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Racial and Ethnic Issues

Critical Race Approaches in the United States

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INTRODUCTION

On September 9, 2009, President Barack Obama presented a major speech on health-care reform to a joint session of Congress. As President Obama expressed to the audience that a government health-care plan would not apply to those living in the United States unlawfully, Republican Representative Joe Wilson yelled out, “you lie.” Republicans also laughed when the President stated the health-care plan still needed to be worked on (Huffington Post 2009). Former President Jimmy Carter was one of few influential whites to publicly come forward and denounce this hostile treatment of President Obama as racist, for which he faced great criticism from other whites. The unprecedented lack of reverence and the crude belittling of the authority of the President of the United States, the first black President, likely reflected a deep-seated racism, which is part of the foundational structure of the United States. However, in contemporary times, mainstream politicians, media commentators, and social scientists – including conservatives and even some liberals – often cleverly claim that the state of the United States is one of colorblindness and “postraciality,” thereby denying outright any form of racism that does not fall in line with the dominant white-constructed imagery.

In this chapter we provide a critical analysis of contemporary racial and ethnic issues, mainly by analyzing contemporary ways that whites engage in racism and by arguing for the continuing significance of “race,” as evidenced by the critical research on race and racism that frequently utilizes new theoretical concepts. We divide this chapter into three sections. In the first section we critique mainstream

race and ethnicity theories, revealing how they are limited in analysis of race and racism and ultimately aid the maintenance of existing white racial-power structures. We then provide a detailed analysis of critical theoretical approaches in race and ethnic studies scholarship. Attention is given to theoretical underpinnings of major critical theorists from varying disciplines that advance Critical Race Theory. These theorists, in both law and social science, have provided powerful scholarship articulating new modes of thought which identify and challenge currently hegemonic notions of race and racism that mostly treat racism as “rare and aberrational rather than systemic and ingrained” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas 1995: xvi).

In the second section, we discuss important examples of racism experienced today by people of color, including effects of racism and its racial framing on Asian Americans and black women. We present critical research studies that employ new concepts to contemporary racism, which allow us to better grasp the deep foundation of racism and document the contemporary ways that whites engage and sustain racist thoughts, values, emotions, and actions.

Historically and in the present, people of color have not passively accepted systemic racism and its discrimination – including the ways in which they have been defined by whites in a system where they wield little or no power. They have always, in varying ways and degrees, fought back and attempted to redefine their own space and meaning in society. In the final section we discuss the centrality of resistance in critical racial theories and the resistance and *counter-frame* strategies actually used by people of color.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RACE AND ETHNICITY THEORIES AND APPROACHES

Critique of mainstream race and ethnicity theories

Mainstream social science research on race and ethnicity has been inadequate in delineating theories and concepts on race that are outside of the hegemonic paradigm that privileges white ideals, culture, thoughts, and interpretations. Historically, these scholars have generally been influential white men, such as Gunnar Myrdal, Robert Park, and Milton Gordon – scholars who provided mid-twentieth-century theories on race that privilege a white male lens. Their limited and white-privileged theoretical approaches continue to be influential, and while their major concepts and theories have sometimes been updated, they often provide the theoretical and methodological agenda for much social science research on race and ethnicity today. These approaches have provided such concepts as “assimilation,” “tolerance,” “stereotypes,” “prejudice,” and “racial bigotry,” which, while often helpful analytical concepts, are severely limited in capturing the full extent of a racialized society and how racism is a systemic, foundational framework of a country like the United States (Feagin 2010b).

A substantial proportion of contemporary work on race and racism in mainstream social science has focused on the actions of prejudiced individuals (e.g., “bigots”), thus placing the theoretical focus of racism at the micro (individual) level, rather than connecting how micro-level racism is rooted firmly in the deeper and

