

“CULTURAL RACISM”: BIOLOGY AND CULTURE IN RACIST THOUGHT

Social scientists in the US have documented a significant decline in the degree to which whites will acknowledge belief in the biological inferiority of blacks, a bedrock belief underpinning the Segregation system. For example a 1997 poll found that only 10% of whites said that “most blacks have less in-born ability to learn”<sup>1</sup> However, social scientists have also documented a continued willingness of whites to attribute negative characteristics to blacks, but to view those characteristics as cultural, rather than biological, in character. Lawrence Bobo and Camille Charles note that between half and ¾ of US whites still express negative stereotyping of blacks and Latinos. But “rather than viewing blacks as less intelligent, one might assert that they tend to be lazy and lack motivation, or that their group subculture is deficient.”<sup>2</sup>

Thinking about a group’s alleged deficiencies in terms of biological characteristics would generally be regarded as quite different from thinking about them in terms of cultural characteristics. In this regard, the trend Bobo and Charles note can be seen as an important shift in the way blacks are regarded by whites. Yet some scholars view “culturalism” (as I will call it) as reflecting only a new way of talking about racial groups, not a form of thinking significantly distinct from the earlier attributions of genetic inferiority.<sup>3</sup> In this understanding the culturalist view in question has also been called “cultural racism.”

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<sup>1</sup> The figure was 27% in 1977, so it has continued to decline with increased distance from the Segregation era. David Sears, John Hetts, Jim Sidanius, Lawrence Bobo, “Race in American Politics: Framing the Debates,” in Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo, *Racialized Politics: The Debate About Racism in America* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 10, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Bobo and Camille Z. Charles, “Race in the American Mind: From the Moynihan Report to the Obama Candidacy,” *Annals, AAPSS* (American Academy of Political and Social Science), 621, January 2009, 246. Being lazy and lacking motivation could possibly be understood as inherent or genetically-based deficiencies (though generally they are not), in which case they would not provide the contrast the authors seek with the attribution of biologically-based inferiority. So we may interpret Bobo and Charles’s findings as implying that subjects ascribe these characteristics to the allegedly deficient subculture.

<sup>3</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 87-88.

In this article I will explore whether culturalism represents an abandonment of racist thinking or merely a new form of it. To do so we must examine more closely the roles of biology and culture in racist thought more generally.

### Five forms of racial “biologism”

Many people take for granted that race is essentially a biological idea.<sup>4</sup> But the category of the “biological” is ambiguous in the racial context. It can refer to at least five distinct things, each taken to characterize races and distinguish races from one another. (1)

Visible bodily/somatic characteristics (“phenotypes”), such as skin color, eye shape, hair texture.

(2) Genetic characteristics—races defined as genetically distinct populations, often reproductively isolated from one another. This view is associated with the scientific field of population genetics, but has at least to a minimal extent spread to a wider, non-specialist public.

(3) Psychological, mental or behavioral characteristics regarded as grounded in genetic characteristics, that differ among different racial groups. Thus, the psychological characteristics are viewed as inherent in the group’s nature, not merely a product of environmental factors or learning. (This differs from (2) in that in (2) it is the genetic characteristics alone and their [alleged] differences among the different groups in question that constitute them as races. In (3) the “biologism” resides in important psychological characteristics being regarded as based in genetic characteristics.)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Morning, *The Nature of Race: How Scientists Think and Teach About Human Differences* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); Joshua Glasgow, *A Theory of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> The bare possession of such psychological characteristics is not one of the biologicistic options, since in their own right these traits are not “biological”. The characteristics could have been conferred by God, learned, or been a product of environment. It is only when their possession is attributed to genetics that it becomes a biological form of (racial) thought.

The development of genetics and genomics in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries show that this feature of racial thought is fallacious, and indeed that the conception of psychological characteristics as “rooted in genes” is based on a misunderstanding of how genes relate to psychological characteristics (notwithstanding other forms of “geneticism,” and indeed explicit racism, on the rise in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, along with those continuing to utilize the discredited forms of feature (3)). See, among a large literature, K. A. Appiah, “Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections,” in Appiah and Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

(4) Common ancestry, so that racial membership is passed down through the generations.

(5) Being regarded and treated as a group (erroneously) thought to possess biological characteristics of any of the aforementioned, but especially (3), because the psychological characteristics in (3) supply a basis for treating the group and its members in certain ways, but also (1) because (1) enables observers to discern membership in the group in question. Racial groups defined by feature (5) can be seen as “biologistic” partly because of being identified by phenotype and partly because they are or were (wrongly) thought to possess (3) and this belief resulted in the groups’ having the sociohistorical character and experiences they did and do have. Racial groups in this sense are sometimes referred to as “racialized groups.”<sup>6</sup>

In the history of racial thought all five of these features or characterizations have been espoused or presupposed; but they are quite different meanings of “biological.” So to say that someone’s view of race is “biological” is inadequately specified. The ancestral idea ((4)), need not be accompanied by any of the other three, at least conceptually. This is obvious concerning (2) (genetic) and (3) (psychological characteristics), but is true of (1) as well. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century project of scientific classification of human beings as part of nature, naturalists often looked for permanent and assumed-to-be-unchangeable types characterized by physical differences, rather than viewing them as groups defined by ancestry.<sup>7</sup> Finally, thinking of race in terms of (1) and (4) clearly gives race a very different significance than adding (3). It is one thing to think of racial groups as ancestral and somatic, quite another to attribute humanly significant psychological characteristics to them that bear deeply on the way we think of and treat other human beings. It is indeed only with the addition of (3) (though not

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1996). Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Mirage of a Space Between Nature and Nurture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Blum, “Racialized Groups: The Socio-historical Consensus,” *MONIST*, vol. 93, #2 (2010). Adam Hochman, “Racialization: A Defense of the Concept,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 8 (2019).

I am aware that I am not weighing in on issues of the metaphysical status of “race” that have drawn so much attention in philosophy in the past 2+ decades. I am hoping to be able to sidestep those issues by focusing primarily on the issue of “racist thought” rather than the more general issue of “what is race?”.

