

# Anthro Notes

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## RACE AND ETHNICITY IN AMERICA

Varieties of (Homo sapiens): "Africanus negreus (black), Americanus rubescens (red), Asiaticus fuscus (tawny), and Europeus albescens (white)." (Linnaeus 1758)

"In my opinion, to dismember mankind into races ... requires such a distortion of the facts that any usefulness disappears." (Hiernaux 1964:43)

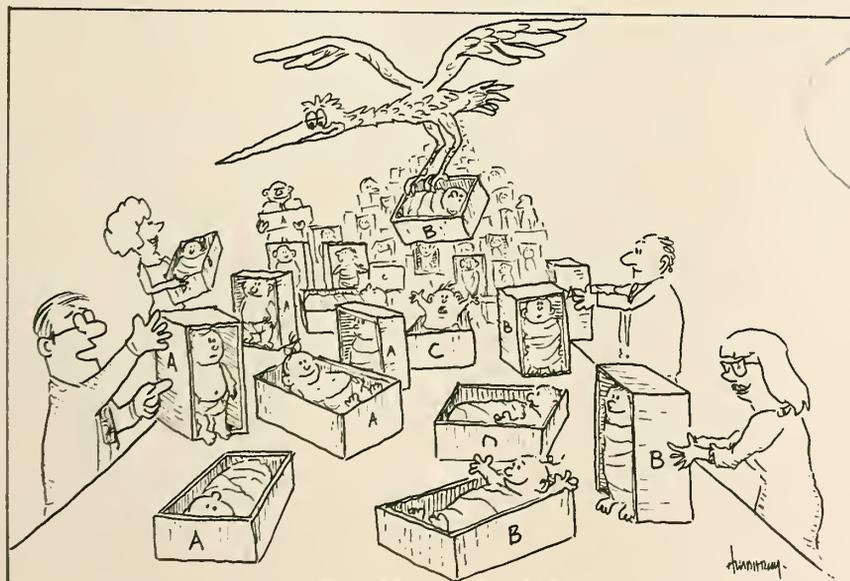
"...race and subrace do represent a truth about the natural world, which cannot be adequately described without consideration of them." (Baker 1974:4)

"Race is a term originally applied to populations who shared close common ancestry and certain unique traits, but it has been so overworked and its applications so broad and general that race is nearly

useless and is often replaced by ethnic group." (Molnar 1992: 36)

"It is important...to have a clear... understanding of the difference between race and racism, on the one hand, and ethnicity and ethnocentrism on the other." (Smedley 1993: 29)

Shortly after birth, each American baby is placed in a box--not a physical box, just a box on a piece of paper. This process, which counts the child as belonging to one and only one "race" or "ethnic group," will be repeated over and over throughout an individual's lifetime. Current American "boxes" include: 1. White, 2. Black, 3. Hispanic, 4. American Indian, 5. Eskimo or Aleut, 6. Asian or Pacific Islander. Anthropology departments sometimes



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receive desperate calls from parents: "I am from Pakistan, should I check 'white' or 'Asian'?" "My wife and I belong to different groups, how do we classify our baby?"

As a child grows, the "box" often will be designated by others, without the person's knowledge or input, as though a simple set of rules could generate a "correct" classification. But is there such a set of rules? Such classification implies that pure races and cultures existed with little intermixture in the recent past. But did such a time ever exist? Before air travel? Before Columbus? Before Marco Polo?

As the initial quotations suggest, anthropologists disagree about the subject of race and ethnicity, and opinions have radically changed over time. Far from reflecting biological and cultural "reality," race and ethnicity are terms increasingly seen as arbitrary constructs fulfilling a social need, with content and limits negotiated among members of each society. How else explain why university affirmative action offices group people from the Indian subcontinent with 'whites,' while in South Africa, they are officially 'Asians'. Japanese visitors to South Africa, however, are classified as 'whites'. In the 1990 census, every non-Native American who is not of Asian descent must be either 'black' or 'white', while 3,500,000 non-Asian South Africans are classified as 'coloured', neither 'black' or 'white.'

For over 100 years, "science"--particularly its biological and anthropological branches --has been asked three questions: Do races exist? If so, why? What is the most accurate racial classification, whether absolute or relative to geography and history? The larger question, most recently addressed by the scientists themselves, is: Why do we care? Why is the race issue important to scholars, and, even more so, to American society at large?

#### EARLY CLASSIFICATIONS - 18TH CENTURY

Anthropology is the field of knowledge most closely connected to the study of human differences, although attempts to

recognize and describe such differences are more ancient than the formal study of anthropology. The French naturalist Buffon, writing in the mid-18th century, may have been the first scholar to use the word 'race' to describe the varieties within a single species, whether humans or dogs, and to attribute these differences to local alterations of a single ancestral group. Like more modern biologists, he saw these physical differences as responses to different climates, diets, and even patterns of behaviors or cultural practices. We now know that agriculture, for example, resulted in decreasing tooth size in modern humans.



In the 18th century, following Linnaeus' classification of the varieties of Homo, the German scholar and physician Blumenbach developed the concept of human races. He drew up lists of physical and behavioral differences among five major "races": Caucasian (Linnaeus' white or Europaeus albens), Mongolian (Asiaticus fuscus L.), Ethiopian (Africanus negreus), American (Americanus rubescens L.) and Malay, the latter not distinguished in Linnaeus' classification, but added in later editions of Blumenbach's work to encompass the peoples of southeast Asia and the Pacific. Like Buffon, Blumenbach argued for a single origin of humankind, but thought that some races had "degenerated" from their original state.

