

Culture and Racism / White Supremacy

by nashid fareed-ma'at

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Racism and White supremacy continue to dominate the world in 2008, even among people committed to ending it. For much of the modern era, these realities have been examined as political, social, legal, systemic / institutional, economic, and scientific matters -- but almost always stop short of examining racism and White supremacy as a matter of culture. The aim of this essay is to do just that. I assert that until we do so, all efforts to combat and end racism and White supremacy will attain only limited successes guaranteed to recede with time (i.e., voting rights for Black people in America) because these realities emanate from an unchallenged culture. My ultimate aim is to show the necessity of moving beyond or drastically transforming European culture (of which American culture is a part) if our aims are to sincerely end racism and White supremacy. And for people of African descent (if not the world), we can look to Traditional African cultures to guide us in embracing a culture free from the elements that create racism or any other supremacist paradigms.

THE DEFINITION QUESTION

Despite an abundance of attempts, some of them noble, perfect definitions of racism and White supremacy continue to allude us. These are sometimes adequately defined within a particular field or circumstance, but as for an overarching definition: the task has yet to be achieved. Part of the reason for this is because, as a cultural phenomenon, racism and White supremacy manifest themselves in a wide range of ways that go beyond the specificity of most definitions -- definitions by their nature seek to be succinct and precise even in explaining the meaning of things that are not succinct and precise. Therefore, I will not attempt to provide a definition because, like culture, certain aspects of racism and White supremacy are undefinable -- but many know it when they experience and witness it. I want to emphasize the importance of examining these as a matter of culture. Like music, you can read all the definitions and descriptions of a particular music that you want, but hearing it (and sometimes dancing to it) is a better way to *understand* it. And understanding is the key word: culture from an analytical perspective (as opposed to living it) is an attempt to understand groups of people who "share" values, beliefs, attitudes, institutions, etc. But a better way to understand these is through their manifestations: how a people's values, beliefs, attitudes, institutions, etc. are manifested as music, language, customs, traditions, spiritual / religious teachings, social practices and actions, their social institutions, art and cultural expressions, etc. So in seeking to understand racism and White supremacy as a matter of culture what are the manifestations of these?

Let us begin with the word race, as this concept is clearly embodied in racism and White supremacy. Race, at its most basic function, serves as a way of categorizing groups of people based on identifiable or perceived characteristics. Many may be surprised that race, as an European concept, was not always based on skin color. Some acknowledge the origin of race to begin with the Greeks as a way

of distinguishing differences between themselves and other groups of people. The basis of categorizing such differences was based on the “spirit” of a people. To give an example from Aristotle’s *Politics*:

“Having spoken of the number of the citizens, we will proceed to speak of what should be their character. This is a subject which can be easily understood by any one who casts his eye on the more celebrated states of Hellas, and generally on the distribution of races in the habitable world. Those who live in a cold climate and in Europe are full of spirit, but wanting in intelligence and skill; and therefore they retain comparative freedom, but have no political organization, and **are incapable of ruling over others**. Whereas the natives of Asia are intelligent and inventive, but they are wanting in spirit, and therefore they **are always in a state of subjection and slavery**. But the Hellenic race, which is situated between them, is likewise intermediate in character, being high-spirited and also intelligent. Hence it continues free, and is the best-governed of any nation, and, if it could be formed into one state, would be **able to rule the world**.” (emphasis mine)
[from Book 7, Part 7 – translation by Benjamin Jowett]

It is interesting to note that the distinctions here are made in regards to a people’s disposition to rule or be ruled by others. And a “people,” in those times, could include persons with a wide variety of physical appearances (including skin colors) who lived the social norms of a particular society. Some scholars have disputed the above’s relation to the concept of race but the dynamic of distinguishing peoples in regards to rulership or subjugation will be evident in the forthcoming concepts of race. In fact, this “spirit” concept of race would later be reflected in some European scholars distinguishing “the rich” and “the poor” of Europe as different races.

Early Medieval Europe’s concept of race was filtered through Judeo-Christian ideology: the three sons of Noah. This doctrine held all of humanity to be descendants of Noah’s three sons: with Shem’s descendants becoming the peoples of the Near East and Asia, Ham’s descendants becoming the peoples of Africa, and Japheth’s descendants becoming the peoples of Europe. Two things are of note with this race concept. The first is that Noah, who was and continues to be portrayed as White¹ (European), is the “father” of Asian and Black peoples -- the cultural implication being that Asian and Black people come from White (“the original”) people. Also, this “fatherhood,” as a patriarchal status and point of origin², in traditional European cultures is a basis for claimed supremacy and elevated

¹ The traditional portrayal of Noah as White is done despite the more accurate description of Noah being a person of color, some argue Black but at minimum he (and the Jews of his time) was Semitic (mixed blood, mulatto).

² From a Biblical context, Adam is the first man from whom all men and women are descendants. Remember that Eve was created from one of Adam’s ribs, not from the earth like Adam. Generations later, Yahweh (God) unleashed the flood on earth, killing all humans and animals except those in Noah’s ark. In this regard, Noah becomes the first man of the next stage of humanity, a *point of origin* for all humans from the Biblical perspective.

status: deemed qualifications for rulership. Secondly, according to the Bible, Ham's descendants were cursed by Noah. This was used to justify the enslavement and trade of African people as well as the social oppression and exclusion of Blacks in European-controlled societies, an oppression and exclusion which continues to this day. Again, take note of the rulership and subjugation dynamics in this concept of race.

