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PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON RACE, RACISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY

by *Johnnetta Betsch Cole*



Growing up in Jacksonville, Florida, in the days of legal racial segregation, “race” was an ever-present reality in my life. Deeply etched into the practices of most White Southerners was the belief that I, as a member of the “Negro race,” was inferior to all individuals of the “White race”; and that wherever possible, the two “races” should be kept apart. Thus I lived in a “colored” neighborhood; in public places I could only drink from water fountains and eat at lunch counters designated for “colored” people; and I had to sit at the back of the bus and in the “colored” car of trains.

From my parents, family, teachers, civic and religious leaders, I heard a radically different message about “race.” It was this: that there were no superior or inferior races; and that I had the potential to be as smart, moral, and accomplished as any White person. From my parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, I was told that I must be successful and “a credit to our race.” And, I was told repeatedly that I had the responsibility not only to soar to the height of my possibilities, I must also do my part to help dismantle irrational notions about “the Negro race.” To reinforce this position, in Sunday school I was taught to sing: “Red and Yellow, Black and White,

they are precious in His sight, for he loves the little children of the world.” Not just during Negro History Week (celebrated since 1976 as Black History Month), but throughout the year, my teachers taught us about great heroes and sheroes of “our race,” who had accomplished extraordinary feats despite the oppressive conditions of racism. Even as a child, I had an intuitive sense that even though I was treated differently by White society, I was not fundamentally different from people who had less melanin in their skin than I.



Johnnetta, age 5 (left), and her sister Mavynee Betsch, age 7.

SPECIAL ISSUE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE AAA EXHIBITION ON RACE
(Exhibition opens at the National Museum of Natural History June 18)





Band member Johnnetta Betsch (first row, third from the right), an 11th grader at Stanton High, one of two high schools for African American students in Jacksonville, FL.

Because I was the great granddaughter of A.L. Lewis, the most prominent “Negro” citizen of Jacksonville, and the city’s first Black millionaire, I came to understand that no amount of money could buy one out of the rules and practices of Southern racism. “Race” clearly trumped class in Southern culture. And although I did not develop a feminist consciousness until many years later, growing up as a girl in the segregated South presented me with many opportunities to experience some of the complexities and intersections of “race,” gender, and class.



Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole, Professor of Anthropology, Afro-American Studies and Women’s Studies at the University of MA, Amherst.

The adults in my family were outspoken opponents of segregation and activists in the struggle against racism. From an early age, I was exposed to calls for racial equality; and as I moved into my teens, I became an active participant in marches and demonstrations against segregation. The fundamental basis on which my family, my community members, and I called for an end to the ideology of segregation was rooted in the belief that the “Negro race” was just as good and smart as the “White race.” However, I do not recall hearing anyone question the very concept of different races. Indeed, the idea that there are different “races” was so pervasive that most Black Americans believe this to be a reality. It was many years later in an anthropology class at Oberlin College that I was exposed



Senior yearbook photo, Oberlin College, 1957.

to evidence that while there is diversity in the physical appearance of human beings, there is only one race, THE HUMAN RACE. Today, many many years since my college days, I still recall the great sense of vindication that I felt in hearing scientific evidence for something I had always thought...and hoped was the truth.

As I moved into the field of cultural anthropology as a graduate student, and then as a professor, I came to appreciate additional lessons that this field teaches us about “race” and racism. Here are four of those lessons.

While the pitting of one group against another based on the fallacious notion of race is found in culture

after culture and nation after nation, we have yet to find a gene that causes these tensions to occur. No matter how widespread and tenacious racism is, it is not transmitted genetically. It is learned. And because it is learned, it can be unlearned. Best of all, imagine if we stopped teaching it! I am not naïve enough to think that it would be easy to stop the teaching of racist ideas. For racism is rooted in the very concept and realities of power and privilege. And as the great abolitionist and feminist Frederick Douglass once said: “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

A second lesson from anthropology is this. While certain groups of people have consistently oppressed other groups, there is no group of people immune to practicing intolerance. Looking around our world, we see that from blatant prejudice to the barbaric victimization of one group by another, such expressions of bigotry are not the sole possession of a particular people.

The power of human empathy is a third lesson that anthropology can teach us. If men really work at it, they can come to understand many of the realities in women’s lives. Those of us who tell ourselves that we are fully abled ought to be able to engage in the kind of human empathy that would allow us to understand what it is like to be differently abled. Human empathy should help heterosexuals to have some sense of what it is like to be discriminated against because one is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Surely, one does not have to be Jewish to imagine the pain and suffering of the victims of the Holocaust. Through reading, serious thought, and human empathy, it is possible for White people to relate to what it is like to be a person of color—Black, Latino, Native American, or Asian Pacific Islander American—in a society that privileges being White.

A fourth lesson that anthropology teaches us is that even when racism is deeply etched into the economic, political, religious, and cultural life of a country, change can come. The famous American anthropologist, Margaret

Mead, put it this way: “Never doubt the ability of a small group of committed citizens to change the world. It is the only way it ever happens.” When I think about the racist environment in which I grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, and I look at that same city today, I acknowledge that along with the great champions of the civil rights movement—like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks—it was the extraordinary efforts and sacrifice of many ordinary people that brought legal segregation to an end.

Today, from where I stand as an African American woman, a cultural anthropologist, and the director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, I applaud the presentation of the American Anthropological Association’s RACE exhibit at the National Museum of Natural History. For our chances of ending racial inequality in our communities, our nation, and our world are surely increased when more and more people learn the lessons that anthropology can teach us about “race” and racism.

Johnnetta Betsch Cole is the Director of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African Art.



Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole, Director of the National Museum of African Art.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE RACE PROJECT

by Yolanda T. Moses and Joseph Jones



Today seems an auspicious time to forge new ways to teach about Race: what it is, and what it isn't – from a biological, cultural, archaeological and linguistic perspective. With the election of an “African-American” President in 2008, a person whose mother was an American anthropologist and whose father came from Kenya, Barack Obama appears to be forging new ways to be a bi-racial and multi-faceted American, helping many approach the issues surrounding race in new ways.

To help teachers and students begin a fruitful discussion about race, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) undertook a major initiative on race, sponsoring a large exhibition *Race: Are We So Different?* that opened at the Science Museum of Minnesota in January 2007. With generous support from the National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation, this exhibition is designed to change the way teachers in middle school and high school teach about race, a subject that Americans, in general, are often reluctant to talk about. In addition, exhibition developers designed a family guide to help parents talk to their children about race: http://www.understandingrace.org/resources/for_families.html. The guide presents activities, stories, and exercises for parents and children to do together as well as offering suggestions for discussions about race.

Through the lenses of science, history, and how race is lived in “everyday life,” project developers provided a platform for discussing one of our society's most complex issues – using the disciplinary lens of anthropology.

The goal of the *Race: Are We So Different?* Project was to produce a traveling exhibit, a website, and educational materials to convey a comprehensive and integrative story about race and human variation. The story, geared for middle-school students through adults, carries three overall messages:

- Race is a recent human invention;
- Race is about culture, not biology;
- Race and Racism are embedded in our institutions and everyday life.

The exhibit and its website explore three themes:

- The history of the idea of race;
- The science of human variation;
- The experience of living with race and racism.

As described in an earlier *AnthroNotes* article (Spring 2007) by Margaret Overbey, the website, www.understandingrace.org, includes a virtual tour of the *RACE* exhibit, videos, historical timelines, activities, and quizzes, as well as scholarly papers. Teachers and families can access further education materials in the website's resources section. Two teacher's guides – for middle school and high school teachers – present race and human varia-



Calipers and hair samples are among the tools scientists used to measure human differences from early to mid-1900s. The calipers belonged to William Montague Cobb, the first African American physical anthropologist. Photo: Mary Margaret Overbey.

tion through the integrated lenses of biology, culture, and history. The guides meet national and select state standards for science, biology, social studies, and social science and provide more than 10 lesson plans that address biological and cultural variation, and the experience of living with race and racism. The teacher's guides include some of the background material and lesson plans published in a related resource for teachers, *How Real is Race? A Sourcebook on Race, Culture, and Biology* by Carol Mukhopadhyay, Rosemary Henze, and Yolanda Moses (2007).

Today, the main exhibition continues its national tour to more than twelve cities across the country, including Washington, D.C., where it will open at the National Museum of Natural History on June 18, 2011. Visit <http://www.mnh.si.edu/exhibit/race> for events at the National History Museum. The exhibition closes December 31, 2011 and then continues its national tour through 2014. In addition to the main exhibition, there is a second 5,000 sq. ft. version of the exhibit and a third 1500 sq. ft. version of the exhibit designed so that smaller exhibit spaces around the nation can take advantage of this tremendous resource.

Currently, we are in the process of learning from teachers who have used the project materials whether or not these materials met their expectations, and whether they have changed the way they approach the subject of race in teaching the social sciences, the biological sciences, as well as archaeology. We are seeking additional funding from NSF for this new project.

What has really surprised us in the years since the RACE exhibit began with its award-winning website is the realization that there is such a strong need and desire for a conversation about race in America – well beyond teachers and students. Anthropological materials from the RACE project have, indeed, stirred conversations in museums and in both 9-12 and university and college classrooms. But such discussions have also been generated in rural, suburban, and urban communities; in civil society and social justice groups and organizations; in corporate boardrooms;



Piles of money show the wealth disparities that exist among those who identify as White, Asian, African American, and Hispanic/Latino. Photo: Mary Margaret Overbey.

in arts organizations; in state agencies (for example, the child protection agency of Texas); and in government circles, including local, state and federal governmental organizations and agencies.

Looking Ahead

As the U.S. public confronts the notion that race and racism are more complex, nuanced, and prevalent than many believe, now is the time to ask collectively— as anthropologists and as educators – *what are the next steps for a public anthropology of race project?* Consider the following:

- Does the integration of concepts such as “global vision” and “social and emotional literacy” into educational standards and frameworks provide an opportunity to promote RACE and anthropology more systematically in schools?
- Since any long-term public education program about RACE must involve a K-12 educational component, how can the AAA partner with K-12 teachers toward this end?

- The Race project's key messages were developed several years ago for a broad public. How can we combine additional ethnographic and other forms of anthropological knowledge to elaborate upon these messages and produce new programming illuminating the dynamics of race and racism? What new research topics and findings should inform this process? How can we best deal with genetics and race?
- What greater role can anthropology departments play in developing and implementing RACE programming especially given that the smaller version of the exhibit will likely be seen in university and college venues? Is there a special role for graduate students who comprise the next generation of anthropologists and often assume important teaching responsibilities in introductory-level undergraduate courses?
- How can the RACE project be used in efforts to develop, maintain, and perhaps repair relationships between universities and their surrounding communities including local schools?
- Among anthropologists, what are the prospects for, and impediments to, the types of intra- and interdisciplinary commitments necessary for addressing today's and tomorrow's social problems? For example, is there a broad social justice vision of human difference that can guide RACE and position it as a platform for future public engagement projects?

There are many other important questions and issues to consider, and we must all work together to continue this work. Please send your comments and suggestions to Yolanda Moses at yolanda.moses@ucr.edu and to Joseph Jones at josjones@anthro.umass.edu.

We hope that educators reading this article will look for the exhibit when it comes to their area. (See aaanet.org/race for a schedule.). If you are in the Washington, DC area, the Smithsonian has arranged many public events at



A turn of the century ceremonial vest with American flags stands in contrast to signs illustrating discrimination. The exhibit explores “white” as a racial category. Photo: Mary Margaret Overbey.

several Smithsonian museums. Visit <http://www.mnh.si.edu/race> for an events listing.

