

SECOND EDITION

Race in North America

Origin and Evolution of a Worldview

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leaving a famous New York hotel, in fancy dinner dress, when a white man handed him his keys and said, "Here, boy, go get my car." Most African-American men, including judges, university professors, famous actors, businessmen, physicians, scientists, and other highly trained and affluent professionals have confronted the same type of racial put-downs, clear comments on the social-status nature of race and its vaunted position as the source of human identity in the United States.

I

Some Theoretical Considerations

Anyone who attempts to write a book about race does so with much trepidation. The subject has been so widely and intensively explored that many probably believe that nothing new can be added. In the social sciences, definitions, explanations, analyses, and interpretations of racial issues, meanings, problems, interactions, stratification, dynamics, prejudice, discrimination, and so forth abound. For many generations, scholars have focused on the patterns of racial realities most obvious and most problematic in the United States: that between whites and blacks, and that between whites and Native Americans. The social interactions among newer immigrants like the Chinese, Japanese, other Asians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and even the Irish, Italians, and Jews have also been frequently couched in terms of race, proliferating the racial imagery imposed on the national scene.

So pervasive is the phenomenon of race that virtually all Americans believe that they know something about it. In all of my classes, I discovered that each student could give some definition or characterization of what he or she means by the term. Yet at no time over the course of teaching about the origin and evolution of the idea of race for twenty years have I found common agreement on a definition. What many agree on are certain characteristics that they feel are associated with each racial group, usually black, Asian, and white. Although everyone will mention physical features, almost always racial traits also will include certain learned behaviors such as music styles, mannerisms, and assumed personality traits.

Most students and other audiences, including some public school teachers to whom I have given lectures, know little about the contemporary scientific studies of human biological variation, and many fail to make any distinction at all between learned or acquired behavior, what we call "culture" in anthropology, and physical features. And most of us know little about the origin of the idea or what specific factors influenced its genesis. It does seem

strange, as we move into the twenty-first century, that we know so much, and yet so little, about a subject that touches all of our lives.

To examine the sociocultural history of the concept requires a different conceptual framework from that of the sociologist whose concern is theories of race relations, or the historian who aims to document the different ways by which populations have been racially classified and the nature of their interrelationships in the past. The intellectual scope has to shift from concern about the appropriate units of analysis to ideas and their relationships, and the cultural matrix within which ideological features have emerged and function. This work represents an anthropological perspective on history, one that seeks the interconnections among cultural features and events over time and the ideologies that humans use to embrace their cultural developments, to explain present-day realities. It is an analytic study and should not be read as conventional history.

The theoretical premises and assumptions of this volume will be outlined in this chapter. I hold that there is indeed a meaning to the term "race," but one that most scholars have not fully recognized or addressed. We have failed to understand this in part because we have been looking at the wrong data and in part because the inertia and myopia often plaguing the social sciences have inhibited the investigation of all of the dimensions of the subject.

The meaning of race is not to be found in the physical features of differing human populations, and it does not rest in the lists of taxa of the biological scientists. Rather than looking inwardly for some esoteric genesis, we must peel away the intricate layers of Western cultural history and look at the material conditions, cultural and naturalistic knowledge, motivations and objectives, and levels of consciousness and comprehension of those who first imposed the classifications of race on the human community. It is important that we understand race as its meaning unfolded in the cognitive world of its creators and first formulators, in part because the subsequent formulations have been so ambiguous and elusive. A major goal of this book is to help eliminate some of the existing confusion about the concept and to examine analytically its constituent elements.

We will see that the idea of "race" is composed of a number of ingredients, some of which we take for granted, assuming that they have always existed in human history. But if race is a modern idea, as many historians are now asserting, we ought to be able to examine its origin and the development of these ingredients over historical time in order to understand how, when, and under what circumstances they were brought together.

In this chapter, I first offer a historical perspective now held by many scholars who see race as a sociocultural phenomenon that appeared only within the past several hundred years. Next, I explain the theoretical context in which it is useful to conceptualize, define, and analyze the components of

race. It is treated as a sociocultural reality whose ingredients can be ascertained through historical and social analysis. It is not a unitary phenomenon but a synthesis of a number of identifiable elements that, bound together, constitute a particular way of viewing human differences. I then briefly describe the social reality of race in North American culture, emphasizing what I think are often unacknowledged realities, and show how one derives the analytic components of race ideology from the social behavior of different categories or groups of people in the United States.

Since the vast majority of people equate visible biological variations with race, I next address the relationship between biology and race. To comprehend the real meaning and the nature of race in American society, it is necessary and essential to distinguish naturally occurring physical diversity in the human species from culturally based perceptions and interpretations of this diversity; that is, we must separate in our minds variations in skin color, hair texture, body size and shape, eye formation, and so forth, from prevailing cultural attitudes and beliefs about people with these different physical features. The cognitive leap that this requires is not easy, but I have found that as students learn accurate information about both of these realities, most experience a jolt of sudden awakening that surprises them.

The position taken here is not without its detractors, and a continuing stream of scholars in the biological and social sciences have argued that the human perception of phenotypic differences as "race" is universal, in a generic sense. I therefore present the arguments and a brief critique of the "primordialists," those intellectuals who would preserve the term "race" for what we might call psychosocial reasons not necessarily related to the evidence and arguments of contemporary biological scientists. The next section offers the theoretical perspective of this book, defining race as a worldview and specifying its minimal basic components. Undergraduate students sometimes find these materials a bit daunting. However, as they read into the history, ideas that at first seem abstract and incomprehensible often become very real, and many find it clarifying to then reread this first chapter.

Finally, I differentiate this definition of race from "ethnicity," a concept that has too often served to complicate the more general and profound issues of accounting for variability in both biology and behavior. Throughout history, ethnocentric portrayals of other peoples in the written literature have often denigrated the "alien others." If the alien others were physically different, this often led to negative and derogatory statements about these physical features. This has been particularly true of people with dark skins, because their color contrasts so strikingly with lighter skin colors. But negative comments, pejorative descriptions, and even associations of such people with animals is not the same as the phenomenon that we call "race" in American society. Negative aesthetic judgments of negroid-looking people

can be found in some ancient literature, and our immediate reaction is to consider it racist. But the institutionalized foundations for racism require much more than that.

