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# Why is There Still Racism if There is No Such Thing as "Race"?

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## Why is There Still Racism if There is No Such Thing as "Race"?

### **Abstract**

This presidential address is keyed to the exhibition "All of Us Are Related, Each of Us Is Unique." It reveals that there are no biological barriers between the 5.7 billion human beings that today inhabit the earth. We all have the same ancestors and the genetic diversity of contemporary human populations reflects the paths followed by our ancestors in the course of human migrations over the past 100,000 years. I assert that there is simply no such thing as "white people", "black people", "yellow people", or the like, except as social constructs. In a world in which intergroup hostility has long been based on erroneous beliefs in biologically determined characteristics of so-called "races", our habitual way of thinking about how we relate to each other needs seriously to be re-examined.

## Introduction

I acknowledge gratefully the honor you have granted me, allowing me to serve for the past two years as your President. This office carries the privilege of addressing you this evening, on the opening day of the Silver Jubilee Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology. I do not take this privilege lightly; I accept it enthusiastically.

This week the Association honors its past while looking to its future. Since I can look back over forty years as a cross-cultural psychologist, my comments this evening constitute a valedictory. In that spirit, I will look back briefly to a feature of the field that was salient when I first became involved with cross-cultural psychology. I will continue by discussing my current professional concerns, and I'll conclude with a look to the future, which includes a research project on which I will invite your cooperation and participation.

The concept of "race" will be the substantive theme of everything I have to say tonight. To clarify how cross-cultural psychologists in particular, social scientists more generally, and, indeed, all thinking people should treat the concept of "race", will be the goal of my argument.

I begin, as promised, with a glance at the 1950s, when my career began. Many issues and arguments characterized psychology and anthropology in those days. Some of them are now of historical interest only ... literally gone from the textbooks and the university curricula. But one that stood out during my years as a student and then a young faculty member persists. It is the question of what determines "racial" differences in behavior, including various indices of competence.

From early on, my teachers and early colleagues, who included the anthropologist Melville Herskovits and the psychologists Donald Campbell and Otto Klineberg, had no trouble convincing me that the conventional answer to that question was patently wrong. There were so many reasons to assert that racial differences in intelligence and in various forms of behavior were *neither* biologically rooted *nor* genetically transmitted. At least, we understood all the reasons why the biology/genetics argument was so weak, including its failure to recognize *interactions* between nature and nurture, the biases in the instruments that yielded performance differences between groups, the many social and economic variables *confounded* with "race", and so on. And all of those reasons continue still serve well to counter the continual resurrections of the old biology and genetics arguments from the Jensens, Eysencks, Rushtons and others who, refuse to give up their dogged commitment to biological determinism.

The arguments concerning inadequacies of measuring instruments administered to groups on whom its validity was never established, or the confounds with social and economic variables are fine arguments, as far as they go. But they do not go far enough.

What I wish to underscore this evening is that the question of *what causes "racial" differences* in *anything* we might measure is a meaningless question, because *there simply are no "races" in the human species*. If this is so, and I will try to convince you that it is indeed so, then there are no racial differences to explain. If we continue to explain differences between any human groups while speaking of those groups as "races", then we are pushed into a frame of mind that anticipates a significant role for biological forces

to play. This is a mind frame that does not anticipate much in the way of individual differences within the groups being compared, and tends to think of whatever differences emerge as pretty stable over time, if not fixed. All of these expectations, reinforced in my view by the very use of the word "race", contribute not only to serious scientific error but to profoundly dangerous ethnocentric politics both within multi-cultural nations and across ethno-religious groups prone to engage in inter-national conflicts as well. At the very least, when inter-communal conflicts over resources are wrapped in ideas of the primordial, racially distinct, nature of the communities involved, the conflicts are exacerbated and more intractable. Any basis for Us/Them thinking is dangerous; when the concept of "race" is part of it, it is hardened as if set in stone.

I turn now to a quick look at some conventional wisdom about "race" and then, in more detail, the findings from contemporary research in population genetics and paleontology that challenge that conventional wisdom.