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- Yolanda T. Moses, National Co-Director of the Race Project, is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of California Riverside.*
- Joseph Jones, Project Director, RACE Project, Phase II, is a PhD candidate in Biological Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.*

WHY HUMAN SKIN COMES IN COLORS

by Nina G. Jablonski



Skin pigmentation provides one of the best examples of evolution by natural selection acting on the human body. The fact that skin color has been so responsive to evolutionary forces is fascinating, and one that is important for modern human societies to understand. Similar skin colors – both dark and light – have evolved independently multiple times in human history. When we think of how races have been defined in the past using skin color, we can immediately see the problem. When the same skin color has evolved many times independently in different places, its value as a unique maker of identity is eliminated and the race so defined is rendered nonsensical. We are all “hue-mans”!

As modern humans moved around the world in greater numbers and over longer distances in the time between 50,000 and 10,000 years ago, a lot of “fine tuning” occurred in the evolution of skin pigmentation. As populations moved to parts of the world with different UVR levels, they underwent genetic changes that modified their skin pigmentation. As people moved into the Americas from Asia, for instance, we see evidence that some populations entering high UVR environments underwent genetic changes which made it possible for them to tan easily. Tanning is the ability to develop temporary melanin pigmentation in the skin in response to UVR and has evolved numerous times in peoples living under highly seasonal patterns of sunshine (Jablonski and Chaplin 2010). When we

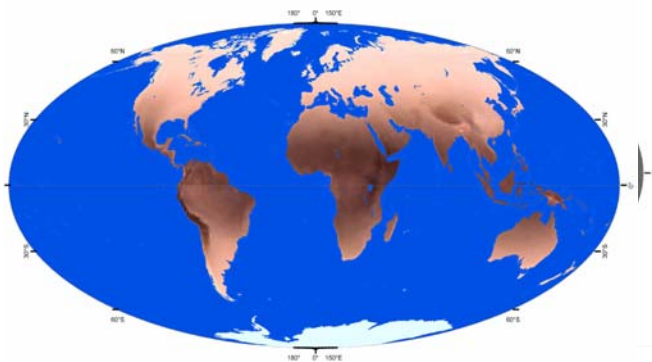
look at a map of predicted human skin pigmentation, we find that all people are varying shades of brown. The intensity of their brownness and their ability to tan is related to the UVR in the place where their ancestors came from.

In the last 10,000 years, we have gotten better and better at protecting ourselves against the extremes of UVR by cultural means. Sewn clothing and constructed shelters now protect us from strong sunlight and augment the protection afforded by natural melanin pigmentation. In far northern environments, diets composed of vitamin D-rich foods like oily fish and marine mammals supplement the vitamin D we can make in our skin under low UVR conditions. The major problem we face today is that we are able to travel so far so fast. Many people today live or take vacations far away from the lands of their ancestors. This means that, often, our skin color is mismatched to the UVR levels we are experiencing. Darkly pigmented people living in low UVR environments and people working indoors all of the time are at high risk of developing vitamin D deficiencies. Lightly pigmented people living in high UVR environments are at high risk of developing skin cancers. We must recognize these issues in order to avoid major health problems today.

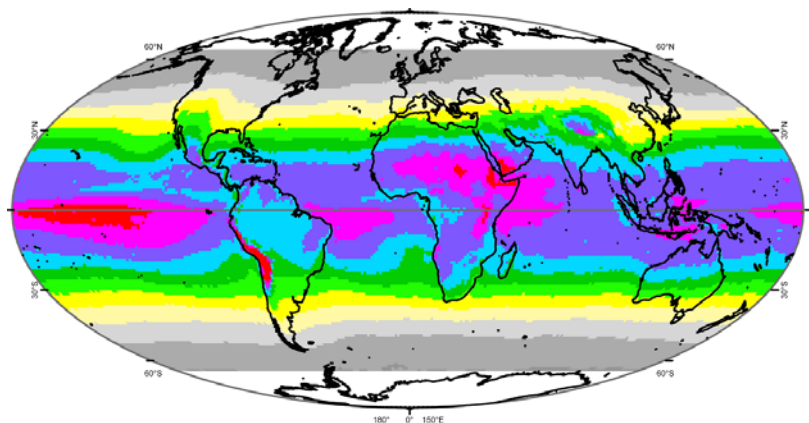
Ultraviolet Radiation and Skin Color

Human skin is mostly hairless and comes in a range of colors. Some people have very dark skin that is almost black, while others have very pale skin that is nearly white. Most other people have skin that has a color somewhere in between. Skin color is remarkably variable in people from place to place, and differences in skin color began to be noticed thousands of years ago when people started traveling widely and engaging in long-distance trade. Observers noted that people who lived under intense sun close to the equator had dark skin and those who lived under weaker sun away from the equator had light skin. But why?

Many centuries ago, some early Greek and Roman philosophers speculated that skin color and other features were associated with climate. According to them, dark skin tones were produced by excessive heat and light



Map of human skin color predicted by multiple regression model. Map by George Chaplin.



Annual average ultraviolet radiation at the earth's surface, based on data from the NASA Total Ozone Mapping Spectrometer 7 Satellite. Map by George Chaplin.

tones by excessive cold. By the mid-1700s naturalists like the American Samuel Stanhope Smith observed that skin pigmentation showed a pronounced gradient according to latitude, from dark near the equator to light toward the poles. He related this mainly to differences in sunshine experienced by people at different latitudes: "This general uniformity in the effect," Smith wrote, "indicates an influence in climate, that, under the same circumstances, will always operate in the same manner." But was it the heat caused by the sun or something else in the sunshine that skin was responding to?

