

Race is an extremely important aspect of our contemporary world. It's one of the first things you recognize in someone from as young as 3 months old and negative association begins before most enter preschool (Sullivan et al., 2021, p. 395). It alters our perceptions and opinions of each other. We check them off in boxes for applications of many kinds, but it has no biological basis. Race is an entirely social construct that many have tried and failed to base in biological science. Using Max Stirner's (2009) words, race is a spook....

...People see the clear, obvious, and negative effects of racism in society and want to combat that, but they also want to keep the concept of race that is so woven into the fabric of our society...

...Through my own experience, I've had aspects of my racial identity questioned because they didn't fit the stereotyped mold of what it means to be black...This is an issue where not only does the supposed top of the hierarchy reinforce these spooks, but so do people who occupy the lowest rungs.

**Race
is
'Spooky'**

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Right at the start of the 21st Century, The Human Genome Project had completed mapping out all of the genetic information in humans. During the public announcement in June of 2000, “Craig Venter, Head of Celera Genomics and chief private scientist involved with the Human Genome Project, claimed that 'race' was not a scientifically valid construct” (McCann-Mortimer et al., 2004, p. 409). Racial distinctions “are not genetically discrete, are not reliably measured, and are not scientifically meaningful” (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 16).

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Stirner's Spooks

German philosopher, Max Stirner, proposed the concept of the spook in his book *The Ego and its Own*. The first mention of the term says that a spook is something without “an apparent body, but real spirit” (Stirner & Leopold, 2009, p. 36). Spooks are “ghosts” in our heads. They are concepts that control us and ones that we seek to fulfill. Before we tackle race as a spook, it might be helpful to discuss some of the spooks that Stirner talks about to dissect them and gain a greater understanding of what composes a spook.

For Stirner (2009), you are “haunted” or “spooked” if you are “serving a higher being” or thought (a spook) (p. 37). He proposes the example of a person who values truth for the sake of truth. They say, “To me the truth is sacred. It may well happen that I find a truth incomplete and replace it with a better, but the truth I cannot abrogate” (Stirner & Leopold, 2009, p. 37). In this example, truth would be a spook. It is fulfilled for its own purpose, not for the purpose of the individual. Truth is recognized as sacred in and of its own.

Another example of a spook that Stirner (2009) provides is “man.” This concept of “man” is brought about from a desire for Christians “to make the spook comprehensible,” in terms of the spirit (Stirner & Leopold, 2009, p. 41). Stirner (2009) claims that what is considered man in this case is also the spirit. It is what bridges humans and the divine. He says, “Everything rests on the spirit, and the spirit's or 'soul's' welfare becomes the exclusive goal” (Stirner & Leopold, 2009, p. 41). The spook of “man” rests within each person, but it is not the person themselves. Like Stirner (2009) says, things are then done for the spirit, to fulfill the spirit.

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the cops and in a stroke of what I can only refer to as instrumentally bad luck and timing, the car actually turns on, right in front of them. Luckily nothing happened, but my heart was pounding out of my chest for the entire ordeal.

So what is the significance of race being a spook? I can only say so many times that there is no biological basis in race, but the significance of race's spookiness lies in Stirner's (2009) words: "apparent body, but real spirit" (p. 36). There is a real effect of race, but if people are still spooked by race, they will fall into many of the ideological issues of race that go beyond the hierarchical placement. As Flower Bomb (2022) says, "Race can never represent anything more than an instrument of social control" (p. 13).

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Getting to "Race"

With this, we can begin looking at race through a Stirnerist lens. Semantically, it's important to understand what we are discussing when we talk about race (which actually plays into its spooked nature). For the vast, vast majority of human history, our modern conception of race did not exist (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 18). In Audrey and Brian Smedly's (2005) article "Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real" they say, "Throughout the Middle Ages and up until the 17th century, religion and language were the most important criteria of identity" (p. 18). The current concept of race that we deal with today didn't come about until the turn of the 18th Century and "by the Revolutionary era, race was widely used, and its meaning had solidified as a reference for social categories of Indians, Blacks, and Whites," but how did we get to our modern concept of race (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 18)?

Debates are still ongoing about when race and racism started existing in the world. Quentin Skinner, who famously critiqued Arthur O. Lovejoy's history of ideas would refer to this as an "endless debate" that is nearly "wholly semantic" (Seth, 2020, p. 347). There exist arguments for race and racism emerging from the early Middle Ages all the way up to the 19th century. While I won't open up this debate in this paper, it stands to reason that all of the thoughts agree that we at least have race and racism in the 19th century, so that means I can draw somewhat of a timeline to there.

