

“A Place for Everyone”: Cultural Geographies of Race

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Race as a Geographical Project

Race, like gender and sexuality, is a geographical project. Race is constructed in and through space, just as space is often constructed through race. As a geographical project the co-production of race and space is never uncontested, and thus the spatiality of race often needs ordering and policing. Such policing manifests itself in all manner of quite ordinary – and sometimes extraordinary – ways. Consider the following example, and you can see just how ordinary the geographical policing of race is: it only becomes extraordinary when we stop to think about it in any reasonable way. On December 3, 1995, Theresa Seamster, a 44-year-old black woman from Denver was evicted from the Greeley Mall in northern Colorado for wearing “gang colors.” Seamster had gone to the mall with three friends, one of whom was an elderly woman with Alzheimer’s disease. After spending nearly two hours there (and after the four had spent about \$750), Seamster was approached by a mall security guard and informed she would have to remove the blue scarf she was wearing on her head if she wished to remain in the mall. The guard was enforcing an unposted – indeed, unwritten – rule that forbade the wearing of scarves of certain colors. When Seamster refused to remove the scarf, the security guard called in help to escort Seamster and her elderly friend out of the mall. Seamster insisted on first collecting her two other friends who were waiting at a store on the other side of the mall. As the women were escorted across and eventually out of the building, a crowd of onlookers gathered, creating a sense of humiliation in Seamster and her friends. When Seamster

complained of their treatment by letter to the mall manager, the letter went unanswered. So did calls from reporters about the incident. The Greeley police chief, however, did comment, saying that he generally supported the policy: he called the wearing of gang colors a "detriment to the atmosphere" of the city.¹ Yet he also argued that the mall needed to be more careful in its enforcement of the policy. "The lady [Seamster] does not necessarily fit the profile of a gang member. If I had a group of eight or ten kids flashing signs and wearing bandanas, they'd be gone. But that's a totally different situation" (Witcher 1995).

"Profile" is everything. What is this "profile"? Clothing style, of course, but also, and obviously, skin color. It hardly needs saying that a middle-aged white woman would not have been treated in the same manner: she would have drawn no attention at all, no matter what the color of her scarf. Such "profiling" on the basis of age, skin color, clothing type, and the like, is a growing – and increasingly controversial – practice by both private and public police forces. Numerous attempts have been made to outlaw "gang colors" in various jurisdictions – often with humorous results. Mike Davis (1990: 318, note 30) tells of the attempt to outlaw gang colors in Fontana, California, which was stymied when someone pointed out that to do so would be to outlaw two-thirds of the colors in the American flag! Usually profiles are more complex and rely on some combination of clothing, skin color, and location. What might be tolerated in one place (black kids hanging out in a poor, black neighborhood), might become suspect elsewhere (black kids hanging out near a rich, white neighborhood). What is clear is that no matter how complex the "profiles" become, at their root is an elementary classification of people on the basis of skin color. Skin color, in the most racist of ways, becomes destiny. For Theresa Seamster and her friends, that destiny was humiliating treatment at the hands of the security guards at the Greeley Mall. For thousands of urban kids, it means a life of unrelenting harassment at the hands of cops seeking to enforce "quality of life" initiatives.²

I can tell you the story of Theresa Seamster's trip into and out of the Greeley Mall because I used to live not too far from Greeley, and a Colorado weekly newspaper, *Westword*, ran a story about it. That this story was *not* picked up by the national news media suggests, to some extent, just how ordinary such occurrences are. What is it, then, about "race" that calls up such reactions, that makes such unreasonable behavior on the part of security officers, mall owners, politicians, and the like, so commonplace? An easy answer would be that this story is less about race than it is about suburban fear, about the loss of community contact that is both cause and effect of the sequestering of the middle class behind walls of their own making (see Davis 1998: chapter 7).³ But such an explanation leads to many more questions than

1 The California-based owner of the mall says it opposes the local rule against "gang colors" and has asked the Greeley Mall to refrain from enforcing any unwritten policies.

2 "Quality of Life" is the name given to urban campaigns to "clean up" streets and public spaces by strictly enforcing loitering and anti-gang color laws, passing new laws outlawing seemingly innocuous behavior like sitting on a curb, washing motorists' windows or hawking newspapers, or cracking down on public drinking. Many of these campaigns trace their roots to an influential article published in 1982 by two criminologists, James Q. Wilson and George Kelling.

3 T. Coreghesan Boyle's (1995) novel about suburban Los Angeles evocatively explores just this point. This argument is also taken, as we will see, in fully racist directions by cultural conservatives.

answers, not least because it seems to minimize the role of “race” in the production of fear. But if we acknowledge that “race” is a key factor in people’s fear of each other, then we have to ask precisely what “race” is – and what it is not. Is it something innately, biologically, part of one’s body, something natural and immutable? Is it purely a figment of society’s imagination, a collective fantasy about difference? Is it a fact, or a factor, of identity? And is that identity therefore individual or collective? And, again, *why* and *how* is “race” a geographical project (as I so blithely declared it was in the first sentence of this chapter)?

These are questions geographers (and countless others) have been asking for more than two decades now.⁴ But they are questions of a much longer pedigree. In this chapter we will explore the biological and social arguments about what, exactly, race might be, and then see how our *ideas* about race are made very real “on the ground.” In other words, as Peter Jackson (1989: chapter 6) has shown so well, there are important, historically and geographically constructed “languages” of race and racism. The key issue we will address is precisely how those languages are dependent upon, even as they give rise to, specific *kinds* of space – specific sites and places – both for their development and reproduction. Languages of racism do not exist in a vacuum: they are effected on the streets of cities, in the fields of the countryside, and in their large-scale spaces of migration that make up the contemporary world. But since these spaces are themselves both socially constructed and open to constant challenge and revision, we will also explore in this chapter precisely how race and geography are policed, by and for whom they are policed, and, hence, again, how and why geography and race are dependent, in so many ways, on each other.

In other words, we will raise yet again the questions so crucial to cultural geography raised in chapter 3: *Who* reifies particular cultural meanings (in this case race)? *How* are these reifications solidified and enforced? *Whom* do they benefit, and whom do they harm? *In what ways* are they contested both in everyday practices and in more spectacular fashion? And, most importantly, *under what conditions* are these reifications made and reproduced? As Robert Miles (1982: 64) has argued, “the basis of racism is to be found not in the attribution of meaning to phenotypical difference, but in identifying the economic, political, and ideological conditions that allow the attribution of meaning to take place.” Like the idea of culture – and the practices that support that idea – the idea of race is powerful only insofar as it organizes people’s activities, actions, and ordinary lives in particular ways for the benefit of particular people, classes, or social groups. This chapter will explore these questions in more detail, focusing on “race” as one of the key ideologies and sets of practices – like gender and sexuality – that structure all of our lives. First, we will look at what race is, and what it isn’t. Second, we will explore a particularly pernicious use of the idea of race – one that associates it with degrees of intelligence and other forms of abilities – and explore how such an idea is underpinned by a quite remarkable geographical vision. Third, we will show how such visions themselves will have currency only to the degree that they are “fixed” in particular spaces. We will take a look at the obvious case, apartheid, but it should be clear that our compass is wider:

4 Perhaps the earliest, and angriest, explicit critical discussion of the geography of race as a project of social control is Bunge (1971); see also Jackson (1987b); S. Smith (1989).

the race idea circulates through all manner of other kinds of space. These spaces are as instrumental in transforming the social and geographical structure of space as space is in reproducing the very idea of race.

Indeed, in the contemporary world, there is not a space that is not saturated with the poisoned blood of "race" through and through. bell hooks (1992: 345) has written that she is frequently astounded at how "the discourse of race is increasingly divorced from any recognition of the politics of racism." My goal in this chapter is to never forget the politics of racism. Instead, no matter how technical the discussions of race may become, I want to keep at the forefront of our attention the fact that it is simply impossible to address issues of race without also addressing issues of racism.

The Vagaries and Vulgarities of Race

"Race" in Western ideology

"Race" seems so obvious. What could be more straightforward than the color of people's skin, the shape of their face, the texture of their hair? There can be no doubt that the physical appearance of people varies and that these variations seem to be associated, over the long history of human development, with particular regions, giving rise to broad similarities and differences between peoples. There seems to be a regularity of skin type (etc.) by region: people from particular parts of the world tend to look similar to each other (figure 9.1). Racial difference is

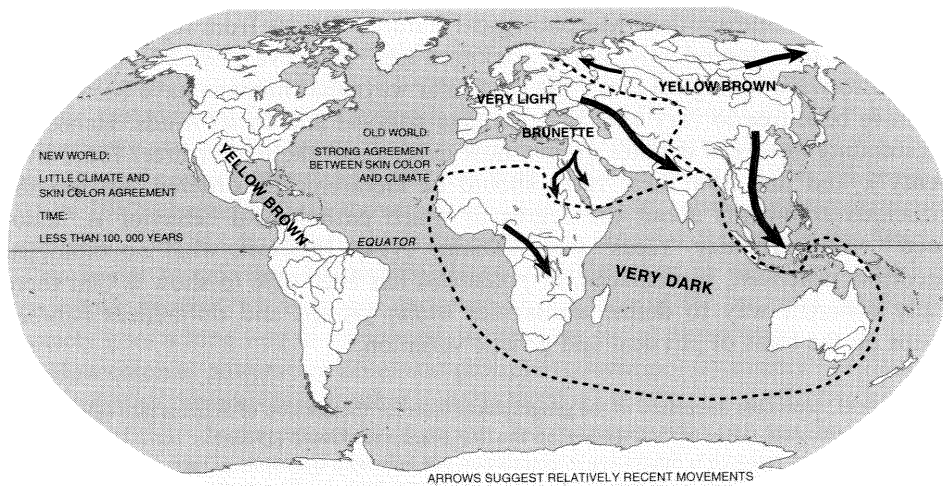


Figure 9.1 The correlation between place and race is taken as given in much Western thought – and it has been dutifully reproduced in cultural geography textbooks. Here, in a book from the 1960s, a simple correlation between skin color and climate is taken as given, and differences between racial features – or features that seem out of place – are explained as the result of migrations. Source: George Carter, *Man and the Land* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968: 24).