The approach of this book has been inspired in part by studies in the sociology of knowledge and in the history of ideas. Concepts such as "race" can appropriately be conceived as a composite of elements, each of which may have had certain distinct functions or cultural meanings in earlier times. These elements, such as the idea of human inequality, had their origins in preceding historical circumstances and do not alone constitute the meaning of race. When the beliefs and attitudes were conjoined and gave rise to a new perspective on human beings, one that I call the "racial worldview," the term "race" became a shorthand method of expressing this new synthesis.

There are many other concepts open to the same sort of exploration whereby one can separate out specific components. Concepts such as democracy, fundamentalism, evolutionism, and socialism each represent widespread and diffuse ideas that have become integrated together into a systematic body of knowledge and thought, ways of looking at things, and understandings that constitute part of our cultural repertoire. Such terms thus become shorthand methods of expressing a particular worldview. "Race" is a shorthand term for, as well as a symbol of, a "knowledge system," a way of knowing, of perceiving, and of interpreting the world, and of rationalizing its contents (in this case, other human beings) in terms that are derived from previous cultural-historical experience and reflective of contemporary social values, relationships, and conditions. Every culture has its own ways of perceiving the world; race is the kaleidoscope through which Americans have been conditioned in our culture to view other human beings. But the concept itself and its substantive meanings are clearly not confined just to Americans.

"Race" as a Modern Idea

It is not without significance that many contemporary scholars have concluded that race is a relatively recent concept in human history. The cultural structuring of a racial worldview coincides with the colonial expansion of certain western European nations during the past five centuries, their encountering of populations very different from themselves, and the creation of a unique form of slavery.¹ Expansion, conquest, exploitation, and enslavement have characterized much of human history over the past 5,000 years or so, but none of these events before the modern era resulted in the development of ideologies or social systems based on race. Dante Puzzo (1964) put it explicitly: "Racism . . . is a modern conception, for prior to the XVIIth century there was virtually nothing in the life and thought of the West that can be described as racist" (579). This view, while referring only to the West, un-

ambiguously challenges the claim that race classifications and ideologies were or are universal or have deep historical roots.

In one of the most recent publications on the history of the idea of race, Ivan Hannaford (1996) states: "In the sixteenth century dynastic ambitions and religious issues were of such great consequence that there was little room for the growth of a conscious idea of race as we understand it today" (182). He identifies the first stage in the development of race as occurring between 1684 and 1815, with two other stages preceding during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (187). Although he derives most of his data from the works of a wide range of philosophers and early scientists, his time frame coincides with that of Theodore Allen (1994, 1997) and other writers who examine material, economic, political, and social conditions for their explanations for the emergence of race. This is the context in which I also have investigated the causal factors for the rise of such an extraordinary view of humankind.

During the age of exploration and European expansion, rising competitiveness among one another and consciousness of their power to dominate others affected the way Europeans perceived indigenous people; these elements were factored early into their methods of dealing with all aliens. "Race" as a mode of describing and categorizing human beings appeared in the languages of the Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, French, Germans, Dutch, and English as these groups established colonial empires in the New World and Asia and set about dealing with their heterogeneous populations. Race conceptions and references varied greatly, however, among the colonizing powers. It was the English in North America who developed the most rigid and exclusionist form of race ideology, and it is on this racial worldview that this book focuses.

Reviewing this history helps to make us conscious of certain facts that, for the most part, have often escaped analysis. The peoples of the conquered areas of the New World, and the other "colored" peoples of what is now called the Third World, did not participate in the invention of race or in the compilation of racial classifications imposed upon themselves and others. To the extent that these peoples utilize the idiom today and operate within its structures, they have inherited and acquiesced in the system of racial divisions created for them by the dominant Europeans (Banton 1977). As a paradigm for portraying the social reality of inequality, the racial worldview has spread around the globe, and its use often exacerbates already existing interethnic animosities (Barzun 1965). We will see some of this development later in Chapter 11.

Accepting the fact that race is a cultural construct invented by human beings, it is easy to understand that it emerged out of a set of definable historical circumstances and is thus amenable to analysis as are other elements of culture. No amount of comparative definitions and synchronic explorations

of modern race relations will lead us to more refined definitions and understandings of race. On the contrary, race is a complex of elements whose significance and meanings lie in historical settings in which attitudes and values were first formed. We should be able to analytically isolate the central components, investigate their probable genesis, and comprehend how they evolved over time.

This approach is different from that of scholars who have written about the history of the idea of race in the past. Louis Snyder, Earl Count, Thomas Gossett, and others have documented the differing definitions of races and the numerous classifications that early taxonomists invented. Historians like Gossett, John Hope Franklin, John Haller, Gary Nash, Winthrop Jordan, David Brion Davis, C. Vann Woodward, Carter G. Woodson, Eugene Genovese, Robert Berkhofer, Roy Pearce, George Fredrickson, as well as many other experts on slavery and race in the New World, have explored the attitudes of whites in the Americas toward peoples whom they identified as racially different from themselves. My concern in this volume is not to repeat these well-known studies but to specify and analyze the ideological ingredients of which the idea of race itself was composed and to identify the cultural contexts that nourished them.

