

PHI 1500: Major Issues in Philosophy

Session 26

December 7th, 2015



Race & Gender: (de Beauvoir &) Mills

➤ de Beauvoir points out **similarities between gender inequality & racial inequality.**

Both genders & races are

- **often segregated into different domains that are meant to be “separate but equal,”**
 - **...but *de facto* are *not equal* at all.**

Both women & racial minorities are:

- **often forced to ‘stay in their place’**
 - e.g., the home, motherhood, particular jobs, particular neighborhoods...
- **often forced into inferior positions, and then told that they cannot advance *because* they are inferior.**

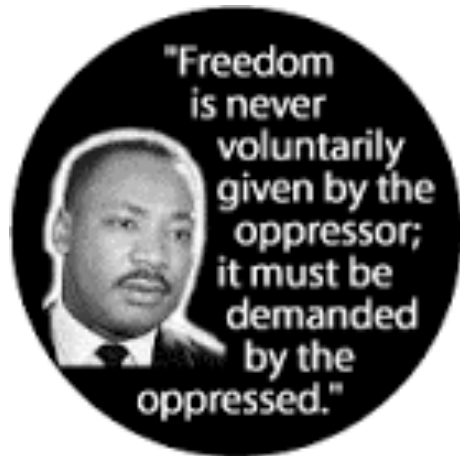


“As George Bernard Shaw puts it...

- “The American white relegates the black the rank of shoeshine boy;
- ...and he concludes from this that the black good for nothing but shining shoes.” (6)



- “If a caste is kept in a state of inferiority, no doubt it remains inferior;
- but liberty can break the circle.
 - Let the Negroes vote and they become worthy of having the vote;
 - let woman be given responsibilities and she is able to assume them.



» The fact is that **oppressors cannot be expected to make a move of gratuitous generosity;**

- but at one time the revolt of the oppressed, at another time even the very evolution of the privileged caste itself, creates new situations;

...men have been led...to give partial emancipation to women:

- **it remains only for women to continue their ascent, & the successes they are obtaining are an encouragement for them to do so.**
 - It seems almost certain that sooner or later they will arrive at complete economic and social equality,
 - which will bring about an inner metamorphosis.” (12)

de Beauvoir asks,

- “...is it enough to change laws, institutions, customs, public opinion, & the whole social context, for men and women to become truly equal?”

» *‘Women will always be women,’ say the skeptics.*” (11)

- e.g., some people think that women’s biological burdens, like child-bearing & hormone-driven mood swings, will always prevent them from exercising all the freedom that men have.

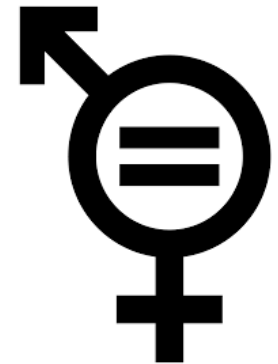
➤ **de Beauvoir disagrees:**

- she thinks these things can be overcome by modifying social customs like imbalanced parenting duties.



She thinks a **gender revolution must not only address:**

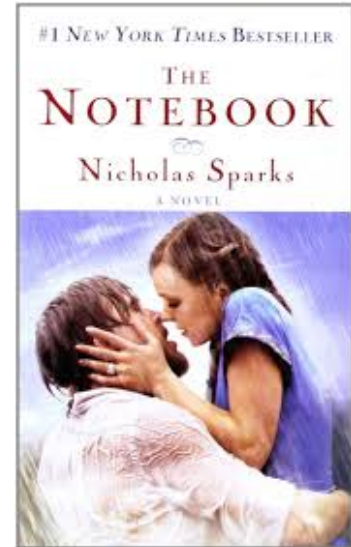
- **the *material conditions* that keep women subordinated,**
 - i.e., facts about how resources (like money, jobs, property) are distributed in a society,
- **...but also *the way members of each gender see and think about each other & their own social roles.***



In response to those who think that gender equality will threaten romance & sensuality, de Beauvoir writes:



- **“It is *nonsense* to assert that revelry, vice, ecstasy, passion, would become impossible if man & woman were equal in concrete matters.” (13)**
 - “To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her;
 - let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less to exist for him also: mutually recognizing each other as subject”. (13)
 - “The reciprocity of their relations will *not* do away with the miracles – desire, possession, love, dream, adventure – worked by the division of human beings into two separate categories;
 - and the words that move us – *giving, conquering, uniting* – will not lose their meaning.” (13)



- **“...when we abolish the slavery of half of humanity,
 - » ...then the ‘division’ of humanity will reveal its genuine significance & the human couple will find its true form.” (13)**

- Now let's talk about race – what *is* race, anyway?