undeniable.⁵ Yet as obvious as those regional similarities and global differences may be, they are also deceptive. There seems to be little regularity of *co-variation* of particular traits within and across populations. As Jared Diamond (1994: 85) has pointed out in *Discover* (a popular science magazine), the way that “races” are classified is “a matter of personal preference” among scientists. In a series of examples, Diamond shows just how idiosyncratic racial classification is: if classification is made by such traits as fingerprints, then one group would combine “most Europeans, black Africans, and east Asians;” another would be comprised of “Mongolians and Australian Aborigines;” and a third would consist of “Khoisans and some central Europeans” (Diamond 1994: 87). If, instead, we looked at the ability to easily digest milk, one grouping would be of northern and central Europeans, Arabs, and some West Africans; the other would consist of most other Africans, east Asians, American Indians, southern Europeans and Australian aborigines. Imagine checking to see how these criteria co-vary with others such as skin color or hair-type and you can see how ridiculous the notion of racial classification is. Diamond (1994: 88) provides the clincher:

One method that *seems* to offer a way out of the arbitrariness [of “race”] is to classify peoples by degree of genetic distinctness. By this standard the Khoisans of southern Africa would be in a race by themselves. African blacks would form several other distinct races. All the rest of the world’s peoples – Norwegians, Navajo, Greeks, Japanese, Australian aborigines, and so on – would, despite their greatly differing external appearance, belong to a single race.⁶

“Race” is thus little more than the vagaries of the popular and scientific imagination; it provides no means to classify human populations. “The straightforward biological fact of human variation is that there are no traits that are inherently, inevitably associated with one another. Morphological features *do* vary from region to region, but they do so independently, not in packaged sets” (Shreeve 1994: 58). Given that “straightforward biological fact,” the particular ways that humans have been classified have been free to vary with the changing political and social winds. Hence the longstanding historical debates on just how many races there are (three? four? five? twenty?), and just how these races should be hierarchically ordered. So too the pernicious arguments about the degree to which pathological behavior is “associated” with particular “races” (see Williams 1994). In short, what no biologist, eugenicist, geneticist, supremacist, or polemicist has been able to show is that there is any coherent way to define similarities *within* groups and differences *between* groups on the basis of physical and genetic variation.

5 For a brief, accessible discussion of the geographical basis for the division of humans into subspecies – and of the ontological status of “subspecies” in the first place – see Gould (1985a).

6 Diamond’s own research is interesting in connection not only with questions of race, but also environmental determinism (see chapter 1). A staunch anti-racist and anti-biological determinist, Diamond continues to search for mono-causal answers to questions of human social difference. His recent Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Society* (1997), is nothing if not a sophisticated development of the environmental determinist thesis (stripped of its racism). The problem is that by using environmental determinism to contest biological determinism, Diamond allows almost no possibility for the social efficacy of society itself. For Diamond the argument seems to be that since it is a fallacy to rely on biology (especially “race”) for understanding social difference, then we *must* rely on environment.

To put that another way, and as my use of the popular science magazine *Discover* indicates, there is broad acceptance in the scientific community, at least, that there is no such biological thing as "race."⁷ Dividing humans into groups, on the basis of some combination of physical and genetic traits, simply does not make sense. And when variation in those traits is further tied to such reified attributes as "intelligence," "character," or "ability," claims about race become even more dubious. Indeed, the very absurdity of such claims can easily be seen in historical tracts on race – tracts that are to our ears quite unsophisticated in their discussions of difference. Consider the following statements from biologist Charles White's "An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables" (1779):

Captains and Surgeons of Guinea ships, and the West India planters, unanimously concur in their accounts, that negroes sweat much less than Europeans: a drop of sweat being scarcely ever seen upon them. Simiae sweat still less, and dogs not at all. (Quoted in Gould 1985a: 288)

Ascending the line of gradation, we come at last to the white European; who being most removed from brute creation, may, on that account, be considered as the most beautiful of the human race. No one will doubt his superiority of intellectual powers; and I believe it will be found that his capacity is naturally superior to that of every other man. (Quoted in Gould 1985a: 289)

Note the context. White draws on the accounts of slave-traders and colonial planters to make his case, an obvious indication of the nature of the "economic, political, and ideological" conditions of which Miles spoke in the passage cited above. And note, too, the degree to which such sentiments have been repeated over the years. In the first half of the twentieth century, the geographers Ellen Churchill Semple (1911) and Glenn Trewartha (1926) would both note how Africans' "economy of sweat" make them particularly suited for manual labor.

That "race" is a fact of nature is deeply embedded in Western consciousness, but it is one that derived from a European encounter with the world in which European superiority was not just asserted, but actively maintained through the use of guns and weapons of torture. Why? As historians such as Sidney Mintz (1974, 1985; see also Miles 1982: chapter 5) have shown, slavery, for example, solved a particular material problem – one of labor shortages in the expanding colonial domains of the Americas. This is not to say that all manifestations of racism can be directly mapped onto economic necessity. It is to say, however, that a look at the material conditions of society goes a long way in *explaining* the need for racial distinction.

How colonial powers – or dominant groups in contemporary society – explain racial difference to themselves is another matter. Ideology is often most effective not on the objects of that ideology (racialized people, for example) who can see through it right

7 A little more than a decade ago, Peter Jackson (1987a: 17) wrote that while the social construction of race was widely accepted in the natural and social sciences, "it has yet to penetrate public consciousness and to influence the realm of common-sense understanding." That is less the case now, as debates over how best to classify by race in the USA census attest. If my own students' comments are anything to go by, then it seems that even early in university education students are repeatedly exposed to critical deconstructions of the idea of race. Nonetheless, matters of popular knowledge about race are quite complex and hardly perfect, as the discussion below of Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) *The Bell Curve* makes clear.

away, but on the people in power as a means of justifying their actions (Scott 1985). Ideology also has the material effect of organizing allegiance in particular directions. For example, in the case of “race,” blacks are often constructed as a “common enemy” of *all* whites, which is a means of masking differences in material interests *between* whites. That is, “race allegiance” is developed and exploited as a means of convincing some in society to “buy into” their own exploitation by transferring the cause of that exploitation to a third party identified as “naturally” different, and socially suspect. Important strains of ideology in the West, have, therefore, been structured on the notion that differences in society – between whites and blacks, Europeans and Asians, even rich and poor – actively reflect, indeed are determined by, not social conditions, but by our biology. Obvious physical differences are *reified* into largely immutable classes that represent not only amounts of melanin, but also levels of intelligence, physical prowess, cultural attributes, and so on (see Gould 1981: 24).

The earliest uses of the term “race” in the English language indicate that it referred to distinct classes or categories of things, but the distinctions were not seen to arise from biology. Not until the end of the eighteenth century did the idea of race take on its biological, physical connotations, as “race” was used to make sense of both European history and expanding colonialism. By the 1850s, it was fairly well accepted, in the centers of imperial power at least, that “what set populations apart was not so much their history as their physical appearance” (Miles 1982: 10). As Europeans tried to come to grips with their encounters with different peoples the world over, and as they sought to justify their own drive to dominate those peoples, a complex debate developed on the origin of racial difference. The question was not so much *whether* innate biological differences existed between people – differences that were directly responsible for social, cultural, and intellectual ability – but *from whence* these differences arose.⁸ Drawing support from the biblical story of Adam and Eve, monogenists argued that all humans were descended from a single original couple, but that different races had declined – fallen from grace, really – to different degrees. Attributions of cause for this degeneration (which whites were seen to suffer from the least) were varied, but usually centered on some environmental factor: biological determinism had its roots in environmental determinism.⁹ Such beliefs in environmental degeneracy were deeply held. Stephen Jay Gould (1981: 39) tells of the president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), who “hoped that American blacks, in a climate more suited to Caucasian temperaments, would soon turn white.” “Race” in the monogenist formulation, therefore, was not entirely immutable, even if many argued that change would occur too slowly to make much difference in the affairs of the world.

By contrast, polygenists argued that races were distinct biological species (or, in more modern formulations, that racial distinctions were apparent in the evolutionary ancestors of humans and were then carried through into human evolution) (Coon 1962; see Gould 1985b). Evidence in support of this view ranged from body shape and

8 The classic – and classically racist – geography text is Ellsworth Huntington’s (1915) *Climate and Civilization*. This book, which went through a number of subsequent editions, is worth reading for assessing the length to which proponents of racist geographies go to support an essentially unsupportable case. In this regard *Climate and Civilization* is a telling precursor to *The Bell Curve* (discussed below).

9 Much of this debate was conducted in neo-Lamarckian terms. See Livingstone (1992) and chapter 1 above.

type to the size of skulls.¹⁰ For the nineteenth-century Swiss-American natural historian Louis Agassiz, like so many others of his time, the existence of different races implied the need to rank those races in terms of natural intellectual and cultural ability.

There are upon the earth different races of men, inhabiting different parts of its surface, which have different physical characteristics; and this fact . . . presses upon us the obligation to settle the relative rank among these races, the relative value of the characters peculiar to each, in a scientific point of view. . . . As philosophers it is our duty to look it in the face. (Quoted in Gould 1981: 46)

For some, a look at the face of the race showed that there were three distinct and immutable races: Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid. Others added two more: American Indian, and Pacific Islanders. A cultural geography textbook from the early 1970s adds "Negritoid, Bushmanoid, Australoid, and Papuan-Melasian" (Broek and Webb 1973: 88). Still others, seeing in the face of race impressive variation, and finding that biological and genetic facts were actually poor support for dividing humanity by three or five, argued for many, many more. By the time he had finished his studies of cranial capacity, for example, the American nineteenth-century craniologist Samuel Morton had divided humanity into twenty-two separate and distinct races (Gould 1981) (table 9.1).

Whatever the nature of these arguments about the number of races, about the proper criteria for distinguishing one race from another, and about the evolutionary (or Godly) origins of racial difference, scientists of the nineteenth century largely agreed on several basic propositions, as Robert Miles (1982: 13) summarizes:

(i) the physical appearance and behaviour of individuals was an expression of a discrete biological type which was permanent; (ii) cultural variation was determined by differences in biological type; (iii) biological variation was the origin of conflict between both individuals and nations; and (iv) "races" were differentially endowed such that some were inherently superior to others.

