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Race Theory Midterm
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The study of race is complicated for a variety of reasons. The most important reason is that the study of race proceeds within systems of domination and subordination and has implications for power relationships within those systems. Another reason that complicates the study of race is multiple theories of race. Within the social sciences there are four major theories of race, and most of these have been modified, revised and expanded. The purpose of this paper is to explain and analyze the dominant theories of race and to try to determine which theory most adequately explains race in the United States. The four theories that will be explained and analyzed are sociobiology, ethnicity or assimilation theory, class theory, and racial formation theory

Sociobiology theory explains race as natural phenomenon determined biologically. ___Graves in his work ___ explains this theory which has historically been called biological determinism. He says that sociobiology theory has three major assumption about race: that genetically determined race categories exist, genetically determined racial characteristics exist, and that there is a natural hierarchy among these genetic groupings (2004: xxix). Graves presents scientific evidences that refutes the biological understanding of race. For example, Graves argues that the mapping of the human genome has shown that, "we all are essentially identical twins at the level of the genome (2004: 2)". Graves conclusively shows that there are no biological racial categories. Therefore, Graves concludes that race is a socially constructed phenomenon not a biological one. But Graves also argues that even though race is a social construction, it is real in its consequences. Even though sociobiology has been refuted, it continues to be important for the study of race, especially for trying to understand race in the United States. This is because sociobiology, or biological determinism, is the common sense understanding of race in the U.S. This point will be developed further when racial formation theory is examined.

Ethnicity or assimilation theory explains race by focusing on the cultural characteristics of racial groups, their differences and antagonisms. This theoretical perspective includes early or orthodox assimilation theory, Gordon's advancement theory, and cultural pluralism theory. Assimilation theory is a general theory, thought by its adherents to be applicable throughout the world, not just in American society. Robert Park , an American sociologist, is considered the "father" of assimilation theory. A central component of assimilation theory is that in all societies there is a dominant culture and that the bonds of racial groups within a given society will inevitably fade as racial groups are assimilated into the dominant culture. .

Park begins by making a distinction between acculturation and assimilation and then develops what he calls the cycle of race relations. Acculturation, for Park, means that a subordinate ethnic group adopts the dominant group's culture, such as clothing, religion, and language. Park supports this idea with the example of blacks who had been brought to America through the

slave trade but had by the end of the civil war, been acculturated into white society. By the middle to late nineteenth century, they were wearing Western style clothing, had adopted Christianity as a religion and were speaking the English as a primary language.

For Park, though, assimilation differs from acculturation because ethnic groups, according to the idea of assimilation, not only adopt the dominant culture, but the dominant culture allows the inclusion of the subordinate group.. Once assimilation is completed the subordinate ethnic group truly absorb the dominant culture s and is absorbed into the dominate culture.. Park gives an example, the assimilation of Eastern German immigrants in the early 1900's They first became acculturated as they learned the dominant language and adopted the cultural practices of the dominant culture. And eventually, Parks argues, they were accepted by the dominant culture and fully assimilated/

Park recognized that the acculturation of black people in the U.S. had not led to assimilation. He theorizeed that this phenomenon results from what he called vertical and horizontal modes of interaction between the subordinate group, blacks, and the dominant group, whites. Parks says, during slavery blacks and whites were in close contact with one another, for example they lived on the same land. However, whites held privilege over blacks, therefore black people wanted to move up in society, so they learned the way or culture of their oppressors. Park coins this type of contact between races as vertical. After the civil war, with the dissolving of the institution of slavery, blacks and whites segregated from each other in their social lives and institutions. This separation resulted in diminished contact between racial groups. Park believes this horizontal interaction slowed blacks acceptence by the dominant culture. Therefore, for Park, blacks represent a group in the U.S. that still need to assimilate.

Park uses the distinction between acculturaltion and assimilation, to develop what he calls the cycle of race relations. This process, according to Parks, takes four inevitable steps that result in the full assimilation of groups into the dominant culture.

1. The first part of the cycle describes the meeting of groups; he labels this contact.
2. The second part of the cycle is the clash between the subordinate and dominate cultures; he labes this competition.
3. The third part of the cycle is accommodation. During accommodation the dominant group takes power and the subordinate groups accept that the dominant culture is both superior to their culture and normal.
4. In the last part of the cycle, assimilation is reached with the acceptance by the dominant groups of the subordinate groups and the merging of the subordinate group into the dominant culture.