Charles W. Mills: Jamaican-born philosopher focused on social/political philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of race



- His article “‘But What are You *Really?*’: The Metaphysics of Race” **explains an array of views that theorists have given to explain what race is.**
 - Mills defends a *social constructivist* position on race,
 - but points out that the complexity of the social construction of race produces ‘problem cases’ which don’t fit neatly into any single racial group.
- But first, he’ll address the more basic questions of **why it is useful to talk about race**, and **why we ought to try to understand it better.**
 - “Race has not traditionally seen as an interesting or worthy subject of investigation for white Western philosophers...”
 - The modern world has been profoundly affected by race for several centuries...
 - In a sense, then, this neglect by Western philosophy has been an evasion.
 - **That race *should* be irrelevant is certainly an attractive ideal, but when it has *not* been irrelevant, it is *absurd* to proceed as if it had been.” (41)**

To be crystal clear,

- **talking about race *doesn't* automatically make someone a racist.**
 - One can discuss racial groupings without asserting that any racial group deserves to be oppressed or generally mistreated.
- On the other hand, **avoiding talk of race and adopting a so-called 'colorblind' look at human society can actually *perpetuate* racism.**
 - Correcting structural racism requires directing our attention to the ways that people are currently disadvantaged because of their race.
 - Only then can we develop strategies to compensate for a history of racism and truly level the playing field.
 - **video:** bit.ly/1ljsrrV



deray mckesson
@deray

I continue to talk about race because race continues to impact my life & the lives of those who look like me.

I'm not the enemy, racism is.

Mills begins with a *thought experiment*, involving a hypothetical system of “quace”:

- “Imagine a nation in which at birth, or at naturalization, all citizens are assigned a code — Q_1 , or Q_2 , or Q_3 —that indicates their "quacial" membership.
 - This code is entered on birth certificates, naturalization papers, passports, state I.D.s, driver's licenses, and the like.
 - So all citizens have a quace. But the assignment is done *randomly*.
 - *There is no connection between quace and an individual's morphology (skin, hair, facial features) or genealogy.*
 - » In other words, we could not tell a person's actual or likely quacial membership just by looking at him or her,
 - » and parents of a given quace would not automatically have children of the same quace.
 - *Nor is there any correlation between quace and historical patterns of exploitation and systemic discrimination.*
 - » [E.g., no quacial group is structurally oppressed in this society]
 - The designation comes down from some long-forgotten practice and is maintained by cultural momentum.

Mills explains that **in this scenario**,

- “quace has no significance to the lives of people in that society...any more than our...passport number” indicates anything about our genealogy or current identity?⁸

Mills says that the insignificance of *quacial* identity is remarkable in its “sharp contrast with declarations of *racial* membership,

- which in the United States and many other countries have historically had deeper reverberations and significances.”



➤ ***Why is it that race matters in the U.S.?***

- Is it *because racial identity, unlike quace, is assigned non-randomly?*
- Or is it *because racial identity, unlike quace, carries reference to histories of oppression (inequalities in “political power, economic wealth, ‘and’ cultural influence”)?*

Mills will argue that race matters *not* because of the grounds on which racial identities are assigned,

