

**Agenda:**  
**AADS 1102 Fall 2015**  
**Race As a Social Construction**  
**September 2, 2015**

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**Objectives- Students will be able to:**

- Recognize and define the concept of social constructionism
  - Acquire an understanding of how race and ethnicity are socially constructed and why
  - Determine the methods in which societies construct socially acceptable norms
  - Articulate how the ideology of race and ethnicity evolved into social classifications in the United States
  - Determine whether there is a scientific link to racial differences and similarities
  - Distinguish whether individuals are genetically predisposed or are products of their environments
  - Determine the factors that contribute to the social construction of race in the United States
  - Articulate how social constructs are influenced by external factors (environment, media, exposure, tradition, etc.)
  - Determine the correlation between language and social constructionism.
- I. The last few weeks we have been discussing the social construction of gender roles in post WWII American culture and society. This next section of readings and discussions will focus on the social construction of race.

In accordance with what we've been discussing so far, what is a Social Construct?

- (OED)  
A concept or perception of something based on the collective views developed and maintained within a society or social group; a social phenomenon or convention originating within and cultivated by society or a particular social group, as opposed to existing inherently or naturally.
- The belief that any generalized characteristic is directly connected to a specific genotype.
  - For example, whether one group is genetically smarter than another; can dance better; are better athletes; are more aggressive or prone to certain behavior, etc.

**Discussion questions based on assigned readings:**

- In light of the article on The History of Race Ideology, is there a genetic link between race and social conduct? Explain why or why not.
- How did racial classifications evolve in the United States?
- How did the assimilation towards whiteness contribute to the ideology of race in the United States?
- Based on the readings, does race predetermine individual behavior or are individuals simply products of their respective environments? Explain.
- Are racial groups genetically predisposed towards a specific behavior or interest?

- Historically, was race always a factor of social classification? What were some of the other elements that societies used to categorize groups?
- What other factors influenced the ideology of race as a social classifier?
- Add a question

### Main points of the readings (possible discussion guide, in the event of...)

- Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives on the Social Construction of Race (19-21)
  - Scientific conceptions of race (19).
    - What does science tell us about race?**
      - “When geneticists appeared who emphasized the similarities among races (**humans are 99.9% alike**), the **small amount of real genetic differences among them (0.01%)**, and the difficulties of recognizing the racial identity of individuals through their genes, doubts about the biological reality of race appeared.”*
      - “Thus, in the 20th century two conceptions of race existed: one that focused on human biogenetic variation exclusively and was the province of science, and a popular one that dominated all thinking about human differences and fused together both physical features and behavior.”*
  - A History of Race and the Ideology of Race (19-20)
    - “In the early 18th century, usage of the term increased in the written record, and it began to become standardized and uniform.”*
  - The Components of Racial Ideology in the United States (20)
    - “Race therefore can be seen as an ideology or worldview, and its components have often been spelled out explicitly in social policy.”*
    - Common myths about racial classifications:
      - *“That each race has distinctive cultural behaviors linked to their biology. The idea of inherited forms of behavior is fundamental to the concept of race and is one basis for the belief in the separation of races (**as, e.g., Black music, Black theater, Black literature, Black dance, Black forms of dress, Black language, etc.**).*
      - *“That both physical features and behavior are innate and inherited.”*
      - *“That the differences among races are therefore profound and unalterable. This justifies segregation of the races in schools, neighborhoods, churches, recreational centers, health centers, and so forth, and proscriptions against intermarriage or inter-mating.”*
  - The History of Race Ideology (20-21)
    - “The Irish began to immigrate, followed toward the end of the century by peoples from southern and eastern Europe **who were both physically and culturally different from the original English and northern Europeans.**”*
    - “**They, too, were initially seen as separate races and were ranked lower than other Europeans.**”*
    - “However, they were eventually assimilated into the “White” category.”*
      - Give a brief explanation of whiteness and white assimilation.

➤ Teaching Race as a Social Construction: Two Interactive Class Exercises.

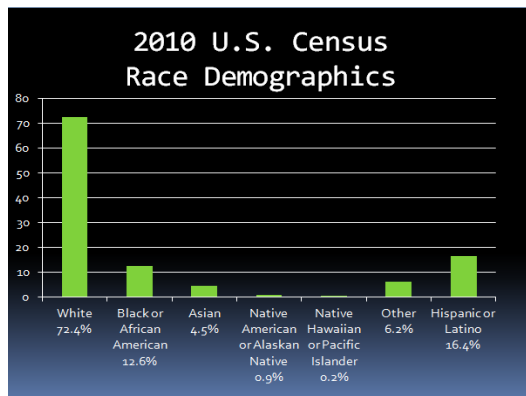
University of Vermont Connecticut University (370-372)

- Understanding the Social Construction of Race –

- a. *“This view of race dates back to the 18th Century when Europeans began to divide and rank human populations into so-called racial groups.” (370).*
- b. *Race - “Socially constructed categories which vary between societies. For example, race in the United States is based on ancestry, while race in Brazil is tied to skin color.” (370).*
  - *The manner in which we (North Americans) view race is can perhaps be completely contrary to that of another culture or society.*
  - *Further contributing to the notion that race classifications are socially constructed.*
    - \*\* *Give examples of how race is viewed in Latin American societies...*
    - \*\* *Also, examples of how “light skinned vs. dark skinned” black people are viewed in Europe.*

c. **United States Census- (371)**

- *“Nearly every single Census taken since 1790 has measured race differently.”*
- *“Who has been included in and/or excluded from the category of “white,” for example, has varied over time...”*
- *“Jews, the Irish, Southern and Eastern Europeans, who are today considered white, were once considered non- white.”*
- *“East Indians, once considered white, are now excluded from this category and categorized as Asian further illustrating **the socially constructed nature of whiteness.**” [Explain this concept if necessary]*
- Refer to 2010 United States census image
- 



- d. *“How do we classify people who are multiracial? Do we classify them according to their multiple racial ancestries, how they look, or how they self- identify?”(371)*
- e. *“Many Americans rely on phenotype to classify people based on race. They privilege skin color, facial features, hair texture, and eye shape to categorize people and groups, but many different groups share similar phenotypic characteristics further adding to the confusion of what differentiates one race from another.” (372)*

II. Watch Clayton Bigsby video. (08:44)

<http://www.ebaumsworld.com/video/watch/82404406/>

**Instructions:**

- Break up into groups of 3 or 4 and assign each group a number (1-3)
  - Discuss the following questions about the video and be prepared to present a brief summary of the group discussion
- a. What examples in the video support the notion that character, Clayton Bigsby's, ideologies about race are social constructions?
  - b. What examples challenge the notion that CB's ideologies are inherent or genetically predisposed to his race?
  - c. Given the character's background and exposure, identify how CB's environment influences his ideology? Explain why CB's philosophy about race would possibly differ if his social location were in a different time and place, where racial dynamics and the accompanying social structures were different?

**Open class discussion:**

- Have one student from each group present their analysis of the three post-video topic questions.

Preface for next week's class about language and social construction (optional, time permitting)

- Is there a significant connection between language and cultural appropriation?
- Does language directly influence social construction or is it a product of it?
- Notice how the white teenagers in the video displayed a sense of acceptance or validation by being called "niggers" by a black man.
- Discuss how the negatively associated word "nigger," through generational and social changes (or construction), became "nigga," taking on a completely different contextual meaning. How has the contextual meaning and use of this word evolved in our society and is this an example of social construction?