

Foundational Knowledge

Race in United States: Theoretical Perspectives

SECTION ONE

Critical Race Theory *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Ed. Lisa M. Given. Vol. 1. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008. p163-167. Copyright: COPYRIGHT 2008 SAGE Publications, Inc.

Critical Race Theory

Critical [race](#) theory (CRT) is a theoretical perspective that purposely centers race and [racism](#) in its analysis. It considers racism to be the central reason for racial inequality in the [United States](#). In CRT, racism is defined as a structure embedded in [society](#) that systematically advantages [Whites](#) and disadvantages people of color. Rather than aberrant or random acts, racism is considered a normal condition of U.S. society, relating directly to and resulting from the racialized history of the country. Originating in the United States, CRT is just now beginning to be explored by scholars around the world seeking a new way to analyze systematic racial inequality in law, [education](#), and other dimensions of society.

The goal of CRT is to dismantle systematic inequity by calling attention to it. CRT does this by intentionally focusing attention on race, problematizing the neutrality associated with dominant ideologies, and highlighting the situatedness of one's perspective. It also centers the stories of those who have personally experienced racial inequality and enables these stories to be told in compelling ways so that a wide audience can learn from their perspectives. This entry first describes the history of CRT, beginning in the mid-1970s. It then explores the characteristics of CRT, including its description of racism as embedded, normal, and permanent; its critique of liberalism; the concept of interest convergence; and the view that Whiteness constitutes a property right. It also discusses the role of storytelling in CRT. Finally, it describes some of the current "outside-centered" theories that are outgrowths of CRT.

History

CRT originated in the United States in the field of law during the mid-1970s, growing out of and responding to critical legal studies (CLS), which at the time was an emerging movement of legal scholarship that rejected the notion that legal matters were neutral and could be interpreted objectively. Influenced by postmodernism, CLS advocates argue that [politics](#) and social situations influence U.S. jurisprudence. Legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Mari Matsuda, among others, responded that race and racism also play

significant roles in U.S. law, influencing laws as well as those who interpret them. The U.S. [civil rights](#) movement and the nationalist movements advanced by Malcolm X and the Black Panthers also influenced the creation of CRT. Bell, Crenshaw, and Freeman (considered the founders of CRT), among others, believed that the progress made during the 1960s toward civil rights was already stalling by the mid-1970s. Thus, CRT was created to focus specifically on racial inequality in all aspects of U.S. jurisprudence and to actively work toward dismantling racism in the law.

In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate introduced education scholars to CRT in their article in *Teachers College Record*, "Toward a [Critical Race Theory](#) of Education." In this article, they argued that CRT can explain racial inequity in school achievement by focusing on race and racism as influential entities in all aspects of U.S. society and schooling. Some scholars in education now frequently address the influence of racism on the historical constructions and purposes of school and schooling as well as on teachers, administrators, and student achievement. Like CRT scholars in the area of law, Ladson-Billings and Tate suggested that the "business as usual" of racial inequality in education will not be resolved until it is addressed pointedly. CRT has also been adopted into the social sciences literature and can be found as a theoretical and analytical tool in very diverse fields of study.

Characteristics

Whereas CRT is a multifaceted theoretical perspective, it has several key characteristics, including the embedded normal nature of racism, the permanence of racism, the critique of liberalism, interest convergence, property rights in Whiteness, storytelling, and the goal of dismantling racism.

Embedded Normal Nature of Racism

A foundational aspect of CRT is the belief that racism is embedded in society. In 1995, Richard Delgado, one of the major contributors to CRT, emphasized, "Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture" (p. xiv). Racism, in this perspective, is seen not only in the rantings of the [Ku Klux Klan](#) but also in the racial makeup of those in power and those who are disempowered as well as in the frequent absence of people of color in everything from political leadership to school curriculum to popular media. CRT theorists (or criticalists) argue that because racism is so deeply ingrained in society, it is necessarily ingrained in jurisprudence, education, and all other institutions and aspects of society.

Permanence of Racism

A second foundational aspect of CRT is the notion that racism is persistent, enduring, or even permanent. The progress of [race relations](#) is not considered linear, moving toward [equality](#) as time passes. Rather, the structural embedded nature of racism prevents it from being removed from the fabric of society. Progress toward future equality is questioned, and much criticism is given to the exceedingly slow and unpredictable nature of societal change. Recognizing racism as a permanent embedded condition in society is what Bell termed "racial [realism](#)." Racial realism is in the tradition of legal realism, which was a precursor to CLS. Its main tenet was that because humans create law, their own imperfections are mirrored in the law. The term *racial realism* implies that racism is a problem influencing law and society because it is a problem influencing humans.

Critique of Liberalism

Directly related to the preceding understanding of racism is the CRT critique of liberalism. Because racism is considered to be embedded and persistent, many tenets of liberalism are rejected by criticalists as actually standing in the way of racial equity. These tenets include the belief that jurisprudence is neutral and outside or above the influence of humans. This is the central tenet of U.S. law which CLS and legal realism also reject. In addition, criticalists reject the notion that jurisprudence is color-blind. They argue that color-blindness masks the influence of race and racism in everyday forms of inequity and prevents them from being recognized as entrenched aspects of the justice system. Criticalists also disapprove of the liberal tenet of incremental change through the system of legal precedence. They assert that this system ensures that the dominating social group in society, Whites in the United States, controls change. As a result, change is slow and comes about only when the dominant group benefits from such change.

Interest Convergence

The notion that the dominant group permits legal change toward racial equity only when its own best interests are served is termed *interest convergence*. This concept was developed by Bell, who used it in 1980 in reference to the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Bell called attention to the ways in which the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown* reflected the recognition by Whites that desegregation had economic and political values for Whites unrelated to the immorality of racial inequality. For example, in anticipation of this case, the U.S. Department of Justice filed an amicus curiae ("friend of the court") brief stating that racial integration in the United States was important because it was considered as highly beneficial for the image of the United States abroad. [Affirmative action](#) can also be examined through the interpretive lens of interest convergence by examining its impact on White [women](#) compared with its effect on men and women of color. A third example of interest convergence can be found in the history of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. Although federal legislation creating the holiday had been passed in 1983 and Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt had signed an executive order designating it as a state holiday in 1986, Governor Evan Meacham rescinded this executive order when he took office in 1987. This action set off a tourist boycott that in 1991 prompted the National Football League to move the 1993 Super Bowl from Arizona to California. In 1992, Arizona voters passed a proposition establishing the holiday, and the 1993 Super Bowl was held in Tempe, Arizona.