### **The Concept "Race" As Bequeathed to Us**

In the second half of the 19th century, through most of the 20th, physical anthropologists (and nearly everybody else) categorized human groups in terms of "race" on the basis of visible physical characteristics, such as skin color, height, hair and facial features. Their taxonomies usually included categories such as, e.g., "Negroid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid", and "black, brown, yellow, red and white". At first glance, classifications like "white, black, brown, red, yellow", seem to reflect a natural phenomenon, linked to geography. None of us today would have any difficulty in distinguishing a native of Senegal from a native of the Netherlands. Nor would we have difficulty distinguishing a Chinese person from an Inuit person, nor guessing where they are from. Since some physical characteristics are correlated, we can usually guess successfully where people (or their ancestors) came from.

However, these visible traits are not highly correlated with each other. The spatial distribution of skin color differs from the spatial distribution of hair form, which in turn is different from facial shapes, or any other visual characteristic.

During colonial times value judgments of superiority and inferiority were attached to these physical characteristics, allowing colonialists and slave owners to justify oppression and exploitation. Despite the end of slavery and colonialism, the concept of "races" is still popular. In many countries in the world, there are even laws couched in terms of "race". While some time ago, South Africa abolished its "apartheid" system, which was, of course, based on "race", in the United States, as we speak, many states still prohibit adoption of children of one so-called "race" by parents of another one! Even the White House "Town Meetings" on "race" relations in the United States fail to include in this all important discourse the fact that there are no "races".

Through history in the West, at least, we have endured "scientific racism." Famous early "scientific racists" were non-anthropologists, like Huston Stewart Chamberlain ("Foundations of the Nineteenth Century"), le Comte A. de Gobineau ("Essay on the inequality of human "races", 1884), and Hans Gunther ("The Racial Elements of European

History") in which he said, a "race" is "marked off from every other human group through its own proper combination of bodily and mental characteristics."

Gobineau's essay included such gems as "for a very considerable number of human beings it has been impossible and will be forever to make even the first step toward civilization." and it is impossible "to overcome the natural repugnance which man, like animals, harbors for miscegenation."

Then, with the specter of Nazi racist ideology fouling Europe, the ugliness was expressed so many times, in so many horrible ways, that it is impossible to evoke it in mere words, but the following is quintessentially representative of the rhetoric of the time: e.g. Herman Gauch 1933: "non-Nordics are more closely allied to monkeys and apes than to Nordics.... Non-Nordic man occupies a midway position between Nordic men and animals, next to the apes. ... he is not a man at all...., but only a transition."

Earlier, during the 1920s, some commentators understood that "race" was a construction that served a social and political purpose. Simar, in 1922, said, that the doctrine of "race" "...was originally a doctrine of classes". The doctrine of "race" was used to explain existing class differences. For example, according to Hertz (1925), Count de Boulainvilliers asserted that French people were composed of two "races", with the nobility descended from Germanic conquerors, the rest from conquered Celts and Romans.

Of course, when various European nations colonized Africa and established slavery in the Americas, the two "races", white and black, took on a profound significance. In the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition that prevailed in Europe then as now, colonialism and racism might not have been possible without the underpinnings of a great divide theory of two races, one of masters, the other of slaves.

### **Contemporary Definitions of "Race"**

But all that is history. Or is it? Let's now ask, How is "race" defined today? This month, from Britannica on-line, I learned that a "race" is "a division of mankind possessing traits that are transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize it as a distinct human type; also .. a family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock" ...(Britannica Dictionary). Does that strike you as clear, unambiguous, and scientific? Of course not! Cannot individuals from any human group, mating with individuals from any other human group, or from their own, transmit traits that lead some people, somewhere to designate those traits as defining a "distinct" human group...whatever distinct means?

We turn now to "the illusion of "race" and "race" as it is popularly misconceived. We will see that journalists, politicians, and even social scientists, in some countries at least, seem spellbound by the notion of "race". In the United States of America, it is common practice today to perceive and describe people as Black, White or some other "racial "type.

