GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF RACE AND RACISM

Edited by Alexandre I.R. White and Katrina Quisumbing King

POLITICAL POWER AND SOCIAL THEORY

VOLUME 38

GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF RACE AND RACISM

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GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF RACE AND RACISM

EDITED BY

ALEXANDRE I. R. WHITE
Johns Hopkins University, USA

And

KATRINA QUISUMBING KING
Northwestern University, USA

United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Marcelo A. Bohrt is Assistant Professor at the School of International Service at American University. Dr. Bohrt holds a BA in Sociology from the University of Texas and a PhD in Sociology from Brown University. Dr. Bohrt specializes in the sociology of race, political sociology, and organizational sociology.

Ricarda Hammer is an incoming Postdoctoral Fellow at the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies at the University of Michigan. She works on questions of citizenship and freedom struggles in the context of colonialism and global racial formations, and she is interested in Du Boisian and anticolonial thought more broadly.

Mishal Khan is a Historical Sociologist focusing on global labor after the abolition of slavery in South Asia and the British Empire. With a doctorate from the University of Chicago, Mishal is postdoctoral fellow at the Rapoport Center for Human Rights at the University of Texas School of Law Austin.

Aliza Luft is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at UCLA. Her work has been published in *Sociological Theory*, *Qualitative Sociology*, *European Journal of Sociology*, *Socius*, *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, and other venues. Her research examines why people with no preexisting history of violence support violent state projects, when and why they stop, and the consequences of violence for postconflict nation-making projects.

Michael Warren Murphy is an Assistant Professor of Sociology with a secondary appointment in African Studies, at the University of Pittsburgh.

Heidi Nicholls is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Virginia. Her dissertation research examines how settler colonists constructed whiteness in coordination with their claims to sovereignty in Virginia and Hawai‘i.

Tina M. Park received her PhD in Sociology from Brown University. She is currently a Research Fellow at Partnership on AI (PAI) where she is researching methodologies and practices to better enable AI practitioners on engaging diverse stakeholders and communities in the design and development of artificial intelligence.

Katrina Quisumbing King is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Northwestern University. She studies racial classification and exclusion from a historical perspective that foregrounds the state's authority to manage populations. She is particularly interested in the ways state actors conceive of and make decisions around race and citizenship. Her research recenters empire as a key political formation.

Luisa Farah Schwartzman is an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto. Her research is about how contextually dependent, informal and institutionalized ideas about race and other markers of difference affect social inequality, and attempts to measure and address it. Much of her previous and ongoing work focuses on Brazil.

Kazuko Suzuki is an Associate Professor of Texas A&M University and the author of the award-winning book, *Divided Fates: The State, Race, and Korean Immigrants' Adaptation in Japan and the United States*. She is the coeditor of *Reconsidering Race: Social Science Perspectives on Racial Categories in the Age of Genomics.*

Susan Thomson is Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Colgate University. She is the author of *Rwanda: From Genocide to Precarious Peace* (Yale University Press, 2018) and *Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda* (Wisconsin University Press, 2013).

Alexandre I. R. White is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Department of the History of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University and School of Medicine. His research sits at the intersections of the sociology of race and ethnicity, history of medicine, and medical sociology.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Marcelo A. Bohrt	American University, USA
Ricarda Hammer	University of Michigan, USA
Mishal Khan	The University of Texas at Austin, USA
Aliza Luft	UCLA, USA
Michael Warren Murphy	University of Pittsburgh, USA
Heidi Nicholls	University of Virginia, USA
Tina M. Park	Brown University, USA
Katrina Quisumbing King	Northwestern University, USA
Luisa Farah Schwartzman	University of Toronto, Canada
Kazuko Suzuki	Texas A&M University, USA
Susan Thomson	Colgate University, USA
Alexandre I. R. White	Johns Hopkins University, USA

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INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF RACE AND RACISM

