Cynthia Kaufman, "Theorizing and Fighting Racism"

The idea of race

As we have seen in previous chapters, racism has been and continues to be an important part of the US political landscape. And yet, race has not always been an important social category. People's consciousness of the distinctions between their group and others on the basis of physical differences has developed over time, and the values assigned to those differences have been determined more by politics than by science or common sense.

This is an important point to clarify at the beginning of this chapter because the concept of race has had such powerful effects on our social system that it is hard to imagine a world without racial categorization.

But, in fact, the idea of the human species being divided into biologically distinct races goes back only about as far as the conquest of the Americas. Before that, people hated one another on the basis of all sorts of differences, but the nature of those dislikes was not centered on the idea of race.

We often think of race as the description of the natural differences that resulted from human beings evolving in different parts of the world, but biologists do not accept as valid the popular concept of race. People who believe in race as biological fact have never come to agreement on how many races there are or how they are divided. Where on the globe do people stop being Asian and start being white? Are Arabs white or Asian or African? Aren't Native Americans from Asia, and what about Jews and biracial people? Which physical differences mark someone as white as opposed to Black? Although we usually refer to race as being marked by skin color, many "white" people have darker skin than many "Black" people do. Our racial designations are built upon a complex mixture of skin color, hair texture, eyelid shape, lip shape, noses, family histories, geographic accidents, and political ideology.

All of these complications lead Omi and Winant to assert that

> Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called "phenotypes"), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process.

To say that our popular ideas about race are not based in biological truths does not mean that race does not exist as asocial reality. Race has become one of the most important axes of social power.

Racial Formation in the United States

The "discovery" of the Americas by English, Spanish, and other adventurers created such a cultural, economic, and physical dislocation as to produce the first "racial" formation in human history. Linked by their common goal of economic exploitation, the competitive English, Spanish, Dutch, and other explorers all began to see themselves as on the same side in one sense. Omi and Winant argue that at the time of Columbus' first voyage to the Americas,

the "discovery" signaled a break from previous proto-racial awareness by which Europe contemplated its "Others" in a relatively disorganized fashion. 1n other words, the "conquest of America" was not simply an epochal historical event--however unparalleled in its importance. It was also the advent of a consolidated social structure of exploitation, appropriation, and domination. Its representation, first in religious terms, but soon enough in scientific and political ones, initiated modern racial awareness.

Although the 18th century in Europe saw the rise of ideas of natural rights, it also saw Europeans increasingly involved in practices of colonialism and slavery. The contradiction between belief in equality and their desire to treat others unequally necessitated the development of increasingly sophisticated systems of justification. The idea that human beings can be divided into fundamentally different types helped solve this problem. Thus, Thomas Jefferson, while arguing for equal rights for "all men" simultaneously argued that there were natural differences between people that should determine how we treat them. "Will not a lover of natural history, then, one who views the gradations in all the animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those [gradations] in the department of Man as distinct as nature has formed them?," The gradations between European and Native American "man" was an essential distinction for those who wanted to expand their fortunes in the American colonies. From its very beginning, the Anglo-Saxon occupation of North America was in the form of settler colonies. This distinguishes it from colonies in which the conquerors go to a place and set up a system of government with the sole purpose of extracting wealth from the indigenous population. The fundamental premise of a settler colony is that the indigenous people are to be eliminated, and a satellite of the original society is to be set up. This was the premise behind the idea of "manifest destiny": that the United States, as an Anglo-Saxon nation, was destined to rule the whole continent. The rationale of racial superiority was seen as an adequate excuse for the wholesale slaughter of any indigenous inhabitants.

The colors of white

The idea of race developed to help manage economic and political interactions between a variety of groups attempting to live and prosper in the colonies. The United States was founded on principles of economic hierarchy, and the wealthy acted to protect their privileges. As these privileges began to be challenged by European and African indentured servants and Indians, the ruling elite began to develop an ideology that allowed some privilege to poor Europeans in return for their allegiance against poor people from other backgrounds. Thus, according to Scott Malcomson, European colonial powers established "white" as a legal concept in 1676 after Bacon's Rebellion, during which indentured servants of European and African descent united against the colonial elite. The legal distinction of white divided the servant class on the basis of skin color and continental origin. In that period, the concept of "free person" shifted from being based on being a Christian to being white. Increasingly, legal rights became predicated upon race.

At the time of the founding of the United States, "white" included English, German, and Dutch people. But it specifically excluded Irish, Italian, and Polish people. In his book, *Whiteness of a Different Color,* Mathew Jacobson argues that, as large numbers of Irish, German, Polish, and Jewish people began to immigrate to the United States, members of the dominant Anglo-Saxon group engaged in a nativist backlash against immigration, questioning the whiteness of these groups, even those previously considered white in other contexts.

Jacobson argues that the Irish were welcomed in as whites during the Civil War by pro-slavery

northerners and also by those whites who were agitating against Chinese immigration into the western territories. Both groups sought more whites, especially Celts, in order to develop a larger coalition of support for their policies.

According to Omi and Winant, Congress' first citizenship law, the Naturalization Act of 1790, defined those eligible for citizenship as "free 'white' immigrants."

Throughout the 19th century, many state and federal legal arrangements recognized only three racial categories: 'white," "Negro," and "Indian." In California, the influx of the Chinese and the debates surrounding the legal status of Mexicans provoked a brief judicial crisis of racial definition. California attempted to resolve this dilemma by assigning Mexicans and Chinese to categories within the already existing framework of "legally defined" racial groups. In the wake of the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexicans were defined as a "white" population and accorded the political-legal status of "free white persons." By contrast the California Supreme Court ruled in *People v. Hall* (1854) that Chinese should be considered "Indian"[!] and denied the political rights accorded to whites.

