

## **Racism, Colorism, and Language within Their Macro Contexts**

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### **Introduction**

In preparing this chapter, I have had one overarching goal: promoting a study of race and language that amplifies the macro context within which they are produced, as well as perspectives on and theories of society, culture, and oppression. Though not the first to promote the macro contextual (see below), I believe this line of research has still been insufficiently attended to and must continue to be strongly advocated. I have in mind, for example, what is done in Alim, *et al.* 2016, Hill 2008, Harrison 1998, Mullings 2005, Omi and Winant 2015, Reyes 2017, Smedley and Smedley 2012, and Spears 1999a, to mention only six works fully confronting race. It is not suggested that every article and conference paper give equal time to the macro context, rather that the macro context be invoked in some way in order to spur more adequate thinking on that level and in so doing provide firmer ground for, not simply describing, but explaining, predicting, and acting for social justice.

In speaking of the macro level, I have in mind the contextual level informed by what I have termed the political-economic pentad (Spears 2016): (1) the global system; (2) the state; (3) ideology-coercion (in practice, two sides of the same coin), for the purposes of social and resource control via regime maintenance; (4) social stratification, not simply as regards socioeconomic class but also other hierarchies of oppression (I stress the hierarchical and also the authoritarian and patriarchal nature of oppressive systems); and (5) oppression-exploitation (two sides of the same coin). This pentad and other remarks I make throughout this chapter fit

securely within the program proposed by Alim, discussed below, in calling for a more self-conscious and structured pursuit of “raciolinguistics” (Alim 2016: 5-6).

This chapter forefronts race. The reason is simple: even the best social science treatments of race, which many of us are most likely to consult, fail to convey the torture and horror of the racialized group’s and its individuals’ lived experience, in the present and historically. Given that, the most important service I can render is amplifying the race side of race and language. I note that I present race through the prism of the African American experience while fully recognizing the mental and material brutalization of other U.S. racialized groups. Worth noting additionally is that blackness, as observed below, stands at the symbolic bottom and forefront of white supremacist racism, the only kind of import globally, and serves in reality as the Anti-Whiteness, African Americans having been subjected to the most extreme forms of most of racism’s horrors. It serves no positive purpose to call them anything but horrors: **M**iseducation or the denial of education, **R**ape and other forms of sexual violence, **S**egregation, **I**ncarceration via governmental practice and policy, **D**isfranchisement, **L**yching, **A**sset expropriation and infringement along with the suppression of entrepreneurship, **M**edical experimentation, and **B**ound labor (slavery, debt peonage/sharecropping, prison labor—including chain gangs, corvée labor, prison farms, etc.).<sup>1</sup> The first letters of all the horrors form the mnemonic that I have used in many of my courses: **MR SID LAMB**.

I might emphasize the historical factors since the treatment of the aftermaths of brutalizing institutions such as slavery and the subsequent US Reign of Terror (euphemized as “Jim Crow”) explain many processes and outcomes today. As an example, I can mention the great difference between black and white wealth in the US, the former almost ten times the latter (Jan 2017). This difference is historically determined not only by servitude but also the many forms of racialized

labor exploitation. Even after slavery, in many work sites labor (debt sharecropping, convict labor and leasing) was bound to the work site with the full assistance of policing forces (Barry 1997, Blackmon 2008). Among the most important factors in the black-white wealth difference today, and one hardly discussed in academic research, is the confiscation spanning all of US history of black assets—property, bank accounts, and other—and the suppression of black entrepreneurship by destroying workplaces and banning black businesses (Walker 2009). This information is recounted in African American families and social networks. Some persons seek to minimize today’s aftermath of slavery—and slavery itself, stating that it was too long ago to matter. However, the grandchildren of slaves,<sup>ii</sup> including me, still walk America’s streets. Slavery was not so long ago. We, the grandchildren in particular, have heard the specifics of asset confiscation and entrepreneurship suppression; and, its contemporary effects are monumental but largely undiscussed.

In most of my writing on racism, I ground discussions and breathe lived experience into them with the black journey in the Americas. This grounding is reinforced by my status as the grandson of slaves: the stories and lives of the preceding two generations take me back *inside* of slavery. Two grandparents, at least, were old enough to have been socially aware at the time of Emancipation, in 1863, before the slave system actually dissolved in a number of places. This grounding is reinforced by my having been steeped in the black experience, having lived, as I do now, in multi-class, largely low-income black communities for two-thirds of my life. Writing from this perspective, then, as the grandchild of enslaved Africans, I seek to make explicit the overlooked and forgotten present-ness of the past, a forgetting that hinders our understanding of the macro contexts of race and language.

## Remarks on the Literature

In this section, I present not a summary of the literature (for which one may refer to (Chun and Lo 2015) but a reflection on it from my academic and personal perspective. I draw on it selectively in order to limn an approach that I would like to advocate, highlighting always, as stated above, the macro context.<sup>iii</sup> As early as 1929 (Sapir 1949 [1929]), in solidifying his current informal title as the “patron saint” of linguistic anthropology (Kroskrity 2000:2), Sapir, having profited from the influence of Boas while a student at Columbia University, evoked the importance of macro contextual research, ”warning linguists against ‘failure to look beyond the pretty [formal] patterns of their subject matter’ and exhorted them to produce more integrative research that would link language to the important issues of the day” (Kroskrity 2000: 2).