Park's assimilation theory, especially his development of the cycle of race relations is problematic in many of its assumptions about _____. That different ethnic groups absorb into the dominant culture in various ways is a main point of concern for other assimilationist

theorists. For example, Jewish Russian's and Irish experienced dissimilar processes of assimilating in the U.S.

In response to the criticisms of Park's theory, Gordon in his major work _____develops incorporation theory. He broadens Park's understanding of assimilation and argues that there are "seven types of assimilation". Gordon claims that his seven levels of assimilation provides theoretical room to explain how diverse groups experience different levels of incorporation, at varying moments. These seven types of integration and adaptation are:

1. cultural
2. structural
3. marital
4. identification
5. attitudes receptional
6. behavioral receptional
7. civic

In Gordon's theory, the subordinate groups adopt the cultural practices, values, and beliefs of the dominant group and they also identify with the more powerful group, an example is the practice of ethnic groups in the U.S. as referring to themselves as "Americans". Next, the dominant group can lower prejudice attitudes and discontinue discriminatory behaviors toward subordinate groups. Then both dominant and subordinate groups determine the acceptance of marrying across ethnic lines, lessening practices of structural segregation, and reducing civil societies built on ethnic solidarity. According to Gordon, these seven areas of assimilation can occur at different moments, in different ways, and in varying combinations.

Gordon's broadening of assimilation theory allows a more flexible understanding of subordinate ethnic groups envelopment into dominant society. Although Gordon's seven levels improves some parts of assimilation theory, for example, the theory became more testable, but it still failed solve all the major problems.

Cultural pluralism argues that the major assimilation theories ignore the influence of subordinate ethnic groups on the culture of dominant society. Cultural pluralism embraces the cultural differences among ethnic groups. . However, __Omi and __Winant point out that cultural pluralism ignores different historical contexts, often blames the victim, and reduces race to only ethnicity [(YEAR:#)]. Similar to traditional assimilation perspective, cultural pluralism also dismisses the power motivation in drawing racial lines.

Class theory points out that assimilation neglects the motivations or interest of creating and maintaining racial divisions, ideologically and structurally. The class paradigm addresses the motivations for defining racial lines, as well as, the origins of racial group conflict. Unlike the ethnicity paradigm, class perspectives view culture as insignificant to racial antagonism. For

class theories, the ultimate root of racial conflict is the struggle for resources. The six main class theories on race are:

1. nation building
2. super exploitive (orthodox Marxism)
3. split labor-market
4. middleman minority
5. national liberation
6. Wilsonian class perspective

All these theories understand class dynamics as the foundation of racial antagonism.

Nation building theory examines race within the context of the emergence of nation-states in Europe whose identities, it claims, are based significantly on ethnicity. It focuses on how race has been used historically to establish these national identities. The primary means by which a nation's identity is established, according to this theory, is by labeling the people of another nation as ethnically "other." . The best example of this is the emergence of the French nation and a French nation identity that was primarily ethnic in the late middle ages and early modernity through its identification of the British and Germans as ethnically "other." Critics of this theory argue that it is historically specific and cannot be generalized to other times and places.

Super exploitive theory, or orthodox Marxism, explains racial antagonism as a result of an owner class (bourgeoisie) creating conflict between different ethnic groups of wage laborers (proletariat) to maintain low costs of labor. Split labor-market theory broadens the super exploitive understanding of racial conflict to include the role of a higher wage labor groups. According to this theory, the higher wage labor groups also possesses the power to take away resources from a lower wage labor group. In this theory, the owner class uses an ethnically defined group to keep high wage laborers in check. However, split labor-market theory recognizes the influence that ethnically determined high wage labor groups exert on beliefs about race, discrimination, political interest, and access to economic resources.

A further revision of orthodox Marxist theory is middleman minority theory which argues that within capitalism the ownership class desires to minimize contact with the laborers. According to this theory, the desire for minimizing contact has resulted in the need for a middleman (petite bourgeoisie). This middleman class then becomes the source of conflict, because both the owners and the laborers demonstrate antagonism toward the middle group. According to this theory, characteristics that tend to define a middleman minority are the following:

1. they are sojourners
2. they come from outside of the dominate society
3. they are concentrated in low investment markets
4. they rely on high levels of trust in family or kinship networks

Sojourners typically are people who intend to save a lot of money and return to their home country, so their work often is temporary. Middleman minorities have high levels of solidarity and economic success, but consequently experience stereotypes and prejudice.

