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Social Construction and Racial Identities

Before the construction of race in science, there were ideas of different human groups but no conceptual system of difference applying to all humankind. The construction of race in science drew on existing societal ideas and created abstract typologies that in turn became the cognitive element of race in society. However, at this time, after typologies of race have been discarded in the biological sciences, racial constructions in society endure and continue to be reconstructed. Socially constructed race has a momentum of its own that people live out, and social scientists, scholars, and those in the creative arts continue to study and suggest ways to change.

The construction and reconstruction of race in society has legal, social, economic, and cultural components, all of which taken together, in different combinations, or in isolated experience, make it seem to individuals that race is natural and inevitable, instead of human-made and historically and geographically contingent. Individuals have different physical traits that have already been selected as racial traits before their birth and that prior selection forms a reality to be experienced—lived with compliance or resistance, or both. Such compliance *reproduces* or maintains and furthers preexisting social race, over time. Resistance has the potential to change the background of racial construction, although any particular act of resistance has unpredictable consequences, because it has to be interpreted, supported, and duplicated by other people, in order to be effective.

Individuals belong to or are associated with racial groups that are imagined to have general traits and the individual herself comes to have patterns of behavior, expectations, and beliefs that pertain to how she regards

and presents herself in racial terms. That is, although race is already present in the social world that a child and adult live in, the child and then the adult has the task of forming a racial aspect of the self and presenting that racial identity to others. Society identifies people racially and people come to have racial identities, both as single units and as parts of the groups with which they identify and to which they belong. Thus, to say that race is *socially* constructed may refer to only one side of the process of social construction. Society, which is to say, other people, have constructed ideas about race and systems regulating behavior based on race. But human individuals are not mere mirrors of social institutions and the thoughts and actions of other individuals. A complete account of the social construction of race, therefore, includes its construction on the level of individual identities.

The **social construction** of race and racial identities affect many aspects of human life in societies with racial systems, often in profound, unintended, and unpredictable ways. There are social constructions that are benign or neutral, for example, the money system and weather reports. Such benign and neutral social constructions usually do not purport to be caused by different underlying physical facts about members of distinct groups, which determine their nature. Race, however, is not a benign social construction, because it purports to be based on real biological differences that do not exist. Human aptitudes and capabilities are randomly distributed within different social racial groups, so that differences in achievement are not caused by those traits that society continues to consider racial traits—there are no biological racial traits in the scientific sense and no differences in human value or moral worth based on biological race. Rather, differences in achievement between racial groups are the result of the fact that social racial systems are hierarchical. Racial identities come with predetermined social status and differences in power. Another way of describing this is to say that disadvantaged racial groups and their members are oppressed by more advantaged racial groups and their members.

Oppression is unjust treatment or control and when the objects of oppression are racial groups and their members, it is usually called *racism*. Racism will be the subject of Chapter 7, but it can be difficult to separate racism from the construction of race itself. One clear difference is that even though racial hierarchy is in itself oppressive, not everyone who benefits from a system of constructed race or racial hierarchy is necessarily a racist person. There are also aspects of oppression that do not begin from within positions of racial hierarchies, but originate in other hierarchies, such as wealth or gender. In order to account for the emergence of race as an idea and system in modernity, it is necessary to understand the non-racial

forms of oppression that preceded race and led to the construction of race. Because racial systems are not caused by natural aspects of race—which do not exist—the underlying motivations for constructing those systems may be masked to participants, by ideology. **Racial ideology** is a false system of claims and beliefs about racial differences and racial groups that justifies racial oppression, as well as racial disadvantage. After systems of race have been constructed, racial ideology may be used to justify the actions of oppressive groups and individuals. But racial ideology is psychic and symbolic, a form of discourse. To implement racial ideology and serve underlying powerful economic and political interests, **social technologies of race** are necessary (for example, new racial identifications). Ideology and social technologies of race may lead to new constructions of race and with them, new racial identities.

The sections of this chapter address several aspects of the social construction of race and identity. First, racial construction for economic reasons will be explored in terms of colonialism and global development. This will be followed by subjects pertaining to processes that occur inside of functioning systems of race: social technologies of race and racism; individual racial identities; models for resisting and deconstructing race.

Colonialism and Global Development

Colonization of Africa, Asia, and South America by European nations spanned the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries (Essential Humanities, 2008–2013). The period from the 15th through the seventeenth centuries, called the “Age of Exploration” or the “Age of Discovery,” was initially financed by Spain and Portugal. There were earlier voyages during the Middle Ages, including land travel to the Middle East and China by Italian traders, Catholic missionaries, and members of the Russian royal family. Muhammad al-Idrisi (1100–1165), an Arab geographer, created a detailed map of the known world, “Tabula Rogeriana,” for King Roger II of Sicily. A Moroccan scholar traveled to Africa and China in the mid-1300s and in the early 1400s, Arab and Chinese traders went to India, Thailand, East Africa, Arabia, and Southeast Asia (World Atlas 2017). Not all early exploration made it into the big historical record (as noted in Chapter 5, there are accounts of twelfth century Welch contact with American Indians).

