

THEORIZING WHITENESS:
INTERROGATING RACIAL PRIVILEGE

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Theorizing Whiteness: Interrogating Racial Privilege

INTRODUCTION

Demographic projections forecast that by 2050 whites will be a statistical minority in the United States¹ (Feagin & Vera 1995). If these projections are even close whites will be a minority in California within the next 13 years. In many arenas these demographic changes are framed as "a problem" of too many of the "wrong kind" of people (e.g. Proposition 187 in California, Peter Brimelow's 1995 book Alien Nation, etc.). Issues ranging from the 1992 riots in Los Angeles to the OJ verdict to the growing movement against Affirmative Action demonstrate that in the midst of these demographic shifts, race and racial conflict are clearly on the national agenda. Public figures as widely divergent in political views as Bill Bradley and Newt Gingrich have publicly stated that race is one of the most pressing issues confronting U.S. society today. Ironically, in this period of racial upheaval, many whites still do not see themselves as racial actors. Similar to the past, racial minority groups are viewed as the "issue" or "problem" while whites themselves are left out of the picture. For the most part, this is as true on University campuses as it is in society at large.

For example, during the last several years I have taught race relations courses that are designed at least in part to fulfill the University of Michigan's race and ethnic relations requirement². These courses, like most race relations courses, historically focus exclusively on the study of various "minority groups." Often near the end of the semester, a white student in the class would express (in some variation) that he/she was "glad to have had the chance to learn about minority groups." When I'd ask in reply, "what did you learn about your own group?" The response was invariably, "What group?"

The structure and content of these courses could easily be defended on the basis that the rest of the university curriculum is "white." However, when organized in this way, these courses can become studies of "the others," of "deviations," of "racialized groups" as if whites themselves are not racialized. While the courses examine social structures, they do not explicitly examine whites; white lives are never put on the line, so to speak, never placed under study in the same way as we study the lives of the disenfranchised. White college students taking race and ethnicity courses learn about histories and cultures of various groups and/or also about institutional processes without being asked to, required to, or expected to find their own place within this racialized structure. Even though the history of relations *between* whites and racialized minority groups in the U.S. is the subject of the

course, whites are never specifically on the syllabus. We do not attempt to represent whites within a two week lecture (with the possible exception of some 'deviant' white groups such as the Irish or the Jews).

Much of the limited research on whiteness also has focused on how whites define others rather than how they define themselves. Winthrop Jordan begins his epic work, White Over Black, by stating, "this study attempts to answer a simple question: What were the attitudes of white men towards Negroes during the first two centuries of European and African settlement in what became the United States?" (Jordan 1968: vii) It is telling that there are few-to-no works that analyze how racialized "others" define whites³. Ironically this is true at the same time that most people of color in the United States would argue that they are forced to learn, if not master, dominant (or white) culture. White students and white people in general, on the other hand, are permitted if not encouraged to see themselves as individuals who defy the kinds of classifications they employ to describe other racial groups. In trying to address this challenge we are forced to confront the question, "what exactly is the substance of whiteness?" Due to the limited availability of empirical studies of whites, addressing this question proves to be quite a challenge.⁴

There has to be something to it if store clerks don't feel compelled to follow whites around in stores asking "can I help you", if whites still prefer whites as neighbors and as sons or daughters-in-law, if restaurant hosts still seat whites near the front, if we don't question whites' right to exist or to be (Bonilla-Silva and Lewis forthcoming). The issue of whiteness is also not merely a question of meaning; it is deeply tied to issues of group interest, material advantage, and to the defense of privilege.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the historical origins and meanings of whiteness towards answering the question, "what is the substance of whiteness today?" As part of this discussion I argue that there are both material and ideological elements of whiteness and that it is crucial that these two not be discussed in isolation from one another. Particularly in any discussion of whiteness, discussions of race or racial meaning should not be separated from discussions of racial privilege. Whiteness and white racial identities are rarely if ever just about meaning but are about resources. As I will demonstrate, in its origins, its evolution and its current manifestations whiteness is inherently always about both. As examples of this I extend the historical connections of this racial category to long histories of colonialism, domination, nationalism, and racism -- connecting whiteness to concepts of Westernness and Americanness. It is important to understanding whiteness, for example, to analyze the use of racially coded language to mask new racial discourse and movements under the banner of such things patriotism. Finally I connect current

racial discourse with material transformations and demonstrate how economic decline in some of the top industrial nations has fueled new forms of racism and new white racial movements.

Race as a Social Construction

Since the early part of this century, social scientists have recognized race to be socially constructed⁵ (DuBois 1968; Gossett 1963; Omi & Winant 1994). These socially constructed racial categories are then used to identify people as the same or different. As social constructs, these categories reflect no nature or essence but they do carry and express relations of privilege and subordination. Particularly, they reflect the power of some to determine for others how they will be named and to determine what differences are important and for what purposes (Spelman 1988)⁶. Though racial categories and systems of categorization are not fixed or immutable, since its inception race has never waned in its importance in shaping how social status and material benefits are parceled out.

Race has historically varied in its boundaries, meaning and pervasiveness, with both the groupings of bodies included in racial categories as well as the meanings of the categories themselves varying across time and space. For example, who counts as black, who counts as white, as well as what it means to belong to one or the other of these groups has not been stable even within the last hundred years in this society, much less across several centuries and around the globe⁷. Yet, one's placement into a racial category within a particular racialized socio-historical context has always had profound implications for life chances, access to social and material resources, and actual physical safety.

According to Omi & Winant's (1994) definition of racial formation, there is a racial dimension in every institution, identity, and social practice in a racialized society. Bonilla-Silva (1997:3) builds on their work, outlining the way in which race has become an independent category within our social system (not reducible to class or gender), "with meaningful consequences for all the races" in that system. Racial phenomena, he argues, have their own structure within a racialized social system. In this way, racial groupings are emergent and socially constructed, dynamic and variable, but at the same time fundamental axes of organization in society. The creation of these racial categories implies a process by which people are placed into racial categories and a process by which placement takes on specific meanings. Race is believed to be indicative of a particular biological profile or cultural/social disposition (Omi & Winant 1994; Guillaumin 1995). Skin color, as the signifier of group membership, is seen as a

symbol of what lies beneath, “the expression of a specific nature.” Belonging to one or another racial group is a matter which has always had important implications for access to resources.