Combined with Social-Darwinist ideas about the cultural survival of the fittest (and thus the "natural" basis for rule and domination),¹¹ such fundamental beliefs were a powerful inducement to the exercise of power. They also provided a handy excuse for dismissing white historical culpability for oppression and genocide. Even so (or perhaps especially because of that) such ideas were largely accepted as common sense well into the mid-twentieth century with biology, sociology, and geography textbooks of the 1970s (and 1980s) still faithfully reflecting the received wisdom about the separate races that inhabit the globe – even when they forthrightly admitted that

10 Gould's (1981) *Mismeasure of Man* is devoted to examining the distortions this scientific effort produced – distortions that ranged from outright fakery of data to the more interesting subconscious skewing of results to fit a predetermined outcome.

11 As we saw in chapter 1, important social theorists such as Herder argued strongly against such notions in the late eighteenth century. The fact that such voices of opposition existed – and were strongly registered – should serve as a sufficient caution in assuming that a *dominant* way of thinking in a particular era and place is the *only* way of thinking.

Table 9.1 Morton's final summary of cranial capacity by race

<i>Races and Families</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Cranial capacity (IN³)</i>			
		<i>Largest</i>	<i>Smallest</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>
<i>Modern Caucasian group</i>					
<i>Teutonic Family</i>					
Germans	18	114	70	90	} 92
English	5	105	91	96	
Anglo-Americans	7	97	82	90	
Pelasgic Family	10	94	75	84	
Celtic Family	6	97	78	87	
Indostanic Family	32	91	67	80	
Semitic Family	3	98	84	89	
Nilotic Family	17	96	66	80	
<i>Ancient Caucasian group</i>					
Pelasgic Family	18	97	74	88	
Nilotic Family	55	96	68	80	
<i>Mongolian group</i>					
Chinese Family	6	91	70	82	
<i>Malay group</i>					
Malayan Family	20	97	68	86	} 85
Polynesian Family	3	84	82	83	
<i>American group</i>					
<i>Toltec Family</i>					
Peruvians	155	101	58	75	} 79
Mexicans	22	92	67	79	
Barbarous Tribes	161	104	70	84	
<i>Negro group</i>					
Native African Family	62	99	65	83	} 83
American-born Negroes	12	89	73	82	
Hottentot Family	3	83	68	75	
Australians	8	83	63	75	

Note: Using cranial capacity as his yardstick, Samuel Gould divided humanity into an impressive 22 separate races. The numbers in this table are not to be trusted. As Stephen Jay Gould has shown, Morton's measurements do not bear up under scrutiny: he had the habit of adjusting his results to fit the outcome he wanted. Morton's taxonomy, therefore, stands more as a testament to nineteenth-century racial ideology than it does as an accurate rendering of differences between humans.

Source: Reproduced from Gould (1981: 55).

such a belief was "nonsense." A good example is the 1973 cultural geography textbook, *A Geography of Mankind*, by University of Minnesota professors Jan Broek and John Webb. The authors begin their chapter on "Race: Biological Facts and Social Attitudes" by stating clearly that "classification of human races is difficult, if not impossible," and that "biologically speaking, mankind is a single subspecies (*Homo sapiens sapiens*);" yet they still devote 11 pages to a discussion of "the main racial stocks," "the present distribution of the races," and so forth. Much of this

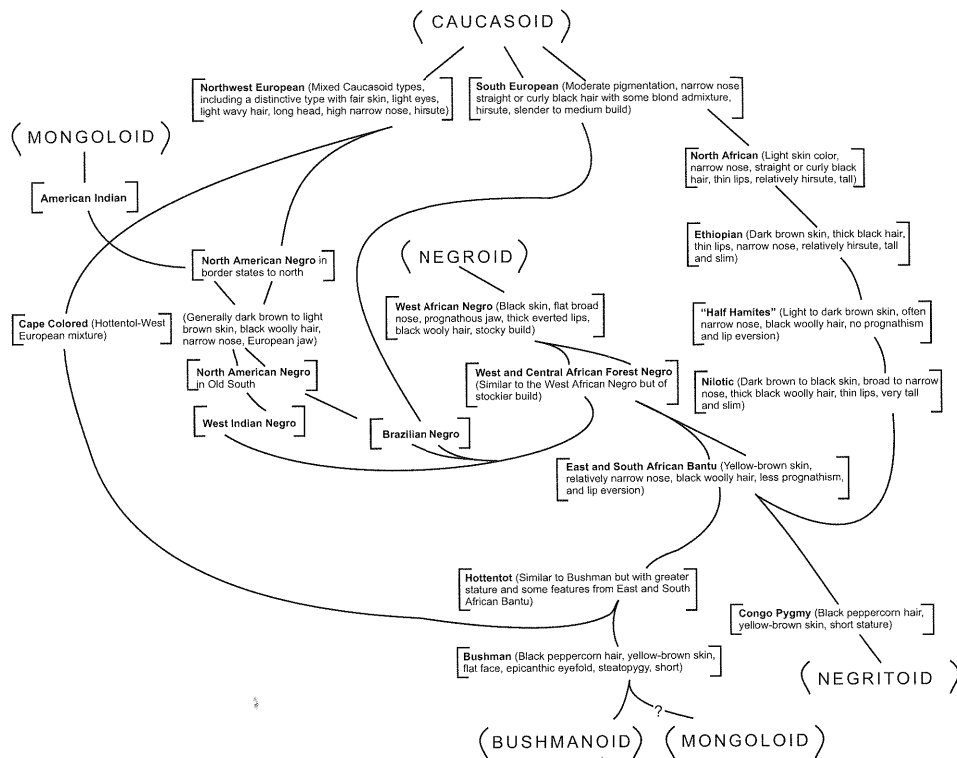


Figure 9.2 Broek and Webb's map of racial difference. This diagram indicates genetic variation from a presumed "true Negroid." The lines, according to the authors, indicate "scales of increasing and decreasing Negroid gene frequency," not "lines of descent." Note that Caucasians are placed in a superior position in the diagram. Source: Broek and Webb (1973: 91).

discussion is given over to associating particular physical features, such as facial shape, hair type, and skin color, with particular regions. We are told where the "true Negroid" and the "classic Mongoloid" are to be found (West Africa and Mongolia), and where groups with "decreased frequency" of Negroid or Mongoloid genes live, but are warned that "it is not so easy to divide the Caucasoid people into distinct subgroups living in separate regions" (Broek and Webb 1973: 81-92) (figure 9.2). Since the authors provide no compelling anthropological or other arguments for spatial variation or racial groups, offer no evidence about the degree of homogeneity in phenotype or genotype among peoples of particular regions, and indeed argue that in most regions phenotypic variety is the rule rather than the exception, it is hard to see what the point of these pages is, other than to reinforce, even if critically, the notion that distinct biological groups do indeed exist on the face of the earth. But that is an idea that has come under increasing attack in the biological sciences in the past several decades (as even the authors of the textbook under discussion admit).

The arguments against "race"

The majority of biologists and geneticists simply no longer accept that "race" has any scientific validity at all. The arguments in favor of a biological basis to race fail in two places: at the level of phenotype and at the level of genotype. Racial classification is usually based on phenotype – the surficial physical characteristics of an organism (skin color, hair type, size and shape of various body parts) that provide the most common basis for dividing people into distinct races. The problem, as we have seen, is that phenotypic traits do not vary consistently together. Stature and skin color, hair type and nose shape – it is impossible to consistently associate changes in one trait with changes in another. As we have also seen, this fact led many who would divide the world into discrete races based on phenotype to continually further divide the human pie into smaller and smaller pieces, hoping thereby to create coherent and cohesive racial populations. They never did. Phenotypic chaos is the rule since *each* phenotypic variation exists along a continuum, and thus the classification of individuals into groups must find a way to slice coherently through variation in nearly infinite dimensions. Exceptions to whatever classifications are formed will not prove the rule, as the old saying goes, they will *be* the rule. "One consequence is that any attempt to identify 'races' by reference to phenotypical variation can only ever produce overlapping classifications and not distinct categories," as Miles (1982: 14) puts it. This is so in part because phenotypic variation is not a simple expression of genotypic variation (genotype is the genetic "code" of an individual). Genotype "programs" for a range of phenotypic expression, and the resulting "look" of an individual is a complex result of biological foundation (the genotypic "code"), biological chance (the contingent expressions of that "code"), and environmental and social influence. The important point, however, is that the sheer abundance of difference cannot be classified into distinct groups at the level of phenotype.

Can it at the level of genotype? Not in any coherent fashion, as the *Discover* Magazine article makes clear. We can arbitrarily choose a particular gene (or maybe even a small gene sequence) and parcel out humanity on the basis of that gene. But as soon as we choose another bit of genetic code we end up with a completely different classification. The problem is exactly the same as with phenotype. So, unless we are willing to believe that the genetic basis for some particular trait (sickle cell resistance or lactase tolerance, for example) is more important than all the other genetic traits that make up our biological endowment, then it is simply impossible to divide humanity into discrete genetic packages on anything but the most arbitrary grounds. Geneticists recognize this and argue that "race" is a term that can only be used to describe "populations which differ in frequency, or in prevalence, of some genes" and hence the exact population of any particular "race" will vary depending on the genes studied (quoted in Miles 1982: 15). Yet even this definition of race falters as anything more than a handy heuristic for whatever limited scientific study happens to be in progress, since genetic variation *within* a "race" so defined is greater than the average difference *between* populations. Hence, whether one divides one race from another at point *x* rather than at point *y*, *z*, or any other point in the total genetic endowment – or whether one divides races at all – is completely

arbitrary. A "matter of taste" as one geneticist puts it (Bodmer 1972: 90, quoted in Miles 1982: 16). What is more, as Jared Diamond's *Discover* article quoted above makes plain, even any *regional* coherence to "race" falls apart – note the similarities in such traits as the ability to digest milk between such geographically distant populations as east Asians and southern Europeans and the differences that occur over small areas in West Africa.