Property Rights in Whiteness

The notion that being White confers valuable rights as inalienable as they are unearned is another central tenet of CRT. During the time of [slavery](#), [African Americans](#) were recognized under the law as property, whereas Whites had no such status and could not be enslaved. African American slaves could be bought, sold, and substituted for cash for purposes of paying debts or making purchases. Legal scholar Cheryl Harris argued that Whiteness, initially a concept of racial [identity](#), was so closely attached to the right to be free and to own property that Whiteness itself became a kind of property right. Harris suggested that such a property right can be seen in legal precedents that give individuals the right to sue for defamation for being erroneously called Black but not for being erroneously called White. *Black* was considered to be a slanderous label affording harm to an individual, but *White* was not.

Another property right put forth by Harris was the "absolute right to exclude." Because Whiteness is constructed as the absence of African heritage, it is inherently exclusionary. The privileging of Whiteness is also evidenced in the "one-drop rule" written into law in most U.S. states, beginning with Tennessee in 1910. This rule contended that any amount of African heritage deprived an individual of the rights attached to Whiteness. The last one-drop rule was repealed by the state of Louisiana as recently as 1983. In contemporary times, Whiteness is still recognized as valuable property that affords certain rights such as the right to be trusted, the right to be given the benefit of the doubt, the right to be perceived as a professional, and the right to attend schools and school programs where one's race does not prevent one from accessing excellent materials, curricula, and teachers. These issues have been examined by Harris and the education scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate, among others.

Storytelling

A central characteristic of CRT that readily lends itself to qualitative methodology is the importance of narrative in general and of storytelling in particular. Because voices of color have so often been ignored and dismissed by the dominant group in society, first-person [narratives](#) are considered to be particularly powerful. They often tell the stories that have not been heard. Being influenced by postmodernism and critical legal studies, CRT maintains that one reality and/or truth does not exist. Instead, reality is considered to be socially constructed and, as such, individuals are believed to have their own realities and truths that are shared through storytelling. In addition, the stories people tell are often engaging and easy to understand, enabling stories to make strong impressions on audiences from a variety of backgrounds. This emphasis on accessibility aligns with the activist nature of CRT. If a wide variety of people are able to comprehend complex and often esoteric legal issues through first-person narratives told in absorbing ways, many people can then actively respond to these issues.

Because of the emphasis on multiple truths and realities, criticalists often use nontraditional forms of writing to make their points. Harris and Ladson-Billings, for example, weaved in stories from their own lives to make their points more vivid. Harris wrote about her grandmother's experience in "passing" for White during the 1930s. Ladson-Billings wrote of being mistaken for a waitress while passing time in a VIP lounge after giving an invited lecture. Bell used science fiction to tell the story of "space traders" who come to the earth offering gold and energy in exchange for just one thing: all African [Americans](#). He followed this short story with a critique of liberalism in U.S. jurisprudence. Delgado took on an "alter ego" in his *Rodrigo Chronicles*, where he shared the fictionalized stories of law student Rodrigo and his professor mentor. Through this writing style, legal and social issues are examined in dialogic fashion with questions, answers, ambiguities, and hesitations par for the course. These scholars are recognized for their more traditional styles of writing as well, but all saw great potential in the creativity and related accessibility of these more engaging writing forms.

In addition to narrative and storytelling, two other strategic forms of stories are used in CRT: stock stories and counterstories. Stock stories are akin to grand narratives in postmodern language. They explain "why things are" in ways that satisfy the dominant culture. The following are two typical examples of stock stories. First, there are so few people of color in leadership positions in business and academia because there are few qualified people of color. Second, only people who prove to be untrustworthy or dangerous are followed by security in department stores or pulled over while driving by the police. Counterstories purposely disrupt stock stories by telling personal accounts

that contradict the stock stories. For example, a counterstory to the first story could be a first-person account of being the most objectively qualified person who was not hired because of subjective concerns about "fit" as a person of color. A counterstory to the second story could be a first-person account of being exceedingly trustworthy and not dangerous (e.g., a teacher, a medical doctor, a church pastor) and nevertheless being followed in department stores and pulled over by police for appearing to be suspicious. These are stories that people of color of all economic backgrounds, and of all educational and professional attainments, tell. The first-person voice, absent in this encyclopedia entry, brings the sincerity, passion, and gravitas to the counterstory.

Goal of Dismantling Racism

It is important to emphasize that the overarching goal of CRT is to dismantle racism. Although critical theories, including CRT, are sometimes criticized for being too idealistic, changing and improving lived realities is a central tenet in all of them. By naming racism, criticizing "liberal" approaches to addressing racism, and highlighting and legitimizing the personal stories of those who experience racism, CRT endeavors to dismantle the systematic nature of racism. Thus, CRT necessarily has a [social justice](#) agenda. It is not a component of research conducted for its own sake.

Related Outsider-Centered Areas of Study

Although CRT has not focused only on African Americans, African American perspectives and concerns have shaped much of CRT. Its focus on the lived experiences and perspectives of those who are subordinated in society, its critique of dominance, its main tenets, and its creative use of form and substance have inspired other outsider-centered theoretical perspectives that have emerged—and continue to emerge out of CRT. Recently emerging (1990s-2000s) race-centered areas of scholarship include LatCrit, which focuses specifically on Latina/o perspectives and experiences in law and society; AsianCrit, which focuses similarly on Asians; and TribalCrit, which focuses similarly on [Native Americans](#). Well-known scholars in these three fields include Richard Delgado, Robert Chang, and Brian Brayboy, respectively.

