

# THE PERSISTENT POWER OF “RACE” IN THE CULTURAL AND POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RACISM

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## ABSTRACT

Historically, anthropology has occupied a central place in the construction and reconstruction of race as both an intellectual device and a social reality. Critiques of the biological concept of race have led many anthropologists to adopt a “no-race” posture and an approach to intergroup difference highlighting ethnicity-based principles of classification and organization. Often, however, the singular focus on ethnicity has left unaddressed the persistence of racism and its invidious impact on local communities, nation-states, and the global system. Within the past decade, anthropologists have revitalized their interest in the complex and often covert structures and dynamics of racial inequality. Recent studies shed light on race’s heightened volatility on contemporary sociocultural landscapes, the racialization of ethno-nationalist conflicts, anthropology’s multiple traditions of antiracism, and intranational as well as international variations in racial constructions, including the conventionally neglected configurations of whiteness.

## OVERCOMING DENIAL

Until recently, anthropology has not been as visible as some other fields in the new critical discourse on race (cf 51, 126, 142, 192). Historically, anthropology has occupied a central place in the construction and deconstruction

of race as both an intellectual device and a social reality (12–14, 20, 162, 178, 185–187, 222, 237, 243, 286). Critiques of race as a biological concept led many anthropologists to adopt a “no-race” position that was not adequately followed up by research designed to answer the simple question: Why does racism continue to exist if there are no races in the natural world? With race’s decline as a conceptual and analytic category, ethnicity—as “expressive processes of cultural identification” (232) among subordinate populations in nation-states—became the master principle of classification (237:15; 243).

For the most part, the focus on ethnicity euphemized if not denied race by not specifying the conditions under which those social categories and groups historically subordinated as “racially” distinct emerge and persist. In many situations, race operates as a principal identity at local and national levels (cf 53). In such settings the structural consequences of race—forced exclusion and stigmatized labor—differ significantly from those generally associated with ethnicity (232, 243, 276, 285); however, as Lieberman (157) observes, race and ethnicity can have overlapping meanings and consequences, as the Bosnian (157) and Rwandan (63, 167) cases suggest.

Before the recent revitalization of race-centered analysis, there were analysts whose interventions in the ethnicity discourse shed some important light on race and racism (e.g. 27, 31, 153–155, 196, 197, 199). Drake & Cayton (77) were among the earliest to question the immigrant-ethnic model in race analysis. Mullings (194) later revised the received tradition of ethnicity theory by differentiating the symbolic, situational, and often voluntary ethnic identification of whites from the more repressive social exclusions associated with African-American, Latino, and Native American identities and social locations (cf 232). Vincent (264), however, took the position that ethnicity is an altogether inappropriate concept for populations designated as minorities. Other analysts (e.g. 106, 252, 253) showed how ethnicity and race can be interrelated but distinct dimensions in the formation of individual and group identity, and how, depending on the context, one dimension may modify or take precedence over the other (31, 39, 89, 147, 254). Anthropologists’ revived interest in race and racism brings to the wider discourse their concern with a number of issues, including (a) the increasing volatility of current racial dynamics, (b) the rehistoricization of race and its relationship to anthropological knowledges, and (c) the variation in racial constructions, including the conventionally neglected configurations of whiteness.

## RACISM IN CONTEMPORARY NATIONAL AND GLOBAL DISJUNCTURES

The current era of global political and cultural economy is characterized by the disorder engendered by reconfigurations of regional, national, and transna-

tional landscapes (6). Shifting “ethnoscapes” (6) and “racialscares” ordered within, across, or beyond the boundaries of “imagined communities” (5) and “imagined worlds” (6) represent increasingly volatile sites of struggle. In this historically specific context of “disorganized capitalism” (6), the “practices and ideologies which comprise [‘race’ have] become less stable and more contradictory” (101:40). However, as Balibar & Wallerstein (15) and Gilroy (101) observe, despite its ontological and epistemic emptiness, race’s vitality and volatility have intensified. Rather than receding, it is progressing, although quite unevenly.

While having continuities with its past, race assumes new forms and is reconstructed and manipulated within a range of contemporary contexts. As Gilroy puts it, no longer proceeding “through readily apparent notions of superiority and inferiority, [t]he order of racial power relations has become more subtle and elusive” (101:40). Indeed, even the line separating racism from antiracism is sometimes so unclear that the two sets of discursive practices converge (15, 70, 101). At this postcolonial juncture, racism frequently “fits into a framework of ‘racism without races’” in which a bounded and ahistorical concept of culture is the ideological device for essentializing difference and reconfiguring race (15:21). In many European settings, where Third World immigration is the main metonym for racial alterity, the dominant theme in public discourses on Otherness “is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences” and the dangers of abolishing cultural boundaries (15:21; cf 48, 101). In the United States, with its indigenous and indigenized racial subordinates who historically have defined layers of the social bottom vis-à-vis several successive waves of immigrants, recurrent notions of “culture of poverty” and “cultural capital deficits” encode, hierarchize, and pathologize difference (130, 173, 174, 196, 197).

According to Balibar & Wallerstein, rather than explicitly drawing on biodeterminism, neoracist discourses imply an association between cultural autonomy and biological viability. It is assumed that when cultural boundaries are removed, environmental degradation leads naturally to the defensive reactions and increased aggression of interracial conflicts (15:22–23). A similar neonaturalism informs the sociobiological assumption that race and racism are rooted in the adaptiveness of nepotism and kin selection (21). Such biologizations of culture evade the question of how socially mobilized power produces and structures the differences defined as race (30, 213, 244).