Most simply put, then, there is *no such biological thing as race*. "Race" is both the classic "chaotic concept" – a concept that is meant to contain far more than it possibly can – and the classic reification – the "thingification" of a process or relationship. Even so, there are few concepts – chaotic or not, reified or not – as powerful as "race." The belief in race, fervently held, fervently acted upon, has been the maker of history and a maker of geography, whether that history and geography is one of colonialism and slavery, housing and urban development, economic exploitation, or education funding. It also insinuates itself in the whole history of Western literature and social thought. There may not be any such *thing* as race, but that does not mean that "race" is not a very real fact in all our lives (whether we are part of a privileged or oppressed group). Racial *differentiation* (as opposed to innate "difference") must therefore be understood "as a product of power *struggle* rather than as something imposed by white society and passively accepted" by people of color (S. Smith 1989: 8). The lack of a biological basis for race, in addition, does not mean that racist thinking, and whole arguments built atop the fallacy of race, are not still current in contemporary society. Quite the contrary.

The Bell Curve and Racism's Geography

I mentioned at the outset of this chapter that an awful lot of effort goes into the policing of the boundaries of race. It clearly must, as we can infer from the discussion above. If there is nothing natural about race – if there is no basis in nature for a racist social order – then it must be socially maintained. This policing takes innumerable forms as it works through our everyday lives. These include everything from racist lending practices by banks that make it difficult for racial minorities to obtain loans or to move to the neighborhoods of their choice, to employment practices, to the actions of the police, to the way from the earliest ages we are taught to talk to each other. But these everyday practices have also to be supported and reinforced at the level of overt ideology and political action. Immigration laws are obvious examples (consider, for example, the changes in British immigration policies as African and Caribbean colonies won their independence), as are the changing rules of asylum and citizenship on the European continent (see chapter 10). The role of public discourse, especially as it is amplified in and by the media, is also important. Even more important is the way that public discourse intersects with the geography of place so as to structure "common sense" about "race."

In the United States, perhaps the most prominent recent example of racist, and clearly racist, public argument – an example that understands the geography of difference to be absolutely central to the social development of the country – was Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's (1994) book, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence*

and *Class Structure in American Life*.¹² To understand the importance of geography to the racist argument presented in *The Bell Curve*, it is first necessary to examine that racist argument itself in some detail.

The Bell Curve's Racist Reasoning

Despite the fact that the mainstreams of biological and even social science have rejected the notion that race has any roots whatsoever in the natural world, Herrnstein and Murray's scurrilous account of the "cognitive ability" of different groups in the United States (and to a lesser extent elsewhere), became a huge media event. The major American newsweeklies, *Time*, *US News and World Report*, and *Newsweek*, all carried feature articles and debates on Herrnstein and Murray's arguments. The *New York Times Magazine* put Charles Murray on its cover and wondered if he was the "most dangerous conservative in America." The *New Republic* (October, 1994) devoted a whole issue to an article derived from the book and no fewer than nineteen separate commentaries on it. Murray was a frequent guest on television and radio talk shows (Herrnstein died just before publication). Herrnstein and Murray plainly saw their work as an important argument against social policies such as affirmative action, welfare, and equality of opportunity in schooling. *The Bell Curve* refueled debate in America on just these issues – and the racist discourses that support them – right at the moment (1994) that radical cultural and economic conservatives were wresting power from the slightly less radical conservatism of the Clinton Democrats who had been elected in 1992.¹³ To the question of what material conditions make racism possible at any given moment, the answer in this case must look towards, among other things, the declining real wages of American whites (particularly men), the continued, and continually questioned, obvious fact of disparate life chances for blacks, whites, Asians, and Latinos, the continued immigration of people of color to the United States, particularly from Latin America and poorer regions of Asia, the "race panic" that set in after the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion, the emergence of prison construction as a dynamic growth industry, and a redistribution of wealth in American society from bottom to top, most marked in the attack on welfare (Muwakkil 1995). This was the world into which *The Bell Curve* was launched – and upon which it hoped to have an incisive impact.

The Bell Curve was not favorably received in much of the early commentary on it; indeed, perhaps the majority of the commentary was highly critical.¹⁴ What is remarkable, however, and what makes the book such an important indicator of how "race" remains a key weapon in the culture wars, is that the book was taken seriously at all (see Gates 1995; Lind 1995). It is remarkable because Herrnstein and Murray's argument is slipshod and their obvious racism puts them in league not with the putative mainstream of American culture, but with the racist right of the KKK and the Aryan Nation, more deserving of scorn than serious analysis. Their use of

12 Unaccompanied page numbers in the sections that follow are from this book.

13 Herrnstein and Murray were fairly coy in their arguments about these issues in *The Bell Curve* itself, but were much more openly hostile to such social policies in their *New Republic* article.

14 Two volumes collect analyses of *The Bell Curve*: Fraser (1995) and Jacoby and Glaubergerman (1995).

sources and evidence borders on the intellectually dishonest, as any relatively attentive reader can see.¹⁵ But more than that, they simply fail to document most of the claims that they make (their common ploy is to say either that documentation would take too much space [p. 23] or that they will support their points later in the book [p. 24] – which they never adequately do). Despite their explicit recognition of the fact that correlation does not equal causation (and correlation studies are the backbone of the book), the authors regularly *imply* just the opposite. To take just one example: “High intelligence also provides some protection against lapsing into criminality for people who are otherwise at risk” (p. 235). Such a statement – made in a chapter introduction designed for those readers who want to understand the author’s points “at the simplest level” – does strongly *suggest* a causative relationship between intelligence and criminality, and the authors do nothing anywhere else in the book to dispel that implication.

More fundamentally, *The Bell Curve* is simply incoherent, as any argument that bases itself on unvarying genetic difference between arbitrary groups must be. This does not slow Herrnstein and Murray down a bit as they insist – and repeat over and over – that while an individual’s membership in any group (be it class, race, ethnic, or otherwise) does not matter one whit to their chances of being “intelligent,” one’s membership in a group (be it class, race, ethnic, or otherwise) is the single most important determinant of one’s probable intelligence.¹⁶ Such an amazing argument is laid out something like this:

- 1 The authors argue that there is some innate thing called “intelligence” which can be captured through standardized tests and which can be expressed as a single number (called *g* for “general factor”). In popular accounts, “IQ” is freely substituted for *g*. This *g* is argued to be “substantially” genetic in origin: anywhere from 40 to 80 percent of the variation in *g* is explained by genetic variation.¹⁷
- 2 Herrnstein and Murray aver that genetic IQ not only varies by individual, but also varies in a regular manner by group. (See especially pp. 298–311)
- 3 At the beginning of the book, these groups are classes. The authors argue that the upper classes are composed of the “cognitive elite” who have risen to their top of the political and economic hierarchy through sheer intelligence. The corollary is that the “dumb” and “very dumb” (as Herrnstein and Murray call them) sink to the bottom, there to wallow in their stinking habits of crime, illegitimate child-birth, menial labor or unemployment, and welfare dependency.

15 Numerous commentators – collected in the Fraser (1995) and Jacoby and Glaubergerman (1995) volumes – point to Herrnstein and Murray’s consistent denigration – or non-citation – of studies that contradict the ones they favor. For excellent studies of Herrnstein and Murray’s use of sources – and the bankrolling of their favored studies by disreputable eugenicist foundations – see Jacoby and Glaubergerman (1995), Part II.

16 Herrnstein and Murray’s contradictions are particularly clear when discussing Latinos: The term, they concede, includes innumerable people of “highly disparate cultural heritages and a wide range of racial stocks.” But even so, “their tests generally fall about one-half to one standard deviation below the national mean.” The group does not exist as a coherent group. The group exists as a coherent group. Both. See Hernandez (1995).

17 Both Fraser (1995) and Jacoby and Glaubergerman (1995) devote considerable space to showing just how poorly Herrnstein and Murray use their statistics, how they misrepresent the evidence such statistics present, and how they often draw conclusions from the numbers wholly at odds with what the numbers say.

- 4 In both cases, one's genes determine one's ascent to the summit or descent into the abyss.¹⁸ Intelligence is coded in one's DNA. There is nothing you can do about it. But since genetic coding varies within as well as between groups, there is no reason to assume that dumb parents will *always* produce dumb or dumber children.
- 5 The odds that dumb parents will produce dumb offspring are increasing, however, as geographical separations between classes prevent intermarrying: more and more, "cognitive elites" breed with "cognitive elites;" the dumb breed with the dumb. (pp. 101–5).¹⁹
- 6 Beginning with chapter 13, Herrnstein and Murray argue that *g* varies regularly not only by class, but also by ethnic group (for which they mean "race"). They point out that African Americans, as a whole, consistently score 15 points lower than white Americans on standard IQ tests. While scores for both blacks and whites have risen over the years, that gap has not closed.²⁰ The authors therefore argue that the *average* African American is simply – and naturally – not as intelligent as the *average* white American. "Translated into centiles," IQ testing shows that "the average white person tests higher than about 84 percent of the population of blacks, and that the average black person tests higher than about sixteen percent of the whites". (p. 269) Unfortunately for whites, Asians out-score everyone.²¹

18 Herrnstein and Murray place a great deal of weight on the claim that intelligence is 40 to 80 percent heritable, and they typically use an estimate of 60 percent as what they hope will seem a reasonable middle ground. They further argue throughout the book that intelligence is negatively associated with pathological behavior (indeed, that is one of their main points). However, they also admit that cognitive ability "almost always explains less than 20 percent of the variance . . . usually less than 10 percent, and often less than five percent. What this means in English is that you cannot predict what a given person will do from his IQ score. . . . On the other hand, despite the low association at the individual level, large differences in social behavior separate groups of people when the groups differ intellectually on average. We will argue that intelligence itself, not just its correlation with socioeconomic status, is responsible for these group differences" (p. 117). As Stephen Jay Gould (1995: 19) points out, the assumption that intelligence is 60 percent heritable means that we must understand that genetic intelligence *at best* accounts for 12 percent of observed variation between groups, and "often" only three percent. Moreover, the best R^2 the authors report is .16 (in an appendix where it would not be noticed by many), thus suggesting the "goodness of fit" of the regression equations upon which their whole argument is built is not very good at all.