<sup>7</sup> Justin Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton, 2015). The naturalists’ project will be discussed further below (xxx).

yet with the inclusion of the genetic dimension) that anything like a plausible rationalization of colonialism, indigenous displacement, and slavery has been provided. Without that rationalization, racist thought would lack one of its most significant historical (and not biological) features.

The different elements can of course be combined. And the form of biologism informing the US 20<sup>th</sup>-century Segregationist view of race involved (1), (3), and (4)—phenotype, inherent, genetically-based humanly significant psychological characteristics, and common ancestry (in continentally-defined regions.)<sup>8</sup>

Relative to our concern with apparent shifts in US white attitudes to blacks, it is plausible to regard “intelligence” as a quality seen by the white subjects as having a substantial genetic and (for this reason) minimally changeable character, and being “biological” in that sense (i.e. (3)). Racial differences in intelligence is an idea deeply embedded in American racial history. This belief may have attenuated, as the opinion data mentioned earlier suggests; but it still remains significant, as reflected by the surprise 1994 best-seller, *The Bell Curve*, which argued that blacks, on average, had less innate intelligence than whites.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I did not include “in continentally defined regions” in my original listing of ancestry, as this is not a biological characteristic. But in the context of the rationalization of Segregation in the US, it is important to specify this element. Segregationist biologism did not involve (2), as this is a specialized scientific view, certainly not widely known among the public in the Segregation era; and in any case few versions of (2) provide support for the racist views of segregationists. This overall account of the biologicistic elements in racial thought is by no means intended as a comprehensive account of racial thought itself, even only in its Segregationist form. It does not specify the particular characteristics attributed to racial groups, nor the hierarchical treatment of those groups and their members alleged to be justified by these attributions.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

A 2019 study found that “one in five non-Black Americans attribute income inequality between Black and White people to unspecified genetic differences between the two groups.” The authors speculate that the “growing admiration for the advances of genetic science” contributes to this uptick in belief in genetically-based racial differences. Ann Morning, Hannah Brückner, Alondra Nelson, “Socially Desirable Reporting and the Expression of Biological Concepts of Race,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* (published on-line by Cambridge University Press, 10 October 2019: DOI: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.umb.edu/10.1017/S1742058X19000195>)

## Culture

Let us turn from biology to culture in relation to racist thought. How should we think of culture in relation to racist and racial thought? When (negative) cultural characteristics are attributed to racial groups, is this just old-style racism in a new guise, or a genuine shift in thought?

“Culture” is actually used in several quite distinct ways in relation to race.<sup>10</sup> I suggest a typology that will hopefully clarify these differences.

### Essentialist or inherentist culturalism

The first conception of culture can be designated “essentialist or inherentist culturalism.” It is described by three prominent race theorists, T. McCarthy (a philosopher), G. Frederickson (an intellectual historian), and A. Rattansi (a sociologist).

McCarthy: “Both [classic racist thought and the new ‘culturalism’] take stereotypical somatic differences to signify stereotypical differences of culture and character. While these latter differences are no longer regarded as innate, they are regarded as deeply ingrained, and though they are not inherited biologically, they are passed on from generation to generation....[T]he biological fixity of such traits gets replaced with their self-perpetuating character, and their absolute immutability with the difficulty of changing them.”<sup>11</sup>

Frederickson: “[C]ulture can be reified and essentialized to the point where it becomes the functional equivalent of race. Peoples or ethnic groups can be endowed with national souls or *Volksgeister*, which, rather than being inherited by any observable biological or genetic process, are passed on from generation to generation by some mysterious or even supernatural means, a kind of recurring gift from God.”<sup>12</sup>

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Note that this degree of belief in a largely genetic character of intelligence is entirely compatible with a much larger shift toward the culturalism that I am examining in this article.

<sup>10</sup> “Culture” is of course used outside racial contexts but that lies outside the scope of my typology.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>12</sup> George Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7-8. Frederickson also refers to this view as “deterministic cultural particularism,” 8.

Rattansi: "In practice, though, cultural demarcations are often drawn and used in a form that naturalizes them by implying that they are more or less immutable."<sup>13</sup>

This essentialist culturalism attributes cultural characteristics to traditionally defined racial groups almost as if those characteristics were inherent in the groups' nature.<sup>14</sup> The cultural characteristics are passed on through the generations, just as biologicistic racial ideology claims about what it regards as racial behavioral/psychological characteristics. They are virtually as difficult to change as are biological characteristics. They thus become the "functional equivalent of race," both in the sense that they share the above features with the biological/genetic form of race, and also that they can serve the same ideological function of rationalizing a racial order in which whites are advantaged to the disadvantage of non-whites.<sup>15</sup>

### *Historical background to contemporary essentialist culturalism*

This essentialized view of culture especially in relation to race seems less a mere misunderstanding of culture than a contemporary version of a long tradition in racial thought. The dominant trend in the history of racial thought casts the "naturalists" or "natural philosophers" of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century—Bernier, Linnaeus, Buffon, Blumenbach, and Kant—as having made the profound innovation of treating human beings as a part of nature, and, in that mode, classifying them into a small number of basic types (often, though not always, calling them "races"), with linked to distinctive somatic characteristics and generally to (ancestry in) regions of the globe. Bernier's classification system (from 1684) was based solely on somatic characteristics, but over time, the naturalists began to add psychological characteristics as part of the typology (Linnaeus said Africans were "crafty, lazy," Blumenbach that East Asians were "perfidious of spirit") somewhat implying that these characteristics were part of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2007), 104. Rattansi also uses the term "essentialism" to refer, as does Frederickson, to what is common to the biological and cultural in this conception of culture (105).

