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Source: *American Sociological Review*, Jun., 1997, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Jun., 1997), pp. 465-480

Published by: American Sociological Association

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2657316

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RETHINKING RACISM: TOWARD A STRUCTURAL INTERPRETATION*

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The study of race and ethnic conflict historically has been hampered by inadequate and simplistic theories. I contend that the central problem of the various approaches to the study of racial phenomena is their lack of a structural theory of racism. I review traditional approaches and alternative approaches to the study of racism, and discuss their limitations. Following the leads suggested by some of the alternative frameworks, I advance a structural theory of racism based on the notion of racialized social systems.

"The habit of considering racism as a mental quirk, as a psychological flaw, must be abandoned."

—Frantz Fanon (1967:77)

The area of race and ethnic studies lacks a sound theoretical apparatus. To complicate matters, many analysts of racial matters have abandoned the serious theorization and reconceptualization of their central topic: racism. Too many social analysts researching racism assume that the phenomenon is self-evident, and therefore either do not provide a definition or provide an elementary definition (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Nevertheless, whether implicitly or explicitly, most analysts regard racism as a purely ideological phenomenon.

Although the concept of racism has become the central analytical category in most contemporary social scientific discourse on racial phenomena, the concept is of recent origin (Banton 1970; Miles 1989, 1993). It was not employed at all in the classic works of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918), Edward Reuter (1934), Gunnar Myrdal (1944), and Robert Park (1950).[1] Benedict (1945) was one of the first scholars to use the notion of racism in her book, *Race and Racism*. She defined racism as "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority" (p. 87). Despite some refinements, current use of the concept of racism in the social sciences is similar to Benedict's. Thus van den Berghe (1967) states that racism is "any *set of beliefs* that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups are intrinsically associated with the presence or the absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics, hence that such differences are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups socially defined as races" (p. 11, emphasis added). Schaefer (1990) provides a more concise definition of racism: " . . . a *doctrine* of racial supremacy, that one race is superior" (p. 16).

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[1] Yet they employed the very similar notion of ethnocentrism as developed by William Graham Sumner (1906). According to Sumner (1906) ethnocentrism was the belief that "one's own group is at the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (p. 13).

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This idealist view is still held widely among social scientists. Its narrow focus on ideas has reduced the study of racism mostly to social psychology, and this perspective has produced a schematic view of the way racism operates in society. First, racism is defined as a set of ideas or beliefs. Second, those beliefs are regarded as having the potential to lead individuals to develop prejudice, defined as "negative attitudes towards an entire group of people" (Schaefer 1990: 53). Finally, these prejudicial attitudes may induce individuals to real actions or discrimination against racial minorities. This conceptual framework, with minor modifications, prevails in the social sciences.

Some alternative perspectives on racism have closely followed the prevailing ideological conceptualization in the social sciences. For example, orthodox Marxists (Cox 1948; Perlo 1975; Szymanski 1981, 1983), who regard class and class struggle as the central explanatory variables of social life, reduce racism to a legitimating ideology used by the bourgeoisie to divide the working class. Even neo-Marxists (Bonacich 1980a, 1980b; Carchedi 1987; Cohen 1989; Hall 1980; Miles 1989, 1993; Miles and Phizacklea 1984; Solomos 1986, 1989; Wolpe 1986, 1988) share to various degrees the limitations of the orthodox Marxist view: the primacy of class, racism viewed as an ideology, and class dynamics as the real engine of racial dynamics. For example, although Bonacich's work provides an interesting twist by regarding race relations and racism as products of a split labor market, giving theoretical primacy to divisions within the working class, racial antagonisms are still regarded as byproducts of class dynamics.

Other scholars have advanced nonideological interpretations of racism but have stopped short of developing a structural conceptualization of racial matters. From the institutionalist perspective (Alvarez et al. 1979; Carmichael 1971; Carmichael and Hamilton 1967; Chesler 1976; Knowles and Prewitt 1969; Wellman 1977), racism is defined as a combination of prejudice and power that allows the dominant race to institutionalize its dominance at all levels in a society. Similarly, from the internal colonialism perspective (Barrera 1979; Blauner 1972; Moore 1970), racism is viewed as an institutional matter based on a system in which the White majority "raises its social position by exploiting, controlling, and keeping down others who are categorized in racial or ethnic terms" (Blauner 1972:22). The main difference between these two perspectives is that the latter regards racial minorities as colonial subjects in the United States; this view leads unequivocally to nationalist solutions.[2] Both perspectives contribute greatly to our understanding of racial phenomena by stressing the social and systemic nature of racism and the structured nature of White advantages. Furthermore, the effort of the institutionalist perspective to uncover contemporary mechanisms and practices that reproduce White advantages is still empirically useful (e.g., Knowles and Prewitt 1969). Yet neither of these perspectives provides a rigorous conceptual framework that allows analysts to study the operation of racially stratified societies.

The racial formation perspective (Omi and Winant 1986, 1994; Winant 1994) is the most recent theoretical alternative to mainstream idealist approaches. Omi and Winant (1994) define racial formation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 55). In their view, race should be regarded as an organizing principle of social relationships that shapes the identity of individual actors at the micro level and shapes all spheres of social life at the macro level.