Ideas, Ideologies, and Worldviews

By exploring the probable origin and history of the idea of race, dissecting it into its component elements and attempting to relate these to their sociohistorical contexts, I am not reifying the concept or elevating ideas into a realm of absolute autonomy. Ideas should not be translated as prime movers of the cultural process, nor should they be considered as mere epiphenomena of cultural developments in other arenas. Ideas are critical, necessary aspects of culture that may vary in strength and form of expression over time and space, but invariably meet some cultural need or advance the interests of those who hold them. From this perspective, ideas cannot even be interpreted or analyzed apart from their cultural matrices. They arise out of specific material and social circumstances and are constituted of individual and group perceptions, understandings, and decisions made by human beings who inevitably have an imperfect comprehension of the complexity of the situations that confront them. The human animal has the capacity to come to conclusions and make decisions out of self-interest, out of devotion to some abstract principle, or out of his or her perceptions of the larger interests of the group, however that is defined. Multiple individual decisions may well accumulate and become entrenched as cultural orientations that persist through time and space.

As such decisions become incremental parts of the cultural order, they reflect specific understandings of the world and its environmental and social

realities. They provide explanations for, and often a means of controlling, social and natural forces. As their adaptive usefulness is realized, they become established as givens, as worldviews or ideologies, and thus institutionalized, they feed back into human thought and actions. By "worldview" I mean a culturally structured, systematic way of looking at, perceiving, and interpreting various world realities, a society's "weltanschauung," to use a word made popular in sociological studies. Once established and conventionalized, worldviews become enthroned in individuals as mind-sets. They may even achieve the state of involuntary cognitive processes, actively if not consciously molding the behavior of their bearers.

I define race as such a worldview. In the United States, Australia, South Africa, and many other areas of the world, race is a cosmological ordering system that divides the world's peoples into what are thought to be biologically discrete and exclusive groups. The racial worldview holds that these groups are by nature unequal and can be ranked along a gradient of superiority—inferiority. My use of the term "worldview" depicts the deep-seated nature of this essentially folk vision of the human species and the often unconscious processes of perception or imagery that it generates. "Worldview" also contains and reflects a variety of folk beliefs about human differences that in the United States we see as stereotypes of different populations. Because they are cultural beliefs to which we Americans are all more or less conditioned, their truth or falsity is rarely questioned. In this volume I call them "ideologies."

Race as a worldview can be understood as composed of specific ideological components. By "ideologies" I mean sets of beliefs, values, and assumptions, held on faith alone and generally unrelated to empirical facts, that act as guidelines to or prescriptions for individual and group behavior. The substantive ideological beliefs about human differences tend to vary in time and space, depending on the values, histories, and experiences of the colonizing powers. We can use the terms "worldview" and "ideology" interchangeably with the recognition that there is a high level of correspondence between them. I tend to think of a worldview as a more systematic and comprehensive set of ideological beliefs that have an integral relationship to one another. When I speak of the concept of race, I am referring to the fundamental worldview, inclusive of its basic ideological components, and all of the adhesions that each culture may add to it. The ideological elements in this worldview can be confirmed by empirical research. Where necessary, varying ideologies within different societies can be compared for their similarities and differences, as some historians do, for example, for North and South America, or for the United States and South Africa.

Some worldviews are highly flexible and generalizable, capable of being diffused to and adopted by other societies. Their adaptability must be perceived by the other culture bearers who may modify the components to fit

the needs, fears, beliefs, biases, ambitions, and goals that they share. The ideological components of race have been eminently adaptable to a wide variety of sociopolitical situations, as this history reveals.

The Social Reality of Race in America

There is a kind of intellectual or cognitive paradox posed by the abandonment on the part of some contemporary scientists of the use of the term "race," while in most Western cultures, in South Africa, and much of the rest of the world it is taken for granted as part of folk belief that everyone belongs to a race. If modern science has not been able to produce the kind of studies that would confirm the reality of race, if indeed some scientists are arguing, increasingly, that races do not exist, then it can be legitimately asked: How can public attitudes and understandings retain the notion of their verity and the belief that science has proved their reality?

I think the facts will show that among the general public, the fundamental belief that races exist is unaffected by contradictions or inconsistencies. We do not discard the basic patterns of thought or question the need for racial classifications when we are faced with great variation and complexity in physical traits and ambiguous realities and uncertainties about the racial identity of an individual or group. There are important reasons for the deeply ingrained sense of racial reality that we inherit as part of our cultural baggage. As I will show in the following chapters, race is the major mode of social differentiation in American society; it cuts across and takes priority over social class, education, occupation, gender, age, religion, culture (ethnicity), and other differences. It is essential, then, to understand race as a sociocultural reality independent of the history and uses of the concept in science and distinct from whether or not scientists can agree on a common biological definition. In this sense, race is a social principle by which society allocates desired rewards and status. It belongs, as Joel Kovel has argued, to "the regulative aspects of our culture" (1970, 26).

For some scientists to deny the existence or reality of biophysical races seems to challenge, perhaps inadvertently, one of the most powerful, deeply entrenched canons of Western thought and belief. The "no-races" position calls into question fundamental truisms that have been accepted for more than two centuries as part of nature's way of arranging things. For most people, race is a given, a biological reality that does not require great leaps of consciousness or intellect to comprehend. They see it (or so they believe) in the phenotypic variability experienced in interactions with heterogeneous populations like those in the New World. Moreover, even those scientists who have taken the no-races position are very much aware of the social reality of race in Western societies. Even as they deny its existence, they cannot avoid it.

There is, then, a great disjunction between the no-races position of modern scientists on the matter of biological races and the social parameters of race by which we conduct our lives and structure our institutions. Experts in many fields who have grappled with the sociology of race and race relations are not apt to find answers to the weighty problems of interracial conflict in the laboratories of modern physical anthropologists, human biologists, or geneticists. Scholars of social behavior and modern scientists investigating problems of human biogenetic variability are really not talking about the same thing. Biogenetic variations in the human species are not the same phenomena as the social clusters we call "races"; it is crucial to understand this, even though the use of a common term confuses the issue.