#### RACE AND RACISM - 19TH CENTURY

From Blumenbach on, physicians dominated the study of human physical differences, emphasizing human anatomy rather than a

broad natural history viewpoint. Early 19th century scholars, like the American physician Morton, used flawed statistics to show that Caucasians had the largest brains, "Negroes" the smallest. (S.J. Gould, The Mismeasure of Man, 1981). Morton attributed these differences to separate creation (polygenism), rather than to adaptation or degeneration, and saw them as immutable. Gould, Smedley (1993) and others have argued that this shift reflects the emergence of a world view in which physical differences or "race" dominated all other kinds of differences such as class or nationality, and were used to justify the oppression of Africans in particular by peoples of European descent.



Smedley's chapter, "Growth of the English Ideology of Race in America," argues that the English, isolated from the more cosmopolitan Mediterranean world, were particularly unprepared to assimilate people with cultural and physical differences. The English colonized Ireland and America at the same time and grouped both Irish and American natives as "heathen," "idolatrous," "wild," and "savage," characteristics used to justify the appropriation of native lands by the more "civilized" English, and the removal or enslavement of the natives themselves.

Anthropologists, though clearly enmeshed in a racist and ethnocentric European and American culture of 19th century scholarship, saw themselves as countering the prevailing theories of the day by asserting human unity. In 1871, Tyler, an Englishman and founder of anthropology, defined the discipline as the study of "man

and the races of man." Although Tyler was careful to separate race and culture, physical anthropologists, many of whom continued to support polygenism, tended to confuse race and culture as well as to regard psychological traits and cognitive abilities as inborn, like skin color and hair form.

### **BIOLOGY AND CULTURE - SEPARATE BUT CONFUSED**

The confusion of biology and culture continued into the functionalist era of the 1920s and 1930s, with the application of organic models and adaptationist explanations to social phenomena. For example, it was asserted that just as dark skin evolved to protect humans from excessive ultraviolet radiation, so "joking relationships" with the mother's brother evolved to balance a strict avoidance relationship with the father and his relatives. Many so-called functional explanations of biological traits, in particular, were based on untested assumptions. Black boxes are perfect radiators of heat, so it was assumed that dark bodies would perform better in hot weather. In a series of tests conducted by the French Army in North Africa, however, performance differences between whites and blacks under extreme heat conditions failed to materialize. The confusion of biological and cultural or ethnic differences, together with an extreme view of racial and ethnic separation, derived from the polygenists, was incorporated into Nazi ideas of racial hierarchy and purity.

### **HOW MANY RACES?**

With more than 200 years of scholarship on the topic of human variation, do we know how many races or how many ethnic groups there are? Biologists define races as populations of a species that differ genetically from one another. The emphasis on genetic differences is important, since two unrelated populations which inhabit the same area can come to resemble one another physically as both respond to the same selective forces. Since gene pools

(continued on p. 11)

## ETHNICITY IN THE USA: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL MODEL

[Editor's Note: This article is a condensed version of an article published in 1993 in the *Journal of Ethno-Development* 2(1). For a copy, write to Professor Cerroni-Long, Anthropology/Dept SAC, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197. The Teachers Corner written for this issue of *Anthro.Notes* grew out of the author's research on ethnicity, summarized below.]

### ETHNICITY AND CULTURE

As a born and bred Italian academically trained in the study of Japanese culture, I never encountered ethnicity as a major social phenomenon until I first visited Hawaii in 1975. Becoming exposed to ethnic diversity for the first time made me realize the great continuity of certain culturally-conditioned patterns of behavior, and the role these patterns play in keeping ethnic groups distinct and separate.

Visiting Hawaii after having spent several years in Japan made me particularly interested in the Japanese-Americans I came to know there. What immediately struck me was how their Japaneseness had been subtly transformed and reinforced. Being familiar with Japanese nonverbal behavior, I could see it reproduced faithfully, even if in a simplified form. What had changed, in some cases dramatically, was verbal communication, especially as a vehicle for the expression of values and beliefs. However, a recognizable Japanese behavioral style was very much present, and among in-group members the decoding of its underlying symbolic meaning seemed to proceed undisturbed by superimposed verbal disclaimers.

These observations considerably strengthened my belief that culture powerfully influences communication, and gave me some basic ideas about how to define ethnicity in relation to culture. If the original patterns of nonverbal behavior are maintained across generations of people born and raised in a culture different from their ancestral one, then perhaps these

patterns constitute a core of cultural behavioral styles that can serve as a key to understanding the dynamics of cultural membership and identity. Subsequent research experiences in Asia, England, and Italy confirmed this. No matter what level of assimilation an ethnic group achieves, its members go on displaying a very specific set of micro-behavioral patterns whose uniqueness is often unrecognized but which, nonetheless, catalyzes both self-identification and group cohesion. Furthermore, these patterns generate a recognizable behavioral style that can establish group boundaries when necessary.

Eventually, I decided to test these ideas by conducting first-hand research in a multicultural society and came to America to pursue this research through graduate training in anthropology. Ethnic diversity is not a peculiarly American phenomenon but the type of ethnic groups one finds here and the ideological definition of ethnicity developed within the context of American society warrant special attention.