Supposedly in the interests of preserving cultural viability, immigration is being subjected to xenophobic regulation (15, 23, 48, 59, 89, 90, 101), speech communities are being repressed (8, 246), and through both low- and high-intensity warfare (59), ethnic groups are being “cleansed” from violently contested landscapes (157). Within these contexts, the racially subordinate express their agency in multiple modes, ranging from neoconservative to trans-

formative (168). Paradoxically, in some US minority discourses, the terms of the dominant racial ideology are appropriated and subjected to romantic transvaluations that in turn reify and essentialize race (e.g. 168:69).

Although the multiplicity of local and national racisms cannot be reduced to a uniform Western racial hegemony, neither can they be separated from "Western cultural influence" (261:109). The ideology and materiality of white supremacy provided the historical precedent for subordinate racisms (277) by providing the most systematic mode of classifying and capitalizing on race (75, 97, 148, 268). However, to varying extents, local or national beliefs and practices challenge and reconfigure the Eurocentric racial imagination (261).

Despite its uneven development and varying systematization, racism is characterized by an international hierarchy (230, 261) in which wealth, power, and advanced development are associated largely with whiteness or "honorary whiteness." According to Köhler (148), the world system represents a "global apartheid" marked by severe inequalities of income, life expectancy, and power. In Wallerstein's view, racism is wedded to underdevelopment and is "constitutive of the capitalist world-economy" (267:92). Ultimately, global material factors have enormous power in the shaping and reshaping of racializing practices, relations, and ideologies; nonetheless, race is not an epiphenomenon of deterministic economic forces. As Wade emphasizes, there is always a two-way relation between material conditions and processes of cultural construction; however, "concerns of power, subsistence, and wealth have a greater capability of restructuring social relations (and hence...conceptions) than do the conceptions themselves" (266:26).

## REHISTORICIZING RACE AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGES

### *Origins and Evolution of Race and Racism*

Since the nineteenth century, the concept of race has been debated heatedly among anthropologists as well as between them and their counterparts in other disciplines and domains of public culture (12–14). Indeed, anthropology's early professionalization as a science was associated closely with the elaboration of typologies and techniques for classifying and operationalizing the discrete "races of man" (13, 14, 20, 75, 81, 98, 206, 237, 243). The key constructs of culture and evolution, which set the terms for early anthropological inquiry, often were invested with essentialist and universalized "biomoral" (286:4) assumptions concerning the natural history of human variation (118, 206). A tool for comparison, the culture concept was grounded in contradictory meanings. On one hand, culture was envisaged to be learned and predicated on the principle of psychic unity, which universalized human men-

tal and psychic capacity. On the other hand, rationality and cultural perfectibility were imagined to be the essential embodiments of Western civilization. Europe's very sense of itself depended on an oppositional relationship to an invented antithesis, primitive savagery (204, 262). The black, sub-Saharan African came to epitomize the most extreme variant of that cultural and racial alterity (204).

The bounded, ahistorical, and hierarchizing implications of the culture construct (1) rendered it vulnerable to the racialization of human variation, which prompted some thinkers to question the humanity of certain peoples. Regardless of their conceptual differences, monogenists and polygenists alike agreed on the natural superiority of whites and the inherent inferiority of blacks, the opposing poles of the global racial hierarchy. Polygenists, however, were particularly active in the United States at the height of the antislavery movement, when a vicious proslavery ideology was elaborated and promulgated through popular culture, political debates, and so-called scientific developments in phrenology and craniometry, which as Smedley (243) reminds us, laid the foundations for "the first American school of anthropology" (13, 20, 105, 206, 217, 249). In the latter part of the century, the biologization of social distinctions was often couched in Darwinist categories filtered, however, through Spencerianism. Blacks were viewed as "misfits of evolution" (117, 118) whose inevitable "crime, debauchery and sloth" threatened white society's viability (243:244). Similar racist sentiments and fears of social contamination were instrumental in nativist and eugenicist attacks on southern and eastern European "buffer races" and "sub-races" whose immigration to the United States was also viewed as a serious social problem (34, 35, 206, 243). In the United Kingdom, the Irish were the main targets of similar attacks (243, 265).

Scientific racism and the folk ideology that informed it had their beginnings in the age of European expansion, when exposure to greater degrees of human physical and cultural variation increased dramatically. In the Americas and later in Africa, Asia, and Oceania, land alienation, coerced labor, and state power drew racial lines on colonial landscapes (98, 107, 206, 232). While ethnocentrism was widespread before the rise of colonial racism, neither color nor any other feature of physical appearance necessarily signified subordinate status (75, 76, 230, 232). However, physical traits were not entirely insignificant in limited situations of intergroup contact (76). Phenotype prejudice was not institutionalized before the sixteenth century. As Drake (75, 76) demonstrated, the process of racial formation (201) took root in New World colonies of exploitation with the convergence of skin color prejudice and slavery. From this historic crucible emerged a racial slavery that initially exploited native labor but in time identified sub-Saharan Africans as the preferred source of labor power (91, 122, 238).

After the birth of white domination, another form of racism emerged that targeted Europe's so-called subraces, relegating them to buffer status between whites and nonwhites (98, 206, 243). By the middle of the nineteenth century, a racial worldview (243) affirmed the superiority of certain Europeans over others. Ethnic, religious, and class stereotypes were racialized, and long-standing disparities in power, privilege, and wealth were legitimated by discourses emphasizing descent and heritability (243:257). This racialization of difference provided fertile ground for the growth of nationalism. The concepts of race and nation came to be intimately interrelated as "two poles of a single historical discourse" (23) on state power, population control, and the relationship between colonizer and colonized (5, 26, 276).

