

and more in confronting their limitations, explaining why they exist, and countering their negative effects through rigorous examination. Because a misinformed humanism does not contain within its discourse a sufficient race critique, it bypasses an explanatory framework that many “humans” use to make sense of their lives. Moreover, humanism thwarts its own goals of achieving complete humanization when it fails to confront and help dismantle those structures responsible for the dehumanization of people in the first place: in this case, institutional racism.

As an organizing principle, race is the justification of an entire social edifice, from schooling, to jobs, to marriage. It is not only or mainly, according to Bonilla-Silva (2001), a relation of attitudes between individuals. This problematic sentiment is common enough and leads some people to assume that every group is an equal opportunity racist because whites do not have a monopoly on racial animosity. Rather, race is a structure in which these attitudes become meaningful, which otherwise are not meaningful in themselves; in other words, the racial structure gives them meaning. It is a process of marking, of hailing human subjects into the racial formation as subjects of its apparatuses, such as schools. The humanist ideology conveniently forgets that in a racist society, asserting humanity by default means asserting whiteness since whites seem to represent what it means to be human; the same can be said for men, heterosexuals, and the bourgeoisie. Textbooks, the media, government, and civilization in general all bear the marks of whiteness, which begin to suggest that “human” equates with “white,” as Victor Lewis reminds us so eloquently in the film “Color of Fear.” In fact, the humanist argument or liberal insistence on individuality becomes a form of rationalization for the way a society is racially structured since it fails to analyze social organization in terms of group interests. This does not suggest that humanists do not recognize the existence of racism, even at the structural level. But its discursive universe does not define the problematic as a question of structure but one of humanization. And as long as humanist ideology, according to Althusser, defines the goal as a perpetual search for Man’s essence (filiation) rather than the continuous development of social structures, then it becomes difficult to combat the strongest investment in race via group affiliation.

Humanization is no doubt the goal, if by that we mean a more free or less oppressive society. A more humanizing education system, a more humanizing society, and approaching students’ full humanity—these are all worthwhile endeavors. But these goals cannot be accomplished before the ethical imperative of “doing the right thing.” That is, whites have not been able to relinquish their racial privileges because it is the humanizing thing to do for others, let alone that they also become humanized in the process. Fighting against racism is galvanized less by a humanist sentimentality and more by an ethical imperative, in Kant’s sense of it. Anti-racism is not a commitment because one *gains* in human terms, although this certainly is a product of it. For whites, it actually

means *losing* their position in the racial structure, of giving up their lion’s share of resources. Ultimately, this is also Althusser’s bone of contention with humanism: its penchant for individual improvement, whether this individual is represented by the person or as a metaphor for humanity at large. Meanwhile, in the case of race, it misrecognizes the racial formation and how it *functions*, how it subverts solidarity across races, and how humanism makes it difficult to define human experience without the qualifiers white, black, Latino, Asian American, Native American, or Arab. Althusser’s second moment in his theory of ideology is quite applicable for a study of race and multiculturalism because it exposes the racial evasions in humanism. It suggests that far from being the autonomous reasoning individual, the subject of racial formations is motivated by the interpellations of its structures. Being human in a racial formation is inescapably bound up with being part of a racial group and subject to its shifting, intersecting, but determining effects.

Racial Ideology and the Unconscious: “I don’t have a Racist Bone in my Body but . . .”

Althusser’s third moment—that ideology is largely unconscious—is arguably the most resonating and most relevant portion of Althusser’s theory for the study of race and racism. It has been suggested that racism (and therefore race) seems to have a permanent status (see Bell, 1992), not unlike the unconscious for Althusser. For example, if we survey American racial history, we note transformations and transformations in race and racism but would not receive the general impression that they are about to go away. In fact, there is little to suggest that race is declining in significance, to William Julius Wilson’s (1978) chagrin. In the USA, we have entered a new racial predicament since 9/11, where religious race (in conjunction with skin color race) complexifies our racial categories and meanings. In the face of all these developments, one would be hard pressed to show optimism that race and its problem of racism will one day diminish; instead they assume the guise of foreverness. Althusser (2003) writes:

Only a “subject presumed to exist” is ever interpellated—provided with his identity papers so that he can prove that he is indeed *the* subject who has been interpellated. Ideology functions, in the true sense of the word, the way the police function. It interpellates, and provides the interpellated subject with/asks the interpellated subject for his identity papers, without providing its identity papers in return, for it is *in the Subject-uniform* which is its very identity (p. 55; italics in original).