The landmark contributions of linguists and anthropologists to race-language studies began with Boas’s *Race, Language, Culture* (1940) and other works in which he argued against white supremacist frameworks in the academy proposing to hierarchize languages, as they did “races,” and to fuse race, language and culture, for example, in falsely positing racist higher order principles connecting races to languages and cultures. Boas’s work was also instrumental in overturning the white supremacist strains in anthropology and in the general US ideational sphere by attacking claims of biological and cultural bases for racist thinking. Boas was an ally of the eminent black scholar, W. E. B. DuBois, the sociologist whose landmark work on society, race, class, and culture (DuBois 1935) was long shunned in the US academy and is still too often ignored (Harrison and Nonini 1992, Baker 1998). DuBois’s work has been marginalized because of its candor concerning race and class as connected to a political system serving the interests of capital in wealth accumulation and the exploitation of labor. He lucidly outlined the function of racial grouping as a means to divide and conquer workers (Roediger 1991), white ones and those

of color, through the use of force and ideologies of white supremacy, complemented by ones of patriarchy, xenophobia, and so on.

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, as linguistic anthropology was rapidly increasing its profile in anthropology and beyond, Kroskrity explicitly buttressed a macro contextual turn in stressing “the need to complement the usual preoccupation with microanalysis (details of phonetic transcription, complexities of verb morphology, ethnographic detailing of specific speech events, sequencing of talk within a conversational ‘strip’) with an understanding of how such patterns might be related to political-economic macro processes” (Kroskrity 2000:1-2).

Hill (2008) provides an indispensable and searing analysis of race and language, admirable in breadth and depth though not fully encompassing the pentad outlined above. Her work assists us in understanding in particular the grounding of racism in everyday talk and other language uses that degrade the racialized Other. She encapsulates white racism as “constituted loosely by a set of cultural projects,” ever in progress (Hill 2008: 20), to wit:

- (1) The production of a taxonomy of human types; (2) the assignment of individuals and groups within the taxonomy of types through “racialization” or “racial formation”[Omi and Winant 2015]; (3) the arrangement of these types in a hierarchy; and (4) the movement of resources, both material and symbolic, from the lower levels of the hierarchy to the upper levels in such a way as to elevate Whiteness and denigrate and pejorate Color (Hill 2008: 20-21).

Hill basically outlines white supremacy as a hierarchizing of racial groups. Most important is her statement on the transfer up the hierarchy of resources, material and symbolic,

through the many forms of exploiting labor and artistic production. . Though the term *ideology* does not appear in this short encapsulation, it is, nevertheless, present in her spotlighting of symbolic resources and the elevation of whiteness. Ideology, in its critical sense, is a set of ideas functioning to promote the vested interests of a particular group. In referencing this term, throughout the academy we are usually talking about the interests of the ruling sector of society, which sets the basic agenda of major governing and other institutions in the society, all ultimately controlled, to varying extents, by the society's ruling elite (Blauner 1973, Thompson 1984, Spears 1999b, Omi and Winant 2015).

Before turning to Alim (2016), I stress the centrality of the notion of ideology, which has somewhat fallen into disfavor, owing to some extent its rootedness in Marxist thought, but which is essential (cp. language ideologies in linguistic anthropology) in thinking about societies. Worth adding is that is that the various types of ideologies—linguistic, racial, elite and societally hegemonic, gender, and others—are all interrelated, though at times oppositional and at times collaborative one with others.

Alim's outline of raciolinguistics in certain ways elaborates Hill's take. He makes note of the outlook "across all subfields of linguistics" that sees racial and ethnic identities as not "fixed and predetermined" but "(re)created through continuous and repeated language use" (Alim 2016: 5). I would add that these identities, though not fixed and predetermined, are nevertheless importantly informed by and negotiated within the context of societal hegemonic ideologies referenced above and ideology of other kinds. More specifically, Alim signals the importance of theorizing the "impact of racism on those who experience race as an everyday lived reality" (Alim 2016: 6). The study of race and language, in its conceptualization as raciolinguistics (Alim et al. 2016), can be packaged as several endeavors. First is the obvious

project of analyzing race and language together rather than separately and, importantly, to bring power front and center into analyses. The second is heightening our understanding of the presentation (which I take as routine and unself-conscious) and performance (more self-conscious and more oriented toward an audience)<sup>iv</sup> of ethnoracial identities. This is to be done with face-to-face encounters as well as media-mediated ones. Presentations and performances invoke identities by marshaling grammatical particulars (phonetics, phonology, morphology, etc.) subconsciously/passively or consciously/actively. Here Alim alludes to the necessity of bringing semiotics (Smalls 2015, and in this volume)—the full range of sign systems—into raciolinguistics.

The third is quite close to the second in underlining the importance of studying style, stance, and performance. The fourth concerns “taking intersectional approaches that understand race as always produced in conjunction with class, gender, sexuality, religion,” and other categories used in complexes of oppression. The fifth endeavor in the project he outlines involves examining the role of language in maintaining and contesting global capitalist oppression, which, I would add, operates as all state societies, conscripting ideology and the use of force in pursuing its goals. The sixth would be to stay mindful, while researching the discursive construction of ethnicity and race, that there are social realities suffusing the lived experience of oppressed peoples. The seventh underlines the importance of societal change, as regards new and emerging demographic patterns, communication forms and channels (notably media ones), and technology. The eighth endeavor would be to investigate social transformation and to develop antiracist programs via activist work in public spheres, notably educational ones. My discussion below is in line explicitly, and sometimes implicitly, with the program of

raciolinguistics; however, at this point I hasten to emphasize the importance of function—examining the function of racist thought and behavior. I return to this topic below.

