

Color – first lecture 8/26

Slide 1

This is our first lecture in this series of five.

There are three reasons why these lectures are necessary.

1. The political culture of this country, as part of a world trend, has pivoted and lurched back into past practice – extreme class polarity regenerating the vulgar racist beliefs and practices of a bygone era. What few reforms we had won are being torn from us. That’s the big picture.
2. Specifically, for us, this has become an attack on Black Studies. First, the system was threatened by the initiative of critical race theory that has turned a light on racist laws, exposing the hypocrisy of claims of democracy (all the way to the constitution and the supreme court). Then the College Board made an attempt to define Black Studies with an AP course, an attempt at consensus. The rising fascist forces of the right rose up from Florida and many other states to begin a counter attack – history had to be sweetened that allowed no bad feelings. Further, all Diversity and inclusion structures and policies had to be eliminated. That’s our immediate external threat to Black Studies.
3. But there is an internal reason as well. We need to reboot, to re-establish our foundation as the base line of what needs to be done at this time. For us this is a return to the birthing battles we had to wage in the late 1960s. What do we fundamentally believe? In fact, we need to step out of being straight jacketed by the gate keepers of the academic bureaucracy and reconnect with the needs of Black people and reaffirm the mission statement of Black Studies created in 1977 “Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility.” Social responsibility means Black liberation.

So, several of us have been meeting to discuss how to proceed. We decided on five key concepts, concepts that can be the conceptual foundation for an introduction course in Black Studies, that would then allow for each course to take its own unique approach but be fundamentally in unity with the general understanding of what Black Studies is all about. We seek to model jazz, improvisation within a structure. Today we lack such a foundational structure.

These lectures and power point slides are a resource for you to use as you will, as they are, or as you mash them up. They will be available as slides, video and text on the website Alkalimat.org

We want to hear from you about your reaction to this project and what you can do with it. In fact, we ask each department this question – is there agreement on a fundamental conceptual basis for your curriculum, or have you even had serious discussions about this. It is time to revisit or begin this discussion.

Slide 2

This presentation will be followed by comments to start the discussion. Be sure to write questions and comments in the chat. Lets make this a community conversation. And, lets take this conversation into our classes and networks.

Almost 250 people have registered, and over 100 want to be in the discussion. There are several ways to do so. Out time is limited to 90 minutes, including 45 minutes of presentation.

1. Several people will be selected to speak for no more than 4 minutes each. Video is required.
2. Use the chat function on Zoom to share questions, comments, links, other sources (100 word limit)
3. Send all more extensive comments to mcworter@illinois.edu by Wed noon that will be compiled and posted to [abdulslit](http://abdulslit.com) on Friday

4. Take the discussion into your classes, your networks and all other Black Studies contexts

Slide 3

We have listed here the concept of color, but our focus is on race – There is an old racist slur – “If you’re white you’re all right, if you’re brown, stick around, but if you’re Black, get back.”

Color is a code word for race in the American context. And race is always defined in biological terms, inclusive of an entire people.

So, the question we are focusing on in this presentation is this: are there different races or is there one human race?

Actually, this is like debating in the geography field of study whether the world is flat or not. On a scientific basis this should be regarded as a settled question. But it is part of the battle of ideas we are forced to fight as part of the Black liberation struggle.

Let’s get into this.

Slide 4

We will be dealing with these 6 topics. We are investigating the concept of race, what it means to be a human, what it means to be an African and an African descendant as part of humanity on a biological level. This is a material question, meaning it is rooted in biology, the fundamental physical make up of what makes us humans.

1. The basic question people have always asked, who are we humans, are we part of nature or as gods above and superior to all animals?
2. We know racism exists, but does this mean that different races also exist?
3. How do we **know** whether different races exist or not – we will look at three basic arguments based on how people look, what fossilized bones of ancient human beings can be dug up, and what

can be learned from our basic biological cellular make up – physiology, archeology, and genetics

Then we will make some summary comments. This is a fundamental issue. Our argument is that there is one human race, not many races. The use of the word race to describe different human populations is a tacit acceptance of a racist point of view

Slide 5

In the course of human history there have been two main approaches to the question of what makes us human.

