

The background of the image is a spiral-bound notebook with a light beige, textured cover. The metal spiral binding is visible along the left edge. The text is centered on the page in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**An Introduction to CLS 3220:
Basic Concepts
&
What is Critical Race Theory?
2.0**

Introduction

- In CLS 3220, we will explore how different cultures and cultural expressions in the Americas have emerged from the historical legacy of colonialism, slavery, and resistance.
- More specifically, we will learn about the historical social construction of race and ethnicity in the Americas, and then contextualize this phenomena with the various cultures and cultural expressions that have existed both in the past and present.

Intellectual Challenges

- One of the intellectual challenges at the beginning of this course is confronting many of the preconceived notions, assumptions, or misperceptions that many people have about the concepts of culture, race, and ethnicity.
- The reading and lecture material for WEEK 2 is intended to help you work through those challenges.

Some Basic Questions

- *What is ethnicity, and what is race, and how are these two concepts related?*
- *How and why do ethnicity and race operate or “function” in our society?*
- *What tools do we have to help us comprehend, critique, and transform the social impact of ethnicity and race?*
- *To answer these questions, we first have to establish some basic definitions regarding the idea of culture.*

culture

- The customs, characteristics, and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and the arts.
- Culture can include certain patterns of behavior, ideological and cognitive constructs, and patterns of socialization.
- Diversity and change within culture is very prevalent, although often not recognized as such due to stereotyping.

Clarifying Culture

- It is important to clarify what culture is because there was a time when people would discriminate between who had culture and who didn't.
- This discrimination was based on class and racial hierarchies, as well as the influence of colonialism, in which the dominant class, or people, or conquerors "defined" what was considered "culture" and usually dismissed the conquered or subordinate class as "uncultured."
- A stereotype is generalization or an exaggerated belief associated with a category (a culture, ethnicity, or "race"), and its function is to "justify" conduct in relation to that category (prejudice, racism).

Popular Culture

- Scholars in the field of cultural studies have identified two types of contemporary popular culture.
 - Popular culture from above
 - Culture created by the “culture industry” for “the masses,” i.e. commodities, social practices, media, fashion created by multinational corporations for mass consumption (consumerism, buying stuff).
 - Popular culture from below
 - Culture created by the people; traditional customs, social practices (rituals), language, apparel, artistic expressions.

Popular Culture & Modernity

- Of course, in the new millennium, the line between popular culture from above and popular culture from below has long been blurred; ever since the beginning of modernity.
- In general, modernity, or the modern era, refers to the historical development of industrialization and the emergence of societies based on capitalist (privately-owned, profit-driven) market practices.
- Technologically-driven social organization, whether industrialized in the 20th century, or digitally-enhanced in the 21st, dictates how people do business and interact with each other.

Intellectual Modernity & Post-Modernity

- Modernity also signified the establishment of an elite canon of knowledge, ideas, concepts, and identities that people in Western societies (Europe, U.S.) were expected to aspire to in order to be “complete.”
 - Intellectual or social achievement, historical precedents, literature and the arts, economics, sciences
- But post-modernity exposed how these canonical ideas were not very original, but actually fragments of ideas borrowed or stolen from past ideas, from past historical precedents, and even from past cultures and civilizations.
 - The notion of being “complete” or having a “whole” identity or being a centered “subject” was just an illusion, constructed to suit an agenda conducive to modernity.

Modernity & Cultural Hybridity

- According to Latin American scholar Nestor Garcia Canclini, the historical legacy of European settler-colonialism has had an impact on how modernity has developed and impacted the people and cultures of the Americas.
- The societies of the Americas reflect a peculiar mix between the imagined pre-colonial cultures of people of indigenous (Native American, aboriginal, the original inhabitants), African, Asian, and European descent, and the impact of modernity/post-modernity on how culture is expressed within the social practices of the contemporary era.
- Canclini referred to this as “cultural hybridity.”

Ok...Back to the Basics

- The digression in the previous slides was intended to give you a taste of where we will be going with all of this later in the course.
- If you want to read up on these concepts there are two free ebooks on these topics under the WEEK 1 module.
 - *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 5th Edition, by John Story (Pearson: London, 2009).
 - *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies For Entering and Leaving Modernity*, by Nestor Garcia Canclini (Univ. of Minnesota: Minneapolis, 1995)
- The next slides present a few basic ideas from sociology, and then return to the central discussion of race, ethnicity, and critical race theory.