Critical studies in Whiteness is also an emerging area of study in the social sciences. Inspired by CRT legal scholars and other scholars of color who look at the ways in which Whiteness dominates society and other racial groups through its idealism and apparent neutrality, academics in a variety of areas have been critically examining Whiteness since around the late 1980s. Ian Haney López (in law), Peggy McIntosh (in women's studies and education), David Roediger (in history), Ruth Frankenberg (in sociology), and Alice McIntyre and James Scheurich (in education) are some of the best-known Whiteness scholars.

Another compelling outgrowth of CRT is critical race [feminism](#), which centers both race and gender in its theoretical framework. An example of a unique term in critical race feminism is "Blackwoman," which emphasizes the inimitable experiences of Black women and the importance of situating one's perspective in race and gender. The goal of critical race feminism, like other dimensions of CRT, is to dismantle racism and sexism as well as to highlight the lived experiences and perspectives of those living within and without the borders of what society deems to be neutral. Jennifer Russell and Adrien Katherine Wing are two well-known critical race [feminists](#).

Although not specifically race centered, queer theory is also connected to CRT, emerging from some of the same social theories and forces that continue to shape CRT and the other race- and gender-centered theories already described. Just as CRT seeks to disrupt Whiteness and the neutrality that masks its power, queer theory strives to disrupt the neutrality associated with heterosexuality and to situate it as an often idealized exclusive construct. In contrast to the neutrality of heterosexuality, other sexual and gender orientations are often demonized, essentialized, or omitted in public and private discourses. Queer theory draws attention to this inequity with the goal of eliminating it. The works of Annamarie Jagose and Francisco Valdez are examples of this theoretical perspective.

Recently, outsider-centered theorists have also begun troubling the binaries that emerge when constructs such as queer and heterosexual, and of color and White, are compared and contrasted with one another. Many of these criticalists argue that, rather than having sharp borders, race, gender, and sexual orientation (among other aspects of identity) have frayed edges that lend themselves to complex, rather than essentializing, analyses. As these concerns indicate, theories that challenge dominant ideologies are emergent and dynamic, influencing each other and a variety of fields of study as they continue to evolve.

Sherry Marx

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SECTION TWO

Racial Formation Theory [Brenda J. Allen *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*](#). Ed. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss. Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2009. p823-824.
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Racial Formation Theory - I

Racial formation theory describes political processes that construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct racial categories and their meanings in the [United States](#). This theory counters views of [race](#) as a fixed, objective element of human identity based mainly on physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture. Instead, racial formation theory contends that race is an unstable social construct whose meanings change across sociohistorical contexts due to conflicts between dominant and nondominant groups' interests and values.

The perspective that race is constructed, contextual, and contested has important implications for communication studies because racial formation processes occur through communication. The primary tenets of the theory are as follows: Race is a pervasive, pivotal organizing principle of U.S. society; race is an artificial, fluid construction that derives from ongoing political conflicts; political conflicts manifest as racial projects based on links between racial representations and social structures; and racial projects occur at interrelated macro- and microlevels of society.

Ethnic studies scholar Michael Omi and sociologist Howard Winant developed racial formation theory in the late 1970s as a critique of social-scientific approaches to theorizing race in the United States. Concerned that those approaches were reducing the significance of race, and therefore diminishing the potential to abolish [racism](#), they argued that race is and always has been fundamental to social organizing processes in the United States, including major social conflicts and recurring racial inequities in employment, education, and housing. They contended further that meanings of race are socially constructed and that they arise from conflicts among social, economic, and political forces. To explain these and related issues, Omi and Winant created racial formation theory.

Racial formation theory focuses on processes by which humans create racial meanings. It denotes race as an artificial social construction that varies in meaning depending on the sociohistorical context. The U.S. Census provides a prime example; census forms have always included items that implicitly or explicitly refer to race. The first form in 1790 distinguished Black [slaves](#) from White people, while throughout the 20th century, census forms listed 26 different schemes to categorize race or color.

Racial formation theory highlights conflicts over racial meanings and stresses connections between representations or significations of race and social structures. Representations or significations of race include classifications and hierarchies, as well as discourse about race. For instance, in the late 18th century, persons in power in the United States relied on an artificial, arbitrary racial classification system to reinforce and perpetuate a racial hierarchy based on the idea that the white race is superior to others. Known as White supremacist ideology, this typology has been a constant source of struggle among people in the United States. This typology also is

reciprocally related to social structures such as policies, laws, and practices. Connections between representations of racial meanings and social structures form the core of racial formation processes, manifesting as what Omi and Winant term racial projects.

Racial Formation Theory

A theory of comprehending the role of race—as a *politically determined category*—in modern capitalist democracies (such as the United States), where the emphasis is on analyzing this role in terms of both culture *and* the political economy on one hand, and on the other, the constantly shifting character of this role as groups work politically to either minimize its significance (e.g. civil rights struggle) or enhance it (e.g. rightwing populism). While not negating the powerful role of such other forces as class or gender in shaping society, the authors of the theory insist on the primacy of the role of race given its ever-changing incarnations. Viewed from this perspective, racial categorizations and hierarchies are highly contested terrains but despite their politically-driven mutations (which they term as “racial projects”), in the final analysis, do not overturn the toxic racial dominance of (for example) “whiteness,” but at the same time the potential for an alternative scenario cannot be ruled out.

The Alternative Faces of Race and Democracy—and the U.S. Presidency



The authors have stated that they developed their theory on the basis of insights drawn from the work of such scholars as W. E. B. DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier, Oliver C. Cox, Herbert Blumer, Antonio Gramsci, bell hooks, Adam Przeworski, and so on. As a result, they “began to consider race as a legitimate and salient social category in its own right, on par with class.” They further explain: “Adopting this approach allowed us to think about race as a fundamental principle of social organization in United States. From there we could discover how race could shape class categories as well as be shaped by them, and also how race was inextricably bound up with other axes of stratification and difference such as gender and sexuality.”