As Europe moved into the late Middle Ages (the fifteenth century), a concept of race evolved to signify descent of an aristocratic lineage. This new concept did not eradicate previous race concepts but became another social means of making distinctions among people. It is no coincidence that this aristocratic concept of race emerged during the rise of strong royalty-based kingdoms in Europe. Episodes such as the Hundred Year's War, primarily fought over English kings' claim to the French throne, saw an increased concentration of power into the hands of royal monarchies and aristocracies over peasants and other groups deemed "minorities" at the time - such as heretics, lepers, Jews, and persons of non-European ethnicities. The rulership and subjugation dynamics in this concept of race should be evident by how it was used to designate members of the ruling groups.

As the European Slave Trade³ (also known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade) progressed, another evolution of the race concept emerged. This concept linked physical appearance and geographic origins with so-called "natural" and "innate" behaviors and abilities, as well as the moral character of groups. Again, it is no coincidence that this new concept emerged with the increased presence of African and Asian peoples brought into Europe as enslaved persons and indentured servants via European conquest, colonization, and imperialism. Thus, skin color, the hair texture, the shape of one's head and face (when skin color and hair texture would not suffice to distinguish Europeans from some Asians and Arabs) became predominant factors. At first, these factors were used to redefine the traditional Biblical racial categories of Shem (Asiatic and Semitic), Ham (African), and Japheth (European). But with a decline in the ruling power of the Christian Church and an increasing social acceptance of European science, these physical-based concepts were cast into scientific terms. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, scientists such as the German Johann Blumenbach presented categories of humans based on skin color and characteristics of the skull. His five categories included:

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
American	People indigenous to North and South America, the Red Race
Caucasian	European, the White Race

³ Most historians and scholars use the terms "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" or "Atlantic Slave Trade" to refer to this event but I feel the term is misleading. The Atlantic Ocean was not running this slave trade, Europeans were and I feel a better way of identifying this slave trade is by who was responsible for it. Similarly, the Arab Slave Trade is a common name for the trade of slaves controlled by Arabs, preceding the European Slave Trade.

Malayan	Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander, the Brown Race
Mongolian	Eastern and Central Asian, the Yellow Race
Negro	African, the Black Race

Blumenbach's categories utilized phrenology which Webster's Dictionary defines as: "a system, now rejected, by which an analysis of character could be allegedly made by studying the shape and protuberances of the skull." Phrenology was widely accepted well into the twentieth century, and served as a foundation for linking physical characteristics with moral / character assumptions of racial groups. This was the starting point for declaring entire races to be criminal, immoral, ignorant, and inferior while other races - usually the White race - were deemed law-abiding, moral, intelligent, and naturally superior. These determinations were sometimes made in spite of historical evidence that exposed the fallacy of these categorical stereotypes. Again, note the rulership and subjugation dynamics in these concepts of race.

By the nineteenth century, biology began to play a more prominent role in developing concepts of race. Phrenology played an increasing role, along with Social Darwinism (an application of Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest) and Eugenics in providing so-called "scientifically neutral" justifications of racial paradigms. These scientific approaches emphasized selective breeding as a way to improve and protect the hereditary stock of the "civilized races," regarded as the best of humanity. And, following the established pattern of race concepts, the civilized races included Whites, particularly those of ruling and higher social classes whose "evolutionary supremacy" was threatened by inferiors: people of color, and Whites who were poor, insane, deemed "unintelligent," and unhealthy. From this perspective, the mixing of the races (physical and social categories) was seen as something to be avoided at all costs. The decline and eventual end of the European Slave Trade (or rather its transition into colonialism) dominated social events along with debates of whether enslaved and colonized peoples should be granted a place in European societies. Discussions of assimilation and cultural pluralism were seen as threats to those who wanted to protect the "purity" of White society. Such purist views were even present among some abolitionists who advocated the ending of chattel slavery but not the oppression and relegation of Blacks and other people of color to the lower and under-classes. Correspondingly, race categories of the day used the purity or mixture of blood (hereditary stock) a person had to determine their racial group. For example, one drop of Black blood could be enough to deem someone as Black even if their other features were clearly considered European. But to be White one had to have "pure" White ancestry, to be free from mixture with other races. These paradigms continued to embody traditional European social and cultural biases of projecting moral characteristics, capabilities, and superiority / inferiority on whole groups of people. Such concepts continued to categorize European ruling groups in favorable ways and people oppressed by these groups in negative ways. Government-sanctioned social policies such as forced sterilization, forced labor and imprisonment (sometimes with execution), scientific experimentation without consent, and genocide were justified on race concepts of these days. People tend to limit such social

policies to Nazi Germany but they were practiced widely throughout Europe and America and their colonies long before Adolf Hitler's regime. Again, take note of the rulership and subjugation dynamics in these concepts of race.