<sup>14</sup> The view in question is standardly referred to as "essentialist," but I prefer the less familiar term "inherentist," partly because the terms "essence" and "essentialism" carry complex associations in historical and contemporary philosophy. (See Sally Haslanger, "Tracing the Sociopolitical Reality of Race," in J. Glasgow, S. Haslanger, C. Jeffers, and Q. Spencer, *What is Race? Four Philosophical Views* [New York: Oxford UP, 2019], 19.) I think "inherentism" can capture the idea that the qualities attributed are inherent in the natures of the groups and its members. I will use both terms in this article.

<sup>15</sup> Frederickson's invoking of a supernatural "mechanism" is not required for inherentist culturalism, but if present, would constitute an amalgam of culturalist and religious forms of racial thought.

nature of the groups in question, and sometimes proffering a geographical or climatic explanation, but often providing no explanation.<sup>16</sup>

Not coincidentally, the resultant groups also corresponded, in the main but not entirely, to the principal parties to European colonization, plunder, and enslavement—Europeans, Indigenous people of the Americas, and Africans. The developing naturalist classification project came to serve an after-the-fact rationalization for these European depredations, although both slavery and colonial domination were sometimes condemned by some of the theorists whose views were recruited for this rationalization.<sup>17</sup>

### **“National racism”**

Nevertheless, the idea and conception of race did not remain confined to the groups designated by the naturalists, nor those involved in the colonial/slavery/displacement projects. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century “race” began to be used for what had been thought of as “nations,” understood as smaller units of peoples of similar beliefs, customs, language, and sometimes form of government. Prior to this period, nations were clearly distinguished from the biological races of the naturalists. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the terminology of race migrated in tandem with a new way of thinking about nations, one also linked to the rise of nationalism. Hudson characterizes it thus: “It meant an innate and fixed disposition in the physical and intellectual make-up of different peoples,” and was applied to national groups such as the Irish, Saxons,

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<sup>16</sup> There is a large literature on the history of naturalistic racial classification. See, among others, Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Smith, *Nature, Human Nature*. There are important differences among the naturalists regarding, for example, whether they thought of the classification as tracking natural kinds, or mere classificatory convenience; whether the different groups were sharply distinct or blended by degrees into one another; whether the groups were either explicitly or implicitly placed on a hierarchy of value; and how a given theorist was employed in the later development of popular and scientific racial thought, sometimes out of line with their actual views.

There is lively scholarly debate concerning whether elements of racial or proto-racial forms of thought can be found in the ancient world or prior to the age of European expansion and the slave trade, or to the naturalists’ project. See Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (eds.), *The Origins of Racism in the West* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> On the interaction between these systems of oppression and the scientific naturalist classifications, see Audrey Smedley and Brian Smedley, *Race in North America: Origins and Evolution of a Worldview*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Routledge, 2011). Because of these connections, I will from this point on refer to the “naturalist-colonialist” conception of race, racism, or racist thought.

Aryans, Jews, English.<sup>18</sup> National racism lacked some biologicistic features of naturalistic racial classifications. Phenotype played no role in identifying the groups in question; there was no distinct implication that the attributed psychological characteristics were grounded in a biological mechanism; and the scheme did not grow out of an attempt to typologize the human race into biological kinds, as the naturalist project did. But this way of thinking about nations is closely akin to the inherentist culturalism characterized by McCarthy, Frederickson, and Rattansi.

Moreover, this way of thinking about “national” groups can also be found in Kant, attributing general characteristics to, for example, the French, British, and Spanish, not appreciably different from the overgeneralized attributions he made to Africans and South Sea Islanders, although much less insulting.<sup>19</sup> The attributions did not quite have the definitively innatist character Hudson mentions, but they were very close to it. An influential fully inherentist version of national racism (interwoven with a naturalist-colonialist racism) was developed by Arthur Comte de Gobineau, in his 1855 *The Inequality of Human Races*.<sup>20</sup>

This application of race and inherentism to ethno-national groups carried over to the US in the 1880-1920 period when many Southern and Eastern Europeans immigrated to the US. They and their descendants later came to be thought of as “ethnic” groups, but at the time, and especially in the first generation, they were

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<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’: The Origin of Racial Classification in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Thought,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29. No. 3 (1996), 258

<sup>19</sup> Kant, “On National Characteristics, so far as They Depend upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,” in Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell). (“The Spaniard is earnest, taciturn, and truthful...The Frenchman is gracious, courteous, and complaisant.” 51). Kant said extremely racist things about black people and Africans, but is quite praiseworthy toward the “savages of North America”: The Canadian “savage” is truthful and honest. (56). Hume had previously developed the idea of “national character.” Hudson, “‘Nation’ to ‘Race,’” 256

The rise of European nationalism also involved nation-states, not only “national groups” as so far characterized, introducing the possibility of a state based not on origin but territorial location and citizenship (so-called “civic nationality”), of which France and the US were prime exemplars in this period. So the racial view I am pointing to applies only to the ethnonational conception of nations.

<sup>20</sup> Gobineau thought Anglo-Saxons in the US were in the process of being overwhelmed by “the most degenerate races of olden day Europe. They are the human flotsam of all ages: Irish, cross-bred Germans and French, and Italians of even more doubtful stock.” From Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1998), 44.



standardly referred to as “races”—the Polish race, Jewish race, Greek race, and so forth.<sup>21</sup> Contributing to this “racialization” though not required by it, was the administering of a set of so-called intelligence tests to US WWI soldiers that purported to show that these ethnic groups were (to different degrees) intellectually inferior to the then-dominant “stock” of Northern Europeans. African Americans were also tested and declared to be inferior, exemplifying overlap of the two racial “systems”—the naturalist-colonialist and the national/ethnic ones. More generally, these “national races” within the overall “Caucasian race” were ranked in terms of moral character and capability, with Anglo-Saxons at the pinnacle, and this ranking co-existed with and partly modified the naturalist-colonialist race hierarchy with Caucasians/whites at the top. This strand of national or ethnic racism, expressed in an influential 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, by Madison Grant, culminated in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, greatly reducing immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe and eliminating it from Asia.