Reyes 2017 is an example of a writing that frames local specifics of race, language, ideology, and power in the Philippines in terms of the pentad. The main focus of her article is the semiotic processing of the “excessive” lifestyle-bearing, bilingual, code-switching mestizo conyo as a symbolic and politicized type of Philippine elite, the object of both derision and envy. The conyo is a “figure of personhood” rather than a “real person,” one “formed through metadiscursive processes” and is, importantly, contrasted to a “sensible, moral, middle-class figure of personhood” (Reyes 2017: 213). The conyo can be seen as part of an ideologically rooted process of “elite bifurcation... positioning conyo elites as acting as colonists,” (Reyes 210), i.e., fixing the object of blame for negative social conditions while providing an alternate “personhood” for elites to inhabit. Reyes’s investigation, then, presents the conyo as macro contextualized by the global sphere in its production of colonialism, postcoloniality-cum-neocolonialism/imperialism, and racialization in support of exploitation, as broken down into its component elements by the pentad.

At the beginning of this chapter, I observed the importance of being able to use our research on language and race in explaining, predicting, and acting for social justice. Alim (2016) does so also in his characterization of raciolinguistics, to name one recent work. Another linguistic anthropological project, *Black Linguistics* (Makoni, Smitherman, Ball, and Spears 2003) puts activism front and center, placing anti-Blackness’s historical and contemporary distortions and oppressions in juxtaposition to language matters.

*Black Linguistics*, following Makoni’s and Spears’s (2003) introduction, “involves four main principles” with regard to practitioners and their research: (1) “membership in or life

experience with the communities whose languages we research and analyze“ [keeping in mind that membership can be a matter of degree]; (2) “use of an ideological orientation designed to analyze and expose the workings of ideology in research *on, about, and for* Black languages”; (3) use of “race as a defining feature of our linguistic autobiographies as Black language scholars”; and (4) “analysis of language as social practice with a keen eye/ear attuned to its sociohistory, changes and continuities in the ‘categories of thought,’ and the historiography of linguistic analyses of Black languages at different historical periods” (Makoni and Spears 2003:5). Clearly, Black Linguistics posits that degrading social groupings, created with the emergence of capitalist modernity and refined thereafter—race in this case—must be used by those seeking liberation and uplift as central notions in strands of research creating a knowledge base for activism.

Above, I introduced the importance of function in researching race and other invidious groupings. What, ultimately, is the function of racism, in the US and globally for example, such that its hold on public and private lives is so tenacious? Why have the many antiracist movements not brought us to a point where we can envision the end of racism? How do the details of racially oppressive systems shapeshift through time to continue achieving their root function: dividing and sidetracking societies’ masses in service to power and the ongoing economic exploitation by elites? In the final analysis, we cannot speak coherently and programmatically about racism without a precise understanding of function in systems and procedures.

Race and Racism

The discussion of race and race theory that follows is based in large part on the broad consensus of race scholars across the social sciences and humanities, notably on Bonilla-Silva (2014), Hill (2008), Mukhopadhyay, *et al.* (2014), Omi and Winant (2015), Smedley and Smedley (2012), and Spears (1999b, 1999d). I believe that any discussion of race and racism must be prefaced by the observation that only in fully confronting the historical arc of racist thinking and action can we think coherently and strategically about eliminating racism and its byproducts.

Blackness and black people represent the iconographic bottom of the white supremacist racial hierarchy, though often not the material bottom (for example, vis-à-vis income, wealth, education, etc.). However, the lives of racially subordinated persons must be understood in terms of lived experience and ideational factors as well as material ones. To start with the basics, which are not actually widely understood, *race* refers to categories in a racial system, resource-access categories based importantly, but partially, on visible corporeal features, real or imagined. Highly salient features of race categories are skin-color, facial features, and hair texture. The “official” US system of racial categorization is rather straightforward, though an illogical patchwork and a monument to malice and willful ignorance that allows, for example, blacks who “look whiter” than most whites and whites who look blacker than some blacks. Race categories vary globally and historically and within individual societies. Thus, someone classified as white in Brazil may be classified as black in the U.S., and understandings of race categories vary across communities in the US as well. A black person who could have passed for white easily sixty years ago in New Orleans might not have been able to do so sixty years ago in Kansas City or Minneapolis, before the advent of considerable numbers of darker-skinned immigrants.

Furthermore, when blacks passing for white during the US Reign of Terror<sup>v</sup> (Jim Crow Era) was more common, those who could pass in South Carolina often could not in Northern states.

Consequently, races cannot be considered biological or in any way scientific. They are sociocultural constructs and, as all such constructs, vary from society to society. Groups of humans can be defined biologically, for medical purposes for instance; but, such definitions are based on real biological features (blood type and genetics, for example), not features used in folk characterizations (Hill 2008) of race categories, which are entrenched in society. Many biological (sometimes called “physical”) anthropologists sometimes use the term *population* to refer more specifically to such scientifically based and defined human groups. Given the above, it becomes easy to understand that race categories are fuzzy, unstable, illogical and varying across time as well as social and geographical space.

Racial systems organize races hierarchically and in practice serve an important function: determining the amount of access that different races have to power and wealth. There is diminishing access going from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom. Thus, racial systems are socially, economically, and politically oppressive and are intimately connected with other hierarchies of oppression, e.g., those involving socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and looks/beauty (as conventionally evaluated). These hierarchies are the material with which intersectionality operates: The many discussions and polemics involving race and class in the literature can be rejoined straightforwardly by observing that race and class are intimately connected; indeed, they are inseparable, while different, in racialized societies. The full term for class, *socioeconomic class*, helps shed light on the category problems. The problem in analyzing race and class is the lack of commonly used metanotions to discuss hierarchy in state<sup>vi</sup> societies

in a way that explicitly joins and relates social hierarchies. The fundamental metanotion needed is hierarchy of oppression (sometimes the term *dominance hierarchy* is used).