Even if there can't be an agreement on if it constituted as racism, it's generally known that "intense forms of discriminations and violence... as well as the xenophobic representations of, Jews, Gypsies, Saracens, and Moors" existed "in the medieval and early modern periods" (Seth, 2020, p. 350). There also existed normative color coding of black and white, but it's tough to flat-out say that these color codings applied to skin color, especially when we consider that "Europeans did not identify themselves as white" during this era (up to the 16th century) (Seth, 2020, p. 353).

We start to see flickers of our modern race conception in the 17th Century with François Bernier's classifications which divided people into four racial categories. This is significantly different because Bernier is making the claim "that there is a scientific, objective way of classifying human beings according to physical characteristics such as skin colour, facial type and bodily shape" (Stuurman, 2000, pp. 3-4). From here, racial categories would change and morph with the help of other figures like Immanuel Kant until we get to modern racial categories (Seth, 2020, p. 358).

Race as Spook

So we have our two understandings now: spooks, ideas that infect us, control us, and whose essence we place above our own, and race, a social category that distinguishes between people based on a multitude of factors such as

geographical location, genetic heritage, and most clearly, physical characteristics. In order to argue for race being a spook, we'll break down the ideological underpinnings of race and look them over with the eye of a Stirnerist.

Thankfully, the Smedleys (2005) give us the six "social characteristics of race in North America" (p. 20). I'll analyze the "spookiness" of each characteristic, starting with the first one which states that, "Race-based societies perceive designated racial groups as biologically discrete and exclusive groups, and certain physical characteristics (e.g., skin color, hair texture, eye shape, and other facial features) become markers of race status" (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 20).

This first characteristic already starts building the foundation of a spook, that being race as an essential attribute. The racial group you inhabit is claimed to be biological and exclusive, something inherent to you that can't be changed, essential. This is a building block to the spook because it starts to give us reason that we might revere race and give it importance over ourselves, as an essential component that links us to others.

This also brings us to a question about indigenous identity. Who gets the claim to be called the indigenous inhabitant of a land? If we look at North America, prior to colonization, Native American tribes were warring with each other and fighting over territories (Chambers, 2000, p. 478). This isn't to imply that Native Americans haven't faced years of oppression and subjugation that continues on to this day, but simply to call into question the idea of being indigenous to a land.

In our modern day, you're indigenous if you descend from people who are considered the indigenous inhabitants of a land, but if there has been a history of wars between indigenous people or muddied history of the indigenous folks, how do we determine who has a current "right" to the land? This also leads to the question of the "right to land" and whether people have some sort of right to land because they are related to people who used to live there. I can't really answer all of these questions as that is a paper in its own right, but it still relates to the discussion of essential identities and race.

The next characteristic states that race-based societies "hold that races are naturally unequal and therefore must be ranked hierarchically (inequality is fundamental to all racial systems). In the United States and South Africa, Africans and their descendants occupy the lowest level of the hierarchy" (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 20). There is some evidential backing to this claim, especially if we're looking at the United States where black people suffer the highest incarceration rates of any race (Prison Policy Initiative). This characteristic is likely the greatest building block to the spook due to the simple

identity which, by colonial design, is the embodiment of inferiority, subservience, and defeat" (p. 10).

Through my own experience, I've had aspects of my racial identity questioned because they didn't fit the stereotyped mold of what it means to be black. There's a hypermasculinization to blackness which can be seen if you see any (perceived) black man publicly and outwardly feminine. This is an issue where not only does the supposed top of the hierarchy reinforce these spooks, but so do people who occupy the lowest rungs.

I can recall a time when I was at a family gathering. I had asked my sister if she could put lipstick on me because I simply wanted to try it out. Not too long afterward, one of my uncles saw me with the lipstick on and got furious. He forcefully wiped the lipstick from my face with a napkin (he has since apologized, but that's not something you ever really forget). On the same day, I believe, one of my cousins saw that I had an eyeshadow kit. If I remember correctly, both he and my brother were making fun of me for having it. I've faced similar comments from my brother for wearing nail decals and crop tops. Thankfully, he is a far different person now, but this speaks to the kind of culture that's prevalent in black families. I still don't feel comfortable expressing my queerness around most of my family.

Flower Bomb (2022) mentions that the POC friends they grew up with would fall into this issue. "Internalizing the stereotype of the 'prosperous, white entrepreneur', drug dealing POC would roll by in luxury cars, flashy clothes and taunt the rest of us the same way other classists once ridiculed them" (Bomb, 2022, p. 7). They make an important ideological assessment about how race has effectively made society carve out specific places for people of different races to occupy.

Conclusion

I had just finished training at a martial arts school, and my brother had come to pick me up. It was late, we were the only ones in the parking lot, and of course, it was just our luck that his car wasn't starting. We spent several minutes waiting there trying to get his car to boot up. Eventually, someone pulled over into the parking lot to see what was going on.