Most ethnic groups I had previously studied in Asia and Europe had not experienced relocation. They lived in areas ancestrally theirs and the characteristics of the land they inhabited were very much part of their sense of uniqueness. The situation in the United States is different. With the exception of Native Americans and Mexicans originally living in what has now become the American Southwest, all of the American ethnic groups are the result of migration. Furthermore, as a consequence of the Civil Rights Movement and the nation-wide unrest of the 1960's and early 1970's, there has emerged in the United States a "minority group" ideology. Consequently, over the past twenty years, the cultural diversity of some ethnic groups has been officially recognized and institutionalized through a process of majority-defined incentives, such as affirmative action, for socio-economic advancement. Largely because of this process, ethnicity and minority status have become equated in the minds of many Americans.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

During my research on ethnicity in America, I repeatedly found that Americans focused almost entirely upon ideas, and that many held the belief that since ideas change, individuals can continually reinvent themselves. However, I found that I could apply a complex set of micro-behavioral observation techniques, and document the retention of ethnic-specific behavioral styles across generations [see Teacher's Corner]. I was also able to document relevant commonalities in the behavior of people observed in random social settings, evidence of American expressive patterns that create the context and the foil for ethnic diversity.

## MODEL OF ETHNICITY

The model of ethnicity I developed is an anthropological one, built upon a specific definition of cultural, ethnic, and subcultural membership, all seen within the context of a comparative, relativistic and self-reflective approach. This approach finds direct application in my "outsider perspective," in the avoidance of any judgmental stance about group-specific rights, and in the emphasis given to self-analysis as the best mechanism for understanding not only one's own cultural/ethnic identity but also the parameters of one's interaction with people of different heritages.

Once I began teaching using my anthropological model of ethnicity, the student response was exceedingly positive, gaining me prestigious teaching awards and increasing the number of anthropology majors in my department. What students appear to find most liberating in the anthropological approach to ethnicity is the acknowledgment that all ethnicity has a cultural content; it is this cultural content--and not groups' special rights--that determines ethnic diversity. Furthermore, there are aspects of one's behavior that can only be understood by tracing their ethnic origin, just as there are other behaviors that are shared by all those born and raised within American culture. However, I have come to the conclusion that the success of

this model in my classroom may depend on some reasons quite unrelated to its intellectual quality. These reasons include the fact that I am a foreigner, that the model has no connection with current American orthodoxy on multiculturalism, and that I do not so much teach about ethnicity as teach ethnicity. Indeed, what may be most useful about this anthropological model is its avoidance of the confrontational premise of so much of the current debate about multiculturalism that focuses on self-definition, on the one hand, and diversity management, on the other.

## THE MULTICULTURALISM DEBATE

The national debate over multiculturalism, in general, and multicultural education, in particular, has contributed little to the solution of inter-ethnic tension in the USA. Despite numerous articles, debates, campus conferences and forums, the very term multiculturalism has come to signify all sorts of things to all sorts of people, while its literal meaning has become lost. This is a pity, because the reality that originally made the coinage of this term necessary has not changed and is not likely to do so in the future.

As immigration continues, the demographic composition of the USA keeps changing in the direction of diversity. The 1990 Census attests that 25% of the American population has "minority" origin. By 2050, the four major "official" minority groups--African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans--will make up 47% of the entire population (W.P. O'Hare: *American Minorities: The Demographics of Diversity*, Population Reference Bureau, 1992). Obviously, the school system is going to be affected directly by this demographic pattern, particularly in view of the concentration of certain minority groups--notably those of Hispanic and Asian origin--in a limited number of states. Several of the largest school systems are already dealing with a situation of "majority minority" populations.

Indeed, the needs created by current and projected demographic changes are so

urgent that one reads current discussions of multiculturalism in growing disbelief that so little is being done so late. Meanwhile, the anthropologists sit bewildered, wondering why they never were consulted on a matter on which they obviously have something relevant to say. But do they? Does the American definition of multiculturalism involve any real interest in culture?

Judging from the educational strategies being developed--especially in terms of curricular changes in post-secondary education--culture does not play a large role. Rather, multiculturalism seems only to generate attempts at increasing the "curricular visibility" of underrepresented groups, be they women, people with disabilities, members of particular religious groups, or ethnic minorities. What is missing is any attempt to enable students to understand the cultural context or cultural content of ethnic groups, the anthropological perspective that would help students better understand the multicultural society developing all around them.

#### CULTURAL MINDFULNESS

While most students respond with enthusiasm to the assigned exercises of micro-behavioral analysis aimed at identifying their own ethnic-specific patterns of behavior, a few students feel that a long family history of inter-ethnic marriage has so complicated their heritage that no clear-cut ethnic style can be identified. As a consequence, these students often tell me--with great sadness--that conducting the exercises would be useless. When I point out that self-analysis exercises always reveal patterns and that, in their case, these may document their "Americanness" rather than a specific ethnic heritage, they look at me with both disbelief and hope. By the end of the semester, only a few of these students manage to overcome their skepticism about the reality of an overarching American culture and document its impact on their own expressive style. All of them, however, acquire a measure of "cultural mindfulness," and as their minds become more discriminating in matters of

cultural/ethnic diversity, they seem to get inoculated against discrimination.