Although this perspective represents a breakthrough, it still gives undue attention to ideological/cultural processes,[3] does not regard races as truly social collectivities, and overemphasizes the racial projects (Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 1994) of certain actors (neoconservatives, members of the far right, liberals), thus obscuring the social and general character of racialized societies.

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[2] Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) also advocate nationalist strategies. Unlike other institutionalists, however, they insist on the colonial relationship of minorities to the majority in the United States.

[3] In the most recent edition of *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant (1994) move closer to a structural view, but they still retain the ideological and juridico-political focus that characterizes the original edition.

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In this paper I point out the limitations of most contemporary frameworks used to analyze racial issues and suggest an alternative structural theory built on some of the ideas and concepts elaborated by the institutionalist, the internal colonial, and the racial formation perspectives. Although "racism" has a definite ideological component, reducing racial phenomena to ideas limits the possibility of understanding how it shapes a race's life chances. Rather than viewing racism as an all-powerful ideology that explains all racial phenomena in a society, I use the term *racism* only to describe the racial ideology of a racialized social system. That is, racism is only part of a larger racial system.

LIMITATIONS OF MAINSTREAM IDEALIST VIEWS AND OF SOME ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORKS

I describe below some of the main limitations of the idealist conception of racism. Because not all limitations apply to the institutionalist, the internal colonialist, and the racial formation perspectives, I point out the ones that do apply, and to what extent.

Racism is excluded from the foundation or structure of the social system. When racism is regarded as a baseless ideology ultimately dependent on other, "real" forces in society, the structure of the society itself is not classified as racist. The Marxist perspective is particularly guilty of this shortcoming. Although Marxists have addressed the question of the historical origin of racism, they explain its reproduction in an idealist fashion. Racism, in their accounts, is an ideology that emerged with chattel slavery and other forms of class oppression to justify the exploitation of people of color and survives as a residue of the past. Although some Marxists have attempted to distance their analysis from this purely ideological view (Solomos 1986; Wolpe 1988) and to ground racial phenomena in social relations, they do so by ultimately subordinating racial matters to class matters.

Even though the institutionalist, internal colonialism, and racial formation perspectives regard racism as a structural phenomenon and provide some useful ideas and concepts, they do not develop the theoretical apparatus necessary to describe how this structure operates.

Racism is ultimately viewed as a psychological phenomenon to be examined at the individual level. The research agenda that follows from this conceptualization is the examination of individuals' attitudes to determine levels of racism in society (Schuman et al. 1985; Sears 1988; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Given that the constructs used to measure racism are static—that is, that there are a number of standard questions which do not change significantly over time—this research usually finds that racism is declining in society. Those analysts who find that racist attitudes are still with us usually leave unexplained why this is so (Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

This psychological understanding of racism is related to the limitation I cited above. If racism is not part of a society but is a characteristic of individuals who are "racist" or "prejudiced"—that is, racism is a phenomenon operating at the individual level—then (1) social institutions cannot be racist and (2) studying racism is simply a matter of surveying the proportion of people in a society who hold "racist" beliefs.

Orthodox Marxists (Cox 1948; Perlo 1975; Szymanski 1983) and many neo-Marxists (Miles 1993; Miles and Phizaclea 1984; Solomos 1986) conceive of racism as an ideology that may affect members of the working class. Although the authors associated with the institutionalist, internal colonialist, and racial formation perspectives focus on the ideological character of racism, they all emphasize how this ideology becomes enmeshed or institutionalized in organizations and social practices.

Racism is treated as a static phenomenon. The phenomenon is viewed as unchanging; that is, racism yesterday is like racism today. Thus, when a society's racial structure and its customary racial practices are rearticulated, this rearticulation is characterized as a decline in racism (Wilson 1978), a natural process in a cycle (Park 1950), an example of increased assimilation (Rex 1973, 1986), or effective "norm changes" (Schuman et al. 1985). This limitation, which applies particularly to social psychologists and Marxist scholars, derives from not conceiving of racism as possessing an independent structural

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foundation. If racism is merely a matter of ideas that has no material basis in contemporary society, then those ideas should be similar to their original configuration, whatever that was. The ideas may be articulated in a different context, but most analysts essentially believe that racist ideas remain the same. For this reason, with notable exceptions (Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears 1988), their attitudinal research is still based on responses to questions developed in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

Analysts defining racism in an idealist manner view racism as "incorrect" or "irrational thinking"; thus they label "racists" as irrational and rigid. Because racism is conceived of as a belief with no real social basis, it follows that those who hold racist views must be irrational or stupid (Adorno 1950; Allport 1958; Santa Cruz 1977; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; for a critique see Blauner 1972 and Wellman 1977). This view allows for a tactical distinction between individuals with the "pathology" and social actors who are "rational" and racism-free. The problem with this rationalistic view is twofold. First, it misses the rational elements on which racialized systems originally were built. Second, and more important, it neglects the possibility that contemporary racism still has a rational foundation. In this account, contemporary racists are perceived as Archie Bunker–type individuals (Wellman 1977).