Examples:

- "Whatever happened to the white athlete" (cover story with this title in *Sports Illustrated*);
- Any day in the *NY Times*;

- In academic publications such as the *APA Monitor* which in its January 1998 issue (p. 8) speaks of "white babies" and "black newborns", "and describes a psychologist who, forty years ago ... "was one of nine black students who integrated" a high school.
- The noted African-American scholar, Bruce Hare, tells a story of his two sons, who, years ago, as children, inquired nervously, but with a giggle, why it was that "They call brown people black and pink people white?" This rhetorical question from these child prodigies reminds us that *nobody's* skin color is black or white. So when we say black or white to refer to people, we're obviously not talking about color in the sense of hue, but something else, something metaphorical perhaps. And we must not fail to note that the words *white* and *black* are opposites of each other. The semantic implication of black/white terminology is that the so-called black and white "races" are, at least unconsciously, implied to be in opposition to each other. How more separated and different can any two categories be if they are opposites of each other? And this piece of word magic is apart from the various connotations of these words, black and white, like day and night, visible and invisible, good and evil.

### **How Many "Races" Do People Think There Are?**

Of course, many who believe in the existence of races have in mind more than black and white. We turn now to what various people respond when asked, "How many "races" are there and what are they called?" In the Swiss television film, *Six Billion Races*, passersby near the Musee de l'Homme in Paris were asked, *Combien de "races"?* The prototypical response was "Quatre, comme nous etions enseigne a l'ecole; blanc, noir, jaune, et rouge. " (English translation: "Four, as we have been taught in school; white, black, yellow, and red." Incidentally, until recently, the Hall of Man in a museum in New York contained at its entrance four statues designating the black, white, yellow and red "races". A 9-minute film showing interviews videotaped in the student center of Syracuse University in past January, 1998 (shown as part of this address) reveals a shared awareness of human diversity accompanied by profound confusion on the part of American university students as to the basis of that diversity.

### **Scientific Understanding of Human Diversity**

What is the contemporary status of scientific understanding of human diversity? Physical anthropologists have long known and taught the difficulties with the concept of "race", but many social scientists, including many psychologists, don't seem to know about it. Let's review quickly what we know. What does contemporary biology have to say about "race"?

There are no biological barriers between 5.8 billion human beings alive today. External physical features previously used to distinguish "racial groups" are not reliable genetic markers because they represent relatively recent (over the past 20,000 years) adaptations. Skin color and height, for example, are subject to rapid change (in genetic terms) in response to environmental conditions. Skin color is a useful adaptation to the exposure to the sun.

The crucial point about these variations is that they are not categorical but constitute a continuous dimension. They are, to use a technical term to which we will return in a few moments, clinal variations. Variations along the skin color dimension, for example, are due to different, continuous, concentrations of a single pigment called melanin in the skin.

So, is it impossible to classify people by skin color? Of course not; we may classify people however we want... by color of eyes, by height, by income, by religion, by political party affiliation, etc. So, it is also possible to classify human groups according to their average concentration of melanin. But, I ask you to reflect, why would we want to?

Geneticists can now examine many more gene categories than the ones that determine external physical features; the best known of those that determine internal features are blood groups and the Human Leucocyte Antigen (HLA) system. These two also have important implications for our understanding of the diversity of human populations. Consider the following.

While there are only four blood groups in the whole human species, there are many billion possible combinations of genes in the HLA system. If human groupings based on these "hidden" genetic markers were treated as "races", the number of "races" would exceed the number of presently living humans! Genetically, humans are all different (with the exception of identical twins). And, as we are about to see, we are also all related.

Humans everywhere share a lot genetically. There is no gene that is specific to one particular human population, and totally absent in any other. The genetic similarity between populations varies basically with geographic proximity, and reflects the history of population movements in the distant past. While scientists still disagree on the exact way in which this happened, the overwhelming evidence argues for a common origin of all humans. In other words, we are all one single species, called *Homo sapiens sapiens*, capable of interbreeding, and descendants, over approximately 5000 generations, of the same ancestors.

