

March 15 and 17, 2004

12-13: RACE I & II

Read: Wade, Defining Race, 1-15; Existing Approaches to Race, 16-36; Historicising Racialized Natures, 37-68; Genetics and Kinship: The Interpenetration of Nature and Culture, 69-96; Race, Nature and Culture, 97-111; Embodying Racialised Natures, 112-122

- I. Conceptions of race¹
 - A. Wade emphasizes that when studying the history of race, one always needs to unpack the terms
 - B. For example, an earlier notion about racial type:
 1. Saw it as something not directly observable
 2. But rather, seen to be an underlying essence, subject to all kinds of variation in its observable manifestations
 3. **Discuss:** to what extent is this notion the opposite of current notions about race?
 - C. Must pay careful attention to how such notions change
 1. Wade discusses various notions about how a changing environment creates 'fixed' qualities
 - a. Fixed over what time period?
 - b. Contradiction
 - c. E.g., God created humanity, but sometime in the remote past the races were established
 - d. Some believed in polygenesis: distinct origins of the races (polygenesis)
 2. Wade cites Todorov:
 - a. "The inside that was supposed to be opposed to the outside is only a slightly older outside"

¹ The first part of this lecture follows Wade's exposition of race.

3. He also cites Young:
 - a. “The question is whether the old essentialising categories of cultural identity, or race, were really so essentialised, or have been retrospectively constructed as more fixed than they were. When we look at the texts of racial theory, we find that they are in fact contradictory, disruptive and already deconstructed.”

D. Earlier meanings of race included seeing it in terms of lineage

1. All the descendants of a given set of ancestors were members of a common stock
 - a. E.g., the *race* of Abraham

E. The meaning changed so that by the nineteenth-century the concept of race was a system for classifying types

1. Humans were divided into a limited number of permanent racial types, sometimes seen as having distinct origins
2. Static, relatively unchanging—although keep in mind Wade’s point about internal contradictions challenging this notion of fixity

II. Today:

- A. A typical definition of race: “an interbreeding population whose members share a greater number of traits with one another than they do with people outside the group” (Ferraro)
 1. Note that establishing a boundary using this definition would be very difficult
- B. Unambiguous categories based on distinct sets of biological attributes and inferred distinct descents

III. Underlying premises of the social construct of race:

- A. First: biology determines behavior
 1. Many earlier racial schemes included traits we no longer consider to be physically inherited—“degeneracy,” drunkenness, poverty
 - a. Wade discusses earlier “racial” classifications that allow for environmental influence, effects of culture

2. Cultural, moral, aesthetic traits were included as “racial” traits
 - a. This continues, in a sense, today: Wade’s points about “cultural racism”
 - 1) Good exercise: list all the “racial” traits that turn out to be cultural
 - 2) One high school had a “race war” on its hands when white girls decided to “dress black”
 - b. Sometimes traits described as “ethnic” are in fact being posited as racial, but the speaker doesn’t want to appear racist
- B Second underlying premise: Europeans are superior
- C. Third: race can be scientifically studied (only a few scientists today believe this)
1. By taking careful measurements
 - a. A good book by Harvard geneticist Stephen Jay Gould: *The Mismeasure of Man* discusses this
 2. They carefully measured hair color and texture, eye color and shape, thickness of lips, breadth of the nose, body stature, skin color
 - a. Several videos demonstrating these “scientific” research projects
 - 1) *Genocide: The ultimate terrorism*
 - 2) We will see another, titled *Master race*
- D. Problems:
1. First: depending on who was doing the categorizing, some racial typologies had hundreds of categories while others had as few as three
 - a. The familiar Mongoloid, Caucasoid, Negroid
 2. Second: external traits traditionally used to classify and identify races didn’t correlate well with other physical and biological traits
 - a. Which are often useful markers of populations (e.g., the Diego factor in blood type)
 3. Third: the schemes differ depending on the traits on which they are based

- a. Skin color
 - b. Body stature—would produce very different categories
 - c. Hair color
 - d. Blood type
 - e. Earlobe structure
 - f. All the above derive, in part, from genetic inheritance
4. Fourth: variations occur not only within, but between breeding populations
- a. Much more variation within a given “race” than between races (if your number of races is small)
5. Our reactions to the idea of using some of these characteristics (“silly”) demonstrate that races are social constructions
- a. **Discuss:** Why not height?
 - b. Huxley’s *Brave New World*: how did the categories of people differ?