A Basic Introduction to the Social Construction Thesis

- A more complex understanding of the social construction thesis is provided in the lecture slides on gender and sexuality, but for now, a more simple explanation will do.
- Societies create (construct) ideas about ethnicity, race, class, gender, and sexuality (i.e. ideas about culture) through social and cultural practices and processes.
 - social policies, laws, institutional practices
 - government & state agencies (e.g. congress, census bureau) the legal system (e.g. the courts), corporate policies
 - cultural production
 - Prose writing, tracts, literature, art
 - mass media
 - film, television, and the internet

The Basics of Critical Thinking

- In society and culture, ideas and concepts are created (“constructed”), and given meaning by people and institutions (through words), and valued with capital (material worth).
- For instance, race is a concept that has been associated with scientific thought, but is, fundamentally, a social construction.
 - See the second WEEK 1 reading assignment, “Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real” by Audrey Smedley & Brion D. Smedley, *American Psychologist*, January 2005.

ethnicity

- A basic definition:
 - A set of cultural qualities (i.e. customs, language, traditions) ascribed to a particular people with a collective ancestral history and established national and political boundaries.
 - The concept of ethnicity helps us understand how marginalized populations achieve cultural sovereignty and independence.
 - Groups whose cultural identity differs from the dominant population or national identity.
 - In the U.S., the term "ethnic" is used suggest something outside of the "dominant culture" or the "norm," and connotes an "exotic" character.
- Ethnicity is often self-defined.

Ethnicity & Mass Media

- In a pivotal piece of modern scholarship on ethnicity and mass media, “Celluloid Palimpsests: An Overview of Ethnicity and the American Film,” Lester D. Friedman describes motion pictures (movies, cinema) as a social practice (i.e. modern technology) that is a part of the process of visually and socially defining ethnic categories by presenting images of peoplehood and identifying select populations with certain cultural traditions, customs, and historical experiences.
 - A palimpsest is “a tablet upon which are written and re-written numerous codes and traditions.”
- In the history of Hollywood, images of American ethnic groups were created by non-ethnics (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, aka the dominant culture), later European ethnics (e.g. Jewish-Americans), and then much later, people of color (e.g. African-Americans, Latinas/os, Asians, etc.).

nation/nationality

- The original meaning of the word nation was virtually synonymous with ethnicity.
 - A people with a common culture and customs who live within a specific territory with sovereign boundaries.
- But how were these customs and boundaries determined?
- Benedict Anderson's perspective:

nation/nationality

- A socially-constructed concept for describing a large community of people.
- An “imagined community” since its constituent individuals do not have everyday face-to-face contact.
- Nationality has more to do with a dominant power structure and culture; the dominant culture is promoted by the power structure (laws, citizenship, media). Ethnicity has more to do with being from a “minority” culture that is different from the dominant culture (nationality).

Example

- Native Americans are peoples who have live in the North American continent centuries before the arrival of European settler-colonizers.
- Their culture and peoplehood pre-existed before the establishment of the U.S. as a country and state.
- And yet, after they were invaded, conquered, and suffered genocidal policies under the establishment of the U.S. their status as sovereign “first nations” is dictated by the U.S. Federal Government under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (B.I.A.).
 - i.e. the state institutions (U.S. government) whose legacy was responsible for their displacement and genocide
 - Ain’t that something...

race

- People **assume** race describes “essential” biological and physical differences between different groups (**i.e. this is what we are consciously or unconsciously taught in US society**),
- Race is actually an arbitrary category ascribed to a large mass of people or different populations, based on **what are perceived** as common traits (i.e. superficial physiological differences, misconceived assumptions about a shared history or biology).
- **Race is a socially-constructed, hierarchical categorization of difference.**
- Unlike the concept of ethnicity, which has been around since the time of the Greeks, race is more of a modern invention from the 17th & 18th Centuries, coinciding with the emergence of European settler-colonialism.

Race as a Modern Creation

- From 1779 to 1795, the German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach created five categories of “races” based on the study of sixty human skulls. He based his categories on colors.
- The academic discipline of anthropology adopted his three main categories as
 - Caucasian or Caucasoid, or “white”
 - Ethiopian or negroid, or “black”
 - Mongolian or mongoloid, or “yellow”
- Blumenbach had 2 more as
 - Mayalan, or “brown” (South Pacific Islanders)
 - American, or “red” (Native Americans)
- But these categories were constructed (i.e. people just made this shxt up) to suit a certain disciplinary agenda or meet a certain standard in the field established by prior scholarship.