The term *social stratification* explicitly references social layers, but it does not make adequately explicit the crucially hierarchical relations among layers, or strata. Class, conceptualized as social status derived primarily from economic, and often, political assets, or capital—and their accessories (e.g., social and cultural capital)—is the substance of one dominance hierarchy. Race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and so forth are each the substance of another type of dominance hierarchy; and, each is a *key social grouping*, here in the sense of a grouping that is relevant for and classifies nearly all of the individuals in a society.<sup>vii</sup> We might conscript the phrase *key social status* here to refer specifically to one's overall status in a society, as determined by one's status in the various social groupings. Bringing into the discussion the notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989), we can state that one's key social status can indeed be termed one's *intersectional social status*.

There are various dominance hierarchies, such as those based on class, gender, race—and also skin color. Thus, race and class are different versions of the same phenomenon—hierarchies of oppression, though they are not the same thing. Social groupings are conceptually distinct, but in practice they often cannot be disentangled from one another. They are, locally, to varying extents mutually determinative of each other and, additionally, mutually constitutive of one's intersectional social status. For example, wealth and the power it accords can raise one's position in the racial hierarchy (A. Smedley and B. D. Smedley 2012), and indeed it historically allowed some people to buy certificates of white status in the Americas, or to pass themselves off as white without challenge, using skin-color capital.

The ideology of white supremacy is a complex of concepts promoting the idea that the “white race” is the best one. Again, I caution that *ideology* here is used in its critical sense, a set of ideas disseminated and promoted, most conspicuously and broadly by social elites for the purpose of social control and the maintenance of wealth and power. It is disseminated prominently through the media, education, and religion, the last less important than heretofore given that many “religious” people are today nonpracticing. Many of the precepts and concepts in white supremacist ideology are related to myths concerning biology and culture. Post-Civil Rights era white supremacy focuses much more explicitly on culture, construed as the primary hindrance of nonwhites’, and especially blacks’, lagging in health, longevity, education, income, wealth, and other areas. This second kind of white supremacy is variously termed neo-racism, the new racism, racism 2.0, or James Crow, Esq. All state societies’ elites use ideology (of various types) along with force in efforts to maintain the regimes they profit from. Examples of the use of force are the many US government-sponsored murders of black leaders of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s and 1970s and the occupation by the military<sup>viii</sup> and/or police departments of black urban areas during the Civil Rights Movement.

Ideologies of white supremacy can lead to internalized forms of oppression among dominated groups. Internalized oppression, under white supremacy, is the acceptance (to varying extents) by racially subordinated individuals or groups of the ideology of white supremacy (e.g., whites are smarter, better looking, more industrious, and in possession of “better hair” and better leaders). Internalized oppression can affect also individuals in other dominance hierarchies, e.g. women, in the gender hierarchy. I often offer the illustration of almost all women students in my classes<sup>ix</sup> believing that a woman, due to “woman’s nature,” would not make a good US president.

Racial systems, or racial formations (Omi and Winant 2015), are historical. They are not inevitable, and they do not reflect human nature. Note that racism must not be conceptually confused with, and is not equivalent to, ethnocentrism and xenophobia though all have fuzzy boundaries since foreigners are sometimes racialized and racialized citizens of states can be tagged as foreign, even by those who understand these distinctions: they ignore what they know in following their perceived interests. (See Urciuoli 1998 for relevant discussions.) Racial formations have a genesis and evolve over time, in response to changing social and political circumstances—indeed, as all institutions do. Racism in the US was not instituted one day hundreds of years ago; it grew recognizable by individual acts of states and individual human agents. In the US, Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676 is often considered a landmark in the rise of racism as an institution. In it, blacks, Native Americans, and the majority of whites, who were poor, joined forces to attack the landed elite’s oppressive rule. The rebellion was suppressed, but it instigated a flurry of state and other actions to divide the constituent groups who forged the rebellion. Thus, a major impetus emerged to distinguish a white identity with privilege that would push non-elite whites to identify upward with white elites rather than with groups of color, to whom they were closer politically and economically. Modern capitalism provided the essential push for modern (New World) racism (Smedley and Smedley 2012), usually said to begin in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and (modern) capitalist chattel slavery (in contrast to “Old World slavery”) evolved in tandem with modern racism. Modern racism is characterized by the institutionalization of whiteness and the racial Other, which become indispensable components of labor management and government in the racialized, capitalist state.

Racism is institutionalized throughout society. Thus, we speak of institutional racism (Fanon 2005 [1961], Blauner 1973\*), which permeates all of a society’s institutions and practices.

Institutional theories of racism hold that individuals do not have to act in willfully racist ways to be racist; merely going along with “business as usual” and not doing anything to end it reinforces the racist system. Furthermore, most white moderates and liberals have such a facile understanding of racism, its pervasiveness, and its impact on the lives of people of color (not to mention its *function* in maintaining their privileged social position in terms of wealth and power, as I have outlined) that it is difficult for them to engage in concrete anti-racist action. Racism is further institutionalized by those who profess to be, or even genuinely believe themselves to be, acting in solidarity with people of color, but who do not in concrete ways struggle against racism. This is not a new idea. As Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” written in April of 1963:

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a “more convenient season” (King 1994).

These comments show how most whites’ ignorance—their racial illiteracy—remains a key factor in institutional(izing) racism. We must, additionally, point out the racial illiteracy of many people of color, who remain woefully underinformed concerning their own racial position. These comments also resonate, and strikingly so, with contemporary political discussions in (mostly

white) Democratic circles today that focus on “civility” whenever people of color attempt to protest forcefully the conditions of their domination—rather than focusing on the uncivilized and brutal nature of oppression itself (from growing income inequality, unchecked police brutality against Black and other communities of color, and so on). Racism is further institutionalized when allies look to control the behavior of people of color through various forms of tone-policing. As Martin Luther King, Jr., concluded, “Shallow understanding from people of goodwill is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection” (King 1994).

