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What is a Race?
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of their own trajectory to contemplate the reasoned basis of their society, a reflective activity that has always threatened the status quo with its revelations and subsequent disrupture. The myth of objective truth is the myth of the culture that sought the conquest of nature. It functions like a good myth ought to: it sufficiently explains the contemporary society in a favorable way that encourages an ongoing compliance with its rules and constraints. And just like a good myth, it conceals its mythical nature in a veil of truth. How very magical.

"you got a dog race
you got a horse race
you got a human race;
but this is a rat race . . . "

— Bob Marley

Race is a fiction. That does not preclude people from acting as if it were fact. Race is palpable, you can feel it on the streets and in the country. You can see its traces in everyone's faces. Oh it is real alright. But does it not feel funny some times? Do you ever find yourself pausing to wonder how it is you go about classifying other people. Already I'm suggesting the initial classification: people other than . . . what? You? Or me? How did we get that way?

With exceptions, everywhere everyday people go about their lives as if this difference called race is somehow real. What is here suggested is that this acceptance of the propositions of race simultaneously serves as the basic constituent of its virtual reality. What the underlying concepts of race actually consist of is another story altogether. This latter story tells the tale of a mirage, a smokescreen of ostensible truths that conceal an entirely different cluster of interests. Do not look too closely at the concepts of race, for they will shatter under scrutiny. Which is exactly the point. The big dreams of the eighteenth century European theorists, collectively known as the Enlightenment, were to liberate us from such mirages. The rigorous scrutiny provided by Enlightenment theory was going to liberate us from every-thing-slavery, despotism, injustice, feeble minded people and above all, from myth, mysticism, and enchantment. Its great mistake-its black hole-was that it could not recognize itself. It could not tell its own nature. It could not tell that it was itself a myth. It was a serious understatement of (fuck you Joseph Campbell) the power of myth. This mistake has proven key to the unfolding of global history in the last two centuries. We have literally been paying the price ever since.

The Biological Concept of Race

> "Look and see whether there is anything common to all, and if we do that we will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that."
>
> — Wittgenstein

The basic theory employed in the race concept is the theory of type. The races of humanity constituted types of Homo sapiens. In other words, a type is a sub-classification of a larger classification. Classifications have to be based on something. For instance, the primary biological division classification known as Kingdom is based on observed differences between plants and animals. The classifications of both Homo and Sapiens are based on measurements of brain capacity and tooth size. So what then is a racial type based on? Take a wild guess.

Skin color is the primary unit upon which type has been based. It, in turn, refers to the phenotype, *i.e.* the physical appearance of the individual. The essential difference between this unit, and say the unit upon which the classification Subphylum Vertebrata is based (the presence or absence of a spinal cord) is not just a matter of time (Subphylum Vertebrata addressing a change that took place over millions of years, whereas skin color can change in a single generation). More importantly it is a difference between variation and evolution. Evolutionary changes are irreversible. Variation, on the other hand, is much more malleable. Evolutionary changes usually can be reasonably well-fitted into a category, whereas variation does not fit very well at all. The problem is this: How do you arrange variation into types when the process of variation itself invariably undoes every racial type. It comes down to the ability to fuck and breed. All it takes are two people from different 'races' coming together and producing a baby to destroy the type. Interspecies sex will never result in offspring. However, inter-racial sex will. Aboriginals, Jews, Blacks, Wasps (I mean WA.S.P.s), et al, are all possessed of the ability to fruitfully copulate with each other, regardless of the doubts each of these may have about the other.

The Cultural Concept of Race

Skin color is but one characteristic out of many that is available for use in a system of differentiation. My hunch is that pointing out the differences between your group and their group has been a very common practice amongst humans throughout history, and throughout a considerable amount of prehistory as well. It may be an indicator of alienation, but it is just as much if not more likely an indicator of a desire to distinguish and differentiate amongst your fellows and fellaheen. A free people will always think of themselves as different from those they perceive not to be free. Skin color is an easy way to identify one group from another. It makes sense in a territorial kind of way. The two opposing teams wear different colors, or play shirts and skins. In New York City, the common gang practice is to match the colors of the caps on the crack vials they sell with the colors of the gang. Just so, in New York City demos, the police generally send in a lot of undercover cops into the throngs and "maintain order." They can be more effective because they are less identifiable (although a second glance is usually enough to tell). They are at those times without their color. Differentiation and status are perhaps universal social desires. Race may, in the final analysis, be described as the pouring of these desires through the filter of market-based economics that are guided by Enlightenment theories. And like everything else that gets poured through there, it gets nasty.

The objective rational truth that gets hauled out in defense of racial types is just as much a component of one myth as is the muskrat who swims down to the bottom of the sea to bring up some earth to plant on turtle's back a component of another. Everyday life, even in postmodern societies, does not function according to a set of codes established upon objective facts; at least, not entirely. A lot of what one does when one negotiates the quotidian (*e.g.*, in New York or Des Moines) is active myth-interpretation, for in the end, one has to forget much in order to get anything done. Myths are stories that are comparably much more practical for integrating experience than are the raw data of biology. Were people to really pause and consider the reasoned basis for their views on race they would be thrown into a conundrum. Inevitably they would become less productive employees, for they would be compelled