These racial categories have shifted over time, sometimes as a result of political movements on the part of people not defined as white and sometimes as a result of state action. According to Omi and Winant,

> The concept of "Asian-American" for example, arose as a political label in the 1960s. This reflected the similarity of treatment that various groups such as Chinese Americans, Japanese American, Korean Americans, etc. (groups which had not previously considered themselves as having a common agenda) received at the hands of state institutions.

As the legal and cultural definitions of the different racial groups shifted over time, one thing remained central, though continuously challenged: the notion that the country is a fundamentally white nation. White supremacy has been the cornerstone of the development of US racial consciousness. While who exactly counts as white and how non-white people are categorized has changed significantly over time, what hasn't changed is the basic belief that the country fundamentally belongs to its white citizens.

In the United States, being legally white has meant having ancestors from exclusively European backgrounds. Since the beginning of slavery, Blacks and whites have mixed, often as the result of white masters raping the Black women they enslaved. In order to protect the lineage of the white family, the children from these liaisons were considered Black. In this way, the legal system developed the famous "one-drop rule." One drop of blood from an African ancestor defined one as Black. Similar rules applied for people of mixed heritage from liaisons between whites and indigenous peoples. Even after slavery was abolished and people of African decent became eligible for citizenship, white supremacists still wanted to exclude other people of color from citizenship. From the 1870s all the way through the 1920s, there was a powerful movement to exclude Asians from US citizenship, with much of the battle taking place in the Supreme Court and Congress.

Dalip Singh Saund was a Punjabi Sikh who immigrated to California's Imperial Valley in 1920. A successful farmer, he wanted to become a citizen. His desire was partly based on a desire for political rights, but even more crucial was the fact that without citizenship, under California's "Alien Land Law," Saund wasn't able to own land. Saund formed an organization of South Asian immigrants who lobbied Congress and, after three years of fighting, eventually won the right to naturalized citizenship. In 1956, he was elected to the US House of Representatives.

The government's responses to challenges from Asian immigrants affirmed the whiteness of all people from European backgrounds. Yet, at the same time, anti-immigrant rhetoric was heating up and challenging the whiteness of many immigrant groups.

> Thus, in this period of volatile racial meanings, peoples such as Celts, Italians, Hebrews, and Slavs were becoming less and less white in debates over who should be allowed to disembark on American shores, and yet were becoming whiter and whiter in debates over who should be granted the full rights of citizenship.

This conflict began a discussion of the meaning of ethnicity, which is how the differences between groups of Europeans came to be characterized. This discussion was split off from discussion of race. And the idea of the melting pot took off in popular consciousness. The melting pot was the idea that as European immigrants came to the United States they lost their ethnicities and became "American." This concept helped make sense of the position of whites from different' backgrounds and facilitated their assimilation into one white group united against other non-white groups. Thus, the idea of the melting pot was used not to describe how all people in the country were to become part of one unified culture but, rather, how people from Europe would shed their ethnicities to become white.

In many important ways the United States has been a Protestant, Christian nation from the beginning. This religious category was used to exclude people who might otherwise be considered white, such as Catholics, Jews, Moslems, and Sikhs. The concept of white was stretched in the 19th century to include Catholics such as the Irish and Italians. Jews are the most recent group to go through this process of becoming "whiter."

Most people in the white American mainstream consider Jews of European descent to be white. For their definition of whiteness, a European cultural background is more important than religious affiliation. And yet, as Jews have moved toward being more accepted as whites, there has been a simultaneous rise in 'anti-Semitic forms of Christian fundamentalism. Those members of the Christian right who insist that the United States is a white nation also see it as a Christian nation. And Jews have been among their primary targets.

Middle Easterners are the most contested racial group in the United States at the present time. Many people consider Arabs and Persians to be people of color, yet legally they are classified as white. Members of these communities differ over whether they should lobby the US government for racial or ethnic minority status or whether they should continue to be classified as white. People from these groups are targeted with some of the most vicious racism in the present time, especially because they are associated with Islam. And yet, because they are not members of a group to which anti-discrimination laws apply, important forms of protection from discrimination are not available to them. The more assimilationist members of these groups see that lack of protection as worth the price, and hope that, over time, they will be considered just as white as Jews and the Irish.

What we can see from this brief look at history is that race is intrinsically linked to systems of economic domination. Yet, while racism originated as a justification for colonial and capitalist exploitation, it has developed a meaning of its own to the degree that even upper-class people of color cannot escape its confines. If we think racism is just a manifestation of class oppression, then we might believe that it is in the interest of white working-class people to oppose racism. While it is, in the sense that all oppression is ultimately not in our human interest, racism often offers benefits and privileges to whites that the,' are likely to want to hold on to. The biggest

challenge in doing anti-racist work is the resistance, sometimes passive and sometimes active, of white people and institutions controlled by them.

In talking about challenging racism, one of the important issues is figuring out the ways that racial formations are perpetuated. Racist patterns that we have inherited as a part of our history continually reproduce themselves in society as a whole. Racism shapes all our institutions-from schools to courts to churches to political parties-and forms a significant part of our culture and systems of meaning. Through these mechanisms it is then reproduced in the psychological structures of individuals.

Institutionalized racism

Sometimes when people talk about racism, they talk as if it were just a matter of attitudes. It is common for people to see racism as existing because some people believe that other people are inferior. While prejudiced attitudes do exist, and are an important part of the picture, the way that racial differences have become woven into the fabric of society is far more important.