Race operates in some ways similar to gender and class. It is a relational category in which groups are mutually constituted. Particularly in regards to dominant racial groups, one does not have to consciously identify with being “white” to benefit from a system in which being designated as a racial “other” carries severe penalties (physical, psychological and material) (Almaguer 1994; Farley 1990; Feagin & Sikes 1994; Harris 1993; Hacker 1992; Oliver & Shapiro 1995; Roediger 1991). What is important is the social fact that race *matters*, for everybody - that race continues to organize social life for everyone. While there is not one whiteness or one way of being white, within a racialized social system like ours, every person’s life is shaped by race. The difference for whites is that they do not even have to recognize their own whiteness in order to benefit from it. Many whites today claim that race is no longer important, that we should all be color-blind, that even talking about race is racist in that it perpetuates racial classification (Berg 1993)⁸. In doing so, this kind of liberal individualism denies the reality of groups and group based privileges/penalties (Crenshaw 1997; Young 1994). Those making such claims to individualism often argue that it is oppressive to even talk about groups as if they mean something --in fact, these claims themselves serve to ignore or obscure the fact of oppression. As Young (1994: 718) argues in reference to gender, “Without conceptualizing women as a group in some sense, it is not possible to conceptualize oppression as a systematic, structured, institutional process.” Similarly, without recognizing racial collectives, including the collectivity of the dominant racial group, we obscure relations of domination. In this sense it is not important to speak of racial groups as having specific cultures or even self-conscious group identities, but as having similar locations within the racial structure. In many ways whites do not share a common self-conscious identity. However, the lack of a common identity among whites does not preclude them from being a social collective. Common identities form as the by product of social or political processes. For example, one could make a strong argument that during periods when white supremacy was being challenged, in moments where racial boundaries needed to be defended, whites came together to do so and in the process formed shared, common identities⁹.

Using Sartre’s notion of seriality, Iris Young provides a useful distinction between self-conscious collectivities (groups) and passive collectivities (series). She contends that a group is a “self-consciously, mutually acknowledging collective with a self-conscious purpose.” (Young 1994: 724) Examples of white groups can be a explicitly racial (e.g. neo-nazi or white supremacy groups) or not (e.g. many community groups, Golf Clubs, Boy

Scout troops are all-white even though they may not have a self-conscious racial identity or purpose). A series, on the other hand is a “social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects around which their actions are oriented and by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of the others.” Young’s differentiation is quite similar to the one Marx made in relation to a class *of* itself versus a class *for* itself (Marx 1936). Both argue for a distinction between the social fact of the material conditions of one’s life and a felt internalized identity. For example one’s statement that they are “a worker” may not designate an identity so much as a social fact. Members of a series are passively unified through their relations to social structures. One’s experiential relation to racial structures are infinitely variable.

Race as a series is a background to identity rather than constitutive of identity. One can even claim not to identify at all as white and this does not change their social location or mean they no longer accrue privilege from being part of the dominant racial group¹⁰. As Young makes clear in the following statement:

“At the level of seriality racial position is constructed by a relation of persons to a materialized racist history that has constructed racially separate spaces, a racial division of labor, racist language and discourse, and so on. A person can and often does construct a positive racial identity along with others from out of these serialized positionings. But such racial identification is an active taking up of a serialized situation. Which, if any, of a person’s serial memberships become salient or meaningful at any time is a variable matter.” (1994: 731-32)

It is arguably a less variable matter for racialized others than for whites. The “blackness” of Blacks is more often a object of focus than the whiteness of whites. Racialized others are in many ways thought to “have race” in a way whites deny of themselves. Saying that a person is white does not necessarily predict anything specifically about how they take up their social positioning but it does predict something about the general constraints and expectations they must deal with (Young 1994). In this way, no person within a racialized society escapes the markings of race but how it marks their life varies considerably. Clearly, a series can become a self-conscious group. As stated above, whites can come together either self-consciously as whites (e.g. the Ku Klux Klan) or just as a group around a specific issue like neighborhood safety (in a context of vast racial segregation, many of these seemingly race-neutral groupings are entirely white). Groupings can be racist, antiracist, or not explicitly racial, but all are still constrained by racial realities (e.g. residential segregation.) In order to understand the role contemporary racial realities play it is important to first understand how they emerged and have been transformed historically.

Historical Work on Racialization and Whiteness

Since the early 1960s there has been a considerable amount of work done mapping out the racialization process in the U.S. (Almaguer 1994; Berkhofer 1978; Dinnerstein, Nichols and Reimers 1979; Gossett 1963; Higham 1963; Horsman 1981; Jordan 1968; Montejano 1987; Roediger 1991; Takaki 1987). Moreover, in the last ten years we have seen the publication of several important books specifically focusing on the racialization of whites (Roediger 1991; Saxton 1991; Ware 1992; Allen 1994; Ignatiev 1995; Rogin 1996).

Winthrop Jordan (1968) and others argue that the racial categories of white and black emerged with increased white European contact with black Africans. The English called Africans "black", a term with many negative connotations in English culture, thereby calling attention to the feature which struck them most, the African's complexion. Color set Africans permanently apart as a distinct "other"; it was not long before many negative qualities (e.g. heathenism, lack of civility, naturalness, etc.) were permanently linked with blackness. Being Christian, English, and civilized came to equal whiteness, a set of clear distinctions from that which was for instance, blackness, or "Indianness"; race became a permanent way of differentiating "we" from "they." Similar to Degler (1971) and others, Jordan contended that racism pre-dated slavery in the U.S.

Other historians have contended that the formation of whiteness as a racial category came about with the rise of slavery in the U.S. either as a specific effort on the part of the upper class to divide what was a growing lower/working-class, or as a result of specifically economic (non-racial) decisions regarding the largest available supply of cheap labor (Williams 1966; Morgan 1975; Takaki 1993). Importantly, much of this literature is concerned primarily with the timing of the rise of anti-black discrimination rather than with the racialization process for whites (Williams 1966; Morgan 1975; Thompson 1975; Van Deburg 1978) though recently Allen (1994) has attempted to build on these economic explanations of the rise of race as a social category in his book *The Invention Of The White Race*.¹¹

What isn't always clear from this earlier work is the importance of regional differences. The exact content of whiteness has varied regionally and historically according to who whites were being defined in relation to and according to the political, social and economic context in which this defining was taking place. Robert Berkhofer (1978) demonstrates this point in relation to Native Americans. He argues that addressing all Native Americans' as "Indians" despite the European's growing awareness of the vast differences among Native American peoples

“promoted an overall collective vision” of Europeans in contradistinction to the rest of the world (1978: 24). Europeans (or whites) were set apart physically, intellectually, militarily, politically and culturally in relation to the “savage” group “Indians.” Racial categories were mutually constituted as clear boundaries were drawn between what were coming to be seen as racial groups. Categories took on meaning in specifically dialectical and relational ways.

David Roediger provides another example of the centrality of “context” in *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991). Roediger argues that in order to understand how the meaning of “worker” in the U.S. came to be so deeply connected to “whiteness” (and maleness) we must examine the social context in which working class identity emerged. American working class identity developed in direct juxtaposition to slavery and, Roediger argues, was necessarily racial because of that. Racial identity formation was a dialectical process which emerged in specific economic and political circumstances and then took on a life of its own. Roediger talks much about the benefits to those deemed “white” within the social hierarchy, particularly those wage laborers who were trying to come to terms with their lack of economic freedom -- at least they were politically free (as opposed to the slaves). In addition, his discussion of the case of the Irish demonstrates clearly how whiteness itself has been up for grabs in terms who is eligible to confer the benefits of being white (Roediger 1991: 133-163). It is also a good example of to what end groups (that can) will often go to be included within the dominant racial category.