1. The religious context is a belief system that posits a reality outside of human experience, a divine intervention into nature that has created all of reality, including humans. Each religion has its own story version of this process
2. On the other hand, humans use reason to investigate the material world, and each other, to find out what it means to be human, in and of itself as well as in relation to all other aspects of nature.

One can think of this as two belief systems, one based on received information from ancient sacred texts of each religion, and the other the empirical work of scientific research. There are organizations for each, churches, mosques, etc. for religion and universities for science.

Slide 6

Here are three major religious examples.

The Koran is the sacred text for Islam.

"We created man from sounding clay, from mud moulded into shape..." (15:26). "He began the creation of man from **clay**, and made his progeny from a quintessence of fluid" (32:7-8).

A major traditional African religion based in Nigeria is IFA of the Yoruba.

Olodumare sent Obatala to earth to create man. Obatala went to earth with the materials of creation. He descended upon Ife, the wide landmass, and began to create **man out of clay**

The bible is the sacred text for Christianity:

"The Lord God formed man of the **dust of the ground**, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Genesis 2/7

Each is a story of divine intervention into nature to create humans. We can say that after each origin story the material make up of being human sets the conditions for scientific study.

Every religion argues that there is one human race, not different races, one origin story for all of us.

Slide 7

When we turn to the world population, we discover a great deal of diversity. The total population of the world is just under 10 billion people. 60% are Asian, and 17% are African. That's over 75% of the total. If what are called white people are European, they constitute less than 10% of the world population.

So, given our diversity as mainly non-white people, we need to explain why there is a problem in our understanding of the unity of being human. Why are we having a problem with the unity of the human species.

Slide 8

We need to turn to history for the main answer to this. Two key concepts can help us, imperialism and colonialism.

Imperialism is how capitalism develops. In every country capitalist corporations compete, and then a few grow so big they take over and become monopolies. These giant monopolies unite with Banks and

other financial institutions. This enables companies to become mobile, and able to move around the world based on their capacity to invest, to have the money and credit to invade an economy and become dominant.

This leads to the definitions on this slide – imperialism is when an industrialized country can take over the economy of another country, usually a less developed country. Imperialism became a global system by which European countries and the US took over the economies of third world countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

But imperialism mainly concerns the economy. More was needed. Colonialism is the process of control, based on imperialism, spreading to every other aspect of society – the government, mass media, education, cultural institutions, the official language, and the official currency.

The Europeans needed a belief system to legitimize both imperialism and colonialism, a way to make it legal, seem moral, and even a benevolent way to rule the world.

They needed racism to control Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Slide 9

Thinking and using the concept of race is not neutral, thinking that there are qualitatively different races is not a “separate-but-equal theory.” There is a hierarchy, a ranking of who is smarter, more rational, with a greater capacity to rule the world. In fact, it is a belief that taking over control of other people is really a positive thing as otherwise they would remain savages.

Imperialism and colonialism are meant to solve the problem pointed out by racism. Racists think they are doing us a favor.

Let’s go deeper into this.

Slide 10

Here is how one scholar defines racism in five parts.

1. It is a way to classify all of humanity.
2. Each category can be ranked and evaluated
3. Looks count. physical features define different races
4. You inherit your racial identity
5. All of this was established by God

This slide includes the image of a lynching, the illegal hanging of a person. This is the political meaning of racism, violence by racists against who they consider their racial inferiors.

So, how does this work in the everyday life of society. We need to check what is considered normal, that's how deep racism is.

Slide 11

Racism is so dominant in society that it can impact everybody. No one escapes. Let me explain by listing these seven ways that racism impacts us

Prejudice. This means a pre-judgement, bringing an assumption of Race thinking to generalize, even to have the assumption shape what you see and how you make meaning of what you see

The overwhelming majority of American people have racism as a default position, a normal way to see things, assumptions that lead to two very different reactions. Racist thinking can lead to violence or missionary type benevolence – racism identifies people to hurt or to help, but not as equals

Black people can have a different but equally a prejudgment reaction – they see white people as a potential danger and therefore have to be careful and prepared to defend themselves. In general this makes sense, its just not always true – check who is in the Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

But note – the key issue is power.