The Age of Colonization is more or less officially past. European colonies became *mandates* after World War I and decolonization was almost complete after World War II. Portugal gave up Macau to China in 1999. As of 2008, there were 16 remaining colonies in the world, populated by 1.2 million

people, including tourist destinations such as the British Virgin Islands, Bermuda, and the Caymen Islands (Lange 2008). Colonization was made official by political domination, taking over preexisting sovereignty, or creating new political structures—all backed up by force. The stronger the political domination, the greater imposed economic changes, and with that, social upheaval in colonized populations (Ziltener et al. 2017).

Colonization has been succeeded by **development**, the expansion of the Western market economy and infrastructure supporting it to parts of the world that were, for the most part, former colonies. The emphasis by international corporations (backed up by governments) on natural resource extraction—including **outsourced labor** for wages much lower than what workers are paid in developed countries—trade, and distribution for final consumption, exhibit further economic continuity with colonialism. And in purely economic terms, global prosperity has generally increased with development (Agénor and Montiel 2008). Yet no one doubts that there are tragic casualties of these economic changes: internal ethnic wars and massacres, civilian deaths in wars supported by external national powers, malnutrition, famine, and environmental degradation, including water shortages and disaster-level fallout from human contributions to climate change (Center for Global Development 2017).

The age of colonization was sufficiently at odds with Enlightenment ideals, especially in its enablement of chattel slavery, to have occasioned the need for anti-nonwhite racial science and white supremacist racial ideologies. Global development, by contrast, is not as explicit about racial difference, although it is not entirely coincidental that the poorest nations in the world, in Asia, Africa, and South America, are populated by nonwhite people. Furthermore, although slavery is both officially illegal and no longer has ideological justification, there are more slaves alive in the twenty-first century than at any time in the past.

Observers and activists estimate that there are 12–45 million slaves at present. Many are women and children who are sexually exploited through “human trafficking.” They are often entrapped through schemes and scams that lure them from their homes with promises of attractive employment that turn out to require prostitution and drudgery. They are then coerced into incurring unpayable debt for the cost of their transportation and lodging and the lives of their family members may be jeopardized if they escape. Other forms of trafficking involve outright sale of adolescents and children for whatever purposes their buyers determine. Contemporary slaves are extremely poor and most are nonwhite (Free the Slaves 2017).

Some progressive scholars study development as both the legacy of colonialism and a continuation of it, via **postcolonial studies** or **postcolonial critical theory of international relations (IR)** (Bayliss et al. 2011). Along these lines, it could be said that if specific racial traits and the system of race were constructed during the age of colonization, then the results of those constructions have contributed to further constructions of race that associate global nonwhiteness with technological backwardness and poverty. Alternatively, it could be claimed that the process works in the other direction, so that global poverty results in the construction of new racial taxonomies on international levels.

It is also important to understand that colonialism, with its constructions of race, was not a smooth preconceived plan carried out by Europe against the rest of world. Europe was often the site of internal wars and there were fits and starts in developing the ideologies to justify colonial practices. For instance, the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1656), shocked the conscience of the Catholic Church with *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542) that chronicled the conquistadors' atrocities against indigenous people in the West Indies. Las Casas dedicated his life to the rights of the Indians, basing his arguments on Church law (Las Casas 1992). Against pro-slavery advocates, he argued that Indians were rational and merited conversion to Christianity (Pennington 1970). By 1607, Spain was bankrupted through inflation caused by a flood of gold into a static economy with no infrastructure to produce goods that the gold could be used to buy (Cavendish 2007). Portugal had the oldest and longest foreign empire but during its alliance with Spain, Portugal was attacked by Spain's enemies and Brazil, its richest colony, gained independence in 1822 (Pedreira 2000). These obstacles to the colonial process and its eventual fall are evidence of the historical unevenness of racial oppression, although successful revolution by the oppressed was rare. Haiti was an early exception.

The slave revolution in Haiti (1791–1803) victoriously gained independence from France for her richest colony. Toussaint l'Overture, a former slave, led forces to defeat the French and repel an English invasion. He took over the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo (later the Dominican Republic) to rule over the entire island, newly named Hispaniola. Napoleon tried to re-enslave Haiti and captured l'Overture, but General Jean-Jacques Dessalines, also a former slave, conclusively defeated the French (Sutherland 2007–2017; Ott 1973.)

Compared to anti-colonial rebellion or revolution there are more institutionalized forms of resistance to the unjust results of development, both internationally through the United Nations and other humanitarian

organizations and from within developing nations and communities within them. But there may at times be external moral paralysis in the face of internal genocide, as in the 1994 war in Rwanda, which was largely the result of the legacy of colonialism.

