Ethnocentrism and Racism

Week 01
Ethnocentrism and Racism

The learning objectives for week 01 are:

– to understand the origins and meaning of the terms Western and Nonwestern

– to understand the nature of racism and ethnocentrism and the reasons why anthropologists reject both of these beliefs
Ethnocentrism and Racism

Terms you should know for week 01 are:

– Indo-European language family
– Thermopylae
– Judeo-Christian-European cultural tradition
– ethnocentrism
– racism
– barbarian
Ethnocentrism and Racism

Sources:

1. West and NonWest


Ethnocentrism and Racism

Sources:

3. Racism—the Genetic Version of Ethnocentrism and Why Anthropologists Reject It


Ethnocentrism

1. The belief that one's own culture is good, beautiful, or important and that

— to the extent they are different —
2. Other cultures are inhuman, disgusting, irrational, ugly, savage...
Ethnocentrism

...can be present in any culture, but it is probably most important to identify and question it in one's own –
What's Wrong With Ethnocentrism?

1. It ignores enculturation: the teaching of a culture by one generation to the next. In other words, if the person pronouncing another culture's practices as inhuman, etc., had grown up in that culture, he/she would think them beautiful, well-founded, etc....

2. Ethnocentrism interferes with scientific understanding. If we make judgments about something before we investigate it, we are more likely to misunderstand it.

3. By contrast, recognizing the fallacy of ethnocentrism leads to tolerance for and curiosity towards cultural differences.
4. Ethnocentrism has led to several errors of interpretation and to much bad advice — for example:

- 4.1. Western scientists ignored the cumulative wisdom of traditional farmers, and completely misunderstood the energy dynamics of cattle in India.
- 4.2. Western-designed high-tech hospitals cost more and deliver less of the medical care needed by many poor country populations.
4.3. The American notion that milk is “the perfect food” has led to the delivery of tons of surplus milk, bringing much grief and suffering among the 80% of the world's people who are lactose intolerant.

[Lactose intolerant ≠ digestive system cannot absorb the main sugar — lactose — in cow's milk.]

European Ethnocentrism: 1400 AD

By AD 1400 the European upper classes had developed a complex and sophisticated system of ethnocentrism – including the categories of

- 1. Barbarians: (Greek: “strangers”)
  Treacherous, cruel, illiterate, uncultured foreigners with different languages and customs.

European Ethnocentrism: 1400 AD

2. Pagans (Latin: “civilian”)
   - Rural people who remained non Christian even after Christianity had been adopted in the major cities

3. Heathens (Anglo-Saxon from “heath,” a wasteland)
   - Polytheists: not Christian, Muslim, or Jew.
European Ethnocentrism: 1400 AD

4. Infidels (Latin: “unfaithful”)
   - People following religions thought to be opposed to Christianity; usually a reference to Muslims

...and...
European Ethnocentrism: 1400 AD

5. Savages (also called “wild men”) (Latin: “silva,” forest)
   - Wild, fierce, cruel, ungovernable, people without good behavior, hairy, lacking the ability to speak and lacking the ability to conceive of a God
   - Savages were thought to have fallen from an original human status to live in the wilderness like other animals and to survive only by strength and aggressiveness
Ethnocentrism

We can see ethnocentrism in the recent history of European and North American maps...
The Mercator Projection
Geradus Mercator invented his famous projection in 1569 as an aid to navigators. On his map, lines of latitude and longitude intersect at right angles and thus the direction of travel - the rhumb line - is consistent. The distortion of the Mercator Map increases as you move north and south from the equator. On Mercator's map Antarctica appears to be a huge continent that wraps around the earth and Greenland appears to be just as large as South America although Greenland is merely one-eighth the size of South America. Mercator never intended his map to be used for purposes other than navigation although it became one of the most popular world map projections.
During the 20th century, the National Geographic Society, various atlases, and classroom wall cartographers switched to the rounded Robinson Projection. The Robinson Projection is a projection that purposely makes various aspects of the map slightly distorted to produce an attractive world map. Indeed, in 1989, seven North American professional geographic organizations (including the American Cartographic Association, National Council for Geographic Education, Association of American Geographers, and the National Geographic Society) adopted a resolution that called for a ban on all rectangular coordinate maps due to their distortion of the planet.
The Robinson Projection: Less Distortion
Many 20th Century US maps put the US in the middle

Africa is shown as much smaller than it really is relative to North America, for example
The Peters Equal Area Projection

- Distorts the shapes somewhat
- But gives the correct relative sizes of the continents and other land masses...
The Peters Projection Map of the World

...is the logo for this course.

