Abstract

Deconstructing Race Reconstructing Difference
Beyond the U.S. Paradigm

In this moment of a turn to identity politics in the United States, mitigating the detrimental impacts of its ideologies and hierarchies predicated on the socially constructed idea of "race" is ever more important. Based on a conceptual framework of “micro-cultures” drawn analyses of extensive, ethnographic interviews with informants who are defined within each of five main, ascribed racial categories in the U.S., this presentation argues for a new approach beyond the color-coded categories that current narratives or race and difference are trapped within.

I further argue that the roles of education and teacher preparation are imperative for transforming understanding of the complexities and contradictions of how race and difference are enacted and also critical for challenging and progressively changing these social constructions in the U.S. and internationally.
Deconstructing Race

Henrich Boell Foundation

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A key 21st Century problem is the Color-Bind

It’s a main driver of multiple processes of othering

It inhibits dealing with other critical global problems

Ethnographic understanding of Micro-cultures expands inclusion and belonging

Climate Change-Nuclear Proliferation-Resource Depletion-Global Poverty-Population Growth
The Problem of the 21st Century

Du Bois profoundly understood ways that the color-line has always been porous and penetrable—that human passions, prerogatives, and power have never been bound by ascribed racial categories, even when policed by unimaginable cruelties.

is the Problem of the Color-Bind.

Spradley – Ethnography
Also 2006 – Lives of Others
Discussions of the color-bind are not color-blind. Rather than not seeing or denying the reality of difference, the color-bind challenges on-going attempts to contain people in fabricated racial categories, shackling minds and imaginations in divisions based on essentialized constructions of difference.
The problem of othering

“The problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of ‘othering.’

In a world beset by seemingly intractable and overwhelming challenges, virtually every global, national, and regional conflict is wrapped within or organized around one or more dimensions of group difference.

**Othering undergirds** territorial disputes, sectarian violence, military conflict, and the spread of disease, hunger and food insecurity, and even *climate change*.”

powell and Menendian
A high point of Felix’s life was meeting Paulo Freire whose lecture at Harvard touched him personally.

Freire talked about his experiences as an exile, about in-between-ness, about belonging and not belonging, about our human conditions to nature, to water, to feeling the air and ocean.

Felix had spent the previous summer wading in the ocean that connects 7,641 Philippine Islands, but he also felt alone on an island of his own. His multiple identities as Filipino American, as gay made him feel he didn’t belong.

For Felix, Freire’s lecture was affirming humanity and affirming his **belonging** as a human being (DR p.118).
Felix is an identical twin.

Today, I will also highlight two other sets of twins.

“These twin sisters make us rethink everything we know about race.”

Race is not a scientific fact, but it is a social fact.
How do we transform our experiences of race so that we positively change the history of race to be consistent with the science of “the idea of race”?

NOW OPEN

Take a cultural and scientific look at race throughout history and discover the many reasons we should celebrate our differences and embrace our shared histories (some of which will surprise you).

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE OF RACE

Explore social and personal experiences of race in familiar settings such as home and neighborhood, health and medicine, and education and schools.

HISTORY OF THE IDEA OF RACE

Race has not always existed. Sorting people by physical differences is a recent invention, only a few hundred years old.
Unraveling Race

We're often asked to identify our race and ethnicity—usually by checking boxes on a form. But is it really so simple?

1. Presented with these options, how would you identify your race? Select as many as apply.

Race has no agreed-upon definition. It's usually taken to mean a group of people from a particular region with a set of common physical characteristics. The categories listed here are based on the U.S. Census.

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black
- Latino*
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Other

2. What is your ethnicity? Loop your string(s) around as many as apply. If your ethnicity is not shown, please add it.

Ethnicity is your social and cultural identity—your nationality, traditions, ancestry, and language.
Kobie Jr. is caramel colored. He was 3 years old when this chapter was written. His family soon started calling him Santi, short for his middle name Santiago.

In the United States where he was born, he is seen as a “black” boy. But his identity is more complex than that.
“Giving back is the greatest gift you will ever receive.”

Enough PC Bullshit, Ok.
Time to promote a real writer.
Republican Members-Elect
“White women, who enjoy proximal power from their association with white men, have often served as the white patriarchy’s most eager foot soldiers,” @rtraister
Percent of “white” male Republicans in the House will rise from 86% to 90%

30 men
1 woman

25 women
15 men

Percent of “white” male Democrats will decline from 41-38%
Since 1790 the Census has changed the language to identify whites once, in 1850. For blacks, the language has changed nine times.

**WHITE**
- Free white females and males

**BLACK**
- 1790: Slaves
- 1850: Slaves; Free Colored Persons
- 1900: Black; Mulatto; Quadroon; Octoroon
- 1950: Black (Negro or of Negro Descent); Black (Negro); Mulatto
- 2000: Negro or Black, Black or Negro, Black, African Am., or Negro

Source: Census Bureau

LARIS KARLIS/THE WASHINGTON POST
One premise of Derrida’s concept of deconstruction is the denial of any possibility of a pure presence or intrinsic essence including the denial of any essential notion of “being.”