The gradual variation of a human physical trait across geographical space is a *cline*. Skin color is clinal, not categorical. For example, the skin color of "Native Americans" or Amerindians is lighter nearer the poles and darker closer to the equator. In Europe, from Scandinavia down through southern Europe and on to North and Central Africa, skin color gets darker gradually, with no sharp breaks.

All genetically determined characteristics, including such visible ones as height, and skin color, are clinal, and, they interact with environmental influences. Invisible ones, like blood types, and HLA, the former with few variations, the latter with many thousands, are also clinal. Moreover, clines do not co-vary. They are not highly correlated with each other. Thus, spatial distribution of hair form differs from that of skin color, both differ from that of blood groups, etc. Because the physical diversity of human populations today is continuous, whatever boundaries have been placed within this continuous diversity are arbitrary. No one knows where one "race" stops and another begins!

Thus, the recent scientific evidence is that "race" is not a useful biological concept at the human level. It is now clear from many recent publications that human genetic diversity defies any simple classification. This is the central point of the exhibition entitled "All of Us are Related, Each of Us is Unique" which I hope you will see in the library sometime this

week. The exhibition is available by rental or purchase from Syracuse University. For ordering details, e-mail [mhsegall@maxwell.syr.edu](mailto:mhsegall@maxwell.syr.edu).

One of the panels deals with the origins of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, pointing out that 100,000 years ago, our first forebears appeared on earth, most likely in East Africa. Since then, we have fanned out over the inhabitable parts of the Earth.

Present paleontological evidence situates these common ancestors to have lived in the Middle East and Africa between 700,000 and 100,000 years ago. Recent DNA research has shown Neanderthal DNA to be different from Human DNA; it appears that the Neanderthals and we descended from a common ancestor. Moreover, probably all human beings alive today have an African origin. As an article recently in the New York Times had it, "Though modern humans may not look exactly alike, we are indeed all Africans under the skin".

Another panel in the exhibition concerns migration effects on our visible (and invisible) characteristics, making it clear that our contemporary genetic diversity is a product of the migration patterns followed by our ancestors over the past 100,000 years.

Another shows how you are related to everyone in this room, in this city, on this continent, and, indeed, anywhere in the world. We all have the same ancestors (many times over). Consider the following:

Through  $N$  generations back, we each have had 2 to the  $n$ th ancestors; e.g. back to approx. 1800 AD (about 7 generations) we each have had 2 to the 7th, or 128 ancestors. Let's go back further, to the year we will cite as we ethnocentrically celebrate a so-called millennial change ....the year Christians call year 1 *anno domini*. That's 2,000 years ago. If each of the 5.8 billion of us alive today had *unique* ancestors, since 1 AD that would have been 10 to the 24th power for all of us, requiring 1 million billion billion people. But, there were only 300 million people on Earth in 1 AD; we didn't reach a mere 1 billion until 1800 AD. Therefore, it is a mathematical necessity that we all share, over and over again, the same ancestors. Whoever is seated next to you, from whatever country he or she may have come, is your cousin.

Thus, biologically speaking, "race" is an illusion. Boundaries placed on any dimension of human variation, including "color" are arbitrary; so there really is no such thing as a group of "white people", "black people", "yellow people" or the like, except as social or cultural constructs.

### **"Race" as a Social Construct**

The categories in everyday use have been reified and have potent political and economic force. These categories are cultural constructs, varying over time and space.

Consider how we perceive our fellow human beings and how we relate to each other. Do we, most of the time, relate strictly on a person-to-person basis? Do we see everyone we encounter, especially when away from home, strictly as individuals? Or do we view persons as members of groups? When, for whatever reason we perceive "us" (ourselves) as co-members of a group, we see "them" as members of some other groups.