The most striking example of “national racism,” though merging with the colonialism-naturalist one, was Nazism. The Nazis held to a rigid hierarchy of worth among what they conceived of as races, including blacks along with European-national races, plus Jews whom Nazis did not think of as national. The Nazis incorporated elements of scientific racism into their overall worldview and were particularly impressed with American eugenics and laws confining blacks to second-class citizenship.<sup>22</sup>

### *Herder's cultural inherentism*

To fully understand this racializing of nationality that became such a major element in the overall idea of race we must turn to J. G. von Herder (1744-1803), a younger contemporary of Kant (1724-1804). Herder explicitly rejected the colonialist-naturalist idea of race as both invalid and pernicious, and was critical of Kant (with whom he studied) for propounding a theory of race of that type. He famously said, “A monkey is not your brother but a Negro is and you should not rob and oppress him.”<sup>23</sup> Herder identified “race” with that conception and shunned using race in his own theories.

Herder thought of nations, conceived of as ethnically homogeneous, as each possessing a distinctive and unique spirit (Geist) or culture, expressed especially in its

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<sup>21</sup> Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.

<sup>22</sup> Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002)

<sup>23</sup> Cited in George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 37.

distinctive language. This spirit was thought of as inhering in the ethno-national group, or "volk," in the way McCarthy, Frederickson, and Rattansi state (above, xxx).<sup>24</sup>

Herder regarded the differing national *volksgeists* as essentially equivalent in value; and on this basis he condemned colonialism, and European conquest of other European nations, for imposing the culture of one group onto another. This pluralist and egalitarian way of thinking about cultures, a forerunner of contemporary multiculturalism, was largely jettisoned by the European, and especially German, nationalisms that made use of Herder's thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nationalism tended to regard the national culture in question as superior to others, while retaining the essentialist or inherentist conception of cultures.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, then, the anti-race, culturally pluralistic, egalitarian Herder, became a source and resource for the later national racism.

National racism is a forerunner of contemporary essentialist culturalism, an historical resource on which this current view draws, both of them sharing the idea of essentialized cultural characteristics as inherent in a group, a colonial-naturalist racial group (rather than a distinctly ethno-national one) in the case of cultural essentialism. It may initially seem that culturalist essentialism is not a coherent form of thought, since cultural characteristics cannot be inherent in anything like the way biological characteristics are. By definition culture is changeable, malleable, not fixed. Frederickson states it this way: "If we think of culture as historically constructed, fluid, variable in time and space, and adaptable to changing circumstances, it is a concept antithetical to that of race."<sup>26</sup> So it may seem that there cannot really be culturalist inherentism.

This is not correct, however, since what counts for essentialism or inherentism's standing in the typology of views of culture is not the actual intellectual coherence of the view but its intelligibility, that is, whether it is possible for someone to hold the view in question. Since we recognize that people can be confused about the character of culture, in precisely the way McCarthy, Frederickson, and Rattansi state, it is in that way intelligible. And we especially recognize that intelligibility when we see its long lineage in the tradition of national racism and Herderian spiritual-cultural essentialism.

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<sup>24</sup> J. G. von Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, abridged by Frank E. Manuel (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>25</sup> Frederickson, *Racism*, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Frederickson, *Racism*, 7

### Non-essentialist or malleable culturalism

The forgoing argument makes clear that there is a second form of culturalism in relation to race, one grounded in an accurate understanding of culture as malleable and changeable. This is non-essentialist culturalism. Changeable cultural characteristics can be attributed to racial, or racialized, groups—groups that are not actual races but were and are treated as if they were (blacks, whites, “Asians,” Native Americans, among others).<sup>27</sup> We recognize a controversy in the social sciences about the role of cultural explanations of the behaviors of racial groups. For example, some argue that black secondary school students often adopt a stance of school disengagement grounded in the idea that school success is “acting white”; this cultural stance then has the effect of depressing their educational striving and attainment.<sup>28</sup> In *The Cultural Matrix*, the sociologist Orlando Patterson defends the view that cultural explanations must be part of an overall explanation of the negative behaviors of poor urban black youth.<sup>29</sup> I am not at this point addressing whether such explanations are plausible or correct, only whether they are coherent, which they are.

The point for my typology of culturalisms in relation to race is that non-essentialist culturalism, in relation to racial groups, lacks essentialist culturalism’s race-like feature that the attributed characteristics are viewed as part of the group’s inherent nature.<sup>30</sup> In non-essentialist culturalism, the cultural characteristics attributed are

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<sup>27</sup> This idea of “racialized group” is developed in Blum, “Racialized Groups” and Hochman, “Racialization” (See note 6.) I will use the more standard terminology of “racial groups” in this paper, but need to indicate how it is coherent to attribute malleable cultural characteristics to groups characterized as racial, which it would not be if races were conceived of in the traditional historical sense as possessing only or predominantly innate characteristics, and perhaps then non-malleable cultures arising from those. A racial group understood as a racialized group is one to which it is intellectually coherent to attribute malleable cultural characteristics.

<sup>28</sup> Stuart Buck, *Acting White: the ironic legacy of desegregation* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2010). Although the “acting white” idea has been given a good deal of popular attention, more recent scholarship has tended to debunk it. A comprehensive treatment in this tradition is Angel L. Harris, *Kids Don’t Want to Fail: Oppositional Culture and the Black-White Achievement Gap* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Orlando Patterson (ed.), *The Cultural Matrix: Understanding Black Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> McCarthy employs both essentialist and non-essentialist versions of culture, but implies that they are the same. After reiterating the essentialist view (quoted earlier, xxx) later in his argument, he follows this up by (rightly) criticizing conservatives for treating “underclass values” as (cultural) causes of racial disadvantage, rather than recognizing structural causes of that disadvantage. He implies that this is a critique of the essentialist view. (McCarthy, *Race, Empire*, 87.) But the form of cultural attribution

regarded, by all sides in the debate about the validity of that attribution, as changeable. For example, many of those who postulate the “acting white” phenomenon among black students believe that those students are capable of abandoning the self-defeating cultural beliefs and practices in question. Thus arguments taken to permit inferior treatment on the grounds that the group in question is inferior in either essentialized genetic or cultural characteristics (e.g. that blacks should not be provided with equal educations because they are not capable, either genetically or culturally, of accessing it) do not work if the cultural characteristics are alterable. In that respect, essentialist culturalism constitutes racist thought in a way that non-essentialist culturalism does not.