He contended “In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with a peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand” (1972, p. 41).
Some scholars have argued that "black" is ... an identity that one adopts,” but more accurately, “black” is an identity that is ascribed by and intricately dependent upon how is projected in contrast to whiteness.

White / Black Binary

whiteness

created

blackness
Prisons and Prisms of social identities
The Brown Box
A Conversation With Asian-Americans on Race
Terms of a New Racial Literacy

- **Pigmentocracy** – Understanding the destructive hierarchy of color-codes between and within ascribed racial categories.

- **Illegible Skin** – Understanding that there is no scientific justification for human differences based on “the idea of race.”

- **Ameritocracy** – Justification of the idea that some groups privileged over others.

- **Lifting the Veil of White Supremacy** – Understanding how ascribed racial categories work by us subscribing to them.

- **Micro-cultures** – Understanding how personal-cultural identity is performed through Positioning (going back generations), Practices (activity-based, relational, and digital identities), Choices (projective and virtual identities and group affinities), and Perspectives (reflective, agentive, and acquired identities) are formed and **Clapping back!**
Learning from the *lives of others*

Passing for black

- Relene

Pretending to be white

- Sasha

Performing Gender

- Ryan

Policing Identities

- Geoff

“Ethnography offers the chance to step outside our narrow cultural backgrounds...and apprehend the World from the viewpoint of others.”
Relene  “There were these distinctions, you’re not really black; you’re West Indian; you’re an immigrant....

And, I experienced a lot of tension and cultural shame.... It became easier to pass for black. I lost my accent, dressed more urban, changed my hairstyle and clothes, started to read the bodies, and adopt African American language.

It was an active project.... to make relationships across cultural differences easier, and, maybe, to not be a target.
In her resignation statement, Ms. Dolezal referred to challenging the construct of race, but as Prof. Jelani Cobb wrote in *The New Yorker* in 2015 that “Many people have challenged the construct of race without lying about their lives.”

However, he further noted that beyond lying about who she is, she was actually lying about a lie – that the construct of race itself is a lie.
“It’s good to see another brother around here.”
Pretending to be white
SASHA TOLD ME, “WHEN PAULO AND I HAVE CHILDREN, I HOPE THEY UNDERSTAND, ‘OH I’M RUSSIAN, AND I’M AMERICAN, AND I’M SPANISH, AND I’M JEWISH.’ AND, I HOPE THEY HAVE THIS REALLY COOL IDENTITY WHERE THEY’RE LIKE, ‘KNOW THEY CAN BE WHOEVER HE OR SHE WANTS TO BE, AND BE BILINGUAL OR MAYBE TRILINGUAL. I HOPE THIS FUTURE CHILD WOULD SEE AS A STRENGTH THAT HE OR SHE COULD PICK WHERE THEY WANT TO LIVE AND BE ABLE TO ENGAGE IN ALL THESE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES AND CULTURES”
“Performing Gender” in a school setting of Hyper-masculinity

Ryan’s father focused only on the Irish side of the family, rather than the German side.
Citizen Potawatomi

Enrolled in the Potawatomi Nation, Lily is secretive about her tribal membership. It’s like “coming out.” Often, tribal identities have to be proven with a tribal ID.

*Twin Snakes

Urban Indian

“Urban Res’ is used to indicate the current spatial, socio-cultural and political contexts of some American Indians.”

Mexica

“I don’t know the exact tribe that my ancestors are from, so I often use the term ‘Mexica’ to capture several sides of my identity – indigenous Indian, as being from Mexico, and as Mexican American.”

Res-Girl

“I introduce myself not only to people, but to the world, to the universe, to the elements. First, I introduce my mother’s clan, the Big Water Clan, then my father’s clan, the Towering House Clan. Then I introduce myself as a prayer to the universe.”
Race is Indeterminant

This exhibit is in the African American History Museum in Washington D.C.

The quote by Alain Locke that questions the construction of race is interestingly superimposed over images of women who are racially ambiguous.
Which woman is my daughter?
Identity Contingencies
Claude Steele (2010)

Identity-Affinities
James Gee (2003)
Each of these masks represents a different reality that I live in.

So, I believe that if I witness parallel beings in myself living in separate realities, it will help me learn to accept myself.

So, I wanted the masks to spin on this wheel to convey the same effect of being at multiple places at once.

And also depicting each mask having like their very own unique parallel universe.
3. The Cultural Iceberg -
Students will use the template below to create their own cultural iceberg. Above water they will draw/write what others see and below they will share the non-observable.

1. 8 Dimensions of Diversity -
Students will take a look at the 8 dimensions of diversity below and think about how each one applies to them. Teachers will need to clarify terms for common understanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2: Critical Family History -
Learners will answer the following questions inspired by Christine Sleeter (http://christinesleeter.org/critical-family-history/):
German Immigration to the U.S. Midwest

This book cogently recovers and reveals illuminating and poignant narratives of family, immigration, Americanization, discrimination, schooling, and language loss to recover and reveal the conflicted quest of German immigrants for U.S. citizenship and belonging.
Flattening Hierarchies - Widening Circles of Compassion and Belonging
Amado and Santi
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Danke Sehr!