broader systemic (macro) structures of racism (Feagin & Feagin 2008; Feagin 2010a). It is problematic when social scientists engage in research that focuses solely on individual racism, because it leads to several inaccurate assumptions. For example, numerous mainstream social scientists suggest that serious or blatant racism is dead or declining, because the instruments used to measure individual racism are usually a set of "standard questions" that do not change much over time (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Alba 2009). When social science researchers focus solely on individual racism, without a structural-historical analysis of institutional racist realities, they assume that social institutions in themselves are not racist and that studying contemporary racism is just a matter of measuring the percentage of people holding certain "racist beliefs" (Bonilla-Silva 1997). These scholars may represent individual racism as just "irrational thinking" – a problematic assumption because people who are overtly racist in their thinking are then defined as "pathological," while those who are "rational" are assumed to be "racism-free" (Bonilla-Silva 1997). What gets ignored in this analysis is that the structural foundation of racism has the *very rational basis* of providing and reproducing socio-economic privileges, benefits, and power to whites at the expense of, and exploitation of, people of color.

Ignoring white racial oppression as the foundation of the United States is a central problem of past and current social science research on race and ethnicity. Let us take for example the contemporary theory of racial formation, developed by pioneering social science scholars Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986, 1994). The central point of this significantly race-critical theory is that racial formation is a process whereby racial projects or ideologies, explanations, interpretations, and representations of race are created, changed, destroyed, and historically situated (Omi & Winant 1994). This theory is more critical of existing institutions than mainstream approaches and has been especially influential in race and ethnicity theorizing in regard to identifying the role of governments in racializing society through the creation of racial categories and racialized institutions (Feagin 2006, 2010b). However, despite this theory's analytical benefits, a critical problem is that it tends to view contemporary US racial groups – white, black, Latina/o, and Asian – as capable of developing racial projects that together can greatly or equally affect the major racial formation(s) in US society. This aspect of the theory is problematic, because it does not recognize and accent the undergirding structural foundation of the USA – a foundation of white-imposed racial oppression that continually provides greatly disproportionate privileges and benefits, some obvious but many hidden, for whites at the expense of Americans of color. Thus, contemporary black Americans can and do develop a series of "racial projects" and/or perspectives, but that does not mean that their projects or perspectives will carry determinative and central weight in a society where they do not wield much power because of centuries of deep-lying oppression and exclusion from major socio-economic resources. Elite and rank-and-file whites mostly decide the extent of the dominant racial discourse in US society, and even the extent to which the demands and perspectives of racially marginalized groups will be recognized and acted upon. Thus, critical race legal scholar, Derrick Bell, developed the concept of interest-convergence, that is, racial progress is made only to the "extent that the divergence of racial interests [for whites] can be avoided or minimized" (Bell [1980] 1995: 24). Elite whites, in particular, must agree for major racial change to take place in society.

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Critical theoretical approaches to race and ethnicity: critical race theory

Critical scholarship on race offers a theoretical space where scholars can critique and analyze mainstream assumptions of race and ethnicity that either do not question the normativity of white power structures or do not provide a critical enough analysis of that power structure which aids in the continued subordination of people of color. The US analytical movement called Critical Race Theory initially developed as critical legal scholars and activists, and some other scholars (mostly scholars of color), were dissatisfied with the discourse and research of conventional legal scholarship as well as much social science scholarship (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas 1995; Delgado & Stefancic 2001) because such scholarship failed to “examine racism as an ideological pillar upholding American society” (Crenshaw 1995: 110). Thus, Critical Race Theory seeks to transform the “relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 2), “to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained,” to understand and change the “bond between law and racial power” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas 1995: xiii), and to adhere to an activist social-justice agenda. Although Critical Race Theory began in the law tradition, scholars of other disciplines, particularly the social sciences, have adopted various tenets of a critical theoretical approach to race scholarship in their respective disciplines. There are several foundational tenets that proponents of critically theorizing race generally follow. In this chapter, we present, non-exhaustively, a few of these key principles developed by social science scholars and related activists: (1) undergirding institutional/systemic racism (and other forms of subordination), (2) challenging hegemonic ideology such as colorblindness and postraciality, (3) centering the experiential voices of people of color in critical race scholarship.