Within Rwanda, Tutsis were an Ethiopian group who conquered the Hutus during the 1300s. Hutus and Tutsis both speak Bantu and French, they shared the same cultural traditions, and practiced Christianity. They lived in peace, with mutual assimilation until Belgium colonized Rwanda in 1916. Belgium colonizers favored the Tutsis, most of whom were lighter in skin color than most Hutus. Tutsis became the dominant ethnic group until Rwandan independence in 1962, when the Hutus, who were the majority, gained control and held the Tutsis responsible for economic problems. Ethnic violence erupted and Tutsi refugees fled to Uganda and formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In 1994, the Hutu president's plane was shot down. Hutu government soldiers and civilian militias attacked Tutsis with machetes and blew up the churches where civilians had taken refuge. This widespread massacre was the Rwandan Genocide, in which 800,000 Rwandans were killed over three months. United Nations forces tried to restore peace but withdrew after ten soldiers were killed. Tutsis, through the RPF and support from Uganda, then embarked on a civil war that resulted in taking over the Rwandan government. Two million Hutus fled to Zaire (The Democratic Republic of Congo), where they were believed to engage in conflicts between Zaire and Rwanda, in addition to their own confrontations with Rwandan forces. The result was 5 million deaths. The Tutsi government of Rwanda repeatedly invaded Zaire in attempts to eradicate the Hutus there (BBC Africa 2012). For reasons still not widely understood or agreed upon, the international community continues to stand by while the Hutu-Tutsi violence continues. In 2008, a Hutu commander told the press, "We are fighting every day because we are Hutu and they are Tutsis. We cannot mix, we are always in conflict. We will stay enemies forever" (Johnson 2012).

Of course, as a sovereign nation, Rwanda is responsible for its own internal affairs. And if the seeds of the ongoing Hutu-Tutsis war were planted during colonialism, that does not mean those who continued to nurture them are not responsible for the discord they create. Nevertheless, from an historical perspective, the 1994 Tutsis-Hutu civil war is continuous with the change in the relations between these groups under Belgium rule. But history goes on. The new 2003 constitution under President Kagame, leader of the Tutsis RFP outlawed the formation of political parties based on race or ethnicity. Toward preventing further genocide, Kagame amassed unprecedented power and was reelected for another 7-year term in 2010.

International observers closely watched Kagame's reelection in August 2017, because the stability of Rwanda is considered crucial for the stability of the entire region of sub-Saharan Africa. Kagame has brought important changes in health, education, and prosperity, but it is feared that his continuance in power will reduce the prospects for democratic rule in Rwanda and beyond (Mbaku 2017).

Social Technologies of Race and Racism

There have been many social technologies of race that pick out racial groups lower in status. Some, such as segregation, was explicit. Others, such as control over human reproduction through marriage restrictions, began by being explicit but continue as implicit matters of custom. There have also been legal doctrines, for instance *terra nullius* and *territorium nullius* and *separate but equal* that were used to support specific practices and then retired when their associated practices were abolished. More difficult to address are indirect social technologies, such as preferential residential segregation and racial differences in educational opportunities.

Terra Nullius and Territorium Nullius

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the founder of philosophical **utilitarianism** (the principle that moral good is the greatest pleasure for the greatest number), thought that there were no natural rights and that all rights are created by government and are legal rights. He accordingly had a jaundiced view of Australian aborigines before 1788, because he presumed them to be without government:

We know what it is for men to live without government, for we see instances of such a way of life—we see it in many savage nations, or rather races of mankind; for instance, Among the savages of New South Wales, whose way of living is so well known to us: no habit of obedience, and hence no government—no government, and thence no laws—no laws, and thence no such things as rights—no security—no property, liberty, as against regular control, the control of laws and government—perfect; but as against all irregular control, the mandates of stronger individuals' none. (Bentham 1816/1998, p. 6)

Here is what an official travel website wrote in 2010 about the inhabitants of New South Wales in the time frame relevant to what Bentham wrote.

At the time of British settlement at Sydney Cove it is estimated that 300,000 aboriginal people, speaking around 250 languages inhabited Australia. On arrival, finding no obvious political structure, the Europeans took the land as their own. The Indigenous people were driven out of their homes and many killed. Various new European diseases spread rapidly amongst the indigenous people, killing many. The introduction of feral and domestic animals contributed to the destruction of natural habitats. Fighting wiped out the Aboriginal population in Tasmania and greatly reduced the numbers in the rest of Australia. (Australian Explorer 2017)

In other words, Bentham, as many of his generation, assumed that without evident government according to European standards, there could be no human civilization or civility. That extremely legalistic thinking was part of an approach to the world during the age of colonization, which derived from a long tradition of **natural law** (law that upheld basic or God-given order in the world). The justification for dispossession of indigenous lands has in retrospect been called the doctrine of **terra nullius** or the right of first taker to what is owned by no one. But at the time Bentham wrote, he was implicitly relying on **territorium nullius**, a doctrine holding that a territory without government jurisdiction can be seized by a society with an established government (Fitzmaurice 2007). Bentham and other educated Englishmen of his day could not conceive of non-western forms of government even when they encountered them. For instance, the Iroquois Indians in New York State had a complex system of representative government, in existence to this day, but not recognized by European settlers as valid sovereignty (Mohawk Nation Office, Kahnawà:ke Branch 2017).