We told him exactly what was happening and that we would be fine. I was even still wearing my martial arts uniform. So the guy leaves and we sit there trying to get the car to boot up, but since it's late and I was training, I fall asleep. I'm awoken to bright lights in my face and flashing blue and red colors in the mirrors and windows.

That man had called the police. We told them exactly what had happened and that our car wasn't starting up. My brother goes to press the ignition to show

the spook even more powerful. Flower Bomb (2022) believes that the “identity as solidarity,” leftist, collectivist movement creates “a dominant narrative that ultimately suppresses the perspective of any anti-left anarchist of color... reinforcing racial identity through assimilation, rather than abolishing identity along with the Society that upholds its intended purpose” (pp. 8-9).

Flower Bomb (2023) further critiques leftism and identity politics in their text “Toward Terra Incognita: A Critical Look at Cultural Essentialism, Nationalism, and Body Policing.” In this text they highlight the problematic issues with body policing, using their dreads as a reference. Even in the name of “anti-oppression” seeking to police bodies and who gets to have dreads “ultimately preserves the white supremacy they claim to act against” (Bomb, 2023, p. 1).

As Flower Bomb (2023) sees it, “White supremacy is the body politics of racial subjugation” and “requires the preservation of identity categories based on color to contrast it” (p. 2). This essentially boils down to what I’ve been talking about: reducing individuals down to their physical aspect (in this case, racial markers) and making essentialist claims about them based on that. This same exact process continues with traditionally progressive and left-associated concepts like cultural appropriation.

If we move back to dreadlocks, they have “historically been used to symbolize black power against white supremacy” which has led to a perceived ownership by black people and subsequently a theft if donned by other races (Bomb, 2023, p. 3). Now, Flower Bomb (2023) doesn’t deny an issue with capitalist commodification that rewards cultural appropriation but instead has an issue with “its overall analysis, which relies on a definition of culture limited by racial identity” (p. 3).

Taking issue with capitalist commodification and discrimination is different from policing bodies and restricting expression. Dreadlocks become viewed as a culturally essentialist item and turn bodies into “identity spaces of structural oppression” and “politicized battlegrounds” (Bomb, 2023, pp. 3-4). We focus on telling people not to wear dreads because they aren’t black, but does that do anything to help commodification or make the issue worse? As a result, “rather than challenging white supremacy by rendering its orchestra of body politics powerless, it is preserved through cultural essentialism” (Bomb, 2023, p. 4).

There’s almost a progressive racism that tries to have its cake and eat it too. People see the clear, obvious, and negative effects of racism in society and want to combat that, but they also want to keep the concept of race that is so woven into the fabric of our society. Flower Bomb states that these issues in the fight against racism and the entire structure of race will persevere “as long as individuals categorized as “white” surrender to the delusion of racial superiority, and individuals identified by Society as “non-white” continue to embrace an

aspect of hierarchy.

One of the biggest components of a spook is that it places itself as higher than the individual. Ranking individuals on a hierarchy is an easy way to do that. Your opinion, view, treatment, and perception of someone is now controlled by the concept. Why are you better than this person? Oh, of course, you are of a superior race. Congratulations, you’ve been spooked!

The third characteristic is that race-based societies “assume that each race has distinctive cultural behaviors linked to their biology. The idea of inherited forms of behavior is fundamental to the concept of race and is one basis for the belief in the separation of races” (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 20). This characteristic builds and compounds off of the second characteristic. This actually creates more spooks than just race on its own.

We already know that according to this modern conception of race, it is biologically based and ranked on a hierarchy. What has now been added are race-based cultures that are also biologically linked. If cultural attributes have been attached to race which has already been determined to be hierarchical, these cultural attributes are now hierarchical. If we apply the same prior reasoning for the second characteristic, it’s easy to now list all of these cultural attributes as spooks. If one cultural attribute is perceived as better than another, it’s easy to let that become controlling and sacred.

The following characteristic of race-based societies is that “they assume that both physical features and behavior are innate and inherited” (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 20). This doesn’t do too much on its own that hasn’t already been said before, but it more just reaffirms the essentialist claims that race makes. The inheritance aspect just leads to some newer, spooky ideas like race purity and anti-race mixing, with the idea that your kids could inherit inferior behaviors.

The fifth characteristic is that race-based societies “assume that the differences among races are therefore profound and unalterable” which can subsequently justify “segregation of the races in schools, neighborhoods, churches, recreational centers, health centers, and so forth, and proscriptions against intermarriage or intermating” (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 20). This is somewhere along the lines of what I had just said, which means it’s likely just the logical conclusion of the prior characteristic.