By the middle of the 20th century, observers determined that skin color was most strongly correlated with ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun. UVR, in fact, accounts for over 87% of the variation in human skin color. So how can it be shown that human skin pigmentation is an actual evolutionary adaptation to UVR? In evolutionary terms, an adaptation is a characteristic of an organism that allows it to reproduce more successfully under certain environmental conditions than other organisms, which do not have the characteristic. We first need to understand exactly what UVR is and what it does.

UVR's Harmful Effects

UVR is a highly energetic and invisible form of solar radiation that is capable of causing a lot of damage to living organisms. Life on earth is mostly protected from damaging UV rays by our atmosphere, but some UVR still gets

through and has powerful biological effects. UVR damages DNA, and this activity can eventually cause skin cancer. Skin cancer is bad, but it is rarely fatal and it mostly affects people after their child-bearing years.

Other harmful effects of UVR have potentially much greater effects on reproductive success. Some wavelengths of UVR break down other important biological molecules, such as some forms of folate in the body. Folate is a B vitamin, which is needed to produce DNA and support cell metabolism. We normally get folate from green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits, and whole grains in our diet. Without adequate folate, we can't make sufficient amounts of DNA to maintain normal levels of cell division in our body. Cell division is needed to maintain the function of organs and tissues in our body and is especially important in tissues with a high turnover, like the lining of the gut and the lining of the mouth. Cell division also occurs rapidly in the early embryo and in the production of sperm. During the first few weeks of embryonic development, rapid and precise cell division leads to the establishment of the basic body plan of the body and the development of the early nervous system and circulation. If cell division is slowed or inhibited at this critical time, serious or even fatal birth defects can occur. Protection of the body's folate supplies is therefore important for successful reproduction (Lucock 2000). And successful reproduction is what evolution is all about. How then, was this ensured?

Natural Sunscreens

When it comes to protection against harmful UVR, many biological systems have evolved natural sunscreens. Most natural sunscreens are special molecules which reduce UVR damage by absorbing or scattering UV rays. The pigment called melanin – and especially the most common type in human skin called eumelanin – is one of the most effective natural sunscreens. Eumelanin is intensely dark and has the ability to absorb potentially damaging UVR as well as neutralize harmful chemical byproducts caused by UVR exposure.

Evolution often works by modifying biochemical pathways or structures that are already in existence. Ancestors of the human lineage had the ability to produce eumelanin in the naked skin on their faces and hands when they were exposed to UVR. When our ancestors lost most of their body hair, there was evolutionary pressure to protect exposed skin from the harmful effects of UVR (Jablonski 2004). The solution to this problem was to make dark pigmentation permanent. This was accomplished by natural selection. Individuals who carried the genetic changes or mutations leading to the production of more protective eumelanin pigment left more offspring behind than those who didn't. Genetic studies have shown that some of the most important changes occurred in a gene called *MC1R*. This gene regulates the production of a protein called the melanocortin-1 receptor that plays an important role in normal pigmentation. All modern humans originated from darkly pigmented ancestors who evolved permanent eumelanin pigmentation in their skin to protect them from the UVR-rich sunshine of equatorial Africa.

Vitamin D Benefits

When some of our modern human ancestors moved away from the most intensely sunny parts of Africa into southern Africa, Asia, and Europe, they encountered lower levels of UVR. This meant that they faced less potential damage to their bodies from harmful radiation, but there was also a downside. UVR is not a universally bad thing: The one important good thing it does is to initiate the process of making vitamin D in the skin. Vitamin D helps us to build and maintain a strong skeleton by regulating the absorption of calcium from the foods that we eat. Without enough vitamin D, bones don't develop properly and are weak. Vitamin D also helps to maintain the health of our

immune systems. If we don't get enough vitamin D, our bodies can become physically weak and susceptible to disease. Only certain wavelengths of UVR are capable of starting the process of making vitamin D in the skin, and these are in the UVB range. The equator receives a lot of UVB year round, but north and south of the tropics (23.5° N and 23.5°S) there is much less and it falls in a highly seasonal pattern. And dark skin with lots of sun-protective melanin slows down the process of making vitamin D in the skin. So these circumstances posed another challenge to our ancestors. How could vitamin D production be maintained in people who were living under low UVB conditions? The answer is – with lighter skin (Jablonski and Chaplin 2000; Chaplin 2004).

The Role of Depigmentation

Light skin is actually depigmented skin. When people started moving away from very sunny places with high levels of UVB to less sunny places with lower levels of UVB, those individuals who had lighter skin were able to stay healthier and leave more offspring. Evolution was at work again. The individuals with lighter skin had specific genetic mutations that resulted in their producing less eumelanin and so having less natural sunscreen in their skin. These new patterns of genetic variation were very successful. We see evidence, in fact, that “selective sweeps” – greatly accelerated periods of evolution by natural selection – led to genes for lighter skin becoming fixed in the population over the course of just a few thousand years.

One of the most interesting and important things about the depigmentation process is that it didn't happen just once. Genetic evidence shows that the ancestors of modern western Europeans and the ancestors of modern eastern Asians underwent independent genetic changes leading to the evolution of lighter skin (Norton, Kittles et al. 2007). These changes involved different genetic mutations, which then were favored by natural selection. In other words, depigmentation evolved independently in both of the lineages of modern humans that began to inhabit higher latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere. We also know from the examination of ancient DNA that loss of skin pigmentation as a result of natural selection occurred in our distant, extinct cousins, the Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*), who inhabited much of eastern Europe

and the region around the Mediterranean during the last ice age (Lalueza-Fox, Rompler et al. 2007).