- but rather **because race has always been a hierarchical system.**

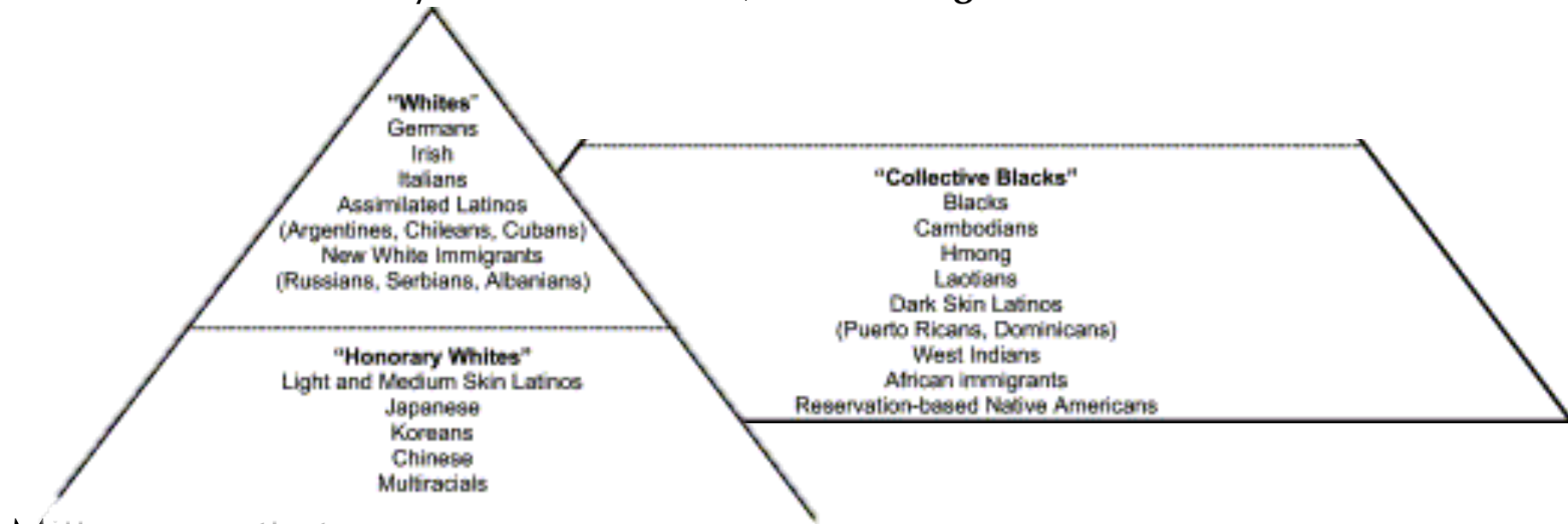
Consider two different ways that race *could* operate:

- **A horizontal system:** racial identity is based on a person's appearance/ancestry, but all racial groups share equal rights, power, resources, and treatment.
 - Mills says “Whether such a society has even actually existed seems unlikely” – racial divisions have historically been intended to demarcate a power structure.
- **A vertical system:** racial identity is arbitrarily assigned, but racial groups are stratified into a social hierarchy ($R_1 > R_2 > R_3$)
 - “The functional goal of the system is to privilege the R_1 s and to subordinate the R_2 s and R_3 s. To this end, the R_1 s are designated as the superior race.”
 - Mills explains that once such a hierarchy is in place, it will be rationalized and reinforced in people's attitudes, customs, and social policies:
 - e.g., “the R_1 s will be seen as more intelligent and of better moral character than the other races.”
 - The hierarchy will be preserved by ensuring everyone belongs to a racial category,
 - and “clear-cut, unambiguous principles would determine to which race the products of intermarriage between Rs would belong.”



Mills explains that **only in a vertical system of race**,
“by contrast with a system of quace or the horizontal racial system,

- [will] one’s racial designation will have immense significance,
- since it will indicate one’s social standing and profoundly affect one’s life.
 - And because the United States and many other nations have historically been vertical racial systems of this kind, race has significance.

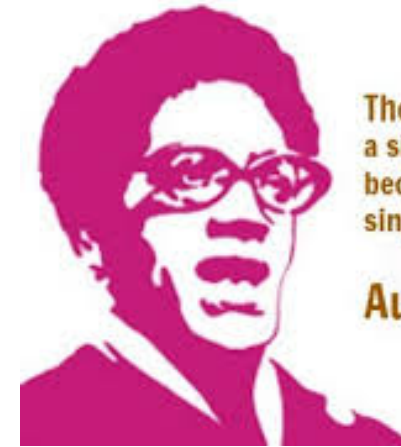


Mills argues that

- understanding that *race has always been a vertical system* “is the background against which the metaphysics of race needs to be examined”:
 - we can only really understand what race *is* once we recognize how it functions in society.

