

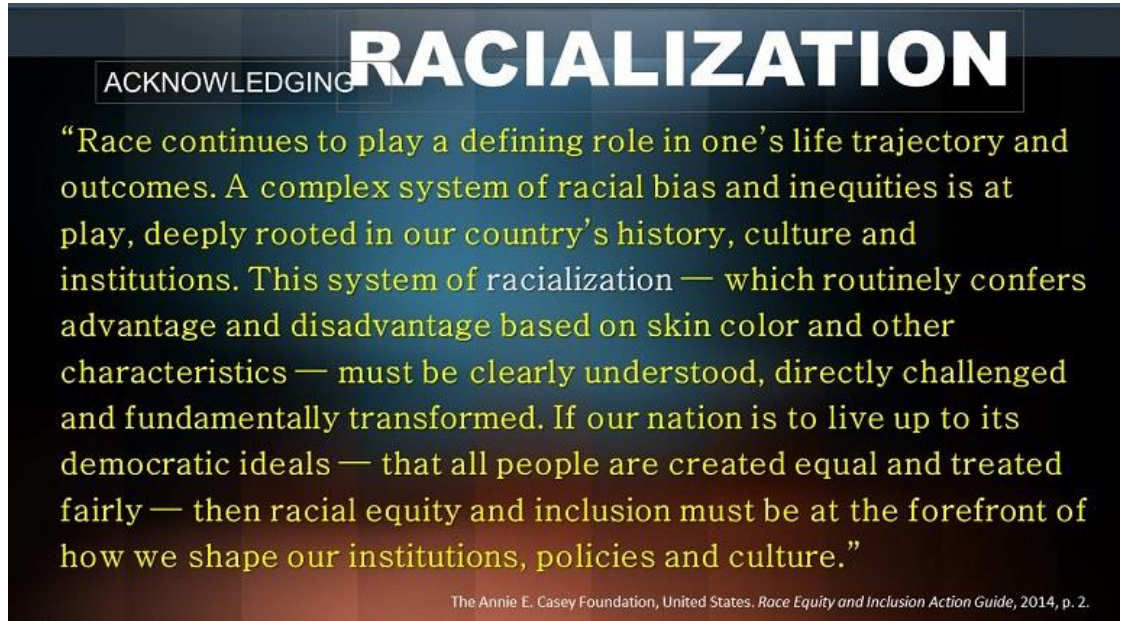
# Race/Racism

## Toward a Comprehensive Conceptual Definition

### (\*) Introduction

If you were to visit the world's largest free online database of library catalogs ([www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)), and do a search for books on race/racism in the English language you will come up with nearly 16,000 books on this one topic! Now, to be sure, the number will include several editions/reprints of the same books; nevertheless, you do get an adequate indication that the Western world is seriously obsessed with this topic. And perhaps it is not without reason. For, if we were to identify the major ideas that have helped to shape the modern world then at least two stand out above all others, one is industrial **capitalism** (I include here its antecedents the Renaissance, and the so-called scientific revolution, and its progeny, the Enlightenment) and the other is racism (includes **nationalism**). From the vantage point of today, the irony is that despite this obsession there appears to be an inability among many to come to analytical grips with the whys and wherefores of this deeply unhealthy feature of modern democratic societies.

Even the seemingly simple task of defining what racism is appears problematic (albeit for justifiable reasons as will soon become clear). Be that as it may, to start us off here is a brief usable definition that is up to the task of encapsulating its key features: racism is, at once, an **ideology** (meaning a systematic set of beliefs, in this case fallacious, that govern and validate human behavior) and systematic behavioral practice, at both interpersonal and institutional levels, of oppression based on the essentialist “othering” of human beings that was first invented by Europeans, beginning roughly in the fifteenth century when they began their voyages of exploitation across the world—fueled initially by merchant capitalism and later industrial capitalism—to legitimate a racially-based imperialist system of economic exploitation and oppression underwritten by military prowess and sanctified first by an occidental version of the Christian religion and later by a racialized occidental science, at the heart of which was the denial of the humanity of those so victimized. (The key words here are **essentialism**, **occident**, **ideology**, **system**, **exploitation**, **humanity**, and **capitalism**—plus one more should be added, **history**.) That's it. That's what racism is. It's simple. One definitely does not need sixteen thousand books to explain what racism is. Or so it would seem; or so it would seem. The truth, however, is that human beings are behaviorally complex animals; hence things are never that simple. What is complicated about racism, and one must stress here that it *is* complicated, is how and why racism evolved and how it has been operationalized in practice, across the centuries up to the present, even in the face of resistance by those victimized by it.



Before we proceed further, however, some important disclosures/disclaimers are in order that you should keep in mind: First, from a strictly scientific point of view, there is no such thing as “race” despite the physical differences one can usually observe among humankind in terms of skin color, hair texture, facial features, etc., unless one is referring to the one race we all belong to: the human race (who, by the way, first evolved in the Garden of Eden—also known as Africa). However, from a socio-political and economic perspective one can still talk about different “races” as identified by physical features (but while still recognizing that these are artificially constructed historically contingent, and therefore unstable, socio-political categorizations of human beings in a given society and not ones rooted in biology). Second, in some places at certain times the roles performed by race/racism in society have been and are performed by ethnicity/ethnicism. Therefore, race/racism can be used interchangeably with *ethnic/ethnicity/ethnicism* when these latter terms signify race-like oppression. (Ethnicity refers to the distinctions between social groups based on **cultural** differences and not physical differences, such as language or religion.) Third, as you go through this entry, it is very important that you recognize that although many examples used in this entry come from the United States it does not mean that racism today exists only in the United States; in fact, in almost every country in the world where there are racial/ethnic minorities the horrible tragedy is that you will find virulent forms of racism/ethnicism against the backdrop of globalized capitalism (countries that immediately come to mind include Algeria, Argentina, Bolivia, Burundi, Canada, China, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Russia, Syria, Turkey, Uganda, and so on, and so on). Fourth, victimization by oppression does not, in of itself, automatically make you a morally superior person. There is no special or chosen race morally superior to others (even if you are tempted to believe that you belong to one because of all the suffering that your race has endured at the hands of others). If we could go back two thousand years into history and were able to ask God, or some other supernatural power of your choice, to make this one change for us but keep everything else the same: transpose Africans with Europeans in their respective places, today we would be grappling with black “Euroracism” instead of white “Euroracism” (and whites of course would be the victims). In other words, racism is not genetically-rooted within a particular group of people—who today happen to be mostly those of European ancestry, as a consequence of historical serendipity. Fifth, from the perspective of analysis be extremely vigilant against the temptation to reify **societies**. To explain: societies do not exist as *concrete* objects that you can see, touch, or feel. Rather, they are intangible social constructions. Therefore, if you, *as an individual*, find that your personal experiences do not reflect some of the statements made in this entry, it does not imply that the statements are *not* applicable to a broad group of others. You, by yourself, are not society. So, take a chill pill, calm down, and carry on.

Mention the words race or racism in most Western countries today, such as the United States, and immediately most people become uptight, defensive, and even angry: the racists because they claim that it no longer exists today, or if they agree that it does exist then at least they themselves are not racists; and the targets of racism because they know all too well that racism is all around them, institutionally as well as interpersonally. Yet, the irony is that the racists and their victims, both, have a very poor understanding of why racism persists, what forms it takes, what role it plays in society, and how (or whether) it can be ever be eradicated. Folks, what you must know is this: while we who live in a society such as this one are ALL affected by racism in one way or another from the time we are born, that does not in itself guarantee that we will understand it fully. The fact is racism, like its other counterparts (classism, sexism, etc.), is a very complex **ideology** and system of oppression. Its complexity stems from the **dialectical** interplay between *structure*, *ideology*, and *behavioral practice* at both institutional and interpersonal levels. There are nine critical issues associated with this interplay: (1) the mythical basis of the ideology; (2) the mode of its origins and transmission; (3) the variety of forms it takes, depending upon historical time period; (4) the role it performs in society; (5) its relationship to other ideologies of oppression: sexism, ethnicism, classism, etc., (6) the problem of contradiction: the futile attempt to create a racially egalitarian society in an inherently non-egalitarian one; and (7) the fallacy of the concept of “reverse racism” (or “reverse discrimination”). Then there is the matter of (8) the geographic specificity of certain forms racism. Three such forms are well-known today. So, with specific reference to most Western countries (such as Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, and United States), racism, *at the ideological level*, takes the specific form of what some sociologists term as **whiteness**. This kind of geographic specificity is akin to two other forms, **Anti-Semitism** and **Islamophobia**, which however are found across the world today. And as if all this is not enough, there is (9) the problem of what theoretical approach to take in the study of racism generally, as an intellectual endeavor (such as in colleges and universities).

# 1. Mythical Basis of the Ideology

In addition to the fact that racism refers to behavioral practice, it should also be understood in terms of an *ideology* that is based on a mythical conception of the category *race*. All scientific evidence to date points to only one fact: that there is only one race on this planet: the human race (and the origins of which can be traced to Africa). Whatever racial categories “societies” have come up with are categories that have been created artificially by those in power in order to create a basis for **otherness** as a means for justifying prejudice and discrimination for the purpose of legitimating what I call “unjustifiable entitlement” (to land, labor, and other resources). Before Columbus set sail from Europe there was no “white” race or “black” race or “red” race, or even “yellow” and “brown” race. It is the European domination of the world unleashed by the **Great European West-to-East Maritime Project** that created a need among the Europeans to produce these artificial categories (hence the legitimate view among sociologists today that race is a *socially-constructed* category). Before Columbus there were only ethnicities based on learned, not genetically determined, distinctions of language and culture, such as: in



The Columbian Project and its Aftermath: A Native American Perspective

Africa: the Akan, Malinke, Ngoni, Yoruba, Zulu, etc.; in the Americas: the Aztec, Cherokee, Inuit, Maya, Sioux, etc.; in Asia: the Arab, Berber, Han, Jews, Korean, Mongol, Indo-Aryan, Dravids, etc.; and in Europe: the English, French, German, Irish, Spanish, etc. Remember also that all human beings originate out of the same place, regardless of what you believe in: religious explanation (Garden of Eden [if you are a Christian, Jew or Muslim]) or scientific explanation (Africa). In other words: whether you believe in God or in science, both recognize only one race: the human race. However, having said that it is important to emphasize that in singing this favorite mantra of many intellectuals that “race” is nothing more than a *social construction*, the fact remains that for most in a racialized society phenotypical markers are embodied with what Loury (2002), for example, calls “social signification.”

For victims of racism (and other similar forms of prejudice and discrimination based on superficial biologically-determined criteria), at one level, it is not difficult to determine what racism is. They really do not need to be told what it is and what it does to them, as attested by their everyday lived experience. In racist societies (as in the United States, or England, or India, or France, or Brazil, or South Africa, or Ireland, or Malaysia, or Sudan, or Mauritania, or Australia, and so on) racism for them involves encounters with a poisoned environment in which, depending upon the society and/or circumstance in question, their dignity and/or their lives are constantly under assault as the racists, by undergoing a process



of “uncivilization,” attempt to harass or dehumanize or brutalize or terrorize or murder their victims merely because they belong to a different racial, ethnic, linguistic or other similar grouping.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the ubiquity of racism in racist societies at the personal (or micro) level tends to blind both victims and victimizers to its origins, forms and functions in society as a whole (macro or institutional level), making it difficult to work toward the eradication of this heinous human social disease. At the outset, following Nash (1972) it would help by establishing the fact that racism is an ideology (that is a “style of thought” or a system of ideas and concepts that, in this instance, is neither cogent nor correct). As an ideology, racism has no scientific basis given its essential purpose: to impose a social and cultural significance on the genetic and morphological diversity found in the human race (usually undertaken for the purposes of justifying and maintaining racially-based hierarchical power relations). At its root therefore, racism does not seek to study and explain this diversity (which remains the legitimate project of science), but rather seeks to illegitimately (in terms of science) use this diversity to arrive at explanations for social and cultural differences among different population groups as identified by diverse phenotypes and genetic frequencies. As Nash (1972: 112–13) explains:

The ideology of race is a system of ideas which interprets and defines the meanings of racial differences, real or imagined, in terms of some system of cultural values. The ideology of race is always normative: it ranks differences as better or worse, superior or inferior, desirable or undesirable, and as modifiable or unmodifiable. Like all ideologies, the ideology of race implies a call to action; it embodies a political and social program; it is a demand that something be done. The ideology of race competes in a political arena, and it is embraced or rejected by a polity, not a scientific community... [Moreover], [o]n these grounds, that is, the functional consequences of ideologies, no amount of evidence (even were it scientifically impeccable) will destroy an ideology, or even, perhaps, modify it.

It is necessary to stress, therefore, that the ideology of racism was “invented,” it did not emerge naturally out of supposed innate differences in intelligence (despite assertions to the contrary by racist hate groups), in order to facilitate the domination of their victims by means of an unending series of “racial projects.”<sup>2</sup> In the case of racism in the Western world, for example, racism emerged to facilitate the racial project of European domination of **PQD** peoples and the plunder of their resources by denying their humanity. This is not to suggest by any means that a conspiracy took place in Europe in the fifteenth century when the so-called “voyages of discovery” (in actuality a misnomer because as Burman [1989] clearly demonstrates much of the world was already known by the fifteenth century) would commence and propel Europeans to the far reaches of the earth, and in the process unleash a nightmare on PQD peoples from which many have yet to recover. Rather, it is that the combination of (a) an Occidental version of the Christian religion (which in reality was a corrupted form of an Eastern religion—Christ, it must be remembered, was not a European), developed against a backdrop of the Crusades, with (b) a revolutionary form of economic system that would first emerge in Europe on a large society-wide scale, merchant capitalism, proved to be a potentially fertile mixture for the evolution of a European racist ideology. Only racism,

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1. Although examples used in this section come primarily from the United States, it should be stressed that the aim of this section is not so much to show that the United States is a racist society—a fact that cannot be disputed—but rather to arrive at an understanding of what racism is and what functions it performs in racist societies. Racism, today is found in almost all societies, except that it takes a different form in those societies where all belong to the same race. This form can be “ethnicism” for example. In many countries of Africa and Asia, the role performed by racism is performed by “ethnicism.” In some societies racism is substituted with discrimination based on linguistic and/or religious differences. Plus one must not forget that in almost all societies today one will find discrimination of another kind: it is a type that is even more pervasive than racism, though it operates in almost the same way as racism does and performs almost the same functions: sexism. But whether bigotry and discrimination are based on racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender (or any other biologically-determined immutable factors) the end-goal remains the same for those who practice this bigotry and discrimination: to dominate and exploit their victims on the basis of “unjustified entitlement.”