The discussion of the white moderate and liberal highlights that the US racial formation is a principal mechanism for social control via the race-based assignment of *privilege*. Privilege (here, specifically racial privilege) is the extent to which an individual or a group *receives more rewards* (better jobs, educational opportunities, treatment by institutions, etc.) *and fewer punishments* from a racial formation—or other system of oppression. Privilege is a matter of degree; and, an individual’s overall privilege is ultimately determined by her/his intersectionality, or intersectional social status: the interplay of the various social identities (gender, class, religion, sexuality, etc.) as affected by the ranking of those social identities in the relevant dominance hierarchy. With this understanding, white, wealthy, heterosexual, Christian males occupy the most privileged position in U.S. society, making the self-interestedness of their calls for “civility” difficult for them to see.

Racial formations are initiated, maintained, reproduced, and restructured *primarily* by societal economic and political elites in response to identifiable political and economic problems. For example, in the English colonies in the 1600s, the problem of indentured servants and slaves escaping and the desirability of readily identifying slaves and nonslaves (along with other

factors) fed one aspect of racialization, namely, connecting slave status to being black—or nonwhite. Such elites manage rewards and punishments to racial and other social groups in accord with the elite’s desire for regime maintenance, i.e., of the political regime that upholds their wealth-power. Punishments include, of course, economic exploitation of all non-elites (white and other), but go significantly beyond it. In this regard, think of the many humiliations—and more—of people of color under Jim Crow racial “etiquette” and under the current U.S. racial regime, e.g., racial profiling, “stop-and-frisk” policing tactics (Butler 2017<sup>xi</sup>), and the many video-recorded, unjustifiable murders by the police. Also relevant here are modern censorship (Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988], Mueller 2016), extralegal executions (by government and nongovernment agents), mass incarceration, lynching, etc. Rewards include privilege (notably the wages of whiteness—the nonmonetary value of being white and receiving white privilege), co-optation, and so on. Racial formations, then, owe their tenacity—their ability to resist destruction—to (1) the privileges (plural) they distribute differentially (to whites, to males, to Christians, etc.) and their divide-and-conquer effects and (2) their institutionalization, i.e., the permeation of an entire society by the racial formation through institutions and their practices.

In the discussion of race, and white supremacist racist systems, which are the only consequential kind globally due to the power and wealth undergirding them, the role of skin color is usually either taken-for-granted or left wholly unconsidered. First, skin color functions actually as a label for a complex of phenotypic features (facial features, hair texture, the body, etc.); and, as such, it is indispensable for analyzing white supremacist systems. Skin color categories, often even less discrete, consistent, and logical, than race categories, nevertheless, are reified and central in the white supremacist hierarchy, in the U.S. and elsewhere. Skin color is not only a key factor in the criminal justice system (who receives longer sentences to who

receives the death sentence, etc.), it is also a key factor in educational attainment, occupational level, income, wealth, health outcomes (Monk 2015), and quality of life (for example, an individual's positioning with regard to the U.S. incarceration state) (Espino and Franz 2002 on Latinx, Hochschild 2007 on African Americans, Hersch 2011 on immigrants, and Hall 2010 on a range of populations).

Comparatively speaking, color hierarchies are thought to be a more conspicuous part of the social imaginaries of Latin American countries. However, in the U.S. the fallout from skin color categorization is just as damaging, though there is less public discussion about it and less terminological elaboration. Fortunately, Title VII of the 1965 Civil Rights Act recognizes the consequences of colorism and facilitates redress. Legal cases involving charges of skin color discrimination provide an important venue where parties involved need but are often unaware of linguistic and anthropological expertise confronting race and skin color in discourse and society.

Colorism is the inevitable byproduct of white supremacy; it is at once a connection to it and a contradiction. Colorism is more noticeable and consequential among groups of color and, thus, within those groups, there is a contradiction: they resist and accommodate white supremacy, as all oppressed groups do, but carry a form of it within themselves: internalized oppression. We have only to think of the constellation of “whitening” beauty products sold around a world struggling with white supremacist globalization, euphemized sometimes as the “North/South Divide.”

There is, however, a good case for some pre-colonial skin-color-ranking (not skin-color caste) systems around the world, sometimes apparently due to sun tanning and its indexing of manual labor, and the lack of tanning, both contributing to hierarchized social status. As I mentioned above, the crucially important issue to any society is whether racial or color prejudice

and discrimination is institutionalized. Inadequate attention has been given to the classification of racial systems; usually the assumption is that any one has the same basic nature as the others. An exception to this observation is the literature on “Old World” vs. “New World” slavery and racial systems (see, e.g., Smedley and Smedley 2012). Also taking a different position is Telles (2006), who distinguishes between vertical and horizontal racial systems, the former showing some integration at all levels (e.g., the U.S.) and the latter showing much integration in the bottom reaches of society but hardly any once reaching the top strata (e.g., Brazil). Distinctions among racial system types globally are crucial for race-language research, particularly as, hopefully, it delves ever more deeply into the racetalk (Pollock 2005) of groups of color.

Even white groups, for instance, those characterized by ethnicity (for example, based on ancestral homeland or religion), can fall victim to colorism in their promotion of fair-skinned blondness, and “light” eyedness—blue, green, and gray—and straight or upturned noses. My students have reported that the bachelors on the television show “The Bachelor,” where an unmarried, “desirable” male is set up to choose one from a bevy of women to be his potential bride, the (white) bachelor often chooses the “whitest”, that is, the blondest natural blond with light eyes—not having dismissed too early in the game token contestants of color and darker (“swarthy”) white ones.