Katrina Quisumbing King and Alexandre I. R. White

ABSTRACT

This volume of Political Power and Social Theory *highlights ongoing conversations concerning sociological approaches to the global and historical study of race and racism. In this introduction, we discuss the challenges and promises of studying race across space and time. We emphasize that attending to race on the global scale not only improves our understanding of how race operates in current times, but also helps us better recognize how social relations of power are organized. We underscore how scholars ought to conceive of racism as central to the making of the so-called modern world. The eight papers in this volume advance this intellectual project. We consider them in conversation with one another to highlight four foundations for the global historical study of race and racism. First, the authors emphasize on-the-ground race-making. Second, they explore continuity, change, and overlapping racial orders. Third, the authors document the tensions between local dynamics and global relations, drawing attention to sites where the two meet. Fourth, the authors interrogate the relationship of modernity to the construction of race around the world. The articles in this volume are important examples of work that pushes the study of race and racism forward.*

Keywords: Modernity; global; historical; race and ethnicity; nation; racism; colonialism; empire; classification; social construction

This volume offers a sociology of race and racism that engages with the world and change over time. We address what it means to study race and racism from a

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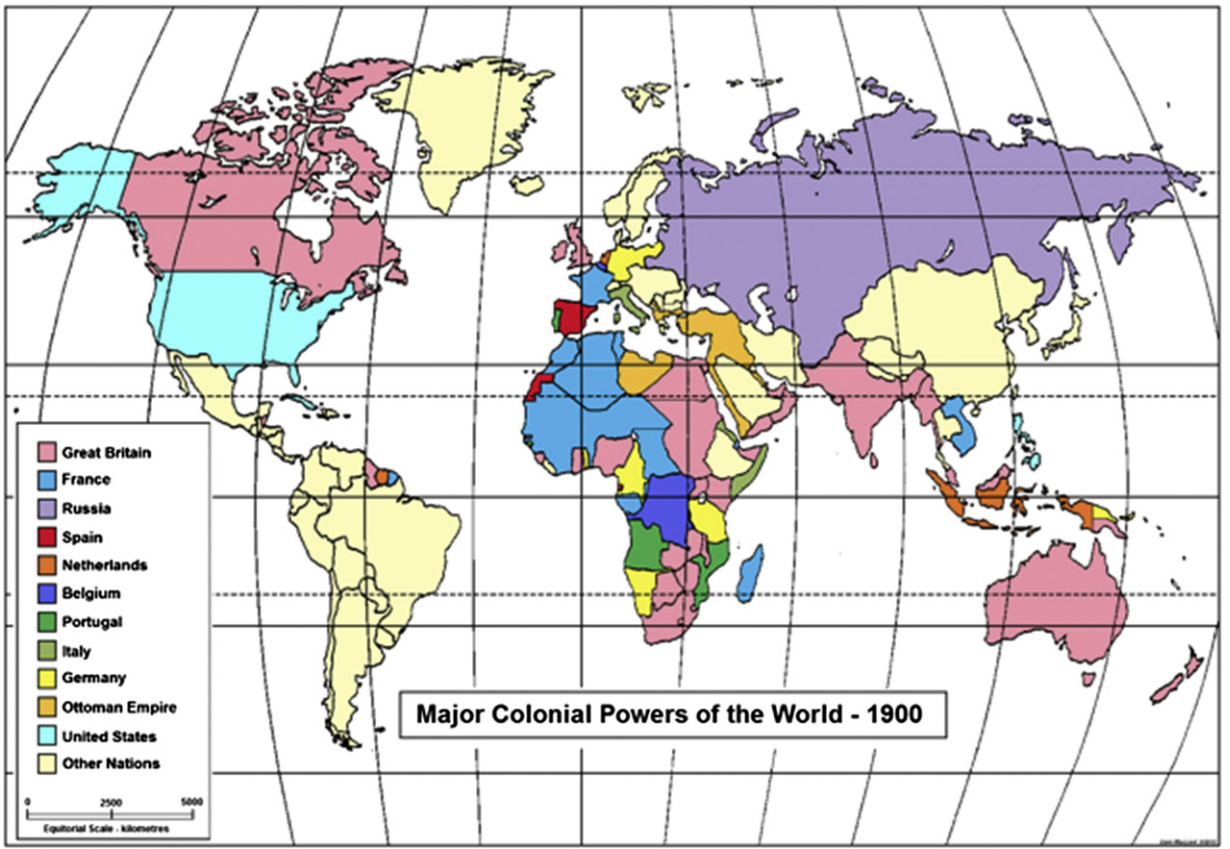

