

Justifying Racism Through Language

The best way to grasp how sociology has managed to make color-blind racism (CBR) seem believable is to study its *Newspeak* (to continue the Orwell theme).

Whiteness

To many modern sociologists, color blindness is a racist weapon that works, somehow, through *whiteness*, a scheme of thought invisible to most whites, but revealed by CBR sociology. Whiteness is part of systemic racism: “Exposing the Whiteness of Color Blindness” is a chapter subhead in Bonilla-Silva’s [book](#). Whiteness is as real an identity as blackness. None of these, neither whiteness, nor blackness, nor systemic racism is measurable in an objective way.

Whiteness, “the practices of the ‘*new racism*’ – the post-civil rights set of arrangements that preserves white supremacy” in the words of Bonilla-Silva – is apparently *hegemonic*: “I contend that ‘color-blind’ ideology plays an important role in the maintenance of white hegemony,” writes [Ashley “Woody” Doane](#), a leading “whiteness studies” advocate who heads the sociology department at the University of Hartford.

“Whiteness” is employed as a method of maintaining control over other groups by the “dominant culture.” Hence, “[challenging white hegemony](#)” is a major motif for “whiteness studies.” According to Bonilla-Silva, only [race traitors](#) (an odd term, since they seem to be the only non-racist whites)– “whites who do not dance to the tune of color blindness”– can escape from whiteness. Color blindness is part of the whiteness strategy and is therefore racist.

Whiteness, like racism, is also *unconscious*. A former student of Bonilla-Silva’s raises the obvious [question](#): “How does one

test for the unconscious?" but, like Bacon's Jestling Pilate, Bonilla-Silva stays not for an answer. Others have tried. There is something called the "[implicit-bias](#)" test which pretends to measure unconscious processes. But it has little or [no scientific basis](#), despite the existence of a Harvard University website. Such tests have been widely administered for some [20 years](#) nevertheless.

Above all, in the CBR universe, whiteness is a bearer of *privilege*. The term itself adds nothing new: white *privilege* is just the same as black *un-privilege*: to discriminate against blacks is to privilege non-blacks. But the word is another way to make whites feel bad. Books and articles in this area are sprinkled with tendentious phrases like "the manifold wages of whiteness," "white privilege," "historically white colleges," all to emphasize persistent, unjust advantages possessed by whites as opposed to blacks. Again, the injustice of privilege is just assumed not demonstrated empirically. The few demonstrable examples of "black privilege" such as affirmative action and diversity policies, are either ignored or dismissed as "tokenism."

Racial Power

The CBR aim is to challenge all white advantage, real or imagined. Higher achievement based on competence or effort is not exempt. Bonilla-Silva continues, with remarkable frankness:

[L]et me suggest a few of the *political* conditions necessary to fight color-blind racism...First, blacks and their allies would be the core of a new civil rights movement *demanding equality of results*...To launch a frontal attack on the "new racism" and its color-blind ideology, the *black masses* must be as *racially conscious* as the leaders of the new movement. In ideological terms, the movement must break with the *hegemony color blindness has over all Americans*. [Emphasis added]

Bonilla-Silva is a major voice arguing for the need to combat white predominance through political action. In [2017](#) he said that:

Adding a few scholars of color to mostly white departments did not involve doing what sociology needed the most: restructuring the discipline and, more significantly, *redistributing racial power*...it has not lead [sic] to changes in sociology's curriculum; nor has it involved changing our *sociological methods*...Another way of doing sociology is possible because critical, engaged, and, indeed, more "political" sociologists are the majority. We might not be at Harvard, Princeton, Wisconsin, Columbia, Michigan, or Chicago, but we have power in our numbers. Although mainstream sociology rules, there are more sociologists who want to be engaged and do "liberation sociology." [Emphasis added]

It seems that power is at least as important to CBR as racial equity-and more important than science.

And why *should* the *problems and methods* of sociology change with the racial composition of scientists? Bonilla-Silva's frequent references to "[white logic](#)" and "white method" are unpleasantly reminiscent of what was once called "[Jewish physics](#)" (*JÃ¼dische Physik*) in Nazi-era Germany. Bonilla-Silva is untroubled; he feels that sociology is insufficiently [comprehensive](#) because "we made a pact with the devil of 'objectivity.'"

Devil of objectivity! This is a frontal assault on a basic assumption of all science: that scientific knowledge is universal. There is not, cannot be, a Jewish physics-or a white sociology.

Black Identity

In the CBR scheme, whiteness is "socially constructed," which "means that notions of racial difference are human creations rather than eternal, essential categories. As such, racial

categories have a history and are subject to change.” Are all racial categories subject to change, as Bonilla-Silva claims? Are all equally valid? “Blackness” may be different. The early black sociologist W. E. B Du Bois wrote in a dreamy Emersonian style about what he saw as a [division](#) – permanent, he thought – in the minds of African Americans:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife...to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa; he does not wish to bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes -foolishly, perhaps, but fervently – that Negro blood has yet a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American...

The idea that there are intrinsic and possibly unbridgeable differences between blacks and whites, between white and “Negro blood,” was plausible in 1897. It moved onto the back burner after World War II. And now the permanence of this division seems to be denied by Bonilla-Silva who calls the racial categories socially constructed and subject to change. So, a hopeful omen, if there is conflict between whiteness and blackness, it may perhaps be resolved peacefully.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is an alternative to hegemony. Its unstated premise is that different cultures – identities – can live together peacefully. The [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) defines it thus:

[P]roponents of multiculturalism reject the ideal of the “melting pot” in which members of minority groups are expected to assimilate into the dominant culture in favor of an ideal in which members of minority groups can maintain their distinctive collective identities and practices.