### *Group responsible for its culture vs. culture rooted in structure*

Nevertheless there are two importantly distinct forms of non-essentialist culturalism that bear on its status as a form of racist thought overall. The difference turns on whether the changeable cultural characteristics are seen as the fault and responsibility of the group (allegedly) possessing the characteristics or not.

On one variant—“group responsible for its culture”—blacks are themselves responsible for the culture of school disengagement which leads black students not to do as well as students from other groups. John McWhorter, for example, says that African Americans have adopted a culture of “anti-intellectualism” that contributes to not setting high standards of school engagement among black students.<sup>31</sup> On this view the school system provides equal opportunity to black students—their opportunities are the same as those of white students—and so is not to blame for the failure of black students to avail themselves of those opportunities. That failure is grounded in a culture adopted by blacks, and so is their responsibility.<sup>32</sup>

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McCarthy is discussing does not exemplify the essentialist version, since the attribute is conceived of (by both the conservative theorists in question, and himself) as alterable, rather than inherent. The failure to clearly distinguish essentialist and non-essentialist views of culture is common in literature on culture and race.

<sup>31</sup> “The reason black students so rarely hit that particular bar [of high achievement]...is that all of these students belong to a culture infected with an anti-intellectual strain, which subtly but decisively teaches them from birth not to embrace schoolwork too wholeheartedly.” J. McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: Perennial, 2000), 100.

<sup>32</sup> I am just reporting, but not endorsing, the normative underpinnings of this line of culturalist thought. For example I would argue that a norm of equal opportunity in education would require schools who recognize cultural barriers to achievement in their students to take steps themselves to challenge or work around such cultural obstacles,

In the other variant of non-inherentist culturalism—“culture rooted in structure”—racial disparities in school attainment are a product of social/economic/political structures, and whatever cultures have taken root in the black student population are grounded in those structures. On this view it remains a responsibility of the school system, and of the society more generally, to create the conditions outside and inside schools that constitute truly equal opportunities for African American students. Such equal opportunity does not presently exist. This view does not necessarily deny that African Americans have sometimes adopted counter-productive cultural values, for example, regarding academic engagement. But it sees these cultural modalities as dependent variables, products of the unjust structures. (It is possible to hold that both structural and partially independent cultural factors together contribute to underperformance or other deleterious behaviors.)<sup>33</sup>

From the perspective of the culture-grounded-in-structure variant of non-essentialist culturalism, the groups-responsible-for-culture view accepts and provides an ideological rationale for racial injustice and thus for society to have no responsibility to correct for it. In that particular respect it can be seen as a form of racist thought, although it lacks other features of racist thought such as its inherentism.

By contrast, the culture-grounded-in-structure variant of non-essentialist culturalism does not supply such a rationale for injustice. Indeed this view is naturally allied with an anti-racist or racial justice project, of trying to dismantle or weaken the unjust structures that are the foundation of black school underperformance. That racial justice project could hold the view that if the oppressive conditions disappeared, so would the counterproductive cultural behaviors. For example were equal opportunity to genuinely obtain, black students would lose the impetus to have a weaker commitment to school success than other groups (assuming, for the sake of this line of thought, that they possess that cultural characteristic). The racial justice project could thus employ the culture-grounded-in-structure variant of non-essentialist culture to challenge racial injustice rather than, in the groups-responsible-for-culture form, providing a rationale for, and thus supporting, that injustice.

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even if the obstacles were an autonomous product of a particular racially-defined student group.

<sup>33</sup> In *More Than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City* (Norton, 2009), the distinguished sociologist of black America, William Julius Wilson, argues that the plight of the black poor is a combination of structural and cultural factors that are deeply interwoven. Although Wilson allows that some features of culture might attain autonomy from the conditions that produced them, the presence of these factors cannot be severed from their structural causal origins.

### Colonialist culturalism

A distinct third form of what has some claim to be called “culturalism” in a racial context constitutes one central thread in colonialist and imperialist ideologies. The Western imperialist powers often rationalized their subordination of and seizure of lands of peoples of Africa, Asia, South America and the Middle East with views of the subjugated as inferior peoples, often described as “barbarous,” “savage,” and “uncivilized.” This rationale was taken to justify the colonial power in exercising domination over the subjugated, partly for the good of the latter. This language is generally regarded as racist. It is certainly so in its ideological vindication of European domination over populations regarded (then as now) as racially distinct from Europeans.<sup>34</sup>

But Frederickson notes an intellectual difference between this rationale and that used in the settler colonial systems of the US South in the Segregation era and of South Africa in the Segregation and Apartheid eras. “Although some proponents of imperialism believed that the colonized were subhuman and therefore incapable of improvement beyond a kind of taming or domestication, others affirmed their capacity to be educated and civilized, although the process might take a long time.”<sup>35</sup>

The form of thought Frederickson points to lies somewhere between the attribution of ineradicable inferiority in the first form of culturalism (cultural inherentism), and the attribution of inferior but changeable-in-the-present cultural characteristics in the second (cultural non-inherentism). It appears to allow that the subject peoples are biologically and culturally capable of what is regarded as “civilized” behavior, and thus rejects the essentialist (biological or cultural) determinism that constitutes one pole of racist thought. However, for the purpose of providing a justification for (racial) domination, it is much closer to this pole than to non-essentialist culturalism; for it provides a rationale that provides a vindication of domination for the

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<sup>34</sup> Colonialist culturalism is of course only one element in the rationalization of colonialism, as for example, the self-interest and glory of the colonial power were other prominent rationalizations, as was a more distinct advocacy of the superiority of Christian over non-Christian societies. (Jennifer Pitts claims that the latter was much stronger, especially in the British case, in the 19<sup>th</sup> than the 18<sup>th</sup> century. [Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, 2006), 13].) These other rationales also permitted some ambivalence in how the colonial subjects’ cultures were regarded. Pitts notes that some British observers, including colonial administrators, admired elements of Indian culture and religion. In that regard, pervasive racial or race-like inferiority was not the only lens through which colonial subjects were viewed.