Map of Major Colonial Powers 1900. *Source:* http://gorhistory.com/hist111/empire.html.

global and historical perspective. Toward this end, a map is a useful heuristic for evaluating our study of race across both space and time. Maps are visual reminders of our loci of analysis. They can remind us of the nations or territories that we tend to analyze. Maps also depict moments in history and remind us that the world looks different today than it once did.

Consider the map below from 1900. The political boundaries serve as reminders of remote sovereignty, staging points of uprooting and shifting social relations, and the imposition of colonial modes of thought and logics of racism. This map from 1900 not only depicts land masses and waters but also systems of domination and control. The geographies depicted, though they may appear as simple renderings of territory, are actually complex records of sovereign claims, territorial disputes, relations between empires and their colonies, and trade and shipping lanes.

This map is also a reminder that these relations have changed over time. The world does not look like it did in 1900. The boundaries of European empires, while still engaged in sovereign disputes over territory, stabilized, forming larger states of France, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Russia. In the Americas, most of the continental polities gained independence from European empires in the nineteenth century, while most islands still remained under imperial control. At the same time, the depictions of North, Central, and South America obscure the ongoing sovereign claims of the Indigenous populations.

While maps draw attention to the centrality of power and domination in organizing the modern world, so too are they reminders of the places we study. Understanding European and (North) American state formation and power relations only covers a small part of the world map. Crossing the Atlantic from Europe to Africa and to the Americas conjures maritime shipping routes of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. These routes scar the ocean, depicting the largest forced migration in human history and the most profitable trade of the time. When exploring the emergence of race as a way of organizing society, scholars look to these circuits between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, citing the European colonization of the Americas as a key moment for the formation of the racial categories we know today.

Studying race in the Americas requires acknowledging the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, but we rarely pay attention to the construction of boundaries and divisions on the continent of Africa. It is a well-known fact that after the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference, the terrain of Africa was famously divided up like a cake for its imperial overlords. The map outlines how the territory and its peoples would be exploited. But the sociological scholarship on race tells us less about how to think of race in this context.

Attention to the relationship of Europe, Africa, and the Americas raises questions about the other half of the world. What can we learn from these other circuits and their interrelations? And how might the way difference is organized in the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific sharpen our analysis of power and racism? The fact of European colonialism does not easily tell us about the forms of subjugation enacted without the direct presence of Europeans. For instance, in China, race has been rooted in different logics of difference – such as culture,

human types, lineage, nation, species, seed, and nationality – some in conversation with Europe and others not (Dikötter, 1992). The Japanese empire relied on ideas of evolution, modernity, and civilization in conquering other Asian countries (Morris-Suzuki, 1998; Park, 2013; Peattie, 1984). How ideas of race travel, coevolve, are linked, and adapted is an empirical question (Dikötter, 2008; Goldberg, 2009).

What we know about European conquest likewise provides little guidance to understanding how non-European societies organized social groups and difference. For instance, in the South Pacific, Maori, Pasifika, and Pakeha peoples have drawn on ideas of Black (Afro-descent) liberation (Shilliam, 2015). The US Black Panther party identified with the struggles of Southeast Asians against US imperialism, joining the Third World Movement (Nelson, 2011; Shilliam, 2015, 2019).The fluidity of thinking about human difference and nuance of racist categorization should lead us to consider more closely the historical contingencies and particularities of racial ideologies around the world. Rather than flee from these nuances, a global historical approach to the study of race and racism would attend to this complexity in order to better understand its effects.