Eugenic concepts of race evolved into certain schools of genetics in the twentieth century. Within the field of genetics, scientists explored and redefined traditional race concepts, with their lingering social and cultural biases. In the realm of genetics, the concept of race has been debated more, with some seeking to eliminate a scientific concept of race. Yet race continues to hold a strong presence in the field of genetics: attempts to link physical traits, abilities, and geographic origins to specific genes and gene pools (peoples). The genetic race debate has mirrored social debates in the twentieth century that examined the role of race in the Modern Age. Some of these debates were spurred by social movements by people of color to combat White oppression. Other debates were attempts by some Whites to decolorize the dynamics of past and present European oppression, so that it is not a "racial matter." These were veiled attempts to "cool the fires" of ongoing social conflicts, along with the denial of responsibility and guilt associated with those who inherited (and refused to relinquish) the gains of their more "bigoted" White predecessors. But just because you change the language or are more slick in "decolorizing" racial realities does not mean these racial realities cease to exist, particularly when the same systems of oppression remain in place and under (elite) White control.

The genetic debate has been accompanied by the acknowledgment of race as cultural / social constructions: something made up as opposed to being natural phenomena observed by science. These race concepts tend to eliminate social class distinctions from race such that Whites who are poor, insane, deemed "unintelligent," and unhealthy are grouped into the same White racial category as the ruling class. These non-aristocratic Whites are still oppressed by the ruling class but are no longer grouped with other "lesser" groups (people of color). This mirrors the reality that the White ruling class is less hostile to non-ruling class Whites and offers them opportunities to better their stake (become middle-class) by working to support the societal structures still controlled by ruling Whites. These race concepts also seek to be less explicit in assigning an inferior status to people of color. Instead, they use more subtle and apparently neutral coding to convey these traditional European biases and stereotypes. So, for example poverty and crime are still explained in the context of racial characteristics: more Blacks are poor - culturally understood as Blacks being *less able* to provide for themselves; more Blacks commit crime - culturally understood as Blacks having a *criminal / immoral* character. Declarations such as these reflect traditional European concepts of race and assign identical characteristics to Blacks as those used in the past. These declarations also often (conveniently) neglect to mention the social forces and barriers that contribute to a significant number of Blacks ending up in these situations -- forces and barriers that Whites control or refuse to address in White-controlled societies. The acceptance of such statements without critical analysis falls in line with the cultural traditions of European race concepts. So instead of examining poverty and crime as factors of being denied opportunities and social resources (i.e. quality education, financial means) to participate in the White-controlled economies of European societies, the factor of race (in this case Blackness) suffices as an explanation.

Another color (pun intended) to the concept of race in modern European societies is multiculturalism. On one level, this late twentieth century concept proclaims to support a society more inclusive of people of color and religious / ethnic “minorities.” Note, inclusion is only necessary for these oppressed groups: not Whites since it is culturally understood that members of the dominant group, by default, are already included into the norms of society. Multiculturalism speaks of being more open to, accepting, and tolerant⁴ of oppressed groups, and tends to emphasize understanding and harmony as ways to end present discrimination / hatred as well as correct past oppression. Terminology such as “rainbow” (The Rainbow Coalition), “melting pot,” and the “human family” are often used in regards to multiculturalism. But this is merely another attempt to redefine European dominance in a way that maintains European dominance. The limits of understanding and tolerating others remains set at what is acceptable to European culture. So, for example, prior to the “War on Terrorism,” Islam was tolerable in Judeo-Christian European societies because Islam is a monotheistic religion that shares many prophets with the Judeo-Christian tradition. But other polytheistic religions were and are not acceptable, even among multicultural advocates. These advocates instead seek to reduce cultures that do not fit neatly within the Eurocentric paradigm into filtered forms that are more palatable to their cultural taste. For example, yoga is reduced to an exercise and fitness program *disconnected* from Indian and Kemetic spiritual traditions with their multi-deity systems. Traditional African spiritual systems that are polytheistic are re-interpreted to now include a “Creator (supreme) God” that is more acceptable to the Eurocentric monotheism.

Also, multiculturalism rarely (if ever) deals with addressing the power dynamics of European-controlled societies. Hierarchical systems with Whites on the top (and in control) remain, even if a few members of oppressed groups are sprinkled in (tokenism) to add a little color to the vanilla ice cream cone. As much as multiculturalism encourages Whites to be “accepting” of these groups, the oppressed groups are expected to assimilate to the prevailing White norms in order to succeed in White-controlled societies. So even persons from cultures that have never embraced European clothing are expected to conform and put on a suit and tie (or other clothing deemed appropriate) to work in European societies. And lastly on this point, the acceptance and tolerance of groups can be revoked at any time, as evident in the “War on Terrorism” that followed the September 11, 2001 “attacks.” Years of Whites tolerating (while still oppressing) Muslims (and others perceived to be Arab) in America and Europe suddenly ended with the public perception of Muslims being responsible for the attacks. As much as some individuals (including political leaders) gave lip service to the acceptance of Muslims, the societal actions (including government and systemic initiatives) were those of rejection and persecution. This same dynamic was repeated with other tragic events where Whites were “victims” and persons of oppressed groups were deemed responsible: the danger of the “Drug (Crack) Epidemic” of the 1990s and the social fear and corresponding mass incarceration of Blacks; the loss of White jobs and wages blamed on illegal Latino immigrants (not corporations) and the corresponding push for harsh immigration policies including mass incarceration / deportation and gates built on the Mexican border (but not the Canadian border).

⁴ Note the Webster's Dictionary definition of tolerate: “1) to not interfere with; allow; permit. 2) to recognize and respect (others' beliefs, practices, etc.) without sharing them. 3) to bear, or put up with (someone or something not especially liked).”