Reflecting this disjunction are some curious features about the semantics of race and its related terms. If, for the general educated community, race has been taken to refer to biophysical variations between populations, it should be regarded as a neutral classificatory term. Yet, on the other hand, such derivatives of race as "racism," "racist," and "racialism" convey an agreed-upon sense of insalubrity—prejudice, ignorance, hatred, narrow-mindedness, malice, and other noxious defects. Virtually no one wants to be accused of being a bigot or of practicing racism. Even members of the White Knights and the Ku Klux Klan will deny that they are racists, which in the context of American culture is an invidious appellation. There seems to be a strange inconsistency here; we attempt to use one term in an objective, impartial, scientific way, while its related and derivative terms are so infused with negative and judgmental elements that they cannot be functionally neutral.

We may not always be conscious of the dilemma that these subtle contradictions reflect. But it un masks for us a paradox that is critical to any attempt to examine the whole phenomenon of race. The paradox has to do with the attitudes toward and treatment of race in some of the scholarly, journalistic, and social-science literature since the beginning of World War II and the social realities of race that we daily experience. Stressing the concept of "sociological" or "social" race as distinct from biological race does not obviate the dilemma. Any descriptor is likely to lead to more confusion than clarity, in part because it cannot deal with the complexities of the various popular and scientific versions of race and because it adds no greater clarity or comprehension to the problem of the perception and interpretation of human variation.

The fact is that, at the level of public consciousness, the presentation of the "no-race" position by science and scientists constitutes a challenge to our cultural worldview, to what we perceive as commonsense knowledge, and to the kinds of relationships that large numbers of people experience. The challenge, were it to become widespread, would, in a very real sense, negate the very structure of American society. For there is a reality to the

idea of race that is grounded in America's historical consciousness and in all of its political, economic, religious, recreational, and social institutions.

Race is about status and inequality of rank in a society where competition for wealth and power are played out at the individual level. Any social scientist objectively observing American culture for the first time would readily recognize patterns of behavior that reflect the important social dimensions of racial status in America. From Americans' behavior alone, the social scientist would conclude that different races rank unequally along several dimensions, and that there are specific mechanisms for maintaining separateness and inequality among them.

A fact denied by none of the experts is that race in the American mind was and is tantamount to a statement about profound and unbridgeable differences. In whatever context race comes to play, it conveys the meaning of nontranscendable social distance. This sense of difference is conditioned into most individuals early in their lives and becomes bonded to emotions nurtured in childhood. In the United States, it is expressed in all kinds of situations and encounters between peoples. It is structured into the social system through residential separation; differential education, training, and income; and informal restrictions against socializing, intermarriage, and common membership in various organizations, including, most visibly, the church. It is reflected in virtually all media representations of American society and in institutional aspects of culture such as music, the arts, scientific research and educational institutions, politics and political forums, businesses, the theater, television, music and film industries, and recreational activities.

Not only are there separate churches, social organizations, and residential areas for blacks and whites, but there are also separate magazines, journals, and newspapers. Music is defined as black or white (although most of it shares the same musical roots), despite the fact that some of America's most outstanding musicians perform in both black and white arenas. There is "black" literature, poetry, and art, thought to be distinct from white versions of these cultural genres. There is black entertainment, presumed to be different from white entertainment, and even some of the literature on health is targeted for a separate black or white audience. The media constantly portrays and supports the racial divide. Advertisements and politicians design their communications for a specific racial constituency.

Race provides the unspoken guidelines for daily interaction between persons defined as being of different races, especially black and white. It often sets the standards and rules for conduct even though individuals may not always be conscious of this fact. All of this suggests that Americans believe unarticulated differences between the races to be profound and ineradicable. Although often the reasons given are incoherent or desultory, the underlying belief is that the differences cannot be overcome under any circumstances. This belief is unfortunately often true of some who have been the

victims of racism as well as those who have not. The important point is that this sense of difference reflects the cultural construction of the reality of the racial worldview in those societies where such differences evolved and became useful.

The reality of race rests in the uniqueness of the attitudes toward human diversity that it expresses. Race is a way of looking at the kaleidoscope of humanity, of dividing it into presumed exclusive units and imposing upon them attributes and features that conform to ideological and social values within the cultures that are defining the races. This statement may sound somewhat circular, but it is a way of saying that specific cultures have been responsible for formulating ideas of race and the social values encompassing racial differences. Race as a cultural construct is only one way of looking at human differences.

On the Relationship Between Biology and Race

Stressing the cultural nature of race requires analytically excising the empirical reality of biophysical variation from our cognitive perspective. In other words, it is useful to ignore actual phenotypic or biological differences if we want to understand how the ideology of race functions in American society. Yet, clearly, physical variations had something to do with the origin and persistence of race categorization. Perhaps the best way of expressing this connection is to state that race originated as the imposition of an arbitrary value system on the facts of biological (phenotypic) variations in the human species. It was the cultural invention of arbitrary meanings applied to what appeared to be natural divisions within the human species. The meanings had social value but no intrinsic relationship to the biological diversity itself. Race was a reality created in the human mind, not a reflection of objective truths. It was fabricated as an existential reality out of a combination of recognizable physical differences and some incontrovertible social facts: the conquest of indigenous peoples, their domination and exploitation, and the importation of a vulnerable and controllable population from Africa to service the insatiable greed of some European entrepreneurs. The physical differences were a major tool by which the dominant whites constructed and maintained social barriers and economic inequalities; that is, they consciously sought to create social stratification based on these visible differences (cf. Banton 1967, 1977, 1988). Theodore Allen's study (1997) of the invention of the "white" race provides indisputable evidence of the deliberate way in which colonial plantation leaders manipulated the social system in this manner (see Chapter 5).

Today, the complex patterns and combinations of genetic intermixture have transformed, indeed have increased, the biogenetic diversity that results

from blended gene pools. Yet the sociocultural reality of race persists; it no longer depends substantively on the preservation of discrete biological boundaries, or for that matter on any form of phenotypic markers. We comprehend this best when we realize that western Europeans since the mid-nineteenth century have constructed their own notion of race not out of overt phenotypic differences within their populations but out of what were class and ethnic parameters. The ideology of race imputes a permanence and heritability to differences fashioned out of cultural meanings. Phenotypic diversity still obviously exists in many societies, but the conflict between the English and the Irish, as well as twentieth-century German Nazi beliefs, demonstrates that such variability is not a prerequisite for the creation of some form of race ideology.