### *Antiracist Transformations*

During the early twentieth century, the anthropology of race diversified. The anthropometric tradition continued in the racial typologies of prominent physical anthropologists such as Hooton and Hrdlička, whose work dominated the mainstream until Boasian liberalism captured "the public imagination and institutional support in the years surrounding World War II" (212:77; see also 28, 220, 243). However, before the intensification of antiracism during the war effort, Boasians were not the only anthropologists to criticize racial determinism. Todd challenged Hrdlička by demonstrating the absence of racial differences in the development of black and white brains (212). This antiracist project was further advanced by one of Todd's students, Cobb, an African-American anatomist (212). Even earlier, another African-American physical anthropologist, Day, had gone against her training under Hooton to refute ideas concerning the degenerative effects of racial crossing (60, 220). During the 1930s, Powdermaker, a sociocultural anthropologist who worked outside Boas' purview, studied race relations in Mississippi (210). Despite her sympathetic portrait of Negro life, her analysis betrayed assimilationist and essentialist assumptions (96:412).

Boas (33–35) limited race's meaning to biophysical and morphological characteristics and divorced it from the learned behavior of language and culture (243:275). His critique of mainstream notions of heredity was based on head measurements demonstrating that the cephalic index and other features could undergo drastic changes in one generation due to changes in environment (243:276; see also 237). The height of Boasian antiracism was expressed in Benedict & Weltfish's popular writing (26, 268). Benedict's otherwise excellent work (26) was flawed by her "failure to mention the role of the African slave trade in the development of European racist thinking" (75:39). She foregrounded Europe's class and nationalist conflicts as the principal sites where racism gained "its currency in modern thought" (26:111). While this Eurocentrism reflected her understandable preoccupation with the threats

Aryanism and anti-Semitism posed at that time, it also signaled the limitations of the period's liberal antiracism. Although Weltfish (268) brought her critique of international racism to bear on the terror of Jim Crow, the Boasian critique of anti-black racism generally was more oblique and based on assimilationist assumptions (140, 281, 283).

While Boasians aimed their attack at ideological racism, a later and to some extent overlapping wave of anthropologists displaced the notion of race itself. Before the end of World War II, Montagu (185–187) took the bold stance that race is a dangerous fallacy and that the ethnic group concept has more heuristic value. Building on advances in human biology and population genetics, he argued that “fixed, clear-cut differences” do not exist between breeding populations or “genogroups,” which differ only in the relative frequencies of one or more genes found in all human populations (186; cf 243). Within two decades, this no-race trend gained considerable momentum. Livingstone (162) and Brace (40) were among those who favored replacing race with analyses of clines or “continuous gradation[s] over space in the form or frequency of a trait” (121:133; 162). Marshall (170) interjected the important dimension of power into the debate between the “lumpers,” who object to race, and the “splitters,” who, for a variety of reasons, accept the existence of races and the validity of a concept of race for describing genetically inherited traits that vary across populations (243:297–298; see also 41, 178). Lieberman and his colleagues (156, 158, 159, 161) surveyed the “declining consensus” on the existence of races and the usefulness of the race concept. Among physical anthropologists, who are more likely to retain race as a core idea, forensic anthropologists are particularly invested in racial classification. According to Sauer (233:107), racing does not necessarily vindicate the race concept. However, race's biological status is being vindicated by recent bioterminist research on reproductive strategies, brain size, and intelligence (30, 132, 222).

### *Subjugated Knowledges*

The Boasian tradition may have captured the anthropological imagination, but it did not accomplish this in isolation from other streams of thought. Boasianism was cross-fertilized with other antiracist discourses, such as those espoused by intellectuals of color (12, 127, 193, 229). Because of “intellectual colonialism” (229) and subjugation (94, 129), most of those early subaltern analysts are largely unknown within mainstream anthropology (125, 127, 131). However, a number of studies have begun to recapture anthropology's multiple knowledges. Medicine (179) and Finn (85) examine the work of Deloria (61), one of Boas' indigenous field assistants, who contested racist representations of American Indians in both sociocultural analysis and fiction. Limón (160:117) and Rosaldo (218:150–155) elucidate the significance of

Paredes (205), who offered a critique of Anglo-Texan racial supremacy. Early African-American anthropologists are receiving some concerted attention (131).

Much of African-American antiracism has been inspired by Du Bois, whose relationship with anthropology has recently been rehistoricized (9, 12, 13, 127, 130, 193, 198, 207). While Drake (74) claimed that black vindicationists were consumers of anthropological knowledge, others (125, 127, 129, 130, 193, 207, 208) have argued that Du Bois and possibly other vindicationists instead produced anthropologically significant analysis. Probably inspired by Boas, Du Bois carried out craniometric and public health research that refuted the conclusions of racial science and demonstrated the adverse effects of social conditions (79; 248:184). Through correspondence and shared participation at conferences, Boas was aware of Du Bois's work; yet Boas did not cite it. Consequently, Du Bois was erased from the discourse that became anthropology's mainstream (127:244; 193:332). A Du Boisian legacy can, nonetheless, be discerned in the work of a number of early African-American anthropologists—especially Diggs, Davis, and Drake—who pursued research as a form of activism, used historical and comparative methods, were concerned with race's intersection with class, placed racial exploitation in the context of capitalism, and synthesized divergent theoretical perspectives to enhance analytical effectiveness (127; cf 58, 64, 72, 73, 75–77, 127, 212).