One key issue that race-language studies can pursue regarding racial systems globally relates to Telles’ (2006) vertical-horizontal distinction, which is particularly relevant for discussing the US along with Brazil and the rest of Latin America. A useful question to pursue further is, to what extent and how immigrants to the U.S. maintain and modify discursively their homeland racial system, if there is one, as it comes into contact with the U.S.’s (Hao 2010). Though talk of “national” racial systems oversimplifies, it is a starting line for investigation. Hao

(2010) has found that race and education are the primary factors in the US's wealth stratification system; nativity and immigrant characteristics are secondary factors. Race and language studies would profit from investigations of how immigrant discourses on race impact race as a factor, among the others, in wealth outcomes.

Black anti-racist activists, organic and other intellectuals, have often mentioned that anti-racism in communities of color requires confronting internalized oppression, of which colorism is a major component. An important example of this was the “Black is Beautiful” submovement of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ‘60s. I will add the telling observation that in my courses on race (and color), students, who are almost all of color in this course, nearly invariably write their papers on colorism, not racism. Colorism, seen by many as superficial, is inextricably intertwined with the macro political context and history of racism.

Colorism, so deeply embedded in the intimacies of their lives, damages in ways that often public, expected racism—practically omnipresent in power-holding institutions—does not. In fact, it can be argued that white supremacy can only be maintained by the participation—actively or passively—of people of color themselves. This is not to “blame the victim” here, but to point researchers to a further examination of how people of color both challenge and maintain white supremacist colorism. Ending white supremacy will require more than the efforts of white people alone; people of color will need to think more reflexively, indeed to engage in critique of our own cultures, in order to discover effective ways to disrupt colorism within our communities. For us, skin colorism is no more a side issue in US society than is racism itself.

Globally, as mentioned, colorism remains central to how societies are structured. The world problem of racial categorization and the racism that is an integral part of that categorization is driven in many ways by the global presence of the U.S. through the export of

mass media products, fashion, images and standards of beauty, and corporate products and administration techniques. The influx of American (and European) capital into regions of less economically developed countries with no color hierarchies or weaker ones has produced comparatively extreme racialization in hitherto relatively uncolor-coded social terrains (Spears 1999b). The reinforcement in Cuba of racial segregation by American business and crime organizations, which was not abolished officially until Castro's takeover, is one of the better known instances (see Whitten 1974 on Ecuador and Colombia). Aspects of American society and culture, due to their promotion and spread by US imperialism, often have worldwide impact. This is the reason that treatments of racism worldwide should have a primary focus on the US. In learning more about American racial dynamics, we learn more also about something that continues to infect human societies globally.

In addition to thinking spatially, we must think temporally to confront racism, particularly in considering the mutability of racial formations. Using the history of changes in the development of US racial formations, we can single out the following considerations in better understanding change. First, the current change it is undergoing, from a rigid race-primary formation to a gradient, more fluid race cum (skin-)color formation, both having white supremacy as their fundamental governing principle. The historical promotion to whiteness, for example of Jews (Brodkin 1998), Italians, Eastern Europeans the Irish (Roediger 1991) and others of "solely European descent," has basically played itself out. Additionally the increased immigration of non-Europeans helps structure the move from racialization with race discourses dominant in power institution to racialization accompanied by the institutionally supported and growing promotion of colorization, i.e., increased colorism-- here in the sense of color's role increasing in importance compared to race in the assignment of privilege.

Notice the re-institutionalization of multiracialism (think biracials, mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, mustees, and redbones) after it had been institutionally phased out in the early twentieth century (officially in the 1920 census). Of prime importance, too, is the marked decrease in the US's white population. We see throughout the Americas a demographic correlation<sup>xiii</sup>: where whites are a majority (notably the US—for now), one finds a more rigid racial system; where whites are a minority (in Latin America), one finds a gradient color-heavy system complemented by race, with greater weight given to closeness-to-whiteness, measured by skin-color and other physical features (Spears 1999b, 1999d; Bonilla-Silva 2002, 2014, among other writings). Some scholars have gone further to argue that with the power-institution support of multiracialism cum skin-color hierarchy has come an emerging new expansion of whiteness, underlain by the promotion to whiteness of very light-skinned Latinx and Asian offspring of unions with one white parent, offspring with known recent nonwhite ancestry, diminishing the centrality of hypodescent (which has been so important historically in the US (Alba 2009). This emerging expansion of whiteness includes also very light-skinned African Americans and others.

The second consideration is whites' fear of reprisal (Spears 1999b). This is a topic usually considered too hot to touch, though it started appearing increasingly, but infrequently, in major media discussions after President Trump's election in 2016. What happens when the racial group that has been dominant in a society, enjoying its group privileges, increasingly witnesses a rise in the wealth, power, and numbers of dominated racial groups? Does the dominant group fear that the dominated groups could eventually gain enough power to retaliate for the way they have been treated, using the means that were used against them? Though unsettling, we must realize that this question is raised and investigated in white supremacist discourses online and elsewhere and should be investigated by members of the academic community since it helps greatly to

explain behavior among those white nationalist groups that foresee and prepare for a “race war.”<sup>xiii</sup> The fear of reprisal factor is additionally of great importance in analyzing the widespread attachment to guns in the US as evidenced by both rapidly increasing guns sales and proliferation of white supremacist militias and hate groups (Stroud 2015).

Can racism be eradicated? Given the remarkable strategic changeability historically of racial systems and their highly effective systems of privilege distribution (in effect, a divide-and-conquer mechanism), in addition to other factors mentioned, we must ask, when in the course of human events is it possible to rid societies of their racial formations (i.e., racism)? I have written (Spears 1999b), but certainly not the first to do so (e.g., Bell 1992), that America cannot be America without racism, or, we might add, colorism, which is inextricable from racism. This is to say that an America without racism as its *indispensable and major* organizational and cohesiveness pillar would be so fundamentally different that it would be a new society, produced by a thoroughgoing disconnection from its past (Spears 1999b).