THE IMPLICATIONS OF RACE CATEGORIZATION

The preceding overview of race concepts is in no way complete but presents a scope of how these concepts have been and continue to be used to categorize people. All of these concepts presented new or redefined (and sometimes resurrected) categories to respond to the current realities of the time in which they were presented. Evident in the progression and evolution of race concepts is a further concentration of power and (perceived) social assets in the ruling White classes. In this lays the root of why there is a need to categorize people and who is categorizing who. The categorization occurs as a way of serving and protecting the concentration of power in the hands of the White ruling classes, even if in modern times the work of this power dynamic is performed by lower class Whites (usually the middle class) and select members of oppressed groups who have assimilated into the White power structure. The same applies as to who is doing the categorization. Traditionally, scholars (including scientists) and religious leaders have devised the race categories. And, for most of pre-modern Europe, schooling (and certainly the level of education that validated persons as scholars) was reserved for members of the White ruling classes. With the so-called "democratization" of education, the doors to education (via public schools) and eventually higher education were open to members of lower-class Whites and persons of color, yet remained aligned to the scholarly tradition established by past White ruling class scholars. Even today, the "top" universities and intellectual institutions in the world are predominantly composed of or supported by the White ruling class. Logic follows that a prestigious university that receives huge financial support from extremely rich persons and corporations (the only entities able to contribute such large amounts of money) will remain in line with what is acceptable to these donors to protect future support, even if the university keeps a few (token) personalities who venture outside the box of what is acceptable to the rich. The same dynamic applies to religious leaders who were either members of the White ruling class or depended on this group to support (financially and politically sustain) churches and religious organizations. When you are or control those who conceive the categories you, in essence, control the categories. And the purpose of maintaining White ruling class dominance is evident in the rulership / subjugation dynamics of every race concept.

So when the White ruling class was firmly in control and needed less assistance from outside its group, race concepts tended to be more restrictive of Whiteness or the ruling race. When the White ruling class needed more assistance in maintaining or expanding their control, the White category was expanded even as power remained concentrated in the White ruling class. When there was a need to divide and conquer oppressed groups, more categories were established. An example is the evolution of the "Latino" category in America following past cooperation among Black and Brown power groups. Prior to the 1990s, Brown or "Hispanic" groups were considered members of either the White or Black races (as evident on government forms), with the Hispanic qualifier identifying their "ethnicity" or language distinction. This was similar to how Irish and Italian are now ethnic indicators for Whites but do not hold the (social) weight as a race category. Many "Hispanics," experiencing oppression and rejection by Anglo-Whites, identified with Blacks (even if they checked their race as

being White on forms).⁵ This shared identity manifested as Black and Brown unity in the 1970s and 80s, and was displayed in a range of social organizations working to benefit the state of Black and Hispanic people under joint efforts, not separate. Soon afterwards, the mainstream (White) media embraced the term Latino: a redefinition of the Hispanic ethnic term that now had the weight of a racial category. So by the late 1990s, former "Hispanic" people, many who socially identified with Blacks, became their "own" (oppressed) group who formed their own separate organizations with less emphasis on unifying with Black groups. The reduced cooperation is a manifestation of the traditional European divide and conquer strategy. Proof of its effectiveness is that many Latino and Black people today (2008) are not even aware of the not-so-distant past when their predecessors acted as one group to combat White oppression. (In the same way the Latino term has been strategically used, the African-American term serves as a means of dividing Blacks in America from Black people from other parts of the world.)

It should also be noted that concepts of race were embraced with little resistance throughout Europe and then forced on other parts of the world via conquest, colonization, and imperialism. Thus, the global discussion of race was rarely if race exists, but mostly how it should be defined with various ruling and oppressed groups using this issue as a means to obtain race categories that were more favorable to them.

So how does this history of European race concepts inform the realities of racism and White supremacy? In practice, racism has been the use of race concepts to oppress members of non-ruling (subjugated or less-empowered) groups. The oppressed groups are described as possessing inherent inferior and negative characteristics (i.e., being unintelligent, violent, prone to crime) which serve as justification for holding these groups in lesser social positions and, thus, under the control of the ruling class. The application of such oppression ranges from explicit bigotry and violence to more subtle forms of social barriers that deny defined non-ruling races opportunities granted to the ruling class and privileged groups. An example of the later is the historical denial of Blacks entry into the best (White) colleges and universities: not explicitly because they are Black but rather because most schools in Black communities do not meet the academic standards these elite colleges require for admission.⁶ And this dynamic will continue even to the job market where the higher paying jobs require a college degree - preferably one from the best colleges. Thus, Blacks are denied the opportunities to obtain these jobs: because they are not "qualified." Many would not see this social practice as racist simply because race was not explicitly used as a reason for denial. But the social reality of these apparent "non-racialized" denials are indeed racist because the factors of lower quality education in Black communities is a reality created (or not addressed) because of race concepts and the long cultural tradition that sees Blacks as unintelligent -- so why provide them with quality education anyway. (The truth of this statement is

⁵ This type of intra-racial battle of ethnic groups has a long tradition in European culture, particularly among the British, French, and Spaniards.