Today a number of anthropologists are coming to terms with the silences and subjugations that influence the discipline's development (37, 125–127, 160, 218). That more effective strategies are needed for overcoming academia's extant racial hierarchies is indicated by recent discussions on the positioning, commodification, and so-called hyperprivileging of minority intellectuals in anthropology and beyond (4, 25, 70). Anthropology has a responsibility to help redress the situation because, as Alvarez (4) laments, the profession is statistically whiter than both academia and the United States in general (232). This demographic profile may have the sort of "intellectual effect" that Hsu (137) noted more than two decades ago.

## VARIATION AND DIVERSITY

### *Race Around the World*

Given the caste-like ascriptions of the most systematically oppressive racial orders, anthropologists have been especially fascinated by the phenomena of "social race" and "racial democracy" in Latin America and the Caribbean. Some of the work on Cuba's revolutionary struggle against racism, Brazil's intricately graded "racial calculus," and systems of relatively continuous categorization and ranking has provided an implicit cultural critique of the so-



called race problem in the United States and South Africa (16, 17, 49, 122–124, 135, 149, 216, 228). Yet, as recent studies illuminate, a multiplicity of graded socioracial categories does not necessarily signify an absence of racism (45, 171). Besides naming the diversity that exists, the color continuum, particularly as it is fetishized in the Afro-Caribbean, has represented a measure of “improvement” (through admixture and/or the lightening of class mobility) for people whose African origins were historically defined in terms of cultural deficiency and racial inferiority (236). A color lexicon was never developed for East Indians or Chinese, whose relationship to whites has been expressed as a ranking among civilizations (147, 236).

Hispanic countries with long histories and hegemonies of *mestizaje* (race mixture) as well as sizable minorities of African-descended citizens have been the focus of recent studies that interrogate racial democracy more critically and illuminate an underrecognized form of racial inequality (45, 111, 211, 216, 234, 266, 273, 274). As the “master symbol of the nation,” *mestizaje* exhibits an “uneasiness about blackness” and indigenous ethnic-bloc formation (275: 20). Despite the ambivalence toward Indianness, valorizations of “mixedness” privilege European-Indian heritage and marginalize—if not erase—blackness and Africanness from the national landscape (45, 169, 216, 266).

Throughout Latin America, the national norm encodes an ideal of *blanqueamiento* (whitening), which “accepts the implicit hegemonic rhetoric of the [United States] with regard to ‘white supremacy’, and often blames those classed as black and indigenous for the worsening state of the nation” (275:18). In some settings, this process of associating whitening with advancement and darkening with backwardness and stagnation has been facilitated by US military occupation, colonial rule, and/or corporate presence (39, 214, 215; cf 211).

In a perceptive analysis of blackness and race mixture in Colombia, Wade (266) demonstrates that *mestizaje* coexists with discrimination and exclusion. Insofar as *mestizaje* advocates and represents the absorption, denial, and purging of blackness through miscegenation and cultural assimilation, it is a manifestation of an insidious albeit unsystematic racism (266:8, 293). The ambiguities of racial gradations do not undermine race’s salience and the disadvantages of African origins. In regions where blacks have been demographically and economically concentrated, race mixture historically has had minimal impact and, no matter how Hispanicized, cultural forms have developed that are defined contextually as black culture. The demographic and cultural processes constitutive of the dominant *mestizaje* pattern entail the demographic dispersal and cultural adaptation of blacks in contexts where whites and *mestizos* predominate. Even when blacks win acceptance, their stigmatized color is not forgotten (266). In sexual and marital relations, racial meanings are “re-hearsed and acted out” (266:313; see also 99, 235). Marriage is an important

arena where color has exchange value in “the game of inter- and intra-class alliances” (261:122).

The assumption that race mixture facilitates upward mobility is being questioned. Silva (241) argues that in Brazil, blacks and mulattoes share parallel profiles based on returns on schooling and income, and that mulattoes may experience more discrimination than blacks. Wade points out that upwardly mobile mulattoes may be more likely to claim higher status than whites permit and, hence, experience a disjuncture between the ideology of racial democracy and the harsh reality of racial inequality. Similarly, Scheper-Hughes observes that wealthy Brazilians express “no ambiguity on the color issue.... [M]ulattos [sic] and blacks are easily recognized, labeled, and treated as social inferiors” (234:543). Harris et al (124), however, challenge the reliability of data used to measure discrimination.

The stigmatization of blackness coupled with the possibility of black assimilation into whitened mixedness makes overt, large-scale racial solidarity and rebellion difficult to achieve or, when achieved, to sustain. Organized resistance is, however, reflected in the resurgence of Brazil’s black consciousness movement (44). The activists and audiences are mainly students, intellectuals, and professionals whose experiences have taught them that color outweighs the value of their credentials. The relative absence of working-class blacks from the movement does not necessarily mean their lack of race consciousness. On the contrary, popular cultural practices have long sustained a vibrant cultural resistance (44, 111, 257, 258, 266).