19 In Parts III and IV of their book, Herrnstein and Murray strongly imply that the cognitive sorting they describe for classes also works between races. Or, more simply, there is little opportunity for cross-racial marriages. In fact, between 1960 and 1990, according to census data, interracial marriages increased by more than 800 percent. That is, the elimination of Jim Crow and formal laws governing miscegenation, have led to greater racial mixing. As we will see, Herrnstein and Murray really want to return us to the pre-1960 days rather than, as they claim, find ways to encourage mixing between races and classes. See Lind (1998).

20 Actually, the authors concede that the gap is remarkably variable according to which studies are consulted (pp. 289–90). That is, the studies don't really support the strong claim that the black–white gap in IQ is largely invariable.

21 The authors again concede that *universally* test scores have been rising steadily since they were invented, "sometimes as much as a point a year for some span of years" (p. 308). This means one of several things: (a) IQ tests *do not* actually measure intelligence – the tests are flawed and the rise in scores is an artifact of the test itself (this conclusion must be drawn by those who want to argue for a genetic control on intelligence); (b) "environmental factors" are more important than genetic factors in determining intelligence, and the world-wide rise can be attributed to changes in the environment (such as more universal and better education); or (c) people are evolving *really fast* (this conclusion must be drawn by

- 7 These "racial" differences are *real* (they say something significant about the natural abilities of African Americans as a whole), according to the authors, because "race" itself is real. Racial differences in skin color, hair texture, "cognitive ability" and a host of other factors are there in the genes (p. 297). In other words, differences in phenotype are classifiable into groups and are mapped directly from differences in genotype – differences that themselves vary regularly between groups in a way that is more significant than all the within-group variation in these genotypes and phenotypes. Racial groups have ontological validity and are not just an artifact of statistical (or other) clustering.²²
- 8 In the end it does not matter whether the "real differences" between races are genetic or environmental (though the authors argue they plainly *are* genetic); the important point is that they are, like race itself, *real* and that fact must be faced squarely (p. 312). But these real differences are differences between *groups* and thus say nothing about *individuals*.
- 9 Indeed, statistical studies show that when controlling for IQ, African Americans have a *better* chance of graduating from college and entering a profession than do whites of the same cognitive ability.
- 10 Unfortunately, as a group African Americans are "dumber," and therefore few of them are simply smart enough to do as well as whites in college and professions (indeed, for "dumb" blacks – which the authors have already declared are the majority – there is "nothing they can learn that will repay the cost of teaching" [p. 520]).
- 11 These differences in cognitive ability, and their relative distribution within and between groups (including races) will not be influenced "much" by "outside intervention." They will be altered, however, by what the authors call "dysgenic pressures" which include higher birthrates among people of lower intelligence and immigration policies that allow in people of the wrong groups. The logical corollary (though one the authors shy away from) is that the only means to improve cognitive ability is by countering dysgenic trends with eugenic ones. That is, some *individuals* and some *groups* must both be encouraged, and others must be discouraged, from having children.

This is a truly incredible and appalling argument, and one, quite frankly, I did not think it any longer possible to make – at least not in circles beyond those circumscribed by the National Front, the Aryan Nation, the Ku Klux Klan, or the

those who would want to retain a faith in IQ testing *and* in genetics as the most important determinant of intelligence). Herrnstein and Murray understand these issues, but argue instead that (a) since the rise is universal, there is no chance that blacks will ever "catch up" with whites and Asians, and therefore IQ tests still measure innate differences between groups; and (b) that the rise is a temporary aberration: "No one is suggesting, for example that the IQ of the average American in 1776 was 30 or that it will be 159 a century from now." Moreover, they argue, "at any point in time, it is one's position in the distribution that has the most significant implications for social and economic life... and also for the position of one's children" (p. 309).

22 Herrnstein and Murray provide no evidence for their claim. They just argue that it is common sense to know that racial difference in skin color indicates some other, more fundamental difference. They also dodge the issue in some places by claiming they will "classify people according to the way they classify themselves." But to then draw conclusions about the *natural, biological* tendencies of such self-identified groups is simply perverse.

“scholars” at the Holocaust-denying Institute for Historical Revision. Herrnstein and Murray do make it, however, in a book published by a quite respected New York publisher, and they do it all under the cloak of dispassionate science.

Beyond the fact that the authors’ own data do not show what they pretend they do, the book itself is founded on a fallacy, namely, the fallacy of “race” that we have already explored. Such fallacies and bad scholarship in *The Bell Curve* have been well exposed. The general incoherence of the argument has been well scrutinized by others, and the book has been found to be not only poorly argued, but fundamentally dishonest in many instances (see Fraser 1995; Jacoby and Glauberman 1995). And yet it seems to me that one reason the book found a ready audience (and not just a critical one – see the commentaries in *The National Review*) is not necessarily because of the scientific vision the authors projected, but because of the *geographical* one.

The Bell Curve's Racist Geography

Underlying, and supporting the whole structure of the argument in *The Bell Curve* is a vision of what America “should be,” and what it should be seems to be a highly nostalgic world of small towns and authentic urban neighborhoods where everyone “knows their place.” It is a world in which the social order perfectly reflects the natural order of intelligence (as Herrnstein and Murray define it), and everybody is properly valued as to their real social and natural worth because they are “where they belong.”²³ Herrnstein and Murray establish their nostalgic geography by first exploring the dystopian direction they see the USA heading (because as a society, it fails to recognize the importance of “natural” and “immutable” cognitive difference). That dystopic world looks something like this:

It is marked first and foremost by an almost ineluctable dysgenic tendency. As we have seen, Herrnstein and Murray argue that “intelligence” is a largely “natural” or genetic attribute of individuals, that it is highly impervious to change by environmental factors, that it is correlated strongly with particular groups (such as races), that group–intelligence correlations are strengthened through geographical isolation and “in-breeding,” and that intelligence, including “group average intelligence,” is highly associated with particular behaviors (ability to make money, criminality, legitimacy and illegitimacy, etc.). Indeed, the dysgenic tendency is being *strengthened* as the “cognitive elite” more and more separate themselves out from the rest of society and work to create – purposely or not – a “custodial state” in which the elite tries to protect itself by ever stricter control over the “duller” masses. Rank fear of the growing black and Latino underclasses and their supposedly violent ways is leading elites, Herrnstein and Murray aver, to ever more fully separate themselves from society, retreating into their compounds from which they direct the ever more harsh policing of the masses. Such tendencies are evidenced in everything from the growth in prison construction and strict policing, to intolerance towards homeless people, to the continual and growing spatial concentration of the underclass. This vision actually

23 For excellent discussions of the ideological relationship between space and “natural” orders, see Cresswell (1996); Sibley (1995).

has much in common with critiques of the current social geography of urban areas by scholars and activists on the Left (e.g. Davis 1990; Mackenzie 1994), except that Herrnstein and Murray explain the evolution of what they call a "high-tech, more lavish version of the Indian reservation" (p. 526) by reference to the putative "natural intelligence" of different groups in society. It's not the *only* outcome towards which such "natural" differences must lead, but it is currently the predominant one.

It should be noted, however, that with the exception of this one reference to an Indian reservation, Herrnstein and Murray nowhere directly link the evolution of the high-tech reservation system (or any alternative to it) to race itself; they only link it to differences in "mental ability." But no reader can help but remember that the authors have already spent more than a hundred pages explicitly linking "cognitive ability" to race, and putatively showing that African Americans, among others, just aren't smart enough (and never will be). What they see as the probable future is one in which African Americans and Indians and anyone else "not especially bright" will live in a world apart, and in a geography of quite dehumanizing conditions.

That makes their alternative all the more intriguing – and the racial geography in it even more obscene. In their final chapter, titled "A Place for Everyone," Herrnstein and Murray suggest that the cognitive elite should develop policies that take as their inspiration a time past when good Americans realized and *valued* innate differences between people. "In a simpler America, being comparatively low in the qualities measured by IQ did not necessarily affect the ability to find a valued niche in society. Many such people worked on farms" (p. 536).²⁴ The authors define "valued" in the following way: "You occupy a valued place if other people would miss you if you were gone. . . . Both the quality and the quantity of valued places are important. . . . If a single person would miss you and no one else, you have a fragile hold on your place in society, no matter how much that one person cares for you. To have many people who would miss you, in many different parts of your life and at many levels of intensity, is a hallmark of a person whose place is well and thoroughly valued" (p. 535). That's a stunning argument if you remember the context – "a simpler America." When was that?

One "blueprint of the good society" to which Herrnstein and Murray refer might be the period from 1890 to 1915, according to Jacqueline Jones (1995: 82–3; see also Wickham 1995). "While the country was undergoing a process of urbanization and industrialization, the majority of black people were domestic servants and agricultural workers (that is, they worked at jobs befitting their low mental abilities, in the parlance of *The Bell Curve*)."²⁵ But this was the time of Jim Crow, of race riots against Asian and African Americans in northern cities, and of the often violent

24 Similar arguments concerning the natural order of place in a "simpler America" have been made in other realms, too. Law scholar Robert Ellickson (1996), for example, has proposed tackling the problem of chronic homelessness by instituting programs of "informal zoning" (reinforced by police practices) in which each member of society is kept in her or his "proper place" – for the homeless, that means they will be kept, forcefully if necessary, on Skid Row, where "they belong."

25 If Herrnstein and Murray seem a bit coy on the implications of their research, one of the authors they approvingly cite is not. Michael Levin of the City College of New York says, "Race difference shows that whites aren't at fault for blacks being down, and making whites pay for something they're not responsible for is a terrible injustice. Eliminating affirmative action is the first step. Next – please, yes, if only – eliminate the Civil Rights Act" (quoted in Miller 1995: 165).

restriction of Latinos to “their side of the tracks” in the Southwest. Herrnstein and Murray persist in their delusional geography, nonetheless. In urban neighborhoods of the golden past, they argue, “anyone who wanted to have a place in the community could find one in the local school boards, churches, union halls, garden clubs, and benevolent associations of one sort or another. . . . Someone who was mentally a bit dull might not be chosen to head up the parish clothing drive but was certainly eligible to help out” (p. 537).