Human Reproduction, Segregation, and Education

State control over which people are legally permitted to marry and as a result, legitimately have children with, is a biological form of social technology. Like other animals, people inherit observable traits from their parents and ancestors. They will resemble their parents and ancestors in hereditary traits of skin color, hair texture, and physical structure, if their parents and ancestors resemble each other. Control of human reproduction over generations has amounted to a physical construction of race. A key idea in US racial reproductive history was **white racial purity**. Given the assumption that the white race was superior, it became important to control who could be white. The simplest way to do this was to regulate the parentage

and ancestry of white people. Looking toward the future, only white people could have white children and grandchildren. Looking back, although the past cannot be controlled, it could be stipulated that only those with all white ancestry qualified as white. By about 1900, any known degree of nonwhite ancestry was sufficient for a person not to be considered white. Before then, varied US state law allowed for whites to have one nonwhite grandparent or great grandparent (Zack 1993, pp. 19–41).

Marriage was important as a secondary article of social technology, because it legitimized new births. People whose parents were not married were illegitimate, which was a social stigma until the late twentieth century when the rate of illegitimate births peaked. (Births outside of marriage increased 5% a year from 89,500 to 1.7 million, from 1940–1990 (Ventura and Bachrach 2000)). White families could have no nonwhite members and in a society placing a high value on families, as well as whiteness, white families constituted by white people were more highly valued than any other kind of racial family. Whites could and did have children with nonwhites but until recently, those children were not recognized as members of the white person's official family (Zack 1993, pp. 43–50).

Anti-miscegenation laws, regulating marriage among people of different races were more than simple matters of the rights of any couple getting married. Such laws assumed there had been control over human breeding in the past so that members of the existing white race were already racially pure. The antimiscegenation laws were assumed to protect such white racial purity, over time. But the legal practice of protecting white racial purity was disrupted by new law in 1967, in *Loving v. Virginia*, when the US Supreme Court struck down all remaining antimiscegenation laws prohibiting marriage between blacks and whites in sixteen states: Virginia, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia (Sickels 1972, pp. 1–10).

Segregation was another important social technology for maintaining racial hierarchy, because it kept the races apart in public facilities, including and especially public schools, which maintained differences in class, as well as racial separation. Nonwhite segregated facilities, including schools, were not of the same quality as white facilities, but the US Supreme Court maintained the fiction of equality through its doctrine of **separate-but-equal** in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 US 537 (1896) (see Chapter 2). Segregation in housing was originally mandated by law in many parts of the United States. Until 1950, The Federal Housing Administration maintained racially

discriminatory mortgage finance policies that supported restrictive agreements to support property values in white neighborhoods. But even after those laws were struck down by the 1965 Fair Housing Act (see Chapter 2), residential segregation persisted (Trifun 2009; Logan 2017).

In the United States, public school education is locally financed by property taxes and supported by community involvement. The more expensive the property, the more money collected in property taxes, and the better the schools in that district—insofar as monetary resources make schools better. Where people live and the race of their neighbors is now officially a private social matter, left to individual choice based on convenience, taste, and affordability that includes available funding by corporate mortgage lenders. But residential segregation is not merely a private social and economic matter. A number of institutional factors contribute to ongoing residential segregation: white aversion to living in racially integrated neighbors; *red lining* by banks (refusing to fund mortgages in minority neighborhoods); *steering* by real estate agents (minorities are not shown properties in white neighborhoods); income and wealth inequalities that correlate with race. As a result, in 2008, 75% of poor whites lived in predominantly middle-income neighborhoods, while 75% of poor African Americans lived in neighborhoods with a 20% household poverty rate (Trifun 2009). Neighborhoods mostly populated by minorities have drastically less resources than white neighborhoods, for K-12 education. For decades, Jonathan Kozol and others have documented this disparity and there is little reason to expect that the situation will improve, soon (Kozol 1991, 1995–2017).

Individual Racial Identities

Individual racial identities are partly the result of how the racial groups to which individuals belong are related to each other in society. The other part involves individual thought and action. A child can be assumed to begin life without awareness of race as such, as something that pertains to her, even though she may react to human traits that others consider racial. Adults may reconfigure their racial identities toward greater well-being through more positive self-images. Insofar as personal racial identity is not a permanent quality or thing, it may be a process of internal dialogue, as first described by W.E.B. Du Bois in his idea of “double consciousness.” Mixed-race people do not fit into the monoracial system and they may need to negotiate their racial identities with others and reflect more on those identities than those who are monoracial.