Racism is anchored and reproduced in people's psyches, but it is also embedded in our social institutions. Slavery and the extermination of Native Americans are two good examples of institutionalized racism. They were not motivated by the psychic need of whites to fed superior. Rather, they were based on raw economic interests and sanctioned through Anglo-Saxon legal and religious institutions. The psychological dimension developed alongside the institutional to help rationalize the brutality in the eyes of the dominant group.

When we say that slavery was a form of institutionalized racism, what we mean is that it was not merely perpetuated by individual people on other individual people. Rather, it was built into the legal, political, and economic structures of society. It was enshrined in the Constitution. It was built into property law. Some people were considered property, and others had rights to control them as they would any other piece of property. Racism was institutionalized in the structures that determined who got a formal education and who was not allowed access to school, who was allowed to go to church and who was not allowed to read or study religion, and in legal strictures on who was and wasn't allowed to marry whom.

When we say that racism continues to be institutionalized, we mean that there are structures in society that tend to privilege whites and disadvantage people of color. The "playing field" isn't level; the teams have not had access to the same training. One of the most important contributions of the theory of institutionalized racism is that it takes discussions of race outside of the arena of personal morality. Discussions of racism often bog down when one side sees an example of racism, and the other doesn't see that anyone is acting in an immoral way.

The theory of institutionalized racism says that whites are privileged by the system whether they like it or not, and that there can be racist outcomes even when no one is acting in a malicious way. Whites are privileged by having better access to good schools and housing, by being considered more intelligent and trustworthy, and by being held up as the social models of beauty. Those us of who are white receive this privilege even when we think it is a terrible thing.

While discussions of racism sometimes lead whites to feel guilty for their privilege, often the best way to deal with privilege is to acknowledge its existence and use it to dismantle the systems that perpetuate it. When white people challenge racism, they are more likely to be taken seriously than are people of color. And, often, simply having a white person acknowledge the racism in a given

situation can be a powerful force for making others take it seriously. These patterns of privilege and disadvantage are structured into society in a variety of ways. We can fight racism more effectively if we understand the different ways that it works. Below, I'll describe four different mechanisms through which institutionalized racism works: overtly biased laws; the rules that organizations use; the legacies of racism that perpetuate unequal outcomes; and, finally, institutional tolerance for racist actions by people in positions of power.

To understand how each of these forms of institutional racism works, let's use the example of housing. Housing segregation is one of the most obvious aspects of racial discrimination at the present time. Where we live has an incredible impact on the quality of the education we receive and the kinds of opportunities we will have later in life. The theory of institutionalized racism can help us understand why housing segregation remains so persistent. For 100 years after slavery ended, much US housing was still segregated by law. Towns had laws that prevented people of color from moving into them. Many of these housing covenants excluded European Jews as well as people of color. In the 1960s, legal challenges began to put an end to this practice.

Although the dismantling of this first type of institutionalized racism--overtly racist laws-has been the law of the land for the recent decades, more subtle forms of institutional racism persist. The practices of banks have been some of the most powerful forces keeping housing segregated. At times, bank officers have literally taken maps and drawn a line around neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by people of color; they then refused to offer loans within the area marked by that line. "Redlining," as this practice is called, and restrictive covenants that don't allow people of color to move into certain neighborhoods are now both illegal. Although some financial institutions and housing developers continue these practices through covert rules-our second form of institutional racism-they can be sued when their practices are discovered.

Often, of course, it is hard to prove that an institution uses such discriminatory rules. And discriminatory outcomes-such as fewer home loans for people of color-might be explained by our third category of institutional racism: the unlevel playing field. Fewer people of color may get housing loans from a particular bank simply because they have less money than white people. People of color might not have enough income to get a bank loan because they are subject to job discrimination, which prevents them from getting promotions. Many people of color have little money for a down payment because their parents were not homeowners. And their parents may not have been homeowners because of an overt racist law from the 1930s. Many of the programs developed in the New Deal to promote home ownership among the lower-middle classes specifically excluded people of color.

This and other earlier forms of institutional racism have led to tremendous differences in levels of home ownership, and thus inherited wealth, between whites and people of color. These differences in wealth are much greater than the differences in income level that people usually focus on. According to Heintz and Folbre in The Ultimate Field Guide to the US Economy, "In 1995, 24 percent of white households reported that they had received inheritances at some time: the average value was $115,000. Only 11 percent of African Americans' had received inheritances, averaging $32,000.

Finally, a person of color may not get a bank loan as a result of the fourth type of institutionalized racism: individual bank employees may be racist and can choose not to approve loans for people of color. While this is an example of personal racism, it becomes institutionalized racism when an institution, the bank in this case, allows the person to act in racist ways. In this case, the institution is complicit in the racist behavior through its passivity. In analyzing this type of action, people often talk about gatekeepers: people in key positions within an institution who prevent the

promotion of people of color or who use their institutional power to prevent structural and cultural changes from developing in the institution. We see this especially in professional settings, where there are less objective criteria for an employer's decision-making. Tenure committees at universities are a prime example.

Institutionalized racism takes many forms and works according to all of these mechanisms. We can see it in the criminal justice system, where even though only 13 percent of drug users are African American, 35 percent of those arrested for using drugs, 55 percent of those convicted, and 74 percent of those who go to prison are African American. And where "the mandatory prison sentence for five grams of crack [a drug used more by African Americans] is five years, but the same sentence for powder cocaine [a drug used more by whites] requires possession of 500 grams, In other words, spending $575 on crack will buy a minimum sentence of five years in prison, To get the same sentence for powder cocaine, you would have to spend $53,500."

We also see institutionalized racism operating in the ways schools are funded, in the ways teachers treat students, and in the ways that school curricula are structured.

