

# RACE AND RACISM

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# Structure of the class

1. Where the idea of 'race' comes from.
2. The social construction explanation
3. Issues with social constructionism
4. Racial realism
5. Modern racism
6. Racism as about structures and ideologies

European discussion of 'man'

Monogenism versus polygenism

From 1600s

# The origin of the idea of 'race'

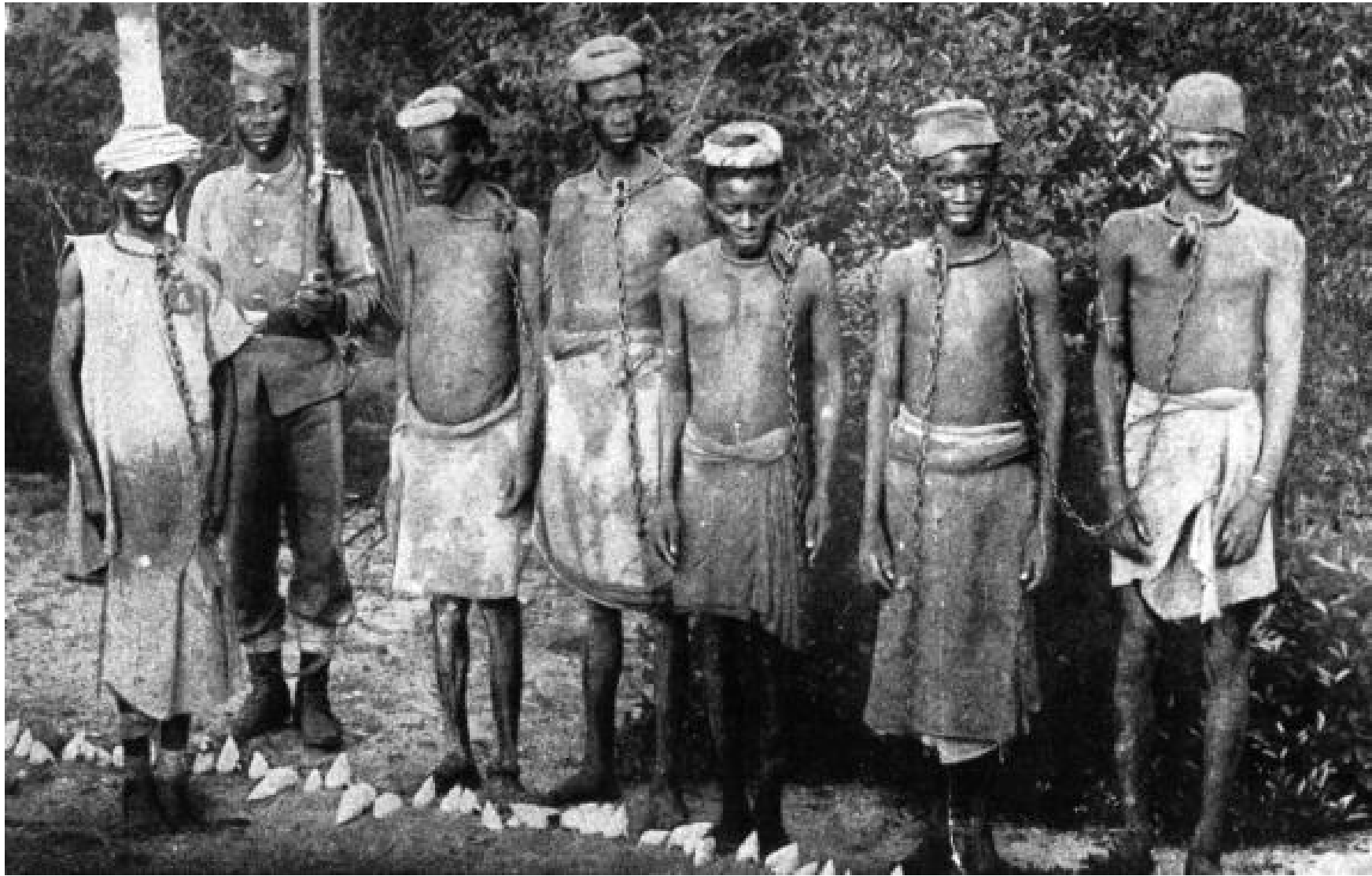
Smedley (2007: 2): "our 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas and beliefs about races did not exist in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Race originated as a folk idea and ideology about human differences; it was a social invention, not a product of science." She explains that when the first Africans arrived in the north America in 1619 were not initially perceived as slaves: "They were assimilated into the colony as laborers under varying contracts like those of Europeans... They exercised the same rights as propertied Europeans.... Edmund Morgan wrote.... 'Black men and white serving the same master worked, ate and slept together, and together shared in escapades, escapes, and punishments."





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# The South African Version

Race enters the discourse formally in late 1800s.