In *Racial Fault Lines* Tomas Almaguer (1994) makes a similar point about the role of organized white laborers in virulently, and violently at times, defending what they believed to be “white work” against the incursions of other groups, in this case particularly Chinese and African-Americans¹². There were many efforts on the part of the white working class in turn of the century California to defend not only their positions as free (white) laborers, but also their social, cultural, and political status. Chinese and others were seen as needing containing in order to protect the sanctity of white life and white culture from contamination from dirty, heathen “others.” (Almaguer 1994) Antimiscegenation laws, laws revoking all political and citizenship rights, as well as more informal forms of social closure were utilized to draw clear boundaries between whites and various racial minority groups.

While all of this historical work has contributed greatly to our understanding of the racialization process generally, and for whites in particular, it is unclear whether this process is similar to or distinct from the process of racialization for whites today. With the transformation of the racial context since the demise of Jim Crow, the explicit defense of white racial superiority is no longer popularly acceptable¹³. As Essed (1991) points out there has

been a shift in racial discourse. While “the traditional idea of genetic inferiority is still important in the fabric of racism, the discourse of Black inferiority is increasingly reformulated as cultural deficiency, social inadequacy, and technological underdevelopment” (Essed 1991:4). Racial ideologies which perpetuate common sense understandings of racial groups as different in certain fundamental ways have not entirely fallen by the wayside, they are merely expressed in less “biological” and more “cultural” language. Despite these discursive shifts, race continues to have a fundamental impact on access to resources and on life chances. Given that whiteness continues to provide material and ideological benefits, how do whites today understand their social location?

Post Jim-Crow Racial Transformations -- New Forms of Whiteness

Throughout the first half of this century a deeply entrenched system of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation ensured that whites would maintain material, social, and political privilege as well as a significant measure of social distance. The latter half of this period coincided with an extended period of economic growth in the United States in which the standard of living increased almost across the board, particularly for the white working class. It was during this time after World War II that new social movements, particularly the Civil Rights Movement, challenged the most overt forms of social closure. These movements were successful in achieving the end of legalized segregation along with some commitment from the government to address centuries of slavery and exploitation. This progress towards a more democratized nation did not last long however.

As the 1960s came to a close America faced the end of what many thought would be an everlasting economic boom. Decades of uninterrupted growth came to an end. Stagflation in the economy along with OPEC's oil embargo in 1973 ended 25 years of expansion. In the wake of these events and as a response to them, America experienced an overall restructuring of the economy; this restructuring reached into all corners of the country.

The economic crisis confronting the United States in the late 1960s coincided with severe political and cultural crises. Along with Vietnam and Watergate, people were confronting the assassination of major national leaders. The new social movements were erupting with riots protests in cities, on campuses, and in state capitals across the country. Combined with the oncoming economic troubles, these cultural upheavals left a government struggling to maintain legitimacy and a people (specifically the white majority) feeling very much unsure of what was to come. As Harvey (1989:171) points out

"It is...at such times of fragmentation and economic insecurity that the desire for stable values leads to a heightened emphasis upon the authority of basic institutions -- the family, religion, the state. And there is abundant evidence of a revival of support for such institutions and the values they represent throughout the Western world since about 1970."

When new conservative voices moved into this fragmented space with explanations and proposed solutions, people were ready to listen. Discourses of traditionalism and nationalism were used to speak to people about what was happening in their lives. The story told blamed both the '60s mass movements, advances made by blacks and women, and an overgrown liberal state for the economic crisis. As workers everywhere were having to work longer hours for less money and fewer benefits a coded racial explanation was offered to explain decreasing access to health care, homes and decent jobs. Nostalgia for earlier times (of legalized racial segregation and clear social and cultural domination) was rampant. Though it was rarely done explicitly, the end of national prosperity was at least partly explained as the result of the actions of a dark, subversive population who had been attempting to upend the national status quo.¹⁴ National moral panics were generated around themes of family, drugs and crime, all codes for racial minority groups who are imagined to be the "enemy within." The analogy of a nation at war was used to attack those who were believed to be destroying the moral fabric of the nation, taking jobs away from "real Americans," and making it unsafe to walk the streets¹⁵. Law-breaking, drug-taking, and family instability were seen to be essential parts of black life. In this way blackness and Americanness became almost mutually exclusive categories and new forms of racism were disguised as patriotism. It is within this context that we can begin to evaluate the content of whiteness today. The main trends I will discuss -- white pride, white resentment, white insecurity, and white guilt-- are linked to the earlier history of the category and are also deeply shaped by the present historical moment

White pride, or as it is mostly manifest, white supremacy movements are clearly on the rise in the United States. Some estimate that there are presently 20,000-30,000 white supremacy movement activists in the U.S. in the 1990s, up from approximately 1,500 in the mid-1970s, with approximately 180,000 less active supporters who purchase literature and support these organizations.(Feagin & Vera 1995: 77) Ironically, these groups both have increasingly international ties and are also articulating many of their messages through the discourse of virulent nationalism. These groups and individuals have carried out numerous hate crimes in recent years all in the name of "defending the white race."¹⁶ Extreme though they may seem, it was not so long ago that David Duke, former grand wizard in the Ku Klux Klan, almost won the election for Governor in Louisiana. These groups express pride at being

white, expressing a sense of clear racial superiority which they believe should be rewarded. America, to them, is a white country and should be defended as such. Many whites who are not actively involved in supremacy movements are sympathetic to many of its themes and share much of its ideology -- even those who do not think of themselves as racist.

Jay Macleod (1994), Joe Feagin and Herman Vera (1995) and Lois Weis, Michelle Fine (1997) and others identified similar themes of white resentment and insecurity in their interviews with both working-class and middle-class white men. While there were clear class differences in the way resentment was expressed, all of it was in some way focused on protecting or defending historic racial boundaries that have secured privilege and status for whites. Working class whites tended to articulate a siege mentality, that minorities were taking over their jobs and neighborhoods, taking what was rightfully theirs (the whites). (Fine, et. al 1997; Macleod 1995; Newman 1988; Rieder 1985; Rubin 1994; Terkel 1992) These working class men blamed fellow working class men of color for their hardships.

