

Further Reading:

- Cammarota, Julio. "Blinsided by the Avatar: White Saviors and Allies Out of Hollywood and in Education." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 3 (2011): 242–59.
- Hughey, Matthew W. "The White Savior Film and Reviewers' Reception." *Symbolic Interaction* 33, no. 3 (2010): 475–96.
- Hughey, Matthew W. "Racializing Redemption, Reproducing Racism: The Odyssey of Magical Negroes and White Saviors." *Sociology Compass* 6 no. 9 (2012): 751–67.
- Moore, Wendy Leo, and Jennifer Pierce. "Still Killing Mockingbirds: Narratives of Race and Innocence in Hollywood's Depiction of the White Messiah Lawyer." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 3 no. 2 (2007): 171–87.
- Vera, Hernán, and Andrew M. Gordon. *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

White Supremacy

This concept refers to both a racial ideology about the superiority of people socially defined as white, as well as a series of social structures and institutional practices that both reflect and support (either deliberately or unintentionally) this ideology. Although terms such as *white* and *black* were not commonly used prior to the 17th century, these terms, particularly in the United States, became increasingly popular with the advent of racial slavery. That is, these racial terms were invented to legitimize a system of racial supremacy that benefitted whites and normalized the subordination and presumed inferiority of non-European groups, especially blacks. On the basis of these racial beliefs, the first U.S. Congress declared that U.S. citizenship was limited to white persons only in 1790. The same racial logic legitimized the famous Dred Scott decision, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that blacks are not U.S. citizens and therefore not entitled to constitutional rights.

As a racial ideology or belief system, white supremacy has taken various forms throughout U.S. history. During the 1700s and early 1800s, debates and discussions about the roots of white supremacy often revolved around the issue of divine creation. Theories of polygenesis were often employed to explain why whites were a unique and superior race. These theories questioned whether God created only

one species of humanity and legitimized a distinction between whites (i.e., "Children of God," full-fledged human beings, etc.), and "others." Accordingly, defining blacks and other nonwhites as beings who were not fully human legitimized policies and practices that deprived these people of their "human rights" (Omi and Winant 1994).

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, white supremacy and the idea of racial hierarchies took on a scientific turn. The popularity of social Darwinism during this time, coupled with the belief in race as a "biological fact," led to a series of beliefs that further legitimized white supremacy and the subordination of nonwhites. An emphasis on racial biology, for example, gave credence to the idea that different races have unique behavioral tendencies. Prominent social scientists of this time, such as Lester Ward, argued that black men had a biological drive to want to rape white women as an attempt to improve their "racial stock." The notion of racial biology was also linked to the presumed intellectual deficiencies or low IQs that were allegedly typical among nonwhites, as well as the belief that nonwhites, particularly blacks, were naturally prone to violence. All these beliefs—illustrated in films such as *The Birth of a Nation*—encouraged racial fears, emboldened efforts to retain the "purity" of the white race, and reinforced white support for racist laws and practices (e.g., Jim Crow Laws, antimiscegenation laws, eugenics, etc.) that were designed to sustain white supremacy. Indeed, from the late 1890s to the first half of the 1950s, white supremacy, particularly in the South, was legally sustained through the so-called separate but equal doctrine that was mandated by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. In actuality, critics argue that this decision legitimized a racially divided society that was separate and unequal.

By the mid-1950s and especially by the 1960s, the civil rights movement succeeded in eradicating racial segregation laws and challenging overt racial bigotry. However, far from vanquished, white supremacy in the United States took on a more subtle and unobtrusive character. Indeed, various writers have argued that white supremacy during the post-civil rights era is not typically overt but rather hides behind liberal values associated with free competition, meritocracy, and equality of opportunity. Among sociologists who endorse this position, perhaps one of the best known is Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, who argues that the aforementioned liberal values currently form part of a color-blind ideology

American Nazi Party (ANP)

Founded by George Lincoln Rockwell (1918–1967) in the 1960s, the American Nazi Party was dedicated to the preservation of white power. Rockwell, claiming to be inspired by reading Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, vowed to exterminate homosexuals, Jews, blacks, and other groups. In the 1960s, the American Nazi Party had only a small membership but gained notoriety nonetheless, particularly as a result of Rockwell's famous 1966 interview with *Roots* author Alex Haley for *Playboy* magazine and his public call for "White Power" in response to the Black Power movement. In the 1960s, Rockwell organized the harassment of civil rights workers in the South. In the 1970s, the ANP organized confrontations against integrationists and eventually spawned another organization, the National Socialist White People's Party. The American Nazi Party, now based in Michigan and run by Rocky Suhayda, uses the Internet to attract membership. The official symbol of the American Nazi party is a red flag bearing a black swastika, a variation of Hitler's Third Reich flag.

VICTORIA PITTS

that encourages a denial of racial differences while emphasizing the notion of treating everyone the same. By encouraging this sort of color-blind liberal logic, all meaningful challenges to the enduring system of white supremacy (e.g., affirmative action programs) in the United States are discredited as acts of "reverse discrimination" (Bonilla-Silva 2001). As a result, patterns of racial/ethnic discrimination and inequality that persist in health care, criminal justice, employment, housing, and education are deracialized and treated as innocent by-products of competition and/or personal or cultural deficiencies. Solutions to these problems, therefore, involve encouraging racial minorities to make the necessary personal/cultural adjustments to deal with these problems in a propitious manner (e.g., work harder, take school more seriously, speak proper English, etc.). Yet by personalizing these problems, the prevailing system of white supremacy is left intact behind a liberal façade.

Furthermore, current research points to a system of white supremacy being legitimized and reproduced through

common-sense assumptions that frame a white view of reality, as in Joe Feagin's (2010b) notion of the "white racial frame," or through a "racial grammar" that subtly (and often inadvertently) supports white supremacy through the usage of white norms and standards that are taken to be universal and ahistorical. Considering these more recent developments, it appears that, with the exception of white supremacist groups that continue to push for an openly racist agenda, the current system of white supremacy in the United States appears far less blatant (or even deliberate) but nonetheless just as effective in sustaining white privilege.

LUIGI ESPOSITO

See also

Ku Klux Klan (KKK); Nazism; Whiteness Studies

Further Reading:

- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. "The Invisible Weight of Whiteness: The Racial Grammar of Everyday Life in Contemporary America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35 (2012): 173–94.
- Feagin, Joe. *Racist America*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2010a.
- Feagin, Joe. *The White Racial Frame*. New York: Routledge, 2010b.
- Graves, Joseph. *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formations in the United States*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Whiteness Studies

In the 1990s, whiteness studies emerged as a body of scholarship charged with examining and documenting the historical and contemporary formation of whiteness as a racial identity and the distribution and exercise of white privilege. Whiteness studies has emerged and proliferated within a historical context where a multitude of sociopolitical factors agitate, like the evisceration of race-conscious civil rights policies; the changing racial demographics of the United States and concomitant white anxiety; the acceleration of global capitalism; and the growth of intellectual movements such as feminism, poststructuralism, critical race theory, and postcolonial theory.