This statement about racism being of the essence of the US merely recognizes that (white supremacist) racism is both pervasive and institutionalized, permeating all institutions—from the executive branch of government to pick-up basketball and play-date groups. It is historical, with its beginning in political-economic realities and goals; and, it serves an essential function in the conduct of the US’s and many other nations’ domestic and foreign affairs (Spears 2009). In terms of function, US racism serves a divide-and-conquer function, dividing whites, blacks, and other groups of color, preventing them from more effectively organizing together to press for the interests of all non-elites (those not of the upper class that controls capital).

It is important to go further to a related point that is not often encountered: one of the key considerations that has been almost consistently ignored in the literature on race and racism is

that non-elite whites do not constitute the primary or ultimate source of racist thinking and values. Rather, they *are led and coordinated in their racism* by the policies, discourses, and symbolism manufactured by white elites and their representatives. This point was elaborated early on by Du Bois<sup>xiv</sup> (1969 [1935]) and taken up later by Gran (1994), Baker and Patterson (1994), and van Dijk (1993, 2008) among others. Consequently, it would be of great value for race-language studies to look more into the workings of the main, power-wielding institutions that disseminate hegemonic ideologies: the mass media, education, religion, and government. An example of such a strand of research in government would be a linguistic etiology of the Republican Party's Southern Strategy. Often seen as launched by Ronald Reagan's campaign speech in Philadelphia, Mississippi, wherein he used coded language in pandering to the anti-black racism of whites in order to build the Republican electoral base.

### **Race Inside of Language**

Language varieties themselves can be structured in a way reflecting a community's race and color dynamics and the ideologies of which they are a part. Raciolinguistics does not have to study discourse solely because language varieties are themselves, through their grammars, raced to varying extents. This leads to an important point: race and language studies would do well to pay more attention to race in culture as it is encoded inside of grammar. Grammar is being used here in the sense that includes phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics/pragmatics, and lexicon.

There are many ways to investigate race, which is part of culture, in grammar. The easiest is by looking into the lexicon. Let us consider a few examples from African American English (AAE). The first involves the curious verb + particle construction *empty out* in the medical sense.

This construction means to perform a hysterectomy against a female's wishes (typically without her knowledge). Thus, we have sentences such as *They emptied her out* and *She was emptied out*. Why would any language variety lexicalize this notion? Why would this lexical item figure in African American English? It does so because during the Reign of Terror (Jim Crow), perhaps less frequently afterward, the practice apparently occurred enough for AAE speakers to find a term for it useful. We know that African Americans widely harbored—and harbor—distrust of medical institutions due to harmful, racist practices—medical experimentation and other forms of medical malice—inflicted on us (Washington 2006).

The second involves the expression *a lot of yella gone to waste*, directly related to colorism and internalized oppression. *Yella* (yellow) refers to light skin tone, which indexes positive personal traits, good looks being the most important. Thus, it is a reflection of internalized oppression (giving higher value to skin tones closer to “white”). Note that no terms for darker skin tones imply good looks. The *gone to waste* part of this old saying labels the putative tragedy of having light skin but not being (conventionally) good-looking, a condition that light skin normally confers. All of this operates to the extent that to questions such as *Is he/she good-looking?*, *What's she/he like?*, a communicatively effective answer is *He/She's yella*.

As noted, it is easy to understand how words and expressions—and also proverbs, which go to make up the most formulaic or frozen part of language—carry racial histories and ideologies. A language variety's phonological, morphosyntactic, and semantic-pragmatic features may seem arbitrary in some cases but are actually fully transparent when seen through culture. Another way of stating this is that, taking culture—taking community ideologies into

consideration, what might appear laden with irregularity and arbitrariness becomes transparent and rule-governed when linked to cultural, ideological particulars.

In African American English there are co-occurrence constraints on skin color terms such as *black*, *yella*, and *brown-skinned* and their equivalents (Spears 1999c). One can use *black* and *yella* in caustic comments and vilifications but not *brown(-skinned)* or its equivalents; and, there are no language *use* contexts where this rule is suspended. Consider the following examples, where the infelicitous example is preceded by a crosshatch:

Look at that yella [word or term used abusively, e.g., *punk*, *bitch*, *idiot*]

Look at that black \_\_\_\_\_,

#Look at that brown(-skin) \_\_\_\_\_.

The inadmissible example with *brown(-skin)* (*-skin* most often thus unsuffixed) compared to the other two examples demonstrates that the set of cultural values linked to these skin color terms has an effect on sentence construction, on what can and cannot be said in AAE. “Yella-ness,” i.e., closeness to whiteness, is often condemned in a metonymic resistance to white supremacy, while “black-ness,” remoteness from whiteness, is often condemned, in accommodation to white supremacy. An aspect of internalized oppression, the pejoration of blackness reflects accommodation to white supremacy while the pejoration of yella-ness reflects resistance to it.<sup>xv</sup>

Resistance and accommodation to the oppression of white supremacist racism, internalized oppression, and race/skin color’s shifting values all facilitate the understanding that language exists not only within the context of racial ideologies and language ideologies but also that *inside* languages, within their grammars, facets of ideologies govern some grammatical elements and structures (Silverstein 1979). This point is evident in the T/V distinction in many European languages and the Navajo animate-inanimate hierarchy, which fixes the ordering in

sentences of nouns based on their animate or inanimate referent's position in the hierarchy (Witherspoon 1977). The consideration of ideology is ultimately required for the adequate and principled description of T/V in the relevant grammars and of word order as it pertains to the animacy and inanimacy of nouns in Navajo. Likewise, racial ideology is necessary for explaining language patterns in the last African American English example, and the resulting explanation provides insight into how speaking subjects conceptualize race and color.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have entered a number of recommendations as to what type of research should be promoted more and the possible directions that future research in raciolinguistics might take. I have stressed the importance of macro contextual studies, particularly due to their value in illuminating and enriching micro contextual ones (and vice-versa), facilitating a deeper understanding of society qua system and structure and additionally an understanding of the state, more specifically the modern capitalist nation-state as an essentially hierarchizing, violent enterprise.