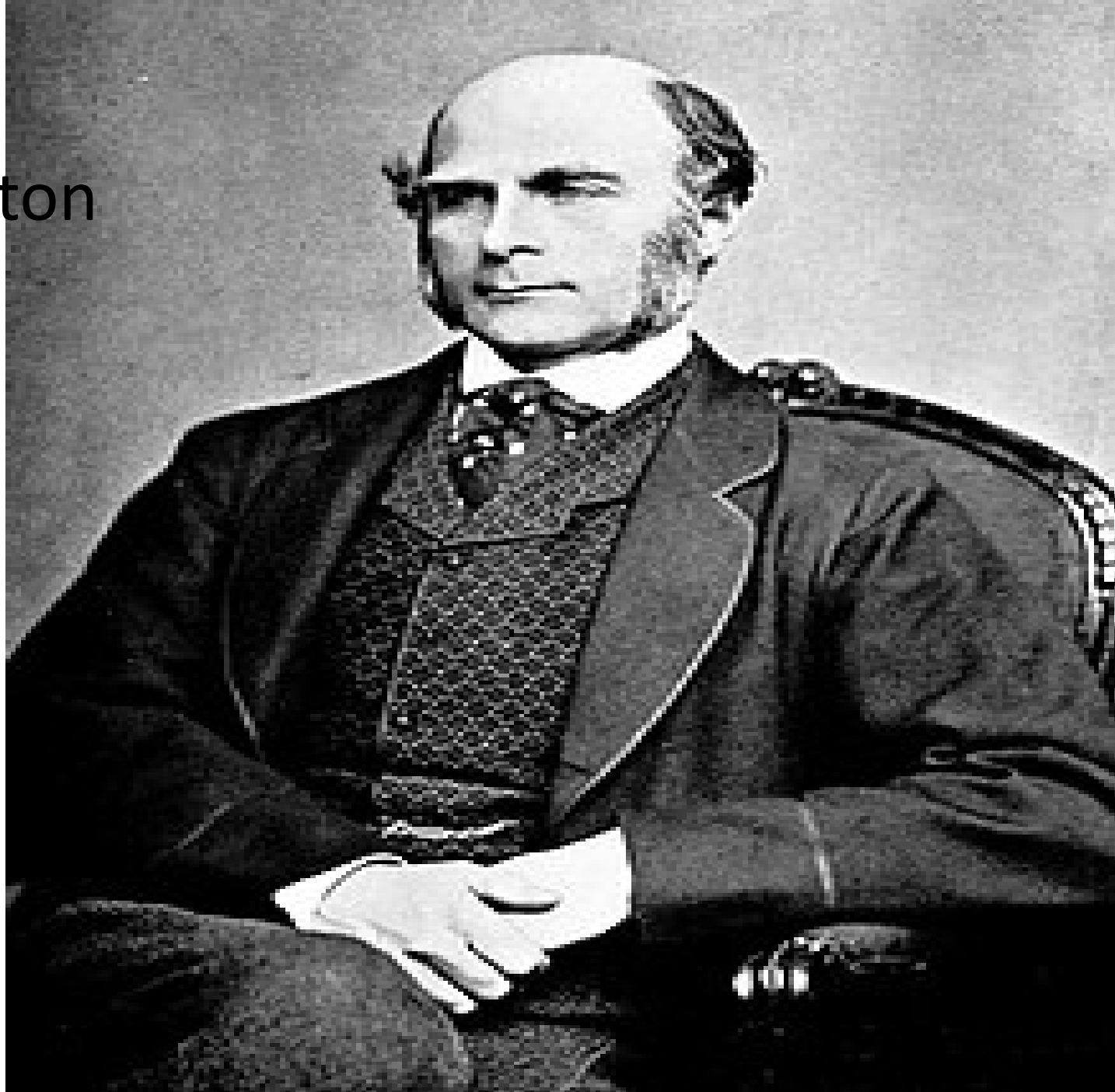
Before that, during period of slavery up until 1834, ideas of difference were a mixture of religion, colour and culture.