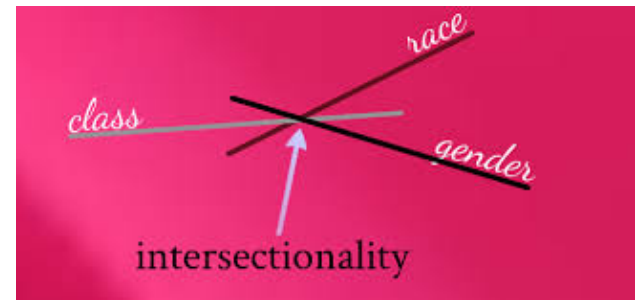
Mills clarifies that:

- **“I am not claiming that race is the only principle of social hierarchy,**
- or that racial struggle is the comprehensive key to understanding history,
- or that individual’s racial [identity] is the most important thing about them”
- **only that understanding what race means “will contribute to (though not exhaust) our understanding of social dynamics”**
 - “Other systems of domination besides race (class, gender) overlap and intersect with it.”



There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde



At any rate,

- “one’s racial category has been taken as saying a great deal about what and who one is, more fundamentally.
- **To what extent and in what ways, then, is race ‘real’,**
- **and how deep is this reality?”**

A screenshot of a census form, specifically question 9: "What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more boxes." The form lists various racial categories with checkboxes: White, Black, African Am., or Negro, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Other Asian, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, and Gu... (partially visible). The form is tilted and shows a grid for marking answers.

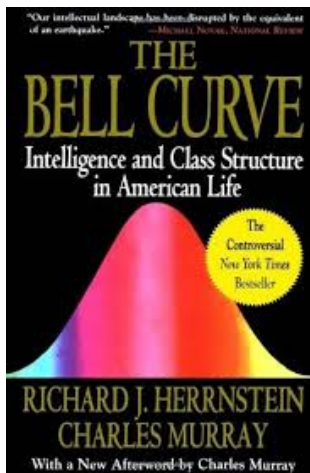
Objectivist theories say that *the existence of race is an objective fact of our world* – it exists independently of any given person’s perspective or beliefs.

Mills explains two different objectivist theories, starting with:

- **Racial realism = the belief that “it is objectively the case**
 - independent of human belief – **that there are *natural* human races;**
 - ...*For the past few hundred years, realism has been the dominant position...*
 - people have believed that there are natural biological differences among races and that these differences run deeper than mere [surface appearance] traits.”
 - i.e., most racial realists believe that natural human races are not only distinguished by appearance (skin color, hair type, facial features),
 - but also by “significant moral, intellectual, characterological, and spiritual characteristics,” determined either by genes or a racial essence.

➤ But **racial realism “runs directly against the gathering consensus of anthropological and biological research.”**

- » People in the same racial category do not all share a common stretch of genetic code that determines anything about them.
 - It’s also apparent that people classed in the same racial category are diverse in appearance and in mental traits – they clearly have no defining essence.



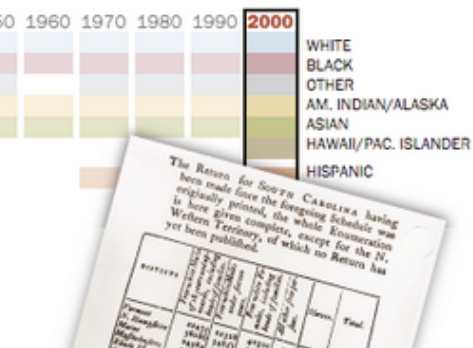
The other objectivist theory allows that racial classifications vary between cultures:

- **Racial Constructivism: race is objectively real, but instead of being a natural phenomenon, it is a social construct** (a product of a society's collective beliefs).