We find a good example of this white racial resentment and sympathy with supremacist ideology in the following excerpt from an ethnographic study of working class teenagers. In his book, Ain't No Makin It, Jay McLeod conducts a study of two groups of boys growing up in a housing project in a large Northeastern city. While one of the groups was primarily African-American, (The Brothers) the other was primarily white (the Hallway Hangers (HH's)). McLeod goes back to visit his subjects several years after they have left high school to see where they are at and finds the Hallway Hangers to have taken on a "siege mentality." (1994: 155) McLeod sketches the violent, racist and sexist behavior of these white working class men and provides the following analysis:

"The racism, sexism, substance abuse, violence, and criminal exploits of the HH's are all tied to their subordinate position in the class structure and their quest to fashion identities as poor white men...The HH's violent crimes are tied to their identities as men - specifically white men. Street fighting is about maintaining one's status, and for the HH's their status is defined in relation to, and usually at the expense of, people of color...[the HH's], lacking the traditional marks of working-class manhood - blue-collar breadwinning jobs and households of their own - have tried to shore up their masculine identities through highly public displays of violence...not directed indiscriminately; the HH's lash out at those by whom they feel threatened: black men." (1994: 159-183)

In fact, over and over again, resounding throughout the statements of these men, is the theme of resentment towards what they perceive to be black ascendancy. In fact, the HH's are quite mistaken; though their African-American counterparts have relatively higher education levels (HS diplomas), the HH's have been much more successful finding above-minimum wage jobs. The HHs' ideas of black ascendancy are diametrically opposed to the reality of their clear white racial privilege on the job market and elsewhere; they do quite accurately reflect however the HH's perception that their privilege has been challenged on some fronts and that they can no longer regulate their contact with racial minority groups. Even more, they reflect their understanding that getting good jobs is harder than ever and that their control over their lives and dignity have diminished as a result.

The HH's are obsessed with the number of African-Americans moving into "their" neighborhood. They express fears of invasion and displacement along with a general sense of lack of control. Their often violent responses to these fears (directed at both African-American residents and their own girlfriends) is both an effort to shore up their own identities as white men and also to "defend a mythological community that they believe is disintegrating." (McLeod 1994: 190) The issues these men contend with is a sense that their rightful place is being incurred upon, both in terms of jobs, and in terms of actual geographic territory and symbolic community; they are actively contending with who counts as a legitimate part of their community or as a legitimate part of the local job market. It is clear that, for them, whiteness is one of the requirements on both these counts and that they emphatically resent any challenge to this.

Middle and upper-middle class white men also express resentment towards people of color but towards a population that tended to be more distant symbolically and practically. They speak of being tired of being targeted as the oppressor and in fact of feeling oppressed themselves. In their book, White Racism, Feagin and Vera (1995) quote from a number of White Americans about their feelings on race. Though their sample is quite different than McLeod's, most of those they talked to were highly educated, we still can see some of the same themes expressed throughout. Again, these people are by no means members of white supremacist groups, but they do express feelings of insecurity and bitterness in regards to racial issues. One male college student spoke of his resentment of what he called, "the victim bandwagon."

"As a white male, I feel like I'm the only subsection of the population that hasn't jumped on the victim bandwagon. And I feel from a racial perspective, as the white man, I have been targeted as the oppressor, and frankly I'm getting a little tired of it, because I haven't done a whole lot of oppressing in my life...Supposedly,

as we study gender and race, as white men, we run the world; I never knew that...I haven't oppressed anybody, but I've experienced feeling oppressed." (Feagin & Vera 1995: 146)

Regularly, the white men in their interviews spoke of resentment towards racialized "others" and spoke of these others not only as being responsible for some of the hardships the white men were themselves facing but also as being distinctly different and deviant from and less than whites. One man stated that, for blacks to be equal, he thought they needed to "adopt *our* values. Be a part of *our* system or whatever...being reliable...I guess its the work ethic." [emphasis added] (Feagin & Vera 1994: 150) Feagin and Vera conclude their analysis by stating, "Many whites seem to have a strong feeling that African Americans are somehow not like white people." Again, here it is difficult to get a grasp on just what "white people" themselves are like except as a yardstick against which others never measure up. This group also articulated a theme Mary Waters (1990) found in her interviews with white ethnics, "they need to be more like me(us)."

In Ethnic Options Waters (1990) speaks of the symbolic significance of ethnicity to whites today, of whites' ability to choose the extent and bounds of their own ethnicity. Though racial minorities don't get to choose race or when to be racial, most whites equate the experience of being a racial minority with their own experience as European ethnics in the formula of "Italian = Irish = Russian = Mexican = Black." These whites expect racial minorities to be able to make it, "like I (my parents, my ancestors) did." This individualized understanding of success in which white ethnics are used as the model of successful assimilation continues to serve as a powerful narrative today in explaining racial inequality and in proposing solutions (Omi & Winant 1994)¹⁷. This idea of whiteness being a normative category, a normative space against which others are compared is one that Ruth Frankenberg (1994) looks at in her recent study of white women.

As is clear from the quotes and citations above, most of the work done on whiteness has been done on white men. It is unquestionable that these perceptions of racial identity are, themselves, gendered. Anxiety about not fulfilling traditional breadwinning roles is not the source of white women's animosity towards other groups. Frankenberg uses life histories to examine white women's place in racial structure in U.S. at the end of the 20th century and analyzes their perceptions of what whiteness is all about. Frankenberg identifies three general groupings of white understanding of what kind of difference race marks and of what kind of difference race makes: essentialist racism, color (and power) evasion, and color cognizance. These understandings range from the more traditional, biologicistic understanding of race to denial of the significance of race and an upholding of color-blindness as the

ideal, to some range of recognition of the continuing significance of race and racism in daily life. Like Waters, Frankenberg identifies the pervasive theme of whites utilizing individualized understandings of race and equity. For example, in the category "color or power-evasion" respondents seek to represent themselves as totally color-blind, to not acknowledge race differences. Quotes from women she spoke to include things such as the following: "If you cut them they bleed red blood, same as we do.....I really don't think I even thought I was different from them. I just took it in stride -- like a bunch of kittens -- all of them are different colors.....Don't just look at them and immediately say, 'Oh, I shouldn't like them.'" (144-146) Ironically, though most of these women thought of themselves as avoiding being prejudiced by not seeing color, in a society divided hierarchically along race, to avoid talking about color can function to support existing racial hierarchies by naturalizing them as the result of individual actions and/or merit. While these women are clearly distinct from those who fell into Frankenberg's second theme "essentialist racism", they are still actively engaged with avoiding any thought of their own race privilege.

Clearly placing racial identity on the terrain of the social and political, rather than just the individual, Frankenberg argues that the white women she interviewed had as their one goal the *reduction of tension* in regards to race. They had, however, conflicting desires about how to end this tension with some focused on ending *the circumstances* that generate racial tension and others just wanting to end their *own personal experience* of such tension. Frankenberg also offers one of the few templates of whites actually actively engaged in trying to fight racism and their very conflicted and confused engagement and resistance within the available discourses on race. Frankenberg, Wellman and many of the others in this tradition have begun to deal with race as not merely an individual issue or struggle, but as a matter of groups struggling within a racialized society. Their work sketches out the way in which whites draw on available ideologies or discourses of race in trying to make sense of their lives and their place within larger structures and how those ideologies are shaped by and interact with racialized structures.