⁶ Note: this is done while granting entry to ruling class White students with sub-par academic skills because their father, grandfather, or other notable family member attended the institution in the past - the family lineage admission still practiced at many of the top colleges and universities.

further clouded by the modern concept of “political correctness” where Whites not wanting to be labeled racist will not openly state or realize such reasoning as they practice it with their actions.) In fact, the admittance of this social reality is evident when members of the ruling class or privileged groups cite use of race categories to address or correct oppression (i.e. affirmative action) as reverse racism -- the opposite of race categories' intent. Therefore, it follows that the use of race categories -- a cultural designation validated by scholarly, scientific, or religious entities -- to further the control and power of ruling and privileged groups is the “natural” function of these categories. And to the extent non-ruling groups oppress other non-ruling groups within this paradigm continues the function of these race categories when such oppression sustains or improves the ruling class' dominance. Just because the perpetrator of a racist action is a person of an oppressed group does not mean the act is not racist; a better analysis examines who the victim is and how much the act fits the historical “natural” purpose of race categorization: oppression of non-ruling groups in a way that protects and / or increases the concentration of power for ruling and privileged groups.

It is important to understand that race concepts are not entities unto themselves: they are manifestations of cultural values that seek to maintain or increase the ability of ruling classes (sometimes via privileged groups) to dominate non-ruling groups. The majority of race concepts seek this goal by having the ruling class (almost always White), sometimes with other privileged groups, be in the controlling, supreme position of rulership. Thus, White supremacy is explained as a successful application of the practice of racism -- successful in the eyes of the White ruling classes, not necessarily those who are oppressed. But from a cultural perspective -- the shared values, beliefs, attitudes, institutions, etc. -- of European societies, the rulership dynamic of the White ruling class is the root of this cultural practice of racism. This root manifests in other forms such as classism (White ruling class rulership over other lower White classes), sexism (White male patriarchal rulership over women), capitalism (White ruling class rulership over the economics of European countries and corresponding wealth), imperialism (White ruling class rulership over the ways of life of oppressed / subjugated people throughout the world). It also follows that if racism and White supremacy are manifestations of an European cultural root, any serious attempts to address and end these must engage (or disengage from) the fundamentals of European culture: a culture system that has evolved to value a living reality of a (White) ruling class, even if opposing forces fight to occupy this culturally-validated status. In other words, if you do not address the culturally accepted concept of a ruling class dominating (usually through oppression) other groups, any attempts to address racism / White supremacy are superficial: ones in which you treat the symptoms of the cold, but not the cause of the cold that will continue to create more symptoms over time.

As a cultural dynamic, racism and White supremacy operate on individual and collective levels. They pollute our hearts, permeate our social systems and customs, and shape how we see and understand (or force our “understanding” upon) reality. They are more easily recognizable in the forms of hatred and bigotry which are less socially acceptable (politically correct) today, but are just as present in a multitude of unconscious racist attitudes and actions we engage because they are “normal” or a part of the accepted tradition -- practices sanctioned, if not outright decided, by past and present White ruling

classes. A clear example of this is hip hop music.⁷ When it first emerged as a cultural force, it was demonized with many traditional (European) characteristics associated with Black race concepts -- Black as defined by White culture. It was considered a "Black music," and like Black people in European societies, not even considered music by many critics -- just as Blacks in the past were not considered humans by Whites. It was only after the mainstream music industry, controlled by the White ruling class, "accepted" (corporatized) hip hop music that it became a "legitimate" form of entertainment. Following the tradition of race concepts, commercial (accepted) hip hop music was reduced to a form that remained in line with the traditions of the Black race category. Therefore, violent, criminal, immoral, and sexually lewd material -- categorized as gangsta and party rap -- became the accepted forms of hip hop music. These forms are validated by professional studio production and worldwide promotion and distribution by the corporate music industry. The exceeding majority of hip hop music that does not fit in these categories (i.e., conscious and political hip hop) is denied a place in mainstream culture. Even the "accepted" hip hop formats (which I call hip pop) are treated as inferior to pop and rock music (both deemed White cultural expressions), although musical elements of hip hop share much in common with pop and rock music. Also, commercial hip hop is more often criticized for its explicit treatment of sex, drugs, crime, and violence that are socially accepted in the forms of pop and rock music. Yet, these same elements are not problems to many who enjoy pop and rock music with such explicit content yet dislike (sometimes hate) hip hop. A closer analysis will reveal how this dislike often falls in line with the tradition of race conditioning in European culture: a preference (sometimes reverence) for that which is associated with Whiteness and a defamation of that which is associated with oppressed groups.

This racial conditioning creates societies that wade in the cultural language of superiority and inferiority. That which is esteemed (considered best or better) is aligned with Whiteness and the ruling class and, to a lesser extent, selected privileged groups. Critics of racism and White supremacy usually note how these (cultural) practices wrongly denigrate oppressed groups, yet these critics often fail to mention how these practices ascribe beneficial characteristics to the ruling class and privileged groups. In today's American society, the White middle class is a privileged group. And as a group, the "middle class" is often described in positive terms: hard-working, intelligent, caring, law-abiding, good individuals and families who contribute a lot to this society. These descriptions are widely accepted at face value, even when they are incorrect. When significant numbers of the middle class do things that are contrary to these stereotypes, the middle class (as a group) is not redefined in negative ways. An example includes the widespread use of illegal drugs among the middle class which occurs at about the same rate of drug use by the lower class and oppressed groups; yet the middle class is not deemed as social vice for this common criminal activity of buying and using illegal drugs. An example of (cultural) unintelligence is the level of debt and bad financial decisions (from unwise investing to overspending to signing mortgages they cannot afford) the middle class commonly engages in. The intelligence of the middle class is rarely called into question for these common practices, but when

