Abstract

This essay reads African-American actress Kerry Washington as emblematic of the contours and contradictions of “postrace” and “postfeminist” ideology. Focusing on Washington’s 2012 roles as Olivia Pope in the first season of ABC’s Scandal and plantation slave Broomhilda von Shaft in Quentin Tarantino’s Django Unchained, I use her recent performances, as well as media scrutiny and applause over these portrayals, to assess the messiness of the concepts of postrace and postfeminism and counter the notion of a postrace, postfeminist society (meaning that race and gender inequality are no longer salient issues or that race and gender are individual, mutable traits rather than structural, historic forces). Taking an intersectional approach, I seek to understand postfeminist and postrace ideology in tandem to underscore the racialized, gendered, and classed aspects of both ideologies, the sociocultural and political implications, particularly on Black women, and the ways in which Washington both challenges and reproduces their falsities.