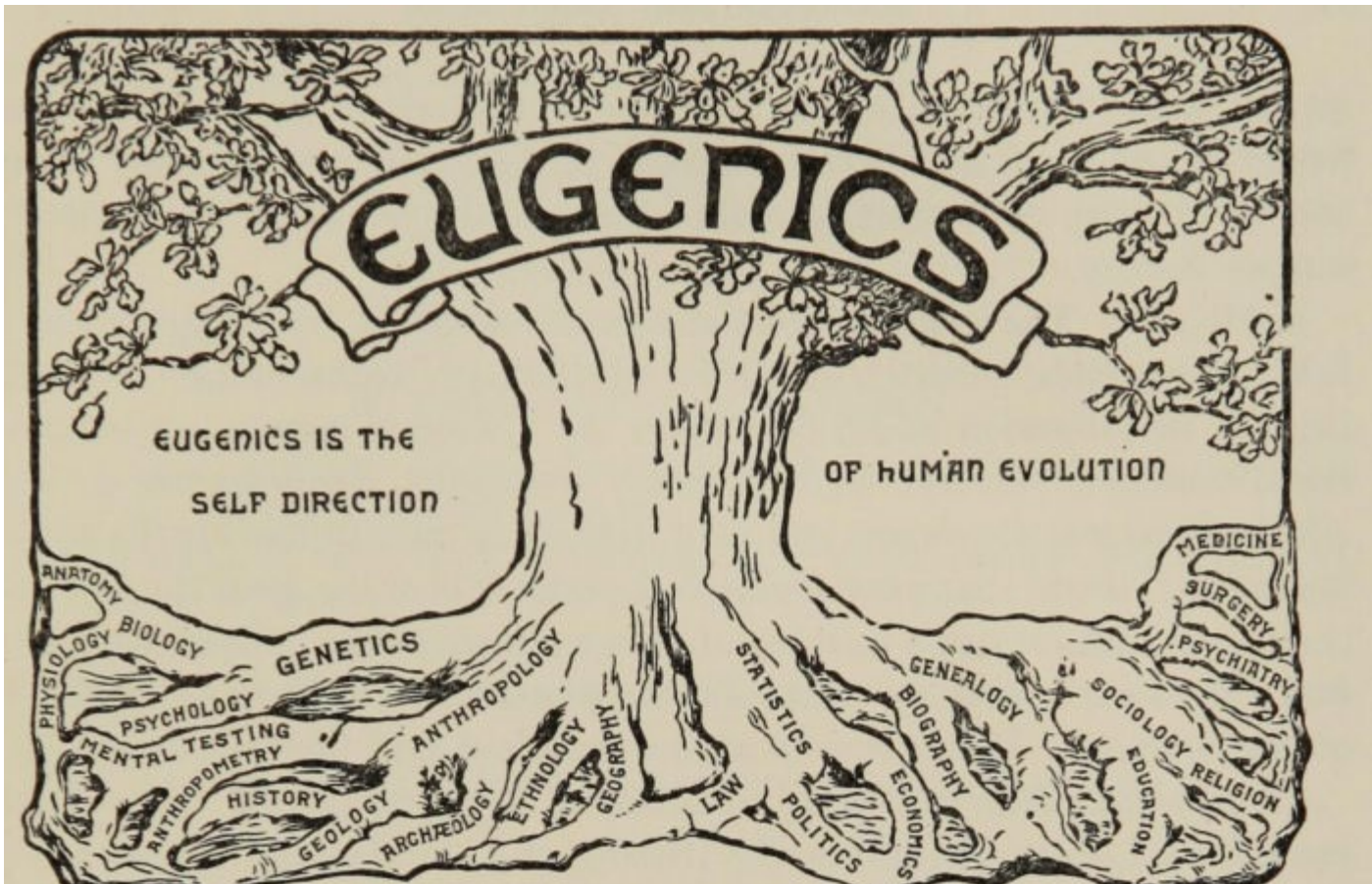
Terms used were fluid and variable. Term 'coloured' enters South Africa from the USA in 1820s.

Idea of 'race' hardens with the moment of Empire after 1886.