2. I am borrowing this concept from a theory known as **racial formation theory** developed by Omi and Winant (1994) to explain the persistence of racism in modern societies.

backed by a self-conjured device of the “divine mandate,” for example, could have made possible such behavior of “God-fearing Christians” as that mentioned in the following account of a European slave raiding expedition in Africa:

Then might you see mothers forsaking their children and husbands their wives, each striving to escape as best as he could. Some drowned themselves in the water, others thought to escape by hiding under their huts; others stowed their children among the sea weed, where men found them afterwards, hoping they would thus escape notice. . . . And at last our Lord God, who giveth a reward for every good deed, willed that for the toil they had undergone in His service they should that day obtain victory over their enemies, as well as a guerdon and a payment for all their labor and expenses; for they took captive of those Moors, what with men, women and children, 165 besides those that perished and were killed. . . . (From in Kaufman and Guckin 1979: 2)

Therefore, armed with a racist ideology sanctified by European Christianity, and possessing technological superiority (in terms of weapons) to implement this ideology, it became relatively easy for European imperialists to venture abroad into the lands of other peoples and proceed to unleash an orgy of rapine terror and wholesale thievery of resources. And once the ideology of racism had emerged, it was not difficult to soak the entire fabric of European societies in this ideology via the ubiquitous, but powerful process of **socialization** for generations to come—that is long after the original economic roots of this ideology had disappeared from public consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Although the seeds of modern racist ideology in Europe were long planted in the debate that took place between those among the Spanish who decried the brutal exploitation of Native Americans in the sixteenth century and those who argued that the exploitation was supported by Christian theology (See McNutt 1909),<sup>4</sup> racism, as an ideology, first received widespread respectability in the Western world via a perversion of the Darwinist theory of evolution with its application to the explanation of the pigmentary, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the human community in the nineteenth century by pseudo-scientists. These pseudo-scientists would claim that biological science (Darwinism) provided “proof” of the inherent inferiority of the black peoples: that is that their evolution was on a different time scale from that of whites, placing them (blacks) closer to apes than to humans (whites).

Science today, of course, recognizes that not only is this perverse application of the Darwinist theory false, but even the concept of race itself is false in that scientific evidence points to only one race: the human race—which (ironically for the racists) evolved in Africa! So pervasive has been this false concept of “inferior” and “superior” race in the Western world that on four different occasions the United Nations Educational and Scientific Commission would assemble

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3. From the perspective of transmission, racist ideologies depend on the creation of stereotypes and their transmission through agencies of socialization. Racists rely on stereotypes to create **otherness** because stereotypes permit them to dehumanize their victims. These stereotypes can be both “positive” (intelligent, industrious, ambitious), and negative (lazy, dumb, thieving, etc.) but, above all, in the arsenal of all racists three stereotypes are universal and salient: one has to do with dirt, the other with sex, and the third with trust. For example, those who hold a monopoly over power and resources in the United States, the English, have portrayed all these groups at various times in history as unhygienically dirty, animalistically oversexed, and highly untrustworthy: Native Americans, U.S. African Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Jewish Americans, etc. But where do stereotypes come from? They come from those who are involved in producing the content of what we today call the media (books, cinema, television, theater, newspapers and magazines, radio, museums, etc.): writers, actors, musicians, entertainers, artists, scholars, museum curators, travelers and explorers, etc. All of these people are involved in the creation, dissemination and maintenance of stereotypes. As stereotypes become widespread in a society over time, other agencies of **socialization** besides the media become involved: the family, the church, schools, and so on.

4. In actuality, the historical antecedents of the origins of the European ideology of racism lie in the first encounters between Europeans and Jews on one hand (following the adoption of Christianity by the Romans under Constantine I in the fourth century), and Europeans and Muslims (following the Muslim invasion of Europe in the eighth century) on the other. Remember too that the Muslims who arrived in Europe were made up of many different races and ethnicities. Further down the road, in the eleventh century, came the Crusades, and this was one more formative influence in the genesis of European racism as an ideology.

scientists to examine this issue; their conclusion: “Neither in the field of hereditary potentialities concerning the overall intelligence and the capacity of cultural development, nor in that of the physical traits, is there any justification for the concept of ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’ races” (from European Parliament 1985: 21). The ideology of racism derives its cogency for its proponents from three principal fallacies: “(1) The identification of racial differences with cultural and social differences; (2) The assumption that cultural achievement is directly, and chiefly, determined by the racial characteristics of a population; (3) The belief that physical characteristics of a population limit and define the sorts of culture and society they are able to create or participate in” (Nash 1972: 118). On the basis of these fallacies a number of ridiculous propositions are then generated; chief among them being:

- (a) It is not correct to legislate relations between races because God has ordained that some races are not equal to others.
- (b) Some races are not capable of becoming modern and “civilized” and hence they cannot be treated as equals of “civilized” races.
- (c) The “fact” that some races have not made any meaningful contribution to the human civilization is an indication that they are genetically incapable of high cultural achievement.
- (d) Even when some races have had an opportunity to associate with civilized races they soon sink back into barbarism once the association ends.
- (e) To struggle against civil and human rights for inferior races is to struggle for the interests of all races.
- (f) Those who struggle for human and civil rights for inferior races are enemies of the civilized races—see Nash, pp. 114–118 for more on this point.

These assertions, however logical, natural and scientific they may appear to the racist mind have no basis in real fact. Even a cursory study of the history of the human race from the caveman era to the present would quickly reveal the fallacious basis of these assertions. And, of course, to date no scientific evidence has yet emerged that links race with intelligence. Yet, to this day, some five hundred years after the ideology of racism began to take shape in Europe, for example, it continues to flourish in the West in countries such as the United States, Germany, France, etc., governing the behavior of the white majority toward the black minority. How does one explain the persistence of this ideology? Nash (p. 120) provides five basic reasons; specifically, the ideology of racism “(1) Provides a moral rationale for systematic disprivilege; (2) Allows the members of the dominant group to reconcile their values with their activities; (3) Aims to discourage the subordinate group from making claims on the society; (4) Rallies the adherents to political action in a ‘just’ cause; (5) Defends the existing division of labor as eternal.” In other words, to put it simply: racism as an ideology aims to encourage and justify the discrimination of people solely on the basis of their skin pigmentation in all areas of life—in such a way as to negatively alter their life-chances and violate their basic human rights—with the aim of dominating them *for economic and political purposes*.

The ability of racists to discriminate against victims rests on the possession of power via the monopoly of political and/or economic means. The term racism, it is important to emphasize, does not cover xenophobia, the paranoid fear of strangers. Whereas xenophobia is generally “curable” via education and amicable contact with those one fears, racism cannot be “cured” in this sense. As an ideology, racism has a specific rational function: to discriminate against victims in order to obtain and/or retain monopoly over access to resources and services in society. Consequently, racism is ultimately rooted in terms of its genesis in economic factors; and, therefore, the strategy for fighting the ideology of racism depends on a number of concrete material actions—not psychiatric treatment as in the case of xenophobia. These include:

- (a) Instituting a dialectical relationship between legislation that prohibits discrimination (whether in education, housing, government, or any other area of public life) and the economic and political empowerment of the victims of racism via concrete measures (e.g., affirmative action programs) that address the injustices of the past.

- (b) Breaking the chain of socialization that permits the ideology from being passed from one generation to the next by outlawing all manifestations of racist thinking in public life—including, and most especially, in the corporate media.<sup>5</sup>
- (c) Consistent, persistent and spirited leadership from the highest levels of government and other public and social institutions in condemning racism and racial discrimination. (In the United States and in Britain, it is not a coincidence that the resurgence of virulent racism in the 1980s came with the election of government leaders with racist proclivities.)

It is important to point out that the institution of such measures is aimed at undermining the mechanism by which the racist ideology performs its “economic” function: the cultivation of a mythology of racial superiority that is imbibed by both victimizer and victim. The victimizer proclaims his/her racial superiority to justify all racially-inspired injustices inflicted on victims, while victims are rendered impotent against racist tyranny—until exceptional consciousness raising circumstances

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5. While such a measure, in the United States for example, will rankle with those who are (or claim to be) opposed to all forms of censorship, they have to be reminded that freedom from racist discrimination that violates fundamental human rights of victims takes precedence over freedom from censorship. Inability to comprehend this simple point is indicative of the fact that such people have simply misunderstood the purpose of First Amendment rights, or they are in actuality “closet racists”—especially considering that, not surprisingly, those who oppose muzzling racists from advancing their gutter ideology in the media (on grounds that the U.S. constitution protects the dissemination of such ideology under the First Amendment rights) invariably, tend not to belong to the group that is being victimized. Surely, if all speech was beyond prohibition, then why are there laws concerning libel (defamation through print, writing, pictures or signs aimed at injuring a person’s reputation) and slander (defamation through oral speech)? Clearly, freedom of speech is not absolute—except, one has to assume, when it comes to inflicting racist injury on victims. Racism was determined to be a crime against humanity at the Nuremberg trials, yet those who advocate and champion the practice of such a crime are deemed to be protected by First Amendment rights! Such rank hypocrisy is only possible under conditions of pervasive racism where even normally intelligent people momentarily abandon their intellect in favor of meaningless slogans that racists have seized upon to smuggle in their gutter ideology. To be sure, there must be vigilance against censorship, but in the West, especially in the United States, the struggle against censorship has been marked by much hypocrisy and ignorance. For example: there is no campaign visible anywhere against the monopolization of the mass media by a handful of giant transnational corporations—which has resulted in a pernicious and pervasive censorship of alternative political viewpoints via the “normal” operation of the market and the “normal” politics of media ownership (he who pays the piper calls the tune). There is no campaign anywhere to force the media to hire, employ, consult writers and commentators with ideological viewpoints different from those of the owners and controllers of the media (e.g., commentators who are not enamored of capitalism and neoimperialistic relations with the PQD ecumene).

The struggle against censorship requires a balanced perspective on what is truly worth fighting for (e.g., against censorship of information that expose the true corrupt nature of the capitalist class and its allies, or information that expose the governmental misuse of taxpayers’ money and/or the mandate of the citizenry to govern for purposes of undertaking nondemocratic and corrupt clandestine projects—like obtaining assistance from drug lords to overthrow legitimate foreign governments) and what should not be fought for (e.g., against censorship of racist propaganda aimed at hurting and psychologically destroying other human beings, as well as fomenting race hatred among the vulnerable—such as working-class youth.) To defend racists who use words to attack and wound people simply because their skin color is different from theirs by arguing that racist speeches and writings are constitutionally protected is a gross perversion of the intent of the First Amendment. What about the rights of the victims? Don’t victims have a right to be protected from the verbal abuse of bigots (who derive their strength, like the typical cowards they are, from the fact that they have the power of numbers, being in the majority); abuse that produce in victims all kinds of mental anguish ranging from shame through anger and from defensiveness to withdrawal; abuse that undermines their self-worth and esteem? Champions of anti-censorship on any grounds may be surprised to learn that the United States is, perhaps, the only country in the Western world that offers governmental protection to bigots and hatemongers. (See Matsuda [1989] for more on this issue; see also Wiener [1990] who discusses this matter in relation to bigots and racists on university campuses.)

surface—because of a racist-inspired (‘blame the victim’) inferiority complex. It is a complex that rests on a dialectic in which the inferior material conditions of the victim are explained by the racist victimizer on the basis of the victim’s supposed inherent inferiority, rather than the racist discrimination that is responsible for the inferior material conditions in the first place. Given this critical function that the mythology plays in racist ideologies it should be noted that its cultivation is not a consequence of irrationality and ignorance. Hence, not surprisingly, antiracist strategies that depend on debunking the mythology stand little chance of success. Only “political” measures such as those just mentioned can undermine racism. In fact, the enormous amounts of time and energy spent on debunking the racist mythology are simply a waste of time and may even play into the hands of the racists.

## 2. Origins and Transmission

In terms of origins and transmission, racist ideologies depend on the creation of **stereotypes** and their transmission through agencies of **socialization**. Racists rely on stereotypes to create **otherness** (you are not one of us), because stereotypes permit them to dehumanize their victims. These stereotypes can be, both, positive (intelligent, industrious, ambitious), and negative (lazy, dumb, thieving, etc.), but above all, in the arsenal of all racists three stereotypes are universal and salient: one has to do with *dirt*, the other with *sex* and the third with *trust*. For example, those who have monopoly of power and resources in this country, the English, have portrayed all these groups at various times in history as unhygienically dirty, animalistically oversexed, and highly untrustworthy: Native Americans, African Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Jewish Americans, etc. But where do stereotypes come from? They come from those who are involved in producing the content of what we today call the media (comprising electronic social and mass media, and traditional media: books, cinema, television, music, theater, newspapers and magazines, radio, museums, etc.): writers, actors, musicians, entertainers, artists, scholars, museum curators, travelers and explorers, etc. All of these people are involved in the creation, dissemination and maintenance of stereotypes. As stereotypes become widespread in a society over time, other agencies of socialization besides the media become involved: the family, the church, schools, and so on.



## (\*) 3. Varieties

Racism can take the following fairly distinct, *but NOT unrelated*, structural forms: genocidal racism, dominative racism, aversive racism, institutional racism, juridical racism, and internalized racism.

*Genocidal racism*, as the term implies, is the attempt to totally annihilate a group of people for whatever reason. Some classic examples of this most brutal form of racism would include: The settlement of the Americas by Europeans at the expense of Native Americans; the Shoah (the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Europe); and the Rwandan Genocide.

*Dominative racism* is racism aimed at dominating victims in order to directly exploit their labor, as in the case of the racist exploitation of African Americans in the South. Note that at the level of interpersonal relations, under conditions of dominative racism, intimate relationships between the racist and the victim are common. Not surprisingly, in the racist South of the past enslaved African American women often ran the household of the white master: from house cleaning and cooking to child-rearing—and sometimes even child-bearing! (By the way, a similar situation obtains to day in the West [California, Texas, etc.] but involving primarily Hispanic American women.)



# WHITE LIBERALS VS WHITE CONSERVATIVES ON RACE

(IN A CAPITALIST DEMOCRACY)

## **White Liberals:**

The "darkies" can be seen, but should not be heard.

## **White Conservatives:**

The "darkies" should neither be seen nor heard.