Frequently (nearly always?) we see persons as partly (largely?) defined by group membership (e.g., "blacks", "Asians", "Jews"). This evokes stereotypical characteristics and if a person doesn't fit the stereotype s/he is an exception. "I don't see you as a black person," That's shorthand for "You're not like all those other folks that I see so very negatively." When I was young, I remember being told that I was a "good Jew". I gratefully admit that no one has called me that, to my face, in years. However, would it be paranoid of me to suspect that the thought may have occurred to one colleague or another? My friends who identify themselves, or are identified by others, as African-American invariably tell me that they know that when viewed by others, that their African-American-ness is their most salient characteristic.

A frustrating search for appropriate group labels has gone on for years in my own country. U.S. census categories get changed with every successive census. What will they be this time around? There has been talk that the category "Other" will be dropped, but that people will be instructed that they can, if they wish, claim to belong to more than one "race". Will the categories include Hispanic? Who are Hispanics? Is a recent immigrant to the United States from Spain a Hispanic? In the USA, are Hispanics a "race"? Or do Hispanics cut across "races"? One reads regularly about non-Black Hispanics. And I won't even delve into the morass surrounding the popular term Latino, which one regularly hears in the United States. Wherever Jews live, are they better described as an ethnic group rather than as a "race"? Or as neither? In Australia, who are the Black people one hears about? Are they, like so-called Blacks in the USA recent African migrants? I don't think so.

So, it should be obvious that we live with a surfeit of classification labels, a maze of overlapping category systems that include tribes, nationalities, religions, and what have you. What kinds of groups, for example, are the Macedonians in Greece and those in Macedonia?

What does one make of groups defined by the language they speak? Are the Quebecois in Canada a "race"? Or the Basques in France or in Spain? What do we make of the groups defined by religion, or ethnicity, like Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Arabs and Jews in Israel/Palestine? Or Croats, Serbs, and Moslems in ex-Yugoslavia. Are these primordial groups? Many groups have origin myths, which assert their primordial status, one that often is linked to a claim for a given piece of real estate.

Whatever these various kinds of groups are, every one of them are often referred to as "races". And everyone of these kinds of groups do in fact satisfy many of the definitions of "race" that one finds in dictionaries and even in some biology textbooks. And, it must be noted, sometimes even in psychology journals, groups categorized by skin color are also referred to as "races", although members of this association are probably less often guilty of this practice than some of our colleagues in other parts of the discipline.

### **Psychology and "Race"**

Although many psychologists continue to treat "race" as a biological fact and continue to debate the nature of racial differences in behavior, a few voices can be heard decrying this repeated airing of what is essentially a meaningless question. I recommend to all of you

Jefferson Fish's dramatic challenge to this continuing error in the magazine, *Psychology Today*, in 1995. (This is recounted in detail in the forthcoming 2nd edition of "Human Behavior in Global Perspective" by Segall, Dasen, Berry, and Poortinga.) It features a striking difference across the United States and Brazil in the way terms like Black and White are understood.

In an article in the *American Psychologist* in July 1998, Comas-Diaz, Lykes, and Alarcon dealt with *racismo*, or Puerto Rican style racism. They say that it "operates differently from its North American cousin in that it is covert, contextual, and subjective. Racial perception is related to individuals' racial self-identification. For instance, a dark-skinned Puerto Rican's race may be perceived differently by two persons according to their racial self-identification. ... the same person's race can be perceived differently according to the race of the observer. ... Regardless of color, the higher the person's social class, the whiter the person is perceived to be, and thus, the less the person is subjected to *racismo*. ... many Puerto Ricans describe themselves as rainbow people ... contrary to the North American dictum that one drop of African blood makes a person Black, one drop of White blood makes a person at least not Black in Puerto Rico."

If "race" does not exist as a biological fact, it is, as we have now seen, a compelling social construct. Since the illusion of "race" is so compelling and so widely held, we have to deal with the fact that many people think it is real and view the world as if it contained "races". When one adds to the belief in "race" the two further ideas that "races" are qualitatively different in terms of talent and capacity and that they should be treated differently, then we have the all-too-familiar form of "racism". Belief in the existence of "race", coupled with widely held beliefs in behavioral differences, is a powerful sociological phenomenon that impacts on intergroup relations. Here I am arguing that merely treating the social construct of "race" *as if it were* a biological reality is itself "racist" and should be resisted as vigorously as one resists "racial discrimination".