Undergirding institutional/systemic racism

While mainstream analysts of race and ethnicity often focus their analysis on prejudiced individuals and assert an “American creed” of liberty and justice for all as central to the United States, critical theoretical approaches to race start by recognizing institutional racism as an essential concept. Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton in their work *Black Power* define institutional racism as “active” and “pervasive” racist attitudes and practices that permeate “the society on both the individual and institutional level, covertly and overtly” (Ture & Hamilton 1967: 5). Expanding on the influential theorizing of Carmichael, Hamilton, and other critical social scientists, Feagin (2006, 2010b) articulates a theory of *systemic racism*. Systemic racism involves the deep foundation and surface structures of racial oppression. It encompasses (1) the array of whites’ discriminatory practices targeting black Americans and other Americans of color, (2) unjustly gained political-economic and other resource inequalities along racial lines, and (3) the emotion-laden racial framing long ago created by whites to rationalize their unjustly gained resources, privileges, and power. Systemic racism is a material, social, and ideological reality and is manifested in all major institutions. Systemic racism is foundational for what became US society. It began in the seventeenth century in the early

European exploitation and genocidal treatment of Native Americans and the domination and labor exploitation of enslaved Africans and African Americans.

To rationalize whites' oppressive treatment of blacks and Native Americans, and later other groups of color, whites developed a *white racial frame*, which has been documented in American society as early as the seventeenth century. This frame includes an array of critical features, including racist ideas, stereotypes, racialized narratives, images, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate (Feagin 2006, 2010b). Whites draw upon this racialized knowledge to interpret, rationalize and legitimize oppression against people of color (Feagin 2006), and to legitimize their privileged positions. The white racial frame presents whiteness as the pinnacle of superiority and morality, and people of color, particularly blacks, as negative and inferior, often regardless of their adoption of white cultural norms. To a lesser extent, people of color often understand the world through the white racial frame as well (Picca & Feagin 2007; Feagin 2010b). This frame is pervasive in major institutions, and thus it is difficult to live in this society without adopting aspects of the racial frame, consciously or unconsciously.

While centering race is an integral component, critical theorists recognize that race does not operate as an exclusive form of subordination and that people of color experience overlapping categories of subordination. The intersecting effects of gender, class, and sexual orientation with race are integral in critically theorizing the oppression of people of color (King 1988; Crenshaw 1991a, 1991b; Collins 2000, 2005; Wingfield 2009).

Challenging hegemonic ideology of colorblindness and postraciality

Critical Race Theory is concerned with refuting hegemonic ideologies, such as contemporary white ideologies of colorblindness and postraciality. Mainstream analyses of race in legal and other influential institutions typically view racism as existing only when one can identify specific discriminators with intent to discriminate. Thus, US courts tend to ignore status-race and historical-race, that is, the historical reality behind dominant racial categories such as white, black, Latino, and so forth. Instead, they focus on formal race, treating racial categories as disconnected from North America's history of racial oppression (Gotanda 1995). This narrow and inaccurate view of racism has led to an espousal of colorblindness in mainstream legal thinking. Critical Race Theory acts as a theoretical framework to counter such contemporary judicial ideology:

Critical Race Theory can be productively used to expose the irreducibly political character of the current Court's general hostility toward policies which would take race into account in redressing historic and contemporary patterns of racial discrimination . . . Critical Race Theory's deconstruction of color-blindness . . . show[s] that the current Supreme Court's expressed hostility toward race-consciousness must be deemed a form of race-consciousness in and of itself . . . (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas 1995: xxviii)

The acknowledgment of systemic racism in legal and other important institutions is an essential component of providing atonement for past and present racial

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injustice. Ignoring the deep structures of racism just facilitates the continuation of contemporary discrimination against people of color and, thus, white power and privilege continue unchecked. The election of President Barack Obama and the subsequent distorted US media coverage of colorblindness and near postraciality – whereby race is no longer a necessary category for acknowledgment or analysis – is an example of such contemporary race-conscious ideologies in action. A critical race approach to legal and social science research on racial matters provides the theoretical groundwork to combat such unsupported suppositions.