<sup>35</sup> Frederickson, *Racism*, 108

foreseeable future, until the vague and open-ended standard of being “civilized” is allegedly met. By contrast, non-essentialist culturalism envisions the possibility of advancing to whatever standard of acceptable behavior is in play in the present or near future.<sup>36</sup>

However, it might be thought that the language of “uncivilized” and “barbarous” is racist in a more intrinsic way, beyond its role in rationalizing racial domination. Certainly this language was quite standard in characterizing populations who were on the way to being seen in the fully racialized way that (ultimately) characterized enslaved populations. Although it does not attribute an absolutely unalterable deficiency, it does involve a much more both pervasive and deeply-rooted (alleged) deficiency than the sorts of cultural attributions involved in contemporary essentialist culturalism (lack of motivation, lack of school engagement). In this respect, as well as its injustice-rationalizing role, it is closer to the inherentist pole of cultural attribution.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Coerced assimilation as a form of cultural racism*

But colonialist culturalism seems to involve racism in yet a further way, not related to the attribution of mental or psychological deficiencies. By demanding assimilation to the culture or way of life of those in the metropole as the standard for the colonial subject’s having achieved the state of being “civilized,” that subject’s own culture is demeaned, and will be largely wiped out if the assimilation is successful. Although not declaring the colonial subject immutably inferior, as both geneticism and inherentist culturalism do, the subject’s attaining of the proffered non-inferiority consists in jettisoning her *non*-inherentist culture. This demeaning and suppressing of the (malleable) culture harms the colonial subject with respect to her embeddedness in that culture and its vital importance to her sense of identity. And we naturally regard this forced cultural assimilation of a racial group as a form of racism, and indeed “cultural racism,” though differing from the way essentialist culturalism is a form of

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<sup>36</sup> Frederickson recognizes that “The view of colonial rule as a lengthy and problematic apprenticeship for civilized modernity can be viewed as functionally racist to the degree that it justified denying civil and political rights to indigenous populations for the foreseeable future.” (*Racism*, 108).

<sup>37</sup> In her account of pro-colonialist and -imperialist thought among 19<sup>th</sup> century English and French liberals, Jennifer Pitts shows that, for example, J.S. Mill, while professing racially egalitarian beliefs, “shared his father’s judgments of Indian society, about the usefulness of making a dichotomous distinction between civilized and barbarous peoples...” , Pitts, *Turn to Empire*, 133 et passim.

cultural racism in the latter's falsely attributing negative characteristics as part of the group members' natures.

The reason colonial culturalism is wrong, and plausibly characterized as cultural racism, is quite different. Here we are assuming that the colonial subjects' culture is valuable rather than deficient; and the wrongness of this assimilationist form of cultural racism lies in the devaluing, demeaning, and attempting to eliminate that valuable culture. This form of racism requires a malleable, non-inherentist conception of culture, in contrast to the essentialist form in inherentist culturalism.

It is true that inherentist culturalism is morally objectionable partly because negative characteristics being regarded as grounded in culture are wrongly attributed to members of the racial group in question. Isn't that also a demeaning of the group's culture? Yes, that is so; but here "culture" plays a different role in the demeaning than in the colonialist case. In the latter it is the *culture regarded as such* that is declared to be defective. In the former it is the *persons* (in the group in question) who are regarded as defective (e.g. in being anti-intellectual). Nothing is explicitly said about their culture as such. Rather culture is invoked as a more acceptable way of declaring the persons defective; but culture is misunderstood, or at least misstated, as inherent, and it is the persons in light of those inherent characteristics who are seen as defective in the inherentist culturalism view.

In this respect, non-inherentist culturalism is much closer to the colonialist case than is inherentist culturalism. In the former it is the cultural characteristics understood as such that are the target of demeaning and insult, rather than the persons. The culture is seen as the source of what is going wrong with the group rather than the group being inherently defective. The assimilationist dynamic that is central to the colonialist case is absent; but both involve cultural demeaning.

This discussion of colonialist racism has drawn on the distinctive history of European colonialism, but is meant to pull from that history a distinctive thread that is at least in principle applicable to the present as well. The rise of multiculturalism across Europe has posed a challenge to the normative underpinnings of this forced assimilationism, so that it is seldom advocated in the blatant form found in the rationales of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialisms. Nevertheless, ethno-nationalism that advocates a form of forced cultural assimilation in Europe and the US has never disappeared, and has become particularly strong in the past decade.

#### **European "Neo-racism"**

A fourth type of culturalism in relation to race can be found in what has come to be called "neo-racism," "new racism," or (in yet a further meaning) "cultural racism."



Like colonial racism, neo-racism is very historically located, in the movement of former colonial subjects to the metropole after the former colonies became independent. But in recent decades, as the national origins of immigration to Europe have diversified, neo-racism has embraced these new groups as well.

In several of these European former colonial powers the argument is made that groups seeking immigration, or members of whom have already immigrated, should be excluded or severely limited on the grounds that their cultures are not compatible with the culture of the European nation in question. The groups referred to are generally viewed as racial groups in the countries in question, such as blacks from the Caribbean or Africa (in the UK, France, and the Netherlands), or certain Asian groups (in the UK and Netherlands). But neo-racism arose in an historical context in which both naturalist-colonialist and specifically geneticist forms of “biological racism” had been discredited by post-war anti-colonial struggles and the Holocaust. So the culturalist turn was in part motivated by that shift in thinking, and in what it was acceptable to say publicly, as was the case in the United States with the turn to essentialist culturalism discussed earlier (pp. xxx).<sup>38</sup>

The exclusion advocated by neo-racism is claimed not to be based on biological characteristics (either phenotypical or genetically-based psychological traits) but on the national cultures of the immigrants in relation to the receiving country. It thus shares with cultural inherentism an essentialized conception of culture, and thus shares that specific feature of racist thought. Both views treat cultures as permanent features of national or ethnic groups and do not envision them changing, or at least focus on their current form without any recognition of the possibility of change.