Psychology of racism

These institutionalized structures of racism could not persist if they were not also a part of the mental reality of people in a racist society. And in psychological terms, racism has deep roots, Deep within the consciousness of the western worldview is the idea that reason is superior to emotion and the mind should rule over the body, Saint Augustine, a fourth century philosopher for the Christian Church from North Africa, introduced this idea into Christianity. He was strongly influenced by the work of Plato, who in turn took much of his basic metaphysical philosophy from ancient Egypt. In a curious twist of history, one of the core ideas that has been used to keep white supremacy in place has its origins in a hierarchical, but nevertheless African, society.

According to this Egyptian-Platonic-Augustinian tradition, truth is something that exists in a world separate from the world of everyday experience. Truth is universal and absolute. We have access to truth through the mind, and only some people have cultivated their rational capabilities in such a way as to have access to this divine world of truth.

Other people need to be ruled over because they do not know what is good for them. These people are too embedded in the world of feelings and sensuality to be able to make good judgments. This paradigm has been central to the worldview of western societies. It has been used to justify the oppression of people of color and women. People in these groups have been systematically denied training in the analytical traditions that are valued by our society. Then the society talks about them as beings ruled by their lower sides.

A dominant system of cultural meaning has developed in which whites and men are symbolized in positive ways and people of color and women are symbolized as subordinate. These symbols have tremendous impact on people's lives. When we think of ourselves, or when we think of other people, these symbolic structures act as lenses through which all material is filtered. When something bad happens to a white person, this lens encourages us to think of that person as an unfortunate victim. When something bad happens to a person of color, the lens encourages us to think that he or she somehow did something to bring the problem on his or her self. When a person of color walks into a store, this lens produces an image of that person as untrustworthy and likely to steal.

In his very influential book, *Black Skin, White Masks,* first published in 1952, the Martiniquan social psychologist Frantz Fanon wrote about how the psychodynamics of this western worldview construct racist consciousness. Fanon focuses mostly on the Black/white aspects of racism. In that dynamic, he argues, whites see themselves as rational agents and as regular people, operating according to universal values. Blacks, on the other hand, are constructed as "the other." They are seen as irrational and sensual. The idea of the primitive is a flip side of the positive self-image that whites have of themselves. They see themselves as on the side of progress, enlightenment, and morality, while Blacks are seen as aligned with backwardness, amorality, and sensuality. As whites come to have a sense of themselves as good, sensible people, they anchor this self-concept by contrasting it with the negative things within themselves that they want to reject or deny.

Fanon argues that whites will often be fascinated with Black culture precisely to give themselves back the sensuous, alive relationship to the world that they deny themselves the rest of the time.

> The presence of the Negroes beside the whites is in a way an insurance policy on humanness. When the white, feel that they have become too mechanized, they turn to the men [sic] of color and ask them for a little human sustenance.

Fanon describes dynamics that are an important undercurrent to the consciousness of white supremacy. While these dynamics most accurately characterize the ways that whites construct images of African Americans, they form a matrix of meaning that impacts the construction of any racialized other who is seen as "primitive."

Indigenous, Latino, and African people are all built into the dominant racial consciousness as people with no history or civilization, as backward primitives. Europeans had a harder time racializing their distrust of civilizations that had elaborate written records of their own histories before contact with merchants and adventurers from the West. This group of "others," including Asians, Arabs, Persians, and Jews, has been characterized as having decadent and hierarchical civilizations that were not compatible with the Enlightenment idea of progress. Where the mind/body split-and its correlative split between rational and emotional people-was central to basic beliefs about less literate peoples; these "decadent" civilizations were seen in terms of a different set of dynamics. They were defined in religious rather than psychological terms, that is, by the opposition between good Christians and immoral heathens.

In *White Racism: A Psychohistory,* Joel Kovel describes the roots of racist psychodynamics. Kovel believes that there is a basic trauma associated with the legacy of slavery that lives on in the consciousness of white Americans.

> The slaver in effect said to his slave "While I own much, much more than my body, you own not even your body: your body shall be detached from your self and your self shall be thereby reduced to subhuman status. And being detached and kept alive, your body shall serve me in many ways: by work on my capitalist plantations to extract the most that can be taken from the land in the cheapest and therefore most rational manner; as a means to my bodily pleasure-both as a nurse to my children and as female body for sexual use (for my own women are somehow deficient in this regard); and as a medium of exchange, salable like any other commodity of exchange along with or separate from the bodies of your family .... [S]ince I have a certain horror of what I am doing, and since you are a living reminder of this horror and arc subhuman to boot, I am horrified by you, disgusted by you, and wish to have nothing to do with you, wish, in fact, to be rid of you. And since this set of ideas is inconsistent and will stand neither the test of reason nor of

my better values, I am going to distort it, split it up, and otherwise defend myself against the realization.

In this passage, Kovel describes both the benefits of racism for whites during the slave period and the ways that whites were invested in being confused about and in denying the situation.

James Baldwin was one of the most important writers about racism in the 20th century. Born in Harlem in 1924, he wrote six novels, many short stories, and some of the most powerful essays ever written on race. Baldwin was gay and African American, and many of his novels involve gay as well as racial themes. He spent many years in Paris, choosing not to live under the racial and sexual structures he grew up with.

In his essay "White Terrors," Baldwin describes the dread that many whites experience on coming into contact with African Americans. The mere presence of an African American reminds whites of a terrible history they have yet to come to terms with.

> This is the place in which it seems to me most white Americans find themselves. Impaled. They are dimly, or vividly, aware that the history they have fed themselves is mainly a lie, hut they do not know how to release themselves from it, and they suffer enormously from the resulting personal incoherence.

According to Baldwin, it is hard for whites to have a realistic and positive relationship to their position in the US racial formation. While the vast majority of whites believe that racism is wrong, they usually become very uncomfortable when racism is discussed.

