

CONCEPTUALIZING WHITENESS

This factsheet uses insights from Timothy Stanley, Marina Valverde, and Vic Satzewich to argue that white people are radicalized as superior, and that who is deemed white changes with time, place and circumstance.

AN INTRODUCTION TO 'RACE' FROM "QUESTIONING THE EXISTENCE OF THE WORLD" BY TIMOTHY STANLEY

- Stanley argues that it is racisms that make 'race'.
- It is racism that makes both real and imagined differences consequential, in a given context.
- **Racializations** are made through social processes such as patterns of cultural representation, knowledge production, and social organization.
- Race is a social construct.
- The **discourse** around race makes race seem self-evident, and determines groups' supposedly fixed attributes which enable people to be sorted into 'races'.
- Stanley reverses the intuition that language is created to reflect innate differences in the world
- He argues instead that it is the language we use about 'race' and its tangible manifestations, that make 'race'.
- He notes that **racializations** are relational: one group is always racialized in relation to another.

GLOSSARY

racialization: socially imagined differences (Stanley)

discourse: a series of statements or utterances, including symbolic representations and meanings and their material effects (Stanley)

constructionist approach: race' is not something that simply is, but rather is "something that is socially created, negotiated, and reproduced". (Satzewich)

FOR EXAMPLE...

- Stanley exemplifies the student school strike of 1923 because, "except for their racialization, 'the Chinese' were not so different from other Victoria residents".
- In response to the segregation students the school board saw as "Chinese" organized a student's strike that lasted the whole school year.
- The project to establish European men's dominance over women and other men had become invisible by the 1920s, and taken for granted by most British Columbians.
- However as Hannah Arendt notes, racism operation was perceptible in everyday life to non-white British Columbians, having become "a texture of life".
- As people resisted in various ways, Anti-Chinese racism also changed.

STANLEY'S SUGGESTIONS

- The goal of anti-racisms is:
- "to trouble understandings of racism that take for granted racist ideas, practices, and representations as if they were indeed like the rules of arithmetic"
- He suggests a "Historical affirmative action program" of weighing self-representations of racialized groups more strongly than other sources.



HOW WHITE SUPREMACY HARMS WHITE PEOPLE FROM RACIAL PURITY, SEXUAL PURITY, AND IMMIGRATION POLICY MARINA VALVERDE

Valverde argues that first-wave feminism cannot be disentangled from racism and white supremacy, especially in the context of a Canadian nationalist movement and white-feminists' campaign for enfranchisement, in which white women were supposed to bring morality to government.

THE PROJECT FOR A WHITE AND "MORAL" CANADA

- During the early 20th century, there was concern for ensuring that Canada become an Anglo-Saxon Protestant nation, a white nation, and that the 'purity' of this 'race' be 'preserved'.
- 'Race' was not a strictly biological concept.
- Race was thought to be organized through traditions, which was crucial to home missionary campaigns.
- Home-missionary initiatives included lobbying the government to ensure "purer" immigrants and teaching immigrants or "giving them help".
- The paternalistic language of "helping" illustrates that coercion and protection are two sides of the same coin.

A TAXONOMY OF IMMIGRANTS

The general principles of classification based on physical attributes as well as the idea of "character," generated a taxonomy of desirable immigrants, as illustrated in the ordering of the chapters of Woodsworth's 1909 book *Strangers Within Our Gates*.

The preferred categories were ranked as follows:

1. Immigrants from Great Britain
2. Immigrants from the United States
3. Scandinavians
4. Germans (more likely to be protestant than the French)
5. the French

The "non-preferred" categories were:

1. Austria-Hungary
2. The Balkans
3. Jews (as if they were a single geographic group)
4. Italians
5. "the Levantine races" including Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Syrians and Persians
6. "the Orientals"
7. "Negro and the [East] Indian"

WHO WAS WHITE? (FROM SATZEWICH)

- Unrestricted European immigration to the US generated a perception that some Europeans were more “fit” for self-government than others
- New sub-categories of white were formulated to account for this supposed unfitness.
- Between the 1840s and the 1920s, who would come to be considered “white” was not a foregone conclusion.
- The current idea of whiteness resulted from political, economic and ideological struggle.
- Stanley advocates for “deracialized inclusion,” but as Satzewich’s work can aid in illustrating...
- Including more groups into the category “white” often functions to strengthen white supremacy.