The Primordialists' Argument

Certain deeply held attitudes tend to confuse and inhibit attempts to understand race as a cultural phenomenon with the kind of detachment that is required. Collectively, I call these attitudes "primordialist" because their proponents rely on the naive belief that it is basic human nature to be fearful of those who are different from ourselves. Many writers in the past have assumed that there is a universal human tendency to interpret physical differences between populations as somehow socially meaningful. Following this premise, Thomas Gossett, for example, argued that race prejudice has an ancient lineage—that it was present among the ancient Aryans of India, the Chinese of the third-century Han Dynasty, as well as among the ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, and Greeks (1965, chap. 1). In fact, he appeared to accept any historical reference to color and other physical characteristics of populations as a reference to race. Bernard Lewis has interpreted race and racism in the attitudes and behavior of medieval Arabs toward sub-Saharan Africans.² And Pierre Van den Berghe (1967) defined race and racism as broad enough to encompass historical conflicts between Tutsi and Hutu of the lake region of East Africa, and the Fulani and Hausa in West Africa.

They are not alone. There appears to be a common tendency among many historians and social scientists to regard biophysical variations as the basis for, and equivalent to, races and to presume that racial classifications are the norm for any society in which such variations occur. Some authors even attempt to explicate social conflict as a natural concomitant of such biophysical diversity. Thus, Edward Shils (1968) argued for the ubiquity of a connection between color and race, explaining that self-identification by color stems from a primordial need for connectedness to others like ourselves. In the same volume, Kenneth Gergen (1968) speculated that skin color differences may in fact be responsible for conflict between peoples. Operating from a Freudian perspective, he argued that self-love tends to eventuate in the love

of others who are like ourselves. The obverse, dislike and suspicion of those who differ from us, leads to the drawing of battle lines between physically different groups. Thus, race and racism, these authors concluded, may be natural components of the human psyche. And where certain colors are associated with negative symbols—such as black representing evil, dread, mourning, filth—and where also there are great differences in skin color within a population, there will be "a pronounced tendency toward strife between the light and the dark" (Gergen 1968, 122).³

The arguments made by some of the primordialists sound more like self-serving and self-deceiving rationalizations that stem from culturally conditioned personal bias (compare, for example, the arguments expressed by proponents of slavery during the pre-Civil War era) than objective examinations of social facts. One may look through history and contemporary circumstances and find so many exceptions that we are inclined to question such generalizations. We do know with certainty that when people are conditioned from childhood to have negative feelings about dark skin color, they may indeed respond with fear, hatred, and loathing, depending on what they have been taught.

This raises to the level of irony the fact that much of the world's greatest violence and the strongest and most hate-filled passions have been expressed among peoples who are physically (and often culturally) similar, as manifested in the two world wars of the twentieth century between various European populations and hundreds of other wars in previous centuries. A premier example of centuries-old hate found in the Western world today is the conflict between the Irish and the English. Most of the world's great wars during the last half millennium have had as protagonists Europeans who were, comparatively speaking, culturally similar and physically undifferentiated. The same is true of Asia and the Middle East, where neighbors who are physically similar have fought numerous wars. Moreover, there are instances where peoples with extensive biophysical, as well as cultural, differences between them have come into contact and intermingled with little or no conflict. There has always been some degree of commingling, and often amalgamation, even when the circumstances entailed devastating conquest (as in the example of some Europeans and Native Americans). In the ancient world, the Persians, we are told, had "respect for the customs and languages of others" (Rowe 1974, 63). Alexander the Great exhorted his soldiers to mingle and intermarry with the peoples they conquered. Neither the Aryan conquests and movements into India nor the Muslim conquests in Africa, southern Europe, and throughout the Near and Far East resulted in racially structured societies. So we are not convinced by such Freudian-based arguments.

In any case, we cannot explain the phenomenon of race by reference to psychological processes that we speculate may be taking place within individ-

nals. The structure of individual personalities comes about only within the context of cultures and ongoing social systems, and within the meanings, values, and proscriptives that are impressed upon individuals as they are socialized within a given cultural matrix. As the song from the musical *Babii Hazi* claims, "you've got to be taught to hate." The idea of race is extremely complex; it cannot be understood or analyzed outside of its cultural integument. Nor is it a simple question of the juxtaposition of dissimilar human groups and resulting conflict between them. Race and racism do not simply or necessarily follow from the mere propinquity and interaction of two peoples who happen to be physically different. As Van den Berghe has also pointed out: "It is not the presence of objective physical differences between groups that creates races, but the social recognition of such differences as socially significant or relevant" (1967, 11).

I would argue that race is even more than the imputation of social significance to physical differences. For example, skin color variations in many regions of the world and in many societies have been imbued with some degree of social value or significance, but color prejudice or preferences do not of themselves amount to a fully evolved racial worldview.⁴ There are many societies, historical and contemporary, in which the range of skin color variation is quite large, but all such societies have not imposed on themselves worldviews with the specific ideological components of race that have been experienced in North America and South Africa.⁵

It is nevertheless historically accurate to recognize that physical differences were (and still are) an important and perhaps a once necessary ingredient in the development of the idea of race in North America. Their existence, however, became much less critical even before the elaboration of the worldview and ideology of race that appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, when Europeans began to extend its components to one another. Actual color and other phenotypic differences are not today crucial to the functioning of race ideology in our society, although color and physiognomy remain in the public mind as symbols of race differences. It is enough to know that a person identifies as a member of a particular "race" regardless of physical features.