Race, Reality & Ridiculous

- Unfortunately, these socially-constructed (made up) ideas were integrated into the institutions of societies such as the U.S., where they were given a certain currency (use value, political weight).
 - Naturalization laws and citizenship (i.e. who gets to be a citizen and who doesn't).
 - Segregation & persecution of marginalized groups (i.e. who gets to be legally separated from whites and who gets persecuted by law enforcement and federal agencies).
- As any person from Georgia, Chechnya, or Armenia (i.e. the real Caucasus Mountains) will tell you, white Americans are not Caucasians. And most people from the real Caucasus are Muslims, not Christians by the way (see the video on the tumblr).
- Today's categorized genetic variations (i.e. the Ancestry.com stuff) are based on public officials' documentation of particular categories from different geographical territories corresponding to ethnic differences, not biological racial differences.
- Dark skin doesn't mean "African" any more than white skin means caucasian. Natives or aboriginals are dark, brown, tan, light, etc.

Compared to Ethnicity...

- Race is a more recently-conceived concept, utilized to institute structures of power and domination.
 - For instance, prior to the arrival of the Europeans, indigenous people in the Western Hemisphere did not have a concept of race; social and cultural divisions were based on “tribal” kinship and social class.
- What distinguishes race from ethnicity is the notion of institutional power (race, racism).

Race, Ethnicity, & Prejudice

- racism – Prejudice and discrimination based on dominant racialized perceptions; expressions of power.
- prejudice – Personal biases based on perceptions and beliefs about particular people, usually related to their ethnicity, perceived race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.
- ethnocentrism – A particular bias or preference for a particular ethnicity
 - e.g. Eurocentrism, which was the norm in U.S. culture and the U.S. educational curriculum before the introduction of ethnic studies.

Introduction to Critical Race Theory (CRT)

- **What is critical race theory?**
 - **A school of thought which contends that race and racism influence American society and politics.**

Activists & Legal Scholars

– CRT was developed by lawyers, legal scholars, ethnic studies scholars, and activists in the Post-Civil Rights Era (1970s).

- Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Lani Guinier, David Roediger, George Lipsitz, Cornel West, and more.



Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor is a Latina CRT scholar on the SCOTUS.

(#winning, sort of; she is the only Latina CRT scholar on a court of mostly conservative white males.)



Developing a Critical Perspective

- How do laws and social policies suggest notions of “common sense thinking,” but actually privilege certain sensibilities that are often racially or culturally-biased?
- How are these ideas further complicated by one’s gender, social class, and sexual identity?

Genesis of a Critical Perspective

– Through a meticulous historical analysis of how...

- laws
- social policies
- court decisions
- legal jurisprudence

...directly or indirectly define race, and thus, impact American society on the basis of race, CRT scholars arrived at a number of definitive conclusions, which constitute the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory.

Basic Tenets of Critical Race Theory

1.) Racism is ordinary, not an aberration.

- The purposes served by race & racism:

- material (white elites)

- For example. slavery as a form of cheap labor served the material interests of American elites ever since the founding of the U.S. (economic interests, capitalism)

- psychic (working class people)

- Different social and cultural groups internalize and express racism towards each other as a means to psychologically rise above their own experience of subordination. (the “pecking order,” interracial conflict)

- Thus, since racism advances their interests, whether material or psychic, they have no incentive to end it.

Material Determinism

2.) Material determinism and interest convergence.

- Race ultimately serves the material interests of elites (capital).
 - Race as a concept has a certain currency in relation to the interests and functions of power and capital.
- interest convergence: Liberal policies to end racism result more from the self-interest of white elites than a genuine desire to help people of color or the poor.
 - 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education
 - Was the court's decision to end legalized segregation (instituted in 1896 under the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision) based on altruism, or was it based on economic (segregation is bad for commerce and capitalism) and geopolitical interests (segregation is a bad look for "the land of the free") of the court?

Race is a social construction

3.) Race is a social construction; it is not biologically-based.

- differential racialization

- Racial categories and racialized notions of difference have varied origins under different circumstances, and thus, have changing meanings under constantly transforming historical context
- Racialization is historicized; race is not ahistorical

- intersectionality and anti-essentialism

- People have overlapping or conflicting identities based on race, class, gender, and sexuality.
- Some people are privileged & many others are marginalized by race, class, gender, and sexuality (i.e. multiple oppressions)
- Essentialism; reducing a people's identity to a few traits; fosters stereotyping and racism.

Unique Voice of Color

4.) The unique voice of color in legal storytelling, or counter-storytelling.

- Telling personal narratives to reveal how race, class, gender, and sexuality function in society
- Racial minorities are in a unique position to voice these experiences, which “talk back” to the “master narratives” of society (i.e. the dominant point of view or assumed “common sense” thinking).
 - The Black Lives Matter Movement has been the most significant example of the unique voice of color in recent years since African-Americans have been telling people that law enforcement were racist for over a century, and yet people didn’t believe them until smartphones captured their reality and testimonies in real time.