Discrimination is how one can act on prejudice and inflict harm. This means you don't give Black people a fair chance because the usual case is that white people have the power and Black people don't

This results in

1. **Segregation**, meaning restricting institutional inclusion to white people by excluding Blacks. When white people are in a situation where everyone is white this is considered normal. It is seldom asked where are Black people or Latinos, or any native people.
2. In housing this means **redlining** areas and making them segregated, also by using restrictive covenant contracts that have prevented Black people from renting or buying
3. In politics this means **gerrymandering** by which districts are drawn to enhance white voting power over Blacks, no matter how crazy the lines for any district happen to be
4. It general for inclusion it means setting a limit, a **quota**
5. And in general it means **profiling** of Black people that leads to police harassment –for example, driving white Black, being suspected by retail clerks, really being a suspect just by being Black

Yes, Black people can be so impacted by racism that they flip the script and believe that Black people are not inferior, we are superior.

Sometimes we thought this about basketball, but recent developments prove that to be false.

The fact is that there are no qualitative difference that make up separate and different biological racial groups. There is only one human biological category.

But differences do exist, for example in physiology, the way people look

Slide 12

Skin color is a major way that humans differ, there is a continuum as represented by this slide from one to ten.

Skin is the largest organ of the human body, and as the slide indicates it has three layers- epidermis, dermis, and hypodermis. It is a protective layer over our entire body.

In humans, melanin is the primary determinant of skin color. It is also found in hair, the pigmented tissue underlying the iris of the eye, and the stria vascularis of the inner ear.

The melanin in the skin is produced by [melanocytes](#), which are found in the [basal layer](#) of the [epidermis](#). Although, in general, human beings possess a similar concentration of melanocytes in their skin, the melanocytes in groups produce variable amounts of melanin. Some humans have very little or no melanin synthesis in their bodies, a condition known as being an albino.

In general melanin blocks the ultra violet rays from creating skin cancer and predominates in areas where the sun is greatest in the South and is less impactful in the northern hemisphere

Color is skin deep. Its interesting to ask not what color humans have been, but what color are humans becoming.

Slide 13

The power of racism has always allowed white men to force sexual activity on Black women, and the fantasy of sexual prowess about Black men has led at times to an extraordinary desire of white women for Black men. But this has been the largely untold but well known story.

There is a legal history to the attempt to prevent legal marriage.

In 1911, Arkansas passed Act 320 (House Bill 79), also known as the one-drop rule.” This law had two goals: it made interracial

“cohabitation” a felony, and it defined as “Negro” anyone “who has...any negro blood whatever,” thus relegating to second-class citizenship anyone accused of having any African ancestry. Although the law had features unique to Arkansas, it largely reflected nationwide trends.

This was not overturned until a Supreme Court ruling in 1967 that declared unconstitutional a Virginia law prohibiting mixed-race marriage — and legalized interracial marriage in every state. This case was Loving vs Virginia. The Black-white couples last name was Loving.

Slide 14

Its kind of crazy to call African American colored people as if white isn't a color, and so called white people are hardly even that white if you ask me

The data on this slide suggests that diversity is a rising value in very personal terms. Given a chance, people marry each other.

But at the same time, racism is on the rise.

Slide 15

This is consistent with the recent survey data that suggests racism is on the rise, especially since the rise of a fascist trend associated with former president Trump.

65% say its more common for racist views to be expressed. And 45% say this is more acceptable.

Racism is an emerging public norm. People are believing that Black people are biologically inferior,

Slide 16

Let's take the so called race defining physical condition of hair.

White people sometimes say they are having a bad hair day, but Black people are told they are having a bad hair life. Racism doesn't want Black people to love themselves.

There is a material difference between what is called straight hair and curly or kinky hair, such as this shown on the slide. This hair difference has a whole set of technologies that make up hair care from combs to chemistry. But what we have is the issue of style and personal aesthetics, not something factual, hierarchical, and true for all.