Study of the evolution of skin pigmentation is an important part of the study of human diversity. Different degrees of skin darkness and lightness evolved multiple times in humans as we have dispersed to different places and adapted to local environmental conditions. Today, people are moving over much greater distances, much faster than ever before, and our adaptations are mostly cultural and social, not biological. These cultural and social adaptations have been imperfect, and we still have much to learn about how we as individuals and as human societies can stay healthy in environments far distant from our ancestral homelands.

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In evolutionary time:



Environment:
- UV radiation levels
- Precipitation



Migration:
- Length of migration
- Recency of migration



Other cultural adaptations to climate:
- Clothes wearing
- Shade seeking
- Shelter
- Timing of daily activities

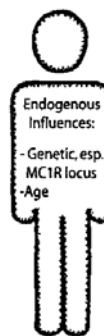


Diet:
- Vitamin D content
- Folate content

During a human lifetime:

Environmental Influences:

- UV radiation exposure
- Application of tanning or bleaching agents



Endogenous Influences:

- Genetic, esp. MC1R locus
- Age

Many factors affect human skin pigmentation and operate over different time scales. As people move around more rapidly today, our adaptations to different environments are mostly cultural, not biological. Figure by Jennifer Kane.

[This article is based on an essay written for a forthcoming book *RACE: Are We So Different?* to be published by the American Anthropological Association as a companion volume to the *RACE* exhibit.]

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RACE AND THE MEDIA

by John L. Jackson, Jr.



Anthropology in a Mass Mediated World

Anthropology has a complicated connection to the study of racial differences. The discipline was responsible for helping to validate folk assumptions about discrete and hierarchical racial categories in the early 20th century, coating those popular assumptions with the veneer of respectable “science.” Currently, however, anthropology is leading the charge to renounce some of the very same categorical racial distinctions it once canonized.

The American Anthropological Association’s award-winning exhibit (*Race: Are We So Different?*) chronicles some of that sordid history, making a three-pronged argument for why race has never accurately divided human populations into neat, mutually exclusive groups: “Race is a recent human invention. Race is about culture, not biology. Race and racism are embedded in institutions and everyday life.” The exhibit is designed as a form of “public anthropology,” an attempt to demonstrate some of what anthropology can offer to ongoing popular debates about the role of race in our collective lives. This ambitious exhibit enters an overcrowded public sphere where mass media offerings constantly battle over depictions of race and racism, depictions that anthropologists have a hand in crafting and criticizing.

Our understandings of racial differences are greatly augmented by mass-mediated stories, by their ability to accentuate and disseminate racial themes all across the nation and the world. Mass media’s overall structure and ubiquity help to popularize certain understandings of race while rendering alternatives relatively invisible, even unthinkable. The way we gather information in the hyper-mediated 21st century of 24-hour news cycles offers sensationalized coverage of all things racial, from the latest drug bust of a celebrity athlete to the disappearance of white teenagers during Caribbean vacations. It also helps to create a different kind of daily living, with a heightened sense of racial awareness and a rendition of ordinary life that seems threatened by potential race-based eruptions at ev-

ery turn. And those eruptions need not be on our block—or even in our own hemisphere.

Media coverage of everything from South African apartheid to Chinese political upheavals encourages people to see race as a globally self-evident reality, something written on the bodies of human beings all across the planet. The speed of global communication helps to grease the wheels of racial thinking by allowing us to confidently imagine that we can see the same few racial groups no matter where on earth our news crews point their cameras. This makes it easier for us to impose our culturally specific racial categories on groups halfway across the globe, partly because they might look like the “foreigners” who recently moved in next door.

The fast-moving, non-stop pace of our current news cycle combines with an insatiable market in sensationalist and headline-grabbing controversies to dissuade many academics from fully entering the public fray with their research. Some faculty at leading universities feel that their colleagues will consider them less serious, less rigorous, less scholarly, if their work is too “popular,” too accessible, and too *public*. Many anthropologists share these professional concerns, but they also worry about how their work might circulate in popular forums for other reasons, especially since that often means losing control of how their ideas about culture are appropriated.



John L. Jackson, Jr.

That is part of what happened in the 1960s and 1970s with the “culture of poverty” notion that anthropologist Oscar Lewis fashioned from his ethnographic research with poor Mexican families. Lewis was talking about the structural causes of negative cultural adaptations, but by the time his idea made it to Capitol Hill and Bill Clinton’s welfare reform initiative in the 1990s, it was mostly shorn of any discussion of structural forces at all, emphasizing culture as its own original and sustaining cause for poverty among certain groups. That was an object lesson for many subsequent anthropologists, some of whom shrank back from public debates for fear of future misappropriations.

The American Anthropological Association’s aforementioned *RACE* exhibit is an attempt to institutionalize a distinctive voice for the discipline on the issue of race/racism in a mass mediated world where such remixes and re-appropriations are seemingly inevitable. Indeed, the current media landscape of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other ubiquitous social media all easily promote such expropriations.

Sensationalized Media Coverage

We live in a media universe that can not seem to get enough talk about race—and the more sensational the story, the better. The media appear to have several basic modes when engaging questions of race. There are the controversial headlines made when celebrities demonstrate blatant forms of racial insensitivity: Radio personality Don Imus getting fired for his comments about black women on the Rutgers University women’s basketball team; Michael Richards (Kramer from the popular NBC sitcom *Seinfeld*) melting down during a comedic performance and hurling racial epithets at black hecklers; Mel Gibson making anti-Semitic statements to police officers and being recorded on voicemail screaming racist comments in a rant against the mother of his children. These headlines are usually framed such that they shun the culprit for not demonstrating a level of racial enlightenment and decorum on which a post-Civil Rights America prides itself.