Among the alternative frameworks reviewed here, only orthodox Marxism insists on the irrational and imposed character of racism. Neo-Marxists and authors associated with the institutionalist, internal colonialist, and racial formation perspectives insist, to varying degrees, on the rationality of racism. Neo-Marxists (e.g., Bonacich, Wolpe, Hall) and authors in the racial formation tradition (e.g., Omi and Winant) acknowledge the short-term advantages that workers gain from racism; the institutionalist and internal colonial paradigms emphasize the systematic and long-term character of these advantages.

Racism is understood as overt behavior. Because the idealist approach regards racism as "irrational" and "rigid," its manifestations should be quite evident, usually involving some degree of hostility. This does not present serious analytical problems for the study of certain periods in racialized societies when racial practices were overt (e.g., slavery and apartheid), but problems in the analysis of racism arise in situations where racial practices are subtle, indirect, or fluid. For instance, many analysts have suggested that in contemporary America racial practices are manifested covertly (Bonilla-Silva and Lewis 1997; Wellman 1977) and racial attitudes tend to be symbolic (Pettigrew 1994; Sears 1988). Therefore it is a waste of time to attempt to detect "racism" by asking questions such as, "How strongly would you object if a member of your family wanted to bring a Black friend home to dinner?"[4] Also, many such questions were developed to measure the extent of racist attitudes in the population during the Jim Crow era of race relations; they are not suitable for the post-1960s period.

Furthermore, this emphasis on overt behavior limits the possibility of analyzing racial phenomena in other parts of the world such as Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico where race relations do not have an overt character. The form of race relations—overt or covert—depends on the pattern of racialization that structures a particular society (Cox 1948; Harris 1964; Rex 1983; van den Berghe 1967) and on how the process of racial contestation and other social dynamics affects that pattern (see the following section).

Contemporary racism is viewed as an expression of "original sin"—as a remnant of past historical racial situations. In the case of the United States, some analysts argue that racism preceded slavery and/or capitalism (Jordan 1968; Marable 1983; Robinson 1983). Others regard racism in the United States as the result of slavery (Glazer and Moynihan 1970). Even in promising new avenues of research, such as that presented by Roediger (1991) in *The Wages of Whiteness*, contemporary racism is viewed as one of the "legacies of white workerism" (p. 176). By considering racism as a legacy, all these analysts downplay the significance of its contemporary materiality or structure.

Again the Marxist perspective shares this limitation. Marxists believe that racism developed in the sixteenth century and has been used since then by capitalists or workers to

[4] This question is used by NORC and has been employed by Schuman et al. (1985).

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further their own class interests. All other models recognize the historic significance of this "discovery," but associate contemporary racial ideology with contemporary racially based inequalities.

Racism is analyzed in a circular manner. "If racism is defined as the behavior that results from the belief, its discovery becomes ensnared in a circularity—racism is a belief that produces behavior, which is itself racism" (Webster 1992:84). Racism is established by racist behavior, which itself is proved by the existence of racism. This circularity results from not grounding racism in social relations among the races. If racism, viewed as an ideology, were seen as possessing a structural[5] foundation, its examination could be associated with racial practices rather than with mere ideas and the problem of circularity would be avoided.

RACIALIZED SOCIAL SYSTEMS: AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING RACIAL PHENOMENA

Because all kinds of racial matters have been explained as a product of racism, I propose the more general concept of *racialized social systems* as the starting point for an alternative framework. This term refers to societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races. Races typically are identified by their phenotype, but (as we see later) the selection of certain human traits to designate a racial group is always socially rather than biologically based.

These systems are structured partially by race because modern social systems articulate two or more forms of hierarchical patterns (Hall 1980; Williams 1990; Winant 1994).[6] Although processes of racialization are always embedded in other structurations (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991), they acquire autonomy and have "pertinent effects" (Poulantzas 1982) in the social system. This implies that the phenomenon which is coded as racism and is regarded as a free-floating ideology in fact has a structural foundation.

In all racialized social systems the placement of people in racial categories involves some form of hierarchy[7] that produces definite social relations between the races. The race placed in the superior position tends to receive greater economic remuneration and access to better occupations and/or prospects in the labor market, occupies a primary posi-

[5] By *structure* I mean, following Whitmeyer (1994), "the networks of (interactional) relationships among actors as well as the distributions of socially meaningful characteristics of actors and aggregates of actors" (p. 154). For similar but more complex conceptions of the term, which are relational and incorporate the agency of actors, see Bourdieu (1984) and Sewell (1992). I reserve the term *material* to refer to the economic, social, political, or ideological rewards or penalties received by social actors for their participation (whether willing, unwilling, or indifferent) in social structural arrangements.

[6] Some potentially useful conceptions about the interaction of race, class, and gender (the primary axes of social hierarchy in modern societies) are Segura's (1990) "triple oppression" and Essed's (1991) analysis of "gendered racism." Also see Andersen and Hill Collins (1995) and Fraser (1989).