#### CONCLUSION

The belief that a distinctive American culture does not exist is so widespread among Americans that I would say it constitutes a core aspect of the national ideology. This ideology has traditionally emphasized ethnicity as something "one becomes truly American by losing," creating a double cultural denial that boosts "rugged individualism" while contributing markedly to the weak sense of identity from which many Americans suffer. My classes often end up being a setting in which people develop strategies for overcoming their sense of ethnic and cultural deprivation. It is encouraging to see that, as these strategies develop, some attempts are made at analyzing the ethnic or cultural roots for the behavioral style of relevant others, a comparative framework is created, and hypotheses are advanced for possible reasons for interpersonal clashes.

The net result of this process is bewilderment, followed by awe, followed by a renewed sense of understanding, in turn leading to at least potential tolerance, respect, and acceptance. At the end of the course, some students thank me, while others express a certain amount of concern for having triggered a "cultural mindfulness" they are not sure they want or can handle. Still others ask me how they can pass on their new awareness of "what makes people tick" to others, especially their children. I often wonder what might be achieved if we "anthropologized" the K-12 curriculum and spread the belief that ethnic diversity is interesting, stimulating and precious.

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## TEACHERS CORNER: TEACHING ETHNICITY THROUGH EXPRESSIVE STYLE

Teaching about American ethnicity is a great challenge. On the one hand, students need an introduction to the tremendous cultural diversity flourishing in the United States; on the other, teachers must beware of the "tortilla trap"--the danger of highlighting aspects of an ethnic subculture that may not be at all what insiders consider significant.

This Teacher's Corner, in two parts, describes an approach to teaching ethnicity by applying the anthropological concept of enculturation to the understanding of expressive style. By analyzing people's way of expressing themselves, students understand the "style" giving coherence to behavior and come to realize that style reflects both cultural and ethnic membership.

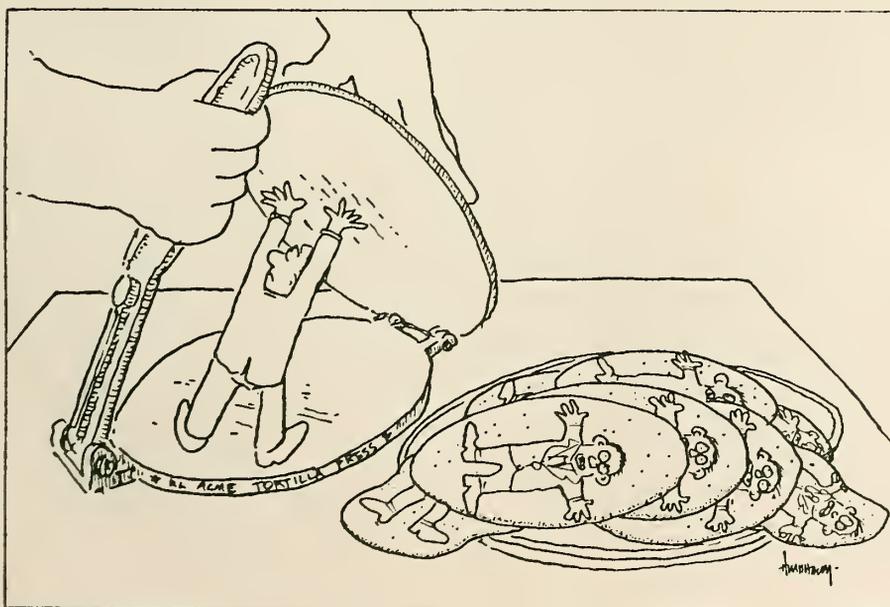
### PART ONE: MUSIC, ART, LITERATURE, AND FILM

By exposing students to a carefully selected range of ethnic-specific expressions in music, art and literature, teachers can help students recognize the common humanity that all cultural/ethnic groups share. By calling attention to the way various forms of personal and aesthetic expression--from clothes to music, from cuisine to painting--

fit together into a coherent pattern, teachers can stimulate student interest in knowing more about how such patterns develop and why they vary. This takes students far beyond the view of diversity as bits and pieces of exotica, to be examined as if culture were something strange and peculiar.

This approach motivates students to find out how behavioral style in another culture affects areas of life they are particularly interested in--such as making friends, falling in love, or choosing a career--which in turn, leads them to dig deeper into the meaning such choices have. If nothing else, such study triggers an interest in analyzing their own expressive style, initiating a process of cultural self-reflection that can lessen ethnocentrism.

How does all this translate into classroom practice? This approach first requires analysis and discussion of three fundamental concepts: culture, subculture, and ethnic group. Next, students learn how cultural, subcultural, and ethnic-group membership affect expressive patterns. Only after students are familiar with the anthropological perspective on cultural variation and have been exposed to how this variation affects behavior, do they study the expressive style of selected American ethnic groups. The number of groups covered and the depth of analysis vary, but the range of expressive forms presented to my classes remains constant.



THE "TORTILLA TRAP"

## Music

Generally, each ethnic-specific style is introduced to the students first through music. This is partly because young adults react strongly to sound, but mainly because the musical art form is the most content-free and stylistically specific. Students "get" the stylistic message of the music they hear quickly and easily. They can start free-associating images to the sounds they are exposed to and this gives them a context in which to assess the integration of ethnic expressive style. After playing select music from various ethnic groups, discussion follows from questions such as "what's the stylistic difference between jazz and rap?"; "where exactly does the hypnotic character of Native-American music come from?"; "why does Latin-American music make you want to move?". Such discussion also leads to better understanding of the process by which stereotypes can emerge from cross-cultural encounters.