National liberation theory refers to internal colonization. Edna Bonacich in her work " describes this class theory as, "Partly growing out of the notion that some national groups are particularly oppressed or occupy a unique class position in world capitalism, is a concern for movements of national liberation." Omi and Winant recognize that this situates race central in analysis, but also shows the focus on specific racial groups as too narrow

__Wilson developed what he believed was a more flexible theory on race. This theory is called the Wilsonian class theory and it is a stratification theory of race. His thesis is that economic circumstances determine racial lines. Wilson focuses on race in the United States and argues that no one class theory explains race relations, but that the relationship between race and capitalism in the U.S. has changed over time. Wilson breaks the U.S. into three major historical epochs:

1. pre-industrial
2. industrial
3. modern

In pre-industrial and industrial periods, Wilson's analysis focuses on the regions of the South and the North. During the pre-industrial stage, the North experienced diversification, industrialization, and urbanization. According to Wilson, split labor-market theory offers the best analysis of race relations for this time and region. He makes this claim because higher and lower wage labor groups established themselves during this time. He supports this claim by

In contrast, Wilson argues the South at this time fits better with an orthodox Marxian perspective, because the plantation system created such an elite owning class that higher wage labor had insignificant power to define racial lines. The low wage labor market was composed of poor whites and black slaves, or tenant farmers. Race was used by the elite class of plantation owners to control poor whites by giving them slightly more economically and a higher status identity, "whiteness." According to Wilson, during the industrial period, split labor market theory still best explains race relationships in the North while super-exploitation still best explains race relations in the South.

Wilson believes that in the modern period of capitalism that race has become less of a predictor of class position, comparatively, in the U.S. Wilson points to the historical experiences and ideology of race and class as an explanation for such a large black underclass that cannot obtain stable forms of employment. Omi and Winant critique Wilson and class theories by recognizing that they all neglect to place race as central to their theories.

Racial formation theory understands race as central to U.S. politics and everyday life. This theory focuses on the social realities of race, and the structural consequences of hegemonic racial beliefs. In the U.S., according to this theory, the overall shape of racial formation defines racial boundaries along biological and essentialist lines of understanding. The state administers these boundaries, in what Omi and Winant call the "racial state". The form, or overall structure, can change its shape, but these modifications result from "racial projects".

Racial projects are events, programs, policies, or patterns of interactions with racialized consequences. These racial projects set up the construction of race boundaries, as well as distribute resources unequally along racial lines. Examples of this are housing and self-esteem. Racial projects are not necessarily intentional, but they reflect dominant social beliefs, which usually mean that they reproduce "whiteness." An example of this is the ways in which magnet programs in public schools reproduce the value of "whiteness" as "giftedness." Despite the legal efforts of the civil rights movements of the 1960's, racial projects of "gifted" programs in school maintain white privilege in schools. An analysis of so called "gifted" programs shows that the majority of those in the programs are white.

Hegemony is a central concept of racial formation theory. Hegemony, according to this theory, is the power of a dominant or elite group to assert its values and beliefs throughout society. . Hegemonic beliefs about race take the form of common sense; they do not need to be imposed by the state and people do not need to be coerced to accept them. They circulate through society and people assume them through socialization. As Graves's states, "Most Americans still believe in the concept of race the way they believe in the law of gravity. They believe in it without even knowing what it is they believe [(YEAR:#)]." Hegemonic normativity is "whiteness", so everything about race in the U.S. measures itself against white, as if it is morally correct. For example, still today people commonly understand race as biological and hierarchical. Despite significant scientific evidence against such beliefs because of the influence of the racial state these beliefs remain widespread in the U.S. today.

Omi and Winant provide important critique against the major paradigms of race theory. Ethnicity paradigm, assimilation and cultural pluralism, as well as class theories generalize: racial inequality, political disentrancement, institutional segregation and cultural domination. These paradigms also do not recognize race as central to everyday life experiences and U.S. power and politics. The intent of racial formation theory is to reconcile all of the critiques that major paradigms of race theory fail to address. It seems, that racial formation is the most effective and dynamic paradigm for analyzing race in the U.S.

ASSIMILATION, is still main way social scientist understand race in US

. Assimilationist, specifically Park the credited "father" of this paradigm, understands this absorption of difference as occurring only one way. In Park's understanding, ethnic groups cannot un-assimilate.

The subordinate group determines cultural and identification assimilation. Then the dominant group appropriates the levels of attitude and behavioral. Both subordinate and dominant groups determine the areas of marital, structural, and civic assimilation.

Omi and Winant show that this perspective simply reduces notions of race to individual pathologies.