Getting whites to take active anti-racist positions usually requires some complex work untangling the knots these authors discuss. One of the biggest problems is white guilt. Whites often feel that when they look honestly at the history Baldwin describes, their only option is to feel guilty, and since they don't want to feel guilt and don't believe themselves to have done anything wrong, their only option is to avoid discussions of race. And when racial discussions are forced upon them, they are likely to feel all sorts of confusion and discomfort, in addition to feelings of guilt, and resentment at experiencing that guilt.

Anti-racist organizers work hard to make a distinction between guilt and responsibility. White anti-racists can be implicated in racism without being guilty of creating it. We can notice the privileges we have been given and still be good people. And we can work to undermine those privileges.

Doing that often puts us into very uncomfortable positions. This is in part because the social world operates in ways that make many operations of racism practically invisible to whites. It often takes a huge shift of consciousness for white people to accept the discomfort that comes along with talking about things that they don't really know much about and don't perceive very well on their own.

Forms of racist consciousness

Racism is built into the institutional structure of society and is also perpetuated through deep psychological processes. Very few of the racist processes that exist today have to do with the direct and conscious hatred of people of color by whites. Instead, the racist attitudes that go along with institutionalized racism in the United States today are more subtle. In her essay "Something

about the Subject Makes It Hard to Name," Gloria Yamato discusses four types of personal racism, as well as internalized racism. Yamato breaks her discussion of personal racism into the following categories: aware blatant and aware covert racism, and unaware/unintentional and unaware self-righteous racism.

Some people are consciously racist. They believe in the superiority of the "white race" and will let people of color know about it. They beat up Asian Americans because they believe that they are responsible for problems in the economy; they argue that all Middle Eastern people should be targeted with extra scrutiny at airports because they might be terrorists. They tell Latinos to go home because they don't belong in the country. They exclude Asians from their workplaces because they don't want to compete with them, and they throw a fit when their child dates someone from another race. That's aware blatant racism, Yamato's first type of racism.

Much more prevalent in the present day is her second type: intentional covert racism. According to this category, people will act out their racist beliefs in secret-by not renting an apartment to or not hiring someone, for example, but then coming up with some sort of an excuse to hide what they've done.

I have known several African Americans who found being in "liberal" northern California to be very difficult because they were constantly subjected to all sorts of racist behavior that they only found out about after the fact. It makes it very hard to know who to trust and to feel safe among whites when you don't know who is going to treat you badly. At least with overt racism people know where they stand. Covert racism, while seeming to be more polite, can be more painful than overt racism.

Aware covert racism is very prevalent, but perhaps not as prevalent as Yamato's third form of personal racism: unaware/unintentional racism. As anti-racist ideas become increasingly hegemonic, unaware/unintentional racism becomes a larger part of the picture of racism. Whites often underestimate the intelligence and trustworthiness of African Americans and Latinos, without having an idea that they are doing so. Asian Americans are often asked where they come from, with the assumption being that they are foreigners, and not really American. Latinos who are native speakers of English are told that their English speaking abilities are impressive.

Yamato writes that

> Unaware/unintentional racism drives usually tranquil white liberals wild when they get called on it, and confirms the suspicions of many people of color who feel that white folks are just plain crazy... With the best of intentions, the best of educations, and the greatest generosity of heart, whites, operating on the misinformation fed to them from day one, will behave in ways that are racist, will perpetuate racism by being "nice" the way we're taught to be "nice"... Then there's the guilt and the desire to end racism and how the two get all tangled up to the point that people, morbidly fascinated with their own guilt, are immobilized.

Yamato's fourth category is unaware/self-righteous racism. Here, "The 'good white' racist attempts to shame Blacks into being blacker, scorns Japanese-Americans who don't speak Japanese, and knows more about the Chicano/ a community than the folks who make up the community." She classifies this as racism because it is based on a sense of entitlement and superiority. Rather than challenging racism, it asks people of color to live as if it didn't exist.

Another force that keeps racism in place is internalized racism. In cases of internalized

oppression in general, the person in the group being targeted by oppression ends up believing many of the negative things that are said by the dominant culture. According to Yamato,

> It influences the way I see or don't see myself, limits what I expect of myself or others like me. It results in my acceptance of mistreatment, leads me to believe that being treated with less than absolute respect, at least this once, is to be expected because I am Black, because I am not white.

One way that internalized racism works is around beauty images. The dominant culture puts out images of what it means to be beautiful, and beauty is almost always built upon whiteness. People of color who are models and movie stars often have light skin and features that are close to white ideals. The Black Barbie doll looks exactly like the white one except for her coloring. All of this makes it very difficult for people of color to see their own beauty and love themselves and each other.

Internalized racism often leads people of color to underestimate their own intelligence and competence and not go after educational opportunities or jobs that they might be able to get. It leads to accepting racism in its many forms.

Another form of internalized racism is when people of color accept the dominant negative images of people from other subordinate racial groups. In this case, they are internalizing the racist imagery of the dominant culture. People of all racial groups are working within a deeply racist dominant cultural system. Racism is then anchored in worldviews, in individual people's psyches, and in the structures of society. And people of color, along with whites, act it out.

Yamato is very clear that all of these forms of racism are related to the ways that racism is institutionalized in society. Racism is not just an attitude of prejudice against someone. This is why she argues that the concept of "reverse racism" doesn't make sense.

> People of color can be prejudiced against one another and whites but do not have an ice-cubes chance in hell of passing laws that will get whites sent to relocation camps "for their own protection and the security of the nation.