IV. Race is a social construction; what kind of social construction? Here is Wade’s argument

- A. The notion that races exist with definable physical characteristics
 - 1. And that some races are superior to others
 - 2. Is the result of particular historical processes
 - a. Colonization by European peoples
- B. We can’t even assume there is such a thing as the brute fact of phenotypical variation
 - 1. We can’t stop at recognizing that races don’t exist as objective biological entities
 - 2. And then reconstruct an objective basis for recognizing ‘racial’ distinctions by grounding them in phenotype

3. This glosses over the problem that the apparently “natural fact” of phenotypical variation is itself socially constructed
- C. Physical differences that have become cues for racial distinctions are quite particular ones
1. They correspond to the geographical encounters of Europeans in their colonial histories
 2. It is *specific combinations* of skin color, hair type and facial features that have been worked into racial signifiers
- D. Phenotype cannot be independent of history
1. Because only certain phenotypical variations become racial categories
 - a. The ones that count do so because they have emerged through history
 2. This is why height doesn’t work as a race
 - a. Height is important—and is a source of discrimination
 - 1) Why Randy Newman’s ironic song “Short People” evoked such outrage—he was on to something that people didn’t want shoved in their faces
 - b. But height doesn’t “do” what we think race “does”—it can’t
 - c. **Discuss:** what work—social, cultural, political, economic—does race do?
- E. Conclusions: Racial classifications cannot be understood to be social constructions elaborated on the basis of phenotypical variation
1. Because they do this using the particular aspects of phenotypical variation that were worked into vital signifiers of difference
 2. During European colonial encounters with others
 3. The study of race is part of that history, not outside it
- V. **Exercise:** the current most prominent signifier of race is skin color
- A. List all the ways skin color alone doesn’t “work”—is not successful at this task

1. S. Asians' skin color darker than many African-Americans
 2. Many African-Americans would be considered white in Nigeria
 3. Example of untranslatability of "white" into Spanish in Colombia
 - a. Blacks in the Vaupés where I did my fieldwork (on the equator and on the border between Brazil and Colombia)
 - b. Were called *blancos*
 - c. The important divide there was between *blancos* ("whites") and *indígenas* ("Indians")
 - d. To us, "white" signals skin color; clearly in the Vaupés its Spanish translation signaled "non-Indian," and "not from here" and not skin color
 4. Brazilian use of "white" (Portuguese: *branco*) is also quite different from English
 5. Different meanings of "white" at different moments in history
 - a. Jews, Irish, Syrians were not "white" earlier in U.S. history
- B. Is the answer that all these classificatory schemes all wrong and only ours is correct?

VI. Differences in racial classification systems around the world

- A. Constitute another set of evidence for social constructionist explanation of race
1. Like ours, these classifications derive from the type of colonial enterprise and sets of social relations that were established in each region
 - a. Gandhi was called a "nigger"
 2. Look at the TV news: you will see Afghanis, Pakistanis, etc. who are darker than many blacks in the U.S.
 3. The populations on opposite coasts of the Red Sea look completely alike, yet the African ones are classified as "black" and the Middle Eastern ones classified as "white" (using a threefold classification system)
 4. Segal and Handler's article provides other examples

5. In North America: category 'black' supposedly includes anyone with a known 'drop of black blood'
 - a. Nagel discusses how different this is from how one is assigned to the category "Indian," or "Native American"
 6. In Latin American racial classifications take the form of a continuum of racial categories
 - a. Often there it is only people who look quite African in appearance who will be identified as 'black'
 - b. Other people are classed by a variety of terms denoting a position in between
 - c. A Puerto Rican or Cuban may not be classed as black in their country, but will be in the U.S.
 - d. Brazil: the phrase "money whitens"
 - e. In Brazil "*A sua branqueza*," "your whiteness," to be said as a way of buttering someone up
 - 1) Both sound silly in English
 - f. Someone poor who has light skin in Brazil *will be perceived* and classified as darker than a comparably colored person who is rich
 - 1) All kinds of studies have been done establishing this
 7. In the U.S., race and class are correlated, but racial classification isn't changed by class
 - a. People do pass, of course—a "one-drop" rule makes this quite possible
 - b. And colorism results in lighter-skinned people being more likely to be higher socioeconomically
 - c. But this is not the same process as in Brazil
 8. Discuss: the racial theories in the video "Stolen Generations"?
- B. Clearly, "black" in any language used to refer to categories of people has no simple universally applicable referent

1. How would it be possible, therefore, to create an objective concept that's applicable everywhere?
 - a. No matter what the terminology is (e.g., "Negroid"—sounds scientific, but derives from Spanish for "black")