⁷ I use the word "music" to describe what is usually nothing more than orchestrated noise -- this statement applies to a wide range of modern "music" forms, from classical to rock, pop, jazz, etc. Perhaps in a future essay I will explore the difference between music and noise, but for the purpose of this essay I will use the word music for convenience.

lower classes and oppressed groups commit these same practices they are often labeled as stupid and irresponsible -- as individuals and as groups. There are other real-world examples that can be ascribed to the middle class that contradict their social image, yet the middle class is rarely (if ever) cast into a negative light. Being a privileged group, the ruling class has no interest in presenting the middle class in such a way since many of them serve as managers of the ruling class' oppressive social structure. In the same vein, as much oppression and harm is committed by (directly or by directives from) the ruling class, most people want to be rich -- oftentimes by whatever (destructive) means available. Despite the destruction and suffering that originates from the ruling class, being a member of this class remains a glorified societal aspiration.

Aspiration for inclusion or proximity to the ruling class or privileged groups is an important feature of racism and White supremacy. As a dynamic of culture, people do not seek to fight or eliminate that which they aspire to be part of (or close to). Thus, this cultural dynamic serves as another protective force for the ruling class. But it is also used to cloak the presence of racism and White supremacy. That instead of transforming the cultural and social reality of this society, a solution often proposed is to move oppressed groups closer or into a privileged status: i.e., to better the educational or economic status of Blacks instead of transforming White culture which views Blacks as inferior -- and certainly these are never combined as a solution. In this way, tokenism serves as a wonderful cover for the continuing presence of racism and White supremacy. Because, as some argue, how can society or a group be racist when they include (a select few) persons from oppressed groups into privileged positions? How can this society be racist when you have Black (skinned) persons reach prominent positions in corporate America (often as celebrity athletes and entertainers) and even honored government roles such as Secretary of State, Supreme Court Justice, or President? These arguments are allowed to stand as valid when people do not connect how *the creation of privileged groups are part of the racism / White supremacy paradigm*. Firstly, the fact that only a few persons from oppressed groups are able to attain such positions is tokenism: in no way does this "accomplishment" mean that all or even most persons from oppressed groups will be able to attain such. It is, in fact, tokenism when a few chosen members of the White lower classes attain highly regarded positions; but since the present cultural doctrine does not strictly exclude poor Whites from the present concept of Whiteness, this form of tokenism is less apparent. But, and this is key, in no way does tokenism change the *power dynamics* for the White ruling class. Even with a class of privileged Blacks (entrepreneurs, entertainers, and "leaders") the White ruling class does not lose its concentration of power and control of society. The creation and maintenance of such privileged groups needs to be seen as part of the race categorization process because it does serve the exact same purpose of why race categories are created and redefined over time. To the extent those who seek to combat racism and White supremacy embrace the cultural value of having a privileged group (i.e. mainstream Black "leadership"), they continue to accept the cultural dynamics (values, ideas, beliefs, institutions, etc.) that manifest racist and White supremacist oppression.

Remember, as much as skin color is the more prevalent characteristic in today's concept of race, it is not and never was the only significant characteristic. Socially cherished characteristics are decided by and associated with the ruling class and privileged groups, and characteristics deemed negative are associated with oppressed groups. These characteristics are strong factors in the process of (cultural)

assimilation some members of the privileged groups have embraced. That is why even if you address the issue of (skin) color consciousness, the dynamics of race and White supremacy will continue to flourish in this society. It is naive to think that diminishing the importance of skin color will result in an equal and just society. It is also naive to argue that skin color does not matter when we live in a culture that has a very long tradition (that continues to and flourishes in the present) of placing divisive importance on skin color. But even if we reach an age of true color blindness -- which actually is more a way of denying race than addressing it -- the long traditions of European culture, if left unchanged, will find other characteristics and (social) differences by which to organize categories of the ruling class, privileged groups, and oppressed groups. In other words, even if we reach a day where people are not "judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said) oppressed people will continue to be dominated by the White ruling class who will use categories of character to maintain their dominance. We would simply move from racism to characterism.

And speaking of the denial of race, there is a fallacy in this approach too. This idea is reflected in statements such as: "there's no such thing as race" or "there's only one race: the human race (or human family)." These statements may be treated as truths in some schools of modern science and philosophy, but people do not live in the world of science and philosophy alone: we live in a cultural and social reality presently dominated by the White ruling class. In this reality, race does exist -- and in a very profound way. Denial of this cultural, historical, and social reality will not end the oppression of oppressed groups. Part of some people's wishes to erase or deny race is actually a sign of their White supremacist conditioning: that people of color must be rendered colorless (close to if not White, which is the absence of color) to be accepted as human. For others, this is an (sometimes unconscious) attempt to obscure the social problems created by Whites through their creation and application of race -- a past *and* present problem. These attempts often seek to eliminate the accompanying guilt and duty to make amends (reparations) for past and present-day wrongs Whites and privileged groups still benefit from -- guilt and duty to amend as defined by European morals and values.. Anyone serious about addressing and ending racism and White supremacy should be wary of these paths.