*Aversive racism*, as the term implies, denotes the type of racism where the racist wants to put the greatest physical and social distance possible between himself/ herself and the target. For example: aversive white racists would never dream of permitting African Americans to enter their homes, let alone cook their food or baby-sit their children. The logical conclusion of this kind of discrimination from the perspective of the victim is genocide. The European Jews were victims of aversive racism. In this country, wherever dominative racism disappeared it was replaced by aversive racism; consequently, today it is aversive

racism that is the most common form of racism. At the structural level, aversive racism is manifest in such ways as *de facto* residential segregation. At the interpersonal level, the desire by aversive racists for as much physical and social distance as possible between themselves and other races stems from the incorporation into their psyche, through early childhood **socialization**, at the minimum the triple racist stereotypes of dirt, sex and trust (mentioned above). As you can guess, laws cannot really overcome this form of racism. Why? Because it is too pervasive and yet very subtle to the point where, sometimes, both the racist and the victim may not even be aware of its existence at a given moment. A classic example of the latter phenomenon, in this society, is the subconscious belief by **almost** all whites (including, ironically, non-racist whites) that their whiteness entitles them to a place above everyone else, regardless of what aspect of society is under consideration: employment, housing, health, religion, culture, language, etc., etc. The only whites who do not suffer from this "white is best; white is right" psychological disease are those whites who are *actively* engaged in struggling with themselves to overcome this disease in order to become normal and mentally healthy human beings. Aversive racism is not a monopoly held only by whites in this society. Other groups can and do exhibit this form of racism too. For example: Jews against blacks; blacks against Jews; blacks against Hispanics and Asians; Asians against blacks, etc.; etc.

While you are reading this entry, I want you to stop for a moment and ask yourself this question: If I am alone in an elevator would I be uncomfortable if a person from group X enters it, even though I have never come across that person before and the person appears to pose no threat? (Substitute group X with whatever racial/ ethnic groups you encounter in your daily lives that you can think of.) If your answer is yes with respect to ANY group, you are a racist. Not only that, but think about this: it means that you are a *potential* candidate for recruitment by a racist organization like the Neo-Nazis (under appropriate circumstances). How do you think a minority, the Nazis, in Nazi Germany were able to convince the majority of Germans to murder millions upon millions of people within a short period of 5 to 6 years? They exploited the *existing* aversive racism that went back hundreds of years toward Jews that most Germans *and* many other Europeans harbored. So, if you are one of those who becomes "uncomfortable" when you encounter in your daily life a person of another color then you need to seriously consider psychiatric treatment because you are mentally sick! Here's another thought experiment: if you have to talk to another person who you consider as different from you in terms of race/ethnicity are you able to comfortably look the person in the eye? If not, then you are certainly a racist/ethnicist (get treatment).

"Instead of involving themselves in an all-out attempt to stamp out racism from their white society, liberals waste a lot of time trying to prove to as many blacks as they can find that they are liberal."

—STEVE BIKO





*Institutional racism*, in this country, is closely tied up with aversive racism. Institutional racism, also known as *structural racism*, in contrast to *interpersonal racism* (the day-to-day racism found in interpersonal encounters between individuals) refers to *historically-determined* overt and/or covert racist discriminatory practices that may be deliberate or simply be motivated by ignorance, prejudice, stereotypes, and the like in the operation of socio-economic and political institutions of society (ranging from schools to hospitals, from prisons to the military, from the police to newspapers, from state legislatures to churches, from banks to city governments) where the discriminatory target is entire groups of people rather than specific individuals. Institutional racism originates from a past where juridical racism was the order of the day. So, for example, when inner cities—where the majority of minorities in urban areas live because of historically determined, racist residential segregation—continue to lack equitable access to resources (ranging from decent schooling through adequate social amenities to jobs and employment), then that constitutes a manifestation of a range of forms of institutional racism.

In United States, in recent years, because of an ultra-right conservative Supreme Court (that even includes an ultra-

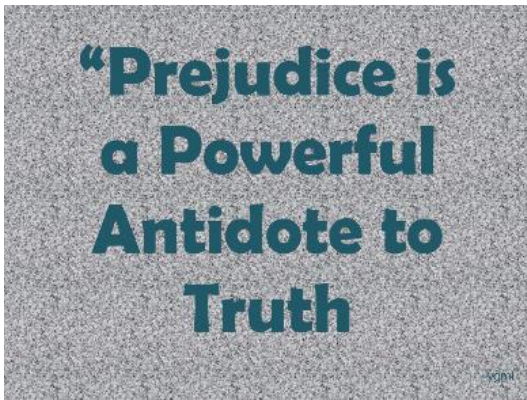
conservative African American justice by the name of Clarence Thomas whose appointment to the bench was, most ironically, colored by his invocation of racism on the part of Congress during his confirmation hearings where credible charges of sexual harassment were leveled against him by an African American woman of integrity, Anita Hill), institutional racism has been given a juridical mandate. In the view of this Court (with the exception of a minority of justices), institutional racism in United States is supposedly a thing of the past, and, therefore, there is no longer any need for any government policy in any area of life that seeks to eliminate institutional racism. And it is encapsulated in a well-known quote authored by Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., in a majority decision outlawing voluntary (repeat: *voluntary*) desegregation efforts in schooling in the combined U.S. Supreme Court cases, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, 551

## The Faces of “Jim Crow” Today



U.S. 701 (2007): “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” While one is left wondering on which planet the Chief Justice resides, this line of thinking may sound logical and seemingly anti-racist in intent, it is, in reality, a very racist view because it deliberately ignores the historically-determined racism that continues to be pervasive in United States today—attested to by massive evidence, both research-based and the daily experiences of ordinary individuals. On almost every measure one cares to look at—ranging from housing to health-care; from employment to policing; from education to rates of incarceration; from environmental safety to possession of wealth; from equal access to social space to equitable positive representation in the media—racial/ethnic minorities in the United States are enormously disadvantaged, for no other reason than their race/ethnicity.

An enlightened Court, on the other hand, would accept the view articulated by Justice Sonya Sotomayor (with whom Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg concurred) in a dissenting opinion in another Supreme Court case, *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action*, 572 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2014), that further advanced the racist agenda of the conservatives on the Court to turn back the gains of the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s by, in this instance, outlawing affirmative action policies: “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to speak openly and candidly on the subject of race, and to apply the Constitution with eyes open to the unfortunate effects of centuries of racial discrimination.” She continues: “As members of the judiciary tasked with intervening to carry out the guarantee of equal protection, we ought not sit back and wish away, rather than confront, the racial inequality that exists in our society. It is this view that works harm, by perpetuating the facile notion that what makes race matter is acknowledging the



simple truth that race *does* matter.” Note: institutional racism may also be referred to as “color-blind racism” where the idea is to claim that by not “seeing” race you undermine racism (the view held by people like Chief Justice Roberts, Jr.). But as explained above, this view assumes that we no longer live in a racist society and therefore no remedies are needed to deal with this deeply insidious form of social injustice. In other words, “color-blindness,” is, in actuality, a form of racism. However, it should also be noted that the concept of colorblindness from the perspective of race also has a different and, in fact, a positive meaning when used as originally intended when it was first invoked in the form of a “color-blind constitution” by Justice John Marshall Harlan in his dissenting opinion in that infamous 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson* that legitimated Jim Crow racism by establishing the patently bogus doctrine of “separate but equal” in direct violation

of the intent of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. In that case, Justice Harlan attempted to remind his colleagues that the U.S. Constitution was colorblind in the sense that it could not be used to justify racist practices, such as Jim Crow segregation. When conservatives hark back to the Harlan dissent they are deliberately, cunningly, and perfidiously misreading the *intent* of that dissent. Here is part of Justice Harlan’s dissent:

But in view of the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law...

The present decision, it may well be apprehended, will not only stimulate aggressions, more or less brutal and irritating, upon the admitted rights of colored citizens, but will encourage the belief that it is possible, by means of state enactments, to defeat the beneficent purposes which the people of the United States had in view when they adopted the recent amendments of the constitution, by one of which the blacks of this country were made citizens of the United States and of the states in which they respectively reside, and whose privileges and immunities, as citizens, the states are forbidden to abridge.

*Juridical racism*, in this country, is closely linked to dominative racism because it was racism that was instituted through law in order to exploit African Americans and other minorities directly. The slave codes and the **Jim Crow** laws are classic examples of laws that established a juridical racist society in the South.

*Internalized racism*, refers to the hatred of and discrimination against people of one’s own race/ethnicity. In other words, it is a form of self-hatred that emerges as a consequence of a lack of political consciousness in the context of a pervasively racist/ethnicist society. A very common example of internalized racism in United States is the deliberate refusal to learn



one's own mother tongue or practice one's culture by second generation immigrant children. Another common example is discrimination against people of one's own race/ethnicity who are recent immigrants (sometimes pejoratively referred to as "fresh off the boat"). Internalized racism allows people who suffer from this form of racism to delude themselves into believing that they themselves will be spared racist discrimination by the wider (white) society. It's a delusion because white racists do not make a distinction between recent immigrants and those who have been in the country for generations when they discriminate against a particular group—it is skin color that matters, not language and culture.

## (\*) 4. Societal Role

The role of racist ideologies in societies such as this one is that it assists the capitalist classes in doing three things: (a) Achieve political and economic stability by using racial/ethnic minorities as scapegoats for the severe problems that the activities of the capitalist classes *as a whole* produce: unemployment, falling standards of living, environmental destruction, scarcity of resources, etc. Racism helps to deflect resistance and rebellion away from the capitalist class and the capitalist system. (Note: in the absence of race, other ideologies of oppression become salient: sexism, classism, etc.)<sup>6</sup> (b) Permit the direct exploitation of victims through measures such as low wages, dispossession of their lands, etc. (c) Allow them to sow

division among the working classes so that they can keep each other in check in their struggles with the capitalist classes. A classic example is the use of African Americans and other minorities to break up labor strikes of Euro-American workers. Historically, and up to the present, racism has been one of the most important tools used in this country to buy the allegiance of white workers by capitalists. By allowing white workers to exchange their **whiteness** for a few privileges, the capitalist classes have kept all working classes from demanding a fundamental change to the entire political and economic system for the benefit of all. Racism creates an *us* and *them* mentality, whereas genuine progress in a society is only possible under conditions of cooperation and mutual respect. To be sure, the white working class (to take the U.S. example) may maintain a short-term advantage relative to the black working class in terms of better employment opportunities *relative to the black working class*, but in the long-run the fact that it is not united with the black working class prevents it from demanding a greater share of the total profits generated from its labor but kept by the capitalist class. At the same time, working-class disunity prevents it from mounting successful struggles in increasing the "public wage" (which takes such forms as unemployment insurance, life-long medical insurance, public schooling, environmental protection measures, and so on).<sup>7</sup> Racism therefore serves as an additional factor, besides the workings of impersonal "market forces," in hiding the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class—an exploitation that many workers in capitalist societies deny because of their ignorance of the workings of the capitalist system. (See also the **Southern Strategy**.)



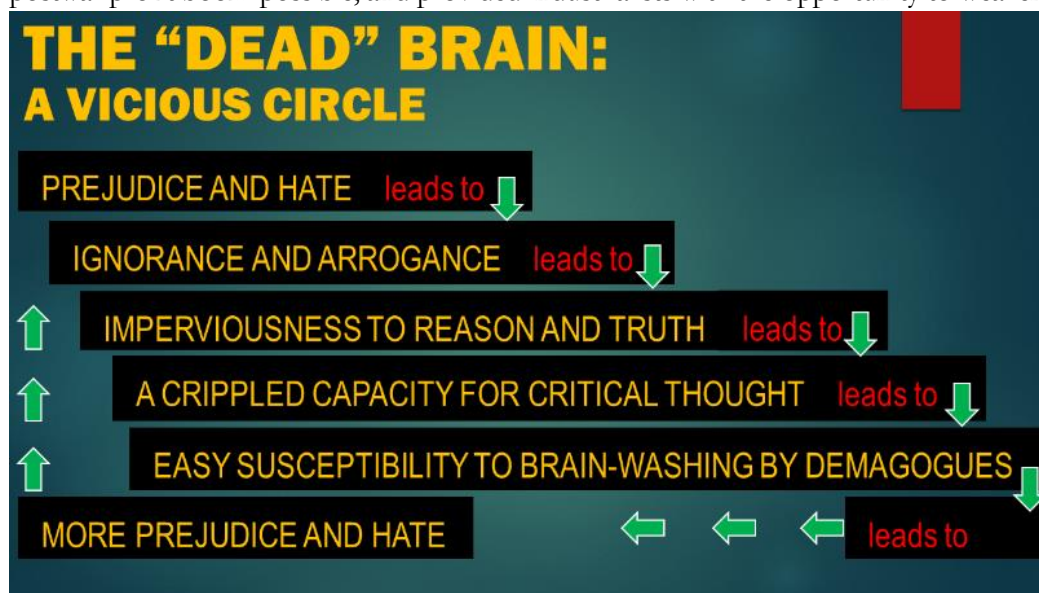
The secret to happiness is finding a  
scapegoat  
It will make you feel good  
but it won't solve your problems!

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6. An adage I have coined that is worth remembering: prejudice is a powerful antidote to truth.

7. It should be remembered that capitalists need workers to survive, but workers do not need capitalists to survive; all that the workers would have to do is to start their own enterprises and redirect all their labor away from capitalists toward their own enterprises in order to survive and thrive. (Where would the workers get their start-up capital? They would have no need for it; they can use their labor initially and use a barter system to exchange commodities with other workers.)

One legitimate question that may be asked is that considering that some of the most virulent, moronic, and highly objectionable racist behavior is to be found among the white blue- and white-collar working classes even though it is immoral, uncivilized and not in their economic self-interest, what explanation can one offer for this behavior. The explanation is two-fold: One, propaganda by capitalists and their allies via the media often elevates blacks to the level of scapegoats for the inequality, alienation and powerlessness that the white working class experiences and thereby assure stability for the capitalist system as a whole. Instead of targeting the real sources of their woes (the capitalist class) the white working class ends up targeting blacks instead. The following example by Reich (1977) will drive home this point: “[M]any whites believe that welfare payments to blacks are a far more important factor in their taxes than is military spending. Through racism, poor whites come to believe that their poverty is caused by blacks who are willing to take away their jobs, and at lower wages, thus concealing the fact that a substantial amount of income inequality is inevitable in a capitalist society. Racism thus transfers the locus of whites’ resentment towards blacks and away from capitalism.” It should be pointed out here, that historically, the black working class has been used by employers to help break white trade unions by using black workers as “scabs” when white unions are on strike. In fact Cherry (1991: 61) convincingly demonstrates that “[t]he post-World War II profit boom [in the United States] resulted from the ability of capitalists to exploit a racially divided southern workforce and a growing low-wage female workforce. The profitable employment of these workers enabled capitalists to undermine the benefits obtained by unionized workers.... Thus, race and gender discrimination made the postwar profit boom possible, and provided industrialists with the opportunity to weaken the power of the unions.” Such



strategies are clearly not conducive to healthy race relations among black and white workers. Two, racism provides for the white working class an avenue of psychic satisfaction: As Reich observes, for example, “the opportunity to participate in another’s oppression compensates for one’s misery” (1978: 387). Karp (1981: 91) calls it the displacement of mistreatment in which one’s own hurts are taken out on others. Then there is the solace one obtains by seeing oneself as “above” another group to

psychologically compensate for life’s tribulations in capitalist societies.