[7] This argument applies only to racialized social systems. In contrast, *ethnic* situations need not be based on relations between superiors and subordinates, as is the case between the Fur and the Baggara in western Sudan (Barth 1969), the various ethnic groups in Switzerland (Hunt and Walker 1974), the Tungus and the Cossacks in Siberia (Berry 1965), the Lake Zwai Laki and the Arsi in Ethiopia (Knutson 1969), and certain mountain tribes and the Thai in Laos (Izikowitz 1969). Certainly, ethnic situations can be conflictual and hierarchical, as illustrated by the Tutsis and the Hutus in Rwanda or the conflict between Serbians, Croatians, and Bosnians in what was once Yugoslavia. The point is that ethnicity and race are different bases for group association. Ethnicity has a primarily sociocultural foundation, and ethnic groups have exhibited tremendous malleability in terms of who belongs (Barth 1969; Leach [1954] 1964); racial ascriptions (initially) are imposed externally to justify the collective exploitation of a people and are maintained to preserve status differences. Hence scholars have pointed out that despite the similarities between race and ethnicity, they should be viewed as producing different types of structurations (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Cox 1948; Rex 1973; van den Berghe 1967; Wilson 1973). On this point see Horowitz (1985), Schermerhorn (1970), and Shibutani and Kwan (1965).

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tion in the political system, is granted higher social estimation (e.g., is viewed as "smarter" or "better looking"), often has the license to draw physical (segregation) as well as social (racial etiquette) boundaries between itself and other races, and receives what DuBois (1939) calls a "psychological wage" (Marable 1983; Roediger 1991).[8] The totality of these racialized social relations and practices constitutes the racial structure of a society.

Although all racialized social systems are hierarchical, the particular character of the hierarchy, and thus of the racial structure, is variable. For example, domination of Blacks in the United States was achieved through dictatorial means during slavery, but in the post-civil rights period this domination has been hegemonic (Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 1994).[9] Similarly, the racial practices and mechanisms that have kept Blacks subordinated changed from overt and eminently racist to covert and indirectly racist (Bonilla-Silva and Lewis 1997). The unchanging element throughout these stages is that Blacks' life chances are significantly lower than those of Whites, and ultimately a racialized social order is distinguished by this difference in life chances. Generally, the more dissimilar the races' life chances, the more racialized the social system, and vice versa.

Insofar as the races receive different social rewards at all levels, they develop dissimilar objective interests, which can be detected in their struggles to either transform or maintain a particular racial order. These interests are collective rather than individual, are based on relations between races rather than on particular group needs, and are not structural but practical; that is, they are related to concrete struggles rather than derived from the location of the races in the racial structure. In other words, although the races' interests can be detected from their practices, they are not subjective and individual but collective and shaped by the field of real practical alternatives, which is itself rooted in the power struggles between the races.[10] Although the objective general interests of races may ultimately lie in the complete elimination of a society's racial structure, its array of alternatives may not include that possibility. For instance, the historical struggle against chattel slavery led not to the development of race-free societies but to the establishment of social systems with a different kind of racialization. Race-free societies were not among the available alternatives because the nonslave populations had the capacity to preserve some type of racial privilege. The historical "exceptions" occurred in racialized societies in which the nonslaves' power was almost completely superseded by that of the slave population.[11]

A simple criticism of the argument advanced so far would be that it ignores the internal divisions of the races along class and gender lines. Such criticism, however, does not deal squarely with the issue at hand. The fact that not all members of the superordinate race receive the same level of rewards and (conversely) that not all members of the subordinate race or races are at the bottom of the social order does not negate the fact that races, as social groups, are in either a superordinate or a subordinate position in a social system. Historically the racialization of social systems did not imply the exclusion of other forms of oppression. In fact, racialization occurred in social formations also structured by class and gender. Hence, in these societies, the racial structuration of subjects is fragmented along class and gender lines.[12] The important question—which inter-

[8] Herbert Blumer was one of the first analysts to make this argument about systematic rewards received by the race ascribed the primary position in a racial order. Blumer (1955) summarized these views in his essay "Reflections on Theory of Race Relations." Also see the works of Blalock (1967), Schermerhorn (1970), Shibutani and Kwan (1965), and van den Berghe (1967).

[9] *Hegemonic* means that domination is achieved more through consent than by coercion.

[10] *Power* is defined here as a racial group's capacity to push for its racial interests in relation to other races.

[11] I am referring to cases such as Haiti. Nonetheless, recent research has suggested that even in such places, the abolition of slavery did not end the racialized character of the social formation (Trouillot 1990).

[12] Some authors have developed notions combining racial/ethnic positions with class. Gordon (1964) developed the concept of "ethclass" but assumed that this was a temporary phenomenon. Geschwender (1977) transformed the notion into the concept of race-class, defined as "a social collectivity comprised of persons who are simultaneously members of the same class and the same

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ests move actors to struggle?—is historically contingent and cannot be ascertained a priori (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Wolpe 1988). Depending on the character of racialization in a social order, class interests may take precedence over racial interests as they do in contemporary Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. In other situations, racial interests may take precedence over class interests as in the case of Blacks throughout U.S. history.

