

Charles Mills, "Revisionist Ontologies: Theorizing White Supremacy" from Blackness Visible [outlining only pages 99-105, not whole article]

99: Global White Supremacy as a Political System: Replies to Objections
CM thinks "global white supremacy" (GWS) is a helpful name for a large political/economic/social system, analogous to "patriarchy" (male domination of women), democracy, communism, capitalism. But he considers objections that can be brought to this idea and this terminology. Then he answers each of these objections.

1. 99: we already have a term for that system: "colonial capitalism," or "imperialism," which seem to refer to the same system as "global white supremacy."

Answer:

- a. These terms do not usually refer to the internal politics (and relations of racial domination and advantage) inside "white settler states" (US, South Africa, Australia)
- b. This terminology is generally understood to refer to the period of formal colonial rule, which is now over; but CM thinks global white supremacy still exists.
- c. colonial capitalism and imperialism do not highlight the racial dimension of these systems sufficiently enough; tendency to see these systems in primarily economic terms [not clear if this is a problem for the terminology itself, or for the Marxist analysis of those systems]

2. 99-100: Isn't "racism" or "white racism" an appropriate name for GWS?

Answer:

- a. term "racism" is too fuzzy
- b. In particular it is sometimes used to refer to attitudes, values, and ideas ("ideational" sense); or alternatively to a political-economic structure. In former understanding it does not express the idea of "GWS," so "GWS" better captures the systemic dimension than does "racism."

3. 100: To speak of white supremacy as a system implies it is autonomous from (independent from) other variables

answer:

- a. No it doesn't. Not saying that white supremacy is the only thing going on in the world. It exists alongside and interwoven with other systems such as capitalism and patriarchy. Point of naming it as a system is to say that the racial dimension cannot be reduced to any of the other large systemic variables.

4. 101: Use of GWS terminology implies that white supremacy is uniform in different countries and regions, and historically unchanging

answer:

- a. No it doesn't. white supremacy takes different forms geographically and historically (slavery, enclosure on reservations, colonial rule, segregation). These are all different but all of them privilege whites.
- b. would be helpful to have historical periodization, esp between formal/de jure white supremacy and de facto white supremacy

5. Even if GWS existed, that was in the past, not present

answer:

- a. 102: Even if it did no longer exist, its demise would have been so recent (post-Segregation in US, post-colonial independence of Asian and African countries in '50's and

early '60's) that it would be bound to affect the present "though institutional momentum and unconscious attitudinal lag."

b. abolition of de jure white supremacy/racial subordination does not make whites relinquish privileges they had under that system. E.g. independent former colonies still have to operate in world economic system almost entirely dominated by whites. ("So a case can be easily be made that white supremacy continues to exist in a different form, no longer backed by law but maintained through inherited patterns of discrimination, exclusionary racial bonding, cultural stereotyping, and differential white power deriving from consolidated economic privilege.")

6. Objections to "white" in GWS: Some countries in Caribbean and Latin America have "brown" or black rulers.

Answer:

a. Latin American countries have different system of white supremacy, with official national identities as mixed ("mestizaje") and as "racial democracies" masking the preference for whiteness ("blanqueamiento")

b. Even where browns to govern, economic power in those countries is generally in hands of white corporate elite.

7. 103: "Race" is an intellectually faulty concept, associated with discredited views and horrendous practices.

Answer:

a. Race can be a valuable theoretical category without buying into all the false assumptions of the classic view of race. It can be recognized as a political, constructed category.

b. 104: whiteness is also a constructed category. Children of certain phenotype or ancestry have to learn to be white. Some "whites" essentially reject whiteness and recognize and challenge the existence and injustice of GWS.

8. Marxist criticism: idea of GWS ignores class.

Answer:

a. No it doesn't. Can recognize class differences within racial groups, and that for example some blacks are better off than some whites. GWS only says that whites as a group are better off than non-whites as a group. GWS also allows for the view that the white elite benefit more from white supremacy than does the white working class, and indeed that while white workers are privileged over black workers in the current social order, in a nonracial order, they would be better off than they are now. [This is a version of point 3 above.]

9. 105: Concept of "GWS" is too abstract to be useful

answer:

a. Many useful theoretical concepts are abstract, such as "capitalism," "patriarchy," "democracy." They can take very different forms yet share certain core features.

"By virtue of its social-systemic rather than ideational focus, this analysis directs attention to the important thing, which is how racial membership privileges or disadvantages individuals independently of the particular ideas they happen to have. (In that qualified sense, race is objective... White renegades are still privileged...)