Finally, I ponder, as always, what can be done with race-language investigations. Focusing on the U.S., I note that the white supremacist racial formation, which obviously cannot exist without language, is an existential problem for all citizens and residents, not just people of color alone. The greed, exploitation, *and violence* that also drive the promotion and maintenance of racist structures, institutions, policies, and procedures are now evolving rather fully in accord with their own internal logic, largely the internal logic of capitalism hardly restrained, the logic

of which logic demands expansion and increasing control, without regard for the long-term interest of the collectivity. Any full reading of U.S. history, not to mention global history, makes the aforesaid proposition a truism. I have only to call attention to what is happening regarding the environment, pollution, losses of coastal lands, inequality, and the loss of social safety nets. Of existential importance also is the U.S. political system, the general dysfunction of which renders it unable to care for its disadvantaged constituents (suffering, for example, from opioid and other drug addictions, lack of access to adequate education, poisoning from pollution, unemployment, racism, and police abuse and brutality). The present-day U.S. polity's dysfunctional trajectory, unsustainable without its white-supremacist pillar, ties in directly with the world system, now realigning in China's favor. This realignment is due largely to the U.S. political system's nearly full capture by the interests of capital, which derives primarily from the logic of capitalism, not nationalism. Observe, as illustration, the astounding conceit, largely swallowed by a docile, uninformed public, that the U.S. qualifies as a democracy<sup>xvi</sup> while expensive electoral campaigns are privately financed, often with money from unknown sources, domestic and *foreign*. The global system, the nation, racism/colorism, language, ideology, capital, human welfare and survival—research and activism of immeasurable value and necessity await us.

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<sup>i</sup> I must point out, since it is not generally understood, that torture was an essential ingredient in the mode of production of bound labor systems, a star exhibit being U.S. capitalist chattel slavery, which came into its own in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In slavery, “every modern method of torture was used at one time or another: sexual humiliation, mutilation, electric shocks, solitary confinement in “stress positions,” burning, even waterboarding” (Baptist 2014: 141).

<sup>ii</sup> I use *slave*, not *enslaved*. All of the arguments in favor of *enslaved* that I have seen simply reflect a desire to ennoble somehow the victims of the institution, some of whom, like some members of other human populations, were ignoble. I do not believe that a word change is necessary in this case. Slaves were all human, and changing the noun does not raise awareness of that fact. *Slave* describes the status of the relevant persons regardless of how they came to be slaves or their attitudes toward their enslavement.

<sup>iii</sup> Spears 1999a, mentioned above as dealing with the macro context, informs this chapter’s discussion of race and racism.

<sup>iv</sup> I, not Alim, make the distinction of the two poles, so to speak, of showing ethnoracial identity.

<sup>v</sup> See Douglas A. Blackmon’s *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, New York, Doubleday, 2008.

<sup>vi</sup> State societies are those characterized by a centralized government, cities, occupational specialization, and social stratification (or dominance hierarchies). They make use of ideology and force for social control, having first arisen in Mesopotamia roughly 6,000 years ago.

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vii The religion hierarchy includes agnostics and atheists, whose very position on religion determines their “religious” status.

viii I lived in Washington, DC, in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King, when military troops occupied the black area of the city. This was the only time in my life that I have seen convoys of soldiers, weapons at the ready, patrolling a militarily occupied area. I lived with white housemates on the periphery of Washington’s main black neighborhood. My white roommates could leave the townhouse freely and were often escorted on their rounds by soldiers; I confined myself to the building after one venture outside, to avoid arrest and/or military violence.

ix This occurred before the 2008 presidential elections in most of my undergraduate courses, which I had stopped teaching before the 2016 election.

x Fanon and Blauner are the first sources to consult on the theory of institutional racism and the rationales for its premises.

xi This book is absolutely necessary reading for young men of color and their parents, especially all black and Latino ones.

xii The social and cultural history of societies can also play an important role. See Smedley and Smedley 2012 on important differences between Britain and the societies it spawned and the Latin colonial powers. See also Marvin Harris’s *Patterns of Race in the Americas*, New York, Walker and Company, 1964.

xiii Observe in this connection the Nazis’ use of the dog-whistle term *rassenkrieg* in their propaganda, some of which was required reading in my college German classes. (These readings were in a textbook on German morphology; and, they were no more, perhaps less, racist than American textbooks in some other courses. Quite accustomed to racist bile in textbooks, I found it quite curious that none of it was focused on black people.)

xiv I might add that DuBois was the first social scientist to demonstrate race’s nonreducibility to class—not Marx, Engels, or Lenin—and race’s inextricability from class, as is true for all social group categories in the essentially stratificational nature of all state societies. For more on DuBois, see Harrison and Nonini 1992.

xv The AAE skin-color term example can be laid out briefly and clearly. Other, more interesting, examples are much too complex to present and justify in a few pages.

xvi This is not to state, for example, that voting at the local and national levels never gives the electorate what it votes for, rather that, in terms of the basic, historical functioning of the nation, voting only temporarily and partially gives the electorate what it wants. Though waxing and waning over time, inequality, oppression, and environmental destruction have continued, lessening in some instances, but continuing as existential threats for the nation’s residents.