Note, however, that while there may be group-level psychic benefits to racists in coping with the capitalist system, it is also true that at the individual level racist behavior is a manifestation of a psychosis. It is manifest in the irrational expenditure of mental (and often physical energy) in hating people of color. When a white person undergoes mental distress every time he or she sees or comes into contact with a person of color (or vice versa) because of their hate and prejudice, there is no question that the person is not mentally healthy. There are, of course, other personal costs too that go with micro-level racism: the self-denial of potentially powerful and meaningful friendships with other human beings, the failure to explore the full range of life’s experiences by avoiding experiencing other cultures, the constantly distorted mental world in which the person lives where everything is “lily white,” and so on. (See Karp 1981)

In explaining the genesis and functions of racism, we have seen that the best approach to understanding racism is to see it as an ideology, and as an ideology it has evolved to play a very specific function in society: the *structural* domination and exploitation of one group of people by another. (A question for you guys: So, which came first: the ideology or the structure? The answer is that both came first in a process of **dialectical** evolution. Hence, Columbus’s arrival in the Americas, for example was, at once, a racist project *and* a capitalist venture.) And that this function has not evolved in contradiction to the evolution of the dominant socio-economic system: *capitalism*. On the contrary, the relationship between capitalism and racism has been one of symbiosis. After all, capitalism is like racism in the sense that whereas racism involves



exploitation on the basis of pigmentation, capitalism involves exploitation on the basis of class. But the analogy does not end here. Compare the role of ideology: the exploitation within the capitalist system is legitimated among both the exploiters and the exploited via an ideology (the capitalist ideology) that includes among its tenets the elevation of this exploitation to the level of “natural law”—expressed through the concept of **meritocracy**, namely the proposition that it is “natural” that some in society (capitalists) deserve to be richer than others (the working class) since not all are equally endowed with intelligence, discipline, self-sacrifice, capacity for hard work, etc. and other similar attributes that capitalists mythically assign exclusively to their class via a perversion of the history of societal evolution. Within racist societies the exploitation is similarly legitimated via a perversion of the scientific explanation for biologically determined phenotypic differences in which the inferiority of the target victims is mythically deemed to be naturally ordained. And in the case of both capitalism and racism this legitimation of exploitation serves to perform two complementary roles: to “dehumanize” the victims and to “uncivilize” the victimizer.<sup>8</sup>

In light of the foregoing, the principal conclusion that we may draw is this: racism is unacceptable in civilized and democratic societies; yet its eradication is bound up with the very *structuring* of their dominant economic system: capitalism. Unless the capitalist system is changed in a radical way, the ideology of racism is here to stay.<sup>9</sup> The problem was best described by Alexis de Tocqueville, the French social philosopher, writing in 1830 about racism in the United States—albeit his identification of the root cause of the problem, democracy, was well off the mark:

I do not believe that the white and black races will ever live in any country upon an equal footing. But I believe the difficulty to be still greater in the United States than elsewhere. An isolated individual may surmount the prejudices of the religion of his country or his race but a whole people cannot rise, as it were, above itself. A despot who should subject the American and his former slaves to the same yoke might perhaps succeed in co-mingling the races but as long as the American democracy remains at the head of affairs, no one will undertake so difficult a task and it may be foreseen that the freer, that is the more democratic the white population of the United States becomes, the more isolated it will remain. (From Bell 1991: 44).

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8. The irony, ultimately, is that ideologies of exploitation are necessitated by the very fact that human beings have evolved to a level higher than animals and thereby acquiring the capacity to be “civilized”; otherwise such ideologies would be unnecessary (e.g.: lower order animals such as sharks do not need ideologies of exploitation to consume other marine animals).

9. Those who may jump to the conclusion, therefore, that the answer is communism of the type this planet has known so far, may do well by looking at the revelations of unimaginable horrors (not unlike those, in modern times, of Nazi Germany) that emerged out of the secret archives of that Soviet monster called the KGB. However racist the United States may be today, it is very doubtful that any black person would choose to live in what was once the Soviet Union (or Communist China for that matter). Though, of course, in saying this one must agree with Cornel West (1991: 61–62) that it is a choice in relative options: “who wouldn’t choose capitalist democracy? That doesn’t mean we can’t be critical. It means we have lives to lead, kids to feed and dreams of being able to exercise certain freedoms of speech and worship. We will choose a place where we at least have a chance, even if the odds are against us.”

It is not democracy that has underwritten the racist ideology in the United States, it is capitalism. In fact, without democracy it is unlikely that progress would have been made in the area of civil rights for blacks (and, of course, women too).<sup>10</sup>

What is Democracy?

## What is Democracy?

Democracy, in its true sense, has two related halves: the *procedural* and the *authentic* (or substantive). The first half refers to “majority rule” (but qualified by a *bill of rights* that protects minorities) and the accompanying institutional processes of universal suffrage, elections, term-limits, legislative representation, the rule of law, separation of powers, and so on. Authentic democracy refers to equitably securing access for all human beings to the four fundamental needs: food, shelter, health, and security. Therefore, the purpose of procedural democracy is to guarantee authentic democracy. In other words, the former is a means to the latter!

“WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all [Persons] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” —Preamble to the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

“...that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” —President Abraham Lincoln, the Gettysburg Address.

While racism is functional for **capital** as a whole, it is not necessarily so for individual capitalists—at least the theory of capitalism would suggest that. Individual capitalists seeking to lower their production costs relative to their competitors may find the artificially high wages of white workers (as in South Africa for example prior to 1992, made possible by apartheid laws enacted at the behest of racist white unions), dysfunctional. For the individual capitalist the only criterion that should be of significance in a worker is his/her ability to do the work at the lowest wage rates that a free labor market can bear, not his/her color, gender, religion, etc. This argument is ably summarized by Edwards, Reich and Weisskopf (1978: 362):

[T]he capitalist drive to rationalize production, lower costs, and expand profits is itself a strong force for the elimination of racial discrimination. Employers are trying to maximize their profits, and in organizing their workforce they will be interested in a worker’s productivity and potential contribution to profits and not in his or her skin color. The pressures from other firms competing for workers will overcome the resistance of racist employers who persist in discriminating.

10. Notice too, however, that democracy has not by itself alone induced this progress. Other forces had to come into play too: in the case of the abolition of slavery, for example, capitalism had to undergo a radical change in mode: from one based on agriculture to one based on manufacturing and industry (at least in the North). Similarly, to take another example, the civil rights movement was helped considerably by the onset of the cold war with the Soviet Union where the United States, in its effort to win over onto its side the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia, was compelled to make progress in the area of civil rights in order to demonstrate to the PQD nations, what it felt, was the moral superiority of capitalist democracy over Soviet style communism.

... Thus, market forces, by allocating labor to its most efficient use, are themselves a strong stimulus for ending discrimination.

Consequently, racism in capitalist societies can, in principle, play both a functional and dysfunctional role. Yet, as Edwards, Reich and Weisskopf (1978) point out, in practice, to take the U.S. example, this has not always worked out. Just as in South Africa today, the economic advantage enjoyed by whites *as a whole* because of their skin color has remained, for the most part, unassailable despite the supposed rationality of the capitalist system and despite the struggles of the civil rights movement; the lukewarm implementation of the much touted “affirmative action” programs of the 1970s; and despite even the election of an African American (Barack Obama) to the U.S. presidency in 2008. Neither the “magic” of market forces, nor obtaining the right to vote has translated into concrete economic progress for the majority of blacks sufficient to bring them on par with the majority of whites—except for the tiny emerging black middle class (the “token blacks” [see below]). What explanation can one offer for the constancy of racial inequality (which most whites, deliberately or because of ignorance, refuse to acknowledge) in terms of income and employment in the U.S.—especially considering that the U.S. does not have an apartheid system (akin to the one that South Africa had)? The answer is that, sure, there is no *de jure* apartheid, but in reality there is a *de facto* apartheid system of sorts at work. While logically the theory just outlined above ought to have worked by now to eliminate (or nearly eliminate) racial inequality in the U.S.—especially in the post-Civil Rights era. The problem, however, is that as was noted earlier racism (or any other fissionary avenues: gender, religion, ethnicity, linguistic heritage, etc. that fragments the working class) is in the interest of capital as a whole. This is not to say that capitalists produced racism in the U.S. (or South Africa for that matter), but they used and maintained it to their own advantage: specifically to keep the working class divided and as a result pliable—thereby keeping the capitalist system stable. In other words, capitalists will adapt whatever forms of social structural divisions that may exist in society for their own ends. If there is no racial division, then they may use divisions based on ethnicity, or religion, or gender, or old age, and so on.

The mechanisms by which racism against racial minorities have continued to operate in the U.S., for example, despite the fact that racial discrimination in education, employment, housing, etc. is illegal, are subtle and many and involve the operation of both micro (individual-level) and macro (institutional-level) racism; they include:

- (a) psychological assaults on one’s dignity in the media, work-place, and schools—by means of “micro-aggression”—aimed at creating self-doubts, an inferiority complex, etc.;
- (b) physical assaults by the police, and white racists such as the Ku Klux Klan and their allies;
- (c) Inadequate funding for *de facto* black schools leading to inferior education and high drop-out rates;
- (d) discrimination by personnel agencies and personnel officers (that is people who ordinarily are not concerned with the health of the economic unit they work for because they do not own it, and therefore noneconomic factors like race are allowed to intervene in their hiring practices);
- (e) “last hired and first fired” tendencies among employers in recessionary periods, which invariably works against black workers;
- (f) discrimination in the judicial system;
- (g) segregation of residential areas in apartheid fashion, thus facilitating discrimination at the level of city services, loans for housing, police protection, access to transportation, etc.;
- (h) passage of rules and regulations aimed at gutting the intent of civil rights legislation by the federal government—especially under Republican administrations; and so on.

Clearly those who see in market forces as social engineering panaceas are either deluding themselves as a result of ignorance or are simply engaged in fomenting a lie for the consumption of the unwary in order to justify the status quo. To put the matter differently: racism in western societies (both as an ideology as well as behavioral practice) serves to objectify the subjective (race) and subjectify the objective (class) which then permits, among other things, the super-exploitation of racial minorities, the scapegoating of racial minorities for the socially disruptive consequences of the activities of capital, and the fragmentation of the working class as a whole in the context of a permanent class-struggle intrinsic to all capitalist societies.

## 5. Relationship to other ideologies.

Racism does not operate in isolation from other ideologies of oppression, but rather a society or an individual often experiences it as part of a nonhierarchical multidimensional system of oppression. The best illustration of this fact is the case of African American women: they are victimized, at the same time, by classism (because of capitalism), racism (from white women), racist-sexism (from white men), and sexism (from black men). To take another example: victims of racism (e.g. Jewish Americans or Asian Americans) will also perpetrate their own racism on other minorities (e.g. African Americans). One more example: the emerging African American middle-class, who themselves are victims of Euro-American racism, will perpetrate classism on fellow African Americans. A good example of this are African American Republicans who support racist legislation aimed at barring the means to overcome or mitigate institutional racism: such as, affirmative action and welfare programs. Today in the U.S., racial categories *to some extent* do coincide with class categories, not perfectly, but generally. In such circumstances, the issue of race rather than class assumes salience in political behavior. However, as structures of juridical institutional racism begin to be dismantled the situation starts to become more complex because the class factor gains ascendancy in explaining political behavior. (Racism, therefore, is ultimately an epiphenomenon in capitalist democracies.)<sup>11</sup> In the case, for example, of blacks in the U.S. the principal division that has emerged among them that is of political significance is between the new U.S. African American petite bourgeoisie and the U.S. African American working and unemployed class.<sup>12</sup> Here, it should be pointed out that in suggesting that the blacks have undergone class fragmentation in the U.S. there is the implicit suggestion that institutionalized racism is assailable to a significant degree via political struggle. The civil rights movement of the 1960s did make a sufficient dent in it to permit some 5% of blacks to achieve middle class or bourgeois status by the end of the 1970s. The sad fact, however, is that the result of this class fragmentation has been the divergence of political and economic interests of blacks along class lines. Thus, for instance, the slowly expanding ranks of black Republicans—of whom people like Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Clarence Thomas are among the more well-known—is indicative of the fact that the interests of all blacks no longer coincide. The class interests of the well-off blacks (the direct beneficiaries of the small political and economic space opened up by the Civil Rights struggle) are closer to those of the white bourgeoisie than to those of the vast mass of urban and rural black poor, who, if and when they vote, tend to vote for the Democratic Party.

In other words: with the weakening of institutionalized racism in the U.S., racial discrimination is not as close to watertight as it was before; it has allowed a number of “token” blacks to achieve upward mobility. However, as their numbers have become politically sizable, their behavior has also changed accordingly in the direction of supporting the status quo. Their interests have now diverged from the rest of the members of their community to such an extent that they will now, with a perfectly straight face, even deny the existence of white racism. What is more, others (such as one Shelby Steele [a professor of English] and one Thomas Sowell [a conservative economist]) have begun adopting the same “blame the victim” racist doctrines held by whites to explain why fellow blacks are not achieving upward mobility.<sup>13</sup> Cashman

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11. That is, class as demarcated by ownership or lack of ownership of the principal means of production; not class as determined by such criteria of stratification as levels of income (the latter criteria may be relevant, but only tangentially). From this perspective, only two principal classes are of significance here: those that emerge out of capitalism, namely, capital (or its equivalent the modern bourgeoisie) which has a complete monopoly over the means of production (be it land, factories, etc.) and the working class which has no access to the means of production, and therefore must sell their labor-power to capital in order to survive.

