliantly interpreted ethnography of a New Guinea people's conceptions of whitemen fashions a powerful new paradigm for the study of intercultural relations. Incidentally, damn good reading." --Marshall Sahlins (Marshall Sahlins 2006-02-20) In the very best tradition of anthropology, this is a book that will force readers to confront their settled

understandings and rethink many things they thought they knew about the cultural construction of racial formations and about whiteness as a global phenomenon. A milestone in the anthropology of the Pacific, this is quite simply a great book to think with. --Joel Robbins, author of *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* (Joel Robbins 2006-02-20) "A nuanced account of a culturally-specific logic of racial categorization and racial evaluation. . . . This thoughtful book deserves a wide audience, and wide published discussion. Its most impressive virtue is that it is at once an accessible, model work of ethnographic interpretation, and a work that breaks new, ambitious ground on important anthropological problems." (Rupert Stasch *Anthropological Quarterly*) "[Bashkow's] focus on white people as the 'foreign' makes this an excellent tour of critical race studies and basic anthropology, encouraging students of all levels to think through the social construction of whiteness and the culturally productive boundaries between groups of people." (Jennifer Roth-Gordon *American Anthropologist*) "Bashkow's book is thoughtful and thought-provoking, a fine addition to the regional literature and its place within anthropological theory." (Aletta Biersack *Pacific Affairs*) "A rich, detailed, beautifully presented, immensely enjoyable, and thought-provoking book which advances a general and important argument about racial stereotyping and the formation of racialized categories. . . . I would thoroughly recommend this book to everyone interested in the concept of race." (Peter Wade *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*) "This is not an easy subject matter to handle and Bashkow carries the theoretical load commendably, delivering a thoughtful, engaging and consummately written contribution to the anthropology of race. Overall, his richly detailed and historically grounded account offers an exemplary study not only for scholars but a wider audience interested in the construction of race and the experience of modernity in the Pacific and beyond." (Katherine Lepari *Oceania*) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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can be a creative and potentially constructive part of all cultures. A brilliant analysis of whiteness and race in a non-Western society, *The Meaning of Whitemen* turns traditional ethnography to the purpose of understanding how others see us. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The intro is a little tough to get through, but on the whole, this book was very informative!

My professor wrote this book. It is fascinating, and so is he. This is a very detailed account, very complete, and quite a good read.

Here is an intellectual treat of the first order. I envy you - it's still in front of you. Let me say - I am not an anthropologist or an expert on Papua New Guinea, just a general reader. Don't be put off by lack of familiarity with the Orakaiva people or lack of background on Papua New Guinea. Bashkow will explain whatever you need to know, clearly and without jargon. What you will get is the product of years of fieldwork living in a little known corner of the world. But the author's focus is directed at how the Orakaiva see white people (mostly people with white skin, but including cultural outsiders such as Africans, 'black' white people). While absorbing details about this unfamiliar Melanesian world, you'll be making all sorts of connections to the way *The Other* is viewed in places you are familiar with. Let me try to substantiate my praise of the book by offering you a tidbit from the introduction. Bashkow is concerned to justify his methods. Surely, as a whiteman himself, the Orakaiva could not be expected to tell him what they really think about whitemen. After all, it's not as if he could blend into the background. He describes himself as sort of like Ralph Ellison's invisible man - in reverse, the object of general attention everywhere he went. I expected Bashkow to describe how he made friends and worked his way into the hearts of the Orakaiva. But !!! he embraces the inequality in the situation, explaining that the standard anthropologist is writing a romance when s/he describes the union of anthropologist and 'primitive'. This observation was enough to make me reconsider how this preference for 'romance' has contaminated all previous anthropology. By the way, please do not assume that Bashkow is any way a 'conservative' just because he refuses to believe that the inequality in anthropological fieldwork situations cannot be put aside.

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