Race as a Worldview:

A Theoretical Perspective

The primary thesis of this book—and what the research has shown—is that "race" was from its inception a folk classification, a product of popular beliefs about human differences that evolved from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. As a worldview, it was a cosmological ordering system structured out of the political, economic, and social experiences of peoples who had emerged as expansionist, conquering, dominating nations on a

worldwide quest for wealth and power. By a folk classification, I refer to the ideologies, distinctions, and selective perceptions that constitute a society's popular imagery and interpretations of the world. People in all societies comprehend the world through prisms that their cultures and experiences proffer to them. They impose meanings on new discoveries and experiences that emanate from their own cultural conditioning and interpret these realities in terms with which they are familiar. One of the first examples of this described in this book is the way the English fabricated an image of savagery from their experiences with the Irish and then imposed this image on Native Americans, and later Africans.

Like all elements of culture, the racial worldview is a dynamic one, subject to oscillations in its expression and interpretation, from time to time intensified or contracted, or sometimes modified and/or reinvented in response to changing circumstances. It also manifests contradictions and inconsistencies as life experiences, various social forces, and new knowledge provoke subtle modifications in attitudes about human differences. In the United States, the racial worldview has waxed and waned largely in response to economic forces that alter the conditions of labor competition, and political realities that from time to time have incorporated or advanced the interests of the low-status races.

Race, then, originated, not as a product of scientific investigations but as a folk concept; it initially had no basis, no point of origin, in science or the naturalistic studies of the times. The folk idea was subsequently embraced, beginning in the mid- to late eighteenth century, by naturalists and other learned people and given credence and legitimacy as a supposed product of scientific investigations. The scientists themselves undertook efforts to document the existence of the differences that the European cultural worldview demanded and had already created. In their efforts to promote a valid basis for the idea of race, scientists not only reflected the biases, beliefs, and conditioning of their times, but, as in the cases of Louis Agassiz in the nineteenth century and Sir Cyril Burt in the twentieth, they often expressed their own personal fears, prejudices, and aesthetic evaluations of peoples whom they saw as alien. That their judgments and scientific conclusions mirrored popular beliefs should come as no surprise. As John Greene (1981) has shown, science is inevitably shaped by existing knowledge, values, beliefs, and pre-suppositions.

From its first continuous application in the English language to human populations during the eighteenth century, race was a way of categorizing what were already conceived as inherently unequal human populations. Indeed, had all human beings been considered as at least potentially equal by European explorers, and exploiters, there would have been no need for the concept of race at all. People could have continued to be identified by the usual ways that had been employed ever since the first distinct groups came

into contact with one another, that is, by their own name for themselves (their ethnic name); by the categorizing terms such as "people," "group," "society," and "nation"; or by labels taken from the geographic region or locales they inhabited. Separateness and inequality, as we will see, are central to the idea of race.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the race concept in North America contained at least five analytically ascertainable ideological ingredients, which, when taken together, may be considered diagnostic of race in the United States. Some were reflections of presuppositions deeply embedded in English culture history; others were relatively new ideas that appeared with the colonial and slavery experiences but were compatible with the values, beliefs, and interests of the leaders of especially the southern colonies. When combined, these formed a singular paradigm constituting the racial worldview.

The first and most basic was a universal classification of human groups as exclusive and discrete biological entities. The classifications were not based on objective variations in language or culture, but were categories that eclipsed these attributes and included superficial assessments and value judgments of phenotypic and behavioral variations. The categories were arbitrary and subjective and often concocted from the impressions, sometimes fanciful, of remote observers. A second element, emphasized above, was the imposition of an egalitarian ethos that required the ranking of these groups vis-à-vis one another. Ranking was an intrinsic, and explicit, aspect of the classifying process, derived from the ancient model of the Great Chain of Being (a hierarchical structure of all living things; see Chapter 7), which had been adapted to eighteenth-century realities.

A third element of North American race ideology was the belief that the outer physical characteristics of different human populations were but surface manifestations of inner realities, for example the cognitive linking of physical features with behavioral, intellectual, temperamental, moral, and other qualities. Thus, what today most scholars recognize as cultural (learned) behavior was seen then as an innate concomitant of biophysical form. A fourth element was the notion that all of these qualities were inheritable—the biophysical characteristics, the cultural or behavioral features and capabilities, and the social rank allocated to each group by the belief system itself. Finally, perhaps the most critical element of all was the belief that each exclusive group (race), so differentiated, was created unique and distinct by nature or by God, so that the imputed differences, believed fixed and unalterable, could never be bridged or transcended.

It was the synthesis of these elements that constituted the folk concept and worldview of race in America, when this term began to replace other classificatory terms and to be widely used in the English language during the eighteenth century. The ideology enveloped in the concept was universal,

comprehensive, and infinitely expandable. By the nineteenth century, all human groups of varying degrees of biological and/or cultural diversity could be subsumed arbitrarily into some racial category, depending upon the objectives or goals of those establishing the classifications.

Once structured on a hierarchy of inequality, different races became socially meaningful wherever the term was used and to whatever groups it could be extended. Attitudes, beliefs, myths, and assumptions about the world's peoples, developed during the period of greatest European expansion and exploitation of non-European lands and peoples, were embroidered into systematic ideologies about their differing capacities for civilization and progress. All colonial peoples were seen as distinct races, all had to be ranked somewhere below whites, and even some Europeans had to be divided into racial groups and ranked vis-à-vis one another.

As it evolved in the nineteenth century, race posed a new dimension of social differentiation that superseded "class" (see Chapter 9). Race offered a new mechanism for structuring society based on a conception of naturally fixed, heritable, and immutable status categories linked initially to visible physical markers. The idea of "natural" inequality was a central component of race from its inception; but few recognized this as a mere analogue of social position transformed into myth. Devout Christians saw it as God-ordained, and the irreligious rationalized the inequality as a fundamental part of "natural laws." In this same century, racial groups began to be confirmed in their inequalities by science, which cast their imagery to reflect the unquestioned verities of the dominant society's beliefs. Finally, the legal apparatus of the United States and various state governments conspired with science to legitimize this structural inequality by sanctioning it in law. Thus, the racial worldview was institutionalized and made a systemic and dominant component of American social structure.