In general, the systemic salience of class in relation to race increases when the economic, political, and social distance between races decreases substantially. Yet this broad argument generates at least one warning: The narrowing of within-class differences between racial actors usually causes more rather than less racial conflict, at least in the short run, as the competition for resources increases (Blalock 1967; Olzak 1992). More significantly, even when class-based conflict becomes more salient in a social order, the racial component survives until the races' life chances are equalized and the mechanisms and social practices that produce those differences are eliminated. Hence societies in which race has declined in significance, such as Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico, still have a racial problem insofar as the racial groups have different life chances.

Because racial actors are also classed and gendered, analysts must control for class and for gender to ascertain the material advantages enjoyed by a dominant race. In a racialized society such as ours, the independent effects of race are assessed by analysts who (1) compare data between Whites and non-Whites in the same class and gender positions, (2) evaluate the proportion as well as the general character of the races' participation in some domain of life, and (3) examine racial data at all levels—social, political, economic, and ideological—to ascertain the general position of racial groups in a social system.

The first of these procedures has become standard practice in sociology. No serious sociologist would present racial statistics without controlling for gender and class (or at least the class of persons' family of origin). By doing this, analysts assume they can measure the unadulterated effects of "discrimination" manifested in unexplained "residuals" (Farley 1984, 1993; Farley and Allen 1987). Despite its usefulness, however, this technique provides only a partial account of the "race effect" because (1) a significant amount of racial data cannot be retrieved through surveys and (2) the technique of "controlling for" a variable neglects the obvious—why a group is over- or underrepresented in certain categories of the control variables in the first place (Whatley and Wright 1994). Moreover, these analysts presume that it is possible to analyze the amount of discrimination in one domain (e.g., income, occupational status) "without analyzing the extent to which discrimination also affects the factors they hold constant" (Reich 1978:383). Hence to evaluate "race effects" in any domain, analysts must attempt to make sense of their findings in relation to a race's standing on other domains.

But what is the nature of races or, more properly, of racialized social groups? Omi and Winant (1986; also see Miles 1989) state that races are the outcome of the racialization process, which they define as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group" (p. 64). Historically the classification of a people in racial terms has been a highly political act associated with practices such as conquest and colonization, enslavement, peonage, indentured servitude, and, more recently, colonial and neocolonial labor immigration. Categories such as "Indians" and "Negroes" were invented (Allen 1994; Berkhoffer 1978; Jordan 1968) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to justify the conquest and exploitation of various peoples. The invention of such categories entails a dialectical process of construction; that is, the creation of a category of "other" involves the creation of a category of "same." If "Indians" are depicted as "savages," Europeans are characterized as "civilized"; if "Blacks" are defined as natural candidates for slavery, "Whites" are defined as free subjects (Gossett 1963; Roediger 1991, 1994; Todorov 1984). Yet although the racialization of peoples was socially invented and did not override previous forms of social distinction

race" (p. 221; also see Barrera 1979:174–279). Geschwender, however, views racial interests as somewhat less "objective" and less "fundamental" than class interests.

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based on class or gender, it did not lead to imaginary relations but generated new forms of human association with definite status differences. After the process of attaching meaning to a "people" is instituted, race becomes a real category of group association and identity.[13]

Because racial classifications partially organize and limit actors' life chances, racial practices of opposition emerge. Regardless of the form of racial interaction (overt, covert, or inert), races can be recognized in the realm of racial relations and positions. Viewed in this light, races are the effect of racial practices of opposition ("we" versus "them") at the economic, political, social, and ideological levels.[14]

Races, as most social scientists acknowledge, are not biologically but socially determined categories of identity and group association.[15] In this regard, they are analogous to class and gender (Amott and Matthaei 1991). Actors in racial positions do not occupy those positions because they are of X or Y race, but because X or Y has been socially defined as a race. Actors' phenotypical (i.e., biologically inherited) characteristics, such as skin tone and hair color and texture, are usually, although not always (Barth 1969; Miles 1993), used to denote racial distinctions. For example, Jews in many European nations (Miles 1989, 1993) and the Irish in England have been treated as racial groups (Allen 1994). Also, Indians in the United States have been viewed as one race despite the tremendous phenotypical and cultural variation among tribes. Because races are socially constructed, both the meaning and the position assigned to races in the racial structure are always contested (Gilroy 1991). What and who is to be Black or White or Indian reflects and affects the social, political, ideological, and economic struggles between the races. The global effects of these struggles can change the meaning of the racial categories as well as the position of a racialized group in a social formation.

This latter point is illustrated clearly by the historical struggles of several "White ethnic" groups in the United States in their efforts to become accepted as legitimate Whites or "Americans" (Litwack 1961; Roediger 1991; Saxton 1990; Williams 1990). Neither light-skinned—nor, for that matter, dark-skinned—immigrants necessarily came to this country as members of race X or race Y. Light-skinned Europeans, after brief periods of being "not-yet White" (Roediger 1994), became "White," but they did not lose their "ethnic" character. Their struggle for inclusion had specific implications: racial inclusion as members of the White community allowed Americanization and class mobility. On the other hand, among dark-skinned immigrants from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, the struggle was to avoid classification as "Black." These immigrants challenged the reclassification of their identity for a simple reason: In the United States "Black" signified a subordinate status in society. Hence many of these groups struggled to keep their own ethnic or cultural identity, as denoted in expressions such as "I am not Black; I am Jamaican," or "I am not Black; I am Senegalese" (Kasinitz and Freidenberg-Herbstein 1987; Rodríguez 1991; Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1987). Yet eventually many of these groups resolved this contradictory situation by accepting the duality of their social classification as Black in the United States while retaining and nourishing their own cultural or ethnic heritage—a heritage deeply influenced by African traditions.