Experiential voices of people of color

To a large extent, mainstream approaches to race and racism privilege a white interpretation, and thus lack a serious in-depth analysis of the experiences of people of color. Thoroughly discussing the experience of racism through voices of people of color also threatens white power structures and is consequently avoided in most mainstream approaches. Thus, to document the lived experiences of racism, to adequately understand racial oppression, and to develop the best ways to counteract it, critical theorizing engages experiential voices of people of color (Yosso & Daniel 2005: 123). According to Delgado and Stefancic, underscoring the voices of people of color “holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (2001: 9). This experiential knowledge is often expressed in critical theory through the usage of storytelling, narratives, oral histories, and other forms of qualitative research techniques (Delgado 1995; Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Solorzano & Yosso 2002; Chou & Feagin 2008).

CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

We provided above a critique of mainstream social science approaches to race and ethnicity issues. We have identified Critical Race Theory, the important tenets of critical racial theorizing, and concepts such as systemic racism, racial framing, and centering experiential voices as a more cogent and probing approach to identifying the white power structures that hide behind the ideological language and pseudo-science practices of colorblindness and postraciality. In this next section we discuss the continued and widespread experiences of racial hostility and discrimination faced by people of color, as revealed through research studies on racism that employ the powerful critical-race concepts.

Asian Americans: the “model minority” myth

There has been little critical research that substantially documents Asian American experiences of systemic racism. Some social science and media have assumed Asian Americans do not experience the same racist stereotyping and imagery as other racial groups (Prashad 2003). To the contrary, Asian Americans have experienced longstanding anti-Asian racial framing by whites, which has rarely been addressed

in social science research, yet is paramount to the experiences of racial hostility and discrimination Asian Americans face. Claire Jean Kim (1999, 2003) and Chou and Feagin (2008) are among the few researchers who have examined the effects of white racism on Asian American lives, including the harsh effects of the white racial framing of Asian Americans as “model minorities.” These social scientists have identified whites as major actors in constructing a racialized system that places whites at the top of a white-constructed racial hierarchy, while subordinating and placing Asian Americans in the middle of this hierarchy and at the same time using them as a measuring stick for other groups of color (especially black Americans) placed at the bottom.

The model minority myth, created during the 1960s by white politicians and commentators (Feagin 2010a), inaccurately portrays Asian Americans as the successful minority that is racially and socially “problem free” (Yu 2006). Although some Asian American groups have achieved significant economic success, this myth is a gross overgeneralization of the Asian American experience. In fact, many Southeast Asian ethnic groups, such as the Laotians, Hmong, Cambodians, and Vietnamese, have relatively high numbers of families living below the US poverty line (Chang 2000). The different experiences among Asian ethnic groups are ignored by the model minority myth to extend a political agenda (Yu 2006). The political purpose of the model minority myth was originally to quiet and discredit black protest against racism during the 1960s. Since then, by claiming Asian Americans have been successful just through hard work, without government aid, the myth has allowed whites to blame blacks (and Latinos) for their problems and chastise blacks for protesting discrimination rather than “working hard” like Asians. Not only has this myth operated to counter black protests, but it has delegitimized Asian American protests against discrimination, and reduced the possibility that governments will take action to meet the social and economic needs of Asian Americans (Feagin & Feagin 2008).

The myth created yet other problems for some Asian Americans who have bought into the racialized ideals and come to believe the stereotype to be a positive representation of Asians, thereby limiting the relationships they can form with other groups of color fighting against systemic racism (Chou & Feagin 2008). Additionally, many Asian Americans have tried to live up to this model minority myth, thus placing great pressure on them to succeed and resulting for some in serious health problems. For example, Asian American teenagers have the highest rate of depression (Center for Medicaid Services 2002). One recent report on young adults at Cornell University found that Asian American students committed half of all suicides at the university, although they made up only 17 percent of the student population (Harder 2005). Additionally, elderly Chinese American women have a substantially higher suicide rate than elderly white women (Browne & Broderick 1994), and Asian American women between the ages of 15 and 24 have the highest suicide rate of all racial groups. The high suicide rates among Asian American women may be a consequence of women experiencing even greater pressure to imitate the model minority myth than men (Amusa 2006; Cohen 2007).