12. It is new in the sense that it owes its origins to the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

13. Notice, however, that these same “token blacks,” whenever they need support from other blacks for their own private projects, will emerge to seek black support on grounds that all blacks should stick together and support each other. It is in the face of such appeals that the black working class must be wary; for, in the past such an argument may have been valid, but in the present it is no longer so. For instance, today in the U.S., supporting a white rival over a black rival (for a given political office) may often be the right course of political action, depending upon their political

(1991: 240-41) best describes the political character of these token blacks, this new U.S. African American bourgeoisie (or “elite” as he calls them), as: “staunch advocates of American capitalism, whose beneficiaries they had become since American capitalism had made significant concessions to them on such issues as affirmative action.” He notes further on: “They did not want a restructuring of American economics and politics lest this should endanger their new, hard won advantages. The undoubted prosperity of certain privileged sectors among the fortunate U.S. African American elite seemed to hide the apparently irreversible drift of numerous U.S. African Americans toward the nation’s poor.” A good example of this privileged type of U.S. African American is the current Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Clarence Thomas. As the Congressional confirmation hearings over his appointment in 1991 revealed, this confused and ignorant arch conservative who had been a beneficiary of the movement for civil rights was, now that he had done well, no longer interested in supporting policies and programs that had helped to weaken institutionalized racism in the 1960s and 1970s.

Yet, notice that the majority of the black masses failed to realize that even though Thomas was an African American he was not necessarily their friend or ally (in fact, as a Republican in the U.S. politics of the 1990s and beyond, how could he be).<sup>14</sup> Sure, Thomas did use the “race” card when it appeared that his confirmation was in jeopardy after a black woman accused him of sexual harassment (though earlier in the hearings he had denied that race had anything to do with his appointment), but that has been a common ploy of this new U.S. African American elite. The black masses have so far, it appears, failed to realize (like its white counterpart) that in the politics of this first decade of the twenty-first century, the critical issue, increasingly, has not been and will not be race, but class when it comes to deciding which candidates to vote into office. If the black working class continues to vote for black candidates, merely and solely because the candidates are black, then they will find themselves in the same position that the white working class is in (who also—most especially in the South—tends to vote for candidates merely and solely because the candidates are of a certain color, white). This position is one of increasing economic and political marginalization. In other words, it is time that the vast majority of U.S. African Americans, the poor and unemployed, realized that even though the struggle for civil rights was mounted on their backs, the true beneficiaries of the struggle have been this new U.S. African American petite bourgeoisie who are not interested in the welfare of the rest of their fellow U.S. African Americans. As befits all capitalist systems, they are interested only in furthering their own interests (which means that from time to time they may still be inclined to play the “race” card, but only when it suits their interests). Thanks to the struggle for civil rights the political situation in the U.S. has become more complex: race and class are both now significant factors. Both black and white politicians each appeal to the black and white masses to vote for them because they share their color respectively, and the masses get taken in, without realizing that these politicians often do not necessarily represent their interests, but the interests of the bourgeoisie.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, a similar situation is now developing in former apartheid South Africa too, of course. There, the abandonment of the apartheid system in the absence of radical changes in the economic system has created a potential to unleash upon the majority a renewed economic tyranny by a reconstituted capitalist class that will now incorporate a fragment of the black population: the emerging **compradorial** petite bourgeoisie. The struggle against white racist tyranny first begun by blacks from almost the day the European settler first set foot in South Africa—vainly pitting spears against bullets, and following military defeat, relaunching the struggle via nonviolent strategies which in turn eventually become transformed into violent struggles in the face of an intransigent neofascist state—culminating in the final defeat of the apartheid state is but only the first step in a long struggle that has only just begun: the struggle for economic dignity, one that will take blacks far into this century. And if the experiences of South America are anything to go by, where freedom from colonialism was achieved

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agendas. This is what is meant by suggesting that racism (compared to class) in capitalist democratic societies can be an epiphenomenon; it is not to deny the existence of racism.

<sup>14</sup>. Since his appointment to the Supreme Court, on almost all cases he has sat, this man has not only sided with capital rather than labor, but, acting in consort with his fellow conservatives, he has sought to weaken respect and protection of civil rights and human rights (in direct contrast to that great Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall, who, most ironically, he was appointed to replace) for all in this country.

<sup>15</sup>. See Kilson, (1989) and Wacquant (1989) for more on the issue of class formation and its implications for black politics in the U.S. For a sampling of the right wing ultra-conservative political views of black Republicans see their journal: *The Lincoln Review*.



over a hundred years ago, the future does not look bright at all. The race struggle is being transformed into a class struggle—testifying to the inherent epiphenomenal character of racism in capitalist societies.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Contradiction.

We live in an inherently inegalitarian society. Why? Because this is a capitalist society. In any capitalist society equality is a concept that is severely circumscribed by a pyramidal social structure that capitalism demands. Not everyone can be a capitalist, otherwise who would do the work? You have to have a working class too, who necessarily are below the capitalist class. Within this context what kind of racial equality is possible? The answer is: one that simply reproduces identical pyramidal **social structures** across all races, where race is substituted by class distinctions. Yet to struggle for this form of racial equality is to demand that the historically racially privileged white middle class (to take the example of this society) shed some of its privileges and join the ranks of the black working class on an equal footing. Which member of the white middle class is going to agree to this? (We can also apply this same reasoning to the white working class. Which one of them would be willing to join the black *underclass*?) The political difficulties involved are best illustrated when we see the frequent inability of, say Jewish Americans and Asian Americans (many of whom are middle class) to come together with, say, African and Hispanic Americans (many of whom are working class), and yet they all face racism/ ethnicism to varying degrees.<sup>17</sup> (See also **Capitalism; Class; Democracy**)

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16. This should not be taken to imply that racism will not be an issue any more with the elimination of the apartheid system. For, as the experiences of countries such as the United States, Canada, and Britain so well demonstrate institutional racism—even in the absence of legislative mandate—can thrive via many devious mechanisms. In these countries, as blacks so well know, elaborate but extremely subtle ways have been found to discriminate against blacks in employment, housing, education and so on. The point, however, to take the U.S. example, is that given that racism is illegal now racial discrimination cannot be as close to watertight as it was before; it does allow a number of “token” blacks to achieve upward mobility. However, as their numbers become politically sizable their behavior also changes accordingly in the direction of supporting the status quo. Their interests begin to diverge from the rest of the members of their community to such an extent that they may, with a perfectly straight face, deny the existence of racism and begin adopting the same “blame the victim” racist doctrines held by whites to explain why fellow blacks are not achieving upward mobility. Such people, however, often lead double-faced political lives: whenever they need support from blacks for their own private projects they will emerge to seek black support on grounds that all blacks should stick together and support each other. It is in the face of such appeals that the black working class must be wary; for, in the past such an argument may have been valid but in the present it is no longer so. For instance, supporting a white rival over a black rival (for a given political office) may often be the right course of political action. This is what is meant by suggesting that racism (compared to class) in capitalist societies is an epiphenomenon; it is not to deny its existence.

<sup>17</sup>. It is important that I strongly emphasize that in any discussion of racism in this country in this course the objective is not to try and prove that whites are an evil and nasty people or that this society *as a whole* is an evil and nasty society that is beyond redemption. Rather, the objective has been to try and understand what racism/ethnicism is, how it originates and what role it plays in this society, in order to see how we can work toward a society where such forms of prejudice and discrimination no longer exist. In advocating a society that is free of such prejudices and discrimination I am not only concerned with issues of morality and social justice, but my position is that, in the long run, such a democratic and civilized society is good even for the racists, sexists, etc. themselves. Remember: that a society that tolerates and even encourages discrimination (in whatever form: racist, sexist, ethnicist, etc.) in the end only hurts itself. Since no single group has monopoly over intelligence and creativity, imagine how far advanced this country would be to day if it had from the very beginning given all minorities, including women, and the white working classes, every opportunity to realize their fullest potential. To further underline this point: a racist society is in one sense like a racist individual. Such an individual has a very narrow and shallow life experience because he/she denies himself/herself access to the rich tapestry of cultures, love, and friendship that non-racist/ non-ethnicist contacts with other racial/ ethnic groups permit. For example: a Euro-American who wants to be truly a racist should refuse to be a Christian, because Christianity is not a European religion, it is a Semitic religion. Take another example: a Euro-American who wants to be

## 7. Reverse Discrimination/Reverse Racism

*In their opposition to programs of affirmative action aimed at correcting inequalities brought about by racist/ethnicist discriminatory practices, racists/ethnicists (for example, in Canada, India, South Africa, and United States) have concocted the mythical concept of “reverse discrimination” or “reverse racism.”* In the United States, the concept of “reverse discrimination” it will be recalled, first entered the U.S. legal lexicon with the court case of a EuroAmerican, by the name of Allan Bakke, who argued that his rights to further education had been violated as a result of preferential admission of blacks in public education (that is, affirmative action), and where the Supreme Court in 1978 concurred with him on the basis of an interpretation of the same Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. constitution that the Court had used in 1954 in striking down the “separate but equal” doctrine in education in the famous case of *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka*. Yet, as Cruse (1987: 31) points out, the court and those who brought the case neglected to consider that “Allan Bakke had not, prior to his filing of suit for “due process,” experienced a lifetime under the onus of ethnic, racial caste, or class oppression, nor had his ancestors. He was as near to the racial ideal of “Nordic” perfection as any white racist could dream.”<sup>18</sup> That decision in favor of Bakke, Cruse further observes, once again raised the rhetorical question of whether or not the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 was intended to protect the citizenship rights of blacks. (Notice also the profound irony in all this: EuroAmericans themselves have always been beneficiaries of affirmative action, for centuries!)

The racism embedded in the concept of “reverse discrimination” is also pointed up by the outrageous suggestion that a minority of the population (in the United States), historically discriminated against to the point where today they continue to remain at the bottom of the economic and political ladder, are unjustly threatening the interests of a majority that historically enjoyed and continue to enjoy a monopoly of political and economic power. Such thinking is, to say the least, one of the most ludicrous arguments ever advanced to continue to justify white political and economic supremacy (See Grabiner 1980; for more on the concept of “reverse discrimination” see also Gordon, et al. 1978). Moreover, this false concept hides behind it the stark fact that the wealth the Europeans enjoy today has come about as a consequence of the economic activities of generations before them. (Even in the most ideal conditions of steady uninterrupted economic growth—not yet recorded anywhere in human history—it takes nearly an entire human life-span for the Gross National Product to simply quadruple.) Therefore, the wealth that the whites in the U.S. enjoy today came about as a result of unpaid labor of enslaved Africans and underpayment of free U.S. African Americans—not to mention the dispossession of Native Americans.<sup>19</sup> If

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truly racist should refuse to listen to rock (because rock has its origins in African American music), or eat tomatoes, potatoes, chocolate, and so on because they are not of European origin. In other words, racists do not realize how rich their lives are because of the contributions of the very people they reject; but how much richer their lives would be if they gave up their racism. To immerse one’s life in hate (as opposed to love) surely is not only unnatural, but mentally unhealthy--perhaps requiring psychiatric treatment. To engage in prejudice and discrimination is to engage in self-hurt, but let me go one step further and state that it is also to engage in self-destruction. The best example I can give here is that of the Nazis in Germany: in the end their racism/ethnicism brought on to themselves nothing but death and destruction. Think about this: Hitler and many of his henchmen eventually committed suicide. If you are a racist (whatever color you may be), or a sexist (whatever sex you may be), etc., I hope that you will work toward eradicating this prejudice in you and in society; it is not good for you and it is not good for society.

18. In truth, throughout history and up to the present day, Euro-Americans in the U.S. have always had the benefit of “affirmative action” arising out of their skin color. Today, when two equally qualified individuals, but one white and one black, present themselves for employment at the factory gate, the chances are that the white will be hired first—if that is not affirmative action the what is? In fact, the problem is more insidious than that: resumes with black-sounding names are less likely to be read than ones with white-sounding names by employers (see Bertrand and Mullainathan [2004]).

19. Mention should also be made of the fact that if Africans had not been forcibly brought over to the Americas and instead left alone in Africa to follow their own historical destiny, without any interference from colonialists and

the Africans brought over to the U.S. had been given the same privileges as their white counterparts to terrorize, brutalize and murder Native Americans by the hundreds of thousands in order to steal and despoil their land, then one can talk about “reverse discrimination” today. But, then, what about the rights of Native Americans?<sup>20</sup>

It follows, on the basis of the foregoing, that measures (such as affirmative action programs in the U.S.) aimed at correcting the present-day consequences of past racially-determined inequities cannot be labeled “reverse racism.” Yet, despite the fallacy of reverse racism (or “reverse discrimination”), it has now become a much bandied about concept among conservatives in the U.S. to attack whatever progress that has been made in weakening institutionalized racism in the 1960s and 1970s following the struggles of the civil rights movement. Clearly, in a racist country, such as the U.S., the concept of “reverse discrimination” is a false concept; it is another racist gimmick dressed up in legal language to deny victims of



centuries of racist discrimination access to what is rightfully theirs.<sup>21</sup>

imperialists, today they would probably be as advanced (at the minimum) as Japan—the only country in the PQD to have escaped imperialist depredation.

20. Perhaps it is time to consider ways of compensating both Native Americans and U.S. African Americans for what the Europeans stole from them. (See Browne [1972] for a compelling argument on this matter.)

21. One more point worth noting: since racism is a function ultimately of power (and not the mythical superiority of the racist) it follows that: (i) at the societal level, the racial antagonism of victims against racists provoked by racism cannot



## (\*) 8. Geographically-specific Sub-varieties of Racism

In this exegesis of the concept of race/racism so far, the effort has been to look at it mainly from a generic perspective—albeit with a focus on the U.S. example. However, one would be grossly remiss if we did not also include a description of at least three geographically-specific sub-varieties of racism as an ideology and practice of oppression: Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Whiteness. While all these three forms have their origin in Europe historically (especially Western



be classified as racist behavior given the inability of the victims to negatively affect the life-chances of the racists with this “rebound” antagonism; and (ii) all human beings are potential victims of racism—including racists themselves—when racism is allowed to flourish against any group; all it takes is for the balance of power to shift. To take an example: in South Africa it will not be long before the European racists who had subjected blacks to centuries of brutal racist oppression will begin complaining about “black racism”—though it will quite likely be more imagined than real (unless South Africa follows the retrogressive path taken by its neighbor, Zimbabwe) given the continuing EuroSouth African monopoly over economic power. Incidentally, the consequence of reversal of power relations for victimizers is well explored in the motion picture *Planet of the Apes* (1968).



Europe), today antisemitism and Islamophobia have become universal, while whiteness remains, for obvious reasons, a feature of Europe and other places where people of European ancestry are dominant (demographically, and/or socio-economically, and politically).