Although the content of racial categories changes over time through manifold processes and struggles, race is not a secondary category of group association. The meaning of Black and White, the "racial formation" (Omi and Winant 1986), changes within the larger racial structure. This does not mean that the racial structure is immutable and completely independent of the action of

[13] This point has been stressed by many social analysts since Barth's (1969) crucial work conceiving of ethnicity as a form of social organization.

[14] This last point is an extension of Poulantzas's view on class. Races (as classes) are not an "empirical thing"; they denote racialized social relations or racial practices at all levels (Poulantzas 1982:67).

[15] Weber ([1920] 1978) made one of the earliest statements of this view. He regarded race and ethnicity as "presumed identities" in which the actors attached subjective meanings to so-called common traits. Leach ([1954] 1964), in his study of the Kachin in highland Burma, was one of the first social scientists to illustrate the malleability of ethnic boundaries.

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racialized actors. It means only that the social relations between the races become institutionalized (forming a structure as well as a culture) and affect their social life whether individual members of the races want it or not. In Barth's words (1969), "Ethnic identity implies a series of constraints on the kinds of roles an individual is allowed to play [and] is similar to sex and rank, in that it constrains the incumbent in all his activities" (p. 17). For instance, free Blacks during the slavery period struggled to change the meaning of "blackness," and specifically to dissociate it from slavery. Yet they could not escape the larger racial structure that restricted their life chances and their freedom (Berlin 1975; Franklin 1974; Meir and Rudwick 1970).

The placement of groups of people in racial categories stemmed initially[16] from the interests of powerful actors in the social system (e.g., the capitalist class, the planter class, colonizers). After racial categories were used to organize social relations in a society, however, race became an independent element of the operation of the social system (Stone 1985).

Here I depart from analysts such as Jordan (1968), Robinson (1983), and Miles (1989, 1993), who take the mere existence of a racial discourse as manifesting the presence of a racial order. Such a position allows them to speak of racism in medieval times (Jordan) and to classify the antipeasant views of French urbanites (Miles) or the prejudices of the aristocracy against peasants in the Middle Ages (Robinson) as expressions of racism. In my view, we can speak of racialized orders only when a racial discourse is accompanied by social relations of subordination and superordination between the races. The available evidence suggests that racialized social orders emerged after the imperialist expansion of Europe to the New World and Africa (Boggs 1970; Cox 1948; Furnivall 1948; Magubane 1990; E. Williams [1944] 1961; R. Williams 1990).

What are the dynamics of racial issues in racialized systems? Most important, after a social formation is racialized, its "normal" dynamics always include a racial component. Societal struggles based on class or gender contain a racial component because both of these social categories are also racialized; that is, both class and gender are constructed along racial lines. In 1922, for example, White South African workers in the middle of a strike inspired by the Russian revolution rallied under the slogan "Workers of the world unite for a White South Africa." One of the state's "concessions" to this "class" struggle was the passage of the Apprenticeship Act of 1922, "which prevented Black workers acquiring apprenticeships" (Ticktin 1991:26). In another example, the struggle of women in the United States to attain their civil and human rights has always been plagued by deep racial tensions (Caraway 1991; Giddings 1984).

Nonetheless, some of the strife that exists in a racialized social formation has a distinct racial character; I call such strife "racial contestation"—the struggle of racial groups for systemic changes regarding their position at one or more levels. Such a struggle may be social (Who can be here? Who belongs here?), political (Who can vote? How much power should they have? Should they be citizens?), economic (Who should work, and what should they do? They are taking our jobs!), or ideological (Black is beautiful! The term designating people of African descent in the United States has changed from Negro to Black to African American).

Although much of this contestation is expressed at the individual level and is disjointed, sometimes it becomes collective and general, and can effect meaningful systemic changes in a society's racial organization. The form of contestation may be relatively passive and subtle (e.g., in situations of fundamental overt racial domination, such as slavery and apartheid) or more active and more overt (e.g., in quasi-democratic situations

[16] The motivation for racializing human relations may have originated in the interests of powerful actors, but after social systems are racialized, all members of the dominant race participate in defending and reproducing the racial structure. This is the crucial reason why Marxist analysts (Cox 1948; Reich 1981) have not been successful in analyzing racism. They have not been able to accept the fact that after the phenomenon originated with the expansion of European capitalism into the New World, it acquired a life of its own. The subjects who were racialized as belonging to the superior race, whether or not they were members of the dominant class, became zealous defenders of the racial order.

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such as the contemporary United States). As a rule, however, fundamental changes in racialized social systems are accompanied by struggles that reach the point of overt protest.[17] This does not mean that a violent racially based revolution is the only way of accomplishing effective changes in the relative position of racial groups. It is a simple extension of the argument that social systems and their supporters must be "shaken" if fundamental transformations are to take place.[18] On this structural foundation rests the phenomenon labeled racism by social scientists.