The American Anthropology Association has gone as far as record as advocating the elimination of "racial" categories from official forms in the USA. Perhaps this association - the IACCP - will someday find it useful to consider a formal recommendation that the discipline of psychology do the same.

On one of the panels of the exhibition, we see twelve young men, their faces arrayed in a (rough) circle. The differences between any two adjacent faces are scarcely perceptible. Yet, one can probably locate on the circle what appear to be quintessential examples of "black", "white" and other "races". But, note that each face flows, continuously, out of the others; so what appear to be "prototypes" are nothing more than variations along a continuum, one without any end points!

These faces take us to my plan for some future endeavors.

### **A Collaborative Research Project**

I want to conduct identical data collection efforts in many different places around the world in order to test the notion that racial categories possess a high degree of consensual

"reality" within societies but vary across societies. The research design employs a standard stimulus set and a standard procedure for collecting responses.

The stimuli comprise 13 black and white photographs of young men, derived from a set of morphed photos. (I can provide researcher with a set of photos on firm paper, of appropriate size, so they can be shuffled and presented as if they were a deck of cards.)

One says to the respondent, "You are about to see 13 photographs of some young men. The photographs have been shuffled, so they will be shown to you in no particular order. Each of these persons is unique, but there are relationships of one kind or another among them. I would like you to look through all of these pictures and then sort them into groups, in any way that seems appropriate to you. Do this on the basis of any aspect of these people that seems meaningful to you "

"Very good! You have sorted these people into x groups. Next, can you name each of the groups? How would you label each group? "*(Respondent states names; collector records them.)*

"Thank you for naming each group. Now, for each group, please choose the one best example of members of that group? Which one is the most typical group member?" *(Respondent designates choice; collector records ID number of best exemplar.)* "Do you personally belong to any of these groups? Which one(s)?"

*(If respondent chooses more than one, ask):* "If you had to choose one group, which one would it be?" *(Record group, and its name, to which respondent claims belonging.)* "If you were filling out a form that required you to designate your "race" or ethnicity, what group name would you use?"

"Now we have finished. Thank you very much for participating in this exercise. Your way of sorting these photos was very good, but, as you probably have surmised, there is no necessarily right way to sort them. In this study, we are interested in various ways people categorize individuals, and how much agreement there is among people who do the categorizing. Thank you again for your cooperation."

Time does not permit a presentation of findings already available but let me assure you that they show a dramatic within-group consensus. Seventy-nine of 80 participants sorted the 13 photos into groups. Nearly all of these created 3, 4, or 5 groups. Nearly half constructed three groups, clustered about photos they most often labeled as "Caucasian", "African-American", and "Asian". These emerge as the races students at one university in the USA perceive as a phenomenon of nature. It remains to be seen how other groups of respondents will sort these pictures.

## Conclusion

To approach a conclusion, let me remind you of the question we began with in the title. Why do we still have racism if there is no such thing as "race"? In other words, why are intergroup relations so often negative, particularly when they are treated as inter-racial? Ethnocentrism theory provides one answer.

Ethnocentrism as discussed by Sumner in 1906 was presented as a universal syndrome of behavior in which positive links with the in-group negative attitudes and

behaviors toward out-groups are mutually reinforced. But, as many of us have argued at length elsewhere, however universal it may be, ethnocentrism can vary in kind and degree and is subject to influence from various social policies and political stances. So, there is reason for social scientists to be engaged in efforts to improve intergroup relations. Perhaps one such effort entails challenging the continued unthinking use of the word "race."