(p. 304, Omi and Winant, “Conclusion: Racial Formation Rules: Continuity, Instability, and Change.” In *Racial Formation in the Twenty First Century*, ed. by Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido. Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 2012.)

This theory was first proposed by Professors Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their book *Racial Formation in the United States* in 1986.

One example of a racial project is [slavery](#). Many White persons conceptualized Black people as inferior beings, which helped to justify relegating Blacks to the lowest level of society and treating them like animals. Social structures such as laws and policies relied on definitions of blacks as inferior to maintain and enforce the racial project of slavery. For example, the U.S. Constitution classified Blacks as three-fifths human. Similarly, White supremacist ideology helped to justify oppressive treatment of native people as well as discriminatory behaviors toward immigrant groups who were not White. This imposed meaning system led to laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In contrast, the racial project of abolition defined Blacks as human beings and demanded that they receive equal treatment in society. As these examples imply, racial projects can either reinforce or resist dominant representations of race and therefore develop and enact racist or antiracist social structures.

As racial projects develop and institutionalize various racial policies and practices, they can clash with one another and prompt new ones. Due to various racial projects, including slavery and abolition, the major racial project known as the Civil Rights movement arose in the 1960s. This

movement facilitated changes in representations of race that altered social structures such as employment laws and educational policies. It also precipitated backlash, resulting in racial projects such as antiimmigration laws.

According to Omi and Winant, numerous racial projects, of varying sizes and consequences, have existed and currently occur in U.S. society at macro- and microlevels of social relations. The macrolevel encompasses social structures such as the government, the media, and businesses. At this level, racial projects connect with economic, political, and cultural conflicts about dominant and nondominant representations of race to form social structures such as affirmative action programs. The microlevel encompasses everyday experiences. At this level, racial projects facilitate forming and transforming individual identities based on racial meanings, and they can influence how individuals interact with one another based on their understandings of race. The two levels are dynamic and reciprocal. For example, macrolevel policies or norms that support or restrict racial discrimination influence individuals' everyday experiences, attitudes, perceptions (of self and others), and behaviors, and vice versa.

To summarize, racial formation theory depicts race as a sociopolitical phenomenon that is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed at macro- and microlevels based on power dynamics. This perspective can contribute to communication theory and practice because it provides a framework for analyzing how communication forms and transforms dominant and nondominant meanings of race. Therefore, it shows promise for how to use communication to effect change related to racial issues in the United States.

Brenda J. Allen

See also [Critical Race Theory](#) ; [Critical Theory](#) ; [Marxist Theory](#) ; [Social Construction of Reality](#) ; [Whiteness Theory](#)

Further Readings

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SECTION THREE

Racial Formation [*Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*](#). Ed. Richard T. Schaefer. Vol. 3. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008. p1102-1105. Copyright: COPYRIGHT 2008 SAGE Publications, Inc.

Racial Formation - II

In the [United States](#), [race](#) and racial categories have long been at the focus of numerous social, academic, and political debates. Historically, race was studied through the paradigm of biology; physiological differences (color, hair, and bone) were the basis for racial categorization. This biological grounding of racial difference gave way to three new conceptualizations of racial difference in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, one based on the concept of [ethnicity](#), the second on class, and the third on the concept of nation.

During the 1970s and 1980s, issues of class, country, and [multiculturalism](#) became highly contested terrains. In response to these socio-politico-economic trends, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* argued that all of these trends reduced race to ethnicity, class, or nation. These reductionistic models became proxies for race, but race as an analytically distinct category was ignored, according to Omi and Winant.

Against these dominant models, Omi and Winant put forth their theory of racial formation: that race was not a by-product of some other category but, rather, a sociohistorical process, both structural and representative, by which racial categories are formed, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed. By recognizing the racial dimension to social structures (macrolevel) and the meanings that racial groups (microlevel) take on within those structures, Omi and Winant offer a theory of race as a point of struggle and contestation analytically distinct and irreducible to ethnicity, class, and nation. The authors consider race as a social construct, unstable and constantly transforming because of historical pressure and political struggle. Understanding true dynamics and ramification of race is particularly important in the United States where the concept has varied greatly over time without ever leaving the center stage. This entry looks at previous theories of race and discusses the creation of racial formation theory.

Critique of Prevailing Theories

Omi and Winant review and analyze three perspectives on [race relations](#) within the United States: ethnicity theory, class-based theory, and nation-based theory. They argue that all three of these theoretical approaches depend on one another to capture the nuances of racial dynamics and fail to emphasize the autonomous nature of race within social, political, and cultural spheres.

Ethnicity Theory

Starting out as a means to destabilize the prevalent biologically based racial arguments made at the beginning of the 20th century, the theory of ethnicity suggested that race was a social category. Ethnicity was determined by an individual's [culture](#) and heritage and was used to categorize people into various [ethnic groups](#). Beginning as a challenge to the status quo of racial theory, ethnicity theory came to represent the commonsense perspective on race within the U.S. cultural and social context.

By the 1960s and 1970s, ethnicity theory symbolized the conservative model that measured all ethnic groups in relation to White ethnic groups, that is, Irish, Germans, [Jews](#), and Poles. Omi and Winant argue that this conflation neglects the significance of race in shaping ethnic [minorities'](#) experiences of racist institutions and social structures. When a given minority fails to climb the [social mobility](#) ladder, Omi and Winant said, people look to the values of the ethnic minority group for an explanation rather than giving more scrutiny to the unequal and racist organizing institutional structures: government, [education](#) system, and the [labor](#) force.

Class-Based Theory

Principally explaining racial differences via their relation to economic processes, class-based theory, as Omi and Winant discuss it, is broken into three approaches: market relations approach, stratification theory, and class conflict theory. The market relations approach assumes that if there were no interference with the economic market, racial [discrimination](#) would not exist. When the market becomes unstable because of the irrationality of [prejudice](#), however, exclusive practices that favor specific networks of people or the state's interference produce racial differences.