The ideology of race and its concomitant discourses interpellate *every* human individual into the racial formation. She is signified and brought into the racial universe, which gives her a racial label, white or otherwise. Of course, this is not a literal process of hailing someone down the street, but an unconscious hailing that is part of self-recognition, or misrecognition to be

more precise. Once the hailing begins and provides racialized subjects with their identity, it never fails to record a response, “Here I am!” This process does not yet speak to the eventual goal of eradicating race—which is a possibility I discuss in Chapter 4—but points to the difficult task of countering racial identification.

Consistent with Althusser’s theory, the more rigorous social scientists become in their systematic understanding of racial stratification and institutions, the larger the ideological field of racial common sense becomes. As the criteria for a systematic understanding of race become more precise (e.g., what it is or is not), the field of distortions becomes more comprehensive. As race, especially its commonsensical meanings, takes hold of more people, they begin to define their experience through reified notions of race, such as “it is about blood, genes, or biology.” It becomes the ubiquitous but unexamined marker. Race is an intimate part of how people represent/understand themselves and others. Racial ideology may distort their scientific understanding of social life, but it also functions for people in a daily way, and not always in a positive sense. It gives them a threshold for comfort as they choose their friends, decide where they want to live, and deliberate on who is or is not moral. The *collective racial unconscious* includes even the most “enlightened” person who presumes to think “outside” of race. For *racial ideology has no outside* and the person or society immersed in race cannot think outside of it, which represents the racialization of reality and the realization of race. Either a society is completely racialized or it is not; there is no such thing as “a little bit racialized” or “his or that nation is more racialized than another.” South Africa is not more racialized than China; Sweden is not less racialized than the United States. They are all racialized societies, but race has assumed a particular form in each of their history. Apartheid in one and Jim Crow in the other. Since racialization and white supremacy have reached global proportions (Mills, 2003), it is becoming impossible to find pockets of non-racialized societies. There is no island on which Robinson Crusoe could land.

The unconscious nature of racial ideology is especially pertinent when discussing racism. The racist is always the other, never the self; another society, he is racist. It produces an ironic condition of “racism without any racists” (see Bonilla-Silva, 2003) since racism is like a flautent that someone else always releases in the room. The first realization a race thinker confronts is that all but a few whites admit to their racism. Groups who appear as “obvious” candidates of white supremacy invert reality by claiming to be victims of “reverse racism.” Rather than indict white advantage, white supremacists indict people of color for wanting too large a share of the “American pie.” In this section of the chapter, I would like to discuss the role that white women play in the maintenance of racism: particularly, through discourses on affirmative action, interracial dating and marriage, and racial politics of sexuality. White men’s racial atrocities

are well-documented, but as a result, they have become alibis for a more general white supremacy. Less is known generally about white women’s racism although critiques of feminists of color have made them more visible (see Mohanty, 1988; hooks, 1984; Anzaldúa, 1999). In the case of white women who oppose affirmative action, they claim that it disadvantages them as white people. With respect to white mothers of mixed race children, this decision goes against their very own children’s structural chances for advancement. First, this belief is belied by the fact that white women have been one of the largest beneficiaries of affirmative action policies (Tatum, 1997; Marable, 1996). When they oppose such corrective mechanisms, they subvert their own personal (immediate) interests as women while acting in accordance with (long-term) racial supremacy. They are involved in a performative contradiction and in the process unwittingly show us their racial cards. Second, this dynamic dispels notions of white women’s innocence from racism based on the belief that they are oppressed by patriarchy and therefore share interests with other oppressed people, that is, their oppressed status gives them epistemic privilege.

The racial interpellation of white women is a feminized form of racism that complexifies the patriarchal myth of women as protectors of the family, captured in the saying “blood is thicker than water.” That is, it is assumed that women choose family first. Because racism makes sense only in the context of group interest, white mothers of mixed-race children are torn between race and family (Horton and Sykes, 2004). As split subjects, they may vacillate between the two poles. If blood is thicker than water, then sometimes *skin is thicker than blood*. At crucial junctures where white power is threatened, such as the debate over affirmative action, white mothers of mixed-race children could just as easily choose race over family, identifying with the former rather than the latter. This largely unconscious act is motivated by supra-individual desires, which does not suggest that white women do not know what they are doing. They may not know the extent of their participation in racism, but they are not dupes of it either. As investors in race, they know that their decisions matter, whether or not they understand the implications. As interpellated racial subjects, white women indeed answer the call but record different responses than white men. In other words, they occupy a different post in the racial army as whites defend the territory, real and imagined.