Childhood and Conversion

Children learn the basics for their racial identities while quite young (Banks and Rompf 1973). In their 2002, *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism*, Debra Van Ausdale and Joe Feagin recount the results of spending 11 months in a racially integrated preschool. They found that contrary to earlier sociological assumptions, young children do show racial bias, they understand adult ideas of race, and they use derogatory race words to shun and insult their peers. Even three and four year olds understand that racial identity is based on skin color and ancestry. There are also differences between black, white, and mixed-race children: black children insist that mixed black and white children are black and are more aware of skin color differences within racial groups; white children insist that skin colors are permanent and seem to understand that “white” has a social meaning; mixed children are aware of being mixed black and white (Ausdale and Feagin 2002). In a research review compiled a decade later, Lawrence Hirschfeld provided broader support of Ausdale and Feagin’s findings, with discussion of studies showing that 6-month-old infants showed greater recognition of own-race faces than those of races different from their care givers. Cross-cultural studies also suggested that infants preferred own-race faces in societies where that race was dominant (Hirschfeld 2012).

The studies of very young children and infants show that individuals recognize racial traits in themselves and others. But that does not mean they understand the system of race that gives full meaning to those traits and to racist behavior. This raises the question of how older children in subordinate racial groups view themselves and what their level of awareness of race, is. In Toni Morrison’s 1970 novel, *The Bluest Eye*, eleven year old Pecola Breedlove longs for blue eyes. Pecola’s life is grim, due to poverty, incest, violence, and racism. (Morrison relates in the novel’s Afterward that she knew a black little girl who also wanted blue eyes.) While *The Bluest Eye* dramatizes **internalized racism**, it can also be interpreted as a poor black child’s realization that her life would have been better had she been white, that is, as an impulse for self-preservation. Just as younger children may think and act with elements of race and racism, without a unified understanding of racial difference, Pecola may have experienced racial oppression in the difference between the lives of blacks and whites, without conscious knowledge of race, as such.

Contemporary researchers and practitioners in education and counseling now believe that academic success and psychological health require positive racial self-acceptance by black, mixed race, and racial minority children, in general (Equity 2017; Wanless and Crawford 2017).

Positive racial self-image is considered important for adolescents and adults, also. In the early 1970s, William Cross developed his highly influential Nigrescence Theory, which by 2000 led other researchers to construct scales for measuring stages of nigrescence (Vandiver and Fhagen-Smith 2001). The leading idea behind this program is that well-being requires black individuals to have a positive racial identity, which they reach in stages of psychological and social exploration that constitute a kind of *conversion* to a black-centered perspective, in opposition to the perspective that centers whites in US society. (Cross himself experienced this conversion.) There are five stages: In the Pre-encounter stage, blacks might be self-hating, not view black identity as important, or reject being black. Black identities are intensified and then relaxed in the immersion-emersion stage, and stabilized in the Internalization stage, when a person's blackness is integrated with their gender, religion, work, and other aspects of life (Cross 1991, 2001; Gayden 2015).

Overall, two strains in social science identity theory are evident in the early twenty-first century: internal processes of self-valuation and the relation between the individual and her environment (Stryker and Burke 2000). In the present philosophical context, especially given the relevance of phenomenological approaches, as discussed in Chapter 4, our focus has been on internal processes concerning the self. Neither reports of the racism of children, nor interventions in racial self-image reveal what racial identity is, in or for the self. Why does the infant pay more attention to those who are the same race as she is? Do we know that she has not also focused on other physical traits that her primary caregiver has? How does the child know where she places in the racial system and what kind of thing is her race to her? Is it a description that she comes to recognize as a true description of her, or is it something more like her name, that is, an *ascription*, a proper name that she answers to? Does the child imagine that others are ascribing race to her, when she ascribes a racial identity to herself or does she independently ascribe a racial identity to herself? Perhaps these are not the right questions to ask about individual racial identity, because they assume that racial identity is a thing or quality inside a person.

On a theoretical level, insofar as some theorists have claimed that the self is a series of silent dialogues or conversations, perhaps individual racial identity is more like that, a kind of open-ended internal dialogue about race (Yan and Wong 2005; Haste and Abrahams 2008). Reading is also a form of dialogue between writer and reader, based on what the writer has written and what the reader reads. Much of the American self-help and self-advancement movements have been available in print throughout the nation's history. This is especially true of the vast progressive literature on race, including nineteenth century **racial uplift** writings for African Americans (Gaines 2010).