Stratification theory places more emphasis on the unequal distribution of economic and noneconomic resources. In this theoretical approach, political dynamics [play](#) a more central role in explaining the lack of social mobility that racial minority groups experience. Class conflict theory is rooted in the Marxist tradition and posits that racial groups are nestled within dominant and crucial existing class relations, and racial discrimination is an outcome of the overarching goal of maximizing profits, expressed, for example, in the White laborer's efforts to minimize the competition from underpaid minority workers.

Omi and Winant criticized all three of these class-based theoretical approaches for failing to account for race as not merely an outcome from economic exchanges, processes, or markets but, rather, as a determining force in economic and class relationships.

Nation-Based Theory

Finally, nation-based theory is primarily concerned with exploring colonialism as the producing force for modern racial dynamics in the United States. Pan-Africanism, Black Nationalism (or cultural nationalism), the nation within a Marxist paradigm, and internal colonialism are all tenets Omi and Winant identify within this perspective. They analyze this general approach for its failure to connect the internally colonized racial nations that exist within the United States. Of the three theoretical approaches to racial theory, however, Omi and Winant regard the nation-based theory as being the most helpful in establishing the micro- and macro-interrelation of race and racial categories that informs their own theory of racial formation.

Omi and Winant's Theory

In the theory of racial formation, race is treated as an organizing principle or a classification for grouping individuals. At the microlevel, race forms [identity](#) through meanings and awareness of personal practices. At the macrolevel, race represents collective action across individuals who share economical, political, cultural, or ideological commonalities. Through this process, racial categories are created, altered, destroyed, and transformed. In everyday life, these two levels are

constantly intertwined, affect each other, and form [social movements](#). Racial discrimination, for example, may occur at the macrolevel, where institutional practices deny access of subordinate groups or people, but the consequences are at the microlevel, where the experiences and identities are affected.

According to this theory, such interactions are supported by the racial state, the institution of government that created laws, court decisions, and policies to determine the course of racial relations. Although the racial state can be seen as a good mediator between conflicting interests, it also controls those in a subordinate position through measures in education, law enforcement, and public and economic policies.

Historically, the category of "Black" was derived from consolidating African identities related to [slavery](#). As a result, a color line was established and maintained where being White was formed for such initial terms as *Christian*, *English*, and *free*. This category of White was challenged in the 19th century when non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants started arriving in large numbers. The Irish and Jews were among the "non-[Whites](#)" who met resistance until they were allowed to assimilate after the Civil War. For these non-Whites, class struggles against other racial minorities were the way to validate their sense of belonging with Whites. Omi and Winant provide an example of the Irish in California, who actively engaged in anti-Chinese assaults when organizing unions.

Once the racial state establishes racial hegemony—the dominance of one group over other groups typically through laws—a popular movement is built to oppose those laws, Omi and Winant thought. If the movement gains support, then the state reacts by absorbing, slighting, or inhibiting the movement. The state's response, through the aforementioned patterns of conflict or accommodation, leads to a compromise and reshaping of the racial hegemony to appease the movement. This process of reshaping racial hegemony results in racial formation.

Omi and Winant suggest that the most prominent example of racial formation is the [Civil Rights](#) Movement. The nonviolent protest against racial hegemony by the Black community grew large enough to gain massive mobilization across the country, and the racial state responded with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which gave legal recognition to demands made by the movement (racial formation). Some have argued, however, that such re-articulation occurred without making any substantial changes in the actual conditions of racial minorities.

By the 1970s, Omi and Winant note that division along economic and political lines and the vast amount of diversity brought on after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 weakened the strength of the movement, and a unified representation for racial minorities in politics disappeared. Such a symbolic response led to so-called color-blind policies during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, when race was once again reduced to epiphenomenal status.

In the early 1980s, the state of Louisiana successfully upheld a state law prescribing that anyone with at least one-thirty-second "Negro blood" is Black by pointing out that racial classification is necessary. This decision prevented Susie Guillory Phipps from changing her racial classification of Black on her birth certificate to White. This case shows how the racial state establishes racial hegemony and then screens individuals based on predefined criteria.

Assuming that race is neither biological nor an illusion, racial formation provides the means to understand a process that creates and manipulates sociohistorical designations of race. Race does

not simply organize individuals into groups, but it is interpreted, represented, and explained under various contexts, and these activities lead to the ways in which resources are reorganized and redistributed.

Kiljoong Kim and Casey Oberlin

See also [Black Nationalism](#) ; [Color Line](#) ; [Declining Significance of Race, The](#) ; [Irish Americans](#) ; [Marxism and Racism](#) ; [Race](#) ; [Race, Social Construction of](#) ; [Racial Identity](#) ; [Racial Identity Development](#)

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SECTION FOUR

Racial Formations [*Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*](#). Ed. John Hartwell Moore. Vol. 2. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. p459-461. Copyright: COPYRIGHT 2009 Macmillan Reference USA, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning

Racial Formations - III

Racial formations are social and historical processes by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed. They are also the product of state practices and policies. Michael Omi and Howard Winant outline a theory of racial formations in *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (1994). They note that "racial formation is a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized" (pp. 55–56). Rejecting a nation-based theory of [race](#), Omi and Winant argue that a global perspective on racial formation is essential to understanding all the elements of racial oppression. In their theory of racial formation in the post-civil rights United States, which Winant further elaborates in *The World Is a Ghetto* (2001), Omi and Winant further argue that "colonialism in the age of capitalism differed from previous imperial systems in that it came to encompass the entire world... . Racial groups are the outcome of relationships that are global and epochal in character" (p. 37). They identify inequality, political disenfranchisement, territorial and institutional [segregation](#), and cultural domination as the central elements of racial oppression and thus, racial formations.

EARLY HISTORY OF RACIAL FORMATIONS

During the period of European colonialism, the territorial consolidation of the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, parts of Asia, and the South Pacific and their control by a minority of European nations (Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Holland) were the product of state practices such as extermination, enslavement, forced [assimilation](#), segregation, and [discrimination](#). These practices were part of the racial formation process. Europeans and their descendants established legal and political structures in the colonies and settler nations that racialized non-Europeans and subordinated them. State-sanctioned [racism](#), including diverse practices such as legal statutes, municipal ordinances, private regulations, federal [censuses](#), police practices, and mob violence, were used to establish and enforce white supremacy and racial hierarchies in multiethnic nations.

Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778), a Swedish botanist, produced the first modern [classification](#) of human populations in 1735. Linnaeus, the founder of scientific taxonomy, divided the genus *Homo* into four racial types: Eurapaeus, Americanus, Asiaticus, and Africanus. During this period the dominant view was monogenesis—the view that all humans were the descendants of a common original ancestor. Johann Blumenbach (1752–1840), a German professor of medicine, became the most influential of the scientists who classified human populations. Between 1770 and 1781

Blumenbach proposed the division of humans into four and later five "varieties" that represented the world's major regions: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay.

Blumenbach introduced "Caucasian" into the classification scheme to describe a variety of humankind—the Georgian—that had originated on the southern slopes of Mount Caucasus. He considered women from the Caucasus region in Russia to be the most beautiful of all Europeans, so he chose them to represent the European ideal type, and all other human groups were a departure and degeneration from this ideal. These racial typologies were ranked and were not considered equal in aesthetic beauty, intelligence, temperament, or morality. The racial typologies Blumenbach created reflected a belief in European supremacy, legitimated racialized [slavery](#), and the subordination of groups of people based upon their physical and cultural differences. These racial classification schemes linked physical traits such as eye color, [skin color](#), hair texture, nose shape, and mouth size to intellectual capacities, cultural traits, and moral temperaments. To formulate these classification schemes Blumenbach and other scientists relied primarily on the written observations and descriptions of "ordinary" men who earned their living as slave traders, slave owners, merchants, or others in dominant positions over peoples whom they considered "savages."

Blumenbach and his contemporaries studying the varieties of the human race laid the foundation for the idea that distinct races existed and that they were inherently unequal. Following the 1770s historians begin to see a general shift in thought from the universal, that is what nations and people shared in common, to an interest in the particular, on what made some races "special" and unique.

RACIAL FORMATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

How did the belief get established in the United States that Anglo Saxons were racially superior to other groups, and thus that it was their "destiny" to racially and culturally dominate all other groups in what became the United States? American historian Reginald Horsman identifies the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century as a crucial moment in the development of racial Anglo-Saxon superiority. He argues that these two decades witnessed the growth of a European romantic movement that shifted the emphasis from "a continuity of institutions to the continuity of innate racial strengths" (1981, p. 25). Horsman notes:

in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Englishmen and [Americans](#) increasingly compared Anglo-Saxon people to others and concluded that blood, not environment or accident, had led to their success. England and America had separated their institutions, but both countries were surging forward to positions of unprecedented power and prosperity. It was now argued that the explanation lay not in the institutions but in the innate characteristics of the race. (p. 63)

Europeans established and employed racial classification systems to establish their control over the people whom they conquered, enslaved, and colonized. By the eighteenth century, racial classification systems were firmly established and economic, political, and social resources were distributed along racial and ethnic lines. Race was firmly established as a "legal" identity, and the state regulated all aspects of an individual's life. In nations such as the United States and South Africa, one's racial classification determined where one could reside and attend school, whom one could marry, whether one could hold elected office, and what occupations were suitable. In other

words, all aspects of one's economic, intimate, social, and political life were structured along racial lines.

People who were classified as "white" were granted citizenship rights, property rights, immigration rights, residence rights, the freedom to control their labor, religious freedom, and the ability to freely travel. In the United States, European Americans established laws and state policies that effectively denied citizenship rights to indigenous Americans, individuals of multiracial heritage, and individuals of visible or known African and/or Asian ancestry. For example, [Native Americans](#) were not citizens of the United States until 1924 and were classified by the U.S. government as "wards of the government and citizens," thus denying them political autonomy and subordinating them to European Americans. Between 1800 and 1858 the U.S. Congress passed a series of laws giving the president and commissioner of Indian affairs absolute powers. Indians were forbidden to sell, rent, or lease reservation lands or to sell minerals, timber, fish, cattle, or agricultural products without the prior consent of the government.

CHANGES IN U.S. RACE CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES

Racial classification schemes have been central to racial formations, and they produced political constituencies and racial inequalities reflecting unstable power relations. For example, in the United States racial categories have been added, removed, revised, and altered during the past 300 years in response to demographic changes, immigration, political mobilization, technologies, cultural shifts, and economic interests.

The U.S. government uses census figures to allocate some resources to members of racialized groups. In the past it distributed citizenship rights, land rights, immigration quotes and other political rights exclusively to Europeans and European-Americans while denying people of African, Indigenous/American Indian, and Asian ancestry the same rights. Consequently, there have always been political and economic stakes involved in the criteria for inclusion and exclusion in specific racial and ethnic minority categories. Racial classification schemes are one dimension of racial projects that reconstitute "racial" groups. Although they are socially produced, they continue to have real material, social, and economic consequences for members of racialized groups.

The United States is unique from all other nations in the Americas in its historical enforcement of what has become known as the "one-drop rule," in which a person of multiracial ancestry who had known or visible African ancestry is legally classified as "black" regardless of appearance, cultural training, and self-identification. The one-drop rule has been consistently upheld by state and federal courts. In states such as Louisiana, there were so many people of African ancestry socially classified and living as "white" that "race clerks" were hired to strictly enforce the one-drop rule.

In 1918, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that at least three-fourths of all native blacks were racially mixed, and it predicted that pure blacks would disappear. Consequently, after 1920 the mulatto category was removed from the census and the U.S. government made no further attempt to systematically count the number of visible mulattos in the United States, partly because so many persons with some black ancestry appeared white. Social scientists have documented the inconsistencies in the logic employed by the census and the disparity between social-cultural and scientific definitions of race. By 1960 the practice of self-identification by race replaced the earlier practice in which the census taker assigned race. Beginning in 1960 the head

of household indicated the race of all of its members. This change in policy did not introduce any noticeable changes in the number of blacks in the U.S. [population](#).

