What is Race?

Race is defined as 1) a breeding stock of animals, 2) a family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock, 3) a class or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics, 4) an actually or potentially interbreeding group within a species; also: a taxonomic category (as a subspecies) representing such a group, 5) breed, 6) a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits, 7) obsolete: inherited temperament or disposition, 8) distinctive flavor, taste, or strength (New Oxford American Dictionary)

“Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.” (Omi and Winant, 2008). In the simplest of contemporary terms, race is a categorization of communities of people subjectively defined by skin color, phenotypic characterizations, cultural traits, geographic residence and/or linguistic differences. Race is often confused with notions of nationality, ethnicity and culture. (Atekpatzin 2014)

Where did the notion of race begin?

“The concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world . . . racial formation is a process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed . . . racial formation is a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized. Next, we link racial formation to the evolution of hegemony, the way in
which society is organized and ruled . . . race is a matter of social structure and cultural representation.” (Omi and Winant, 2008).

Term once commonly used in physical anthropology to denote a division of humankind possessing traits that are transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize it as a distinct human type (e.g., Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Negroid) (New Oxford American Dictionary)

**Is race a biological fact?**

Today the term race has little scientific standing, as older methods of differentiation, including hair form and body measurement, have given way to the comparative analysis of DNA and gene frequencies relating to such factors as blood typing, the excretion of amino acids, and inherited enzyme deficiencies. Because all human populations today are extremely similar genetically, most researchers have abandoned the concept of race for the concept of the cline, a graded series of differences occurring along a line of environmental or geographical transition. This reflects the recognition that human populations have always been in a state of flux, with genes constantly flowing from one gene pool to another, impeded only by physical or ecological boundaries. While relative isolation does preserve genetic differences and allow populations to maximally adapt to climatic and disease factors over long periods of time, all groups currently existing are thoroughly “mixed” genetically, and such differences as still exist do not lend themselves to simple typologizing (New Oxford American Dictionary).
Is race a social construct? What does that mean?

“Race” is today primarily a sociological designation, identifying a class sharing some outward physical characteristics and some commonalities of culture and history (New Oxford American Dictionary). Race is a social construct systematically imposed as a process of colonization. By designating darker skinned individuals as “less than human,” in concert with the Catholic and Protestant churches, colonizers have been able to justify theft, murder, genocide, rape and oppression and to put into place structures that continue to disadvantage any and all people that are not white or to provide a template for similar acts of discrimination in other parts of the world (Atekpatzin, 2014; Young, 2011).

How has the notion of race changed over time?

Although ideas of race are centuries old, it was not until the 19th century that attempts to systematize racial divisions were made. Ideas of supposed racial superiority and social Darwinism reach their culmination in Nazi ideology of the 1930s and gave pseudoscientific justification to policies and attitudes of discrimination, exploitation, slavery and extermination (authors note: While Nazi Germany became the extreme example of racism, the practice was codified by the Catholic Church via the Papal Bulls in the mid-fifteenth century). Theories of race asserting a link between racial type and intelligence are now discredited. Scientifically it is accepted as obvious that there are subdivisions of the human species, but it is also clear that genetic variation between individuals of the same race can be as great as that between members of the different races (New Oxford American Dictionary).
What has contributed to our understanding of race today? Is race a reality?

While it can be argued that race is a social construct and there are really very small differences between humans, the reality is that race is a very real way of categorizing people such that White or lighter skinned people are more privileged, have better opportunities, hold and retain economic and political power and darker skinned individuals experience many levels of discrimination and exclusion from privileges. Race is a tool that White skinned communities have used to privilege themselves historically and contemporarily. People that are discriminated against because of perceived racial differences will attest to race being very much a reality (Atekpatzin 2014).

What are the characteristics of race?

Racial categories are defined using observable, physiological characteristics such as hair color and type of hair (straight, curly, kinky), eye color and shape, skin color, nose size and structure, cheekbone location and prominence, height, chest shape, vocal sounds and intonations, speech patterns, body shape. DNA testing has become the new de facto racialization of people that is already showing signs of discriminatory categorization by erasing or minimizing the uniqueness of Indigenous communities (Atekpatzin 2014).

What is Ethnicity?

Ethnicity is defined as the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition (New Oxford American Dictionary). Originally, the word meant pagan or “not Christian.” With the evolution of racism, the term ethnicity
took on differing meanings settling, presently, on the idea of a group of people with a common heritage. Ethnicity can be best understood as a smaller cultural group within a larger nationalistic *imagined* group (See *Imagined Communities*, Anderson, 1983) where the larger group holds social and/or political power. For example, Mejicanos living in the United States can be regarded as an ethnic community. Individuals that self identify as Latino are an ethnic group different from the larger white community of imagined “American” citizens. The Cajun people of Louisiana are an ethnic community of French descent in a larger white/black community of Southerners (Atekpatzin 2014).