***

This introduction highlights different approaches to thinking about race and racism, the global, and temporality. In this introduction, we, the editors, raise ongoing debates in the study of race and racism and discuss challenges of doing this work on a global scale. We suggest that to understand race and racism as socially constructed, scholars must contend with power and inequality across both space and time. Indeed, the way that racial formations change and vary speaks to the constructed nature of race.

While endeavoring to be not overly prescriptive, we show the possibilities for a new research agenda in the sociology of race and racism. Our goal is to open new spaces for conversations and debate. We discuss the challenges and tensions of doing this work and suggest how a global and historical perspective can sharpen our collective theorizing. First, attending to race on the global scale improves our understanding of how race operates in current times. Second, a global historical sociology of race and racism expands the scope of our analysis so we may better understand how social relations of power have been organized in different ways in different times and places. Third, and finally, we underscore how scholars must conceive of racism as central to the making of the so-called modern world.

In addition to laying out the challenges and promises of global historical theorizing about race and racism, we offer an analytic overview to demonstrate how the chapters included in this volume contribute to this intellectual project. Each of the chapters sets a direction for the future of this field. We consider them in conversation with one another and highlight four foundations for the global historical study of race and racism. First, the authors challenge the notion that races are natural or given groups, and instead emphasize on-the-ground race-making. They pay attention to the processes that shape our understanding of human groupings, including not only dispossession, state-making, hierarchical differentiation but also inclusionary practices. Second, the authors address continuity, change, and overlapping racial orders. They show how people transform

ideas and categories of human kinds, paying attention to processes of homogenization, differentiation, resignification, and naturalization. Third, the authors document the tensions between local dynamics and global relations, drawing attention to sites where the two meet. Fourth, and finally, the authors interrogate the relationship of modernity to the construction of race around the world.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE IN A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE AND HOW IT MATTERS TODAY

One of the motivations of this volume is to explore the different construction of ethnoracial difference and categories across time and space.[1] Doing enables better analysis of the salience of race and power in different societies today. Racial categories, group identification, disparities, and inequality are outcomes of state, elite, and collective action (Barth, 1969; Boas, 1931; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Du Bois, 1903, 1920, 1998; Jenkins, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994). People make race, draw boundaries, and define the meaning of different categories, and they do so with different interests in mind. State actors, jurists, and ordinary people have long drawn on different logics to define racial boundaries and content, including common sense and pseudo-scientific knowledge (Fullwiley, 2008; Haney-López, 2006; Morning, 2008).[2]

Drawing on these "scientific" ideas of race among others, some people define race in exclusionary ways. State actors codified both "scientific" and commonsense ideas of racial difference in law, determining who is deserving and capable of citizenship and rights (Haney-López, 2006; Ngai, 2004). Ordinary citizens, through their informal practices, differentially distribute rights and resources giving new meaning to race (Edelman, 2016; Fox, 2012; Katznelson, 2005; Lieberman, 1998; Pager, Bonikowski, & Western, 2009; Ray, 2019). At other times, people invoke broad definitions of race for the purposes of inclusion, as in the case of South Asian and West Indian immigrants in Britain identifying under the label "Black" (Hall, 2019). Racial designations like "Black," which in the United States tends to refer to people of African descent, can include people of South Asian descent. Because racial categories gain meaning from the shifting relations of difference, Hall called race a "a floating signifier" (Jhally, Spencer, & Hughes, 2002). There was and continues to be disagreement over racial categories and what they signify. We should continue to differentiate racial ascription and assertion and interrogate conflicts between the two, especially in moments of political claim making.[3] If we acknowledge that race is socially constructed, then this means we must contend with its variations.