In addition, Asian American communities are seriously impacted by other forms of anti-Asian stereotyping and discrimination. Common anti-Asian stereotyping and discrimination includes the enforcement of a “foreigner” status (Wu 2002; Tuan

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2003; Chou & Feagin 2008) whereby Asian Americans are regularly considered outsiders and/or immigrants regardless of how many generations their families have lived in the US. In Chou and Feagin's (2008) recent research involving interviews with 43 Asian Americans on their experiences, one respondent described an experience of an Asian American co-worker being treated this way:

I got into this disagreement with one of my coworkers because we have this person, she's rather old. She's from Cambodia. She is an assembler, so all she does is she comes to work for eight hours, she assembles some stuff. She goes home. Because her English is poor, he wouldn't say she's "American." I say she has American citizenship, she pays American taxes, you know, she does everything to be qualified to be American citizen. His argument is she doesn't speak the language well. I tried to tell him . . . that's just unfair because she did everything the American government asked her to obtain American citizenship. Now somebody said she's not American. (Chou & Feagin 2008: 129)

In this quote the respondent illustrates the reality of many Asian Americans, that regardless of American citizenship, Asian Americans will never truly be considered "American" by many whites and other non-Asians.

Not surprisingly, as a way to avoid this hostility, non-acceptance, and other forms of anti-Asian discrimination, some Asian Americans hyper-conform and buy strongly into the white-constructed racial hierarchy and racial frame. Since those groups at the bottom of the US racial hierarchy face added vilification, some Asian Americans fight hard to maintain their middle status in the hierarchy and thus aggressively adopt white ideals, values, and even stereotypes from the white racial frame (Chou & Feagin 2008).

Contemporary forms of white racism: frontstage and backstage racism

Today US society has moved away from a legalized acceptance of overt racial discrimination and segregation, a process that has resulted in contemporary whites using more subtle, covert, and backstage ways to maintain and enact racist beliefs and behaviors. According to mainstream media and social science analysts who accentuate the colorblind and postracial framing of society (see Alba 2009), the blatantly racist and discriminatory attitudes of whites in the past rarely exist anymore. However, such inaccurate conclusions are often based on survey research which uses brief superficial questions to measure racial attitudes, and/or on other research studies which also do not adequately take into account social desirability bias. Research shows that discussing sensitive subjects, such as racial matters, often leads to socially desirable responses whereby respondents provide answers that fall in line with the (socially or publicly correct) temperature of the time. Thus, in today's society researchers may find that whites are "less" racist, because they may be inclined to provide "colorblind" or "postracial" responses to superficial survey questions on racial matters that are asked of them by strangers (for example, survey researchers on the phone). Additionally, whites' responses to interviewers' questions on racial matters have been shown to be affected by the racial characteristics of the interviewer. Some time ago, research by Hatchett and Schuman (1975) found that

whites were more likely to provide responses to black interviewers that were racially liberal, i.e., more colorblind, whereas their responses to white interviewers were more racist and frank. Studies that remove the social correctness and interviewer effects lessen the likelihood of the social desirability bias in providing answers on racial matters (Sudman & Bradburn 1982; Kellner 2004). Critical research on racism reveals, contrary to mainstream survey research findings, that much of the old-fashioned racist framing among whites has not dissipated. These old-fashioned racist views still exist, but have often moved in their routine expression to “backstage” settings, since many whites now realize that expressing strong racist views in the public “frontstage” is no longer socially acceptable.

For example, critical research by Picca and Feagin (2007) sheds light on the type of racial performances that whites commonly engage in while in such frontstage and backstage settings. Their research analyzes racial events that 626 white college students at more than two dozen colleges and universities reported in recent journals they kept for a few weeks. Most actors in the events were whites; the data show most whites know when and where to engage in openly racist performances. More than 7,000 backstage-racism and frontstage-racism events were reported in these diaries. Backstage racism is when whites engage in racist performances in settings with other whites (e.g., friends and relatives) among whom they feel comfortable and have little fear of being reprimanded. When in the frontstage, around people of diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds or with people who will not tolerate such racism, a great many white individuals will engage in racial performances of “colorblindness,” hiding or playing down their racist views. Significantly, the majority of racist commentaries and performances the students reported, for backstage and frontstage settings, were directed at African Americans, showing the continuing centrality of blacks in the white racial frame in all US regions.