I reserve the term *racism* (racial ideology) for the segment of the ideological structure of a social system that crystallizes racial notions and stereotypes. Racism provides the rationalizations for social, political, and economic interactions between the races (Bobo 1988). Depending on the particular character of a racialized social system and on the struggles of the subordinated races, racial ideology may be developed highly (as in apartheid), or loosely (as in slavery), and its content can be expressed in overt or covert terms (Bobo and Smith forthcoming; Jackman 1994; Kinder and Sears 1981; Pettigrew 1994; Sears 1988).

Although racism or racial ideology originates in race relations, it acquires relative autonomy in the social system and performs practical functions.[19] In Gilroy's (1991) words, racial ideology "mediates the world of agents and the structures which are created by their social praxis" (p. 17; also see Omi and Winant 1994; van Dijk 1984, 1987, 1993). Racism crystallizes the changing "dogma" on which actors in the social system operate (Gilroy 1991), and becomes "common sense" (Omi and Winant 1994); it provides the rules for perceiving and dealing with the "other" in a racialized society. In the United States, for instance, because racial notions about what Blacks and Whites are or ought to be pervade their encounters, Whites still have difficulty in dealing with Black bankers, lawyers, professors, and doctors (Cose 1993; Graham 1995). Thus, although racist ideology is ultimately false, it fulfills a practical role in racialized societies.

At this point it is possible to sketch the elements of the alternative framework presented here. First, racialized social systems are societies that allocate differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines; lines that are socially constructed. After a society becomes racialized, a set of social relations and practices based on racial distinctions develops at all societal levels. I designate the aggregate of those relations and practices as the racial structure of a society. Second, races historically are constituted according to the process of racialization; they become the effect of relations of opposition between racialized groups at all levels of a social formation. Third, on the basis of this structure, there develops a racial ideology (what analysts have coded as racism). This ideology is not simply a "superstructural" phenomenon (a mere reflection of the racialized system), but becomes the organizational map that guides actions of racial actors in society. It becomes as real as the racial relations it organizes. Fourth, most struggles in a racialized social system contain a racial component, but sometimes they acquire and/or exhibit a distinct racial character. Racial contestation is the logical outcome of a society with a racial hierarchy. A social formation that includes some form of racialization will always exhibit some form of racial contestation. Finally, the process of racial contestation reveals the different objective interests of the races in a racialized system.

CONCLUSION

My central argument is that racism, as defined by mainstream social scientists to con-

[17] This argument is not new. Analysts of the racial history of the United States have always pointed out that most of the significant historical changes in this country's race relations were accompanied by some degree of overt violence (Button 1989; Cruse 1968; Franklin 1974; Marable 1983).

[18] This point is important in literature on revolutions and democracy. On the role of violence in the establishment of bourgeois democracies, see Moore (1966). On the role of violence in social movements leading to change, see Piven and Cloward (1979) and Tilly (1978).

[19] The notion of relative autonomy comes from the work of Poulantzas (1982) and implies that the ideological and political levels in a society are partially autonomous in relation to the economic level; that is, they are not merely expressions of the economic level.

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sist only of ideas, does not provide adequate theoretical foundation for understanding racial phenomena. I suggest that until a structural framework is developed, analysts will be entangled in ungrounded ideological views of racism. Lacking a structural view, they will reduce racial phenomena to a derivation of the class structure (as do Marxist interpreters) or will view these phenomena as the result of an irrational ideology (as do mainstream social scientists). Although others have attempted to develop a structural understanding of racial matters (such as authors associated with the institutionalist, internal colonial, and racial formation perspectives) and/or to write about racial matters as structural (Bobo and Smith forthcoming; Cose 1993; Essed 1991; Feagin and Feagin 1993; Page 1996; van Dijk 1993), they have failed to elaborate a framework that extends beyond their critique of mainstream views.

In the alternative framework developed here, I suggest that racism should be studied from the viewpoint of racialization. I contend that after a society becomes racialized, racialization develops a life of its own.[20] Although it interacts with class and gender structurations in the social system, it becomes an organizing principle of social relations in itself (Essed 1991; Omi and Winant 1986; Robinson 1983; van Dijk 1987). Race, as most analysts suggest, is a social construct, but that construct, like class and gender, has independent effects in social life. After racial stratification is established, race becomes an independent criterion for vertical hierarchy in society. Therefore different races experience positions of subordination and superordination in society and develop different interests.

The alternative framework for studying racial orders presented here has the following advantages over traditional views of racism:

Racial phenomena are regarded as the "normal" outcome of the racial structure of a society. Thus we can account for all racial manifestations. Instead of explaining racial phenomena as deriving from other structures or from racism (conceived of as a free-floating ideology), we can trace cultural, political, economic, social, and even psychological racial phenomena to the racial organization of that society.

The changing nature of what analysts label "racism" is explained as the normal outcome of racial contestation in a racialized social system. In this framework, changes in racism are explained rather than described. Changes are due to specific struggles at different levels among the races, resulting from differences in interests. Such changes may transform the nature of racialization and the global character of racial relations in the system (the racial structure). Therefore, change is viewed as a normal component of the racialized system.