*Antisemitism (or anti-Semitism)* is unlike any other kind of racism because it is a unique and exceptionally virulent form of racism in that genocide is already baked into this racist ideology of oppression (something that Nazi Germany, for example, tried to achieve in practice through its death squads, gas chambers, concentration camps, and the like, killing millions and millions of Europeans of Jewish ancestry<sup>22</sup>). In other words, an anti-Semite is always contemplating and working toward a world where there are no Jews alive at all. It is not simply a matter of religion, and in fact religion may not necessarily be an issue at all, but rather it is about an ethnic group as a whole—no matter what their religious beliefs, if any. Here is a thought experiment: what if all the Jews had converted to some other religion (Buddhism, or Christianity, or



22. The estimate used to be that around six million European Jews were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators (usually ordinary Europeans) in a time period of roughly no more than ten years (1933-1945)! (And this is not counting probably an equal number of others—Poles, Russians, the Roma people, people with disabilities, homosexuals, Germans who opposed the Nazis, and so on, altogether.) New research, however, suggests that the numbers were probably much, much higher—possibly, ten million or more! See the report in the [New York Times](#) by Eric Lichtblau: "The Holocaust Just Got More Shocking," March 1, 2013.



Islam, etc.), or had become atheists, in Nazi-occupied Europe? To the European anti-Semite it would not have mattered. But why? Because Jews had become, for historical reasons—beginning from the time of the Roman occupation of Judaea around 63 BCE, the subsequent revolt of the Jews against Roman rule, and their forcible dispersal from Judea as refugees, about 2000 years ago—a convenient scapegoat for the ills of a society, perpetrated by the ruling elites of the day. This scapegoating, initially through religious justification (Christianity being the main culprit here), and later secular justification (with industrial capitalism being the villain of the piece), was made possible because of their ethno-religious difference from the rest in their host societies. So, for example, for centuries, Christianity taught its adherents that Jews were “Christ-killers,” which of course was a complete myth. (Christ was killed by the Romans for political reasons.)

Notice, however, that given that Jews were always a minority group, following their dispersal from Roman-occupied Judea, in any given host society (until the creation of the State of Israel in 1948), the Jewish identity that was the basis of antisemitism was itself a function of antisemitism—one depended on the other dialectically. In other words, over the millennia, had Jews not faced antisemitism, they would have disappeared through the natural processes of demographic and cultural absorption, as a distinctly identifiable ethnicity, because of their circumstance as a minority population. Today, *while it has steadily receded in Europe and North America through the process of “whitening” (meaning Jews being considered a “white” people rather than an alien minority, as in the past<sup>23</sup>)*, antisemitism has become much more prevalent in the Islamic Middle East since the

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23. See, for example, *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says About Race in America* by Karen Brodtkin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), and *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* by Eric L. Goldstein (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Of course, this matter brings up the broader question (as in the case of racism among Arabs when discussing the matter of Islamophobia—see note below) of racism among Jews. That is, given their long history of persecution can Jews be racist? And what does Judaism say about racism? The answer to the first question is undoubtedly yes. As human beings (regardless of whether or not they consider themselves a “chosen people” by God) they are subject to the same weaknesses as the rest of humanity. Talk to almost any Israeli African, or Israeli Arab or Palestinian who has encountered Israeli Jews in her/his daily life and the veracity of this observation quickly becomes incontrovertible. The same conclusion applies to U.S. minorities of color (African Americans, Latina/Latinos, etc.) and their experience with U.S. Jews. Then there is the matter of political Zionism which as a form of nationalism, is by definition a racist ideology, as is the case with all forms of nationalism. Now what about Judaism? There are two answers that one can come up with.

One answer is best captured by a quote from the third book of the *Torah* (third book of the *Old Testament*, also known as the Hebrew Bible): *Leviticus 19*, verses 33-34: “And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.” “But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

The second answer, is that some rabbis have attempted to read into the story of Noah and his misbehaving son Ham a justification for assuming the racial inferiority of people of color. A well-known racist version of this misreading is what may be referred to as the “Hamitic Theory.” Those familiar with the Bible will recall that in it there are two versions of Noah, the righteous and blameless patriarch who is saved from the Great Flood by a prior warning from God that involves the construction of an ark by Noah (*Genesis 6: 11–9: 19*); and the drunken Noah of *Genesis 9: 20–9: 27* who inflicts a curse on one of his three sons, Ham. It is the latter version that is of relevance here. Here is how the story goes in the King James version of the Bible:

20. And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: 21. And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. 22. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. 23. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. 24. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. 25. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. 26. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. 27. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

Thus was born the Biblical curse of Ham (which in reality was a curse on his son Canaan). It may be noted here that it is the ancestors of Canaan, the Canaanites, who are conquered by the Israelites giving rise to that well-known passage in

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the Bible (*Joshua 9: 21*) "And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them" (emphasis added). The Canaanites living in the city of Gibeon saved themselves from the possibility of being massacred by Joshua (for no other reason beyond the fact that their land had now been promised by God to the Israelites) by pretending to be foreigners from outside the Land of Canaan and entering into a peace truce with Joshua. However, upon discovering this deception, Joshua cursed the Gibeonites relegating them forever to become "hewers of wood and drawers of water" in the service of the Israelites.

Initially, in the period of Latin Christianity of the Middle Ages, the curse of Ham was used as a justification for the existence of slavery in a generic sense, that is without reference to skin color. Considering that slavery during this period encompassed all manner of European ethnicities and was not restricted to people of African descent alone, this is not surprising. However, by the time one arrives in the seventeenth-century when the enslavement of Africans is now well underway in the Americas, the curse of Ham becomes the justification for this enslavement; that is Ham and his progeny have been transformed into an accursed black people ordained by God to be slaves of white people (the progeny of Japheth) in perpetuity. (Aside: placed hierarchically in between these two groups were the progeny of Shem, namely, Jews and Asians.) Before reaching this point, however, first there had to be a connection made between the color black and the curse of Ham. The problem is best described by Goldenberg (2003: 195):

To biblical Israel, Kush was the land at the furthest southern reach of the earth, whose inhabitants were militarily powerful, tall, and good-looking. These are the dominant images of the black African in the Bible, and they correspond to similar images in Greco-Roman culture. I found no indications of a negative sentiment toward Blacks in the Bible. Aside from its use in a proverb (found also among the Egyptians and the Greeks), skin color is never mentioned in descriptions of biblical Kushites. That is the most significant perception, or lack of perception, in the biblical image of the black African. Color did not matter.

So, the question is how did color enter into the curse? Here, there is some disagreement. Goldenberg suggests that the linkage takes place through two principal exegetical changes: the erroneous etymological understanding of the word Ham as referring, in root, to the color black (which also spawns another serious exegetical error, the replacement of Canaan with Ham in the curse); and the exegetical seepage of blackness into the story of the curse (which originally, he observes, was colorless) as it was retold, beginning, perhaps, in the third or fourth-century C.E. with Syriac Christians via a work titled the *Cave of Treasures*, and then further taken up by the Arab Muslims in the seventh-century following their conquest of North Africa (and the two, in turn, later influencing the Jewish exegetical treatment of the story). Goldenberg further observes that the *Cave of Treasures* in its various recensions down the centuries extends the curse to not just Kushites, but all blacks defined to include, for example, the Egyptian Copts, East Indians and Ethiopians (that is they are all descendants, according to the *Cave of Treasures*, of Ham). Hence, Goldenberg quotes one version as reading "When Noah awoke...he cursed him and said: 'Cursed be Ham and may he be slave to his brothers'...and he became a slave, he and his lineage, namely the Egyptians, the Abyssinians, and the Indians. Indeed, Ham lost all sense of shame and he became black and was called shameless all the days of his life forever" (p. 173).

On the other hand, taking the lead from Graves and Patai (1966)—as for example Sanders (1969) does—the connection, it is suggested, occurs via the agency of Jewish oral traditions (*midrashim*), specifically those contained in one of the two Talmuds, the Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)—the other Talmud is the Palestinian Talmud (*Talmud Yerushalmi*). The Talmuds were a compilation of *midrashim*, which for centuries had been transmitted orally, put together by Jewish scholars in their academies in Palestine and in Babylonia. Although the *Talmud Bavli* was compiled in fifth-century C.E., it did not make its appearance in Europe until probably sixth-century C.E. Now, the *midrash* relevant here was concocted, according to the gloss by Graves and Patai (1966: 122), in order to justify the enslavement of the Canaanites by the Israelites; and here is how it goes (reproduced from the version compiled by Graves and Patai 1966: 121):

(d) Some say that at the height of his drunkenness he uncovered himself, whereupon Canaan, Ham's little son, entered the tent, mischievously looped a stout cord about his grandfather's genitals, drew it tight, and [enfeebled] him.... (e) Others say that Ham himself [enfeebled] Noah who, awakening from his drunken sleep and understanding what had been done to him, cried: "Now I cannot beget the fourth son whose children I would have ordered to serve you and your brothers! Therefore it must be Canaan, your first-born whom they

creation of the State of Israel (and its subsequent and ongoing persecution—aided and abetted by the United States—of Palestinians in Israeli-occupied Palestine, as well as its occupation of the third holiest city of Islam, Jerusalem). Yes. It is true,



that antisemitism has always been present in the Islamic world too, but it had never been as widespread and horrendously virulent as in Christian Europe. On the contrary, more often than not, Jewish communities in Islamic lands often thrived, such was the case, for instance, over most of the seven-hundred year Muslim rule of Spain, which of course was then followed by the infamous Christian-led Spanish Inquisition, as Muslim rule came to an end, that led to another massive

enslave....Canaan's children shall be born ugly and black! Moreover, because you twisted your head around to see my nakedness, your grandchildren's hair shall be twisted into kinks, and their eyes red; again because your lips jested at my misfortune, theirs shall swell; and because you neglected my nakedness, they shall go naked, and their male members shall be shamefully elongated." Men of their race are called Negroes, their forefather Canaan commanded them to love theft and fornication, to be banded together in hatred of their masters and never to tell the truth.

Anyhow, regardless of whether it was early Eastern Christians, or Jews, or even Muslims who were responsible for corrupting the biblical story along two axes, replacing Canaan with Ham and rendering Ham black, this much is incontrovertible: Medieval Christians in the West would in time adopt it as their very own because it would allow them to develop an ideology of exploitation and oppression of black peoples, especially beginning in the fifteenth-century onward, without violating their religious sensibilities.

diasporic dispersal of the Jews. (One reason being that Islam recognizes Judaism, as it does Christianity too, as a legitimate religion—after all, knowledgeable Muslims recognize the fact that their religious roots lie in both these religions, constituting together with the other two, the three dominant Abrahamic faiths.) So, what then is antisemitism, in a nutshell? It refers, at the ideological level, to the genocidal hatred (repeat—genocidal) of all peoples of Jewish ancestry on mythical grounds that Jews are a cunning and money-hungry people always plotting to take over the world (as mythologically outlined in that antisemitic fraudulent tract known as the *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), and at the socio-economic and political level it refers to such practices targeted at individuals and entire groups as employment discrimination, residential segregation, enslavement, murder, and mass-killings, often at the behest of ruling elites (as in the case of pogroms, of which the Holocaust is a prime example).

*Islamophobia.* As one can surmise by parsing this word, this form of *ethnicism* has to do with the religion of Islam. One can begin by noting that relations between Islam and the West date back almost to the beginning of the founding of Islam in the 7th century; however, the West's view of Islam has almost always been through the lens of what may be called Islamophobia. And this continues to be true today. (See, for example, the Islamophobic article authored by Wood (2015) popularized by ultra-right zealots, as well as critiques of it by Dagli (2015); Haqiqatjou and Qadhi (2015); and Jenkins (2015). For a historical perspective, see also Hillenbrand (2000), and Meserve (2008).) So, what then is Islamophobia? It refers to a variant of racism (much like *anti-Semitism*) that rests on essentialist stereotypes that foster an irrational distrust, fear or rejection of Islam and those who are Muslims (or thought to be Muslims).<sup>24</sup> While Islamophobia dates back almost to the period of the founding of Islam, as just noted, in recent times it has received considerable currency and legitimacy (especially in the West with the complicity of much of the Western corporate media, as well as academics and government officials—often hiding behind “freedom of speech” slogans) following the 9/11 tragedy in United States. Read, for example, Sandra Silberstein's well-received book, *War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11* that not only documents how language can be commandeered in the service of objectives that go well beyond simple communication, but also provides an illuminating window into the mechanics of the construction of ideologies of war (such as the current replacement of the Cold War, with the “War on Terror”).

Of particular relevance is her last chapter (titled “Schooling America: Lessons on Islam and Geography”), in which she demonstrates how an opportunity, in the aftermath of 9/11, to mount a genuine effort to provide the U.S. citizenry (and the rest of the planet that subscribe to such U.S. television news channels as CNN) with an objective introduction to Islam—in terms of its history, basic tenets, and its far from insignificant role in the genesis of modern Western civilization—was, instead, often subverted to produce a caricatured image of Islam and Muslims well-suited to the task at hand of manufacturing a new global enemy to replace the one of yesteryear, communism. As she explains: “The geography [of Islam] Americans learned post 9/11 was of a particular sort. This was not a benign travelogue of cultural and historical highpoints. Rather, instruction focused on the military, political, and economic self-interest of the United States as it became involved in a region in which several of the countries were presented as dangerous and incompetent. And the metaphors used to describe this area were often military” (p. 149).<sup>25</sup>

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24. It ought to be mentioned here that sometimes one gets the sense as one travels around Europe and North America that the issue is not Islamophobia but what may be called “Arabophobia,” where the age-old racial hatred of Arabs is trundled out under the pretext of a “freedom of speech” criticism of Muslims. Of course, ignorance is also tied in because there is a lack of conscious awareness that not all Arabs are Muslims and vice versa. (On Muslims and the “freedom of speech” issue that the Charlie Hebdo tragedy in France highlighted see the excellent address (Trudeau, 2015) by the celebrated U.S. cartoonist Garry Trudeau—of the *Doonsbury* comic strip fame—at an award ceremony.)

25. For additional sources on Islamophobia, past and present, see: Ahmed (2013); Allen (2010); Helbling (2014); Kundnani (2014); Lyons (2012); Meer (2014); Omidvar and Richards (2014); Rane, Ewart, and Martinkus (2014); Shyrock (2010); Trudeau (2015); and Van Driel (2004).