In backstage settings many whites feel safe in making racist comments or telling racist jokes, a common backstage interaction and essential component of sustaining modern racism. For example, one white college student in Picca and Feagin’s research described the racial joking of white fraternity members in the backstage:

As I sit in a room with a bunch of frat guys, Phil walks in chanting “rotchie, rotchie, rotchie!” I asked quietly what that term means and I am answered with a giggle and a quick “its slang for nigger like niggerotchie.” . . . The guys I hang around (white college males) spend their “bored time” making up new ways to criticize each other, and the easiest way to do that is to call each other racial slurs when everyone is clearly white . . . If there happened to be people of a different color in the room, they would never say anything like that . . . I see that making racial slurs is only really “racial” when it is said to the person of the race. Otherwise, it is more of a term people use to define someone, where sometimes it has negative connotations. I just don’t understand why people choose race as a means to make fun of other people. (Picca & Feagin 2007: 97)

In this diary entry the student reveals how white students use code language to express racial slurs in an exclusively white setting. Instead of saying “nigger” the students replace it with a code word, so if outsiders intrude into this space, they will not understand it. The central protagonist here was open to explaining the code

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meaning for “rotchie” to the student diarist because he was in a backstage setting. An important point represented in this diary entry, found often in Picca and Feagin’s (2007) diaries, is that whites easily rationalize other whites’ racist behavior. Their friends and acquaintances are not “really racist,” for in their view that phrase is reserved for Ku Klux Klan members. Here their use of racial slurs is not seen as racial if they are not addressed to people of color.

White men’s deep frame and its impact on their perception of black women

As stated previously, many mainstream social scientists assume that race and racism are no longer central components of the everyday lives of whites and that whites are dramatically less racist than in the past. Downplaying the significance of racism can also be seen in current research and analysis of interracial relationships, such as white–black dating and marriage. A major problem in some interracial relationship literature is that once researchers have debunked the relevancy of exchange or caste theories in explaining the likelihood of interracial relationships, they assume that race and racism are no longer relevant to understanding these relationships. As a result, these analysts conclude that decisions regarding interracial marriage and dating are mainly based on love and common ideals or goals (Yancey & Yancey 1998; Rosenfeld 2005). However, this supposition is inaccurate and limited in explaining the longstanding exclusion of black women as relationship partners for white men, as well as for other non-black men.

Census data show a distinctive and persistent trend over time: black women are not intermarrying at significant rates with white men or men of other racial groups. The incidence of black women–white men marriage is not as positively influenced by education and class status as for other forms of intermarriage with whites (Lee & Edmonston 2005; Qian & Litcher 2007). Studies of online dating trends show that black women (and blacks in general) are a severely excluded dating group when whites are making such choices. A recent study of internet dating preferences by Feliciano, Robnett, and Komaie (2008) found that of the white men who specified a racial preference, 93 percent had excluded black women – indeed the most excluded racial group for these men. Although white men are less likely to indicate a racial preference in dating advertisements, their openness to interracial relationships is largely exclusive to *non-black women* (Phua & Kaufman 2005; Feliciano, Robnett & Komaie 2008).

These studies show that black women are persistently excluded as dating and marriage partners for white men yet do not provide an adequate and in-depth conceptual analysis to explain this phenomenon. However, the use of a critical theory that underscores how racism continues to act as a central societal structure and, thus, to affect decisions white men make regarding black women allows us to better analyze what is taking place. Slatton’s (2011) recent qualitative research (using self-administered open-ended online questionnaires) has looked carefully and intensively at the longstanding exclusion of black women by white men. In this work she engages critical theory and uses the concepts of social construction and *deep framing*. According to her research analysis, influential white men have for centuries had the power to socially construct black female bodies in raced, gendered, and classed

terms. Historically, elite white men constructed black female bodies as sexually licentious, naturally immoral, diseased, animalistic, and masculine. They are portrayed as the opposite of the hegemonic, positive white femininity (Hammonds 1997; St. Jean & Feagin 1998; Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003; Collins 2005). Black women were and today still are considered everything that a white woman is not in terms of beauty, sexual morality, femininity, and womanhood.