Whiteness remains today what it began as several centuries ago, a normative space that is primarily defined by negation¹⁸. Except for those who are race conscious, there is very little perception of privilege amongst white men or women, there is little sense of why it is white men "haven't jumped on the victim bandwagon," or in fact have. Whiteness continues to be defined through negation only today it is not merely defined in relation to blackness, but also in relation to perceived "foreigners." Here again we see the connection between whiteness and nationalism. In this regard it does not matter whether one is actually a citizen but whether you are part of symbolic national community which is itself becoming more narrowly, racially defined. In the next section I will address the

connections between racial ideologies (or race as if functions at the level of culture) and structural elements of race and racial identities. Whiteness has a long history of connection to active engagement with colonialism, slavery, racism, and other forms of domination.

Racial Ideology and Racial Structures

Aside from the comparative-historical work outlined above, most sociological work on whites and race has been in the realm of survey work on racial attitudes¹⁹. More recently however, social scientists have argued for focusing on racial ideology as a group level phenomenon rather than on (individually generated) racial attitudes (Bobo 1988; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Hall 1990; Jackman 1994). They argue that ideas about race and racism itself need to be understood in regard to structures, institutional and cultural practices, and discourses, not simply as "something which emanates from certain individual beings" (Hall 1990: 7). Racial ideologies provide ways of understanding our lives and of how we fit into social relations. In this regard they provide important explanations for both the causes and solutions to both personal and social problems. They are tightly connected to social relations and are produced and reproduced in specific sites, particularly in those ideological apparatuses that produce and distribute social meaning in society (e.g. the media, schools, etc.).

I am using the term ideology here very specifically to mean several things. First, it is a framework for understanding our social existence, providing a way of making sense of the world. Ideologies work most effectively when they are invisible, just "taken for granted's," which tend to naturalize the world and the status quo (Hall 1990), because they affect ways of understanding the world they also deeply shape practices in that world. When an ideology becomes common sense, the "of course" way of understanding social existence, it has gained hegemony (though it is always contested and always only partial).

For an ideology to gain hegemony it must do more than enable people to make sense of their lives; it must successfully naturalize the status quo. In naturalizing and legitimating the present state of things, ideologies tend to support certain interests and subvert others. In a society riddled with social inequality, they must naturalize a system which ensures subordination for millions (Fiske 1987). Ideologies become hegemonic by enabling people to accept their position within a stratified society. They gain consent from those on all rungs of the social ladder to a system which secures the positions of both the dominated and the dominating. Within societies like the United

States which are based on ideals of equity but are rife with vast inequality ideology is essential for people to live comfortably with the pervasive contradictions. People are not "duped" by ideologies; an ideology is only successful when it helps people to understand their lives by providing stories of the world which make sense. In that way they fulfill certain needs²⁰.

For example, in schools ideologies of meritocracy based on the belief that individuals succeed or fail according to their own merit help both students and professionals "understand" why some excel and others flounder. In that way schools are seen merely as transmitters of useful knowledge, as neutral instructional sites rather than as cultural and political sites which represent "arenas of contestation and struggle among differentially empowered cultural and economic groups" (Giroux 1983: 3). The knowledge and cultural norms of dominant groups are naturalized and legitimated because the schools are seen as neutral sites which transmit neutral information. As Holt (1995: 9-10) states, in regards to race, "one must seek explanations for the reproduction of racist belief and behavior not in individual pathologies but in social formations at specific historical moments that shape and make both self and other knowable." Race is about who we are, what we do, how we interact. It shapes where we live, who we interact with, how we understand ourselves and others. But it does so in specific ways based on our social and historical location. We cannot isolate white racial identity and racial ideology from a history of defining 'self' through the construction of (and domination of) other (Said 1978; Hall 1991; Gabriel 1994; Almaguer 1994). Racial ideologies are produced and rearticulated in relation to changing material circumstances.

In Portraits of White Racism, David Wellman (1993) is concerned with how to link structural elements of racial advantage to the ideological expressions of race and racism. He does not specifically address whiteness but he does engage with the idea of racism as a defense of group privilege, an idea closely linked to the more overt forms of whiteness discussed above. He argues that blacks and whites are divided because of issues grounded in real and material conditions. Extending this argument we can see how behavior such as that of the Hallway Hangers discussed above could well be understood, not as the actions of uneducated, irrational men but as actions of those who at some level understand that they enjoy certain privileges attached to their group membership and that those privileges need defending. We see here how closely racial ideas and meanings are tied to racial privilege and racial domination. These men were not acting violently towards the African-Americans in their neighborhood merely

because their sense of themselves as white men needed shoring up, but because they were fighting against the real (or imaginary) encroachments into what they believe to be their territory.

The origins of whiteness are closely tied into histories of imperialism, slavery and colonialism. It has always been true that the realm of ideas associated with whiteness and with blackness have been invested not only in representing groups of people, but in dominating those people, encroaching on their territory. In this way whiteness should be understood to be closely tied to ideas of both Westernness and Occidentalism. In his study of Orientalism, Edward Said examines how the Orient was constructed and then represented through Western ideologies and institutions. An Occidental 'us' was integrally bound up with ideas of Western, European superiority; the Western 'we' being clearly distinguishable from an Oriental 'they.' These ideas of superiority were seen as clear justifications for intervening into the lives of those they had identified as "oriental." Michael Adas makes a similar point about contact between Europeans and Africans. (1989) European voyagers believed themselves to have a superior culture because of their scientific and technological development. These attitudes of material superiority shaped their attitudes towards those they confronted overseas. Specifically, Adas states, "In the industrial era, scientific and technological measures of human worth and potential dominated European thinking on issues ranging from racism to colonial education." (1989: 3) The colonial setting was one of the original backdrops for the building of an inclusive notion of the West.

"The colonial castes of the various nationalities worked together to forge the idea of 'white' superiority, of civilization as an interest that has to be defended against savages. This representation - 'the white man's burden' - has contributed in a decisive way to molding the modern notion of a supranational European or Western Identity." (Balibar 1991: 43)

The 'other' is knowable, describable, bounded, exterior, and inferior; material interventions are then posited as if they will benefit both parties - the white man is spreading civilization. This new white identity is tied to feelings of racial superiority, and more importantly a sense of superiority that was active rather than passive. These ideas of cultural superiority were put into action in the "defending" of civilization against the savages, the Orientals, blacks, and in the taking over of the land, lives, and resources of these 'others.'