If that model of interaction between the smart and the dumb – the black and the white – in America seems a bit fanciful, Jacqueline Jones suggests another model which fits the author’s argument much better, but which they may have shied away from. “On the plantation, blacks and whites coexisted in a relatively peaceful way (though the peace was always enforced with violence or the threat of it)” and the division of labor – between those who could “head up” and those who could “help out” – was as clearly drawn as it was inclusive.

The slave plantation operated on the principle that all low-IQ persons (i.e., blacks) could work productively and should be taken care of accordingly – a virtue in any society. If we extrapolate from Herrnstein and Murray’s analysis – and understand the planter as a paternalistic smart white man overseeing lots of hardworking black males and fecund “wenches,” and controlling the “Nats” predisposed to violent crime or rebellion – then the slave plantation takes on a more benevolent, or at least socially useful, cast. (Jones 1995: 86)

Such is the result that Herrnstein and Murray’s analysis of race, IQ, and society, combined with their complaints about a reservation state, gets us.

Perhaps Herrnstein and Murray would not go quite that far, but it is hard to see where the line should be drawn between the kind of “value” they define as important in society, and the way that slave owners “valued” their slaves (figure 9.3). After all, a hard-working slave would surely be missed by many if she or he escaped or died. Knowing the dangers of making clear these historical antecedents for the world they want to construct, Herrnstein and Murray instead promote a vision of world order that perhaps could best be called conservative multiculturalism. In this vision people recognize that “cognitive partitioning will continue; [i]t cannot be stopped,” and that “inequality of endowments, including intelligence, is a reality” (p. 551). The roots of a “liberal and just society” (p. 388), therefore, lie in people coming to appreciate their own natural endowment – and learning to respect and appreciate others’. As neo-conservative cultural commentator Andrew Hacker noted, such a vision of the just society has roots in such ancient philosophers as Plato and Socrates, and in more modern philosophers such as Edmund Burke. In Hacker’s (1995: 107) words,

If all of us can be led to accept our “appointed place,” the result will be personal happiness and social stability. Those of high ability and deserved responsibilities will be able to find cheerful and deferential servants to mow their lawns and clean their homes. We will also have a class of skilled and reliable artisans, who take pride in their callings. In addition, they will charge appropriate fees, realizing what is their rightful due. And if governance follows the Burkean model, citizens will grant that rule belongs to those best able to conduct matters of state. In return, all will be honored and respected for jobs well done, without condescension on one side or envy on the other. To which

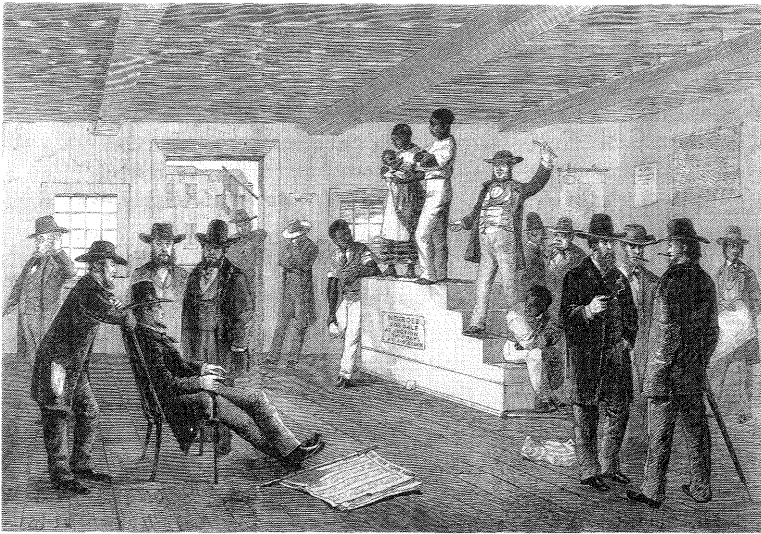


Figure 9.3 Determining the “value” of a human being in New Orleans. Also on auction here: estates and pictures. Herrnstein and Murray suggest that the value of people depends on whether (and how much) they would be missed when they die or move on. It is never clear in *The Bell Curve* where the authors would draw the line between the world depicted here and the one they want to create. Source: *Leeds Anti-Slavery Series*, No. 16.

must be added a further *Bell Curve* corollary: if members of some races are found, on average, to be less suited for responsibilities, they should accept this as nature’s dictate and not human artifice.

Such a vision of a “liberal and just” society has had many adherents, but they have often made a much more explicit account of what “place” in such a world must imply.

“Clear-headed thinkers” pursuing such a Burkean universe understand that if it is the case that some are simply naturally inferior to others, then daily contact between people of different castes is best avoided. The best model of the world Herrnstein and Murray hope to see constructed is thus, beyond doubt, apartheid South Africa. Here, for example, is South Africa’s Minister of the Interior, Dr. T.E. Dönges, in the debate over the Group Areas Act (a crucial component of apartheid), in May, 1950:

Hon. Members will realize what it must mean to those groups, always to have to adopt an inferior attitude, an attitude of inferiority towards Europeans, to stand back for the Europeans, where they live alongside the Europeans, but if we place them in separate residential areas, they will be able to give expression to their full cultural and soul life, and that is why we say that separate residential areas must be established. (Quoted in Western 1996: 86)

It’s easy enough to see the disingenuousness of these remarks – full cultural and soul life, indeed! It’s not much harder to see the same disingenuousness in Herrnstein and Murray’s professed concern for the ability of “each human being” to find their proper place in society: “It is time for America once again to try living with

inequality, as life is lived,” they intone in the final sentences of the main part of their book:

understanding that each human being has strengths and weaknesses, qualities we admire and qualities we do not admire, competencies and incompetencies, assets and debits; that the success of each human being is not measured externally but internally [i.e. genetically]; that of all the rewards we can confer on each other, the most precious is a place as a valued fellow citizen. (pp. 551–2)

Perhaps Herrnstein and Murray, like Charles White and Glenn Trewartha, might like us to value blacks for their “economy of sweat,” or perhaps like the racist South African Dönges they really are interested in the full development of the “soul life” of people presumably less intelligent than themselves. Either way, theirs is a fully racist geography, and so it is important to turn to an examination of just how that geography has played itself out in practice.

Apartheid and the Geography of the Race Idea

While analysts like Herrnstein and Murray keep debates about race alive by obscuring their fallacious basis, social policy, economic development, and so much else remains predicated on the *assumption* that “race” is a real thing. As that is the case, it is especially important for geographers to turn their attention to the *idea* of race, for the circulation and powerful reinforcement of that *idea* is decisive in how we organize the world. A focus on the geography of the idea of race shows how race, like culture, can be *made* very real “on the ground” through a series of spatial strategies designed to make the reification of race a fact, if not of nature, then of society. Groups *are* formed in society. Group membership *can* be quite determinant in such things as social opportunity, education, income, and the power to effect change. But this is not because of some natural, genetic sorting process, but rather because of the workings of social power. The policing of race – of group difference – relies not only on such arguments as those made in *The Bell Curve*, but also in the sorts of social policies, and the sorts of geographies, that works like *The Bell Curve* seek to create.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the system of apartheid that ruled South Africa until 1991, and which was decisively eliminated – as a constitutional tenet of South African life – with the election of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress in 1994. Apartheid literally means “apart-ness” – the creation of separate spaces for separate races in South Africa. It rests on and makes possible what John Western (1996) famously called “the power of definition” – that social ability to name (a group, a group’s place in society, a person) and make that name stick. To define one person or one group as “dumb” or as “low in cognitive ability” is, as we have seen, a powerful ideological tendency. But there is nothing inherent in the defining process that makes definitions “stick.” Rather, that is a question of power. On the one hand, as Lefebvre (1991: 44) put it, “ideology only achieves consistency by intervening in social space and in its production, and by thus taking on body therein. Ideology *per se* might well be said to consist primarily in a discourse upon social space.” On the other hand, while space itself, through its built form and codes of conduct, has the effect of sorting

and dividing, or assuring people do or do not mingle, such control is never perfect, and must be policed both ideologically and through raw exercise of power itself (through violence, incarceration, etc.). In short, space and spatiality *make* "race," to the degree that they require the separation of peoples into groups and reinforce ideological notions about race. Or, as Kay Anderson (1987: 584) has put it concerning Vancouver's Chinatown (see chapter 4), "racial ideology [is] materially embedded in space... and it is through 'place' that it has been given a local referent, become a social fact, and *aided in its own reproduction*" (emphasis added). In this regard, geographical "isolation," the factor most commonly adduced as the prime cause in phenotypic and genotypic variation between groups, *does* make a difference in the construction of "race," but not at the level of biology. It is a key fact in the *social* construction of races.

Apartheid effected this social construction and gave race "its local referent" through a series of laws that regulated the movements and actions of people of different "races" at three primary scales.²⁶ At the most immediately personal level, interaction between people was controlled through the "microsegregation" of everyday space – buses, toilets, beaches, seating at stadiums and theaters, elevators, and the like (Western 1996: 61) (figure 9.4). This "petty apartheid" sought to assure that no informal contact between the "races" went unregulated, and it saturated every aspect of life. At the urban scale, apartheid divided the space of the cities into separate residential areas for each racial group (figure 9.5). Enforced in part through the Group Areas Act of 1950 (and its successors), this level of segregation was effected through restrictions on the sale of homes across race lines, and through an extensive program of urban planning, including the destruction of whole residential neighborhoods if they were occupied by the "wrong" race (Kruger 1992). At the regional and national scale, apartheid operated through the creation of "homelands" for different racial groups and the enforcement of "pass laws" which regulated the movement and



Figure 9.4 Signs of petty apartheid. In Apartheid South Africa, space was partitioned right down to the level of the beach, park, and toilet. Photomontage by Mike Bostock, Henry Holt Company.

26 I use the past tense in this paragraph because the legal basis for apartheid has been removed. That does not mean that apartheid as a spatial system has somehow simply disappeared.