This white male construction of black female bodies is representative of many white men's (as well as white women's and other men's) *deep framing*, which is our common-sense worldview and "cognitive infrastructure of the mind" (Lakoff 2006: 12). The deep frame of many white men contains white-constructed, racialized, gendered, and classed pseudo-knowledge of black women and is the lens through which a great many white men come to perceive, interpret, understand, emote, and engage in actions where black women are concerned. Slatton's (2011) study found that well over three-quarters of her 134 white male respondents viewed black women directly from a white-constructed deep frame. These white male respondents – despite most having very little contact or experience with black women – defined black women as unwanted women and ascribed a bevy of white-constructed attributes to them. Many stereotypes come directly from the racialized deep frame, including negativity, disease, unattractiveness, and strength.

For example, one respondent stated the following: "Just the term 'black women' conjures up thoughts of an overweight, dark-skinned, loud, poorly educated person with gold teeth yelling at somebody in public. I hope that doesn't make me racist but honestly that's the first thing I think of." This respondent described himself as having had little experience with black women, including no black female friends and rare interactions with black families growing up, yet he has a deeply entrenched view of black women. This is an example of the deep racist frame in operation, whereby whites do not need experiences with black women to have such views. Learned from white parents and friends and/or the mass media, their deep frame of white-constructed racialized knowledge acts as a cognitive, emotional, and action/reaction guide on how to think about, understand, define, and interact with black women and with black people generally (Slatton 2011).

RESISTANCE

Previous sections document some of the critical-racism research, revealing the contemporary ways whites engage in racism and documenting the continuing experiences of racial hostility and discrimination in the lives of people of color. However, in the past or present people of color have not just passively accepted racism and white domination, but in various forms and degrees have engaged in resistance strategies against this white oppression. A critical approach to race acknowledges the ways in which various groups of color fight back against white power structures that subsist on racial subordination. Critical race theorists have a rich history of providing insightful narratives and counter-stories (Ross 1989; Delgado 1995; Torres & Milun 1995) to engage in resistance and theorize how people of color create their own meaning systems in a white-normative society. Critical race theorists analyze narratives and counter-stories of people of color to reveal those

resistance realities that have been ignored or marginalized, and they use counter-methods as tools to dispute the narratives and stories of the dominant white group (Yosso & Daniel 2005). According to Delgado, thus, the “stories or narratives told by the [dominant group] remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups, and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural. The stories of the outgroups aim to subvert that reality” (1995: 60).

Feagin (2010b) extends the literature on resistance with the concept of counter-framing, an interpretive tool many people of color use to resist the white racial frame’s negative ideas, stereotypes, and images of them. The counter-frame provides a way for groups of color to fight back against oppression and to resist the way the white racial framing defines them as inferior and whites as superior. Generally, black Americans have a substantially more defined and effective counter-frame than other racial and ethnic groups of color, because they have had some four centuries in North America to develop it (Feagin & Feagin 2008; Feagin 2010b).

Consider briefly some resistance strategies of African Americans and Asian Americans. African Americans have a long history of resistance and counter-framing that traces back to centuries of slavery in North America. An integral component of resistance for enslaved Africans involved religion. White slaveowners taught enslaved Africans about Christianity to encourage docile acquiescence to slavery, teaching obedience and long-suffering. Many enslaved Africans, however, used this Christianity in an alternative form that linked it to their traditional African religions, including using biblical ideas in preaching deliverance from slavery. The valiant yet unsuccessful 1831 slave revolt of Nat Turner, a Baptist preacher, and 70 other enslaved Africans (Greenberg 2003), is but one example in a long tradition, to the present day, of the centrality of religion and religious leaders in black resistance and counter-framing.

Enslaved black Americans also resisted by counter-framing the white racial frame’s definition of blacks as inhuman, dependent, and unworthy of liberty and justice. For example, the 1829 pamphlet, *To the Coloured Citizens of the World*, by David Walker, a young black abolitionist, provides one of the earliest counter-frames to the white racial framing of blacks. Walker refuted statements of influential whites, such as Thomas Jefferson, who framed blacks as inherently incompetent and incapable of learning. Walker asserted racial oppression to be the barrier to black learning. He aggressively identified white slaveowners as stifling black talents and self-actuation, as one of their means to sustain black subordination. Walker also asserted in his appeal a strong counter-frame to the white construction of blacks as inhuman; he proclaimed, “Are we MEN!! – I ask you, O my brethren! [A]re we MEN?” (Walker 1829: 36). Resisting white racism and oppression by claiming their humanity and right to be treated as “men,” and not animals, has long been a key component of black resistance framing.