Du Bois's Idea of Double Consciousness

The term **double consciousness** became very well-known by scholars of race after Du Bois's used it twice, first in an 1897 *Atlantic Monthly* article and second on the first and second pages of "Our Spiritual Strivings," the first chapter of his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. After recounting a conversation with a white person asking his views about violence against blacks, Du Bois wrote:

To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

And yet, being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. ... After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 1903, pp. 1, 2)

As John Pittman points out in his comprehensive entry on Du Bois's notion of double consciousness in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, this passage is echoed in another passage written by Du Bois in Chapter 10 of *Souls of Black Folk*, "Of the Faith of the Fathers":

From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century,—from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality, and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism. (Pittman 2016; Du Bois 1903, pp. 155–6)

The passage from Chapter 1 of *The Souls of Black Folk* describes the reflexive nature of consciousness in terms that might not be unique to African American experience. The general insight that the self-reflecting on itself

has an object different from itself goes at least as far back as Shakespeare:
The eye sees not itself

but by reflection, by some other things. . . .
And since you know you cannot see yourself
So well as by reflection, I, your glass,
Will modestly discover to yourself
That of yourself which you yet know not of.
—William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (1.2.55–55; 69–72)

However, Du Bois's passage from Chapter 10 of *Faith of the Fathers* more emphatically refers to the experience of African Americans, because he there talks about the double lives and double social roles that African Americans live among whites and among other African Americans. Du Bois does not explicitly say that the double lives and roles are contradictory, but he does imply that the condition is unique and problematic for African Americans. Still, others who are in some ways outcasts or despised members of dominant society, and who also belong to groups in which they are full members and not despised, might have the same structure of double consciousness when they reflect on their contradictory lives and roles. DuBois himself wrote, decades later, in his 1940 *Dusk of Dawn*, "the majority of mankind has struggled through this inner spiritual slavery" (Pittman 2016). If there is a general human process of self-reflection, the process of self-reflection pertaining to race can be viewed as one form of dialogic self-identity.

Mixed-Race Identities

If self-identities generally share certain very widespread psychological processes, those processes become more complicated and intense if a person's racial identity within a taxonomy of races is contested or ambiguous. American mixed black and white self-identity is complex in this way and it also reveals the constructed nature of all racial differences. A person's mono-racial identity is already socially constructed in the background of race in a society with a racial system. Because people have been mistaken about the existence of biological race, their ideas, and actions in the past and present concerning race constitute the *social construction* of race. But "race" means "races" and not all racial possibilities have been constructed in the United States. Rather, tradition has it that those with any black ancestry, especially if they do not have an appearance that conforms to expectations of how someone belonging to another race should look, are black. But many mixed

black and white Americans who identify as black are also aware of white parentage or ancestry. So, since racial identities are determined by the race of the family of which one is a member, the racial self-identity of a mixed black and white person is more complicated than even the double consciousness described by Du Bois.

Births of American mixed-race people increased since *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967. According to the 2010 census, 9 million people checked more than one box for race, which was 30% more than the 2000 census when that option was first offered. About 1.8 million respondents who checked more than one box, checked black and white (U.S. Census 2010). Mixed black and white race is a logical contradiction insofar as whiteness in the United States is defined as having no nonwhite, especially black, ancestry. That is, a person cannot be both a member of the group that has no black ancestry and a member of the group that does have black ancestry. But 1.8 million chose that option. So one subject for an inner dialogue toward the construction of a racial self-identity by a mixed black and white person might be the question, Why doesn't society count my white ancestry as part of my racial identity and should I personally count it?

In her famous 1993 Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage, Maria P.P. Root asserted 12 rights that pertain to mixed-race self-identity.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

1. Not to justify my existence in this world.
2. Not to keep the races separate within me.
3. Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.
4. Not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical or ethnic ambiguity.
5. To identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify.
6. To identify myself differently than how my parents identify me.
7. To identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters.
8. To identify myself differently in different situations.
9. To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial or multiethnic.
10. To change my identity over my lifetime—and more than once.
11. To have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people.
12. To freely choose whom I befriend and love. (Root 1993)

All of Root's asserted rights could be affirmed in internal dialogue pertaining to the construction of mixed black and white racial self-identity. However, proclaiming such rights to oneself or in concert with other mixed-race people

is not sufficient to change social tradition. In that sense, it is not possible for individuals to settle mixed racial identities, themselves, without participation by monoracial people. However, the same can be said about other many other self-identities that are not recognized by the dominant culture in which a person lives. Again, we are left with a dialogic process of racial self-identity construction, although now with undetermined resolution (Zack 2017).

Models for Resisting and Deconstructing Race

There have been four major models for resisting and deconstructing race in societies with oppressive racial systems: Pragmatism, Accommodationism, Racial Eliminativism, and Politicized Racial Identities. Accommodationism is a form of pragmatism in a practical sense and racial eliminativism immediately comes up against the need for politicized identities, so it makes sense to discuss these models in pairs.