Media theorist Marshall McLuhan was criticized for “technological determinism” for his arguments about how the medium used to transmit a message has a fundamental, even central, impact on the message’s meaning and societal impact. I do not want to sound too much like a technological determinist in my own claims about media representations of race, but, nonetheless, some of the prob-

lems with mass mediated treatments of race/racism today stem from the prominence of visual imagery (of television, film and the web) as the primary vehicles we use to tell popular stories about race. We demand to *see* race and racism in clear and conspicuous ways. Anything too subtle and complicated does not get picked up by the camera. This means that current versions of race and racism, versions less concrete and definitive than, say, “Whites Only” signs above water fountains or bodies in nooses hanging from trees, get passed over for stories that are more easily rendered in shocking still photographs and videos. Of course, this is all connected to a sound-bite culture that arguably privileges pithy quotations over the intricacies of careful and complex social analysis.

To understand 9/11 or the aftereffects of Hurricane Katrina—two traumatic national events with popularly racialized interpretations—is to understand how watching such events on television potentially changes the events themselves, as well as the people who watch them. This is a little like the fanciful notion that we are all living in our own private version of *The Truman Show*. In that film, Jim Carrey plays the lead character, Truman, whose every action is part of a television program that he isn’t aware he’s shooting. That isn’t to say that we are all, in a sense, just like Truman. Or at least, that isn’t the only lesson to be drawn. Instead, I am talking more about the kinds of lives lived by those television fans religiously watching Truman’s life as it develops from infancy to adulthood. Do they do so at the expense of their own stories? Does it increase or decrease their ability to empathize with this mass-mediated life? Does it have to mean living life vicariously, in a kind of self-alienated way? We are always seeing ourselves through the images technology helps us to craft, forgetting that images produce mythological reflections of our own culturally specific self-concepts, a point that the discipline of anthropology is particularly good at demonstrating.

In many ways, sensationalized media coverage of race/racism pivots on a version of voyeurism that is reminiscent of *The Truman Show*’s logic. A Louisiana-based Justice of the Peace who refuses to marry an inter-racial couple becomes a Trumanesque character who easily embodies all the negative things about our current commitments to race, negative things that we project onto others in a way that helps to let media audiences off the hook. Don Imus, Michael Richards, Mel Gibson and others provide indi-

vidualized bad guys who depict the story of race in *micro* as opposed to *macro* terms. These same stories offer main characters who inhabit our worst racial selves, characters defined against the grain of America's collective progress on issues of racial inclusion. There are still news stories about racial differences in education, employment, and overall social progress, but these are often told in similarly Hollywood-esque ways: looking for bad guys to demonize and defend against, as though all of society is not complicit in the reproduction of social difference and inequality—another quintessentially anthropological claim.

Race and 'Media Events'

Racial scandals, such as the ones mentioned above, are often popular "media events." Sociologists Danial Dayan and Elihu Katz described "media events" as ceremonial moments when television stations represent the social collective to itself, dramatically and ritualistically. Such events focus on special occasions—royal weddings or presidential funerals, moments when the mass media frame the viewing of major affairs in ways that help to redefine the national and even the international community. Everyone is watching and appreciating that other people are doing the same—people they know and the millions more they do not. Benedict Anderson (*Imagined Communities*, 1983) has la-

beled this the making of "imagined communities," senses of togetherness and identification fostered by the media and subsequently crafted into politically charged social divisions. The OJ Simpson murder trial was just such a quintessential media event. So was the Rodney King saga. These stories became litmus tests for American assumptions about inclusion and belonging, litmus tests that tended to break along decidedly racial lines.

Even when not trying to proffer particularly sensationalist narratives, the media still cannot help but act as a hothouse for such potential sensationalism, for a kind of feeding-frenzied reporting. If an editor at the *Washington Post* wants to avoid a sensational story that he or she thinks has no real merit, a kind of media-based gravitational force demands that the paper take up the baton anyway—or else. To opt out is to risk accusations of irrelevance or even to create yet another "media event" as a consequence of that very attempt. If NBC does not cover something the way other outlets cover it (because, say, that one network does not think a particular story has real merit, such as some people argued about the continued coverage of the birther movement's accusations about Obama's foreign status), NBC's non-coverage itself will get coverage—maybe even as just another ideological move from "the left-wing media." Resistance, then, might really be futile.



Jackson prepares to field questions from a local news anchor in Philadelphia, PA.

Of course, none of this is to say that the mass media simply gets race wrong or never adds anything of real value to ongoing discussions about race and racism. That is not necessarily true. Even if we can criticize particular instances of media coverage for clear racial biases and sensationalist storytelling, the mass media also serves as one of the few spaces left that consistently forces Americans to talk about race and racism—and not always in polite ways. It is clear that a version of anthropology’s argument that race is not simply biology has already permeated the larger public sphere, which is probably a good thing. And the new AAA exhibit will take that message even farther to encourage additional productive discussion.

Getting Beyond ‘The Race Card’

A commitment to either/or formulations over-determines contemporary media representations of race. One of the most problematic versions of such an entrenched and unproductive popular debate has to do with accusations and counter-accusations of racism. Those pundits who disparage others for unscrupulously playing ‘the race card’ have been complaining extra loudly these days, declaiming Democrats in Congress and the Obama administration (not to mention “the liberal media”) for crying (racial) wolf at every opportunity. Obama was supposed to move us beyond race, the argument goes, but he has only made us more racially polarized. If minorities—and the white liberals who indulge them—would just stop trafficking in race-based victimization, they say, we all might be able to see that racism is the least of America’s current problems. There are many versions of this kind of would-be post-racialism, and they can be found on both ends of the political spectrum.

When a group of Columbia University graduate students, myself included, brought literary critic Walter Benn Michaels to campus in the mid-1990s for a conference on “passing,” he made a request that students disavow their commitments to “race” as an effective way of analyzing and organizing social life. For Michaels, it is all about “class.” He is particularly skeptical of scholars who challenge race’s biological/genetic legitimacy while holding onto its social and political significance, leveling some of his most scathing criticism at anthropologists. Once we stop being duped by “identity politics,” this argument goes, we can start mobilizing around the objective material interests that unite and divide us. We can stop making a fetish out of race.