Again, the issue revolves on the issue of power, the control of advertising, the media in general, and who has power that can impose values. In the case of Black people, powerful white racism has taught many Black people to hate themselves because of hair and other physical features as well.

Power can punish, and in the case of hair, hating Black hair can be used to hire and fire workers.

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This slide is about the political struggle over Black peoples hair.

The text on the right is about a woman who was fired because of the way she was wearing her hair. July 2023, this summer

This kind of legal racism has been countered by what is being called "The Crown Act".

The Crown Act legislation at the state level demands protection against race-based hair discrimination in the workplace and in K-12 public and charter schools based on hair texture and hair styles. As of 2023, the Crown Act has been enacted in 22 states, but most are considering it.

So we are still fighting for Black hair liberation. But we do wear our crowns!

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As we have been saying, Black is beautiful!

Slide 19

Scholars try to refute the idea of race by saying it is simply a social construction. What they don't always say is that it is a socially constructed lie.

Here is an advanced statement from the American Anthropological Association

Historical research has shown that the idea of "race" has always carried more meanings than mere physical differences; indeed, **physical variations in the human species have no meaning except the social ones that humans put on them.** Today scholars in many fields argue that "race" as it is understood in the United States of America was a social mechanism invented during the 18th century to refer to those populations brought together in colonial America: the English and other European settlers, the conquered Indian peoples, and those peoples of Africa brought in to provide slave labor.

We must insist that we always call the idea of race a **lie**, an anti-scientific fraudulent statement that denies the biological unity of all human beings.

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OK, we have debunked the idea that Black people are a different race because of the way we look. But how does science actually prove that the concept of race is a lie, a fraudulent approach to understanding humans.

We need to take a look at what is being done in archeology and genetics, more generally in the science of anthropology and evolutionary biology.

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This study has a long history and has changed with more and more scientific research.

Black people need to know something about this science that attempts to describe the evolution of the humans, homo sapiens sapiens.

Archeology studies fossils, the preservation of material from the past within a natural environment such as a volcanic area. For our discussion, we are mainly interested in bones of primates. Geologists commonly use **radiometric dating** methods, based on the natural **radioactive decay** of certain elements such as potassium and carbon, as reliable clocks to date ancient events.

The dates used in the evolutionary clock constantly change based on new fossil discoveries.

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Here is a general evolutionary picture of human development using skulls.

“In 2015, a new species of early humans, named Homo naledi, was discovered in the Rising Star Cave in South Africa. This discovery, led by paleoanthropologist Lee Berger, is significant because it suggests that Homo naledi lived alongside other early human species, such as Homo erectus and Homo habilis, and may have coexisted with our own species, Homo sapiens, for tens of thousands of years”

Paleoanthropology has been changing from a descriptive and historical science to a more quantitative and analytical discipline. The covariation of multiple traits is investigated to study the evolutionary changes of the underlying anatomical models, mostly through the introduction of digital biomedical imaging procedures and of computed geometrical analyses supported by multivariate statistics.

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More specifically, here are seven ways to compare two skulls, differences in shape between modern humans and Neanderthals.

The more fossils that are found, the more precise the measurements can be. This is important since there has been a history of mis-measurement.

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At the level of biological differences, the only serious discussion is that between Neanderthals and Humans. “Both fossil and genetic evidence indicate that Neanderthals and modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) evolved from a common ancestor between 700,000 and 300,000 years ago.

Neanderthals and modern humans belong to the same genus (*Homo*) and inhabited the same geographic areas in western Asia for 30,000–50,000 years; genetic evidence indicate while they interbred with non-African modern humans, they ultimately became distinct branches of the human family tree (separate species). **Smithsonian**

Slide 25

Here is a general picture of human evolution based on the fossil evidence of human bone fragments, especially skulls.

The V shaped markers group the skulls, while on the left you see the scale in millions of years.

Note we are at the top, but it puts biological differences in perspective. When thinking of human history at most we think in terms of thousands of years. To go biological, we move to millions of years.

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By putting together all of the primate human related fossils on a global level, and dating each of them it is possible to construct this map.