It should be pointed out that from the perspective of the Muslims living in Western countries, Islamophobia has also involved government sponsored projects to reconstruct the Muslim identity by suggesting implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, that Islam is a primitive and backward religion practiced by a backward peoples (the darkies) that is intrinsically violent and terrorism prone. Such an essentialist view, of course, is not only false but completely neglects to consider the historical truth, as those intimately familiar (in a scholarly sense) with both the history and practice of Islam know quite well, that its appearance on the stage of human history marked an important turning point toward the better for much of the Afro-Eurasian ecumene (and indirectly the rest of the world). It is not simply that Islam was marked by such deeply progressive ideas as education and social welfare as constituting the responsibility of the state (*baitul mal*), or that a highly inegalitarian class-fractured society was unjust (*ẓukaaʾ*), or that an economic system that rested on unbridled capitalism was anti-democratic (laws of equity governing commerce), or that the conduct of war be based on principles akin to those agreed to at the Geneva Convention of 1864 and its later incarnations, or that reciprocal obligations between the state and the citizenry be constitutionally codified (*dhimma*), or that seeking knowledge (*ilm*) was an exceptionally worthy attribute, and so on, long, long before such ideas came into vogue elsewhere, but that without the Islamic civilization it is quite conceivable that there would be no Western civilization as we know it today. The question that emerges here, however, is this: Is the problem of Islamophobia simply one of ignorance and misunderstanding? Or is there something more going on in that Islamophobia is a symptom of a wider problem: the use of ideologies of prejudice in Western societies to underwrite domination and exploitation, internally and externally? The answer is that it's the latter. That is, Islamophobia, whether in its past (Crusader era) or current ("war on terror") guises, is not an aberration, but tied up with the construction of the Euro-Americo-Australasian identity. It is one of several ideologies of the "Other" that aims to render non-European peoples as merely "resident aliens" of this planet and which has been so instrumental in justifying and explaining both the past and the current global domination by the West.<sup>26</sup>

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26. No discussion of Islamophobia would be complete without also bringing up the matter of Islam's own views on race/racism. From a strictly theological point of view, Islam does not recognize the concept of the chosen race; in fact, such socially divisive markers as racism and nationalism (contrary to current practice in Islamic countries) are forbidden. Though in practice this has not always been adhered to at all times in all places. While all forms of racism and ethnocentrism are highly objectionable, what is especially disquieting is when it is expressed against fellow coreligionists in a theological context where all are supposed to be equal before God. Hence, even though the only two references to skin color (one tangential and the other specific) in the entire Qur'an has to do with affirming God as the architect of all things, including diversity in human pigmentation, and the admonition that piety supersedes all distinctions in the eyes of God—as Lewis (1990: 54) explains: "[t]he Qur'an gives no countenance to the idea that there are superior and inferior races and that the latter are foredoomed to a subordinate status; the overwhelming majority of Muslim jurists and theologians share this rejection." Muslim Arabs, however, contrary to Islamic teachings, quite often (which is not to say always) appear to have favored those who most closely approximated their own skin color; which they mistakenly perceived as "white." Certainly the current arrogance, vis-à-vis other Muslim peoples of color, but who happen not to be "Arabs," expressed some times openly and sometimes sotto voce, that one finds among many Muslim Arabs—who usually and hypocritically consider themselves as the true inheritors and custodians of the religion of Islam regardless of their level of practical commitment to it—appears to have always been part of the Arab Islamic tradition. Here, for example, is what the Arab Muslim Ibn Khaldun—arguably one of the foremost philosophers of history of the medieval era—had to say about black Africans: "Their qualities of character are close to those of dumb animals. It has even been reported that most of the Negroes of the first zone dwell in caves and thickets, eat herbs, live in savage isolation and do not congregate, and eat each other." (Though in fairness to him he did not think much of Europeans either for in the next sentence he writes: "The same applies to the Slavs." His explanation for this supposed inferiority of blacks and whites was that it had to do with climate. (Khaldun 1967, Vol. 1: 168–69)

What is particularly disturbing is that such prejudice has at times been expressed in extremely virulent forms, with horrendous consequences for their victims. Two examples in support of this point; one from the past, and the other from the present: during the era of the slave trade, Muslim Arab slave traders were not entirely above enslaving their fellow Muslims and selling them into bondage—simply because the latter were not, in the eyes of the former, racial co-equals. (Here, the matter of the theological position of Islam on slavery is of relevance: it was akin to that of Christianity

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and Judaism, and is well summarized by Diouf (1998: 10): "Islam neither condemned nor forbade slavery but stated that enslavement was lawful under only two conditions: if the slave was born of slave parents or if he or she had been a pagan prisoner of war. Captives could legally be made slaves if the prisoner was a kafir (pagan) who had first refused to convert and then declined to accept the protection of the Muslims. In theory, a freeborn Muslim could never become a slave.") One ought to also point out, however, that the corrupting influence of the slave trade did not spare black African Muslim slave traders from succumbing to the same temptation; they too at times sold their fellow black African Muslims into slavery. The enslaved Muslims who became part of the humanity dragged across the oceans (see Diouf) were more than likely sold, mainly, by non-Muslim black African enslavers, but it is not beyond the realm of the possibility that a few were also sold by both black African and Arab Muslim enslavers. All this was in the past, but what about today? The short answer is that things have not changed much for the better. Consider, for instance, what is going on today in the Sudanese Muslim province of Darfur where government supported "Arab" militias are embarked on a mass slaughter of, this time, fellow Muslims (unlike in Sudan's south where the target of Khartoum's genocidal tendencies for the past several decades have been Christians/ animists) who they consider as black and therefore inferior. The irony of this horror is that the so-called Arabs involved in the conflict are Arabized black Africans, phenotypically indistinguishable from their fellow Sudanese (whether Muslims, Christians or animists) they are slaughtering. (For more on this conflict visit the [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com) website and search their archives of news stories.)

Attention should also be drawn here to the horrendous mistreatment *today* of migrant Muslim labor (and non-Muslim labor alike) imported—often under false pretenses—from Asia and Africa in a number of Arab countries in the Middle East. As Sharon Burrow (general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation), writing in an extended feature section titled "Modern-day Slavery in Focus; Qatar" in the *The Guardian* newspaper observed, to give just one example: "Life for a migrant worker under Qatar's *kafala* sponsorship system means living under your employer's total control over every aspect of your existence – from opening a bank account to changing jobs, and even being allowed to leave the country. This corrupt system starts with recruitment under false pretenses in their home countries and entraps them once they set foot in Qatar. Talking to workers in the squalid labor camps has brought home to me how these proud young men, who have left home to build a future, are deprived of dignity and treated in the most inhumane way. Worse, in the years that I've been visiting the camps, nothing has changed. Hundreds of these workers succumb every year to the appalling living and working conditions, returning to their home countries in coffins, their deaths callously written off as the price of progress." (Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/19/qatar-world-cup-slavery-migrant-workers>.) And one should not also forget the matter of gender where female migrant labor has to endure even worse conditions, tantamount to nothing less than slave labor. Then there is the issue of human-trafficking, which of course is simply slavery and nothing less. For additional sources on this topic, see also the various reports put out by the U.N.'s International Labor Organization; the International Trade Union Confederation; and Human Rights Watch. Arabs and their apologists, may want to quibble here by suggesting that in the matter of this deep and widespread exploitation and abuse of foreign labor, regardless of whether it is migrant or trafficked, what is at work in the Middle-East today is not so much race, but class (the rich versus the poor), and gender. The truth is that it is all three, where one merges into the other.

In raising this entire matter of Arab racism one risks being accused of abandoning historical objectivity; in defense, dear reader, you are asked to consult sources by others who have looked at this issue with some diligence; such as Bernard Lewis. In his book *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (1990), he meticulously documents the history of the nefarious attitudes of Muslim Arabs on the race question. He begins by noting that the arrival of Islam in the Afro-Eurasian ecumene introduced a new equation in the matter of race relations: the potential to associate skin pigmentation with "otherness" (something that was rare up to that point in the ancient world where otherness was more a matter of ethnicity [such as linguistic or religious differences] and/ or nationality [e.g., Greeks versus Persians] rather than race). This potential emerged out of the fact that for the first time in human history Islam created "a truly universal civilization" where "[b]y conquest and by conversion, the Muslims brought within the bounds of a single imperial system and a common religious culture peoples as diverse as the Chinese, the Indians, the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, black Africans, and white Europeans," and not only that, but the obligatory requirements of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca enjoined on all Muslim adults, if they can afford it, at least once in their lifetime) placed members of all these groups into direct and close contact with each other (p. 18). Against this background, the

*Whiteness*. To start with, this is a sociological term—no, folks I did not invent it—and it refers to a racial **ideology** that is unique to those societies today where Europeans (whites), or their colonial descendants, dominate other peoples in political and/or economic terms, against the backdrop of capitalism, and which is characterized by a number of fallacious beliefs—held consciously *or* subconsciously—that are all rooted in the notion of the supremacy of the “white race” (captured by the common phrase: white is right! white is might!). In other words, this is a sub-variety of racism (much like **Antisemitism**, and **Islamophobia**). In order to explain further what “whiteness” really means let me ask you to consider the following two quotes: The first is by Etherington (1989: 286-87) and it is part of his account of relations between the European settlers and missionaries in the colony of Natal (that would later become part of South Africa and which today is called KwaZulu-Natal) in the nineteenth-century.

[A] settler complaint was that... missionaries attempted to convert people who were not capable of becoming true Christians. According to a Methodist district superintendent, the major reason why settlers would not contribute to missions was “skepticism as to the converting power of the gospel upon the native population.” A candidate for the Legislative Council once told an election rally that a “corps of police officers could do more to civilize the Kaffirs, than all the missionaries in the Colony.” Lieutenant-Governor Pine reinforced local prejudice by telling the Methodists that experience had taught him “the extreme difficulty of really converting savage nations to a knowledge of our religion...”

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transformation of the potential to the actual (theological prohibitions notwithstanding), for a variety of reasons (including holdovers from pre-Islamic times of Arab prejudices), was a matter of time; thereby leaving us with a circumstance that he summarizes thusly: “The cause of racial equality is sustained by the almost unanimous voice of Islamic religion—both the exhortations of piety and the injunctions of the law. And yet, at the same time, the picture of inequality and injustice is vividly reflected in the literature, the arts, and the folklore of the Muslim peoples. In this, as in so much else, there is a sharp contrast between what Islam says and what Muslims—or at least some Muslims—do” (p. 20). Consequently, even among subordinate populations, such as slaves, according to Lewis, hierarchic distinctions were often imposed: white slaves tended to fare better than black slaves in almost all respects. What is worse was that as the African slave trade (both the trans-Saharan and the Atlantic) became ever more lucrative, there was a corresponding rise in the putrescence of Muslim Arab attitudes on this matter—exemplified, as already noted a moment ago, in the enslavement of black Muslims too.

The amazing irony in all this, to complicate matters, is that today there are, in truth, very few Muslim Arabs who can claim a pure Arab ancestry. Regardless of how racist Arabs think of other peoples of color, or how their equally racist detractors from among the people of color think of them, Arabs (especially those in Afro-Arab Islamic Africa), like that segment of the population categorized as “black” in the United States, range from the whitest white to the blackest black! In other words, the category Arab is less a category of skin-color and phenotype, than it is a linguistic and cultural category. That this should be so is not surprising considering that as the Islamic empire came to encompass a heterogeneity of colors, Muslim Arabs came to genetically intermingle with ethnicities from across the entire Afro-Eurasian ecumene over the millennia.

There is one other matter that ought to be noted here in the interest of scholarly integrity: while it is true that Lewis’s detractors have accused him of “orientalist” bias (a variant of Eurocentrism as indicated in Appendix II) in his work—and they may well be correct, especially in the case of his earlier works—as with all Eurocentrists, it would be wrong to assume that everything he has written is ipso facto false. In fact, in this instance, his 1990 work, one finds, is well researched and documented, even if his earlier work (Lewis 1971) on the same subject may have been less so. More importantly, on this particular issue, Lewis does not stand alone. For instance, see Davis 2001; Fisher 2001; Goldenberg 2003; Gordon 1989; Hunwick and Powell 2002; Marmon 1999; Segal 2001; and Willis 1985. (A defensive view from the other side is available via Kamil 1970.) For a trenchant critique of Lewis, see Nyang and Abed-Rabbo (1984); Halliday (1993), is also relevant here.

It was as though the settlers unconsciously feared that Christian Africans would have a more powerful claim to equal rights than an uneducated population devoted to their ancient beliefs.

This second quote is from Ostler (2004: 17-18) who seeks to explain the ideological premises of the dispossession of the U.S. Native Americans in the U.S. West following the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory from the French in 1803 (as if it was theirs to sell in the first place).

Though many men and women who “settled” western frontiers became virulent Indian haters and advocated extermination, most theorists offered assimilation as an alternative. Assimilation resolved the contradiction between a commitment to dispossession with its implications of genocide on the one hand, and Enlightenment and Christian principles of the common humanity of all people on the other... Yet the basic premise of assimilation, that Indian ways of life were inferior, was linked to increasingly systematized theories of racial classification and hierarchy that tended to reinforce ontological thinking about race... American elites eventually tried to resolve the contradiction between imperialism and humanitarianism through the idea that whereas rare individuals might become “civilized,” Indians were an inferior race that was inevitably destined to vanish. Although Americans knew at a practical level that Indians controlled a significant proportion of North America, on an ideological level they conceived of the entire continent as empty.

O.K. So, what is my point? It is impossible for the psyche of a people to remain completely unaffected by their unprincipled and violent abrogation of the rights (that is those subsumed by the **Natural Law of Prior Claim**) of other peoples over a period spanning centuries and on a scale that is simply unfathomable by the human mind—most especially when those so victimized continue to live among the interlopers. It is not surprising then that the denouement of such shameful markers in the history of the colonization of the United States and South Africa as the enslavement of Africans and Asians (in South Africa—1650s–1830s) and First Americans and Africans (in the United States—1500s–1863/1865); the Hundred Year War (1799–1879); the aftermath of the Louisiana Purchase (1803); the Trail of Tears (1838); and Wounded Knee (1890), on the ideological plane has been the development among the descendants of the European settlers of what may be described as the hegemony of the ideology of “whiteness.” United in their common history—that transcends class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and any other social structural division one may care to identify—of gross criminality (in terms of crimes against humanity), a perverse racist sense developed among them of entitlement to human and natural resources, before all other peoples, on the basis of nothing more than their skin pigmentation. Fortified by the power to continue across centuries, all the way to the present, to impose hegemony upon others (and contrary to the logical expectation of feelings of remorse, the quest to seek forgiveness, the magnanimity to consider restitution, and so on, befitting a people that have never ceased to trumpet to this day their membership of a supposedly superior civilization) the descendants of the European colonial settlers elevated the notion of whiteness as signifying entitlement to privilege to one of Darwinian naturalness (or in the case of those of a religious mind a God-given right).