Let me try now to conclude by reiterating what we know about the role of the concept of "race" in the story of intergroup relations. Human groups surely exist as more-or-less distinct entities. Some of them even have legal status. For example, insofar as there is such a thing as international laws, most members of the United Nations enjoy the legal status of nation. Some groups, on the other hand, exist, sometimes for short periods, sometimes for centuries, on the basis of their own members' conviction that the group is a meaningful social entity. We have seen that groups may be designated on the basis of the language their members speak, the religion with which their members affiliate, and numerous other bases. Some of these groupings cross national boundaries; some of them also exist as sub-groups within nations. Where does "race" fit into this multivariate matrix of human groupings?

It seems highly likely that the prevailing understanding of "races" around the world is that they are relatively few in number and most often subsume and cross-cut other groupings. Thus, once again using my own nation, the USA, as an example, the "race" called white (or, as many seem to believe is a more polite term, "Caucasian") consists of persons whose recent ancestors migrated from all the different countries of Europe, speaking any of the languages spoken there. A noted African-American scholar once noted how remarkable it was that the English, French, Germans, Turks, Spaniards, Italians et al., once they crossed the Atlantic all became white folks.

Of course, it was also the case that people brought to the United States from Africa were all designated black. Later, as whites and blacks mated with each other, the resultant offspring were all still designated as black, with the various degrees of blackness, such as quadroon and octoroon actually legal categories for many decades in at least some sections of the United States.

This example underscores a second point about "race" and that is that the guidelines for designating groups as "racial" categories can vary markedly from place to place. Thus, as we were reminded, in Brazil and Puerto Rico, as well as in many other places, mating between Europeans and Africans yielded offspring whose racial designations were governed by very different rules.

Another point not to lose sight of is that the racial designation terminology has continually to be readjusted, as various political and economic changes occur. With the white-black categories so salient in the United States, as well as in some other parts of the world, there can emerge such quasi-racial labels as Hispanic or Latino, with attendant ambiguity as to whether some Hispanics are white and some black, or if all of them should be recognized as a third "race".

Membership in a "race" is mostly not a matter of choice, except in relatively few instances for persons who fall near a prevailing boundary of racial categories and who

then, to use a term grounded in the language of "race", pass. Passing, of course, is usually unidirectional, from the disadvantaged "race" to the advantaged one.

Despite all of this complexity, most people treat "races" as supercategories of human groups, derived from some primordial division of humankind, fixed and determined in some natural way. "Races are, in this popular view, seen as impervious to environmental influences.

"Race" is thus treated *not* as a cultural construct ... which is all it is, but as if it were a biological reality. As such, it is thought to reveal itself in superficial traits, like skin color, and then, more significantly, to carry a deep, biologically-determined structure of behavioral styles, talents, and capacities. It is this sense of "race" that contemporary population genetics has shown to be absolutely invalid.

It is my contention that the continued use of the term "race" hampers the already difficult process of reducing intergroup conflicts. Acknowledging that many such conflicts are not, strictly speaking, inter-racial, but, rather, inter-religious, inter-communal, or otherwise inter-ethnic, I believe that many of them carry at least an overtone of racial thinking. And a sufficient number of intergroup conflicts are overtly described as inter-racial for those conflicts to be lessened if we could spread the realization that the conflicting groups are not, after all, "races".

Culture enters into this story in two distinct ways, so as cross-cultural psychologists, we are in an especially advantageous position to make a contribution to intergroup relations. First, we can help spread the word that "race" is a cultural construct, varying over space and time, differing even from one country to another, and within a single country from decade to decade. Secondly, we can demonstrate in our research and writing that various groups that are anywhere perceived as "races" are better described as ethnic groups, simultaneously shaped by and reshaping their own particular cultures, and influencing other groups with whom they come in contact. These are two related, but separate points, about "race" and culture.

Most of you, of course, know *all* of this. However, if you leave here this evening with these points in mind, intending to instruct others who do not already know it, I'll leave now, finally pleased to have said something, after several decades as a cross-cultural psychologist, that truly needed to be said. Enjoy this Congress. Enjoy the exhibition. Thank you, and good evening.

## References

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