Whitten & Torres (275) claim that Haiti is the only country in the Americas that has adopted an explicit nationalist ideology of *negritude* or *noirisme* (blackness) (cf 261). Safa, however, observes that since independence, blackness has become “a cornerstone of national identity in the Anglophone Caribbean” (225:119; cf 23). She explains the dramatic shift to racial solidarity in terms of the political elites’ need for legitimacy in the eyes of their black constituencies; an Afro-Caribbean identification with independent African states; and inspiration from, as well as some Caribbean immigrant involvement in, civil rights and black power struggles in the United States. Race historically has played a significant role in Anglophone Caribbean societies where, until fairly recently, a sense of national identity was inhibited by social cleavages separating white, brown, and black segments of society. To the extent that sociocultural and structural pluralism developed, it was conditioned by race’s interaction with class (2, 114, 115, 171, 184, 245).

With the exception of South Africa, racial dynamics in societies outside the Americas have received much less systematic attention. This trend is changing as more researchers turn their attention to a broader range of contexts. The growing multiracialization of present-day Europe has become an important focus of analysis (15, 16, 48, 72, 101, 143). The political demonization of

Arabs (15, 107, 226) and Israeli Zionist discourses on Otherness (69, 227, 259) have been examined. Howard's (136) treatment of racial politics in Fiji and Wetherell & Potter's (269) analysis of the cultural reproduction of race in everyday discourses in New Zealand also contribute to the newer inquiry. Dikotter's (65) historical analysis extends our knowledge of race-making in China; in confrontation with "the white peril," a defensive counterracism emerged that displaced Europeans from the apex of the racial hierarchy but accepted black inferiority. A number of anthropologists have explored the relationship of Japanese nation-building and capitalist development to the racialization of subordinate Others (120, 146, 221). Kelsky's (146) investigation of the international and interracial borderland of recreational sex among Japanese women illuminates both the place of "intimate ideologies" in enforcing racial boundaries and the international scope of many racial stereotypes, such as that of black hypersexuality, a theme also discernable in the United States and Latin America (266). The politics of gender and sexual regulation is highlighted in Martinez-Alier's (171) study of Cuban slave society and in Stoler's (250, 251) study of colonial Asian societies, where controls over sexuality and marriage were integral to drawing racial boundaries and to enforcing colonial domination.

Studies of sub-Saharan Africa have also revealed racialization's role in colonial and postcolonial domination. Banton (17), de Waal (63), and Malkki (167) offer insights into recent conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi, where racial distinctions were manufactured and inscribed into law by Belgian colonists, who invoked the "Hamitic myth" (73) and imposed Tutsi overlords over former Hutu kingdoms (63). Inverting these racial meanings, Hutu refugees in Tanzania have constructed a mythico-history positioning the Tutsi outside the Hutu moral community and nation (167). The political economy of apartheid has been a key concern, especially for Magubane (166), whose work explicates race's inextricable link to capitalist development in South Africa as well as the world. In their study of Zimbabwe, Page & Page (202) illuminate how Rhodesian settler colonialism and the underdevelopment of indigenous agricultural production were achieved, in part through the subjugation of indigenous agricultural knowledge and the control and dissemination of racially calibrated information through churches, schools, mass media, and agricultural extension programs. Comaroff & Comaroff (52, 53) analyze the development of consciousness and forms of cultural resistance among black South Africans, and Lan (152) demonstrates the power of ancestor-centered ritual knowledge in mobilizing against white rule in Rhodesia.

### *United States Multiracial Matters*

That race still matters in the post-civil rights era United States is reflected in recent studies that go beyond conventional bipolar approaches to the race

problem (e.g. 38, 110). The growing presence of new immigrants—often with transnational identities—from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia (7, 23, 90, 151), and struggles over multiculturalism and diversity in education and employment (70, 126, 138, 218, 255, 256) have expanded both popular and academic awareness of the nation's multiracial complexion. The racism of the postmodern era is not understood to be a uniform configuration of power and experience, nor is it necessarily expressed in overt language and consistent practices. As Gregory puts it, “racial meanings are implicated in discourses, institutional power arrangements, and social practices that may or may not be explicitly marked as ‘racial’” (109:25). With the crystallization of a racial politics that retreats from a civil rights agenda (110, 168, 255), the salience of race is both obscured and amplified.

The structure, language, and meanings of race and of racial bipolarity are resisted by new immigrants as well as by many established minorities (23, 141, 215, 255, 263). There is resistance also from black immigrants, largely Caribbean, whose identities have often been shaped by nationalist and transnational ideologies based in part on positive evaluations of blackness (23, 89, 103, 145, 252–254, 284). Identities are always enacted situationally, and in some aspects of new immigrants' everyday lives, race and ethnicity may be less influential than the organization of workplaces, residential areas, and schools (150:2–3). However, evidence indicates that racialization, no matter how subtle and uneven, is an undeniable dimension of new immigrants' experience. When new identities develop, including dual or multiple identities (83, 215), they do so in a wider context where racial politics informs the meanings of ethnicity and national allegiance.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, a race- and class-evasive discourse (95:14–15) on pluralism displaced assimilationist conceptions of US nationhood (23:43, 284; 66). This construction reflected and contributed to a resurgence of white ethnic identity, which drew upon and occurred in response to the civil rights movement. In the political rhetoric of the day, the white ethnic, blue collar Silent Majority was patriotic, committed to traditional patriarchal family values, resident in stable urban communities, and deserving of government largesse—unlike the black “undeserving poor” (66, 67). The growing salience of ethnicity set the stage for new immigrants as well as established minorities to deploy ethnic strategies in their competition for political and economic advancement and in their rise above stigmatized forms of racial alterity (23). Although since the 1980s ethnic identities have become increasingly institutionalized in the lives of West Indian residents in New York City, race historically has been of much greater significance for them and some Hispanic Caribbean immigrants (145:252; 225; 284).

