

Racial definition



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Racial definition Genetic engineering and new researches in educational psychology have once again revived the contentious 'nature or nurture' debate on race. Is race a biological phenomenon or a social concept Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their book " Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s" debunk the scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries who thought race as a biological concept.

The concept of race has defied biological definition. (Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. Page 285)

Omi and Winant try to prove that biological definition of race has been motivated by racist notion and has only helped racial ideology.

None of the ostensibly 'objective' measures to determine and define racial categories were free from the invidious elements of racial ideology. (Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. Page 285)

They give the example of Count Arthur de Gobineau, who based his four-volume tome " Essay on the Inequality of Races" on the scientific studies of his time, to " influence the racial thinking of the period" and boost the belief that " superior races produce superior cultures."

Francis Galton's " eugenics" (good genes) concept had an impact on " scientific and sociopolitical thought in Europe and the United States."

To emphasize their viewpoint, Omi and Winant quote Michael Billig: Racial beliefs operate as an 'amateur biology'.. a way of explaining the variations in human nature. (Billig, Michael. Pp 161-79).

Biologically race can be human groupings with physical differences. But if such differences trigger preconceived notions about certain groupings then this is racial ideology. This defines the social concept of race.

Comments such as 'Funny, you don't look black,' betray an underlying image

of what black should be. (Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. Page 289)

Thus Omi and Winant make clear distinction between 'racial ideology' and 'racial identity.' Racial ideology is a social concept, yet racial identity can be a biological fact.

According to them race is " a pre-eminently sociohistorical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race.. have varied tremendously over time and between different societies." (Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. Page 287)

Race today is " assumed to be a variable which is shaped by broader societal forces." The concept varies from society to society. 'Blacks' in the contemporary British politics refer to all non-whites. In the United States 'havin' a little Negra blood' makes one non-white.

Biological definition and social concept of race do make a lot of difference. Omi and Winant distinguish them as " natural" and " common sense." Having a particular skin tone or hair is one's racial identity, but branding him or her as black or Hispianic or white is racial ideology.

Races do not emerge full-blown. They are the results of diverse historical practices and continually subject to challenge over their definition and meaning. (Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. Page 289)

Yet the social definition of race is more acceptable, because as stated above biological definition is only a corollary of social definition.

Works cited

Billig, Michael. " Patterns of Racism: Interviews with National Front Members," Race and Class. Vo. 20. No. 2

Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. " Racial Formation in the United Sates: From the 1960s to the 1980s).

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