Multiculturalism is a utopian project, in the sense that it assumes different cultures can co-exist without restricting the freedom or warping the identity of any one. This may be true for some small set of closely related cultures. But as a general rule, it is [nonsense](#). The Jews could not co-exist with the Nazis and cannot reconcile with the Islamists; people who believe in the subjection of women cannot peacefully coexist with Western culture. Anti-colonialists [cannot co-exist](#) with anyone who points to [positive features](#) of colonialism. W.E.B. Du Bois himself thought that black and white were “two warring ideals.” In other words, in cases of cultural admixture, the two cultures must either compromise, let one win out – or separate.

Is a peaceful multiculturalism compatible with CBR’s racial agenda? If, as Du Bois so passionately claims, the black identity is inbuilt, perhaps it cannot come to terms with whiteness? Or perhaps, as Bonilla-Silva contends, identities are socially constructed, hence malleable, so the identities of black and white could perhaps fuse in some sort of compromise. But many voices both black and white don’t want fusion because to them it means “white hegemony.” This is the CBR view. Multiculturalism for them seems to mean separation, white submission, or eternal conflict.

Racism

In CBR social science, the existence of racism tends to be just assumed, proved by numerical disparities, or verified by anecdote, including ridiculous examples such as the [admission](#) by a white male interviewed by Bonilla-Silva that “He is not attracted to black women.” If none of that works as proof, racism is related to a wider “systemic” problem.

In off-the-record comments made at an [Atlantis](#) staff meeting, Ta-Nehisi Coates, perhaps the most visible black writer on [these issues](#), repeatedly affirmed that if, say, *The New Republic* was at one time 100 percent white, then it was

racist. Apparently, racial disproportion *proves* racism. The fact that only 1 percent of Caltech's student body is black, is, therefore, evidence of racism in Coates's view. It is not just *prima facie* but proof positive of racism if blacks and whites are not employed/honored/paid in strict proportion to their proportion in the population. Yet, when facts go against the CBR narrative, they seem to be just a distraction; the fact that black women are actually paid slightly more than comparable white women goes unremarked.

Bonilla-Silva, a few years ago gave a talk entitled "Why can't we just get along" at Brown University (where, in an aside, he assured his northeastern audience that Durham, NC, is "One of the most segregated cities in America" which is almost the opposite of the truth). He described two versions of racism, color-blind racism and what he called the *folk view*: *The irrational beliefs some people have about the presumed inferiority of others*. Bonilla-Silva found the folk view to be inadequate, mainly because it

...misses the fact that racism is "structural" or "systemic" that is, racism is part of the social structure of society, hence we all participate in it and we all participate in it whether we like it or not. [Emphasis in original slide]

So, like "whiteness," systemic racism is unconscious. Whether they know it or not, white people are racist. Racism is the original sin of the white race. Whites are a people eternally condemned. No proof is offered for an untestable and slanderous, not to say racist, claim.

Racial Disparities

The CBR sociology of race says almost nothing about measurable causes. A causal analysis of racial disparities might look like this: There are manifest statistical inequalities between black and white, such as education, cognitive skills, crime and incarceration rates, income levels, family structure, etc.

There are two kinds of cause for these differentials: *exogenous*, due to outside forces over which individuals have no control. And *endogenous*, factors under the control of the individual and his or her immediate family. The main exogenous factor is racial discrimination in employment, policing, schooling and housing. The endogenous factors are behavioral group-differences between blacks and whites: individual interests, motivation, ability, and family environment. These endogenous factors are not entirely independent: motivation, interests, and ability depend to some extent on family environment and education.

The allegation that looking for non-racial causes for racial disparities is itself racist has led to successful efforts to suppress research on, and even attention to, those non-racial causes. Endogenous factors-black-white behavioral differences in interests, abilities, family structure and motivation-all are off the table for CBR. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in the leaked transcript of the [Atlantic](#) staff meeting, refused to entertain the idea that blacks and whites differ in endogenous factors: "obviously that's out of bounds for us." *Atlantic* editor Jeffrey Goldberg concurred.

This suppression of alternative points of view on racial issues is now commonplace in the academy and in the media. Open discussion of endogenous factors is widely acknowledged to be taboo, even by the pre-eminent scientific journal [Nature](#), which rates research on genetics and intelligence "Taboo level: High" and that of race and genetics: "Taboo level: Very high." One researcher said he felt "ambushed" by the discussion of his early findings on race differences, as even his allies ran for cover: "My friends [including one co-author] said nothing," he reported. And the [vilification](#) of race-and-IQ researcher Charles Murray has gone on since the publication of *The Bell Curve* in 1994.

Equality of results

The logic of the CBR argument is straightforward. It assumes there are no non-racial reasons for racial disparities. Ergo, without racism, blacks, whites, Asians and all others would be equally represented in every profession (which, under free conditions, is demographic nonsense). To repeat Bonilla-Silva:

“...Blacks and their allies would be the core of a new civil rights movement *demanding equality of results*...To launch a frontal attack on the *new racism* and its color-blind ideology...the movement must break with the hegemony color blindness has over all Americans.” [Emphasis added]

This is a solution with which many CBR sociologists seem perfectly happy. Yet it is a proposition that will dumbfound most Americans, who can live with disparities providing they reflect meri

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