This cultural construction of race as social reality reached full development in the latter half of the nineteenth century. After the Civil War it was utilized as a social device to transform the freed black population of the North American continent into a subordinate subhuman caste. It was further used to degrade and brutalize the Native American peoples and to establish specific social parameters for other, newer immigrants, including the Irish, who had first experienced some of the elementary features of the racial worldview (see Chapter 3).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea of race differences was seized upon to divide, separate, and rank European populations and to justify the dominance of certain class groups or ethnic elements. This led inexorably to the mass terror, incalculable atrocities, and genocide of Nazi race ideology and practices. These events had a major impact on American social consciousness and generated growing antiracist sentiments among a populace prepared by its own ideals to combat Nazism. Also in the

twentieth century, the state of South Africa came much closer to realizing and operationalizing the mandates of this worldview under its system of apartheid.

The legacy of the historical development of the idea of race has been the retention into the late twentieth century of the folk sense of fundamental differences and inequality between those peoples classified as separate races. It persists as an unarticulated reality despite recent developments in the biological sciences, which, as we shall see, have failed to confirm the existence of group differences greater in magnitude than those found between individuals. Its existence continues in large part because of its value as a mechanism for identifying who should have access to wealth, privilege, loyalty, respect, and power and who should not. And of course, for some individuals within the high-status race, it is a powerful psychological force, providing scapegoat functions as well as a facile external means of establishing and measuring one's own self-worth. Race became, and still is, the fulcrum, and symbol, of a worldview and ideology that promotes an easy and simple explanation for human history and progress, or the lack thereof. Most importantly, it declares a kind of ordered structure to society that appears to be grounded in the very diversity created by nature.

This is the story that this book tells, but it is not an easy one to learn.

Race and Ethnicity: Biology and Culture

In previous discussions, I have mentioned a distinction that requires some elaboration at this point. As we have seen, a fundamental dichotomy made by modern anthropologists and other scholars is that between culture and biology. We emphasize that culture is learned behavior that varies independently of the physical characteristics of the people who carry it. People who live and interact together in a common community develop lifestyles, value orientations, language styles, customs, beliefs, and habits that will differ from those of their neighbors. Over expansive geographic areas, variations in language and culture traits may become quite noticeable so that populations may differ radically from one another even within the same political community. People who share similar cultural characteristics, a common culture history, group identity, and language traits see themselves as distinct from other populations. A modern way of expressing the common interests of people who are perceived by others and themselves as having the same culture is to speak of them as an ethnic group. When ethnic groups evolve values that project their own lifestyles as superior to the cultures of others, we identify such attitudes as "ethnocentric" (or chauvinistic).

It is important at the outset to have a clear, heuristic understanding of the difference between race and racism on the one hand, and ethnicity and ethnocentrism on the other. These terms reflect conceptually, and realistically,

quite different kinds of phenomena, and their use should be so restricted in the interest of accurate communication. It is unfortunate that the languages of the sciences, particularly the social sciences, have sometimes tended to proliferate and obfuscate meanings rather than provide precision and clarity. "Ethnicity" is one of those relatively modern terms that has sometimes been hailed as a suitable substitution for "race," but that has also itself taken on a confusing plethora of meanings and nuances. Just one of the meanings listed in *Weber's New International Dictionary* will alone show how imprecise and impracticable the term can be: here, ethnicity is defined as "racial, linguistic and cultural ties with a specific group." Ethnicity is a quality of ethnic groups, and "ethnic" itself seems to be almost anything and everything. The automatic linkage of biology and behavior (culture) in our collective consciousness obviously precipitated the inclusion of "racial ties" (here seen as physical traits) and the confusion of these very different domains.

Somewhat more sanguine about how we deal with physical, psychological, linguistic, and cultural phenomena, anthropologists have been cautious to relate the terms "ethnic" and "ethnicity" to real, as well as perceived, cultural differences between peoples. Nowadays, "culture" is defined, following E. B. Tylor's inclusive and unsurpassed rendering, as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" ([1871] 1958, 1).⁶ In our times, we would substitute "human beings" for "man" and emphasize the term "acquired." The point is very simple: Culture is learned, not inborn, behavior; it refers to ways of behaving and thinking that we learn as we grow up in any society. It also refers to the things we learn when we adapt to or assimilate features of a different culture. The terms "ethnic" and "ethnicity" are best used, analytically, to refer to all those traditions, customs, activities, beliefs, and practices that pertain to a particular group of people who see themselves and are seen by others as having distinct cultural features, a separate history, and a specific sociocultural identity.

On occasion we have all used certain physical attributes of individuals as clues to speculate on their nationality or geographic origins as, for example, in the identification of East Indians or Asians. But physical characteristics do not automatically proclaim the *cultural* background or behavior of any individual or group. There are many people who look East Indian but have no such ancestry or cultural background. Some Middle Easterners have been mistaken for Puerto Ricans and vice versa. Some Arabs have been mistaken for black Americans, and so have many peoples from the tropical islands of the South Pacific. Biophysical traits, then, should never be used as part of the definition of ethnicity. Every American should understand this explicitly, since there are millions of physically varying people all sharing "American culture" (ethnicity) who know little or nothing about the cultural features of their ancestors who may have arrived here from almost any area of the earth.

stereotypes that appear unabashedly racist. But ethnic stereotypes and ethnic boundaries can and do change and much more rapidly than racial ones; ethnicity is based on behavior that most people understand can be learned.

Where race is the more powerful divider, it does not matter what one's sociocultural background may be or how similar ethnically two so-called racial groups are. In fact, the reality of ethnic, or social-class, similarities and differences is irrelevant in situations where race is the prime and irreducible factor for social differentiation. The best example of this is the case of blacks and whites in America, whose cultural similarities are so obvious to outsiders but internally are obfuscated by the racial worldview.