Yet for all the agreement that race is socially constructed, the sociology of race and ethnicity has still not adequately attended to race on a global scale. For instance, scholars still debate exporting US bureaucratic racial categories to other places of study (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999; Hanchard, 2003; Loveman, 1999b; Stoler, 2001). Racial classifications vary globally, reflecting how local context matters and how ascribed and asserted identities do not always match. Migrants, for instance, encounter new systems of classification in their receiving society (Roth, 2012; Waters, 2009). State actors change the official ways of defining and

counting race (Loveman, 1999a, 1999b; Nobles, 2000; Prewitt, 2013). Additionally, by mobilizing for resources and in making political claims, ordinary people redefine racial categories and their meaning (Espiritu, 1992; Mora, 2014; Okamoto, 2014; Paschel, 2016; Rodríguez-Muñiz, 2017, 2021). Acknowledging that race is socially constructed means not taking racial categories as given but rather studying the processes of construction and change.

From the perspective of a global historical sociology of race and racism, we advocate for a study of race and racism that pays attention to the contingencies of categorization and differential treatment. We should study race and racism in this way because it tells us about how societies are organized in unequal terms. The study of race should focus on power, social organization, rationales of division, ideas of human difference, the rewards and punishments attached to social groups, and codification in law and practice. In other words, we emphasize that to study race, one must study the processes of demarcating difference and subjugation.

Therefore, when we speak of race, we do not rely on US bureaucratic categories of Black, white, Asian, for example. Instead, we refer to both the ideas of different human kinds and to the practices of power and subjugation that draw boundaries among people. While racism operates on a global scale, there are also local particularities and manifestations of racial thinking and structures (Bonnett, 2018; Goldberg, 2009). In the global study of race and racism, we must parochialize our understandings of supposedly objective or universal knowledge (Chakrabarty, 2007; Go, 2018, p. 443). When assuming the universality of contemporary, modern, and Euro-centric definitions of race (as a social category), scholars risk reifying national and continental boundaries. Using US racial categories as the lens through which to see the world also elides the terms of difference that matter on the ground for organizing society in different times and places.

We use "race" as a shorthand for understanding ideas about superiority and difference. In practice, when people invoke the term "race," it refers not only to ideas of biological of physical difference but also to ideas of culture and descent (Chandra, 2006). At the same time, when we use the term race, we do not sharply distinguish it from ethnicity, which is more commonly associated with the idea of cultural difference. Indeed, scholars continue to debate these terms. Some think of race as biological and ethnicity as culture, race as imposed and ethnicity as asserted, race as invariably an assertion of power, while this may not be true for ethnicity, and that race connotes hierarchical thinking (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). Others situate race and racial categories as originating in European colonialism and enslavement of African populations (Omi & Winant, 1994).

We do not wish to reify what we consider a problematic analytical distinction between the terms race and ethnicity. Ideas of culture and biology are often coconstituted (Go, 2004; Thompson, 2010). Both ideas of race and ethnic difference are situated in power relations (Wade, 1997). The content of these definitions not only shifts according to whom you ask but also with time, and over space. Most scholars agree that it is impossible to definitively distinguish race and ethnicity, and most popular definitions of the terms overlap as do their practical uses (Banton, 1979; Omi & Winant, 1994; Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). The subjects of the chapters included in this volume do not clearly distinguish between

the terms in a predictable way. This reflects that the distinction between race and ethnicity, as categories of practice, are blurry and muddled (Hall, 1991; Loveman, 1999a).

A global historical sociology of race and racism, in its attention to the social processes that constitute racial categories, includes discussion of indigenous people. Indigenous scholars have long pointed out that considering American Indians as a racial/ethnic group in the United States erases their status as first peoples/Kanaka Maoli and their sovereignty. The issue of sovereignty draws attention to the problems of thinking about race as coterminous with bureaucratic categories in a given polity. If we see indigenous people as a racial group that is discriminated against within a liberal nation state, then we erase the ongoing project of settler colonialism that constitutes indigenous peoples as subjugated others. If instead we consider the process of racializing, then we can see how logics of exclusion and hierarchical differentiation have been applied to various people to justify dispossession. As Norgaard (2019) notes, in the United States colonialism is the context and reason for racial formation. At the same time, indigenous scholars have long argued that colonialism is an ongoing act (Deloria, 1969; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Trask, 1999).