Pragmatism and Accommodationism

Pragmatic approaches to deliberate or unintended unjust consequences of the construction of race share a desire to correct situations, without blame, in the face of such injustice. Affirmative action initiatives to correct past discrimination were an example of this approach. People of color would get new opportunities for admission or employment, without any direct address of past discrimination or exclusion (see Chapter 9). Onlookers who recognize injustice but do not wish to incur the cost of direct involvement act pragmatically, in this sense. The international community's noninvolvement in the 1994 massacre and attempted genocide in Rwanda is an example of such pragmatism. While members of that community might have an ongoing interest in political stability in sub-Saharan Africa and react with moral abhorrence to the facts of genocide, there is sufficient economic, political, and moral distance to make noninvolvement the most prudent reaction.

However, **accommodationism** is a reaction by those oppressed to their oppressors which seeks to avoid confrontation in words or action, usually out of fear of violent defeat. There were long periods of accommodation by African Americans, during and after slavery and historical exceptions are striking. For instance, Nat Turner's Rebellion was the only slave rebellion on US soil. In Southampton County, Virginia, Nat Turner (1800–1831), a slave and self-proclaimed Baptist minister, led an attack on August 21,

1831, which left 55 or 61 white men, women, and children, dead. Turner and sixteen of his followers were captured and executed and black slaves were killed throughout the area, their heads left on roads to caution others (History Matters 2017). Turner was vilified until the 1960s. He had written “Confessions” that were interpreted as sexually and diabolically deranged and the aftermath of his rebellion caused hysteria among slave owners and other whites, throughout the world (Aptheker 2006). The white reaction to Nat Turner’s rebellion was an abiding source of fear among African Americans that made general accommodationism understandable. If whites were not accommodated, their fear could motivate them to more oppressive antiblack racism and violence.

Still, accommodationism has not been universally endorsed by African American leaders. Du Bois disparagingly called Booker T. Washington “the Great Accommodationist.” Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) was born a slave, and secured an education despite great poverty. He founded Tuskegee Institute, a boarding school for African Americans where they were taught manual trades and domestic management, under highly disciplined conditions. Washington’s main idea was that Negroes ought not to confront whites or demand political equality (it was the age of lynching) but should instead contribute needed goods and services to the economy and make the best of their segregated second-class lives. Washington became the main representative of African Americans, meeting with heads of state and business leaders, all over the world, from the 1890s until his death. He was famous and highly praised by the white establishment for his 1895 address, known as the “Atlanta Compromise,” at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. Washington said:

To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: “Cast down your bucket where you are”— cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.

Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. ... Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life. ... It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities.

To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your bucket where you are."

In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress. (Washington, 1901, pp. 111–4)

Washington's accommodationism involved acceptance of inequality, but went beyond that through a program of education, hard work, and self-discipline. Still, throughout *Up From Slavery*, Washington claimed that white society was a meritocracy and he frequently and lavishly praised whites who had helped Tuskegee Institute.

Racial Eliminativism and Politicized Identities

Racial eliminativism is an extreme position that has been attributed to philosophers who have emphasized the lack of a foundation in the human biological sciences for common sense racial taxonomy (Appiah 1995, 1996; Zack 1993, 2002). The eliminativist position would be that we should "get rid of race," because the idea of race is based on now-discarded science and that idea has been a source of great human misery and injustice. Educated individuals can understand the scientific situation regarding race, but beyond them, it is not evident what getting rid of race would mean or entail. Race has become embedded in human life and tradition and it has positive emotional and liberatory meanings for nonwhite people in their daily lives, as well as for whites who benefit from high-status positions and those who have inherited past benefits from those positions. Overtime, non-white racial identities have become important unifying symbols for resistance against oppression and demands for justice. This suggests that it might be ineffective to get rid of race in any cognitive or intellectual sense, without also eliminating racism, which would require substantial social change. Finally, even if everyone would be better-off without race, there is no clear path to that end except continual education and reeducation about the facts of race. But in a country with local educational systems and strong free speech rights, such as the United States, there would be no democratic way to implement the elimination of race from public speech and classrooms.

As discussed in Chapter 3, since the early 1990s, philosophers of race have been engaged in what has been called "The Race Debates," a series

of discussions about how to react to the fact that race does not have the biological foundation so many previously assumed it had. Insofar as there is a consensus about the lack of biological foundation according to biologists, all participants in these debates are modified eliminativists to one degree or another, depending on what about “race” they advocate eliminating. Thus, *racial constructivists* emphasize the social, institutional and political constructions of race within society, insisting on their reality, while suspending questions about underlying biology. And *racial population naturalists* seek to preserve a stripped-down scientific version of race by picking out the human populations to which ordinary language racial taxonomy might refer (James 2017). In neither of those cases is there an attempt to resurrect older ideas of **racial essences** as real spiritual or physical entities, shared by all members of race in social racial taxonomies, as primary causes of the traits associated with that race. Thus, both sides of the race debates in philosophy are eliminativists about racial essences.