Neo-racism also does not claim, at least not explicitly, that the immigrant groups’ cultures are inferior to that of the European culture in question. In this respect it differs from US-based cultural essentialism, and indeed of non-essentialist culturalism of the “group responsible for its culture” form also. In those forms the attributed

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<sup>38</sup> Sometimes neo-racism is described as rejecting prejudice based on visible physical characteristics rather than on psychological characteristics, and this is described as a contrast between biology and culture. (See Tariq Modood, “‘Difference,’ Cultural Racism and Anti-Racism,” in Bernard Boxill (ed.), *Race and Racism* (New York: Oxford, 2001).) Our earlier discussion of different forms of biologism shows why this is misleading. A major form of biologism attributes psychological characteristics (alleged to be) based on genetic ones, rendering the psychological characteristics inherent, or essentialist. Prejudice based *solely* on visible physical characteristics (with no implication of other differences in character or culture) is not the only form of biologistic racism, and is not the historically most significant.

cultural features are regarded as rendering the group inferior or deficient in some particular respect—lacking an adequate “work ethic,” not being committed to performing well in school, and so on. The whole point of those two forms of culturalism (inherentist and non-inherentist) is to say that a disadvantaged aspect of the group’s situation (being materially disadvantaged, not doing as well in school) is caused by the group’s (alleged) cultural deficiency (of either inherentist or non-inherentist form).

Neo-racism does not take this line. It says only that the culture in question is *incompatible* with the culture of the metropole; that is, that people from the two different cultures could not co-exist in the same political society without destructive conflict. So the invocation of culture here is not put in the service of domination or the legitimation of inequality as it is in essentialist and non-essentialist culturalism, but of exclusion from the national polity through denial of immigration, or difficulty in acquiring citizenship.

The differing contexts of the European and US case partly account for this difference in focus between exclusion and subordination. Populations, like indigenous peoples or descendants of former slaves, who have shared territory with the dominant white group for hundreds of years, cannot be excluded in the way emigrants can.

A further, related, difference between cultural essentialism and non-essentialism in the US and neo-racism in Europe is that in the former cases, the cultural attributions in question pertain to very specific features of the group that take place within, and presuppose, interaction with the dominant group, and other groups, in society. It is in the context of blacks and whites in the same schools, or at least the same school system, that blacks are not performing as well, and the cultural feature of school disengagement is parlayed to explain that very specific phenomenon. By contrast, neo-racism casts the *total* culture—not only one delimited feature of it—of the immigrant group as incompatible with the dominant group’s culture, and that is why (it is alleged) the two groups cannot share the same society without conflict, or damage to the dominant group.

However, as Etienne Balibar points out, the shift from domination to exclusion is less significant in practice than neo-racist adherents claim for it.<sup>39</sup> In both cases the targeted groups are being kept from accessing goods and opportunities accorded full-fledged members of the receiving countries—in one case through denial of immigration or citizenship, in the other through unequal treatment within the receiving nation that often constitutes a form of second-class citizenship.

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<sup>39</sup> E. Balibar, “Is There a Neo-Racism?” in E. Balibar and E. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).

In addition neo-racism's claim that the excluded "culture" is not seen as inferior can seem quite disingenuous. The way the contrasting cultures are described are often quite evaluatively loaded—democratic, open-minded, progressive, and free are contrasted with cultures seen as closed, backward, authoritarian, sexist.<sup>40</sup>

Neo-racism presumes that the targeted groups are being viewed racially, and that everyone knows this, even if the language (or even substance) of "culture" is employed to characterize them. They are (regarded as) non-white. This point applies to the group most frequently currently targeted in Europe, Muslims. Although Muslims are a religious group and can be members of every standard racial group, the general image of Muslims in the mind of white Europeans (and Americans) is of a "non-white," generally Arab or South Asian, person.<sup>41</sup> In addition to this phenotypist dimension, Muslims are also racialized in the way neo-racism does, through the attribution of essentialized cultural characteristics. Neo-racist members from the dominant white group do not recognize that they are viewing Muslims in this way, since the point of essentialist culturalism is to mask the racism present in the (inherentist) characterization of the group, in being seen as cultural but *not* racial. My claim is only that culturally essentialized groups are being viewed racistly even if those doing so do not recognize this.<sup>42</sup>

Neo-racism contrasts strikingly with colonial culturalism, especially given that both are directed toward the same groups, though at different times in their histories. Colonial culturalism does not attribute an essentialized culture to colonial subjects, in that colonialism's fundamental ideological rationale is that colonial subjects can be brought from their benighted, inferior cultures to an enlightened European one, under the tutelage of their colonial masters. Neo-racism takes these colonial subjects after independence and declares that they do indeed have an essentialized culture, and this

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<sup>40</sup> Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'," 24. In addition, many are willing to take the next step of explicitly declaring belief in the superiority of European culture to those of the cultures from immigrants from other regions. That explicit supremacism has by no means disappeared, co-existing with the turn toward neo-racism's denial of it.

<sup>41</sup> In the US, Arabs are and have traditionally been counted as "white" on the federal census; but, especially since the World Trade Center attacks in 2001, this practice does not reflect popular perceptions, including those of many Arab Americans. Some Arab groups are attempting to get a "Middle East and North Africa (MENA)" category on the 2020 census. See Arab-American Institute: <https://www.aaiusa.org/census>.

<sup>42</sup> Modood emphasizes that neo- or cultural racism presupposes that the groups in question are viewed as racial groups (even though this is denied in the explicit discourse of neo-racism), but that the alleged cultural differences are the more salient factor in how the groups are regarded by others. Modood, "'Difference,' Cultural Racism"

makes it impossible for them ever to become “Europeanized.” Therefore they should be excluded or their presence minimized in the metropole. (Note that colonialism did not envision colonial subjects moving to the metropole either.) It seeks exclusion rather than domination (although we saw that the normative significance of that distinction should not be overstated).