Because Yamato sees racism as fundamentally about structures of power relations, she does not see the ways that people of color can be cruel to whites as constituting racism per se. Many theorists of racism see the ways some people of color mistreat whites as examples of prejudice and bigotry, but reserve the term racism for situations in which there is institutional power backing the prejudice.

The changing racial formation

As we move away from a time in which institutionalized racism was enshrined in laws, and as more and more people have fought against subtle forms of institutionalized and personal racism, we enter a new period in race relations.

Increasing numbers of people are biracial or multiracial, and claim identities based on their mixed heritages.

Another important development has been the increase in the number of middle-class and wealthy people of color. Many of the older theories of race-based oppression were built upon the

assumption of poverty for people of color. And while people of color are still disproportionately poor--meaning that while the majority of poor Americans are white, a higher percentage of people of color are poor--the class dynamics of the situation are increasingly complex.

Many of the remedies proposed for racism, such as affirmative action, target people of color without respect to class and end up benefiting wealthier people of color more than they do the poor. Some theorists have argued that we are in a period of a declining importance of race, in which the problems of poor people of color will increasingly have to be solved by looking to class-based solutions rather than race-based ones. It seems that as long as racism can be mobilized to keep the general public from believing that the poor deserve better treatment, then it will be important to look at racism as a significant part of the problem. But inattention to class can also cause problems. In the present period, when government programs for the poor are unpopular, it is easier for anti-racist activists to win battles focused on non-governmental, non-financial issues, such as images in the media and multiculturalism in schools. But when we look at what is causing the most misery for people of color, it is poverty-and the creation of governmental and non-governmental programs designed to eliminate poverty-that should command most of our anti-racist attention.

Challenging racism

We can see from the discussion of institutionalized racism that racism is embedded in the practices of our society and tends to reproduce itself. Racism can keep reproducing itself in society without anyone having a desire to oppress or mistreat anyone. This situation has important implications for anti-racist practice. If racism were only a matter of personal prejudice, then the solution would be simply consciousness-raising.

Because racism is built into the structures of society, abolishing it requires challenges to power structures and institutions. People in historical movements to abolish racist practices have faced a number of difficulties that are still significant for contemporary anti-racist struggles. The next section looks at some of these historical struggles, in order to understand some of the persistent issues in anti-racism.

Agents of social transformation

Frantz Fanon argues that in racist western societies, people of color arc seen as objects and whites are seen as subjects. The stories of grand achievements usually focus on whites: the presidents, white explorers, white authors, white women suffragists. Things happen to people of color, but they are rarely represented in popular culture as people who make things happen. One consequence of this is that stories of liberation from racism often cast people of color as recipients of liberation rather than as its agents. Nowhere is this story more persistently believed than in the fight against slavery. Liberation from slavery is portrayed as something that "just happened" as a side effect of the Civil War. The great dramatic actions that were part of the abolition of slavery are minimized, and the role that African Americans played in their own liberation is ignored.

While many people are taught in school that African Americans did not resist slavery, the fact is that, for as long as there was slavery, there was resistance to it. Slaves escaped, they resisted by not working hard when they could, they helped others escape, and they engaged in organized rebellions. One of the most famous of these rebellions was the one led by Nat Turner, who had been born into slavery in Virginia in 1800. In 1831, Turner led a group of 70 enslaved people

from plantation to plantation, killing those who got in their way, gathering supporters as they went. Eventually they were captured. Many, including Turner, were executed.

Interestingly, while white abolitionists generally tended to focus more on moral suasion as a tactic, one of the most famous white abolitionists was John Brown, who led a dramatic anti-slavery insurrection. With support from Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, Brown gathered a group of Black and white supporters to launch an assault on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in Virginia. The idea was to seize and distribute arms, setting off a general insurrection throughout the slave states. The insurgents were captured, however, and subdued before the plan got very far.

As the movement for the abolition of slavery developed, there were real differences of opinion over the role played by rebellions such as these. Many of the more mainstream white abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, argued that insurrections set the cause back by discrediting the abolition movement in the minds of moderates. Garrison and his followers tended to believe that the most important tool on their side was moral righteousness. Others, such as the ex-slave Frederick Douglass, believed that the battle should be fought using whatever means were possible, whether this meant moral discourse, political maneuvering, or violent insurrection. Many of the more radical forces among the abolitionists argued that mere words would never overthrow the system. People were making too much money off of it, and the interests supporting it were too entrenched. The combination of insurrections, resistance, and moral arguments helped make the slave system into an issue that eventually was taken up in very complex ways through the Civil War.

An important theorist of the African American contribution to the abolition of slavery, and one of the great American intellectuals of the 20th century, was W.E.B. Du Bois. Born in Massachusetts in 1868, 85 years after that state had outlawed slavery, Du Bois was the first African American to get a Ph.D. from Harvard. He wrote the influential *Souls of Black Folks* and many other sociological, historical, autobiographical, and fictional books. He lived for 95 years and remained deeply involved in anti-racist work until the end of his life. Du Bois founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910. He was involved with the Communist Party for many years. At the end of his life, he grew frustrated with the slow pace of change in the United States and went into self-imposed exile in the newly liberated West African nation of Ghana where he was a close associate of African revolutionary leaders.

In his analysis of the Civil War, *Black Reconstruction in America*, Du Bois wrote that while Lincoln and most people in the North were not abolitionists, abolitionism played an important role in the war. While many historians have argued that African Americans gained their freedom without any effort of their own, Du Bois points out that the abolition movement played an important role in developing an ideology that was then used by the North to justify its use of Black soldiers. He quotes Lincoln as saying, "Without the military help of black freedmen, the war against the South would not have been won." Du Bois goes on to write that Blacks, "Far from being inert recipients of freedom, at the hands of philanthropists, furnished some 200,000 soldiers in the Civil War [approximately 10 percent of the Union armed forces who took part in nearly 200 battles and skirmishes, and in addition perhaps 300,000 others as effective laborers and helpers."