– On this view,

- » *“Race is not foundational: in different systems, race could have been constructed differently or indeed never have come into existence in the first place.*
- » *Race is not essentialist: the same individuals would be differently raced in different systems.*
- » *Race is not ‘metaphysical’ in the deep sense of being eternal, unchanging, necessary, part of the basic furniture of the universe.*

Census Calls Us
ative Timeline: 1790-2010



➤ **But race is a contingently deep reality that structures our particular social universe,**

- having a social objectivity and causal significance that arise out of *our* particular history.

➤ **...because people come to think of themselves as ‘raced’ ...these categories...attain a social reality.**

- Intersubjectivity creates a certain kind of objectivity.”

6. What is this person's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White
 Black, African Am., or Negro
 American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal tribe. ↕

Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian
 Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro
 Filipino Vietnamese Samoan
 Other Asian — Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on. ↕ Other Pacific Islander — Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on. ↕

Some other race — Print race. ↕



➤ **Saying that race is a social construct is *not* to deny that it is *real*.**

– Plenty of things that are socially-constructed have *very real* and *very serious* consequences for our lives:



- » nations
- » money
- » marriage
- » beauty ideals



- Racial realists often use Strawman arguments against Constructivists, like
 - *How can race be a social construct if you're telling me that I have 'white privilege'?*
- Such arguments miss the whole point of constructivism: to explain how race can be real without having a biological basis.

Anti-objectivist theories, in contrast, claim that **there are no objectively-existent things called races in our world.**

- **subjectivism:** “the view that since racial designations are arbitrary (as constructivists would agree), one can choose one’s race.”
 - Subjectivism says racial membership is arbitrary because it’s voluntary,
 - whereas constructivism says that “the arbitrariness of racial designation is rooted in a particular social history and cannot be overturned by individual fiat.”
 - Few people accept this view; the recent controversy over Rachel Dolezal is a case in point: bit.ly/1SETZCv
- **relativism:** racial designations are dependent on actual community agreements (formal decisions, not just the collection of individual beliefs)
 - On this view, “it is possible to change race through the decisions of a subcommunity of like-minded people within the larger population”
- **error theory:** there just are no races, period – people are simply mistaken in talking as if such things have either objective or subjective reality.



MY COUNTRY IS THE EARTH.
I AM A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD
WHICH CONSISTS OF ONLY
ONE RACE – THE HUMAN RACE.

Mills takes up the constructivist understanding of race as the view that best explains scientific & anthropological data, and cultural differences in racial categories.

Now, he turns to:

- ***“the question of the possible criteria for determining racial identity***
- *and what happens when these criteria conflict.*

Seven possible candidates for racial self- & other-identification may be distinguished...
[though] they usually function in conjunction with one another.

- **The categories are *bodily appearance, ancestry, self-awareness of ancestry, public awareness of ancestry, culture, experience, and self-identification.***
 - When these categories all point to a specific racial designation, $R_1/R_2/R_3$, we do not hesitate to identify the person as a particular R , nor does the person.
 - But since the United States has a nonideal racial system [one that doesn't have consistent rules for how people are racially classified], ...we may experience difficulty when the criteria conflict.
 - Moreover, the problems in any decision procedure are compounded by the fuzziness of some of the criteria...
 - There is also the question whether $R_1/R_2/R_3$ -ness is a discrete, on-off affair, or whether on occasion allowance is made for degrees of $R_1/R_2/R_3$ -ness." ¹⁷