Racial identities, especially for people of African descent, have been politicized as a means for resisting racial oppression and achieving racial justice. The question of racial eliminativism, discussed above, arrived relatively late to US Philosophy of Race. In the early 1960s, there was a race debate between Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre regarding the necessity of essentialism for the liberation of Africans who, although French, faced racial discrimination when they claimed their nationality. Both Sartre and Fanon generally agreed that racial identities would not be necessary after the end of racism, but Fanon expressed misgivings about Sartre’s right to proclaim that on his (Fanon’s) behalf (Bernasconi 2002). Apart from the literary and political complexities of its time, the Fanon-Sartre dispute highlights the political and moral importance of the racial identity of who advocates racial eliminativism, those who belong to the group of the racially advantaged or those who belong to the group of the racially oppressed. That is, it is one thing for people of color to be racial eliminativists. But they are likely to be suspicious of whites who want to eliminate race without a deep understanding of racism, the subject to which we now turn, in Chapter 7.

Conclusion

Constructions of race are evident historically through the present. Globalism is continuous with colonialism in that the same disadvantaged populations are not white Europeans. Social technologies of race such as segregation and same-race marriage customs reproduce racial taxonomies by preserving the racial

identities of status groups. Individual racial identities, including nonconventional ones, such as mixed black and white race, may be constructed through constant internal dialogue. Pragmatic and accommodationist approaches to racism allow nonwhites to live within these systems by minimizing conflict. Most participants in the so-called race debates are eliminativists about racial essences, although wholesale racial eliminativism is unlikely at this time.

Glossary

anti-miscegenation laws—state regulation of whether people of one race could marry people of another race.

accommodationism—a reaction by those oppressed, which seeks to avoid confrontation with oppressors, in words or action, usually out of fear of violent defeat.

colonization—political annexation or takeover of a territory or nation by a stronger national power, historically backed by aggressive force, with different degrees of economic, social, and political involvement following.

development—economic and political projects by governments and international business in countries or regions that are relatively poor and lack the same infrastructure as the countries of developers.

postcolonial studies or **postcolonial critical theory of IR (International Relations)**—theoretical and practical analyses of populations and countries in areas of the world that were previously colonized and believed to undergo the effects of colonization.

double consciousness—W.E.B. Du Bois's idea that African Americans view themselves both as they are in their own communities, and as whites view them; idea of the selfreflecting on itself, going back to Shakespeare in "Julius Caesar."

eliminativism—position that the idea of race should be discarded based on what is known about its lack of a foundation in the human biological sciences.

internalized racism—an individual's application to herself of societal racism against the racial group to which she belongs.

miscegenation—term for racial mixing, especially in marriage, as in **antimiscegenation laws** that prohibited interracial marriage.

natural law—tradition of European and English law that upheld basic or God-given order in the world.

oppression—unjust treatment and control.

racial ideology—false system of claims and beliefs to justify racial hierarchy and racial oppression.

racial essence—posit of a spiritual or physical “something” that members of each distinct human race shared and which caused the traits associated with that race.

racial identity—description that places an individual, racially, as a member of a group within social system of race.

racial hierarchy—an abstract or real system of distinct races that ranks them with regard to one another with regard to status and social power, as based on posited traits.

racial uplift—nineteenth century projects, undertaken by more successful African Americans to support and bring about racial progress for the wider group of African Americans.

segregation—legally imposed or socially supported separation of people by race in the use of public facilities and amenities.

separate-but-equal—US legal doctrine permitting segregation under the fiction that racially separate facilities were equal, which they never were.

social construction of race—beliefs and practices pertaining to racial traits and the hierarchy of racial groups, which usually claims to have a biological foundation.

social technology of race—social and institutional mechanism to provide for the functioning of a societal system of race.

terra nullius—the justification of the ownership of first taker to what is owned by no one.

territorium nullius—the doctrine that collectives without government did not own the land they occupied.

utilitarianism—moral system based on the principle that moral good is the greatest pleasure for the greatest number.

white racial purity—idea that white people have no nonwhite ancestry.

Discussion Questions

1. Give examples from your own experience of how people encounter race in society as already constructed.
2. How is development continuous with colonialism? Does race construct development or does development construct race? (Explain both perspectives.)
3. What are the lessons from Rwanda in terms of competition among nonwhite groups under oppression?

4. Explain the difference between *terra nullius* and *territorium nullius*.
5. What is your assessment of Cross's idea of Nigrescence?
6. How might a racial self be a dialogue in terms of Du Bois's idea of double consciousness? Explain how that situation may not be unique to black Americans.
7. How is mixed black and white race a logical contradiction?
8. What are some examples of social technologies of race not mentioned in the text?
9. How is accommodationism pragmatic?
10. Explain how racial eliminativism is a more widespread position than the "race debates" indicate.

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