

Review: Race as a Social Construct and Basis for a Social Hierarchy

Race as a Social Construct (*The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger & Luckmann)

- A. Externalization
- B. Objectivation
- C. Internalization
- D. Institutionalization
- E. Socialization
- F. World-Maintenance and Reification

The Origins of “Racial Realism.” “Fifteenth-century European colonizers invented racial group concepts to facilitate the conquest, subjugation and exploitation of indigenous peoples and their lands (Hannaford; Fredrickson). Racial classificatory systems—enshrining Europeans as the ideal ‘race’ destined to rule over and Christianize the other ‘races’ of the world on God’s behalf—were the organizing principle on which colonial societies were established. From the outset, **racial classification** assigned individuals to hierarchically-ranked groups to which the goods of the community were distributed differentially, based on physical attributes (chiefly skin-color). Influential Enlightenment philosophers, especially Kant, argued that ‘natural, separate divisions, akin to subspecies, exist within humankind’ (Sung, 2001) and that whites were the superior race from which others had declined. ‘Race science’ was developed on these tenets. **‘Biological racial realism,’** affirming whites’ superiority, reinforced majority opinion and leaders’ efforts to implement additional race-based, dominative and exclusionary social policies, creating political, legal, socioeconomic, and other disparities that continue to structure and condition contemporary life.” (Sung, 2020)

“Racism” (George Fredrickson)

“[W]hen groups whose differing ancestry is culturally and/or physically marked come into adversarial contact, there is a powerful temptation, especially on the part of the more powerful group, to justify aggression, domination, or extermination by invoking differences defined as ‘racial’—meaning they are intrinsic and unchangeable.” (Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 154)

“My theory or conception of **racism** ... has **two components: difference and power**. It originates from a **mindset** that regards ‘them’ as different from ‘us’ in ways that are permanent and unbridgeable. **This sense of difference provides a motive or rationale for using our power advantage to treat the ethnoracial Other in ways that we would regard as cruel or unjust if applied to members of our own group.** The possible consequences of this **nexus of attitude and action** range from unofficial but pervasive social discrimination ... to genocide at the other, with government-sanctioned segregation, colonial subjugation, exclusion, forced deportation (or ‘ethnic cleansing’), and enslavement among the other variations on the theme. In all manifestations of racism from the mildest to the most severe, what is being denied is the possibility that the racializers and the racialized can coexist in the same society, except perhaps on the basis of domination and subordination. Also rejected is any notion that individuals can obliterate ethnoracial difference by changing their identities.” (Fredrickson, *Racism*, 9)

“Once considered primarily a matter of belief or ideology, **‘racism’ may now express itself in institutional patterns or social practices that have adverse effects on members of groups thought of as ‘races,’** even if a conscious belief that they are inferior or unworthy is absent.” (Fredrickson, *Racism*, 151)

Racialization

“‘Racialization’ describes a context in which ‘race’ has been *institutionalized* (i.e., has become ‘the way we do things around here’): one ‘wherein **race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities and social relationships**’ (Emerson & Smith) because culture and systems are organized by race and operate to reinforce it” (Sung, 2015).

“[D]ue to the origins of the idea of race, the placement of people in racial groups always means some form of **hierarchy**. This is why we may define a racialized society, in part, as one that allocates differential rewards by race.” (Emerson & Smith)

“A **racialized society** ‘**allocates differential economic, political, social and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines:** lines that are socially constructed.’” (Woodberry & Smith, “Fundamentalism et al.,” in Emerson & Smith)

Reading Assignment

For Session 3 (Sept. 27), please be prepared to discuss these short essays (the crucial ones are in bold font):

1. Eric Foner, "Why Reconstruction Matters"
2. Henry Louis Gates III, "The 'Lost Cause' That Built Jim Crow"
3. **Eric Foner, "The Lost Promise of Reconstruction"**
4. **Melinda Janko, "Elouise Cobell: A Small Measure of Justice."** *American Indian* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2013).
www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/elouise-cobell-small-measure-justice
5. **Jane Dailey, "Some Unexpected Links in the Chain of Racial Inequality"** (book review of Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*)
6. **Gordon Marino, "Me? Apologize for Slavery?"**
7. **Eric Foner, "Confederate Statues and 'Our' History"**

Further Reading: Recommended Resources

Genetics and Race

The Human Genome Project (completed 2003). <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/primer/hgp/description>

Bonham, Vence. "Race." <https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Race>

Collins, Francis, and Monique K. Mansoura. "The Human Genome Project: Revealing the Shared Inheritance of Humankind," *Cancer* 91 (Supplement) (2001): 221-225.

Rutherford, Adam. *A Brief History of Everyone Who Ever Lived: The Human Story Retold Through Our Genes*. New York: The Experiment, 2017.

The Social Construction of Reality

Berger, Peter, and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor, 1966.

Racialization of Church and Society: Black and White U.S. Evangelicals are "Divided by Faith"

Emerson, Michael, and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

The Establishment of Racial Inequality in the United States--A Racialized Society

Fredrickson, George M. *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, rev. ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 2008.

Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Katznelson, Ira. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006.

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2016.

Sung, Elizabeth. "Understanding the Roots of 'Race' and Racism in U.S. Society: A Historical and Sociological Perspective." *Chicago Studies* 57, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2018/2019): 2-28.

https://issuu.com/chicagostudies/docs/cs_fall_winter_2018_19_issue_comple?e=25413303/68439389

Equal Justice Initiative. www.eji.org