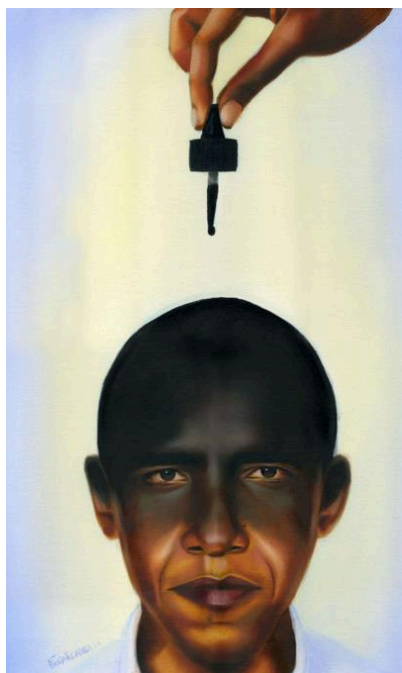
Bodily Appearance

- “...the so-called eyeball test is the criterion we all use to make summary judgments about race, since information about the other criteria is not usually immediately known to us.
 - Historically, this has been true not merely for lay but for "scientific" judgments about race also, since before the advent of genetics earnest attempts were made to ascertain racial membership on the basis of such characteristics as skin color, skull measurements, & hair texture.
- In some racial systems, however, the appearance of R-ness is neither sufficient nor necessary for actual R-ness—though it will generally be a good evidential indicator—for some people may be able to "pass."
 - (e.g., biracial celebrities like Vin Diesel and Rashida Jones are often assumed to be white)
- Appearance is then **the generally (but not always) reliable visible manifestation of a deeper essence that is taken to inhere in *ancestry*.**



Ancestry

- **In the U.S. racial system**, at least for whites and blacks, **ancestry is usually taken as both necessary and sufficient for racial membership.**
 - [That's one major reason why people won't accept Rachel Dolezal's claim to black identity.]
- (**Elsewhere**—in some Latin American countries, for example—**appearance is more important**, so that siblings of different colors may be assigned to different races despite their identical genealogy.)



- Where blacks and whites are concerned, U.S. policy has historically been to classify them with the R_2 s on the basis of **the one-drop rule** (= anyone with any black ancestry is black)
 - ...**So entrenched has this view been until recently** in national folkways and popular consciousness that it seems obvious, "natural," when in fact **it is simply the result of a conscious public policy decision.**
- ...in a tri- or multileveled racial system, such as obtains in the Caribbean & Latin America, there are formally recognized intermediate racial categories."

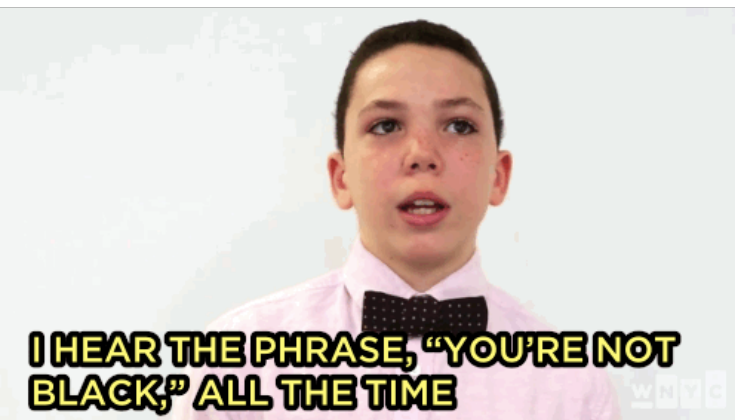
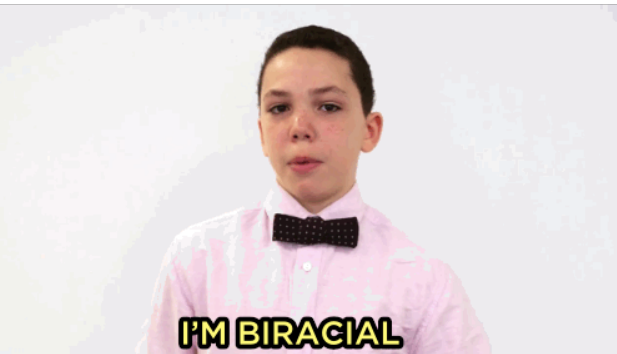
Culture

- Traditional racial theory, committed to racial realism, sees culture as an emanation of biological race, so invoking it as an additional criterion would be [redundant]...
 - If culture stems from genotype, ...[then] one's 'real' biological self is always immanent within the borrowed clothes of the alien culture, waiting to assert itself.
- **For nonrealist theories**, on the other hand, whether constructivist, relativist, or subjectivist,
 - **culture is seen as** adoptable with greater or lesser degrees of fluidity and is **detachable from biological race**,
 - **so that it may play a role in racial identification."**
 - The importance of culture as a component of racial identity is evident in the outcry against the *appropriation* of cultural elements from oppressed racial groups for the financial benefit of privileged groups.
 - **video:** bit.ly/1LWCjgc



Experience

- “Like culture, ‘**experience**’ has an **unavoidable fuzziness**, **but it is important**, for in the vertical racial systems we are considering **it is part of the core of what it is to be** (with all the metaphysical overtones of be) **a member of a particular race**.
 - Thus in the United States, we naturally think of whiteness as being associated with the experience of racial privilege and of blackness as being associated with the experience of racial oppression.