While the literature on the subject of the hegemony of whiteness is burgeoning, a brief foray into its principal characteristics is all we can afford, folks, given limitations of time. There are seven central elements around which the ideology of whiteness is organized:

- a pervasive and stupefying **ahistoricism**;
- the deep illusion that whiteness is an immutable biologically determined concept, rather than one of contingency (exemplified by the profound inability to clearly and consistently define who a “white” person is across time and space);
- the fallacy that whiteness equals civilizational superiority (a Eurocentrist hubris);
- the preposterous belief that whiteness is a synonym for humanness;
- the notion of whiteness as “property”;
- the belief that possession of this property entitles one to privileges that others without this property are not entitled to;

- and the idea that what constitutes knowledge is a prerogative that belongs only to those who possess this property (and therefore, even describing and questioning whiteness, its practice, its historical antecedents, and so on is akin to dabbling in superstition).

Using this framework as a starting point it is possible to do an analysis of the role of whiteness in society from the perspective of a wide range of topics, such as:

- 'White' as an unstable, time and place dependent ethnic category;
- Whiteness and 'normality' in the popular consciousness of Western citizenry;
- Whiteness as a determinant of social spaces;
- Whiteness as a determinant of power relations;



- Whiteness and urban planning;
- Whiteness and its intersection with class relations;
- Whiteness and its interaction with race relations;
- Whiteness, and settler colonialism;
- Whiteness and imperialism;
- Whiteness and Marxism;
- The politics of whiteness in the academy;

- How whiteness determines personal identity;
- Whiteness, law and legal discourse;
- Whiteness and the justice system;
- The role of the media in the 'normalization' of whiteness (nationally and transnationally);
- Whiteness and cinema;
- White feminism and the interrogation of whiteness;
- Women of color and their interrogation of whiteness in white feminism;
- Whiteness and the politics of white supremacy (in the present and in the past);
- Whiteness and concepts of human beauty;
- Whiteness and Christianity;
- Columbus and the origins of whiteness;
- The history of the manufacture of the 'white race';
- Whiteness and presidential politics in the U.S.;
- Whiteness and the politics of immigration;
- The politics of whites struggling against whiteness;
- People of color and their perception of whiteness;
- Whiteness and international relations;
- Whiteness and psychiatry;
- Whiteness and war;
- Whiteness and the globalization of Western culture
- Comparative white studies (Australia, Canada, Europe, South Africa, U.S., etc.).

But of what relevance is the concept of whiteness to the subject matter of our course? Simple: as I have explained quite a few times, we cannot comprehend the functions of racism in this society without understanding this concept. The reason is that “whiteness” has become the ideational element in the ideational/structural dialectical binary that not only underwrites the material basis of the prosperity of the peasant/proletarian European interlopers and their descendants to this day, but also helps to shape the character of the relations that currently exist between whites and blacks in the U.S. There is however, one fly in the ointment in the analysis so presented: A question arises that is not so easily dispensed with: Exactly how does whiteness interact with the overall process of accumulation that in the last instance is the driving force of all capitalist orders? Very briefly: whiteness within the working-classes of European ancestry serves as an ideological vehicle for the subjectification of the objective and the objectification of the subjective in the domain of class-relations, which in the end benefits capital. This explains, for instance, why in the United States cross-racial working class alliances have been notoriously difficult to organize or sustain, permitting capital almost unfettered access to political power. It also explains, to turn to a wholly different time-period, why most of the poor whites in the slave-holding South (who could not afford to own slaves) supported the plantation aristocracy in maintaining the slave order—so much so that when that order came under severe threat they en masse took up arms in its defense (reference here is of course to the U.S. Civil War).

A close reading of the foregoing, to sum up, should lead to this conclusion: whiteness performs a contradictory role. It is, at once, a source of privilege, and a source of oppression for the working classes of European ancestry; similarly, for capital whiteness serves to undermine accumulation as well as enhance it. In other words, like all ideologies whiteness is an inherently contingent cultural artifact in its practice; it all depends on the level and specificity of the analysis one undertakes, and the place and time-period in question, to comprehend the contradictory role of whiteness, today—as well as in the past. In one sense the policy of affirmative action has always existed in this country from the very beginning of European colonial settlement, in the shape of legalized racist and sexist discriminatory practices that gave preference to whites in general, and white males in particular, in all areas of the economy, politics and society (from employment to voting rights). In other words, white racism and sexism has always been another name for illegitimate “affirmative action”—in support of whiteness and patriarchy. Yet, when legitimate affirmative action policies were instituted beginning in the 1960s in order to help rectify the historically rooted injustices of racism and sexism, considerable opposition among whites (even among



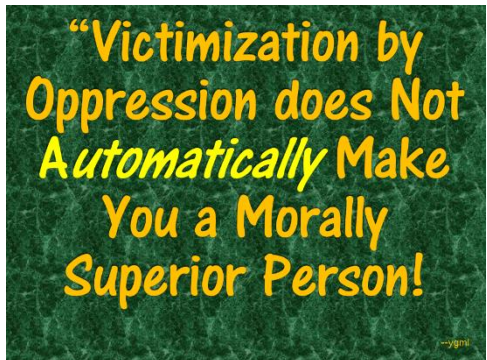
liberals—including, ironically, white females) to this policy emerged. (See also **Essentialism, Jim Crow, Marginality, Other/Otherness, Race/Racism, Social Darwinism, White Southern Strategy, Stereotype, Textual Erasure.**)

## 9. The Academic Study of Racism

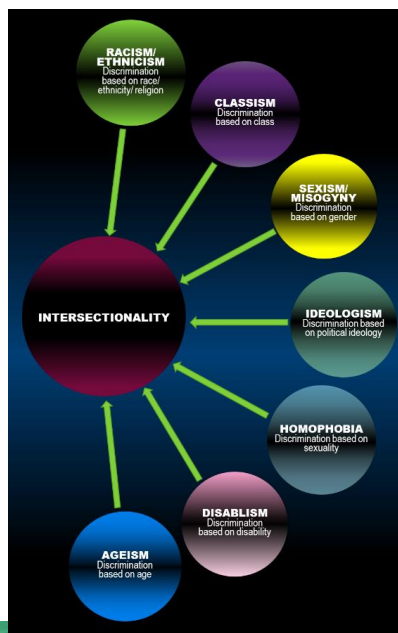
Given the complexity of the societal role of racism in the past *and* today—here in the United States and elsewhere in the world—it is not surprising that a number of different theories have been advanced by academics to grapple with it. For our purposes, these four (and only in brief) will have to do: (a) Racism from a *Marxist perspective*; (b) Racism and *Feminist Theory*; (c) Race and Law: The *Critical Race Theory* perspective; and (d) the *Racial Formation Theory* perspective. An immediate question that arises is which of these theories has the best explanatory/analytical power? The answer is that none of them and all of them. That is, each provides us with valuable insights into a given dimension of the subject; therefore, one would do well to consider all of them together, as each has some value in advancing our understanding of the role of race/racism in a society like this one—that is, a capitalist democracy in the twenty-first century. What is important to note is that all of them consider, at least sub-textually, the end goal to be a victory for social justice for all, where no one is subjected to marginality and oppression of any kind (be it classism, sexism, racism, disablism, etc., etc.)

*Marxism*, at least in its traditional approach, does not recognize racism as a subject worthy of study in its own right; in fact, the view is that it is a distraction from what should be the focus of all concerned with social justice in capitalist societies: namely, class and class struggle. After all, Karl Marx himself was, like many intellectual contemporaries of his day, a racist, but not, it is very important to emphasize, in the sense of rejecting the humanity of people of color (as represented, for example, by the Nazi perspective), but in the sense commonly prevalent today among many white liberals: that people of color remain intellectually backward, not necessarily for biological reasons but for historical reasons, and therefore continue to need the guiding hand of whites—a view characteristic of the “Great White Father” syndrome—if they are to achieve progress in their struggles for social justice. Not surprisingly, Marx saw European imperialism (including settler-colonialism) as a great boon for people of color in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and elsewhere. Eschewing the horrendous atrocities in which millions died, the massive exploitation, and the widespread injustice that was visited upon peoples of color across the planet by European imperialists, he saw imperialism as progressive force dragging them out of the mire of socio-economic backwardness and the “despotic” tyranny of their rulers onto the path of socio-economic progress and eventually liberation from all tyranny, *including imperialism itself*, as well as that of their traditional rulers. In terms of his overall vision, he saw all workers across the planet eventually uniting, irrespective of color or ethnicity, against that foremost tyranny that subjugates and exploits all workers: capitalism. In recent decades, especially in United States, Marxist revisionists (labeled Neo-Marxists), have come up with an alternative view on the matter of race/racism: that it should be considered as one of the three interrelated avenues of oppression, with class and gender being the other two.

Moreover, some Neo-Marxists have also come to conclude that racism can be quite compatible with the interests of some segments of the working class—specifically, that represented by (though this is not the concept they apply), the labor aristocracy. The idea of a “labor aristocracy” in a capitalist society may appear to be an oxymoron par excellence, but upon brief reflection this is not necessarily so. It speaks to the fact that some sections of the working class enjoy socio-economic privileges far above the rest because of their structural location within the U.S. economy and simultaneously, for historical reasons, their white skin color (the labor market segmentation theory). Compare, for instance, the fortunes of the working class in the so-called hospitality industry with that of the working class in the aerospace or auto industries.



*Feminist Theory* takes a similar approach to the Neo-Marxian approach to study of race/racism, in that it applies the concept of what it calls “intersectionality,” to the study of race/racism where its concern for gender (not class, as in the case of the Neo-Marxists) as its key organizing principle of its intellectual endeavors is tempered by the view that women of color in a capitalist and racist society are also simultaneously subjected to racism, classism, and other

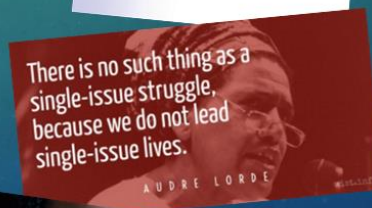


forms of oppression. The actual lived experiences of women of color for centuries, and up to the present, in this country has always been (and often continues to be) subject to a multiplicity of oppressions—and often simultaneously (imagine for a moment a woman of color who is poor, who is gay, who has a physical disability, and who faces gender discrimination at work). However, it took a woman of color professor of law, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, to give a name to this multidimensional experiences of oppression. Her theory of *intersectionality*, it is important to point out, was initially an effort at addressing the racism of many white feminists who had tended to wantonly neglect in their work the experiences of women of color. White women very often refused to see that not all oppression facing women could be put down only to **patriarchy**, but rather that a substantial population of women also faced, at one and the same time, other equally powerful forms of oppression—such as that represented by classism and racism.<sup>27</sup> After all, in so far as racism was and is concerned, white women also stand implicated (this was true in the past, and it is true today).

## What is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality refers to the complex web of different forms of oppression--such as sexism, racism, and classism--experienced simultaneously by marginalized individuals and groups in a society in such a way as to constitute *super-oppression*; that is, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (to borrow a well-known phrase from the Greek philosopher Aristotle).

**Note:** The theory behind intersectionality was first articulated by the African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her article published in 1989 in the journal *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, titled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." She had written it as a criticism of white feminists who, quite often, remained naively insensitive to the racism that black women experienced in United States--a problem that continues to plague them to this day because of their *colorblind racism*.



*Critical Race Theory*, as the name suggests, is the application of critical theory (the idea that the fundamental basis of all critiques of social injustice must be rooted, above all else, in the critique of ideologies of oppression) to study of race. This approach first gained currency in legal studies beginning in the 1980s when a sizeable number of legal scholars who

were people of color had achieved a sufficient mass in numbers in law schools to come together and challenge existing thinking by white scholars on the relationship between law and race. They were driven by the need to

27. The theory behind intersectionality was first articulated by Professor Crenshaw in her article published in 1989 in the journal *University of Chicago Legal Forum*.

determine why the struggle for civil rights that the civil rights movement had produced had made little headway in eradicating institutional racism in United States. Their conclusion was that law was also to blame in the persistence of institutional racism; moreover, critical race theorists called upon traditional scholars in the area of critical legal studies who studied race and civil rights to abandon their “color-blind” racism (in other words, they were accused of being institutional racists) and look afresh at how law could advance the continuing struggle for social justice—especially from the perspectives of race, class, and gender.

*Racial Formation* is a term first coined by Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their book *Racial Formation in the United States* (first published in 1986, but now in its third edition) and it’s a play on the Marxian concept of *social formation*, and therefore, as can be deduced, suggests the historically-determined permeation of the factor of unequal “race relations” at all levels of society, and intersects with, but does not displace, such other dimensions of the social structure as class and gender. For Omi and Winant, in a country such as the United States, race as an avenue of oppression can take a life of its own separate from such other dimensions of oppression as class and gender. That is, given that race is a socially constructed category (and not, as we have seen, a biological category), its social construction has been in the service of specific “racial projects,” depending upon a given historical time period, up to the present. Under these circumstances, “race” is an unstable ever changing category, depending upon the needs of the bourgeoisie in a given time period. For example, in recent U.S. history, at one time ethnicities such as Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, Greek Americans, Russian Americans, and so on, were not considered “white” and therefore were not considered “full” U.S. Americans. Today, this is no longer so. To give another example: racial formation theory would suggest that the intensifying class warfare perpetrated by the bourgeoisie on the U.S. working classes through the processes of **globalization** (symptomatic of which, above all else, is the massive income and wealth inequality, perhaps unprecedented in U.S. history, effected through the subversion of **procedural democracy** by the **bourgeoisie**), has called for another racial project in order to distract sections of the white working class from this warfare, and it is represented by racist right-wing populism in which the immediate target, that is first-level target, are not African Americans, as used to be the case traditionally, but other people of color, all swept together into the category “illegal immigrants” (which, from the perspective of this populism, not surprisingly, does not include white immigrants, legal or illegal, from Canada, Europe, and elsewhere)—and this is regardless of whether they are U.S.-born citizens or not. Of course, other factors may also come into play in this diversionary effort, such as gender or homophobia, but in this instance it is ancillary. Note also that just because African Americans are not the first-level target of this racist populism, they are not completely off its radar; they remain a second-level target.