There are clear incentives for most Whites to not clearly define or address racism and White supremacy because of how it benefits them -- the same is true for non-White members of privileged groups. To explore racism and White supremacy as matters of culture exposes the guilt, destructiveness, and fallacies of European culture. Yet many people, including oppressed groups, willingly live this culture in its many manifestations without changing it in any significant ways. For people concerned about seriously addressing racism and White supremacy while living European culture, the challenge is for them to address the roots of the culture they live. If they do not, all their attempts to address racism will, at best, achieve temporary limited effectiveness guaranteed to recede with time. Clear examples of this in America are the legislation passed during Reconstruction (after the Civil War) and the Civil Rights laws of the 1960s: legislation designed to address racism. In both cases, the gains obtained by the passage of these laws were severely (if not completely) eroded over the course of a few of decades. In a conformist idea-centered culture, everything follows the culture (the values, ideas, beliefs, institutions, etc.) Idea-centered cultures hold ideas and values to be more

important than the actions of these societies.⁸ That is why the American Declaration of Independence, which states the idea “all men are created equal,” can be written by people who held mass numbers of African men, women, and children as chattel slaves. The idea of equality can be cited and praised as a “living reality” despite the actual inequalities created by the actions of these men: holding other humans in slavery, committing genocide to take land from indigenous people, creating a small elite class of White male landowners and a larger class of poor Whites, etc. In the same way, past efforts to address racism via law, politics, economic initiatives, moral campaigns, etc. have failed because these efforts have not addressed the cultural roots from which racism and White supremacy emerge. Even Black resistance to racism has failed because many in these efforts, following the cultural example of Europeans, have also reduced Blackness / Africaness to physical characteristics and a geographic / lineage connection to the African continent while still living European culture. Thus, we put a “Black face” on European ideas / values and seek a redefined place within a societal structure that maintains a ruling class. In turn, our resistance has sought to either better our stake by moving closer to the ruling class, becoming a privileged group, or seeking to place ourselves in the position of ruling class. The outcomes of this cultural approach manifest destruction, inequality, injustice, and other elements of oppression in these groups and their work even as they claim to fight against such realities.

For Black people, the issue of culture is of particular importance because the elimination of Traditional African culture was a major component of European conquest. For the majority of Traditional African cultures (the period prior to the conquest and colonization of Africa), the idea of a ruling class was completely foreign and incompatible to their ways of life. Most of these cultures held a living (action-oriented) practice of collective ownership and responsibility, such that the concentration of power and resources that allows one group of people to rule others did not exist.⁹ This was a factor in the unending resistance to European conquest until Europeans were able to culturally conquer African people. It is also worth noting that in the age of Traditional African civilizations, realities such as racism and supremacy were not prevalent. Whereas Europeans within the race paradigm see differences as reasons to separate and oppress people, there is a much larger human history of seeing group differences as opportunities to respect, appreciate, and share (teachings, trade, experiences, power, etc.) among different groups.

By understanding racism and White supremacy as cultural realities, we can deal with their explicit and subtle components. Most people no longer defend the explicit forms of racism and White supremacy which manifest as bigotry and outright hatred. But fewer people are willing to rightly label the more

⁸ This differs from action-centered cultures which hold actions of the utmost importance: what a people do; and the values / ideas of that culture are shaped by and follow the actions of the people.

⁹ This fact contradicts what you will find in most written history of Traditional Africa. The bulk of such history was contrived by European and European-influenced scholars who have rewritten such history from their own cultural point of view. In their cultural arrogance, they interpret the history of Traditional Africa to fit in a European mold that they understand. Thus, representatives of the people who only carry out the collective will of the people are re-interpreted to be kings and pharaohs. This is but one example of a variety of ways an accurate history and understanding of Traditional Africa has been obscured by European scholarship.

subtle practices of racism and White supremacy as such. For example, is the use of the term "minority" to describe non-White people racist? Some defend the use of this term since presently Whites are the statistical majority in the United States and other European countries. But when you examine the cultural implications of the term minority -- particularly how it also means lesser, and view this in the context of historical race concepts where being lesser is seen as being inferior and, thus, justifiably ruled by those who are considered superior -- you can begin to see how the term minority fits within the cultural tradition of race concepts and their use to maintain and increase White ruling class dominance. So even if there is an intention to speak to the statistical reality, if there is a true intent to not be racist the challenge is to use or create terminology that states the statistical reality in a way that is divorced from the traditional cultural messaging of race concepts. This same principle would apply to other coded statements such as "we are a nation of laws" or "a nation that respects the rule of law." On its surface, these phrases may not seem racist but when viewed in the context of historical race categories stereotyping non-Whites as immoral and criminal by nature and, thus, incapable of living by laws, and such being used to justify harsh "law enforcement" oppression of these groups, these phrases fall directly in line with racist and White supremacist traditions.

Another socially accepted cover for racist and White supremacist traditions is race-based comedy. In a joke, one is allowed to make explicitly racist statements that would otherwise be criticized outside the safe haven of humor. In fact, this society has created grand entertainment spaces for non-White comedians to perform such racist comedy about the groups they are categorized as being part of, often to mostly White audiences. Examples include Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Chris Rock, and Dave Chappelle performing race-based humor that negatively portrays Blacks in entertainment venues geared predominantly to White (usually mainstream) audiences. (Such non-White comedians are or aspire to become members of the privileged group of entertainers.) But just because such material is presented as comedy and people laugh at it does not diminish that it is racist. People interested in addressing and ending racism and White supremacy would be wise to not engage such comedy, just as they would not engage in other racist and White supremacist actions.