- Since criterial divergence is possible, so that **R_2 s who look like R_1 s and are not publicly identified as R_2 s will escape racism**,
 - **it may then be alleged that these R_2 s are not "really" R_2 s**, insofar as *the essence of being an R_2 is the experience of oppression as an R_2 .*
 - (This was Jelani Cobb’s main reason for denying that Rachel Dolezal is a black woman,
 - and also why people sometimes deny that white-passing biracial people are really people of color.)

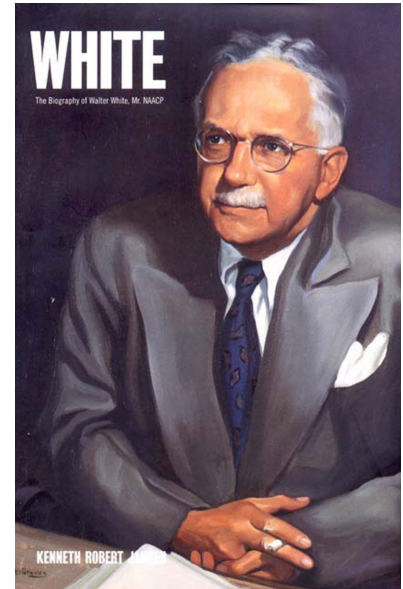
Subjective Identification

- “Finally, subjective identification—**what one sees oneself as—needs to be conceptually separated**
 - **from self-awareness of ancestry**, for one may refuse to recognize the validity of this criterion for racial membership;
 - **and from culture**, for one could still identify oneself as an R_1/R_2 while embracing R_2/R_1 culture;
 - **and finally from experience**, for one could have experiences characteristically taken to be definitive of the R_1/R_2 experience while denying that these experiences should be seen as definitive of who one is.
- As a further complication, self-awareness of ancestry is an either-or affair (either one knows or not),
 - whereas **subjective identification lends itself to degrees of variation**, in that one can weakly or strongly identify oneself as an R_1/R_2 ,
 - so that **this identification is less or more significant to one's sense of oneself and one's life projects.**
- » Philosopher Robert Gooding-Williams makes the useful distinction of ‘thin’ & “thick” senses of “black” to differentiate these varying degrees of self-identification for African-Americans.”



Mills' point is that the complexity of racial categorization leaves many open questions about what race someone belongs to if they:

- ***identify as one race, but sometimes pass as another for strategic reasons***
 - e.g. NAACP leader Walter White was socially categorized as black because he has 1/64th black ancestry, but had blond hair and blue eyes;
 - he used his ability to pass for a white man to investigate injustices against black Americans.
 - *Is he really black if he sometimes pretends otherwise?*
- ***permanently identify as the race they pass for instead of the one that matches their ancestry*** (either deliberately or by accident)
 - e.g., *is Rachel Dolezal black if she self-identifies as black but admits that her parents are white?*
- ***identify with the culture of a different race than their appearance/ancestry***
 - e.g., *is Eminem a “reverse Oreo”: white on the outside, but black on the inside?*





more problem cases about people who:

- ***use cosmetic surgery to change their appearance so they can pass for a different race than their ancestry***
 - *Did Michael Jackson become white through his skin lightening and facial reconstruction?*
- ***subvert the expectations for how people of that race treat people of other races***
 - *Are you no longer white if you don't participate in oppressing nonwhites?*
 - (Mills suggests that white people can opt out of discriminatory 'Whiteness'.)
- ***are biracial and claim a hybrid identity***
 - *Do people like Miguel have to choose which of their parent's races they identify with more closely?*
- ***try to opt out of having a race altogether***
 - *Can Raven Symone claim that she is "colorless"?*