Francis Galton



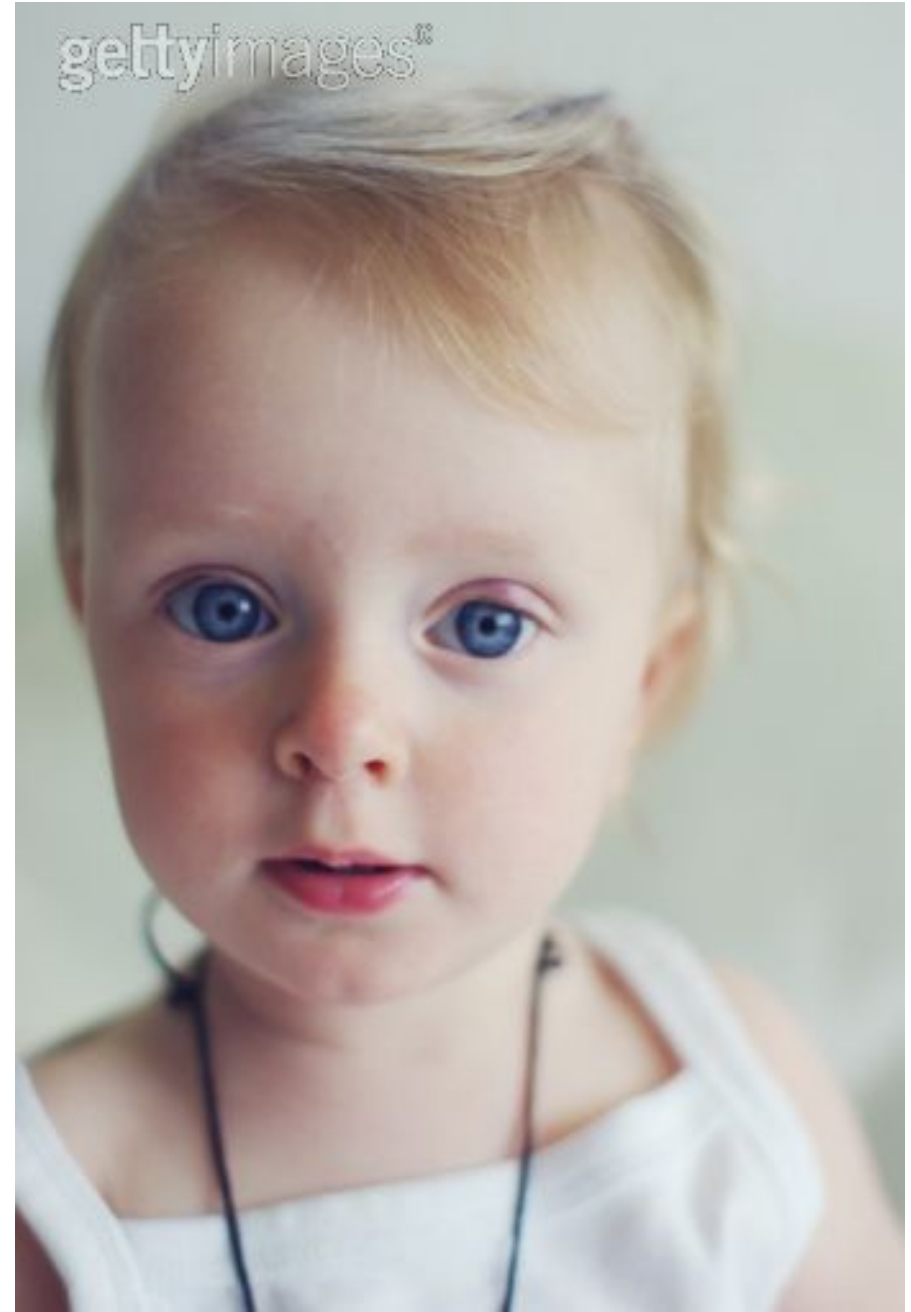


**Caucasion:**

**Skull: Dolicephalic(Long-Head),High forehead,Little supraorbital development.**

**Face: Mainly Leptoprosopic(Narrow)Sometimes Meso- or even Euryprosopic, Neither Facial nor alveolar prognathism occurs except among some archaic peoples.**

**Nose:Long,narrow,high in both root and bridge.**



**Skull: High incidence of Brachycephaly(Short Round Head) American Indians while Mongoloid are often Dolicephalic. Foreheads slightly lower than that of the Caucasoid. No Supraorbital development.**

**Face: Wide and short, projecting cheek bones, Prognathism rare. Shovel shaped incisors common especialy in Asia.**

**Nose: Mesorine(Low and Broad in both root and bridge.**



**Negroid:**

**Skull: usually Dolicephalic, a small minority are Brachycephalic.**

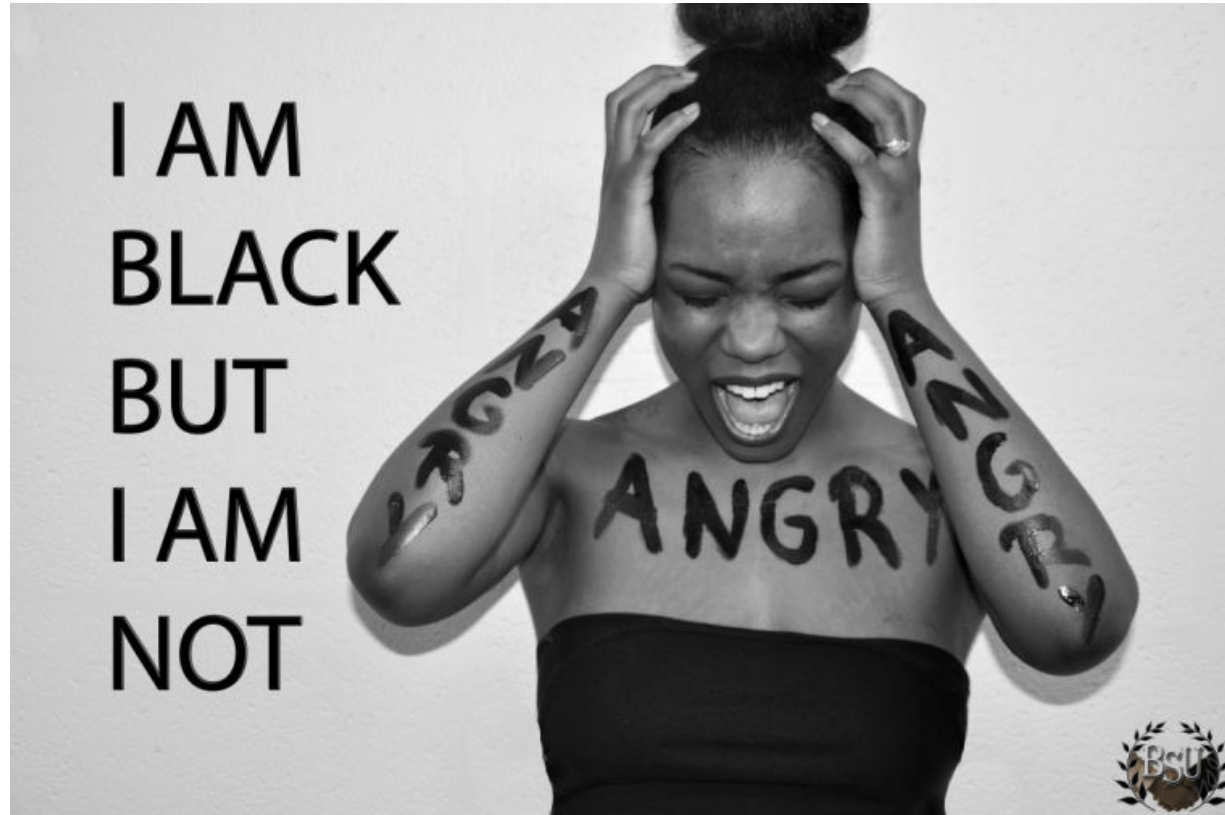
**Forehead most often high, little supraorbital development.**