Because racism assumes a gendered form, white women play a distinct role in promoting their race, usually through the detour of mothering. It may appear in the form of discouraging their children away from inter-racial dating in efforts to “protect” them from the criticisms and challenges that await them. Here we note the racial unconscious at work through the detour of “caring.” The critique does not suggest that white women are less caring than before, but that this caring contains racial contradictions. White mothers who discourage their children from interracial dating or miscegenation reassert the ideological

purity of whiteness through the purity of “blood.” Such forms of caring are a result of patriarchy to the extent that women have been socially constructed and have evolved as the caring gender. But because this process occurs in the context of race and racism, it contains racial dimensions. On the surface, the scenario appears like an instance of choosing family over race, of protecting one’s child. But a closer look reveals some contradictions.

Choosing one’s partner is one of the most important choices that adults make and, along with career choice, is definitive of a person’s level of happiness. Protecting the family suggests that the child’s ability to gauge with whom he will share his happiness is promoted, thereby increasing the overall happiness of the family unit with the assumption that all concerns but race are favorable. When this choice is thwarted because of race, resentment and guilt usually occur. Protecting a child from the “pain” of interracial dating or miscegenation overlooks the richness of two different worlds coming together, exposing the reified notion of racial coupling, a process which has different purposes for different races. Furthermore, it exposes the myth and ideology of love when race complexifies the match. It is a popular belief that people marry their “soul mate.” When inter-racial dating and marriage are discouraged, a large portion of the dating world is outside the field of consideration. This condition is hardly conducive to finding one’s soul mate.

Objectification is not only a matter of gender relations under patriarchy, it is also a racial problem. When white women objectify men of color, they participate in the upkeep of white supremacy. Often, they are informed by the assumption that sexual comments about men cannot be branded problematic in the context of patriarchy and existing power relations between men and women. Although this distinction is important, it also shows white women’s racial consciousness. In other words, to some white women, *sexual comments only concern gender*. They fail to notice that although their comments are not sexist, they are both racial and racially problematic. That is, they are examples of feminized forms of racism and recall the centuries of sexual domination and manipulation of men *and* women of color by white men *and* women. They are evidence of white women’s ability to assert their racial privilege and power through sexuality even in the face of their own sexual oppression. Moreover, white women’s objectification of bodies of color represents an instance of their solidarity with one another as racialized subjects. White sisterhood shares something with white men through their unconscious collaboration in racial supremacy, but the former takes on a specific historical appearance that differs from the latter. On this point, men of color have been reticent to enter the fray over the gendered articulations of racism, perhaps out of fear of appearing gendered in the process. However, the entrance of men of color into a critique of gender/race ideology is important because it represents their solidarity with women of color, as bell hooks (1984) reminds us.

Following Lacan’s extension of Freud, Althusser reminds us that although

we cannot directly experience the unconscious, it exists through its effects—in the discourses of everyday life, experience, and dreams. It would be too much to claim that the unconscious is real, but its effects are as real as the dream is to the dreamer. To the extent that racial ideology, like the unconscious, is not real, its modes of existence or manifestation are real (see also Macdonell, 1986). The racial unconscious produces functions, one of which Althusser (2003) calls the “subject-function” (p. 53), which produces a “subjectivity-effect” (p. 48). The ideology of race has produced racial discourses that recruit racialized subjects who find their sense of self through them. Althusser (2003) explains, “It solves the problem evoked in the old complaint of military men—what a pity soldiers are recruited only among civilians—because the only soldiers it ever recruits are already in the army. For ideological discourse, there are no civilians, only soldiers, that is, ideological subjects” (p. 55). A racial formation only recruits from its citizens, which by default are the only candidates for racial subjects. Racial subjectivity is fundamentally unconscious because it always leaves a bit of itself unbeknownst to its subject. Racism is always a remainder. And as the standards for a critical reading of race increase, more of the social field succumbs to racial ideology. That is, it engulfs its subjects to the point that they no longer imagine a non-racialized horizon. Even when they resist race at every turn, it betrays them in the end.