As Said argues, the forms of Orientalism have changed over time but at their heart, all these Orientalist projects are aimed at possessing what is represented as 'the Orient' or 'the other' -- others who are not merely

represented but subjugated if not enslaved. (Said 1978:5) Similarly, whiteness was created in a process of constructing blackness; its origins are not merely about “a necessity of the imagination,” but about relations of domination. Said describes this set of relations as “imaginative” divisions which are lived through in quite specific ways with those constructed as other paying high costs because of this designation. “Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or - as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory - taken over.” (Said 1978: 207) These ‘others’ that are in need of solving, confining, or taking over have not historically been limited to colonial subjects or those residing on distant lands. In the post-colonial era in particular (in the last several hundred years in the United States) many of these ‘others’ have resided within. W.E.B. DuBois long ago spoke about the struggle of living as an ‘other’ within, of being defined as a problem:

“Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked be some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town.” (DuBois 1993: 178)

DuBois spoke not only of being defined as a problem but of the difficulty in reconciling his racial identity with a national identity that actively sought to exclude him.

“One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts...two warring ideals in one dark body....The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -- the longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self...[the Negro] simple wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.” (DuBois 1993: 178)

The modern struggle between ideas of national belonging and racial categories is no less complex than those DuBois confronted almost a hundred years ago; they are possibly only somewhat more covertly expressed specifically in nationalistic, rather than explicitly racial, terms.

Definitions of self and other are interdependent and emerged out of a shared history. Despite the fact that the subject of race is as much about white people as it is about blacks, whiteness and white ethnicity often manages to hide behind its negative constructions of otherness (Gabriel 1994; Hall 1991) Even those texts which attempt to represent whites feelings about themselves are filled with whites feelings about others. This is at least in part a result

of the fact that whiteness is always, inseparably, tied to its negative; as a relational category it has no meaning other than as a negation. Whiteness often involves a series of exclusions, excluding all those things considered to be undesirable, improper, and deviant. This process results in exclusions of large groups of people who are then, simultaneously, represented as deviant, undesirable individuals. Whites are dependent upon and have depended on representations of others in their own process of self definition.

In their article on “doing gender” West and Zimmerman (1990) outline several concepts useful to our understanding of how race comes to take on meaning in our daily interactions. West and Zimmerman argue that gender is a routine, methodological, and recurring accomplishment. Doing gender correctly is essential to being a competent member of society, “Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities (West and Zimmerman 1990: 126),” e.g. choosing which public bathroom to enter, how we greet a stranger on the street, how space is shared, etc. Gender is something achieved; it is not internal to the person but is produced in interactions and institutions. Like gender, race is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort. West and Zimmerman argue that gender displays may be optional but we do not have the option of being seen by others as female or male; similarly, we do not have choice about being recognized as “racial” or about which race we want to be identified with. While this has been complicated somewhat by growing numbers of multi-racial children (see Ferber 1995; Spickard 1992), as the case of Tiger Woods and others demonstrates even explicit efforts to identify as multi-racial (or cablinasian in this case) rarely meet with success given current racial realities. Tiger Woods is touted as a great *black* golfer (not a great multi-racial golfer); Fuzzy Zoeller did not warn him off serving Thai food for the 1998 Master’s but rather mentioned fried chicken and greens, cuisine associated with the Black southern tradition. In many ways in regards to race, the one drop rule still reigns supreme. The test for categorization is, if people can be seen as members of relevant categories, *then categorize them that way*. Participation in race is not voluntary. As West and Zimmerman (1990: 137) note, “Insofar as a society is partitioned by ‘essential’ differences between women and men and placement in a sex category is both relevant and enforced, doing gender is unavoidable.” In the same manner, doing race is unavoidable in societies such as ours where racial meaning and categories are relevant and enforced and where racial differences are naturalized. Doing race, or the production of race in interaction, allows not so much the “the expression of natural differences as for the production of that difference itself.” (138) Race shapes self-understanding,

interactions with others, institutional practices and access to material resources. As Holt (1995: 12) points out, "Race yet lives because it is part and parcel of the *means* of living"

In the recent period, the politics of race, whiteness and Westernness have more and more been fought out within the context of the nation. As Etienne Balibar has cogently argued, race bounds what is considered to belong to the nation. As in the past, the representation of what Balibar calls 'true nationals' of those who belong, is accomplished through the representation of those who don't belong. The "racial-cultural identity of 'true nationals' remains invisible but it is inferred from (and is assured by) its opposite, the alleged, quasi-hallucinatory visibility of the 'false nationals'." (Balibar 1990: 284) In recent years being identified as a 'false national' has had important implications. It is perceived that for a nation to be strong and pure, it must also be racially and culturally pure, and must therefore expel its impurities -- the false nationals. (Balibar 1990)

The new relations between ideas of race and ideas of nation and national belonging have resulted in the redrawing of the lines of inclusion and exclusion. (Gilroy 1990) Paul Gilroy, writing about Britain, talks of the new focus on the "enemy within" defined through the imagery associated with crime and immigration. Racial ideology therefore is claimed to be patriotic, rather than racist, involving defending the nation (here a quite exclusive category). The culture of the "enemies within" is posed as a threat to the well-being of the nation as being distant and distinct from standards of civilized (white) behavior. We can see this theme resonating throughout the comments of white men and women quoted earlier. Blacks and other racial minority groups are imagined as distinctly different people, almost foreigners, who are invading the neighborhood. Similarly, the new, virulent anti-immigration movements targeted often at those who are already in residence and targeted specifically at racial minority groups is exemplary of a strong defense of limited notions of who can be counted as a true American²¹. "Nationalism and racism become so closely identified that to speak of the nation is to speak automatically in racially exclusive terms. Blackness and Englishness are constructed as incompatible, mutually exclusive identities. To speak of the British or English people is to speak of the white people." (Gilroy 1990: 268) As Benedict Anderson argues, nations are largely imaginary communities that are constructed through cultural, ideological, and political processes which "culminate in the feeling of connectedness to other national subjects." (Gilroy 1993: 49) Individuals who have no direct contact are connected through a sense of community that is limited to those having access to certain group memberships. The analogy of war is growing common in political discourses applied in racially coded ways around themes of family, drugs, and crime. The nation and the cohesiveness of national identity is understood to be under

attack by subversive, invading, criminal forces - "the enemy within," and 'the nation' has literally declared war on this enemy.

These themes of nationalism are deeply connected with ideas of white racial superiority and western cultural superiority. Ironically, this racialized nationalism is linked with a racist "supranationalism" which idealizes the West, civilized man, and Europeans; this universality seemingly interrupts and interferes with nationalism but its firm grounding on ideas of whiteness creates solid ground on which these contradictory themes are able to grow and build. Current white supremacy movements show clear strains of a strong defense of a racially bounded nationalism being combined with ties to international supremacy movements. It is widely true that these movements are thought to be 'fringe elements.' Yet, a majority of Californians supports new strong anti-immigration laws. Most Americans would like to think much progress has been made towards racial equality. They are often willing to admit that some discrimination exists and something should be done about it, yet they don't want any program implemented which might affect their lives. At the heart of this ambiguity is an unwillingness to confront dominant racial identities and the privilege it bestows. It is impossible to interrupt the covert processes which make increasing marginalization of many members of racial minority groups possible without confronting the role privilege has in allowing most whites to ignore the impact of race in their own lives.