In 1970 the Hispanic category was added to the census for the first time. And in 1980, for the first time, a question on ancestry was included in the census. In response to increased political mobilization by members of interracial or multiracial families, the United States added the category "multiracial" to the 2000 census. In the following year the United Kingdom also added a "mixed race" category to its 2001 census. These changes in the official census reflect political struggles over the boundaries between and within racial groups, and they produce new racial formations in the post-civil rights United States. In the late twentieth century, as state-sanctioned racial inequality such as Jim Crow segregation in the United States and apartheid in South Africa were dismantled, nations established a range of public policies designed to remedy past group-based discrimination. These policies have taken various forms, such as [affirmative action](#) in the United States and positive discrimination in the United Kingdom. Although nation-states have dismantled de jure (legal) racial segregation and formally criminalized discrimination against members of racial and ethnic [minorities](#), racial status continues to over-determine an individual's life chances and access to resources in multiracial societies.

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SECTION FIVE

Implicit Racism [Encyclopedia of Race and Racism](#), Ed. John Hartwell Moore. Vol. 2. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. p156-157. Copyright: COPYRIGHT 2009 Macmillan Reference USA, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning

Implicit Racism

Situated within the discussion of [racism](#) in the [United States](#) and elsewhere, particularly in relation to the study of [social psychology](#), the term *implicit racism* is often erroneously used in oppositional comparison to explicit racism. Explicit racism is overt and often intentional, for it is practiced by individuals and institutions that openly embrace racial [discrimination](#) and hold prejudicial attitudes toward racially defined groups, which they assume to be scientifically identified through [genetics](#). Implicit racism, however, is not the opposite of explicit racism but a different, yet no less harmful, form of racism. Implicit racism, broadly defined, refers to an individual's utilization of [unconscious](#) biases when making judgments about people from different racial and ethnic groups.

According to a number of observers, implicit racism is an automatic negative reaction to someone of a different [race](#) or [ethnicity](#) than one's own. Underlying and unconscious racist attitudes are brought forth when a person is faced with race-related triggers, including preconceived phenotypic differences or assumed cultural or environmental associations. Since this type of racism lies beyond the awareness of the person displaying the attitudes or actions, it is quite possible for someone to report that they hold few, if any, overt racist ideologies and yet display implicit racism in their everyday interactions with people of different racial groups. In particular, this can occur among [whites](#) when they are confronted by others not perceived as white. As discussed by the sociologist Joe Feagin, examples of everyday racism can include such things as being treated differently when exchanging money at cash registers, being seated at bad tables in

restaurants, or being assigned undesirable rooms when checking into hotels. Each of these

What is Aversive Racism?

Aversive racism is racist discrimination that works primarily at the individual level (but which may also be manifest, aggregatively, at the societal level) where, in contrast to traditional forms of racism, there is an **aversion** to associating with the target of the discrimination, the **racial Other**, but the perpetrator all the while claiming that he/she is not a racist and in fact firmly believes in such progressive values as: all persons are created equal; racist discrimination is inherently wrong; racial/ethnic diversity everywhere should be the natural state of affairs; and so on. While this dissonance between belief and actual behavior may, at first, appear to be a case of nothing less than blatant hypocrisy, it is not really so because the belief may be quite genuine given the subjection from infancy to adulthood to the socializational imperatives of a socio-cultural-political environment that *ostensibly* (repeat, ostensibly) champions these values, as in the case of Western capitalist democracies. What, then, is the source of this dissonance, which for the racial Other can be just as injurious as dominative racism? To put it very concisely: the historically determined persistence of institutional racism against the backdrop of a legislative environment that attempts to prohibit it.

A Few Examples of Aversive Racism

- Not objecting to attending a multiracially diverse educational institution, yet always avoiding interacting with the racial other (in the classroom, in the cafeteria, in the dorms, in hallways, on commuter busses, etc.).
- Avoiding eye-contact while speaking to the racial other in the workplace, and other similar interpersonal behaviors.
- Supporting the prohibition of racist discrimination in housing while all the while—in practice—accepting, and participating in residential segregation (a pervasive phenomenon, for example, in United States).
- Rationalizing racially discriminatory conduct in employment *in terms other than obvious racism*.
- Subjecting the racial other to different and hence debilitating standards of evaluation in places where evaluations are a norm (e.g. for purposes of promotions in the workplace, when grading coursework in educational settings, when determining pay rates, and so on).

Aversive racists

genuinely believe in racial equality and justice but are unwilling to work to abandon their subconscious racist behavior because of growing up in a society that continues to be plagued by *institutional racism*.



scenarios is a possible result of the implementation of implicit racism.

Project Implicit is a large and somewhat controversial psychological study that was designed as a demonstration project at Yale University in 1998 and later taken over by researchers from Harvard University, University of Virginia, and University of Washington. The study utilizes Internet testing as a primary research tool for subject recruitment and data gathering. The goal of the Implicit Association Test is to explore the "unconscious roots of thinking and feeling" in the contexts of particular words and pictures associated with gender, **sexuality**, age, weight, race, and other areas. In reference to implicit racism, it explores reactions to factors such as skin tone, ethnic groups, and race. The goal of these tests is to gauge participants' implicit preference for one group in comparison to another through responses to representative stimuli.

An average of 15,000 tests per week have been completed in the seven years Project Implicit has been gathering data via the Internet, for a total of 4.5 million tests administered and over 200 investigations published. Researchers have uncovered four main results from this large data set: People are unaware of their implicit biases, biases are pervasive, implicit biases predict behavior, and people differ in their levels of implicit bias. Specific to implicit racism, people harbor negative associations in reference to particular racial groups while reporting that they hold no such biases,

resulting in statistically significant racial preferences such as 75 to 80 percent of white and Asian Americans showing an implicit racial preference for whites over [African Americans](#). Individuals with higher levels of implicit racial [prejudice](#) engage in acts of discrimination including lower levels of friendliness, lack of racial inclusion, and lower evaluations of performance in the workplace.