According to right-wing media pundits and self-described “culture warriors,” if people would just stop pandering to the rhetorics of race/racism, we could all organize ourselves as patriotic Americans. At the end of last summer, I tried to play with this idea by declaring my own 40-day moratorium on race-talk. I announced this decision in the *Chronicle on Higher Education* and even received a bit of media attention for the stunt. Ultimately, my point was to say that such a position is untenable and to demonstrate the impossibility (even the absurdity) of calls to eschew invocations of race/racism.

Race is everywhere, and we inhabit a global media infrastructure that is particularly good at circulating specific kinds of race-talk. For anthropologists trying to make sense of, and to navigate, the current media moment, our job is not simply to prove or disprove particular instances of purported racism or reverse racism. In many ways, that is a kind of trap that our current media landscape proffers, unproductively, as the only game in town.

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FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WYE HOUSE

by Mark Leone, Jocelyn Knauf, and Amanda Tang



[Editors' Note: Plantation archaeology explores the material record of multiple threads of American history: the daily lives of large-scale farmers, as well as the lives of their wives and children; the landscape modifications and farming practices used in early America; and the lives of those who worked on the plantations, including overseers, craftsmen, and enslaved Africans. When these groups' descendants still live on or near the plantation site, as in the case described here, the archaeologist's task is especially important as s/he must negotiate the aims and desired outcomes of the research among many different interests.]

Located in Maryland on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, Wye House was once the center of a large plantation on land owned since the 1650s by the Lloyd family. Around 1780-90, Edward Lloyd IV, a delegate to several early US Congresses, built the present house near his older (1770s) and more famous "orangery"—a type of greenhouse where citrus trees were grown. Now a National Historic Landmark, Wye House, then known as the "Home House Farm," was also home, for a time, to Frederick Douglass— orator, writer, and abolitionist, who was owned as a slave by an overseer of Wye House plantation.

In all three of his autobiographies, Frederick Douglass described Edward Lloyd V, Wye House, and its large slave population. He also named and described the "Long Green" between the gate and the main house, where slaves and overseers lived.

In 2004, Mrs. R. Carmichael Tilghman, the current owner and 11th generation Lloyd descendant, offered the University of Maryland's Archaeology in Annapolis Project the opportunity and some of the funding to excavate the Long Green at Wye House. Two groups were

especially interested in the outcome of the Long Green work: the descendant Lloyd family and the descendant African-American community. The descendant Lloyd family wanted to know more about their property than documents alone could provide.

The African-American descendants living nearby in Unionville also welcomed an extensive archaeological project on their heritage. During the Civil War, the Union Army removed eighteen slaves from Wye House and promised them their freedom in exchange for fighting. After the war, they settled on Quaker land nearby. A senior member of the African American descendant community asked the archaeologists for information bearing on "slave spirituality" and "what the Lloyds did for freedom?"

Mapping the Landscape

To understand what is missing from the historical records, as well as from Douglass' accounts of the Wye House plantation and other plantations in the Chesapeake, the archae-



Wye House

ology team used both traditional excavations and LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), an aerial remote sensing technology that can see through some groundcover and leafless trees. This technology can locate roads, built terraces, and features such as the ruins of slave quarters that cannot easily be seen on the ground. These maps also show shorelines, fields, and forest cover. Comparisons to historic records and maps from ca. 1800 can measure changing farmland to forest ratios and shoreline loss due to both erosion and global warming. Such mapping also detects geometrically planned landscape designs, characteristic of the great plantations that surrounded the Chesapeake Bay.

Buildings of the ‘Long Green’

Almost 50 University of Maryland undergraduates and seven PhD students have explored the rich and intact archaeology of Wye House. Over sixty 5’x5’ squares have been excavated on the Long Green, all in buildings associated with slave life. Three buildings were excavated thoroughly enough to understand their changing functions. Since the archaeology did not match precisely Douglass’ evocative descriptions, the archaeological discoveries clearly make important contributions to the property’s heritage.

A Lloyd family inventory of their slaves in 1826 documented 166 enslaved persons at the Home House farm. Douglass describes slaves as being everywhere, living everywhere, and serving in a wide set of occupations. The project discovered one 16.5x16.5 foot slave quarter whose chimney and hearth were rebuilt two or three times that does not match anything described in Douglass’ writings. Near the plantation’s wharf, two small warehouses dating from 1790 were excavated, at least one of which was used as a slave quarter ca. 1840 and then abandoned and reused as the base for another building ca.1865. It does not appear in Douglass’ description or in historic photographs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

On a rise on the Long Green, there is a 40 x 25 foot building exactly where Douglass described a blacksmith’s and a cooper’s shops. However, the archaeol-



Excavation on Long Green. An open cellar, filled in the early 19th century, contained within one of the excavated buildings (the Middle Building, Locus 3).

Photo courtesy Archaeology in Annapolis.

ogy shows a long low frail building containing no material pointing to either of these types of industrial activity.

The buildings and quarters we have discovered were frail, lacking interior walls, with evidence of frequent maintenance, and no room for storage. Despite Douglass’ descriptions, it is not reasonable to assume that the large number of slaves that the Lloyds owned could have lived in these buildings. Additionally, there is no evidence of gardens or animal pens used by enslaved Africans.

We have thus far not found the buildings where the majority of the enslaved persons lived. What we have discovered, though, is evidence of animal bones, fish, and shellfish, representing a much wider range of food than the Lloyds would have provided, a finding that runs contrary to their strict prohibitions on hunting and fishing. The enslaved population clearly and independently exploited the waterways and the woods far more than any historical record details.