Can you see why?
Racism

...is the biological version of ethnocentrism. In place of cultures, physical types are used...
Racism is...

1. A set of practices
2. An element of institutions in society
3. A set of beliefs
Dr. Richard W. Franke
Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Montclair State University
Resident and Board Member Ecovillage at Ithaca

Racism Is...

1. A set of practices, such as
   - Housing segregation
   - Separate and unequal schools
   - Laws limiting the behavior of people according to a racial classification
   - Laws against “intermarriage” among races
   - Genocide: attempts to completely destroy entire peoples
Racism Is...

2. An aspect of the institutions of society (institutional racism) such as

- Patterns of income and employment (not necessarily resulting from specific laws)
- Patterns of health and disease
- Patterns of education and achievement
- Patterns of incarceration, of political representation

...resulting from the daily workings of society, and not necessarily desired by or caused by particular individuals
These patterns are often referred to as “institutional racism.”
Institutional racism is the most difficult to identify and understand and is the source of a great amount of confusion and misunderstanding in today’s USA.
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Affirmative action programs were designed to try to overcome some elements of institutional racism but have become among the most controversial outcomes of the civil rights movement because of the lack of adequate public understanding of institutional racism.
Racism Is...

3. A set of beliefs

In the remainder of this presentation, we shall consider racism as a belief only.
Racism As a Set of Beliefs

Main psychological component is:

stereotyping
In 1954 Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport wrote the classic work on prejudice. He defined a stereotype as...
“...an exaggerated belief associated with a category [of people].”

Stereotypes are usually the basis of “prejudice,” which Allport defined (p.8) as:

“An avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group”
Stereotypes and prejudice can occur in many ways and among any groups but in the history of the United States probably the strongest prejudices have been based on racial stereotypes.
We can say that racism is a stereotype about a race of people, usually held by some other race of people.
To fully understand racism and what is wrong with it we can make it into a set of beliefs based on certain ideas that might or might not be true.
Then we can decide if racism has any basis in fact or reality.
Racism: A Three-Part Belief System

1. The belief that physical differences among races represent real genetic, biological barriers,

...and...
Racism: A Three-Part Belief System

...and...

2. That therefore, at least some races are biologically “pure,”

...and therefore...
Racism: A Three-Part Belief System

3. That some races are superior to others that are inferior.
What's Wrong With Racism?

1. There are no definitive biological boundaries between the races:
   - races have interbred and thus exchanged genetic material for at least the last 100,000 years of human evolution.
What’s Wrong With Racism?

2. There are no consistent correlations among racial traits: skin color does not predict nose shape, etc.
What’s Wrong With Racism?

We can see this scientifically by looking at some geographic distribution maps:
What's Wrong With Racism?

- The traditional four races
- Stature
- Skin color
- Hemoglobin S (sickle cell)
What’s Wrong With Racism?

The following maps filter out known migrations and thus approximate the home base of the various races.
What's Wrong With Racism?

First, let's look at each characteristic separately...
The Four “Traditional” Races
Skin color
Hemoglobin S — sickle cell
What’s Wrong With Racism?

Now let’s see if there is any correlation between the four traditional races and any of the supposed racial characteristics...
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Anth 140: Non Western Contributions to the Western World
Dr. Richard W. Franke

Race

Skin Color
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Race

Sickle Cell
What’s Wrong With Racism?

What do you see?
What’s Wrong With Racism?

What about genetics and race?
What’s Wrong With Racism?

3. Recent genetic evidence strongly suggests that all humans evolved from an ancient African population: we all have Black ancestors.
What's Wrong With Racism?