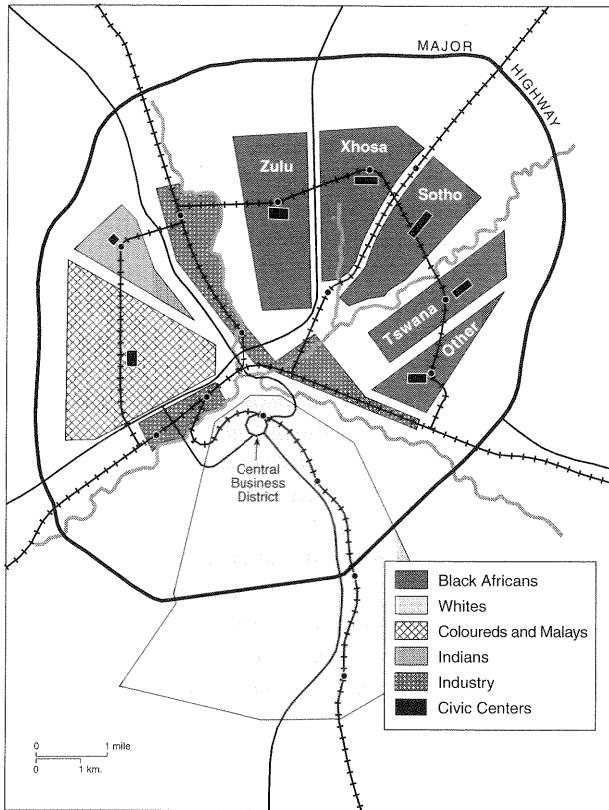


Figure 9.5 Using a set of principles laid out by the Durban city planning department, John Western suggests that the dream of an ideal apartheid city looked something like this. Such perfect separation and symmetry was never fully achieved under apartheid, but urban space was nonetheless radically sorted. Source: Redrawn from Western (1996: 91).

settlement of non-whites (figure 9.6). Together these scales of “apartness” were meant to solidify on the ground a “perfect system of control,” as Jennifer Robinson (1990) has called it, in which white domination was made manifest and reinforced through a clear geographic strategy. Segregation was a form of domination; it had no other purpose (Western 1990: 60).

It was also a means of reinforcing difference. If apartheid apologists saw segregation as a means of allowing for the full development of each race, then that was only a poor euphemism for the goal of complete separation between the races – the goal of a clear spatial strategy for creating and enforcing that which simply was not there in “human nature.” At the urban scale, racial group residential areas were created (with whites arrogating to themselves the most desirable areas, of course) and reinforced through environmental means – the creation of solid barriers between groups, such as superhighways, rail-lines, empty tracts of land, or, less optimally, fences and walls – and through the unrelenting *physical* policing of people who were “out of place.” Among black South Africans, fine distinctions were made between ethnic groups and separate areas were set aside for Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, and others. No such distinctions were made between various white ethnicities, despite a long history of animosity between, for example British- and Dutch-descended South Africans. The goal, obviously, was control through division, and control was meant to be a *white* (minority) project. “Race” was thus a precondition for the division of space in South

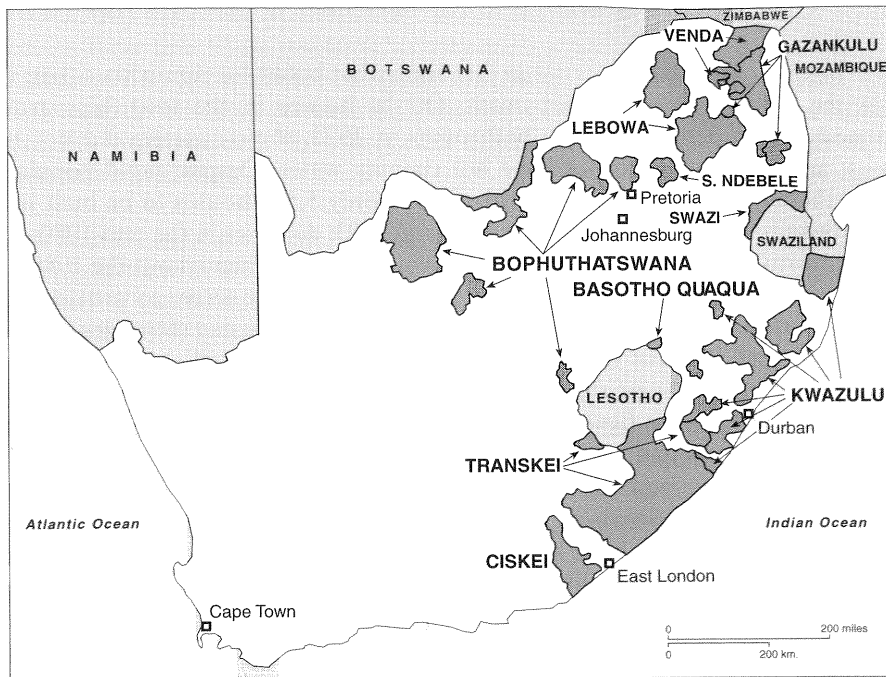


Figure 9.6 A plan for “homelands” in South Africa (ca. 1975). Source: Redrawn from Western (1996: 67).

Africa, but it was also very much an outcome. Whites were whites (even if there were class differences); but blacks were a lot of things, each of which needed to be provided with its own space in which to develop a full “cultural and soul life.”

The details of life in the different group areas of South Africa under apartheid are well known. Whites could live very well indeed (even accounting for differences of class status), reserving for themselves the best lands, the best views, the best schools, and the best neighborhoods. They could, as John Western (1996: 309) has put it, choose to believe that “nonwhites and their problems . . . have been put at a distance” and that they had thereby “lessened the potential for ‘friction’” between races. In the black homelands and the non-white townships and squatter settlements, by contrast, conditions were (and are) bleak. In the Transkei in the 1970s, for example, some two-thirds of the households were *never* able to produce enough food to be self-sufficient; 70 percent of the remainder only produced enough for self-sufficiency during good years. Child malnutrition hovered around 12 percent and infant mortality around 25 percent. Movement to urban centers in search of work was an economic necessity for black males in the homelands, just as black labor was necessary to the functioning of the “white” South African economy (Western 1996: 289). Such was made abundantly clear in 1976 when the minister for Bantu administration and development “stated that the only reason for which black Africans were permitted in ‘white areas’ was to sell their labor.” And the pass laws, designed to assure that blacks did no more in “white areas” than sell their labor, were vigorously policed. In 1975–6 alone, 1 of every 25 black Africans in putatively

“white” South Africa was prosecuted for infractions of the pass laws (Western 1996: 291).

In urban shantytowns things are in fact somewhat better for non-whites than they are in the homelands – but not much. Of the houses in the townships around Johannesburg 85 percent had no bathrooms in 1975; three-quarters did not have ceilings; and two-thirds did not have hot running water. Despite rapid population growth, the South African government allowed only 5,500 houses to be built in the already overcrowded Soweto between 1970 and 1983: densities in the mid-1980s were between 10 and 15 people per house (Goodwin 1984: 98). Throughout the 1980s, the South African government increasingly relied on the private sector to provide housing for non-whites, a policy that did nothing but intensify housing shortages. By 1991, the Development Bank of South Africa estimated, about 7 million South Africans lived in informal dwellings; the “official” housing shortage was estimated to be 1.2 million (Saff 1994). These figures were exacerbated by, on the one hand, the historical attempts to “remove” and relocate people of the “wrong” race from group areas not designated for them; and on the other, continued high rates of rural to urban migration among black South Africans. Together these trends have led to appallingly low levels of nutrition in both the homelands and the townships and such social deprivations as lack of schooling, high unemployment rates, and poor healthcare. Education in the group areas and townships was bad enough that students frequently boycotted classes, protesting lack of textbooks, broken facilities, and understaffing. Occasionally these boycotts led to full-fledged protest movements and riots (as in Cape Town in 1980: Western 1996: 327–31). Were Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray to transport their study of IQ to South Africa, they would no doubt maintain that any differences found between “races” was a product of bad genes rather than any environmental or social factor. And their brand of “conservative multiculturalism” would tell us that it is best that the various peoples of South Africa continue to pursue, as they always have, the separate development of their full cultural and soul life. They, like apartheid’s planners, would urge that everyone keep in mind that there really is a proper place for everyone.

Unfortunately for Herrnstein and Murray and for apartheid’s supporters, but not for most South Africans, the overthrow of the Afrikaner government and the legal dismantling of apartheid have shown that there are other, better paths to development. But even so there is not much cause to hope that the vast disparities in wealth, education, nutrition, and the like between whites, coloureds, and blacks in South Africa will be quickly overcome. Rather, as Grant Saff (1994) has shown, the reality is that as space is being “deracialized,” at the same time it is being reseggregated on the basis of class. Saff (1994: 382) points to two simultaneous processes at work in the post-apartheid city. The first is a process of *desegregation* of white suburbs and urban enclaves. Desegregation “is characterized by the in-migration of blacks [and other non-whites] of an income status equal to or higher than those [whites] moving out.” The process can work the other way too. Saff (1994: 385) reports that in Cape Town, whites have begun to move into a formerly Malay area, gentrifying property and forcing out lower-income Malays.

The second trend is towards the *deracialization* of space. Here the process is one of “the expansion of townships or informal settlements onto the boundaries of, or within, ‘white’ municipal areas” (Saff 1994: 382). As he points out, “while spatially

the racial impress of the apartheid city is changed by this process, it has little social effect on these new black residents, as they are excluded from access to virtually all the facilities and social institutions (such as schools) within the 'white' areas." White resistance to deracialization, these days, tends to be expressed in class rather than race terms. For example, one white petitioner against the appearance of black squatter settlements noted that:

The issue is standards and not race since we already have several black families living in Presidents Park. . . . We strongly object to the siting of squatter shacks right on the doorstep of our R200,000 homes which will be devalued to the extent that they will be unsaleable [*sic*] at any price. (Quoted in Saff 1994: 388)

What apartheid established, in other words, was a geography of privilege that worked not only to police the boundaries of wealth – to establish the spatial form in which the reproduction of inequality was possible – but to do so by simultaneously establishing and policing the geographical boundaries of "race." With no existence in biology, "race" was *created* and *maintained* through the geography of apartheid. The legal dismantling of the apartheid system, as important as it is, is only one step in the process of "deracializing" society and space, not the deracialization as represented by squatter incursions into "white" areas, but the sort of deracialization implied by the need to dismantle the policing of socio-spatial *boundaries* established for the sole purpose of *creating* and *naturalizing* exactly that which is not the least bit "natural:" race. Such a project in South Africa, as elsewhere, will be one of also dismantling the *class* privilege that has historically attended being "white" (see Roediger 1991).