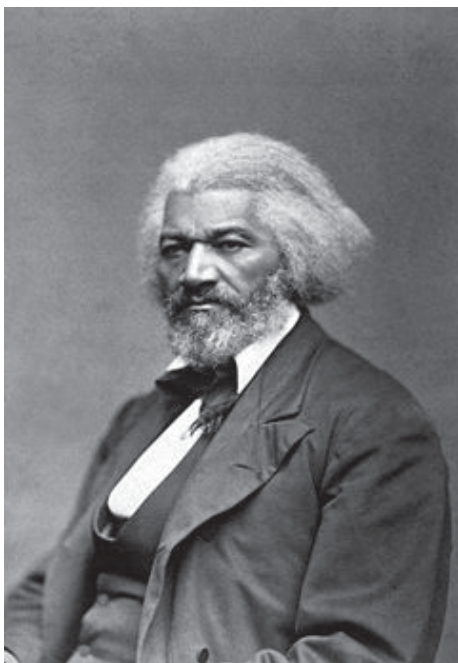
Slave Spirituality

Slave spirituality is reflected in three sets of archaeological finds. Two years ago, the Tilghman family requested and sponsored archaeological work in their famous Orangery. Our work showed that Edward Lloyd IV built the first

greenhouse in the early 1770s and modified it around 1785 so that it contained a furnace and a channeled heating system known as a hypocaust. Next to the furnace room on the north side was a room now known as a potting shed, which appeared to have been a slave quarter from the 1780s through the 1820s.

Outside the door of the slave quarter, but buried directly in front of the threshold, were two projectile points and a coin. Both have importance within West African spiritual traditions. Inside the south room, over the arch where the furnace feeds hot air into the hypocaust channel, was a large granite prehistoric pestle mortared directly into the brick vault of the furnace. The pestle is pecked and rounded on one end and is reminiscent of stones commonly utilized in a number of West African spiritual traditions. The granite also contains inclusions that catch the light and sparkle. The entire furnace, with the pestle in place, was built by the same person.

In the attic, next to the chimney of an overseer's house ("the Captain's House") and overlooking the Long Green, was a two-headed, carved wooden figure that was about two inches long. The two faces on it sit back-to-



Frederick Douglass



University of Maryland, College Park, students excavating a portion of the foundation walls of the open cellar on Long Green. Photo courtesy Archaeology in Annapolis.

back. It could be a two-headed doctor, known from the *Slave Narratives* collected by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s.

With these three artifacts, we have the beginning of an answer to the request for information about spirituality among the enslaved as well as to larger questions about the emergence of an African American religion that contained African beliefs and practices. We cannot yet reconstruct the enslaved Africans' commitment to Christianity.

The Lloyd's Contributions Today

What did the Lloyds do for freedom? To support education, research, and an understanding of their role in peoples' quest for freedom, all the Lloyd family papers have been placed at the Maryland Historical Society, with microfilm copies at the University of Maryland. For decades the family has supported the Historical Society of Talbot County, the Hammond Harwood House Museum, and innumerable visits to Wye House by educational and historical groups.

A younger generation of Lloyd family descendants is committed to conserving the Bay and its adjacent lands by using Wye House as a model farm with exemplary practices. Such practices include no-till farming and wide grass

buffer strips between agricultural fields and the shoreline to reduce run off, as well as a “living shoreline” along areas of significant erosion in lieu of stone “rip-rap” or bulkheads. The family also sponsors archaeological and historic explorations that help reestablish a balanced place for the Lloyds in Maryland and national history.

Lloyd descendants recognize that the Lloyds were no different from other wealthy plantation owners of the time, including many of the Founding Fathers, in their efforts to run slave-based plantations. Did Douglass portray the Lloyds justly in his autobiographies, they ask? This question goes to the heart of the descendant family’s concerns. While making a determined effort to preserve Wye House for the local and national good in the largest sense, descendant family members are also interested in promoting a balanced approach to the long history of Wye House, including both its early 17th century history when slavery was minimal in Maryland and also during the period after Emancipation. Archaeology may not only be able to illuminate the workings of the plantation during its days as a slave-based enterprise, but also to add balance to the Lloyds’ place in current appraisals of American history.

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A short video on the ‘Long Green’ excavations can be viewed at <http://news.discovery.com/videos/archaeology-wye-house-mysteries-uncearthed.html>.

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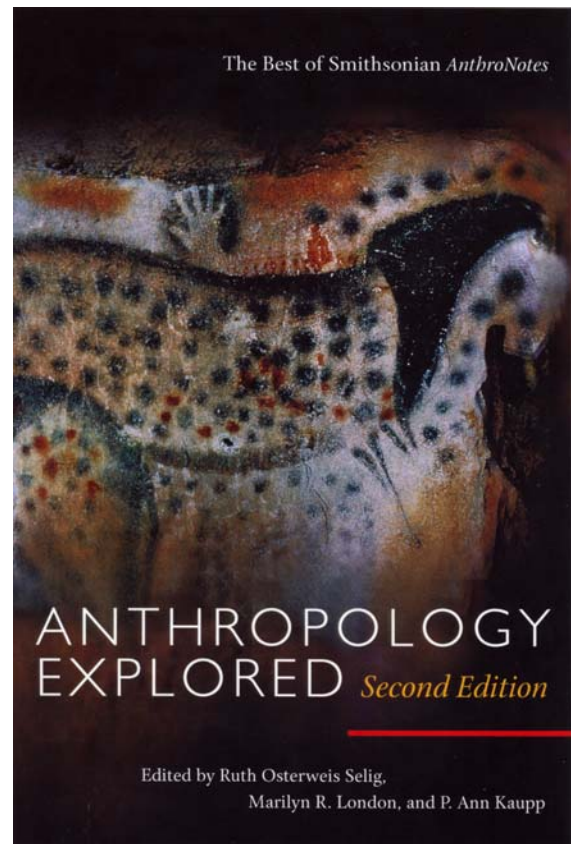
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