Conclusion

Near the end of his semi-biographical novel, Black Boy, Richard Wright discusses a daily exchange he has with two white waitresses with whom he works. He comments:

"I learned of their tawdry dreams, their simple hopes, their home lives, their fear of feeling anything deeply, their sex problems, their husbands. They were an eager, restless, talkative, ignorant bunch...They knew nothing of hate and fear...I often wondered what they were trying to get out of life, but I never stumbled on a clue, and I doubt if they themselves had any notion. They lived on the surface of their days; their smiles were surface smiles, their tears were surface tears. Negroes lived a truer and deeper life than they, but I wished Negroes, too, could live as thoughtlessly, serenely as they...How far apart we stood! All my life I had done nothing but feel and cultivate my feelings; all their lives they had done nothing but strive for petty goals, the trivial prizes of American life. We shared a common tongue, but my language was a different language from theirs. It was a psychological distance that separated the races that the deepest meaning of the problem of the Negro lay for me.

For these poor, ignorant white girls to have understood my life would have meant nothing short of vast revolution in theirs.” [emphasis added] (Wright 1993: 319-320)²²

Wright’s comment is an immensely important one. Within one short paragraph he taps into the depth of privilege that creates a massive gulf of understanding between the races. Part of the privilege associated with whiteness is, in fact, the choice about whether or not to think about race at all, whether to take any notice whatsoever of its role in daily life. It is clear that we need empirical studies of whiteness in order to interrupt its unquestioned normativity but the very nature of it makes it very difficult to study substantively. Whites are rarely if ever asked to articulate or examine either their racial identities or their positions within racialized institutions. The silence which so often surrounds whiteness leaves white racial selves unexamined, leaves them unchallenged as norms; they are simultaneously ignored and universalized. (Frankenberg 1994)

Wright finishes his thought with a comment on why it is that America chooses to ignore what he calls, ‘the problem of the Negro,’ but which we might want to call the problem of the unquestioned hegemony of whiteness:

“As I, in memory think back now upon those girls and their lives I feel that for white America to understand the significance of the problem of the Negro will take a bigger and tougher America than any we have yet known. I feel that America’s past is too shallow, her national character too superficially optimistic, her morality too suffused with color hate for her to accomplish so vast and complex a task. Culturally the Negro represents a paradox: Though he is an organic part of the nation, he is excluded by the entire tide and direction of American culture...our America is frightened of fact, of history, of processes, of necessity. *It hugs the easy way of damning those whom it cannot understand, of excluding those who look different, and it salves its conscience with a self-draped cloak of righteousness.” [emphasis added] (Wright 1993: 320-321)*

In his essay, “The Fact of Blackness” Frantz Fanon (1990) offers one more take on whiteness. He describes the white world as one which blocks participation, which overdetermines the lives of the non-white, which enslaves, which rewrites history, which hates, and which is driven to acquisition.

It is not a mistake that I end a paper on whiteness by quoting black writers. It is arguably true that it is blacks (racialized ‘others,’ “Orientals”) who have historically had to spend the most time and energy contemplating just what whiteness is all about. It is their lives which have been contained, limited and excluded. When John Gabriel described the process of forming dominant identities he presents it as a series of rejections or expulsions, at

the end of which there exists an identifiable 'we,' "whose collective nation, European, 'Western,' identity rests on these kinds of exclusions." (Gabriel 1994: 16) We can not disregard the impact these 'exclusions' have.

As I have argued, it is practically impossible to divorce the social category whiteness from its role as a force of domination and subjugation. This makes it essential that all studies of whiteness not attempt to discuss racial discourse or "culture" separate from a discussion of material realities of racism. In fact, studying dominant racial categories is a business which requires care in order that it not take on either supremacist tendencies of making "white" fashionable or serve to undermine long-fought for space within the academy for both minority scholars and ethnic studies. Studying whiteness or white people absent social context drops the link of precisely why it is important to focus on whiteness in the first place -- in order to remove the cloak of normality and universality that helps to secure continuing racial privilege. For this reason, the politics of "whiteness studies" notwithstanding²³, it is essential to place whiteness and whites themselves within the purview of social research and under the lens of critical examination.

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¹ Though whites will be a statistical minority they will not be an economic, cultural, or political minority. As the case of South Africa shows, a group does not need to be a numerical majority to dominate politically and economically. Due to the present

vast gaps in resources, whites are not likely to take on minority status (in anything other than absolute numbers) anytime in the near future.

2 This requirement was initiated in 1988 in response to a series of student strikes.

3 An exception to this is survey research of black racial attitudes done post-1960s riots. See Caplan & Paige 1968, Marx 1967, Paige 1970, Schuman & Hatchett 1974.

4 While there has been a great number of books published in the last few years dealing with whiteness, they have come primarily out of cultural studies or literary theory and include little to no empirical work.

5 While biological arguments have not totally disappeared, they are widely condemned. For example, following the recent publication of Herrnstein & Murray's *The Bell Curve* a whole spate of books came out condemning their work. See for example, *Measured Lies: The Bell Curve Examined* (1996, New York: St. Martin's Press), *The Bell Curve Debate* (1995, New York: Times Books), and *The Bell Curve Wars* (1995, New York: Basic Books). Additionally, survey research has shown that few whites publicly support the idea of biological inferiority. See Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo 1985 and Sniderman & Piazza 1993.

6 As those who have often named others and determined that racial differences are important, whites cannot now opt out and declare that race is not important and that whites are not racial. Today, many whites are in fact claiming this - it forms the backbone of much color-blind and reverse racism discourse. As demonstrated in recent political campaigns and elections, there has been a convergence among both liberals and conservatives on this point with both groups regularly claiming that the solution to our racial conflicts is to ignore or transcend race.

7 Historically in the U.S., Southern and Eastern European as well as Irish immigrants initially were categorized as non-white. In fact it was not until several decades into this century that Italians clearly became part of the "white" racial designation. For more on this see Omi & Winant (1994), Takaki (1993), Roediger (1991), Saxton (1990), Higham (1963). Even today several groups such as Native Hawaiians and Arab-Americans are engaging in political struggles with the U.S. Census bureau to change their official racial designation (Wright 1995).

8 As much as whites want to deny the salience of race, under certain conditions they acknowledge the costs of being black. For example, in Hacker's *Two Nations*, he documents an exercise he conducted with white students; he asked students "how much financial recompense" they would require if they were suddenly to become black (1992: 32). As Hacker states, most students felt that "it would not be out of place to ask for \$50 million, or \$1 million for each coming black year. And this calculation conveys, as well as anything, the value that white people place on their own skins." (1992: 32)

9 Today this has gotten more complicated as many forms of defense of racial privilege are done in racially coded or implicit ways as defense of the status quo, of American values of individualism, or the right to safe neighborhoods, etc. Winant (1997) and others have recently argued that this is possible only in a context of achieved white supremacy. As white supremacy is challenged, more explicit forms of defense arise.