## Visual Expression

After musical encounters, students come face to face with visual expressions. These may be presented through slides or reproductions of illustrative paintings or sculptures. Frequently I use examples of less "artistic" but no less relevant forms, such as fashion, personal ornamentation, food presentation, home decorations, and body language. Through discussion of these materials, students sort through the distinction between form and content, the influence of style on personal taste, the individuality-commonality of artistic idiom, and the various levels at which symbolic meaning can be "read."

## Literature

Once students understand that various levels of "reading" apply to all expressive forms, we move to literature through the analysis of short stories, poetry, and novel excerpts. These readings reinforce student appreciation of the linkage between content and form, and highlight the role of language as a powerful instrument for simultaneously expressing the universal and the particular, the culture-specific and the

ethnic-specific, the general and the personal. In this respect, I found the use of fictionalized autobiographical narratives particularly effective. The works of Louise Erdich, John Okada, Carlos Bulosan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Oscar Hijuelos, Paula Marshall, Jo Pagano, and Maya Angelou are excellent examples of this type of writing and can be easily excerpted. Less conventional but no less powerful materials come from the poetry of Sandra Cisneros and LeRoi Jones/Amiri Barakai and even unorthodox choices such as Garrison Keillor's humorous prose can be put to very good use.

Stories can be an excellent vehicle for intercultural understanding; indeed, one of the aims of teaching literature is to stir what Robert Coles calls the "moral imagination" (*The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, 1989). Novelist Barbara Kingsolver has observed that:

Fiction creates empathy, and empathy is the antidote to meanness of spirit. Nonfiction can tell you about the plight of working people, of single mothers, but in a novel you become the character; touch what she touches, struggle with her self-doubt. Then when you go back to your own life, something inside you has maybe shifted a little. (*Newsweek* July 12, 1993:61).

This subtle shifting in the axis of a self-centered universe is precisely one of cultural anthropology's chief contributions and the capacity for sustained empathy one of the skills the discipline fosters.

## Film

Without detracting from the value of literature, however, the expressive medium I consider most effective in heightening sensitivity to cultural and ethnic diversity is the feature film. Film combines the impact of a storyline--triggering catharsis--with enormous richness of documentation at the visual, auditory, and symbolic levels. Film simultaneously engages the senses, the emotions and the intellect. Film stays with you as image-specific memory and as content-based message. Film is a multifaceted

cultural document open to a variety of analyses, and, when chosen carefully, it can be a powerful vehicle for immersing students into a completely alien world.

By choosing films made by directors who are themselves members of the ethnic group represented, you can call your students' attention to the insider point of view in dramatic expression. By judiciously selecting "popular" films, you can facilitate comparisons of style and themes across groups. By highlighting the musical, visual, and fictional characteristics of the films presented, you can lead students toward integrating the knowledge they have already accumulated through exposure to other expressive media and facilitate their recognition of the ethnic group's overall style. On the practical side, the availability of videos for rent makes this approach easy and cost-effective, and the entertainment dimension of films manages to involve even the most disengaged student.

Because feature films are such a powerful medium, even brief excerpts make a great impact. With some careful previewing, you can select the most effective sections for consideration. As an extra bonus, I have found that the films that best illustrate ethnic style also tend to dispel the most generally-held stereotypical views of different groups, which even well-meaning films sometimes unwittingly reinforce. Thus, I use "Pow-Wow Highway" rather than "Thunderheart," "School Daze" rather than "Do the Right Thing," "Crossing Delancy" rather than "The Chosen," "True Love" rather than "Good Fellas," "A Great Hall" rather than "Dim Sum." Happily, ethnic cinema is a flourishing phenomenon and while some films--such as "El Norte" or "The Wash"--are likely to remain among my regular choices, I constantly add new titles to my selection list.

### Conclusion

After almost a decade of experimenting with teaching ethnicity through expressive style, I believe this approach effectively modifies students' attitudes toward diversity in the direction of increased tolerance, understanding, and respect.

What's more, students seem to feel this way, too. Even in cases in which personal negative reactions to a particular group's expressive style do not become resolved through the analysis of it, students often express appreciation for at least achieving a clearer understanding of what specifically alienates them. It has long been an axiom of education that it is indispensable to know oneself in order to understand others. Cultural anthropology expands this view by teaching us that it is only by understanding others--in all their many varieties--that one can truly know oneself. The "expressive-style approach" facilitates this process and, at least occasionally, leads students to recognize that the "other" can really be a "brother."

### Suggested Readings:

How ethnicity affects expressive style:

Kochman, T. *Black and White Styles in Conflict*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Longstreet, Wilma S. *Aspects of Ethnicity: Understanding Differences in Pluralistic Classrooms*. New York: Teacher's College Press, 1978.

Multimedia documentation of ethnic expressive styles (especially musical, artistic, and literary):

Ch'maj, Betty E. M. *Multicultural America*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993.

Two excellent anthologies of "ethnic" writings are:

Brown, Wesley and Amy Ling, eds., *Imagining America*. New York: Persea Books, 1991.