MOVING TOWARD SOLUTIONS

So how should we approach addressing and ending racism and White supremacy? Our approach must include dealing with the concentration of power and social resources under the control of the White ruling class. That is, in fact, the reason you have race concepts which inform social practices. Diversity alone is not an adequate response if the power dynamics remain unchanged and the White ruling class (or any ruling class) and privileged groups remain in positions of control. The goal needs to be an equitable distribution or sharing of power among all members (or social groups) in a society; and the implementation of this goal must address the cultural roots that make it socially acceptable to concentrate power via the oppression of others. For some, this is an inconceivable reality; and such would be true if history were limited to the post-Middle Age European paradigm. But a more communal and group-sharing cultural paradigm did exist in Europe prior to the rise of aristocracies and monarchies. To attain such an approach requires transforming the tenets of European culture. For those who feel comfortable operating within the European cultural paradigm, this is your challenge.

But personally, I prefer embracing a path rooted in Traditional African culture and the essay titled *Beginning Steps To Traditional Africa* begins to explore this path.

Another challenge is a cultural shift from ideas to actions. Over the centuries of White supremacist domination, many ideas have been presented that speak of equality and just relations among the races while social actions remained strongly rooted in the cultural practices of racial oppression / domination of non-ruling groups. Some of the most racist people (racist by their actions) quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" Speech while overseeing the continued racial oppression of Blacks throughout the world: from the more explicitly segregated American South to the more subtly but just as segregated American North, as well as colonization, apartheid, and imperial domination of people of color throughout the planet. Ideas and cultural messaging need to be put to the side while strongly focusing on individual and collective actions that will produce the outcomes of social equality. To continue the path of lofty dreams and idealistic aspirations is to continue the existing tradition of White supremacy that leaves the actions of society unaddressed while supporting the continuing domination of the White ruling class and their chosen privileged groups.

Another pressing issue in this shift will be the acceptance of non-ruling groups' humanity. For centuries, the prevailing social definition of being human has been confined to what is acceptable to European culture, as defined by the White ruling class. This has led non-White groups who sought to be accepted as humans to basically aspire to Whiteness. This has also created an often unaware lack of sensitivity and respect by Whites (and those aspiring to Whiteness) to other people's cultural practices that went beyond what European culture deemed acceptable. The inability of Whites (and those conditioned to aspire to Whiteness) to accept people with cultural practices that are beyond what is comfortable to Europe is, in fact, a result of racist / White supremacist conditioning. And if you cannot break free from the conditioning, it is nearly impossible to break away from the practice of racism and White supremacy. I should state that many indigenous cultures, many who came in contact and were later oppressed by Europeans, did not have a problem accepting people with very different cultural practices. There was an acceptance of the difference, even if such difference meant that differing groups should have their own designated places to live their different ways of life, along with the resources necessary to do so. But rarely was difference seen as a reason to oppress and then force an oppressed group to assimilate to your culture. So those in the European cultural paradigm may want to learn (not interpret and impose your understanding upon) from other cultures who were able to have a more humane embrace of human differences.

Another issue that must be addressed in this shift is self-determination. There is a prevailing confusion that the use of categories is what makes racism inherently evil (destructive). The fact is humans used categories in non-oppressive ways for millennia prior to European race concepts. The key question is: who is categorizing who and why? Note that in the European race paradigm oppressed people, for the most part, are not allowed to categorize themselves.¹⁰ Even when they are, they must devise categories that are acceptable to the White ruling class. Categorizations of humans can

¹⁰ Do not confuse this with oppressed people passionately embracing and sometimes slightly altering pre-designed race concepts or bringing "new" or "renewed" emphasis to components of pre-designed race concepts.

be helpful when they are not used as a means to oppress others. Discussions of self-determination can collectively explore what categories are necessary and how they are to be devised. And clearly, when people are allowed to categorize themselves, the power inherent in such categories resides with the people. Fears of chaos and disorder about how to categorize people should not be deterrents to embracing this process because, for oppressed groups, the "order" of White supremacy is not only chaotic but very destructive.

And lastly, the shift must include a honest examination of ourselves: as individuals, as families and communities, and as nations. In a culture that holds to concepts of shame, it is rarely easy to view and accept one's own ugliness. To see our place in a long legacy of racism and White supremacy. To see how we have benefitted and been victimized by this legacy. To see how it continues today and see our part in its continuance. To see what we must be willing to give up to end it. For many people, including oppressed groups, there will be little willingness to fully embrace this path -- yet only by fully embracing it will significant progress be made. With reality being so, it would be more honest to admit that such persons are not interested in ending racism and White supremacy; at best, they seek to reform these to be kinder and gentler -- as the abolitionists did in ending chattel slavery but not racism and White supremacy. Thus, those interested in ending racism may be better suited abandoning efforts to change society (or the world) or existing groups rooted in racist / White supremacist traditions. Instead, let them form new groups and communities that embrace the challenge. If such groups and communities attain a state of being that is free of racism and White supremacy, they will be examples for the rest of the world to consider. But more so than influencing others not willing to make such a shift, is the beauty to be attained and shared by those who individually and collectively shift away from racist living. It is a challenge to be written with actions, not words. It is a challenge that forces us to examine every part of ourselves, as the influences of White supremacist culture reach deeper than most realize. It is a path that requires more than drastic change, but the courage to transform one's self and one's way of life in route to possibly transforming more...