Many people claim that the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery. Du Bois argues that the debate over the humanity of African Americans was at the core of the North's ability to win the war. In addition to the military need for soldiers, the moral high ground of emancipation was important as well: "Unless the North faced the world with the moral strength of declaring openly

that they were fighting for the emancipation of slaves, they would probably find that the world would recognize the South as a separate nation." Du Bois claims that as those defending the union in the name of democracy gained in prestige and in power, they appeared as prophets, and led by statesmen, they began to guide the nation out of the morass into which it had fallen. They and their black friends and the new freedmen became gradually the leaders of a Reconstruction of Democracy in the United States, while marching millions sang the noblest war-song of the ages to the tune of " John Brown's Body."

Whatever influence the abolitionists exercised during the battle against slavery, they were unable to sustain their momentum long enough to ensure the dignity of the newly freed. With the end of the war, the federal government remained in control of the South, providing physical and financial resources for Reconstruction. During this time, African Americans voted in large numbers, electing Blacks to state and federal offices, and many believed that equality between the races was an achievable goal. But African American progress during this period was constantly contested by white supremacists. Within 14 years, federal support for Reconstruction was withdrawn as a result of an incredible racist backlash that included: the creation of the Ku Klux Klan; lynching as a regular practice supported by government authorities and ignored in the North; and a systematic disenfranchisement of Black voters. Blacks were relegated to near slavery conditions that remained largely intact until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Assimilation versus social transformation

A common theme in discussions of anti-racism is the debate between assimilationists and those advocating for holding on to cultural differences. Some want to make a place for themselves in society without challenging the status quo, while others think it is necessary to radically transform the social order. This debate appears in different forms over and over again in the history of anti-racist and other activism.

In an early attempt at assimilation, the Cherokee established in 1820 a government modeled after the US system, with a president and two houses. They developed a public school system and newspapers. They hoped that this appropriation of white social structures would enable them to survive alongside the whites.

While the US government claimed that Native Americans would need to adapt to survive, as it turned out, there really was no option leading to survival. In 1828, the government of Georgia expropriated Cherokee lands to give to whites. The reality was that white supremacy was a much more important principle than the goal of freedom and equality for all who would adapt.

Booker T. Washington was an important proponent of the strategy of accommodation among African Americans in the post-Reconstruction period. He argued that African Americans needed to get basic technical training in order to fit into society in a way that was not threatening to whites. He was bitterly opposed by Du Bois, who argued that the demand for equality contained within it a deeper demand for radical changes in society; a society founded on white supremacy would need to go through some deep transformations to grant real equality to people of color. Thus, while Washington wanted African Americans to find a place in the social order without making any waves, Du Bois wanted that order to be upset.

More recently, ideas about assimilation and transformation have been central to discussions about the place of Asian Americans in US racial hierarchy. In the 1980s, many political commentators began to notice that quite a few Asian Americans were doing fairly well in society and, most

noticeably, that they were disproportionately represented in institutions of higher learning, such as the University of California.

To explain this phenomenon, social conservatives proclaimed their model minority theory, which argued that Asians should serve as a model to other minority groups of how to succeed in US society. Asian success was attributed to hard work, a high value on education, and a propensity to not engage in political movements that challenged racism. Asian Americans were portrayed as politically passive and economically successful.

Almost immediately, Asian activists and intellectuals began to challenge this concept as "the myth of the model minority." They argued that the data used to indicate high levels of Asian wealth were skewed in important ways. One is that they were based on measures of mean family income, without taking into consideration the fact that most Asian American households contain more wage-earners than do white ones because of a tendency toward extended families living together. Another is that many of the wealthier Asians were already wealthy when they entered this country. Asians who enter the country poor, such as Vietnamese refugees, tend to remain poor for as long as members of other immigrant groups.

The myth of the model minority implies that while members of other minority groups have agitated for their liberation, Asians are doing fine simply by keeping their noses to the grindstone and not complaining. This ignores both the extent to which Asian Americans have agitated for their rights and against discrimination, and the extent to which they have benefited from the agitation of other groups.

The idea that members of other groups of people of color should act like Asian Americans in order to succeed in the United States ends up working to divide people of color and pit them against one another.

Nationalism and multisystems approaches

So how do we fight racism, given the complex histories we all bring to the table? The debate often focuses on the choice between a single-issue approach and a multisystems approach. Two general types of single-issue approach have been prevalent in anti-racist organizing. One that reduces race to class, which we explored in Chapter 3, and another, called nationalism, that prioritizes race over all other issues.

A nationalist response to racism involves building a sense of unity among members of an oppressed group or nation, and trying to build an alternative worldview and set of values based on this group identity. One example of a nationalist movement in the United States was Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association founded in 1914. Garvey argued that the best hope for American Blacks was to return to Africa and to develop pride in their African heritage.

More recent examples of nationalism include the Nation of Islam, which focuses on independence and Black self-help, often promoting Black capitalist enterprise. And there were powerful nationalist tendencies in the Chicano movement of the 1970s. What all of these movements have in common is an ideology that focuses on group unity. Thus, nationalist leaders will develop a story of the group that focuses on heroism and historical achievements. There is usually a strong element of pride-building in nationalist movements, and they attempt to foster group solidarity by emphasizing the inherent hostility of oppressive forces.

Nationalism can play a crucial role in helping members of oppressed groups develop an alternative worldview to the dominant hegemonic one, overcoming the internalized oppression we looked at earlier. Because the dominant worldview positions them in subordinate ways, it is important for members of oppressed groups to form their own cultural systems. These alternative cultural systems value their members and reflect back to them a sense of pride in their accomplishments while rejecting dominant stereotypes and negative images. They also build political and financial resources and train people to work together for common goals of social transformation.