In more contemporary times, black resistance to legal segregation was observed in civil rights and black power movements of the 1960s to 1970s. In these movements, black men, women, and children resisted and emphasized their rights to liberty, justice, and *black power*. They counter-framed white definitions of them as unattractive by asserting “Black is Beautiful” (Ture & Hamilton 1967) and “I’m Black and I’m Proud.” A central component of black resistance has been the passing

on of a resistance or counter-frame to black children, generation after generation. Most black Americans today have some degree of a resistance frame that they can use when faced with white oppression. Indeed, Robinson and Ward (1991) note that contemporary black (particularly black women's) resistance strategies must be more than a resistance for survival, but also a resistance for liberation.

Other research shows that resistance to white racism by many Asian Americans takes the form of aggressively assimilating to dominant white ideals and values, such as by changing names to white Americanized names, in the hope of avoiding white hostility and discrimination (Chou & Feagin 2008). For example, some Japanese Americans' use of resistance through conformity may be rooted in the experiences of second-generation Japanese Americans forced by whites into US concentration camps during World War II. After their release from these camps, many second-generation Japanese Americans placed great pressure on themselves and their children to assimilate to white culture, ideals, and values (Tanaka 1999), including a strong adoption of elements of the white racial frame and racial hierarchy. These Japanese Americans adopted white values and orientations in the hope of preventing and avoiding present and future white racial discrimination.

Because Asian American groups have had fewer centuries of historical experience in dealing with white racism than African Americans, relatively few among them have as yet constructed as strong a counter-frame to the white racial frame as have African Americans. Nonetheless, some in Asian American groups have developed a strong counter-frame and engaged in more overt resistance against white racial framing. This includes the "yellow power" movements that took place alongside 1960s–1970s black power movements, as well as the relatively recent pan-Asian and other anti-discrimination organizations (Daniels 1988; Zhou & Gatewood 2000; Chou & Feagin 2008). Despite generally lacking a well-developed anti-racist counter-frame, most people in Asian American groups do have strong home-culture frames – frames predicated on important Asian American cultural and community beliefs and values – which allows them to engage in at least modest acts of resistance to anti-Asian racism. Through use of their home-culture frame, Asian American groups are able to maintain and assert their distinctive cultural perspectives that can offer strategies of resistance (Feagin 2010b).

CONCLUSION

Critical-racism research shows the continuing importance of understanding and analyzing racial matters in society. Mainstream race-ethnic theorists and many politicians and media commentators – especially those who are white – strategically push colorblindness and postraciality as the "new" signs of the times, thereby providing a convenient way to deny systemic racism and ignore the emotional, psychological, and economic effects of centuries-long oppression experienced by people of color. Colorblindness and postraciality allow whites to marginalize the experiences and claims of injustice of people of color. This reality has even played out on the largest political stage in the 2008 US presidential election. However, the adoption of critical theoretical concepts in approaching racial matters allows us to challenge this colorblind ideology with strong evidence.

The critical approach to racial matters is not just concerned with presenting data on systemic racism, but often takes an activist stand. "It not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better" (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 3). The ability to bring about positive racial changes is greatly impeded by whites' racial framing of society, which rationalizes white dominance and privilege and the subordination of people of color as normative. Thus, a key component in evoking societal change is through the process of deframing and reframing a racialized society. This process is a difficult one, especially for whites, as the major components of the old racist frame are deeply embedded in societal institutions. In the white case, this deframing process means that a majority of whites must examine the deep-seated white-constructed thoughts, values, and emotions of the old white racial frame, and then reframe by accepting a framing that includes critical knowledge regarding systemic racism. For real change, reframing must include the adoption of anti-discrimination programs so that whites not only think differently about race, but also actively oppose white racism in all frontstage and backstage settings and thus engage in anti-racist activism (Feagin 2010b).

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