



Constructing Race in U.S. Popular Culture

+ Race As Construction

- Oxford English Dictionary: According to various more or less formal systems of classification: any of the major groupings of mankind, having in common distinct physical features or having a similar ethnic background. In early use usually applied to groups of people with obviously distinct physical characteristics such as skin colour, etc. An influential early system was that of J. F. Blumenbach *De Generis Humani Varietati Nativa* (1775), which, on the basis of skin colour and conformation of the head, divided the human species into five races, the American, Caucasian, Ethiopian, Malay, and Mongolian, and assigned them qualitative ranking. A similar division into six was proposed by Goldsmith (cf. quot. 1774). In particular contexts (e.g. former European colonies or areas of the United States) adherents of a theory of race have freq. applied only a simple two-term distinction (such as ‘black’ and ‘white’).
- Now frequently used more generally to denote groups of different cultural or ethnic origin. In recent years, the associations of *race* with the ideologies and theories that grew out of the work of 19th-cent. anthropologists and physiologists has led to the word often being avoided with reference to specific ethnic groups. Although it is still used in general contexts, it is now often replaced by terms such as *people(s)*, *community*, etc.

+ But...

- Even though it is a culturally constructed category, people's perceived race influences their everyday experiences.
- Have you ever been treated in a certain way by others because of your perceived race?





- Because race is a construction, its meanings shift over time and we have some power over in those changes.
- We may never be able to change our skin color, but we can challenge stereotypes that dictate what our skin color means.



9. What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↴

Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian

Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro

Filipino Vietnamese Samoan

Other Asian — *Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.* ↴

Other Pacific Islander — *Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.* ↴

Some other race — *Print race.* ↴

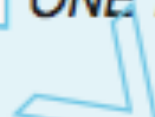


Changing social constructions is not easy...



6. What is Person 1's sex? Mark ONE box.

Male Female





Traditional racial categories are in a state of flux.

More and more people are choosing to adopt a “mixed race” identity.

President Obama chose to identify himself as “Black, African Am, or Negro” but he could have chosen mixed race as well.





WHO ARE YOU?

Take a few minutes to write out your answer...



Who are you?



- Why did you answer this question the way you did? What's most important to you about your identity? Why?
- Cultural identity dictates what we think, feel, desire ... your ethnic and cultural background impacts the way you see the world. How does your cultural identity impact your worldview?



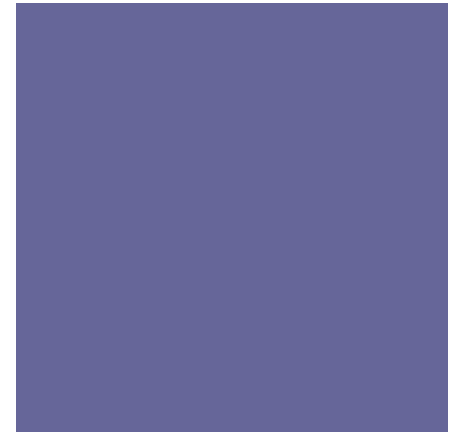
Racial Attitudes in U.S. Popular Culture

Race is still a particularly important category of American identity.



Our assumptions about race are shaped by representation in American entertainment

These stereotypes influence the way we perceive ourselves and each other.





For example, African-Americans have often been represented as one of several stock characters in popular culture

This originated from minstrel shows, a type of entertainment 'variety show' wherein the performers wore blackface make-up. Popular after Civil War, declined in popularity before turn of century though continued to exist. Minstrel portrayals of black people as ignorant, lazy, and buffoonish is now regarded as highly offensive.





Black Female Stock Characters



■ Mammy

- Matronly, devoted to Southern family values, often cares for the white family over her own, asexual.

■ Tragic Mulatto

- A tragic figure who often passes as white and is then punished when they or others discover that they have black heritage

■ Temptress

- Typically mulatto, sexually aggressive, promiscuous, desirable



Racial Stock Characters in Contemporary Popular Culture?



What racial stereotypes do you see in popular culture today?

- Take notes on the racial stereotypes present in this music video.
 - How does this video reinforce stereotypes?
 - How does it challenge stereotypes?
- “[Humble](#)” (explicit)