**Face: Leproscopic (to a much lesser degree than the Caucasion), Prognathism common in most Negro populations.**

**Nose: Low & broad in root and bridge with characteristic depression at root.**

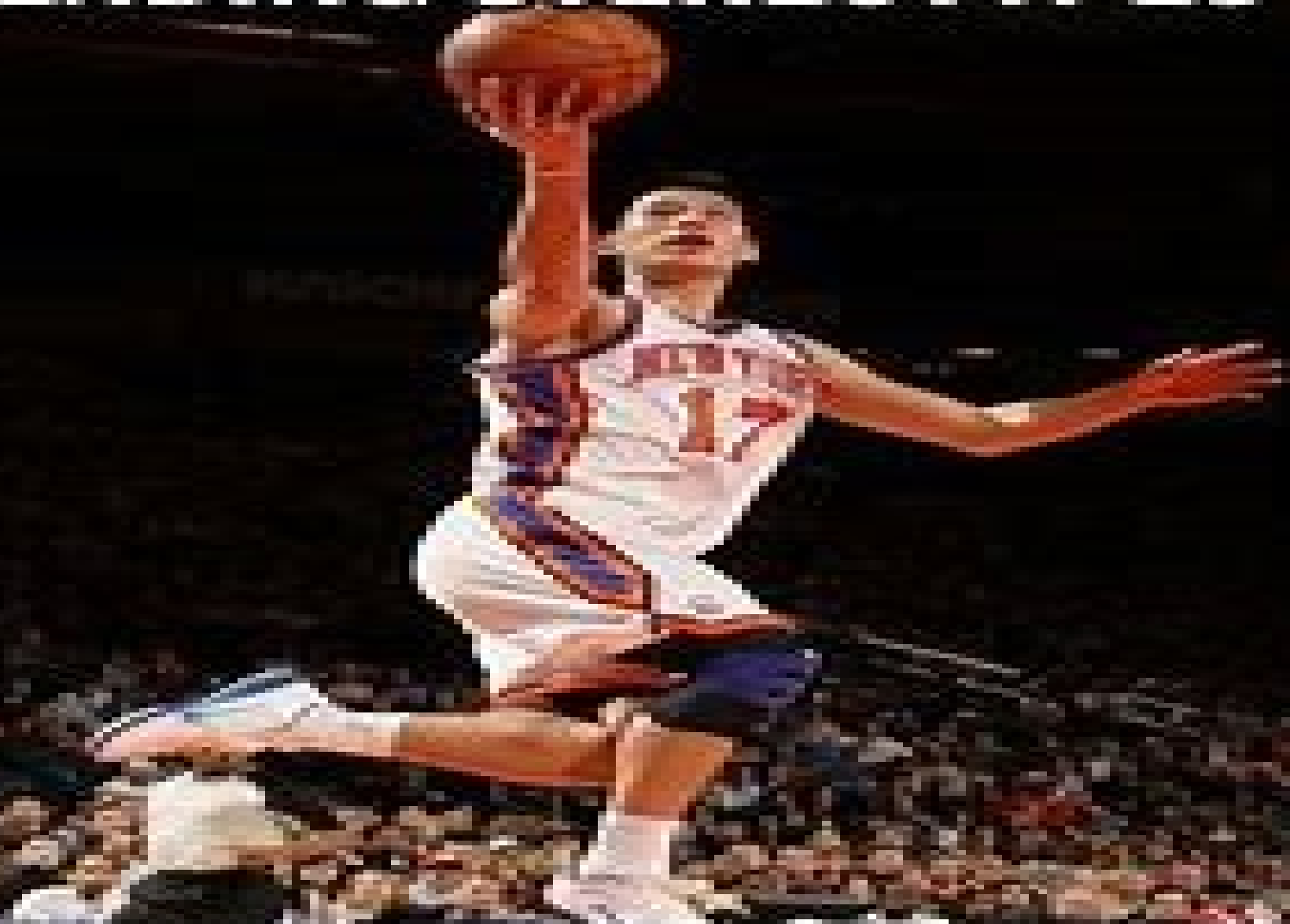






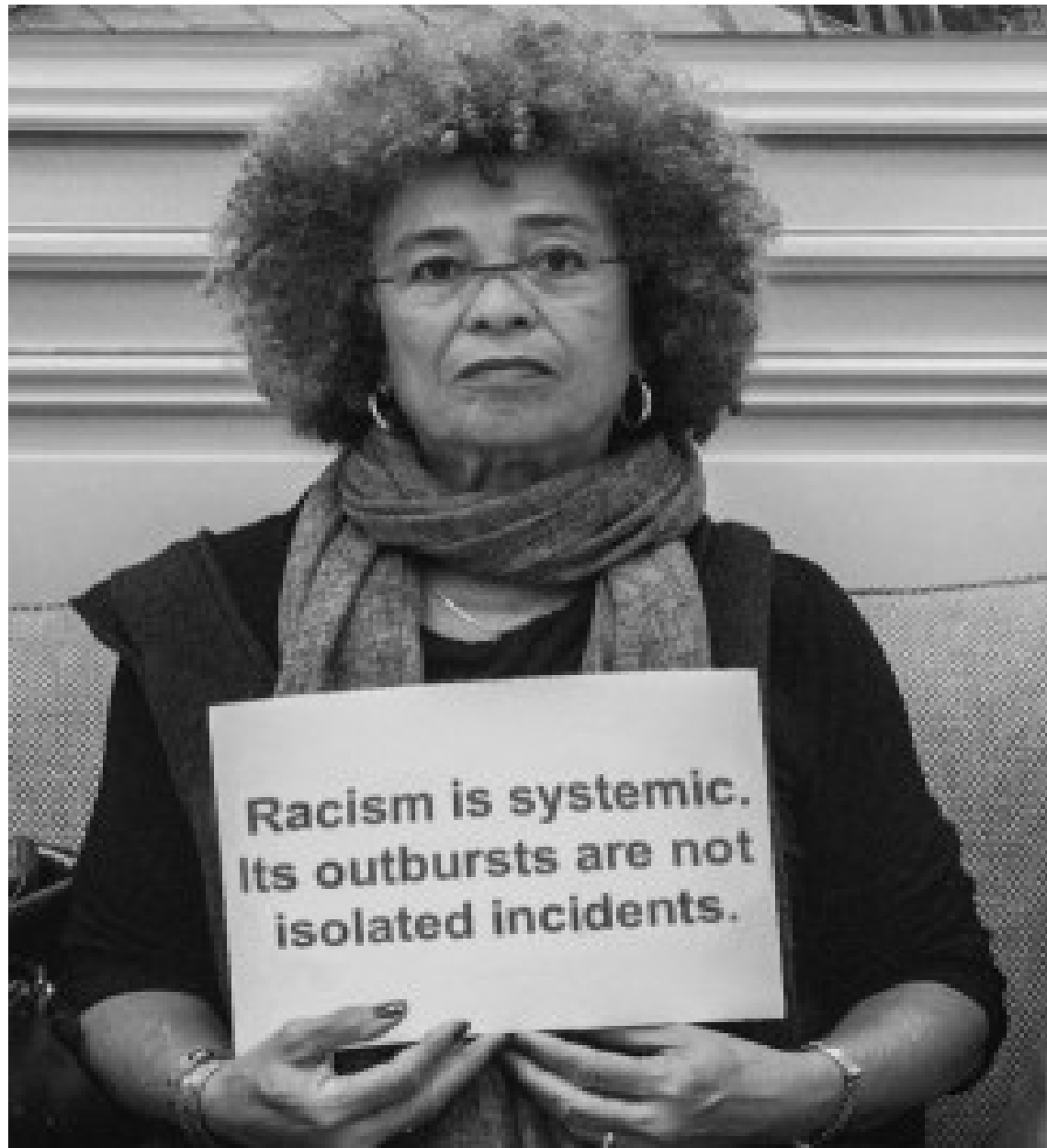
**Making of  
racial  
discourse,  
racialisation**

ENDING STEREOTYPES



ASIAN CAN DRIVE





**Racism is systemic.  
Its outbursts are not  
isolated incidents.**

# The challenge to racial orthodoxy

Olive Schreiner -1900

Lancelot Hogben – 1929

Julian Huxley and Alfred Haddon – 1935

Gunnar Myrdal - 1944

Ashley Montagu – 1950

Ben Kies - 1953

Richard Lewontin - 1972

Glen Gould - 1981

# UNESCO 1950



- In 1950, [UNESCO](#) suggested in [The Race Question](#) – a statement signed by 21 scholars such as [Ashley Montagu](#), [Claude Lévi-Strauss](#), [Gunnar Myrdal](#), [Julian Huxley](#), etc. – to "drop the term *race* altogether and instead speak of [ethnic groups](#)". The statement condemned [scientific racism](#) theories that had played a role in [the Holocaust](#). It aimed both at debunking scientific racist theories, by popularizing modern knowledge concerning "the race question", and morally condemned racism as contrary to the philosophy of the [Enlightenment](#) and its assumption of [equal rights](#) for all. Along with Myrdal's [An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy](#) (1944), [The Race Question](#) influenced the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court [desegregation](#) decision in "[Brown v. Board of Education](#)."<sup>[86]</sup> Also, in 1950, the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) was adopted, which was widely used on racial discrimination issues.<sup>[87]</sup>

# Social Constructionism

Most social scientists agree now that 'race' is a social construction, a thing that human beings have made up about each other. Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003:2-3) argue that both 'race' and nature are what they call historical artefacts, "assemblages of material, discourse, and practice irreducible to a universal essence.... Nature appears to precede history, even as it wipes away the historical traces of its own fashioning."