The oldest is in Africa, documenting Africa as the origin of humans, who then spread to the rest of the planet. The numbers are estimates of how longer this happened. So, the estimates for North America in 12,000 years ago.

The numbers are estimates of when migration happened.

But remember. New research continues to redefine this map in terms of location and date.

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As a public we need to learn as much as we can, but we also need to appreciate the work of the Black scientists who are engaged within the science community. In this case we have

The Society of Black Archaeologists was created in 2011 with five goals in mind:

To lobby on behalf and ensure the proper treatment of African and African Diaspora material culture.

To encourage more people of African descent to enter the field of archaeology;

To raise and address concerns related to African peoples worldwide;

To highlight the past and present achievements and contributions that people of African descent have made to the field of archaeology;

To ensure the communities affected by archaeological work act not just as objects of study or informants but are active makers and/or participants in the unearthing of their own history

John Gilbert is regarded as the first professional trained African American archaeologist.

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To go further, our scientific study into our inner selves moves us from artistic representation to scientific symbols and numbers, into biology and the cellular structure of our existence and reproduction from one generation to the next throughout historical time

Here we have images from ancient Egypt to Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man done in the late 15th century.

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Human beings are complex multicellular organisms made up of trillions of cells. Scientists estimate that the adult human body contains around 37 trillion human cells and 200 different cell types.

Inside each cell there are many different parts, but for our purpose we need to know these three

Chromosomes are the content of a mother's eggs and a father sperm that unite to begin creating each of us. Each contributes to the 23 pairs of chromosomes found in every cell in our body

Each chromosome pair carries the **DNA** that makes up our genetic structure

Each **gene** connects with some physical aspect of our physical make up

Slide 30

Over 99% of all genes are the same in every human. Let me say that again, over 99% of all genes are the same in every human.

At a biological level different races do not exist, but many believed that there were major differences biological differences between Black and white blood. The Red Cross Blood Donor Program began in early 1941 – and went on to collect blood from millions of Americans that the military shipped to soldiers fighting overseas. It was not until 1950 that the Red Cross stopped requiring the segregation of so-called Negro

blood. And it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that Southern states such as [Arkansas and Louisiana](#) overturned similar requirements.

The irony is that the use of blood plasma was invented by an African American, Charles Drew (1904 – 1950) who was also in charge of the Red Cross blood program.

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One more point about genes. They do not act alone, this incorrect point is called biological determinism. Genes interact with the natural environment, and the rest of our biological make up impacts what genes do. Genes are part of the story, but the story is full of natural improvisation, mutation and even accident.

As biology, we are dynamic and not static.

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The next sessions of our IFA course will take up the concepts we will use to make distinctions that actually do exist among humans, some objective and some subjective.

But at a biological level we are all the same – one basic human type.

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Again, we need scientists, including those that study genetics.

And again, we have Black people doing just that – BIG

Black In Genetics, Inc. (BIG) is an organization dedicated to amplifying the voices and work of Black-identifying geneticists across the U.S. and beyond. Some goals include connecting Black-identifying geneticists and trainees with organizations seeking to hire them, providing the scientific community with resources on understanding racial inequity in the Genetics field, educating the public on recent advancements in Genetics, and providing a platform to host conversations about dismantling systemic racism

But even here the term racial inequity is problematic since races don't exist.

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In this first IFA session our goal has been to create a universal base line for the study of the Black experience. Black people are part of humanity, an equal biological part. There is no natural reason for the exploitation and oppression Black people have experienced, the damage that has been done.

We can summarize our argument into these points:

1. There are no races, only one human species
2. There are people who believe in racism
3. Racism is a system of white supremacy
4. All physical features are superficial
5. Humans first evolved in Africa. In a deep sense of biological origin all humans are African.
6. Again, in a biological sense all human populations are equal

Let me ask you this: What would the discussion be like whenever you hear someone use the word race you correct them and say there is only one race, the human race.

Don't we need to have that conversation? What do our students think? What does our community think? Why do we use the word race in our curriculum as if it exists?

We have to be consistent and fight to defeat racism. The question now is, if this IFA session has made sense, what are you gonna do.

But first, let's talk about all of this.