Conclusion: Space Makes Race

The moral of the story of apartheid should be plain: As a geographical system it used space to quite literally construct and maintain hard-and-fast boundaries between "races." That is, it constructed on the ground precisely that which could not be constructed in our bodies: clear distinctions between us. It should also be plain that the legal destruction of apartheid does not imply the end of "race" in South Africa. Far from it. As in America, race is built into the ground, in housing and neighborhood patterns, in funding of schools, hospitals, and other necessities of life (Massey and Denton 1993). As Susan Smith put it in 1989, in a statement little undermined by the collapse of apartheid a few years later, "racial (racist) exclusivity may be less a legacy of the past and more a strategy for the future in advanced industrial economies" (S. Smith 1989: viii). This is so because, among other things, one of the contradictions of contemporary capitalism is that it is an incredible force for homogeneity at the same time as it is an incredible force for heterogeneity.²⁷ As the relations of capital expand, putting everybody on the same footing as buyers and sellers of commodities (their own labor power; Big Macs), there is simultaneously the need for distinction between and within people not only to accord with ever more

27 A now classic, if often incomprehensible, account of this issue is Appadurai (1990); see also chapter 10 below.

complex divisions of labor, but also as a means of guarding against advancing costs of labor power (see chapter 3). The “racialization of labor” (Jackson 1992b) is one means by which difference can be organized to the benefit of capital by creating castes and classes in which decent pay is somehow “unnatural,” or “undeserved.” Apartheid surely operated on this assumption, but such racialization is part of a more general process in which “capital uses racial, national and sexual categorization to differentiate between groups of workers, splitting the labour force, and permitting the super-exploitation of certain sectors” (Castles, with Booth and Wallace 1984: 98, quoted in S. Smith 1989: 8). As Susan Smith (1989) argues, this “unequal dispensation of economic rights” finds a corollary and seeks its legitimacy in unequal distribution of other rights, particularly those of citizenship.

It is in this sense that “race” may be understood as a “strategy” for advanced capitalist societies: if race can be seen as a *natural* basis for unequal access to rights (as Herrnstein and Murray assert), if race can be presented as a commonsense reason why some in society are meant to be more privileged (with money and in the eyes of the state), then such inequality is made to appear as pre-ordained, as simply the natural order of things (S. Smith 1989: 8).²⁸ In other words, the continued definition and redefinition of “race,” refracted through unceasing political and economic struggle over the power to define both people and space – their being *and* their place – must be predicated on keeping alive clear distinctions in social practice precisely *because* they do not exist in biological fact. All the references to “can be seen” and “made to appear” in the preceding sentences are a clear indication that what we are dealing with here is nothing “natural” at all; it is instead the power to define, the power to reify, the power to make the social into the natural.

If race is a social practice, then, the spaces in which we make that practice are crucial. To approach this issue from a slightly different angle than the preceding paragraph, consider the relative ability, in white-dominant society, to move about, to travel. Metaphors of movement and travel are very much the rage in contemporary social theory (see Cresswell 1997), drawing often on the insights of James Clifford (1992: 111), who has argued that the metaphor of “travel” within and between cultures is valuable because it comes laden with images of “gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, documents, and the like.” That is, thinking about relationships between peoples as relationships of “travel” keeps at the forefront the hierarchical order of the world in which we live, for it is by movement within and between those hierarchies, and across the boundaries that delineate one “culture” from another, that the possibility of cultural creativity, resistance, and transformation opens. “Travel, in this view, denotes a range of material, spatial practices that produce knowledges, stories, traditions, comportments, musics, books, diaries, and other cultural expressions” (Clifford 1992: 108). In apartheid South Africa it meant pass laws.

For the USA, bell hooks (1992: 343–4) worries that Clifford’s notion of travel “would always make it difficult for there to be recognition of an experience of travel that is not about play but is an encounter with terrorism. . . . To travel, I must

28 This is precisely the issue under contention in one of the key “culture wars” in the contemporary United States – the ongoing debates over affirmative action in America. The argument is that somehow disadvantaged groups have not *earned* a place in universities, jobs, etc.

always move through fear, confront terror.” As a black woman, hooks knows just how much her own travel is circumscribed by the racialized and gendered spaces in which she must live, work, and move. “All black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with possibility that they will be terrorized by whiteness” (hooks 1992: 345).²⁹ By contrast, “in white supremacist society, white people can ‘safely’ imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people accorded them the right to control the black gaze. . . . Since most white people do not have to ‘see’ black people (constantly appearing on billboards, televisions, movies, in magazines, etc.) and they do not need to be ever on guard, observing black people, to be ‘safe,’ they can live as though black people are invisible and can even imagine that they are also invisible to blacks” (hooks 1992: 340).³⁰ They can live so, that is, until some event erupts into their consciousness – like the collapse of apartheid in the wake of continual demonstrations and organizing, or the more sudden Los Angeles rebellion in 1992 – and forces them to come to grips with the specific racial geographies that have been created (see Davis 1990, 1998).

hook’s comments need to be put in context. Her point is not that whites understand themselves as *simply* invisible. Rather, it is that they continually try to construct for themselves a world in which they are *in fact* invisible to blacks. Fear of black people is crucial here. The aim has been – and is – in white racist societies to create and maintain a world in which whites have near total freedom of movement precisely because blacks do not. The “travel” of whites is predicated on the sequestration of blacks. It is precisely here, then, that Herrnstein and Murray’s desire for a world organized around some putatively natural “place for everyone” gains its greatest, and most horrific, currency.

This construction of a “place for everyone” – a place that whites could move freely and invisibly across – was also, of course, precisely the practical problem faced by apartheid’s planners. How should that “terrorism of travel” be institutionalized so that knowing one’s place became as natural as Herrnstein and Murray would like it to be? And, simultaneously, how could certain forms of travel across the hard and fast boundaries of space – to work, for example, in the shops and factories of the city or the homes of the suburbs – be controlled so as to retain the essential hierarchies enforced through the division of space? How could the travel of the racial “other” be controlled such that it became impossible for blacks (and other racial groups) to burst their bounds and spill into spaces where they “do not belong?” South Africa’s pass laws, which attempted to govern the movement of blacks across putatively “white” space, but which contained no similar provisions for whites, was an attempt to answer just these questions, but so too is the construction of what Mike Davis (1998: 359–422) describes as a new “social ecology” for cities such as Los Angeles. This

29 These issues have had frequent hearing in the United States Supreme Court, most recently concerning the right of a black man to walk unmolested by the police through “white” neighborhoods in San Diego (*Kolender v. Lawson* 461 USA 352 [1983]). That such a right would have to be affirmed by the Supreme Court is some indication of the degree to which it is a right honored in the breach rather than in the practice.

30 This was just the point that John Western was making above about how apartheid made it possible for whites in South Africa to imagine that they had “distanced” themselves from the problems they attributed to non-whites.

“ecology,” predicated on abject (and largely racial) fear, seeks to re-order the city into a series of more or less contained spaces of control.

The point is bigger than that, however, for the issue is not just one of control. Rather, as we have seen, at the most fundamental level, control over the production of space – the ability to create space in particular ways – also lends to powerful groups the ability to actively *create* race. That is, “race itself” – that social reification, that ideology masquerading as nature – is made “real” on the ground through the maintenance of spatial boundaries. If “race” is something that does not exist, then it is always something that *is made* to exist through specific (if contested) practices and policies. And it is something that is ideologically supported through the work of defining and redefining just what it is that is “natural.”

The eviction of Theresa Seamster from the Greeley Mall in December, 1995, for wearing gang colors might be seen simply as an example of stupid and overzealous policing. There is no doubt it was that. But given the context, amid debates about the relationship between race and crime, while the arguments about Herrnstein and Murray’s desire to put everyone in their place were still raging, and at a moment in American history when fear is the reigning principle by which space is being divided, sorted, and ordered, it would be a mistake to attribute Seamster’s experiences to mere anomaly. Instead, they show the degree to which “race” itself is a project of the ordering and controlling of space – and of ordering and controlling the movement (or “travel”) of people. For many whites, safety is defined precisely by making others invisible. And if that is not completely possible, then efforts can at least be made to assure that everyone knows her or his place, that movements are strictly controlled so that the lives of the privileged are not unduly disrupted. Theresa Seamster’s “mistake” was that she put herself “out of place” by showing up at the mall with the “wrong” clothes, the “wrong” friends, and, most importantly, the “wrong” skin color. She had no *rights*.

Geographies of Belonging? Nations, Nationalism, and Identity in an Era of “Deterritorialization”

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Why did it seem so *wrong* for Theresa Seamster to be seen in public, dressed as she pleased, doing as she wanted? Why is it still so contentious when black people in America claim what is their *right*? Part of the answer to those questions surely has to do with the continual reproduction of the proper “places for everyone” explored in the last chapter, but part must also have to do with the nature of the American nation more generally. Who counts as an American?, Theresa Seamster’s case forces us to ask. What does an “American” look like, and what rights is one entitled to? These questions, so haunted as they are with the politics and geography of race, are hardly unique to the United States. Consider the identical questions for England: What is “Englishness”? Who are “English”? What do they look like? Where are they to be found? There are, of course, no easy answers to those questions, but perhaps a rather stark image will help us see who is *not* English – at least in many people’s minds.

Look at Ingrid Pollard’s photograph (figure 10.1) of a black woman out for a walk in the English countryside, pausing to admire the view of rolling hills, fields, and wood-lots so evocative of rural England. Accompanying the photograph is a stark text: “. . . feeling I don’t belong. Walks through leafy glades with a baseball bat by my side . . .” Pollard’s work asks what it means to belong, what it means to be excluded – often violently – from the England that is her home, and indeed what it means for her to be “at home” in the first place. Much of Pollard’s work, in fact, is designed explicitly to ask *who* has the right to the land, who can call the land “home.” Other