In addition, the differences between the US and Europe, while certainly real, are less sharp than the above characterization. There is and has always been a strand of both “neo-racism”—exclusionary racism—and coercive assimilationism against immigrants and near-immigrant generations in the US. Historically, various groups’ cultures have been alleged to be incompatible with the then-dominant culture of the US (e.g. Irish Catholics in the mid- 1800’s; Southern and Eastern Europeans in the 1880-1920 period, mentioned earlier; various different people-of-color groups in the post-1965 period; Mexicans and Central Americans perhaps most notably in the Trump era).<sup>43</sup> But in addition pressures to assimilate have been directed toward these groups, thus implying that the groups were viewed as having malleable cultures that could be jettisoned and replaced by the dominant culture.

The two stances are intellectually incompatible—the former says that assimilation is impossible because the culture of the aspiring-to-be immigrant group is unchangeable and permanently incompatible with that of the receiving nation’s culture, the latter that immigrating groups can, and should be forced to, assimilate, that is, to abandon their (therefore changeable and impermanent) culture. Nevertheless both views can exist alongside one another inside the same society, simply as contrary tendencies.

## Conclusion

The typology of ideas of culture has been prompted by and aimed to address the question whether the shift from an earlier, Segregation era, attributing of genetically-based inferiority to racial groups to a more recent “culturalism”—attributing culturally-based deficiencies—should be seen as a form of racist thought, sometimes referred to as “cultural racism;” or whether it betokens a different and non-racist (though possibly problematic) way of thinking about those groups. I have argued that culturalism takes several forms, which yield different answers to that question. “Essentialist culturalism” is racist in two respects. It attributes inherent characteristics to the racial group, as biologicistic (geneticist) racism does. And it supplies a rationale that supports racial injustice and wrongful white advantage. “Non-essentialist

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<sup>43</sup> Opposition to immigration is based on some arguments other than racist or neo-racist ones, for example, a concern for competition for scarce jobs, in both the US and Europe.

culturalism” avoids the first of these forms of racist thought; the attributed characteristics are seen as changeable in the way that culture is in fact changeable. This is an important difference from traditional geneticist racist thought and thus manifests a significant difference in how racial groups are conceived of.

However, one particular form of non-essentialist culturalism— “group responsible for its culture”—retains the other racist feature, in that it aims to provide an ideological justification for the society’s allowing unjust disparities to continue, declaring that they are not unjust but that the cultural forces that (allegedly) produce them are produced solely by and are the sole responsibility of the disadvantaged group itself. As in the case of essentialist culturalism, the historical and structural causes of unjust racial disparity are ignored or explicitly denied, so the two forms share this aspect of racism.

I then considered two other forms of culturalism with respect to race, less directly tied to the original question, but to fill out the larger picture of the variety of culturalisms. “Colonialist culturalism” is racist in providing a purported rationale for racial domination (in its colonialist form). That rationale does not unequivocally attribute inescapable inferior characteristics to the colonial peoples in question; for it purports to claim that under the appropriate tutelage of the colonial power, these peoples could become “civilized.” Nevertheless, that civilizing process is envisioned as taking place over a long period of time, and so in the (historical) present the colonized peoples were regarded as uncivilized in a manner little different from the forthright attribution of unchangeable barbarity to them. So in practice colonialist culturalism is close to essentialist culturalism with respect to this aspect of its racist character.

Neo-racism also attributes essentialized cultures to racially-defined groups, and is racist in that sense. It does so in the name not of domination or legitimation of injustice within a given society, but of exclusion from that society, which thus constitutes a form of racism as promoting racial injustice.

#### **Four types of “cultural racism”**

Finally, the original question raised another one—to what phenomena does the appellation “cultural racism” properly apply? I have suggested that four types of culturalism—inherentist culturalism, non-inherentist culturalism of the “groups responsible for their own cultures” form, colonialist culturalism, and neo-racism—have some claim to be called “cultural racism,” but not always for the same reason.

Inherentist culturalism and neo-racism exemplify cultural racism in virtue of their inherentism, a feature of racist thought in the “national racism” we traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but which has affinities with the biological inherentism present in

earlier forms of racist thought. *Non*-inherentist culturalism is *not* racist in this particular way, and colonial culturalism is ambiguous on this issue. In practice it can be grouped with the two unequivocally inherentist culturalisms, as its characterization of the colonial subjects as backward or uncivilized were in practice treated as being long-term features of those groups. But in its explicit claims, it diverges from the inherentism of cultural essentialism and neo-racism.

Neo-racism, colonialist culturalism, and non-inherentist culturalism exemplify cultural racism in a manner not shared by inherentist culturalism. They demean the cultures of its target groups, though in somewhat different ways. Colonialist culturalism does so by declaring those cultures uncivilized. Neo-racism does so more indirectly, by saying that the cultures in question are alien to, and incompatible with, what is taken to be the superior culture of the receiving country in question, though neo-racism explicitly denies claiming that superiority. Non-inherentist culturalism does so by attributing a negative characteristic regarded as cultural in nature.

Finally, all four forms warrant the “cultural racism” characterization insofar as all supply ideological rationales for white domination, racial injustice, or illegitimate white advantage.

One item in the typology—non-essentialist culturalism of the “culture grounded in structure” variety—is a form of culturalism but is not racist in the forms we have discussed. It does not provide a rationale for racial injustice, nor attribute an inherentist negative characteristic to the group. When the quality being attributed (e.g. school disengagement) is negative, this could perhaps be seen as insulting, and might be thought racist in that sense. But it is more appropriate to regard the attribution (assuming accuracy) in light of its structural causes, that supply the group and the society a diagnosis to remedy the injustices caused by those structures and their cultural effects. In fact this form of culturalism is naturally allied with an anti-racist project, though of course particular attributions must be accurate in order to serve this end.<sup>44</sup>

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