## The American Anthropological Association issued its *American Anthropological Association Statement on 'Race'* - 1997

The statement asserted that

(w)ith the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century... it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated biologically distinct groups. Evidence from the analysis of genetics (eg DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94% lies *within so-called racial groups*.... There is greater variation within 'racial' groups than between them.... (a)nd because physical traits are inherited independently of one another, knowing the range of one trait does not predict the presence of others. For example, skin color varies largely from light in the temperate zones in the north to dark in the tropical areas in the south; its intensity is not related to nose shape or hair texture” (

# STANFORD SCIENTISTS 2008

- i). “(w)e believe that there is no scientific basis for any claim that the pattern of human genetic variation supports hierarchically organized categories of race and ethnicity” (ibid: para 3).
- ii). “We recognize that individuals of two different geographically defined human populations are more likely to differ at any given site in the genome than are two individuals of the same geographically defined population” (ibid: para 5).
- iii). “We discourage the use of race as a proxy for biological similarity and support efforts to minimize the use of the categories of race in clinical medicine, maintaining focus on the individual rather than the group”

# Racialisation and racial ordering

Goldberg (1993: 202) - if “premodernity lacked any conception of the differences between human beings as racial, modernity comes increasingly to be defined by and through race.... By the late nineteenth century,... Disraeli could declare without fanfare ‘All is race’. In three and a half centuries the world had become a dramatically different place, and a central strand of that difference was the growing impression that ‘race’ made upon notions of human self-identity, and upon identification, both human and animal.”

# Arbitrary idea

The results that flow from this – conventional wisdoms, ‘truths’, beliefs – as can be seen around the world, are approaches to ‘race’ which depend entirely on what is going in a society at a particular time. ‘Race’ emerges from this as a fluid, if not arbitrary, concept. So, as in South Africa during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particular groups of people are included in the category of ‘European’ or ‘white’ as circumstances necessitate.



# How 'race' works

Deconstructionist analyses have not managed to supplant racial biology as an explanation of how 'race' works. Racial biology remains stealthily and seductively on the discursive limits of our social imaginations, even for many of us in the academy. It has been subsumed without losing any of its essential biological features in a range of *alibi* concepts – ethnicity, nationality, culture and community. These concepts come, regularly, to do the work of 'race'.

# 'Race' as identity

An individual's sense of having their identity defined by belonging to a particular race or ethnic group. The strength of such identity is dependent on how much he or she has processed and internalized the sociological, political and other contextual factors within that group.

How the social construction has been internalized, how ideas of 'looks', hair, physiognomy have been taken on board as markers of belonging.

# 'Race' as belonging

Confusion about what is 'authentically' you –  
embodiment of culture



Ta-Nehisi Coates “The entire narrative of this country argues against the truth of who you are.... They made us into a race. We made ourselves into a people.”

# Some confusions

Race is not singular. Rather, it weaves together ideas from biology, culture, nationalism and religion to make inferences about whole populations. It is first and foremost a technique for the management of human difference that has been used by states, governments and institutions, such as the police, education, healthcare and welfare, to organise and demarcate between people.

# Some caveats

Social constructionists generally do not explain the durable, persistent and steadfast attachment to the 'race' idea that one sees in public discourse, official policy scripts. They do not account for its deployment, almost universally, as a category of social analysis in academic writing. What one has instead in academic engagements with it, is disavowal of the idea through the stratagem of something like 'it is recognised that the use of these terms is unacceptable'. But then, without irony, the idea is not only rehabilitated but completely reified: 'white people do x, y and z, and black people manifest the following'.

Yes-no, perhaps-perhaps not

Bonilla-Silva (2014:8) says of these people that “writers in this group then (after disavowal) proceed to discuss ‘racial’ differences in academic achievement, crime, and SAT scores as if they were truly racial.” The complexity of the manoeuvre, as a reflection of just where we are as individuals and groups in the time and space of the modern, is, I want to argue, symptomatic of the precarity of modernity and its identity compulsions.

# Racial realism

Xolela Mangcu (2012) and Mabogo More (2017) and in the United States the cultural theorist WJT Mitchell (2012), the author of *Seeing Through Race*. I concentrate on the work of Mitchell. He develops the most thorough argument, ultimately drawing on Lacan, for the necessity of 'race' as a framework for social analysis. Mangcu and More's arguments are important but essentially concentrate on the social politics surrounding anti-black racism. They do not work with or explicate the concept of 'race' itself. Mitchell holds on to the idea of 'race', even as he acknowledges its socially constructed nature. His version of 'racial realism' takes the position that the social constructionist position is naïve and fails to understand the materiality of 'race'.

# Redemptive Realism

Justice here is the demand for the full and unconditional acceptance of blackness. At its theoretical core is the argument that white supremacy is so pervasive and so contaminated that abandoning the demand for black recognition and respect, *qua black*, is at best politically naïve and at worst utterly reactionary. The demand is that white systems of meaning have to acknowledge their essential disregard for blackness. Blackness and its validation in this struggle is a legitimate political project simply because of how white supremacy is constituted. Not recognising the 'realness' of the black body and its intrinsic statement of 'black worth' is, in the struggle for emancipation, against this historical backdrop, not recognising the nature of this supremacy



# WJT Mitchell

“The truth is (against this understanding of white supremacy as the pervasive medium) that there is *nothing* (his emphasis) in the world, or in language, that can do all that we ask race to do for us.”

