Critical Thinking Assignment: White Ethnics and the Social Construction of Whiteness

Think about: How and why has the social construction of “whiteness” varied historically? Regarding this question, in what ways are “white ethnics” similar to Jews, Mexican Americans, Arabs, and Chinese?

WHO ARE WHITE ETHNICs?

White ethnics [namely, non-Protestant Europeans] (i.e. Italians, Russians, Poles, Greeks, Hungarians, Slovaks, French-Canadians, and Jews among them) experienced some levels of ethnocentric racism and xenophobia by the majority culture they lived among. Although in the USA the main racial divide was between light-skinned "White" and darker-skinned "Black" African Americans and so the European immigrants who became "white" ethnicities were absorbed, assimilated and integrated into the mainstream in a much faster rate.

(from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_ethnic)

WHO IS WHITE?

The process of officially being defined as white by law often came about in court disputes over pursuit of citizenship. The Naturalization Act of 1790 offered naturalization only to "any alien, being a free white person". In at least 52 cases, people denied the status of white by immigration officials sued in court for status as white people. By 1923, courts had vindicated a "common-knowledge" standard, concluding that "scientific evidence" was incoherent.

Mass immigration to the United States from Italy occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Italians often fell victim to stereotypes of criminal involvement, anti-Catholicism, ethnic and cultural prejudices, and violence. Anti-Italian violence caused lynching in Tampa;[15] and eleven Italian immigrants in New Orleans, one of the largest mass lynchings in United States history. The Immigration Act of 1924 reduced the entry of Italians into the United States. Southern Italians were classified as a different nationality primarily at the request of their Northern Italian counterparts who were considered Alpine more akin to French and Germans.[16] [Though classified as “white,” Italians were perceived to be racially inferior—see section on “White Ethnics as Inferior races?” in section below.]

The official racial status of Mexican Americans has varied throughout American history. From 1850 to 1920, the U.S. Census form did not distinguish between whites and Mexican Americans.[35] In 1930, the U.S. Census form asked for "color or race," and census enumerators were instructed to write W for White and Mex for Mexican. In 1940 and 1950, the instructions were to "Report white (W) for Mexicans unless they were definitely of full Indigenous Indian or other non-white races."[35] . . . . [Also], Asians were barred from marrying Mexican Americans because Mexicans were legally white.[37] . . . .[A] test case came in December 1935, when a Buffalo, N.Y., judge rejected Jalisco native Timoteo Andrade's application for citizenship on the grounds that he was a "Mexican Indian." Had it not been for the intervention of the Mexican and American governments, who forced a second hearing, this precedent could very well have made many Mexicans, the majority of whom are mestizo, ineligible for citizenship.[38]

Under the U.S. Census definition and U.S. federal agency, whites with ancestry from the Middle East and North Africa are considered white. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations also explicitly define white as "original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the
Historically, Middle Eastern peoples and their descendants were legally white in general, but there were a lot of discussions in the early 20th century about labeling them as Asian, and thus ineligible for citizenship. Some Syrians, Afghans and Arabs have occasionally been denied naturalization due to not being white. Armenians, were classified by the courts as white with help from the testimony of anthropologist Franz Boas.

Jews in America have maintained a complex relationship to 'whiteness'. According to one source—although not supported by census records of the period which recorded all Jews as white—Jews in America did not become accepted as "white" until the 1940s. As early as 1911, anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1952) purported in The Mind of Primitive Man, that "no real biological chasm separated recent immigrants from Mayflower descendants." Therefore claims of difference were based on prejudice, whether religious or ethno-cultural, and had no biological basis.

The Naturalization Act of 1790 restricted naturalized American citizenship to whites. However, United States v. Wong Kim Ark in 1898 confirmed citizenship by birth in the US regardless of race. As a result, in the early 20th century many new arrivals with origins in the Far East petitioned the courts to be legally classified as white, resulting in the existence of many United States Supreme Court rulings on their "Whiteness". In 1922, the court case Takao Ozawa v. United States deemed Japanese to be part of the Mongoloid race, and thus non-white. Less than a year later, the US Supreme Court also concluded that South Asians are legally non-white, even though a proportion of anthropologists classified many Indians (especially from the Northern regions of the India) as Caucasian, instead declaring that whiteness should be based on "the common understanding of the white man". Associate Justice George Sutherland found that, while Third, an Asian Indian, may have had "purity of Aryan blood" due to having "high caste" status and being "born in Punjab" he was not Caucasian in the "common understanding", so he could not be included in the "statutory category as white persons". Associate Justice George Sutherland wrote in his summary:

"The eligibility of this applicant for citizenship is based on the sole fact that he is of high caste Hindu stock, born in Punjab, one of the extreme northwestern districts of India, and classified by certain scientific authorities as of the Caucasian or Aryan race...In the Punjab and Rajputana, while the invaders seem to have met with more success in the effort to preserve their racial purity, intermarriages did occur producing an intermingling of the two and destroying to a greater or less degree the purity of the “Aryan” blood. Thus, in Hindustan [India] and Berar [town in India] there was such an intermixture of the “Aryan” invader with the dark-skinned Dravidian.