VII. Race in Japan²

- A. In 1986 former Prime Minister Nakasone contrasted his country's supposed homogeneity with the ethnically mixed U.S.
 1. Said the homogeneity was responsible for Japan's success in international business
 2. Created an international furor
- B. As a major industrial state, Japan is indeed relatively homogeneous
 1. 10% are minorities
 2. Linguistically, too (although some dialects of Japanese are mutually unintelligible)
 3. Assimilation is discouraged
- C. The minorities:
 1. Aboriginal Ainu
 2. Annexed Okinawans
 3. Immigrant nationalities, mostly Koreans
 4. Outcast burakumin (who, unlike Koreans, are citizens)
 - a. They number 4 million
 - b. Their origins are from a tiered system of stratification (Tokugawa period – 1603-1868)
 - c. That had 4 ranks
 - d. Present-day burakumins' ancestors were outcasts

² Discussion of race in Japan follows C. Kottak, 1996. *Mirror for Humanity: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.: 61-65.

- 1) Who did unclean jobs, animal slaughter, disposal of dead
- 2) Similar to India's Untouchables
- 3) Some job niches still hold (e.g., leather work, Burakumin are more likely to do manual work)

D. Burakumin

1. Are physically and genetically indistinguishable from other Japanese
 - a. But are seen to be racially different
2. Japanese racial classifications include notions of what people smell like (Burakumin, Koreans)
 - a. But—note the built-in contradictions similar to Wade's points about racial classifications
 - 1) These differences sometimes will be attributed by Japanese themselves to non-genetic factors like diet and level of cleanliness
 - 2) Not some relatively immutable and long-standing separation between the races
3. In response to Burakumin political mobilization:
 - a. Japan has dismantled the legal structure of discrimination against them
 - b. And worked to improve conditions in their racially segregated neighborhoods (*buraku*)
 - 1) Poor sanitation, housing, etc.
 - 2) For example, a Sports Day for burakumin children was established
 - c. But, for instance, if Burakumin attend schools with majority Japanese, they will face discrimination
 - 1) People will refuse to eat with them (they are considered unclean)
 - d. Many of them “pass” as a majority Japanese

- 1) As do some Blacks in the U.S.
- e. But if they marry a Japanese and are discovered, a divorce might take place
 - 1) Many Japanese hire marriage mediators to check out the family histories of prospective spouses
 - a) Especially looking for Burakumin
- 4. The discrimination—attitudinal and institutional—is strikingly similar to what blacks face in U.S.
 - a. Even though there is no clear phenotypic difference
 - b. In Japan, like the U.S., the discrimination is *de facto* rather than *de jure* now
- E. Koreans
 - 1. WW II more than 2 million Koreans in Japan
 - 2. Recruited to replace Japanese farm workers
 - 3. 70,000 to 200,000 forced to serve as “comfort women” (prostitutes for military forces)
 - 4. Most had been repatriated to a divided Korea by 1952
 - 5. Those who remained were denied citizenship
 - 6. Koreans qualify for citizenship if one parent was born in Japan and resident for 3 years
 - a. Some qualify for citizenship but choose not to take it
 - b. Resentful of earlier and continuing discrimination
 - c. And they maintain strong ethnic ties, often residentially
 - 7. If they do become citizens
 - a. They are strongly encouraged to take a Japanese name

- b. A kind of semi-occult assimilation that helps maintain the ideology of Japanese homogeneity
- F. The valued group is the majority—spoken of as “pure” Japanese
 - 1. Strong feelings about “same blood”
 - 2. Example: a caption under a photo of a Japanese-American:
 - a. “She was born in Japan but raised in Hawaii. Her nationality is American but no foreign blood flows in her veins”³
 - 3. Children of mixed marriages may not get the same “racial” label
 - a. But they are still stigmatized
 - b. As are Japanese who spend a long time away from Japan
 - 1) When they return, a process of reintegration must take place
 - 2) Children are sent to special schools⁴
 - 4. Again, built-in contradictions—the idiom of “pure blood” which presumably remains in the body no matter what
 - 5. This idiom is replaced by a notion of contamination from foreign influence
 - a. That must be cleansed, eliminated

³ Jennifer Robertson, Koreans in Japan. Paper presented at U Michigan Dept. of Anthropology Jan. 1992. Cited in Kottak.

⁴ See Merry White, 1988. *The Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children*. New York: Free Press, 1987, and Tokyo: Kodansha. Also in Japanese: Shueisha, 1992.