“who exactly is freed by the post-racial discourse and the abandonment of race as a concept?”

# 'Race' is a medium - Mitchell

requires careful description and analysis.... One might find a way to complete Du Bois' incomplete argument by understanding that it was always driven by a desire to affirm race while negating and opposing racism, a desire that could only be articulated as an endless vacillation between the categories of science and the socio-historical, between nature and culture. Du Bois's whole intellectual career... could then be seen as a heroic attempt to *mediate* (his emphasis) these antinomies.

# A medium - Mitchell

“We have to ask ourselves, as Cornel West and Ian Hacking do, why race still matters when it has repeatedly been exposed as a pseudoscientific illusion and an ideological mystification. The answer lies in the peculiar position of race in the unavoidable human practice of classifying and discriminating kinds of things.” It has the status, he argues, of a “conceptual icon, a potent, magical, talismanic word that can be uttered in the service of a diagnosis or as a symptom of racism; it can be used as an analytic device or a polemical, rhetorical weapon”

## Medium - Mitchell

The concept of race seems irredeemably corrupted', it remains (he says) curiously too valuable to do without'" (Mitchell, 2012: 22). He concedes that the endeavor he is opening up is a 'precarious' one, but insists on its 'necessity' as a 'framework in which any kind of reality testing could take place' (ibid). There is no other idea in contemporary use which is able to go after the insistent creativity of racism. The post-racial era, he argues has unleashed "an epidemic of racialization, in which a variety of ethnicities and identities are mobilized to satisfy what looks like a structural need for an Other and an enemy" (Mitchell, 2012: 31).

## Medium - Mitchell

Significant for racial realists is accepting 'race' as a mediating concept for engaging with 'the white things in the world' (Mitchell, 2012:38). How it will do this, as Mitchell (2012:17) says, is to constantly "seek, test, and of course, ... reject new evidence." The approach is essentially a methodology.

# A medium - Mitchell

- Racism is a ‘nourished and nurtured passion’ that evolves into a “conception of the world... that may be expressed by statements of reasonable tenor... which can involve even bodily modifications, ... involve(e)... the mind (in)... deep-seated and complete (ways).... As happens in hysteria” (Mitchell, 2012: 19).
- Significant about this cognitive process, says Mitchell, is that “racism is the brute fact, the bodily reality and race is the derivative term, devised either as imaginary cause for the effects of racism or to provide a rational explanation, a realistic picture’ and diagnosis of this mysterious syndrome known as racism” (Mitchell, 2012: 19). ‘Race’, he posits, is not the cause of racism, ‘but its excuse, alibi, explanation, or reaction formation.’

# Race and racism

Aware of the multiple moves that are in play in the argument that is being made. Two are significant. The first is the distinction it makes between 'race' and racism. In Mitchell's explanation they are not the same thing. The second is being clear about the work that the concepts do and what purpose they serve.

With respect to the first, Mitchell works hard, not always successfully, I argue, to prise apart 'race' and racism. He does not succeed, I suggest, simply because of the complexity of the movement between the psychological and the social and the movement from 'race' to racism.

# Race and racism

It is the second move which racial realism makes which is crucial – that which calls our attention to racism. Demanded from us, they insist, is an explanation of how racism works. And here we are, I would like to suggest, in some difficulty. The explanatory schema of theorists such as Lacan are useful. How people learn racism, Mitchell, using Lacan, says



# Learning Racism - Lacan

The Real is the state of absolute nature into which people are born. This is not where 'race' is. The Real is ruptured when people find language. It is as Lacan (Fellugia,2002) says, impossible to express in language. When people find language – words – they begin to develop into the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Imaginary is where the individual expresses his or her demand. Demands, says Lacan, are unsatisfiable. He or she cannot recover the basic state of nature from which he or she came. In that process one sets up a fantasy for oneself. It could be role models. These operate as a mirror for one. This provides the platform for the Symbolic. The Symbolic is where people's desires come to be located. Once, however, a child "enters into language and accepts the rules and dictates of society, it is able to deal with others' (Felluga, 2002: para 4). 'Race' is to be found here.

# Intersectionality

But we need to see, as Hook following Bhabha (2012:16) asks of us, how the whole assemblage of forces operating in the experience of racism, the material as it is intersectionally brought together in the economy, the cultural and the social, is entangled and articulated with the psychological, to produce *real* effects. The 'real' of racism, it needs to be emphasized here is not in 'race', it is in what racism gives rise to. Real advantage. Real disadvantage.

# Systems of racism

- Racism is systemic. While it manifests in individual attitudes and behaviours, it is not produced by them. That is the primary reason it is so difficult to eradicate. The other is its ability to constantly adapt to changing circumstances.
- Race is mobile and ever-changing. But ultimately, it serves to maintain white supremacy, at both a local and global level.