Implicit racism has taken hold in our everyday lives, where decisions about individuals and groups continue to be based on racial identifications dictated by perceived clues pertaining to racial group membership. These split-second decisions are based upon non-definitive sensorial associations including, but not limited to, [skin color](#), speech patterns, hair texture, and clothing style. In this day and age of many professing color-blind ideologies, there is strong evidence to show that a large portion of the population, albeit subconsciously, continues to discriminate according to race. Lines are drawn between individuals based on difference, in particular those not perceived as fitting into a category of white. As a result, limitations are placed on [minorities](#) in a myriad of societal arenas resulting in everyday racism, relatively low possibilities for interracial friendship formation, and inadequate access to and mobility within housing, [education](#), and jobs.

SEE ALSO [Cultural Racism](#) ; [Racial Hierarchy](#).

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SECTION SIX

Marxism and Racism *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*. Ed. Richard T. Schaefer. Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008. p877-878. Copyright: COPYRIGHT 2008 SAGE Publications, Inc.

Marxism and Racism

Marxists argue that it is impossible to discuss [racism](#) without also considering the economic context in which that racism exists. In the [United States](#), that means [capitalism](#) and its accompanying class [exploitation](#). Racial oppression, it is argued, has always been an integral part of U.S. economic and political history. That being said, there are at least two general approaches taken by Marxists who study racism. The first, *traditional Marxism*, sees class as the fundamental or primary source of oppression, with racism being an important but secondary issue. The second approach, *race-sensitive Marxism*, argues that both race and class are primary sources of oppression. What follows is an outline of the major points within each of the two approaches.

Traditional Marxism

Traditional Marxists argue that the class oppression that is part of capitalism affects both White workers and workers of color. While all workers are exploited by capitalists, they argue, workers of color are "super-exploited." In other words, while capitalists make profits from the [labor](#) of White workers, they make larger profits from workers of color due to race-segregated labor markets and unequal pay for the same work. The degree of exploitation of workers of color and White workers is viewed as a difference in degree rather than a difference in kind.

In this view, people of color are also seen as part of the "reserve labor force" that is necessary to the smooth functioning of capitalism. In periods of economic expansion when more workers are needed (i.e., World War II), people of color are pulled into jobs they can't usually obtain. During periods of contraction, they are pushed out of these jobs.

It is in the interests of the [working class](#) to become class conscious, say traditional Marxists. This means that workers of all races and cultures will understand that their common class interests (exploitation by capitalists) are more important than any differences they may have in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, or culture. It is in the interests of the capitalists, on the other hand, to keep the working class divided.

Racism is one of the ways that the working class remains divided. The ideological and attitudinal aspect of racism ([stereotypes](#), [prejudice](#), political beliefs) make workers believe that workers of other races, rather than capitalists, are their enemies. [Whites](#) and people of color will fight each other rather than uniting against the capitalists. This is sometimes called "false consciousness." Sometimes, capitalists purposely try to use race to divide workers, such as by using Blacks as strikebreakers in a predominantly White workplace. Most of the time, however, the free-floating culture of racism causes workers to think in racial rather than class terms. Traditional Marxists tend to be suspicious of Nationalist movements among people of color (e.g., Black Power during the 1960s and 1970s), since this could further divide the working class.

In analyzing social phenomena like racism, traditional Marxists always ask the question "Who wins and who loses?" White capitalists clearly benefit from racism, and workers of color clearly lose out.

As for White workers, Marxists say that they lose more than they gain from racism. Although they have short-term benefits (e.g., better housing, jobs, pay, [education](#)), they are ultimately hurt by their continual exploitation by the capitalists. They would be better off uniting with workers of color against the capitalists.

Capitalists of color, according to traditional Marxists, also lose more than they gain. Although they can make profits off the labor of workers of any race, their businesses are often small and marginal, and they are at the mercy of the more powerful White capitalists. However, traditional Marxists are more interested in organizing workers of color than in building a strong business class among people of color.

The expectation of traditional Marxists is that once capitalism is replaced by [socialism](#), the material base of racism is removed. All that remains is to address some of the residual attitudes, cultural stereotypes, and behavior patterns that no longer fit the new economic conditions.

Race-Sensitive Marxism

The militant [social movements](#) in the Black and Latino communities during the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to a more race-sensitive Marxism, which argued that both race and class are fundamental sources of oppression. While people in these movements would agree with much of traditional Marxism, they would argue that racial oppression has a life of its own that goes beyond issues of class.

The prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behavior of White workers are seen as more than just false consciousness. White workers are seen to gain real material benefits from being the privileged group in society. While they are still exploited by White capitalists, they also share some of their racial privilege in terms of better jobs, higher social status, and more political power than workers of color. Prejudice and stereotypes are seen as part of a racist ideology that justifies and protects White privilege.

This also has implications for postcapitalist society, since White workers would still have real advantages over workers of color. Their better education, for example, means that they would be more likely than workers of color to qualify for better jobs, even in a socialist society. Creating racial [equality](#) in a socialist society would be a long-term process that involves more than just changing residual prejudiced attitudes.

Several all-Black political organizations have articulated race-sensitive Marxism. The Black Workers Congress had some success in organizing Black autoworkers in Detroit in the 1970s by seeing both the companies and the liberal, predominantly White United Auto Workers Union as their enemies. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense focused on organizing poor Black communities around issues of police brutality and political oppression in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although both groups were Black, they were willing to work in coalition with White Marxists who supported their principles.

Race-sensitive Marxists are also concerned about the [globalization](#) of capitalism. Immigrants of color come to the United States from poor countries in search of jobs and compete with native-born workers of color for low-paying jobs. This, in turn, has caused animosity between White workers and immigrants as well as between native-born workers of color and immigrant workers of the same race. In the view of race-sensitive Marxists, the predominantly White capitalists continue to make profits from the labor of native-born and immigrant workers of all races.

Fred L. Pincus

See also [Black Nationalism](#) ; [Black Panther Party](#) ; [Chicano Movement](#) ; [Color Line](#) ; [Privilege](#) ; [Social Mobility](#)

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