**What is Nationality?**

Nationality is the status of belonging to a particular nation (New American Oxford Dictionary). In short, nationality pertains to citizenship. An American is someone that holds American citizenship, a person either born in the United States or naturalized. A German is someone who is a citizen of Germany. An Italian is someone that holds citizenship in Italy. A Mexican is someone who holds citizenship in Mexico. There are many people in the United States that think of themselves as “Mexican” even though they have never been to Mexico, have no citizenship in Mexico and were born in the United States (Atekpatzin, 2014).

**What is Culture?**

Culture is what we do and how we do it. Culture is expressed and understood in many ways. The following is a list of categories that can be used to define culture:

- Geography
• Language
• Food
• Music
• Dance
• Religious expressions
• Daily rituals
• Community rituals
• Rites of passage
• Marriage practices and beliefs
• Education
• Values: life, personal, family, community, education, work, history, future, belonging, outsiders
• Beliefs

The United States is a multicultural nation. A large percentage of the people, who regard themselves as American, share cultural artifacts from more than one culture. For example, youth may listen to country music, hip hop, pop, reggaeton, rancheras, and jazz and think nothing of the differing cultures that have produced such a variety of music.
What is Racism?

Racism is generally understood as prejudiced attitudes or bigotry, on the one hand, and discriminatory practices on the other. Discrimination is an unavoidable outcome of patterns of socialization which through individual acts or conscience policies has been the structural feature of U.S. society, the product of centuries of systematic exclusion, exploitation and disregard of racially defined communities of color. (Omi and Winant, 2008)

How is race stratified? What is the hierarchy?

Race is stratified in the U.S. hegemony by skin color as determined by geographical and ancestral descendency. At the top of the hegemonic hierarchy are whites (of European descent), followed by Yellow (Asian), then Brown/Red (Indigenous to the Americas), with Blacks at the lowest rung.

What are the consequences of stratifying people racially?

By stratifying people racially, a system for establishing and maintaining a social structure that privileges white people and disadvantages all others is concretized. Such a system assures that whites in the U.S. continue to enjoy the entitlements and privileges of economic and social wealth and access while all others are relegated to less privileged access and status. Racial stratification serves an economic, political and social function.

What are the four essential elements of a racist attitude?
According to Albert Memmi, a “racist attitude” has the following “essential” elements:

1. Stressing the *real or imaginary differences* between the racist and his victim.
2. *Assigning values* to these differences, *to the advantage of the racist* and the detriment of his victim.
3. Trying to make them *absolutes* by *generalizing* from them and claiming that they are final
4. *Justifying* any present or possible *aggression or privilege*.

**What does Ferguson, MI tell us about racism today?**

The killing of a young Black man in Ferguson, MI reminds us that racism is still very much a reality for people of color in the United States. With a police force of 53 officers, 50 of whom are white in a community that is predominantly black is structural racism that is intentional and by design. With no representation on the city council, the black community of Ferguson has no voice and, consequently, remains disadvantaged and discriminated against by the white community. Moreover, justice for white members of Ferguson is exercised differently than for black members of Ferguson.

**What is xenophobia?**

Intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries (New American Oxford Dictionary). From: xeno – other, different in origin + phobia – a fear of something.
While dictionary interpretations of the word xenophobia are inert, that is relatively neutral in content, the foundation of the “fear of others” has a profound basis. Therefore, the dictionary definitions of xenophobia are inadequate and should not be used to define xenophobia. At the core of fearing others is an inherent need to protect two things: one’s offspring and the attributes that define oneself, family and community charged with assuring the success of one’s offspring. In other words, people and social beings, like monkeys, dogs, birds, bees, ants, etc., have as a principle objective the survival of their offspring along with the means and manner by which to do so. For example, a Mejicano family (from Mexico) has a strong desire to progenate (produce children) that will grow up speaking Spanish and will live by the values, cultural norms and mores of mexicanidad. If one of the children chooses to marry a black or white person, there is a fear on the part of the family (and particularly the parents) that the grandchildren will lose their connection to mexicanidad and be unable to speak the language of the grandparents. This produces xenophobia, a fear in other people that are different from the family in many and profound ways. That which will be lost by marrying outside of the community cannot be regained. This is xenophobia; a fear of others that are different because that difference can rob one of their sense of self, their self identity. It should not be confused with racism, because there is no power dynamic required or expressed. While there may be a prejudice toward others, the fear that best describes and fuels the prejudice is xenophobia (Atekpatzin, 2014).