Perkins, Barbara and George Perkins, eds., *Kaleidoscope: Stories of the American Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

How to heighten intercultural understanding through films, and where to find useful films, read Summerfield, E. *Crossing*

*Cultures through Film.* Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993.

## PART TWO: MICRO-BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION EXERCISES

### A: Non-Verbal Interaction Analysis

Ethnicity influences aspects of behavior that are clearly revealed in two-people interaction. By observing the way you express yourself in interaction with others, you can pinpoint some overall characteristics that, in turn, may reflect your identification with ethnic or subcultural groups.

1) Interactive DISTANCE (How close do you like to be to people when you interact with them? Pay attention to the range of your choices and what affects them most. Is it the relationship with the other person, the other person's sex-age-status, or the circumstances/setting of the interaction?)

2) TOUCHING (How often do you touch in standard interactions with: a stranger, an acquaintance, or a friend? Where do you touch this person? Examples of touching include: brushing, spot touching, hitting, holding. Which one do you use most often? How do you typically react to being touched by a stranger, an acquaintance, or a friend?)

3) Postural ORIENTATION (How do you position yourself in interaction? Possibilities include: face to face, at an angle, side by side, and back to back. Which do you choose most often in interacting with strangers, acquaintances, friends?)

4) Interactive GAZE (Eye contact can be direct, side-glance, peripheral, and absent. Which one characterizes your interactive gaze and which one do you find most comfortable receiving? What do you consider a comfortable gaze duration in interacting with strangers, acquaintances, friends?)

5) GESTURES (How often do you gesture during a typical episode of interaction? What parts of your body are involved? Do you combine gesturing with touching? Of

self or of your partner? Do you gesture with objects or only with free hands? How aware are you of your gesturing? What is the impact of a conscious restriction of gesturing on the quality of the interaction?)

### Reference Source:

Hall, Edward T. *The Hidden Dimension.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966.

### B. Taste Orientation Analysis (Food)

Using the information given in class on the cultural specificity of basic culinary choices, try to answer these questions:

1) Which basic flavor combinations characterize the food you find most appealing for regular eating? (You need to pinpoint the basic flavoring ingredients. This is sometimes fairly simple--many people may be able to guess at least two of the basic flavors of Mexican cuisine: tomato/chili peppers/cumin--but it can also be quite complex.)

2) What staple food do you find especially difficult to do without? (Something basic you simply "must" have quite often.)

3) Whether or not you cook, what type of food preparation do you find most appropriate for festive occasions?

4) Which "look" do you enjoy most in the way food is presented on your plate?

On the basis of your answers, try to trace the ethnic background that most closely correlates to your choices. For example, if you most enjoy soy sauce/ginger/sugar-flavored foods, often "need" to eat rice, consider the preparation and partaking of soupy stews very cheering, and like food to be presented in small pieces, arranged with an eye to color and shape, your ethnic ancestry is most likely Japanese.

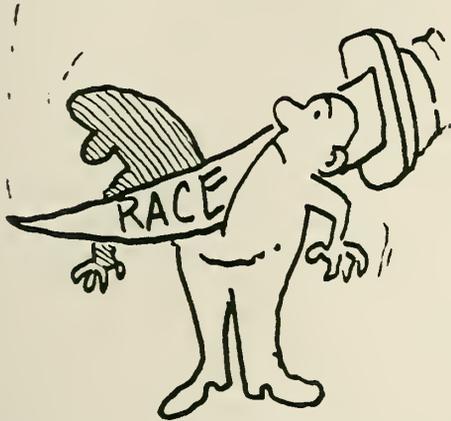
### Reference Source:

Farb, P. and G. Armelagos. *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating.* New York: Pocket Books, 1980.

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change over time in response to natural selection, mutation, random events, and migration or hybridization, biological races are also limited in time. Can the human species be divided into populations that differ genetically from one another?



Many anthropologists today would argue that such a division is impossible, due to extensive migration and hybridization among human groups throughout human history. In a reaction to the discredited studies of the early 20th century, many anthropologists have pointed to the continuous or "clinal" nature of human variation, arguing that biological 'races,' in fact, do not exist. There is no line across the middle of the Sahara, or the Mediterranean, that divides people into "white" and "black," nor is there a north-south line in Eurasia dividing "whites" from "Mongoloids" (or "Asians"). Even the New World remained in genetic contact with the Old through the intermingling of seafaring peoples from both sides of the Bering Sea, as well as of Inuit and Norse in Greenland. Nor is there a set of criteria that will reliably differentiate members of these large racial groups. The use of skin color will group Africans with native peoples of Australia and south Indians, while the use of hair form and hair color will group the latter two with Europeans.