Racial meanings and hierarchies are unstable, but this instability is constrained by poles of difference that have remained relatively constant: white

supremacy and the black subordination that demarcates the social bottom (103). Although whiteness and blackness have not had fixed meanings and boundaries, the opposition between them has provided the stabilizing backbone for the United States' racialized social body. The most visible instability has occurred between the poles. As Sanjek (230, 231), Takaki (256), and others have acknowledged, a number of racially oppressed immigrants have achieved considerable social mobility and fairly high intermarriage rates, and they have played "ethnic cards" to reposition themselves above the bottom layers of the racial hierarchy (23, 163). In current discourses, these "model minorities" are distinguished from dominant whites largely in terms of what are perceived to be bridgeable and transcendable differences. In some contexts, this redefinition of difference has facilitated the attainment of "honorary white" status, as in the case of Egyptian immigrants (190) or Mississippi Delta Chinese (163). Whenever racial distinctions are discursively salient, as they clearly were for earlier generations of Asian immigrants, differences are biologized and/or considered to be culturally irreconcilable.

The rise and mobility of intermediate, buffer groups (206) may appear to reflect society's democratization of race; yet, the discourse celebrating their incorporation into the mainstream implies a condemnation of those racial minorities that supposedly rely more on political agitation and affirmative action than on the values of individualism, hard work, and thrift (256:14). The model minority notion also obscures the cultural and socioeconomic diversity among, for instance, Asian-Americans, many of whom have not achieved the American Dream (192, 255, 256).

The pattern of mobility and assimilation characterizing the experiences of model minorities and white immigrants does not apply readily to African-Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and many Asian-Americans as well (77, 194, 218, 231, 232, 255). The structural location of disadvantaged minorities, their encounter with diverse faces of racism, and especially in the case of Latinos and Asians, the ethnic and national diversity among them has made pan-ethnicity an expedient strategy for consolidating larger and more effective political constituencies (82, 180, 181). However, in the absence of carefully negotiated coalitions built on a recognized diversity of regional, ethnic, and class interests, pan-ethnic categories are vulnerable to becoming homogenizing units for implementing inadequate policies (181).

That pan-ethnicity is a sociopolitical construction rather than the automatic result of cultural similarities is clearly evidenced in the experience of one Asian-American group: Filipino-Americans, who, because of their Spanish colonial heritage and their overall socioeconomic location, occupy a borderline position between Asians and Hispanics (23, 82). Another important instance of the ambiguity and political constructedness of race and ethnicity is the experience of Native Americans, which as Jaimes (141) claims, is the

historical benchmark of US racism (cf 258). The line dividing Indians from Mexican-Americans has been the subject of considerable political and legal contestation in the past century's history of the Southwest (182, 219, 263). As Menchaca (182) points out, after the United States annexed Mexico's northern frontier, it racialized its policy toward Mexican-Americans' rights to citizenship: Only those who were white were entitled to the privileges of citizenship. Mexican natives and those *mestizos* who had Indian appearances were treated as unfranchised Indians, unless they could prove otherwise. Racial status was much contested and negotiated in legislative and judicial arenas, and struggles over socioracial positioning and against discrimination led many *mestizos* to claim a Spanish and white identity, and some non-Hispanic Indians to pass for *mestizos* (182:587).

Indian Otherness was created to inhabit a terrain eroded by the forces of physical, psychological, and structural violence (91, 141, 148, 206, 238, 239). This violence was inflicted through military onslaughts, boarding school "domestication" (164), and the ecological racism depriving indigenous peoples of their original homelands and forcing them onto the underdeveloped political economies and health hazards of reservation life (141, 144; cf 86, 87). Bureaucratic racism has manufactured and manipulated criteria of Indian blood quantum as a means of controlling and expropriating Indian land and natural resources (141). Over the past century, Indian communities have been denied federal recognition because of "lost treaties" and legal "extinction" due to the inability to document continuous tribal histories and genealogies revealing no traces of African bloodlines (32, 47, 238, 239, 242, 282). Historically, some Indian communities, especially those along the east coast, commonly incorporated blacks as well as marginal whites (29, 32, 47, 91, 209, 238, 242, 282). In view of the "one drop/tar brush" principle of hypodescent, whites perceived many of those communities as racially mixed borderlands closer to black than Indian. Government and white settlers often used black membership and admixture as a weapon against corporate aboriginal rights to land and other property. This divide-and-rule tactic produced and/or exacerbated intracommunity tensions, compelling many with native identities to deny and avoid any meaningful affinity to black people, effectively relegating black-Indian heritage to "a history of silence" (91:270; cf 240). This history of interracial contact and fusion is recognized by the concept of triracial isolate, which is often applied to Indian groups with uncertified identities. Also placed within this category, however, are other racially liminal and interstitial populations that, through triracial negotiations, have come to be relatively socially distanced from both blacks and whites (24, 29, 62).

A corollary of the unique American principle of hypodescent, which has been applied only to people of African origins, is a heterogeneous construction of blackness that embodies, absorbs, and subordinates mixedness (cf 133). In

the United States, particularly in nationalist and Afrocentric discourses, blackness has come to marginalize mixedness (e.g. 128) and cast it as a mark of oppression and a threat to racial survival. The salience of mixedness vis-à-vis or as a component of blackness has varied over time and space. The antiracist praxis of turn-of-the-century black vindicationists included a defense of mulattoes, whom racists targeted in their attacks against the dangers of miscegenation (127:244; 220). Racial solidarity has been mobilized effectively around the common oppression experienced by African-Americans of all shades and degrees of admixture. However, within the boundaries of a common race, colorist meanings have exerted uneven influence (133). Spears (247) reminds us that although what he calls “colorstruction” is a form of cultural domination, it is also a discursive site where oppositional meanings are generated. Negotiations over the meanings of color, mixedness, and blackness also occur within families, in which divergent identity claims are sometimes made across generations—or within them, even among siblings (113, 128).