What is eugenics?
Eugenics is the science* of improving a human population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics. From *eu – good, well, easily, normal + *genic – of or relating to genes (New American Oxford Dictionary). *Be care of submitting to the notion that because something is called science that it is free of racism or prejudice. There is nothing “scientific” about eugenics (Atekpatzin, 2014).

Eugenics is the belief (not science) that certain characteristics are superior to others. For example, the eugenics movement posits (argues) that white-skinned, blond hair, blue or green eyes, and Aryan traits are superior to all other “races” or biological traits. Proponents of the eugenics movement, an inherently racist movement, believe that they are the chosen people of god and that their superiority justifies that many atrocities they have historically and presently perpetuate against communities that are not white.

The eugenics movement is historically a white movement founded on white supremacy, white privilege, white entitlement and the promotion of white values. The eugenics movement was founded by Francis Galton, cousin to Charles Darwin, who was following in the footsteps and ideas proposed by Darwin. Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” justified white aggressions and violence against the people of Africa, India, Asia and the Americas (people of color). The majority of white leaders in the Americas and Europe embraced the eugenics movement, the idea that white people are superior, in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Adolf Hitler exemplified what eugenics looks like when fully executed as evidenced by the killing of millions of people (gay, lesbian, mentally and physically handicapped, non-christian, i.e., jehova’s witnesses, jews). Eugenics has its roots in religious fanaticism as expressed in christian, Islamic and jewish religious beliefs that assert there is only one correct religious belief, or only one chosen people of
god thereby justifying the genocide and/or ethnic cleansing of people of differing religious beliefs (Atekpazin, 2014).

What is apartheid?

Apartheid is defined as a policy or system of segregation or discrimination on grounds of race (New American Oxford Dictionary). The root of the word comes from Afrikaans (Dutch/English) meaning separateness. While the word separateness may seem innocuous on its face, the practice of setting up a society where white-skinned citizens have unfettered freedoms and black (or other People of Color) are required to extract permission to move about, marry, work, travel, leave the neighborhood where they are imprisoned bespeaks a level of systemic racism that has no equal. The phrase apartheid was first used as a policy instituted in South Africa as an attempt to protect white South Africans from having contact with Black South Africans. The Black South Africans were literally imprisoned in Black communities where they required documents and permission to travel about. Marriage between white and black individuals was outlawed (Atekpazin, 2014).

How is apartheid practiced today?

Apartheid is practiced today in Occupied Palestine/Israel where Israeli citizens are free to live and move about as they please while Palestinians are locked away in interment camps (Gaza and the West Bank), require documents and permissions to travel across town, are searched every few minutes when traveling and detained to obstruct
freedoms. ([http://electronicintifada.net/content/south-african-study-israel-practicing-apartheid-and-colonialism/3432](http://electronicintifada.net/content/south-african-study-israel-practicing-apartheid-and-colonialism/3432)).

What is PIR?

PIR stands for Parity, Inclusiveness, and Representation. Activists and progressive thinkers strive to achieve PIR in the work that they do. Rather than talk about “equality” which legally has lost potential to level the playing field of racism, sexism, ability, gender inequality, and heterosexism, PIR is a measurable tool for achieving the egalitarian society free of the racial and other disparities we experience presently (Atekpatzin 2014).

**Parity:** Parity means that samples of populations reflect the larger population. The best example of parity is, if the community is 75% Brown, then the school board should have 75% Brown members seated, the administration should be 75% Brown, the teachers should be 75% Brown and the percentage of students that graduate from high school should be 75% Brown. Parity means that the numbers are always reflective of the entire population accordingly (Atekpatzin, 2014).

**Inclusiveness:** This means that all of the community members have been invited to participate in any given process. It means that all community members feel compelled to participate in any given process because their voice is a valuable contribution to the issue. It means that entities (businesses, governments, boards, places of employment, schools) do all that they can to assure that ALL people are included especially when critical
decisions need to be made regarding the entire community. When agencies fail to invite or include the participation of all community members then they, by design, make decisions that impact all community members but systemically exclude part of members. For example, when only white teachers are hired to teach a school that is 80 percent Brown, then the administration has intentionally excluded potential Brown teachers and they are not being inclusive in the hiring process (Atekpatzin, 2014).

**Representation:** This means that the make up of any decision-making body reflects the community. It means that all the voices that have an interest in the issues addressed are represented in the decision-making processes. For example, how many members of Spanish-speaking individuals are allowed to represent Spanish-speaking communities on school boards, in city councils, in state government and what is the extent of their vote? If there is only one member in a community that has 75% population, is that really representation? What influence do these representatives have on the decisions that are made? Are they just tokens? Or do they yield real power? Are they advocates? Or do they just attend the meetings and remain silent? Representation means that the voices of all the interested parties are present for decision making and have an equal voice and vote on the issues (Atekpatzin, 2014).

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