What about genetics? Should not a comparison of the genetics of different populations allow us to define differences and reconstruct historical relationships? Yes, argues L. L. Cavilli-Sforza of Stanford, who has used genetic traits determined

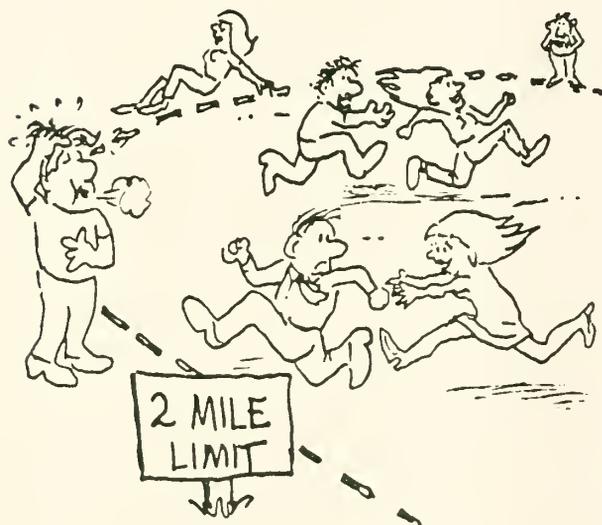
from blood samples to construct trees of relatedness for large numbers of human groups worldwide. Genetic traits unrelated to surface differences were once considered to reflect a deeper genetic relationship between peoples, unaffected by natural selection. We now know, however, that even such supposedly "neutral" features as your blood group (A, B, or O) are often subject to natural selection in a way that creates similarities in groups that are otherwise unrelated. For example, both the Irish and the Blackfoot Indians have similar frequencies of A blood; this is more likely to reflect a common disease history than any migration event of the past. People with A blood appear to have been more susceptible to smallpox, while people with O blood were more frequently felled by bubonic plague.



Rebecca Cann, of the University of Hawaii, has constructed trees based on the overall similarity of the mitochondrial DNA genomes in individuals of different populations. These trees often cluster individuals from different populations together, particularly in very diverse regions such as Africa. But J. Marks of Yale University, among others, cautions against the too rapid acceptance of population relationships based on DNA similarities. The degree of similarity between two strands of DNA is a subjective judgement, particularly if the strands are of different lengths, due to deletions or repetitions in one, relative to

the other. Furthermore, as long as we do not understand the relationship between particular DNA sequences and particular traits, we do not know what we are looking at.

Can we even define a local population of humans for the purpose of sampling it and comparing it to others? On a local level, geographers have demonstrated the existence of breeding populations in humans, reflected in the statistical tendency to select one's mate from within a certain radius. Even in industrialized societies of the 20th century, this radius may be surprisingly small: a mile or two in mid-20th century England (Molnar 1992: 195).



In each situation, however, the breeding population of "suitable" or even "actual" mates is always culturally circumscribed or expanded in ways that defy geographical proximity. Immigrants may be required to take a mate from their home population or encouraged to marry into the new one. Cultural rules may prescribe marriage to a cousin (Bedouin), or to the most geographically distant person available (ju/wasi).

Mates taken from outside the geographer's radius may bring changes to the genetic frequencies of the local population or even create new populations. African-American populations exhibit different genetic frequencies from those of their presumed parent populations in West and Central Africa, due to the American pattern of exogamy (mating outside one's group) among once separate African ethnic groups,

as well as gene flow with non-African populations in the Americas (primarily western Europeans and eastern Native Americans). In addition, African-Americans were exposed to a different set of natural selection factors in America--climatic, nutritional, and disease differences. For example, the Duffy blood group gene  $Fy^b$  protects against a particularly deadly form of malaria called vivax malaria. Virtually 100% of contemporary West and Central Africans carry the  $Fy^b$  gene and are protected against vivax malaria. European, Asian and Native American populations, on the other hand, maintain low frequencies of the  $Fy^b$  gene and are susceptible to this infectious disease. Approximately 89-93% of African-Americans carry the  $Fy^b$  gene, reflecting the results of the reduced natural selection pressure of vivax malaria in America as well as genetic change in non-African groups. Similarly, the gene frequencies of individuals classed as "White" in America, frequently reflect substantial percentages of genes that are more common in "non-Whites." This pattern strongly suggests that in the American environment, the flow of genes between formerly geographically distinct peoples has been multidirectional, influencing the subsequent composition of each group.

Restrictions on interbreeding within the geographer's average radius, due to caste or religious differences, for example, may create genetically differentiated groups that occupy the same local area. This has been the case in Ireland, where Catholics and Protestants rarely intermarry. As a result, differences within populations are often as great as differences between populations, making it almost impossible to assign individuals to particular groups, based on physical traits alone. Even in a case where some anthropologists argue for major "racial" differences, e.g. Khoisan vs. "Negroid", in actuality it is impossible to assign every individual to one or the other of these groups on physical grounds alone, just as it is impossible to assign individuals in America to the categories of the census on physical grounds alone. Within the African continent, for example, there is more physical, physiological, and genetic diversity, than among Africans and any

other group, or between Europeans and east Asians. At no time in the past did totally "pure" or "isolated" races exist.

A glance at most introductory texts of physical anthropology, however, shows that efforts to list a few major geographical subdivisions are still current, although always qualified by noting that not all individuals or populations can be put into the categories. Most of these lists closely approximate the original five races of Blumenbach, although some also elevate the Khoisan-speaking peoples of southern Africa to that level of distinctiveness, e.g. Homo sapiens hottentotus, also called Sanids (Baker, 1980: 303-324, 624) or Capoids. Interestingly, the greatest variation in these lists is in the treatment of what the US Census calls "Asian and Pacific Islanders." Where Blumenbach recognized only Mongolians and Malays, others, using 1950s studies by Stanley Garn, may divide the latter into Australians, Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians. In addition, some taxonomies separate peoples of the Indian subcontinent as a separate race. Groups that are assumed to lie outside these large categories, or geographical races, from African-Americans to the Ainu of Japan, are either subsumed, ignored, or treated as curiosities, isolates, or 'hybrids'.