Settler colonialism and the construction of the category Indian or Native matters for understanding colonialism today. A global historical sociology of race and racism is attentive to how racial inequality and subjugation operate for the purposes of dispossession. Accounting for the particular logics and practices of exclusion applied to indigenous people in the Americas illuminates how the construction of human kinds supports practices of exclusion, dispossession, and genocide. By theorizing how race is constructed for myriad purposes in myriad ways, scholars can avoid boxing indigenous people into a Black–white way of racial thinking within a liberal nation-state (Deloria, 1970). The political response to discrimination is often inclusion, which erases sovereign claims. The response to colonialism should instead be decolonization.

THE GLOBAL STUDY OF RACE: HOW RACISMS TRAVEL

Our approach to race is additionally motivated by asking what categories mean and how they travel to other parts of the globe. Thinking about race and racism globally is not the same as thinking about it universally. This volume takes up the question of how we should contend with both the local particularities and global constitution of race. For the past 25 years, comparative scholarship has occupied center stage in the global study of race and racism. Transnational and global theorizing offers another way of thinking about race around the world. Recent scholarship that sits at the intersections of sociology, history, and international relations has drawn attention to how concepts, processes, and ideas transcend nation-state borders (Go & Lawson, 2017; Iriye, 1989, 2012). This scholarly work has unsettled and challenged comparative analytic approaches that may otherwise not consider the international, transnational, and global dimensions of social phenomena.

Comparative approaches tend to fall into three camps.[4] In the first mode of comparison the United States or the country to which it is being compared is viewed as exceptional in its racial structure in contrast to the others. In the second type of comparison, the focus looks to the presence of analogous structures and forms of racism in United States that can be found in other countries. In both these comparative logics, scholars continue to view racial groups as universal (i.e., that there are Black and white people in the United States and Brazil and that these "groups" are the same or at least similar enough to be compared). Finally, in the third approach, scholars argue that the racial (il)logics of the United States cannot be exported to other countries.[5]

Nevertheless, while comparative race scholars, especially those in the third camp, argue against the universalization of racial categories, they have less to say about how racisms operate and travel globally. Such comparative approaches risk analytically separating the racial structures in these nations as hermetically separate from one another.[6] They tend to ignore the global circulation of racist ideas and knowledge and historically constituted global systems of relation. In addition, the focus on nation-state comparisons risks obfuscating imperial or colonial formations of racial orders that precede state systems of racism. A global approach can strengthen our structural and institutional understanding of race by clarifying how domestic or national projects are shaped by global and transnational factors.

Parallel and complementary areas of research in history, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, and critical theory have explored race on the global scale. Many of these approaches center empire as a key political formation. Studying empires enables scholars to see how racial ideas travel and how state actors and elites use them to transform societies through hierarchical domination. This fact clearly draws attention to the imposition of economic, political, social, and cultural domination. These approaches also force us to take seriously how race is constructed outside of and across national borders. Race is not territorialized along state lines.

Global approaches to the study of racism analyze the common roots of racial ideologies and practices. The articulation of racial differences and inferiority between white Europeans and other peoples was central to Enlightenment and modernist framings of human agency and reason (Gilroy, 2002; Dussel, 1993; Davis, 1971; hooks, 1990). The figure of the slave was central to defining modernity from its prior historical and intellectual periods and was the archetypal figure of unfreedom to enlightenment thinkers like Kant, Locke, and Hegel (Susan Buck-Morss, 2009). Studying more recent history, scholars have also uncovered the relationships between genocide in the European Holocaust and racialized colonial governance (Bauman, 2001; Césaire, 2000; Lindqvist, 1996). Others draw attention to how race science, racial ideologies, and categories emerged through the international trafficking of knowledge and practices (Bates, 2019; Go, 2018; Magubane, 2017). Global and postcolonial approaches to the study of race also remind us that we should not take the nation-state or national boundaries as given.

Global approaches also draw attention to the centrality of racial ideology for world capitalism between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eric Williams