Rather than just ideology, we begin to see the real effects that the ideology creates, the consequences of these spooks. We have an ideology created that claims people are composed of different races with inherent physical and behavioral traits, ranked in a hierarchy. Not only are you generating a supremacy of the “higher” race, but a reasoning as to why you would want to

keep the other races separate from you.

The sixth and final characteristic of race-based societies is that “they have racial classifications stipulated in the legal and social system (racial identity by law)” (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 20). This characteristic helps solidify the spook concept through its most dangerous aspect: control. Race being embedded in institutions and laws makes the ideologies of race not only acknowledged through the mind but enforced through the state.

“Haunting” Effect of Race

The main issue with spooks is that they control. Spooks take precedent over the ego, and there is a plethora of examples of how race controls our mind and society at large. Keeping with the Smedlys (2005), “The majority of studies, however, find that racial and ethnic disparities in health care remain even after adjustment for socioeconomic differences and other factors related to health care access” (p. 23). It’s shown that individuals in the US who inhabit a race lower on the hierarchy, especially black and hispanic people, get treatment far worse than white people. Specifically, “African Americans and Hispanics tend to receive lower quality health care across a range of disease areas... and clinical services” (Smedly & Smedly, 2005, p. 23).

There also exists a concept known as ORE or the other-race effect which is the documented and well-established “poorer ability to recognize other-race than own-race faces” (McKone et al., 2023, p. 230). This manifests in numerous ways, some more harmful than others. While the real-world impacts haven’t been studied that deeply, there have been investigations into the effect on police face-matching failure, which can get about just as bad as you would expect (McKone et al., 2023, p. 231). If there’s a non-white suspect of a specific race on the loose, you better believe that anyone of the same race is in danger of being unjustly profiled.

We’ve fully moved on from just the ideological structure that composes race and the societies that it infects, but onto real effects. We can see that race is exactly what Stirner describes the spook as with its “real spirit.” The claims made about people based on race have no scientific basis, yet generate real control over populations. The example prior shows one way, worse health treatment, but there are a great deal of others, even in the fight against racism.

Race and the “Left”

The post-leftist thinker, Flower Bomb (2022) wrote a text on the concept of race nihilism, a critique of race that seeks to destroy the concept. In their text, they give their own history of growing up black in an impoverished area. They write, “Despite sharing the common class experience of being broke as fuck, people I knew in and out of gangs had very different ideas, solutions, and responses to it” (Bomb, 2022, p. 6). I think the importance of this statement is in how it combats

some racist concepts that have embedded themselves into progressive concepts. For a bit of history, the term gang itself comes “from Old English gang ‘a going, journey, way, passage,’ and Old Norse gangr ‘a group of men, a set,’” (Harper). In the States, some of the first gangs came out of New York City. The first gangs were formed by Irish immigrants who came to the city en masse in the mid to late 1800s (Howell et al., 2015, p. 1). The sheer volume of immigrants coming in “overwhelmed the housing and welfare capacity of” New York City and directly contributed to the creation of slums, ghettos and gangs (Howell, et al., 2015, p. 2).

The first gangs were primarily white, and that trend continued for a while. When Chinese immigrants started crossing the sea, they started forming extremely powerful and efficient gangs (tongs) on the East Coast (HBO Max’s *Warrior* is a good show exploring this) (Howell, et al., 2015, p. 6). The decline of white street gangs and the uptick of black and hispanic street gangs didn’t occur until the late 1800s and early 1900s when European immigration was on the downtrend and those same European immigrants began to be assimilated into American culture and society (Howell, et al., p. 7).

The black and hispanic gangs that we know of today started coming into being more around the 1930s following northern immigration from southern black people and immigration from Puerto Rico. This shift in demographics led to a great deal of interracial violence between various white, black, and hispanic street gangs who lived in proximity to each other. Over time, the black and hispanic demographic represented the overwhelming makeup of street gangs (Howell, et al., p. 8).

So what seems to be the main driving force of these gang formations? Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay’s social disorganization theory proposes three mechanisms: “neighborhood population mobility, ethnic heterogeneity, and poverty” (Howell, et al., p. 78). In impoverished areas with weak social institutions, gangs rise up to fill those voids.

A major issue that Flower Bomb (2022) takes with a lot of collectivist movements is they often base their communities on identity. People are supposed to unite and come together because of their blackness. If we look back at some of those characteristics, we see repeating ideas of inherent qualities of race. Flower Bomb (2022) claims, “When a large portion of Society is positioned against any particular group of people, there will be a bonding within that marginalized group – but only to a degree” (p. 6).

They remind us that race is simply a social category not based in science. The claims made about culture and psychology being fundamentally linked to race are not true. I feel like when you try to fight a system while concretizing their underlying ideological frameworks, you start to lose. You reinforce and make