[Nonetheless], in Jim Crow era Mississippi, however, Chinese American children were allowed to attend white-only schools and universities, rather than attend black-only schools, and some of their parents became members of the infamous Mississippi "White Citizens' Council" who enforced policies of racial segregation.

Owing to the one-drop theory in the United States, Americans with any known African ancestry, no matter how slight, have often been categorized as black. Those of Hispanic, Middle Eastern or
North African heritage have been an exception, in that those who look European, or occasionally even those appearing mixed, are not labeled "black" though they may have some sub-Saharan African ancestry, perhaps even acknowledging it.

REFERENCES


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36. US Population in the 1930 Census by Race


49. Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab American Experience

50. How the U.S. Courts Established the White Race

51. #& RACE - The Power of an Illusion . Go Deeper | PBS


70. Somewhere Between White and Black: The Chinese in Mississippi | Asian American History | OAH Magazine of History

71. Mississippi Chinese - Delta history - Bobby Joe Moon

(Extracted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definitions_of_whiteness_in_the_United_States)

WHITE ETHNICS CATEGORIZED AS INFERIOR RACES?

William Z. Ripley The Races of Europe (1899)[24] created a tripartite model that was later popularised by Madison Grant. It divided Europeans into three main subcategories: Teutonic, Alpine and Mediterranean

2. European Racial Types according to Ripley[25]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head</th>
<th>Face</th>
<th>Hair</th>
<th>Eyes</th>
<th>Stature</th>
<th>Nose</th>
<th>Synonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

[24] Ripley, William Z. The Races of Europe. 1899
[25] Ripley, William Z. The Races of Europe. 1899
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Head Shape</th>
<th>Hair Color</th>
<th>Eye Color</th>
<th>Skin Color</th>
<th>Body Type</th>
<th>Stratum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine (Celtic)</td>
<td>Round</td>
<td>Light chestnut</td>
<td>Hazel, gray</td>
<td>Medium, stocky</td>
<td>Variable; rather broad; heavy</td>
<td>Occidental (Deniker), Homo Alpinus (Lapouge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Dark brown or black</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Medium, slender</td>
<td>Variable; narrow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teutonic [Nordic]</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Very light</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Tall</td>
<td>Narrow; aquiline</td>
<td>Nordic (Deniker), Homo Europaeus (Lapouge)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Germany, Britain and the USA, it became common for white supremacists to promote the merits of the blond, blue-eyed Nordic race as the most advanced of human population groups: the "master race". Southern/Eastern Europeans were deemed to be inferior, an argument that dated back to Arthur de Gobineau’s Nordicist claims that racial mixing was responsible for the decline of the Roman Empire.\(^{[26]}\)


Madison Grant was the leader of the eugenics movement in the United States. He popularized the infamous notions that the blond-haired, blue-eyed Nordics were the “master race” and that the state should eliminate members of inferior races who were of no value to the community. (Spiro 2008)

Grant’s behind-the-scenes machinations convinced Congress to enact the immigration restriction legislation of the 1920s, and his influence led many states to ban interracial marriage and sterilize thousands of “unworthy” citizens. (Spiro 2008)


President Coolidge signs the 1924 immigration act, restricting non Northern European immigration. John J. Pershing is on the President's right.

Eugenicist Madison Grant, in his 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race, or the Racial Basis of European History*, argued that the Nordic race had been responsible for most of humanity's great achievements, and admixture was "race suicide" and unless eugenic policies were enacted, the Nordic race would be supplanted by inferior races. Future president Calvin Coolidge agreed, stating "Biological laws tell us that certain divergent people will not mix or blend. The Nordics propagate themselves successfully. With other races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides."[54]

The *Immigration Act of 1924* was signed into law by President Coolidge. This was designed to reduce the number of immigrants from Southern Europe and Russia, [and] exclude Asian immigrants altogether . . . .

Madison Grant's book was the first non-German book to be translated and published by the Nazi Reich press, and Grant proudly displayed to his friends a letter from Hitler claiming that the book was "his Bible."[64][65] The Nazi state used such ideas about the differences between European races as part of their various discriminatory and coercive policies which culminated in the Holocaust. Ironically, in Grant's first edition of his popular book, he classified the Germans as being primarily Nordic, but in his second edition, published after the USA had entered World War I, he had re-classified the now enemy power as being dominated by "inferior" Alpines.

54. Coolidge, Calvin (1921). "Whose Country is This?". *Good Housekeeping*: 14