CRT has produced, or is related to to other schools of thought:

- Critical White Studies or Whiteness Studies

- How is “whiteness” socially-constructed in the U.S.?
- Similar to Ethnic Studies, but focuses on deconstructing “white privilege.”
 - See Peggy McIntosh, George Lipsitz, David Roediger
 - How has public policy benefited people recognized as “white?” (e.g. naturalization law of 1790)

• Latino Critical Theory

- CRT for Latinos/as; focuses on immigration, language policy, and the Latino consumer market.

- Queer Critical Theory

- How do laws and social policies delimit identities and civil liberties for the LGBTQIA community?
- Was the US Supreme Court's decision to legalize same-sex marriage another example of interest convergence?
 - Same-sex marriages generate capital for the state and the consumer market while heterosexual marriage is in decline.

The Legal Precedent of Race in the U.S.

Act of March 26, 1790

(1 Stat 103-104)

“establishes a uniform rule for naturalization by setting the residency requirement at two years”

- **“That any alien, being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof..”**
- **Although the conditions for becoming a U.S. citizen have changed a lot since the late 18th Century, what has been the legacy of the 1790 Naturalization Act?**

By the way, where did the name “America” come from?

- The name “America” is derived from the Latin name, “Americus Vesputius,” of the Italian explorer and cartographer Amerigo Vespucci.
- Allegedly, Vespucci made several voyages to the Western Hemisphere in the early 16th Century under the Spanish Crown, documented in several written letters to associates in Italy.
- His most famous letter, titled *Mundus Novus* (“New World”), challenged the geographical misconceptions made by Christopher Columbus.
- The veracity of Vespucci’s letters has been debated by historians and other scholars. For some reason, Christopher Columbus gets the credit for “discovering America,” not Vespucci.
- More on Columbus and Vespucci later in the course...

Why did the social construction of race occur in the history of North America?

- **settler colonialism**

- A policy by which a nation maintains or extends its control over foreign dependencies.
- Control by a foreign power over a dependent area or native people; a policy advocating or based on such control.

- **imperialism**

- The policy of extending a nation's authority by economic or political means over other nations.
- The policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation, especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas (cultural imperialism).
- Broadly speaking, the extension or imposition of a nation's power, authority, or influence.

Critical Race Theory, Settler Colonialism & U.S. History:

The social construction of race serves a material purpose.

- In the U.S., ideas and images of race are used to exert power over people (i.e. racism) in order to serve a material purpose (i.e. economic gain).
- In the early history of the U.S., the division of people into categories called “race” served a material purpose; exploitation of labor (slavery) and monetary gain (private property ownership, capitalism).
 - The English created and disseminated (through letters and tracts) racist ideas of Native Americans as savages to justify killing them and removing them from their land.
 - Hence, the English could take their land as private property and exploit it (capitalism); removal of people from a land in order to claim their natural resources as private property (capitalism).
- Consider the political purposes of today’s news media and its racist depiction of ethnic groups and nationalities (e.g. Arabs, Muslims, Mexican immigrants, etc.). What is the material gain and for whom?

The U.S. Census Bureau

- Under policies dictated by the United States Federal Government's Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the U.S. Census Bureau creates categories for race and ethnicity.
- This also constitutes a social construction of race, with a very powerful influence in U.S. institutions (i.e. state & federal govt. policies) and the U.S. economy (i.e. the marketplace).

Data from the 2010 Census

- **U.S. Population by “Race”**

– White	72%
– African-American	12.6%
– Asian	4.8%
– Native American	.9%
– Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander	.2%

- Hispanic, or Latino, is not considered a race, but rather as an ethnic group that is mixed across the racial categories, and currently stands at 16.3% of the total U.S. population.
- Historically, California had categories of “White Mexicans” and “Mexican Indians” to determine who could own land (White Mexicans) and who’s land would be taken away by ‘whites” (Mexican Indians).
- Asian also includes South Asian (India) and Middle Eastern peoples (arbitrary racial categorizations).

References & Further Reading

- **David M. Newman, *Identities and Inequalities: Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*, 2nd Ed. (2011).**
- **Lester D. Friedman, *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (1991).**
- **Stephanie Greco Larson, *Media and Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment*, (2005).**
- **Ian Haney Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (2006).**
- **Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory, An Introduction*, 3rd Edition (2012).**
- **"Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real" by Audrey Smedly & Brion D. Smedly, *American Psychologist*, January 2005.**