10 Gamson (1968) makes a similar distinction in his discussion of the difference between interest groups, quasi groups, and solidary groups.

11 Similar to Williams (1961) and others, Allen argues that racial oppression is a deliberate strategy on the part of the ruling class. He claims that the creation and re-creation of white supremacy in early U.S. history was a result of the efforts of employers and slave-owners to maximize their control over black slaves and European-American workers. While Saxton (1990) also focuses on the legitimization of the ruling-class coalition, his argument is primarily an ideological one. He focuses on the processes of ideological revision that enabled the continual reaffirmation of white supremacy and the continued legitimization of the new class coalitions that ruled the United States in the 1800s.

12 When Chinese first started arriving in California they went through a process, as one writer put it, of "negroization" (Cauldwell: 1971). Not only were many anti-Black stereotypes associated with the Chinese, but in several legal cases Chinese were included within "Black," used in its most generic sense, with Black seen to be the thing furthest from and most opposite to "White." The implications of these varied efforts become clear in 1854 with the state supreme court's decision in *People v. Hall* when previously passed legal restrictions imposed on Indians and Blacks were said to be inclusive of Mongolians or Asiatics (Heizer and Almquist 1971). The justice writing the decision concluded that

"The word 'Black' may include all Negroes, but the term 'Negro' does not include all Black persons. By the use of this term in this connection, we understand it to mean the opposite of 'White,' and that it should be taken as contradistinguished from all White persons...the words 'White,' 'Negro,' 'Mulatto,' 'Indian,' and 'Black person,' wherever they occur in our Constitution and laws, must be taken in their generic sense" (Heizer and Almquist 1971: 233-4).

As was made clear in this ruling, the racial boundaries were being clearly and carefully constructed to delineate between whites and "miscellaneous colored others." Chinese were relegated to second class status, "officially deemed nonwhite" and ineligible for any citizenship rights (Almaguer 1994:162). Whites were carving out a distinct social, political, and economic space which was to require active and steady defense and to which only they were to have access. While many of the boundaries were first constructed in regards to Blacks, 'Black' was transformed into a generic term covering all nonwhites. This was not a simple or easy process, but once completed, "whiteness" became the collective identity uniting Europeans. As Omi and Winant and others have shown, despite some earlier attempts to classify Irish, Jews and Italians as Black or colored, these attempts ended with "the institutionalization of a racial order that drew the color line *around* rather than *within* Europe." (Omi & Winant 1994: 65) The

process was one of consolidating racial identities on both sides of the divide. Chinese were not only included within the generic category "Black," but as some authors have argued, actually went through a process of the "'negroization' of the Chinese stereotype" (Almaguer 1994:159). While there were particular aspects of the Chinese (religion, clothing, language, etc.) that distinguished them from other racial minority groups, they also had many negative stereotypes previously associated to Blacks assigned to them (e.g. lasciviousness, laziness, lying, thieving, heathens). In the early history of the state of California the Chinese were both symbolically and legally included in the category, "Negro," as the legislature pointed out that the real consideration in the specification "Negro" was that such individuals were not *white*. Clearly though Chinese and Blacks were not racialized in identical ways, their relation to the group "white" was central to their access to resources. White was a political, social, and cultural category that had meaning in opposition to all racialized "others."

¹³ While overt racism is popularly condemned, there is considerable evidence that white supremacy movements are having a resurgence in the 1990s (Feagin & Vera 1995).

¹⁴ QUOTES FROM REAGAN, WILLS, BUCHANAN AND OTHERS...

¹⁵ Paul Gilroy discusses the parallel phenomenon which took place in Britain during the same time, "in very different ways for both blacks and whites, the idea of race [became] a fundamental aspect of their responses to the turbulence of economic and cultural crisis - providing a chain of meaning which [made] the process of national decline intelligible as a whole" (1993: 54).

¹⁶ Even in the last several years, newspapers across the country have reported incidents of explicitly racial, and too-often deadly, violence including just recently the series of incidents carried out throughout 1997 in the Denver, CO area.

¹⁷ Also, many recent national surveys have included questions which tap into this idea. For example seventy to eighty percent of whites agree to the following kind of statement: "Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors."

¹⁸ Similar findings have been cited by those doing work on colonial confrontations between colonials and colonists. For an example see Stoler 1991.

¹⁹ Within sociology there is a long standing survey research tradition of tracking white racial attitudes (Bobo 1988; Gaertner & Dovidio 1981; Greeley & Sheatsley 1971; Firebaugh & Davis 1988; Hyman & Sheatsley 1964; Hyman & Sheatsley 1956; Jackman 1978; Kinder & Sears 1981; Lipset & Schneider 1978; Schuman, Steeh & Bobo 1985; Sears 1988; Sniderman & Piazza 1992; Taylor, Sheatsley & Greeley 1978). While survey research in this area has much to offer, there are several shortcomings. First, the explanations survey researchers have provided (as do the survey questions they draw on) focus primarily on whites attitudes about others rather than their attitudes about self. Also, all are premised on an individualized understanding of racial attitudes rather than on a theory of racial ideology that is generated in the context of group struggle. Finally, due to the nature of survey research, though this work can provide some breadth of understanding using its large samples of individuals, it is necessarily limited in its depth.

Over the last 10 years several other authors have attempted to map out stages of white identity development [WID] (Helms 1993, Hardiman & Jackson 1992). Building on work on the racial identity development of blacks, these authors have developed theories delineating the stages through which they hypothesize whites travel in their own racial identity development. Though these theories do perhaps offer some insight into the issues involved in racial identity formation for whites they have four major drawbacks. First, as pointed out by Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson (1994) these theories are built on the same assumptions used in developing racial identity development models for Blacks and minorities. Black racial identity development models assume that individual development is driven in response to an oppressive, dominant society. This, however, is not true for whites and constructions of their racial identity development must necessarily be conceptualized differently. Second, examining the measures used to categorize whites, it becomes clear that WID models, like traditional survey research, primarily track attitudinal shifts in feelings about *others*, not about *self*. Third, The WID models also suggest a universal, linear, uni-directional movement towards a nonracist identity. Finally, white identity development models are cast solely in Black-White terms, limiting their generalizability across regions.

²⁰ As pointed out by Apple (1993), when examining hegemonic ideologies the first question we must ask is not what is false about them, but what is true.

²¹ Similar phenomenon in Britain have been noted by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and others.

²² This is an observation that James Baldwin and others have also made. See Baldwin 1968

²³ see *New York Times Magazine* 11/???'97