“IMMORAL” WHITE WOMEN

- The inclusion of “character” allows Valverde to account for some white women being penalized for “moral deviance”, while in the same period, other white women were using the concept of white supremacy to gain rights.
- In 1910, the Immigration Act was changed so that pimps and prostitutes could be deported, but also encompassed the deportation of “women and girls coming to Canada for immoral purposes”.
- The historian Barbara Roberts demonstrates that women were routinely deported for transgressions such as having a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or being pregnant.
- Marilyn Barber’s work illustrates that single women immigrants were automatically taken to be moral deviants.
- Compulsory medical examinations were first introduced for unchaperoned women and were extended to all immigrants later.
- Harm can be done in the name of “preserving” or “improving” the so-called “Anglo-Saxon race”



WHITENESS LIMITED: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ‘PERIPHERAL EUROPEANS’ VIC SATZEWICH

- In 2000, when Satzewich was writing, scholars had begun understanding whiteness as a form of racialized identity.
- Conversations about race have focused on the problem of racism experienced by people of colour and have made whiteness seem invisible and natural.
- Satzewich strives to highlight dynamics of power by placing whiteness on the same conceptual terrain as other racialized identities.
- The new social history, he argues is more consistent with a **constructionist approach**, than feminist theory or anti-racism which is similar to Stanley’s approach to understanding race, meaning that race is real rather than a social construct.
- Racial assignments do not automatically make racial identities, and in the case of Ukrainians in Canada, racial assignments led to the creation of a national identity.



- For new Ukrainian-Canadian arrivals, identities tended to be restricted to a village or a region.
- The word “Ukrainian” took almost two decades from 1895 to 1914, to become a part of people’s self-identification.

THE RACIALIZATION OF UKRAINIANS

- Supporters and opponents of Ukrainian immigration spoke about Ukrainians in racialized terms.
- Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior from 1895 to 1905 and a supporter of Ukrainian immigration, likened them to ‘beasts of burden’ but felt Ukrainians were necessary to work the land to expand the frontier, and could be assimilated. Opponents of Ukrainian immigration were concerned about bloc settlements where large populations of Ukrainian Canadians could not be assimilated.
- Ukrainian-Canadians were the ‘Other’, while simultaneously contributing to Indigenous dispossession.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

FOR STANLEY:

- “Power intervenes to refix meanings”
- **Racializations** change with time, place and circumstance.

FOR SATZEWICH:

- Everyone is racialized
- Racialization can inferiorize and superordinate
- White people are racialized as superior
- If we view “white” as a racialization, it fits well with Ukrainians being racialized as ‘Other’ in relation to Anglo-Saxon Canadians.
- Because racialization changes over time, Ukrainians are now considered white.

VALVERDE’S CONCEPTION OF WHITENESS:

- The conception of white as being morally superior fits with Satzewich’s idea that the way that white people are racialized is as superior.
- Because white suffragettes’ argument for why they should get the vote hinged on their supposed morality, “immoral” white women were harmed.
- “Immoral” white women were proof that white women were not actually morally superior in the way that white suffragettes insisted they were.

CONCLUSION & CONNECTIONS

- Together, these works highlight that whiteness is not indicative of any inherent superiority
- As “white” is a racialized category, who is deemed white changes with time, place and circumstance.
- Whiteness is a socially imagined superiority that has tangible consequences.
- Because racialization is relational, the negative consequences of this socially imagined superiority are often felt by people racialized as not-white, while those that are racialized as white are imagined to be more moral



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