The framework of racialization allows analysts to explain overt as well as covert racial behavior. The covert or overt nature of racial contacts depends on how the process of racialization is manifested; this in turns depends on how race originally was articulated in a social formation and on the process of racial contestation. This point implies that rather than conceiving of racism as a universal and uniformly orchestrated phenomenon, analysts should study "historically-specific racisms" (Hall 1980:336). This insight is not new; Robert Park (1950) and Oliver Cox (1948) and Marvin Harris (1964) described varieties of "situations of race relations" with distinct forms of racial interaction.

Racially motivated behavior, whether or not the actors are conscious of it, is regarded as "rational"—that is, as based on the races' different interests.[21] This framework accounts for Archie Bunker–type racial behavior as well as for more "sophisticated" varieties of racial conduct. Racial phenomena are viewed as systemic; therefore all actors in the system participate in racial affairs. Some members of the dominant racial group tend to exhibit less virulence toward members of the subordinated races because they have greater control over the form and the outcome of their racial interactions. When

[20] Historian Eugene Genovese (1971) makes a similar argument. Although he still regards racism as an ideology, he states that once it "arises it alters profoundly the material reality and in fact becomes a partially autonomous feature of that reality" (p. 340).

[21] Actions by the Ku Klux Klan have an unmistakably racial tone, but many other actions (choosing to live in a suburban neighborhood, sending one's children to a private school, or opposing government intervention in hiring policies) also have racial undertones.

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they cannot control that interaction—as in the case of revolts, general threats to Whites, Blacks moving into "their" neighborhood—they behave much like other members of the dominant race.

The reproduction of racial phenomena in contemporary societies is explained in this framework, not by reference to a long-distant past, but in relation to its contemporary structure. Because racism is viewed as systemic (possessing a racial structure) and as organized around the races' different interests, racial aspects of social systems today are viewed as fundamentally related to hierarchical relations between the races in those systems. Elimination of the racialized character of a social system entails the end of racialization, and hence of races altogether. This argument clashes with social scientists' most popular policy prescription for "curing" racism, namely education. This "solution" is the logical outcome of defining racism as a belief. Most analysts regard racism as a matter of individuals subscribing to an irrational view, thus the cure is educating them to realize that racism is wrong. Education is also the choice "pill" prescribed by Marxists for healing workers from racism. The alternative theorization offered here implies that because the phenomenon has structural consequences for the races, the only way to "cure" society of racism is by eliminating its systemic roots. Whether this can be accomplished democratically or only through revolutionary means is an open question, and one that depends on the particular racial structure of the society in question.

A racialization framework accounts for the ways in which racial/ethnic stereotypes emerge, are transformed, and disappear. Racial stereotypes are crystallized at the ideological level of a social system. These images ultimately indicate (although in distorted ways) and justify the stereotyped group's position in a society. Stereotypes may originate out of (1) material realities or conditions endured by the group, (2) genuine ignorance about the group, or (3) rigid, distorted views on the group's physical, cultural, or moral nature. Once they emerge, however, stereotypes must relate—although not necessarily fit perfectly—to the group's true social position in the racialized system if they are to perform their ideological function. Stereotypes that do not tend to reflect a group's situation do not work and are bound to disappear: For example, notions of the Irish as stupid or of Jews as athletically talented have all but vanished since the 1940s, as the Irish moved up the educational ladder and Jews gained access to multiple routes to social mobility. Generally, then, stereotypes are reproduced because they reflect the group's distinct position and status in society. As a corollary, racial or ethnic notions about a group disappear only when the group's status mirrors that of the dominant racial or ethnic group in the society.

The framework developed here is not a universal theory explaining racial phenomena in societies. It is intended to trigger a serious discussion of how race shapes social systems. Moreover, the important question of how race interacts and intersects with class and gender has not yet been addressed satisfactorily. Provisionally I argue that a nonfunctionalist reading of the concept of social system may give us clues for comprehending societies "structured in dominance" (Hall 1980). If societies are viewed as systems that articulate different structures (organizing principles on which sets of social relations are systematically patterned), it is possible to claim that race—as well as gender—has both individual and combined (interaction) effects in society.

To test the usefulness of racialization as a theoretical basis for research, we must perform comparative work on racialization in various societies. One of the main objectives of this comparative work should be to determine whether societies have specific mechanisms, practices, and social relations that produce and reproduce racial inequality at all levels—that is, whether they possess a racial structure. I believe, for example, that the persistent inequality experienced by Blacks and other racial minorities in the United States today is due to the continued existence of a racial structure (Bonilla-Silva and Lewis 1997). In contrast to race relations in the Jim Crow period, however, racial practices that reproduce racial inequality in contemporary America (1) are increasingly covert, (2) are embedded in normal operations of institutions, (3) avoid direct racial terminology, and (4) are invisible to most Whites. By examining whether other countries have practices

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and mechanisms that account for the persistent inequality experienced by their racial minorities, analysts could assess the usefulness of the framework I have introduced.

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