Ideology and Racial State Apparatuses: “Race is Real, Race Ain’t Real”

Ample controversy has been thrown into the cauldron of race concerning its status. To the extent that race as a concept is not real, its modes of existence are real. Its racial subjects are real; likewise, schools, the workplace, and families are institutional forms of race. There is good reason to believe that race is not a scientific concept, which is not reason enough to reject its study but necessitates a multiple framework that includes ideological and materialist perspectives. As opposed to production, for which Marx found a suitable language to attach, race was an invention originating in the Occident. Unlike production, which humans did not have to create but discovered, race was invented in order to accomplish certain social goals. In order to rationalize their place in the world and then justify the treatment of others, white Europeans invented a classification system that put people of darkest skin tones at the bottom of the human hierarchy and lightest at the top. This position makes inequality central to the concept of a racial order and questions the notion that racial orders exist because of the mere presence of racial difference. Bonilla-Silva (2001) clarifies, “[W]e can speak of racial orders only when a racial discourse is accompanied by social relations of subordination and superordination among the races” (p. 42). The ideology of race was born and spurred on the development of the world in a direction that its creators could not have anticipated. It is in this sense that enables us to forward the thesis that race is not real because whites gave it an existence it did not already have. To the extent

that monsters are not real, the giant we call race is likewise unreal. It is tempting to respond that the “race is real or not real” debate is energy not well spent, that it circumvents the more important work to be done describing how race functions and how racism can be subverted if not eradicated. However, defining correctly the conceptual status of race is part of unseating whiteness, depending on how race-conscious scholars set the terms of the debate over race.

That race is an ideology has led to the conclusion that it is not worthy of invoking because doing so further reifies what is already unreal. In that case, David Duke’s sense-making of race is just as problematic as Cornel West’s, each taking a different bite of the fruit from the same rotten tree. But just as Althusser warns against reducing philosophy to the status of mere ideological illusion, so we can say that race cannot be reduced to mere chimerical status devoid of material underpinnings. For example, as a racial state apparatus (RSA), school is a material institution where race takes place, where racial identity is bureaucratized/modernized, where people are hailed as racialized subjects of the state. In schools, teachers take roll as they hail students in homeroom as much as teachers hail them to answer when their race is called. Schools usually never fail to receive an answer for either one. It is one important place where race takes on an empirical form: from tracking practices, to resource disparities, to different rates of achievement. Therefore, race has material underpinnings and cannot be reduced only to ideological status (in the classical sense), or relegated to the realm of pure ideality.

Be that as it may, race-conscious work engages the ideological dimensions of race and links them to the material world and its racial organization. It is not based on skin color *simpliciter* but more accurately on the racialized imagination, of how *skin groups* exist and are reinvented over and over again. For example, through miscegenation and race mixing some African Americans are lighter skinned than South or South East Asians, but the American ideology of race neither constructs South and South East Asians as black nor do darker skinned Indians, for example, consider themselves black for that matter. The racial imagination, or the ideological process, is largely responsible for these group assignments. Even Bonilla-Silva (2001), whose structural model arguably approaches most closely the Althusserian paradigm of race studies, did not avoid the ideological dimension when he reports white workers’ racial attitudes towards blacks, an ideology that serves practical functions. Bonilla-Silva (2001) favors a materialist examination of race relations and:

reserve[s] the term *racial ideology* for the segment of the ideological structure of a social system that crystallizes racial notions and stereotypes. Racial ideology provides the rationalization for social, political, and economic interactions among the races (p. 43; italics in original).

Consequently, material institutions and their resources are modes of existence of an ideological process that requires a deep racial sensibility if undoing them remains a possibility.

Althusser’s multi-pronged analysis of ideology is perhaps his greatest contribution to Marxist studies of society. Although not without its problems in the form of structural overdetermination and some theoretical excess, Althusser forged a discourse on ideology unmatched in recent debates. His thoughts represent a watershed in the debate between the real and ideological, representing genuine insights on their syncretical and recursive relationship with each other. Although a materialist in the last instance, Althusser always considered the ideologico-political battle as important theoretical and practical nodes in the warfare against bourgeois philosophy and capitalism. I have attempted to import his general findings for a study of race and ethnicity in order to illuminate the ideological contours of our current racial and cultural formation. I found that the third moment of Althusser’s theory of ideology—a deployment of Lacan’s theory of the imaginary and the unconscious—most directly intersects the racial problematic. It projects a clear picture of how racial ideology actually functions or works on a daily basis. Although we must mitigate the thesis that racial ideology is *completely* unconscious, to use Althusser’s language, *racial ideology is unconscious in the last instance*. The three other moments in Althusser’s theory provide supporting discourses to the third moment, lending the theory a sense of cohesion rather than unity. As the land of racial understanding becomes more solid, the sea of racial mystifications spreads. This is not meant to be a pessimistic statement about the future status of race and its hirsute companion, racism. On the contrary, it projects the importance of critical reflection over race and the strength of the ideological effort that such a process requires.