While much of this has been very positive, nationalism has a less positive side, for instance, when differences within the group are suppressed in the attempt to build unity and insights from other communities are not taken into consideration. Nationalism often leads to an inattention to class differences, such that wealthy nationalists can use the notion of group unity as the basis for economic exploitation of other members of the group. And it can lead to an explicit suppression of feminist and gay issues, which get painted as divisive. Women of color who advocate for feminism and gay people of color who attempt to fight homophobia within their own communities, or who simply try to exist within their communities, are often criticized as bringing foreign elements from the dominant white society into the community.

Starting in the 1970s, feminists of color resisted this charge by claiming that they were not causing rifts in the community, they were merely pointing out divisions that already existed. By advocating for the needs of women within their communities, they were also advocating for the needs of the community. If sexism no longer hobbled women's ability to contribute, the community would be much stronger.

Multisystems theory grew in part as a response to the weaknesses of many of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Its first major impulses came from women of color who were trying to find a way to be both feminist and committed to the survival of their racial and ethnic communities. Many were lesbian. People like Audre Lourde and Gloria Anzaldua argued that feminism must be transformed to take race, class, and sexuality into account, and that anti-racism must consider gender, sexuality, and class. The '70s taught both the power of overcoming internalized oppression and the importance of learning about the variety of oppressive social structures. Coalition-building became the watchword for many formerly single-issue activists. The right's aggregation of power under Reagan and Bush, and the terrible devastation of AIDS and the drug war, encouraged people of good will to go into the trenches together. This work of understanding how systems of oppression are interrelated and turning that understanding into coherent political projects is an unfinished task. But what we are finding in the present period is a real step forward in people's ability to balance the competing demands of multiple systems of oppression.

Civil rights

One of the most effective strategies of anti-racism has been the demand for civil rights. While human rights are the protections we believe we deserve simply on the basis of being human, civil rights are the protections we ought to have as members of a society. They are usually thought of as the right to equal protection under the law and the right to freedom from discrimination. The demand for civil rights has been at the core of movements for racial justice since at least the end of slavery.

Much of the power of the concept of civil rights is that it uses dominant ideas of "equality and

justice for all," which resonate with large numbers of people in the United States. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an expert at using the dominant values of the majority society to build support for radical change. As with demands for equality, demands for civil rights can sound moderate but end up being very radical. They use the ides of the dominant culture, but by pushing them into new areas, by insisting that they apply to everyone, they end up having deeply transformative implications.

The Civil Rights movement, which began in the 1950s, was probably the single most important movement of the 20th century. It was enormously effective at achieving its goals. Before the movement, African Americans, especially in the South, were second-class citizens by law. They were not allowed to use facilities, such as local municipal swimming pools, water fountains, and bathrooms that were reserved for whites. They were prevented from voting and were refused housing in white neighborhoods. They were sent to second-rate schools and barred from state universities. And they were required by law to defer to the needs and desires of whites in many arenas of life, such as seating on buses and space on sidewalks. The situation was not very different from apartheid in South Africa.

Thousands of African Americans and their white allies engaged in sit-ins, boycotts, and other forms of protest to challenge segregation. They used the media effectively, appealing to the better aspects of the dominant ideology.

After the Civil Rights movement, it was no longer possible for states to discriminate under cover of the law. It was a major accomplishment of the movement to make discrimination finally and clearly illegal. And even though discrimination still exists in powerful ways, it no longer has the power of government sanction behind it. This change led to the elections of African American government officials, from city councilors to senators. It also led to an ongoing struggle for better schools, jobs, and housing. And probably most significantly, it led to a major cultural change, through which African Americans no longer were forced to defer to whites.

In addition to its impact on the lives of African Americans, the Civil Rights movement inspired major changes in US society as a whole. It inspired movements among other groups that were not given their full civil rights as equal citizens. Beginning in the early 1960s, movements for cultural and political equality developed among Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans.

On college campuses, these movements led to demands for Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, and, in general, a less biased curriculum. They led to the development of the idea of student empowerment, the demand for free speech on campuses, and the abolition of the principle that colleges were to act like they were the parents of students. This was the beginning of the student movement that would eventually develop into a full-scale movement to oppose the war in Vietnam.

Many women who were involved in the Civil Rights movement began to notice how, even within the movement, the rhetoric of equality for all wasn't extended to them. Women in the movement, as in the rest of society, were treated as second-class citizens, expected to support the leadership of men, but not expected to take leadership themselves. As we shall see in the next chapter, that beginning led to a whole movement to challenge the gender structure of society.

Conclusion

The civil rights approach will remain a powerful tool for social transformation as long as social

institutions discriminate. But in the coming period, it is likely that new tools will be needed that go beyond the demands of civil rights.

One of the limitations of civil rights rhetoric is that its demands remain within the dominant structure of US ideology. They ask for equal rights for everyone in terms of US law. But many of the problems people experience are based more on economic exploitation and lack of access to resources. These are not things provided for by the US Constitution or by US law.

Thus, environmental activists have been able to sue local governments or the federal government for discriminatory behavior when environmental pollution disproportionately impacts people of color. But when those same policies disproportionately impact the poor, there is no redress. Because many middle-class people of color are able to escape from polluted neighborhoods, in many cases there is more of a correlation between poverty and exposure to toxic pollution than there is between race and such exposure.

The multisystems approach that activists have been developing over the last three decades has the potential to create a new set of demands on society that incorporates issues of race as well as gender, nationality, ability, and sexuality and does not shy away from issues related to class.