The significance of race has been modified since the civil rights movement transformed race from a “category of political oppression to one of political participation” and cultural identity (31, 48). The meanings of blackness have been affected by the class mobility that has expanded the black middle class (31, 54, 108, 109, 113, 168, 175). Consequently, race is being reconfigured across a wider range of social locations as blacks make new identity and power claims in many arenas—educational, political, economic, and religious (10, 11, 92, 199, 270, 271). That class mobility does not resolve problems of race is demonstrated by the fact that the black middle class confronts more obstacles than do whites with comparable educational, employment, and credit rating profiles (54, 279; cf 232). Gregory’s ethnography of a Queens, New York, neighborhood offers an insightful analysis of the interaction of race and class in the politics of everyday life (108, 109). Race remains salient in local middle class identities, but “what it means to be black and middle class in the post-civil rights era landscape” is conditioned by “class-based interests, ideologies and political alignments” that have been shaped by state-sponsored reforms (108:271).

The role of mass-media representations and political discourses in the production and reproduction of racial hegemony has been the focus of increasing critique and analysis. Lutz & Collins’s (165) study of *National Geographic* demonstrates how the national identity of US citizens, particularly of white Americans, draws on gendered and often sexualized images of racial Others that implicate color-coded social evolutionist assumptions. Other analyses elucidate how popular and politically constructed images of poverty, welfare, the war on drugs and against crime, educational disparities, economic trends, government policies, and even the leisurely consumption of tropical tourist paradises are shaped and disseminated by electronic and print media, which

promote partial and hegemonic visions of racial stratification (36, 42, 57, 100, 173). As Feldman (84) illuminates, mass media colonize sensory perceptions, legitimating some sensory experiences while repressing others. From a racially colonized gaze, segments of the racially oppressed are made responsible for the systemic inequalities with and against which they live (42, 59, 67, 100, 173, 174).

In examinations of how social problems are racialized, Williams (278, 279), Maxwell (173, 174), Okongwu (200), Vincent (265), and Gilliam (100) offer perceptive analyses of the underclass, which in gendered, sexualized terms is depicted as a "reproductive underclass" (279). They criticize mass media-reinforced assumptions that underestimate "the complex ways in which race, class, and gender...differentially shape...female-headed households" and structure access to resources (200:127). The construction of a pathological underclass diverts the public eye from the structured dependencies and crises of the predominantly white middle class, whose life-styles are based heavily on credit and household debt (279). The preoccupation with drug consumption and dealing in inner cities diverts attention away from the more preponderant suburban consumers and the top-tier entrepreneurs of the international drug industry (100).

Buck (42) illuminates how media coverage has also rationalized the privatization of prisons and the exploitation of "concentrated prison labor" by corporate interests. The exploitation of incarcerated labor, which is disproportionately black and brown, is rationalized by right-wing ideologies that manipulate fears and manufacture consent for oppressive population control measures (116, 130, 183:220). That many people are inclined to consent to this process is evidenced in Merry's (183) analysis of a multiracial neighborhood in a northeastern city. She observed that unfamiliar persons and places were perceived to be dangerous, and that the idiom of danger and crime implicated racial and ethnic boundaries. The criminalization of racioethnic strangers is shaped by both the tensions of local experience and the menacing racial imagery projected through the mass media production of "facticity" (84:406), which to some extent is disseminated internationally (100).

Anthropological analyses of US racial matters also cover a number of other important issues, including educational inequalities and institutions as loci for reproduction, resistance, and transformation (3, 8, 46, 57, 70, 80, 86, 88, 92, 93, 119, 153-155, 176, 177, 191, 192, 199, 246); teaching anthropological perspectives on race as antiracist praxis (43a); the institutionalization of sociolinguistic inequality and the suppression of language varieties in facilitating overt and covert racisms (8, 246); religion as a locus of accommodation and protest (11, 128, 270, 271); and race and racism's relationship to health and health care disparities (18, 19, 78, 87, 102, 112, 134, 139, 172, 188, 203, 272).



An important concern that permeates much of the literature and warrants much more discussion than is possible here is race's interaction with class and gender; race is always lived in class- and gender-specific ways (83, 175, 195, 200, 219, 223, 287). Largely in response to critiques and theoretical directives from women of color, more feminist analysts have begun to rethink gender in nonessentialist terms that do justice to race's salience as an articulated axis of difference and inequality (22, 50, 66, 95, 175, 188, 195, 200). Sacks's (223) work toward formulating a unitary theory of race, class, and gender underscores the growing recognition of the need to rethink not only gender but also class in ways that work against the received convention of subordinating race and reducing it to an epiphenomenon (50, 66, 188, 200, 287).