### ETHNICITY INSTEAD OF RACE

As noted by Molnar, the term "race" is increasingly replaced in public documents and folk taxonomies by the term "ethnic group" or "ethnicity." Ethnicity is a more recent concept in anthropology than "race," although the underlying concept of "ethnos" or "ethnology," denoting a people distinguished by cultural traits is older, dating back to at least the mid-19th century. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "ethnicity" was first used in 1953 by the sociologist David Reisman to explain how individuals and groups in multi-cultural settings shape their identities and their political and economic goals in terms of their interactions with one another.

How do groups (or the scholars who study them) construct or define the boundaries of an ethnic group? As in the case of race, two

contrasting views of ethnicity exist. The "primordialists" hold that ethnicity arises from similarities between individuals of the group in physical features and language. These features have the power to impart a sense of group and individual identity, of belonging to the community. Ethnicity in this view is "natural," and is based on biological (skin color, body shape) or linguistic affinities that are distinct from and prior to particular social or historic conditions.

In contrast, "instrumentalist" models hold that groups create ethnicity for political and economic interests. In this view, "ethnicity" is rationally oriented toward the fulfillment of specific goals like access to economic power, nationalism, or freedom from colonial rule.

Most scholars today reject these simplistic alternatives and hold the position that neither is sufficient to explain ethnic group structure and sentiment. Primordialism overlooks the fact that ethnic identity is not a natural feeling that simply emerges mysteriously in all human communities, but a complex and dynamic set of symbolic meanings patterned in history. Instrumentalists are so concerned with political and economic motivations that they sometimes ignore the question of how the particular elements or symbols of an ethnic identity are chosen. Ethnic consciousness may depend on perceived biological similarities, on a common language or linguistic structure, or on numerous cultural factors and learned behaviors ranging from religion to "styles" of speech and interaction.

Some ethnicities have been determined in large part by recent historical events such as colonization, nationalism or urbanism. In Ethiopia, the "Falasha" Jews were named by Amharic leaders (Falasha means "exile" in Amharic), while in Europe, the Bosnian Muslims identified themselves as Muslims both as a way to further their political power in previous Islamic states, and, more recently, as a form of resistance to Yugoslavian nationalism.

Other ethnicities have long histories. In Africa, the Hutu and Tutsi of Rwanda, and

the Tswana and Sarwa of Botswana predate the onslaught of European colonialism. Nor can the ethnic composition of nations in Europe, (Basques, Flemish), or northern Africa be explained as a correlate of modernity. This is not to imply that ethnic sentiments are "traditional" and unchanging, only that what people believe about their past has a direct relationship to what they are doing in the present. People may believe their ethnic ties are ancient, but the meaning and definition of these changes over time and differs according to historical circumstance. Ethnicity among Hutu and Tutsi, for example, while embedded in a long pre-colonial history, underwent drastic changes in just two years: 1959-61, when the states of Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire were created. The Muslims of Bosnia, mobilized by ancestry and modern nationalism, do not fit neatly into either the primordialist or instrumentalist conceptions.

#### ETHNICITY AND STEREOTYPES

Like racial categories, ethnic categories have a static quality that can perpetuate stereotypes of cultural homogeneity and mask within-group variation. Categories such as "European-Americans," "African-Americans," "Hispanic-Americans," and "Asian-Americans" are comprised of many smaller culturally diverse groups. When we fail to recognize this internal variation, we perpetuate stereotypes that often do great disservice and assume that all members of each category are alike.

One benefit of an ethnic focus in anthropology is that it requires us to search for ways in which people, not nature, create their identities. Unfortunately, this emphasis has yet to broaden into public usage.

In the US census of 1970 and 1980, the clearest example of a "race" with little or no biological component was the category "Hispanic." This grouping originally was designed to encompass Spanish-speaking migrants from Latin America, who were also categorized as "brown" due to various admixtures of Africans; native South Americans; and peoples from Spain,

Portugal and other European (and Asian) countries. But, if the purpose was to define a biological entity, why should Europeans recently arrived from Spain, or non-Latin individuals who have acquired a Spanish surname through marriage, be included? Why should Spanish-speaking immigrants from Latin America with German surnames be excluded? How should Latin Americans of primarily African descent be categorized? In the 1990 census, the category "Hispanic" was redefined as an ethnic group, so that an individual can also classify him or herself by "race" as a "White," a "Black," or an "Indian" (Amer.). But what ethnic group combines Portuguese from Brazil and Argentineans of Welsh or Syrian descent, except with reference to the "Anglo" culture of the U.S.?

In the U.S., on the other hand, African-Americans or Blacks and European-Americans or Whites remain overemphasized, leading to increasing polarization between these groups, and creating false notions of biological and cultural homogeneity within these groups. Such practices, rooted in the political, economic, and historical circumstances of this nation, continue to obscure the very real commonalities shared by members of the same sex, class, community, or job category, as well as the common values and beliefs of a uniquely American culture that the two groups have jointly created.

If identities, whether racial or ethnic, are indeed cultural and historical constructs, then they are also changeable. At a time, when ethnicity is so often associated with violent conflict throughout the world, a conception of identity as mutable and contingent on circumstance may offer some optimism for the future.

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