When the racial worldview is operant, there can never be an alteration of an individual's or group's status, as both status and behavior are presumed to be biologically fixed. Stephen Steinberg captured this reality clearly in his discussion of ethnic (European) immigrants and racial minorities. "Immigrants," he observes, "were disparaged for their cultural peculiarities, and the implied message was, 'You will become like us whether you want to or not.' When it came to racial minorities, however, the unspoken dictum was, 'No matter how much like us you are, you will remain apart'" (1989, 42). The ideology of exclusion and low-status ranking for blacks in America precludes recognition of how culturally similar whites and blacks are. This is particularly true in the southern states where, class differences aside, they have shared a common culture for centuries.

Where ethnocentrism governs, a people's biophysical characteristics, no matter how similar or divergent, are immaterial to the sociocultural realities. What obtained in most of human history, and certainly throughout the ancient world, was an unarticulated understanding of these principles. This explains why so little was mentioned in ancient texts about the physical features of different groups. The ancients knew that differences of language and custom were far more significant than mere physical traits. They also knew, despite many statements that appear to us as "racist" (in some of the works of Tacitus and Herodotus, for example), that a German tribesman, or any other "barbarian" on the outskirts of civilization, could learn the language and culture of Romans and become a citizen—in other words, that the ethnicity of a person or group was not something inborn and irredeemable; it could be transformed.

But the modern world, after the great migrations of Europeans and the intermixtures among them and with non-Europeans, experienced disorder and confusion of class and ethnicity that crumbled old patterns of social identity and division. It was in large part the uncertainties of this situation that made the idea of race acceptable and useful. Indeed, it can be argued that, beginning in the nineteenth century, many differences that were once essentially ethnic in nature and origin have become transformed and expressed in modern times in a racial idiom. Race, because its characteristics

are thought to be innate, exaggerates whatever differences do exist and renders them even more profound and permanent. Thus, race structures a social order that is perceived as unalterable.

Although the 1960s and 1970s brought a resurgence of ethnic consciousness and the application of the term "ethnic group" to blacks and other groups, Ronald Takaki has shown that Americans have historically treated ethnic and racial groups very differently. He concludes from a study of the political status of different groups that "what actually developed . . . in American society was a pattern of citizenship and suffrage which drew a very sharp distinction between 'ethnicity' and 'race'" (1987, 29). And he argues that it is erroneous to treat subordinate racial groups in American society as if they were merely ethnic. Race is a qualitatively different mode of structuring society.

Race represents a systematic worldview that has proved useful to some protagonists in situations of conflict and competition. It provides its own rationalization for the instigation and perpetuation of intergroup animosities, and reduces or eliminates any potential for recognizing commonalities or for reaching compromise. It evolved in the Judeo-Christian world as a justification for perpetrating inhumanities on others. Perhaps this is why so many people are discomforted by its persistence. We can achieve a greater level of understanding of this phenomenon by examining how it was molded as an idea and an ideology through history.

Notes

1. Compare Banton 1977, Harris 1968, Montagu 1969, Stanton 1960, Van den Berghe 1967, and Williams [1944] 1966.
2. See Lewis 1971, Brown 1968; Davis 1984; and Hunwick 1978 for different perspectives on this topic.
3. See also Degler's strange argument regarding Brazilian "racial" feelings, especially where he assumes that negative attitudes toward darker-skinned (negroid) peoples who form much of the lower classes is due to a "universality of prejudice where there are visible differences among peoples" (1971, 287). Some writers look at ancient documents, and wherever they see negative descriptions or derogatory comments about the physical characteristics of an alien people, they immediately assume a racial element. Were we to accept such a wide view, not a definition, of race, virtually all relationships among human groups would have some form of racial beliefs. And we would not be able to refine this definition so that comparative studies could be made.
4. St. Clair Drake made a similar distinction between color prejudice and racism (1987, 8-10). Many cultures place social meanings on differences in skin color that have nothing to do with race. In Japanese history, women with pale skins were aesthetically highly valued, in part because this skin tone signaled that their fathers (or husbands) were wealthy and their daughters (or wives) therefore did not need to

work outside in the fields (Wagatsuma 1968). In contrast, white Americans often acquire deep rans to convey an aura of affluence, high status, and leisure. Drake also believed that, among other factors, negative aesthetic evaluations of negroid physiognomy affected attitudes toward Africans in many societies quite apart from mere skin color preferences or prejudices. But aesthetic values are subjective and highly personal. One would be hard pressed to identify the kind of evidence needed to prove this.

5. See Frank Snowden's description of blacks in ancient Greek and Roman societies ([1970] 1983).

6. This definition is frequently quoted in introductory textbooks in anthropology. See, for example, Harris 1995, 7; Swartz and Jordan 1976, 4; and Keesing and Keesing 1971, 20, among many others.

2

The Etymology of the Term "Race" in the English Language

In the fifteenth century, western and northern Europeans ventured out from their geographic and historical isolation and discovered the rest of the world. Within the next five hundred years, European exploration, expansion, colonial settlement, and exploitation changed the course of human history and generated complex new relationships between the peoples of the world.

In the process of exploration and penetration into what was *terra incognita*, European adventurers encountered other peoples totally unknown to them before that time. The sometimes awesome and exotic groups had material, religious, and social lifeways alien and unexpected to the peoples of Europe. The strangeness of these peoples and their habitats challenged the European imagination, prompting a rash of speculations and novel interpretations of the new discoveries. In order to grapple both intellectually and practically with these alien societies, Europeans imposed upon them meanings and identities that fit within their own historical understandings, experiences, and preconceptions of what the world was all about. Somewhere in the process they began to use the term "race" to characterize differences among human groups. They left little record of the source of the term and allow us only a hint of the specific meaning(s) attached to it.

The term "race" is found in all of the languages of European settlers in the Americas, where it generally denoted populations of differing origins in the heterogeneous mix of peoples. However, the substantive meanings in different European languages have varied. In English, the term has had nearly a dozen distinct meanings dating from medieval times. But as a semantic form referring to human groups, the English term has a curious kind of history. Its etymology appears obscure, although most dictionary descriptions suggest that the term probably stems from the Italian, thus assuming a