4. Race is more of a social classification system than a biologically sound means of distinguishing individuals or groups from one another.

For details, go to any of the source readings listed on the beginning slides of this lecture.
What's Wrong With Racism?

5. Racism has led to degrading and insulting stereotypes of individuals and groups that bear no relation to reality.
What’s Wrong With Racism?

6. Beliefs about racial inferiority or superiority have helped justify oppression, exploitation, slavery, discrimination and genocide; wherever it still exists, racism continues to interfere with efforts to build a just and peaceful world.
Racism: Some Historical Views

“Do not obtain your slaves from Britain because they are so stupid and so utterly incapable of being taught that they are not fit to form a part of the household of Athens.”

Cicero to Atticus, 1st Century BC

Racism: Some Historical Views

“The White [here meaning “Nordic”] race originally possessed the monopoly of beauty, intelligence and strength. By its union with other varieties [here referring to Alpines or Mediterraneans], hybrids were created, which were beautiful without strength, strong without intelligence, or if intelligent, both weak and ugly.”

Racism: Some Historical Views

“Judgment, truthfulness and energy always distinguish the Nordic man. He feels a strong urge toward truth and justice....Passion in the usual meaning of the rousing of the senses or the heightening of the sexual life has little meaning for him....He is never without a certain knightliness.”

Racism: Some Historical Views

The Negroes Character

Cowardly and cruel are those Blacks Innate,
Prone to Revenge, Imp of inveterate hate.
He that exasperates them, soon espies
Mischief and Murder in their very eyes.
Libidinous, Deceitful, False and Rude,
The Spume Issue of Ingratitude

John Saffin. 1701. A Brief and Candid Answer to a Late Printed Sheet, Entitled The Selling of Joseph [the first New England antislavery pamphlet].
Racism: Some Historical Views

“Comparing them [blacks] by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous.”

Thomas Jefferson. 1787. *Notes on the State of Virginia*.
Racism: Some Historical Views

“The innate love to act as body servant or lacquey is too strongly developed in the negro race to be concealed...the primordial cell germ of the Nigritians has no more potency than what is sufficient to form a being with physical power...with the mental organization too imperfect to enable him to extricate himself from barbarism.”


Racism: Identifying an “Enemy”

“There is no difference between Jew and Jew. Every Jew is a sworn enemy of the German people. If he fails to display his hostility against us, it is merely out of cowardice and slyness but not because his heart is free of it.”

Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Propaganda Minister, 1941

Racism: Identifying an “Enemy”

“The Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second-and third generation Japanese, born on United States soil, possessed of United States citizenship have become “Americanized,” the racial strains are undiluted.... It, therefore, follows, that along the vital Pacific Coast over 112,000 potential enemies, of Japanese extraction, are at large today.”

Lieutenant-General John L. DeWitt, Commanding General, Western Defense Command, February, 1942

Racism: Identifying an “Enemy”

“I suppose I should be ashamed to say that I take the Western view of the Indian. I don’t go so far as to think that the only good Indians are the dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn’t inquire too closely into the case of the tenth. The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian.”


Racism and/or Ethnocentrism: Identifying an “Enemy”

“Ellison’s [...] taking the oath on a Koran] will embolden Islamic extremists and make new ones, as Islamists, rightly or wrongly, see the first sign of the realization of their greatest goal – the Islamicization of America.”

Dennis Prager, conservative radio host
December 2006
Racism: Some Historical Views

“If you’re incapable of taking the oath on [the Bible], don’t serve in Congress.”

Dennis Prager, conservative radio host, after the first Muslim was elected to the US Congress, Keith Ellison of Minnesota
Racism: Some Historical Views

“Keith Ellison...does not have to answer to you, to me or anyone else in regards to questions about his faith.”

Bill Pascrell, Democratic representative from the 8th District in New Jersey that includes MSU’s campus.
Racism: Identifying an “Enemy”

In a private ceremony (after being sworn in publicly without any religious paraphernalia) as an elected member of the US House of Representatives in Jan 2007, Keith Ellison of Minnesota used Thomas Jefferson’s Koran...
End of Week 01
Lecture 02
Ethnocentrism and Racism