### *Recognizing and Naming Whiteness*

Anthropologists' growing interest in rethinking race and in "studying up" (197a) has led to a cultural critique of whiteness as the key site of racial domination (95, 177, 203, 224). Page & Thomas characterize this hidden site as "white public space," which in many material and symbolic forms "routinely, discursively, and sometimes coercively privilege[s] Euro-Americans over nonwhites" (203:111). According to Frankenberg's (95) analysis, whiteness is a structural location that confers exclusive privilege, a standpoint from which to view and assess Self and Other, and a set of cultural practices that is usually unmarked, unnamed, and normatively given. This relative invisibility both enhances and is an effect of its dominance. However, the cultural dominance of whiteness is never unquestioned: "In times of perceived threat, the normative group may well attempt to reassert its normativity by asserting elements of its cultural practice more explicitly and exclusively" (95:232). Currently, the explicit elaboration of white identity occurs largely in the context of the far right's "white pride" movement, which undermines whatever incipient class consciousness exists among poor whites. Buck (42) claims that among poor and near-poor white folk are populists and some nativists whose incomplete class analysis might lead them to a more developed class-based identity and openness to multiracial coalition-building. Both she (43) and Nonini (198) offer historical analyses that elucidate the problems whiteness has posed in struggles against agrarian underdevelopment.

Historicized analyses of whiteness go against the convention of ignoring yet universalizing whiteness as an unspoken but naturalized norm presumed to be unaffected by racism (cf 189). Frankenberg's analysis of white women's discursive repertoires clearly demonstrates how the lives and identities of the racially privileged are just as affected by racism as are those of the racially oppressed, who are the usual focus of racial discourses. Although "inflected by nationhood, such that whiteness and Americanness...are profoundly shaped by one another," whiteness is differentially shaped by and co-constructed with

class, ethnicity, age, gender, and sexuality (95:233). Interethnic contexts may also condition negotiations of whiteness, especially when ethnicity is socially salient, as it is for many Jews. The discourses Frankenberg analyzes claim that there are two kinds of whites: "the truly or only white, and those who are white but also something more—or is it something less?" (95:198). This second category has arisen from a history in which the boundaries of white privilege have been unstable and contingent. However, Frankenberg states that these "border skirmishes over the meaning of whiteness and Americanness...have been resolved through processes of assimilation, not exclusion" (95:203; cf 217).

Euro-ethnic mobility into whiteness was facilitated by shifts in social climate that the 1940s war effort engendered and by state policies and subsidies. According to Sacks (224), the state institutionalized "an expanded notion of whiteness" that secured white status for European immigrants (e.g. Jews) and their offspring. Moreover, the state created material conditions for that change of racial-class status. The growing economy of the postwar period demanded more technical, professional, and managerial workers than were available. That labor force grew out of a massive affirmative action program designed especially for white GIs: The GI Bill, Veterans Administration and Federal Housing Administration mortgages, and federal highway funding produced a suburban life-style and opportunity structure that rewarded the abilities of Euro-ethnics.

The contingency of racial status for some whites today is evidenced in those categories (e.g. Creoles, Hispanics, Arabs, and Jews) occupying border-line locations in the sociopolitical space of whiteness (68, 180, 181, 190). Sacks points out that in 1987 the Supreme Court ruled "that Jews and Arabs could use civil rights laws to gain redress for discrimination against them...on the grounds that they are not racial whites" (224:87). Yet Jews, Arabs, and North Africans are classified officially as whites in the United States. That white status is not seen uniformly as an advantage nor as a meaningful identity is illustrated in the case of a black Egyptian who challenged the US Department of Immigration and Naturalization's race and ethnic standards (190). However, Morsy (190) observes that it is more common for Egyptian immigrants to emphasize their nationality or religion over either their Arabness or Africanness.

Whereas white dominance is tied to demographic predominance in the United States, in South Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere in the Third World, whites constitute a small minority. Whether the recent turn to majority rule will release South African whites from the social entrapment that Crapanzano (55) describes is a question that can be raised when democratization is more institutionally consolidated. As his analysis shows, fear has long motivated much of white identity and practice. The Anglophone Caribbean repre-

sents another context where whites historically have made up a small minority but have, nonetheless, exercised enormous structural power (2, 71, 135, 245). Douglass's (71) ethnography of Jamaica's white "family elite" provides insights into the cultural politics of race and gender during the 1980s, when whiteness was elevated as a symbol of wealth and economic restoration while blackness was denigrated as a symbol of shortages, inflation, and economic collapse (214). Her study demonstrates how Jamaican whiteness is shaped by convergences and juxtapositions that bind the classes and races together in a single sociocultural order. Whiteness is also informed by a racial politics of gender that institutionalizes a power imbalance and double standard that benefit elite men and confine their "ladies" in the exercise of cross-class and cross-color sexuality (cf 250:651).

A number of analyses have drawn attention to the problem of ideological and cultural whiteness in anthropology itself, where as in other disciplines, it represents the dominant site from which knowledge is produced and validated (25, 56, 104, 127, 129, 130, 280).

## CONCLUSION

Anthropologists have realized that the various forms of racism and antiracism need to be studied both up and down, and deserve a prominent place on the disciplinary agenda (51, 126, 130, 192, 237). Racism is made up of beliefs, emotional convictions, and "a special kind of prejudice" (237:105), but it is also much more than these. Drake argued that prejudice can exist without being publicly expressed "if the sociocultural situation [were to provide] no rewards for doing so or actually [provided] punishments for those who discriminate against another race" (75:33). Racism must be understood to be a nexus of material relations within which social and discursive practices perpetuate oppressive power relations between populations presumed to be essentially different. These practices need not be intended, because unintended actions—and even those intended to be antiracist—can have racist and racializing effects (70, 75, 101, 269). Race still matters in the world today because the contradictory realities of racism are being reproduced in the disjunctures of the late twentieth-century world.

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