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Against the Notion of a 'New Racism'

COLIN WAYNE LEACH*
Department of Psychology, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

ABSTRACT

Despite the *de jure* equality achieved in the second half of the 20th century, racial discrimination and racist political movements persist. This has encouraged the orthodoxy that a 'new racism' serves as an ideological basis of contemporary white investment in racial inequality in Western Europe, North America and Australasia. It is argued that this 'new racism' is shown in more subtle and indirect formal expressions, such as a denial of societal discrimination, rather than the once popular expressions of 'old-fashioned' genetic inferiority and segregationism. In opposition to this conceptualization, I review quantitative and qualitative studies from social psychology, sociology and political science, as well as historical analyses, to show that the 'old-fashioned' formal expression of racism was not especially popular before *de jure* racial equality and is not especially unpopular now. I also show that there is nothing new about formal expressions that criticize cultural difference or deny societal discrimination. Thus, there is greater historical continuity in racism than the notion of a 'new racism' allows. This suggests that the first task of a critical social psychology of racism is a proper conceptualization of racism itself. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: racism; prejudice; ideology; modern racism; new racism

INTRODUCTION

By the end of world war two, it became increasingly difficult for states that claimed to be democratic to continue the *de jure* racial[1] discrimination they had practiced for centuries (Miles, 1993; Myrdal, 1944; Winant, 2001). As a response to the Nazi's particularly effective ideology and industry, as well as civil rights and decolonization movements,

* Correspondence to: Colin Wayne Leach, Department of Psychology, Pevensey 1, Brighton, BN1 9QH, England. E-mail: c.w.leach@sussex.ac.uk

[1] I use the terms 'race', racial, white and people of colour to identify *political* categories made real by racism. In no way do I mean to suggest that 'race' is an essential or natural way to make sense of human variation. However, the social and political reality of race makes it essential to engage the distinctions between 'whites' and 'people of colour' that serve racism and serve to oppose racism. As Reeves (1983, p. 175) put it, '. . . it is also possible that discourse might have to be increasingly "racialised" if certain racially discriminatory practices are to be recognized and eradicated. The stubborn refusal to see the way a social system operates on racial lines may support and maintain racially discriminatory practices'.

the second half of the 20th century was marked by the establishment of laws and public policies that established *de jure* racial equality (for reviews see Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Minow, 1993). There is little doubt that this provided the groups long subjected to racial discrimination a certain level of protection against it. And yet, in North America (Omi & Winant, 1986; Sears, 1988), Western Europe (Cheles, Ferguson, & Vaughan, 1991; Ford, 1991), and Australia (Riggs & Augoustinous, 2005; Rapley, 1998), political groups continue to gain substantial support by criticizing state efforts against racial discrimination. And, throughout Western Europe (Ford, 1991; Miles, 1989; Winant, 1994) and North America (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Winant, 2001), as well as in Australia (Broome, 2002) there is continued evidence of racial discrimination in housing, employment, police treatment, sentencing, health provision and a host of other domains. That racial discrimination and racist political movements persist in societies that have achieved *de jure* equality has led many to suggest that a 'new racism' serves as an ideological basis of contemporary white investment in racial inequality.

The notion of a 'new racism' transcends national boundaries. It has been suggested in the United States (e.g. Essed, 1991; Omi & Winant, 1986; Sears, 1988), Britain (e.g. Barker, 1982; Reeves, 1983), South Africa (e.g. Durrheim & Dixon, 2004), Australia (e.g. Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Rapley, 1999; Pedersen & Walker, 1997), New Zealand (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and throughout Western Europe (e.g. Essed, 1991; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Tagueiff, 1989; van Dijk, 1984). The notion of a 'new racism' also transcends scholarly boundaries, as it has been suggested by psychologists, sociologists, political theorists, historians, literary and cultural critics, citing evidence collected with qualitative, quantitative, historical, discursive and archival methods (for reviews see Duckitt, 1992; Durrheim & Dixon, 2004). As Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 194) point out in their discursive analysis of racism in New Zealand, 'one can see many parallels, superficially at least, between the patterns we identify and the phenomenon identified by many American experimental social psychologists, described variously as 'modern racism', [. . .] 'symbolic racism', [. . .] and 'racial ambivalence'.

Although, there are variations in how 'new racism' is conceptualized, most approaches rely on two inter-related assumptions. First, it is assumed that the *de jure* racial *in*equality that characterized the world before the 1970s enabled the ideologies of genetic racial inferiority and segregationism to be widely shared and formally expressed with impunity (see Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Sears, 1988). As Schuman, Steeh, Bobo & Krysan (1997, p. 10) put it in their analysis of anti-black attitudes in the United States, 'Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most whites, North and South, considered blacks to be their biological and social inferiors . . . ' Like other proponents of the notion of a 'new racism', they suggest that genetic inferiority and segregationism were so popular and unproblematic that they could be expressed blatantly, overtly and directly, even in formal settings such as interviews, public discussions and political rhetoric.

The second claim central to the notion of a 'new racism' is that there was a marked change in the formal expression of racism after the 1970s, when *de jure* equality was achieved in most societies. It is argued that the formal expression of racism had to change to jive with the new reality of *de jure* equality. For example, referring to Britain, Barker (1982, p. 25) argued that '. . . there has been a conscious bid by the Tories, led from their Right, since 1968, for a new theorization of race. It is powerful in that it avoids the older definitions of race that were so evidently tainted with Hitlerism'. Researchers in Western Europe (Balibar, 1991; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), Britain (Barker, 1982; Reeves, 1983), Australia (Augoustinos et al., 1999), and New Zealand (Wetherell &

Potter, 1992) all suggest that this 'new racism' could be expressed openly in formal settings by criticizing others' *cultural difference*. For example, in their analysis of 'white' (Pakeha) New Zealanders talk about indigenous Maori people, Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 137), argue that, 'Culture discourse, therefore, now takes over some of the same tasks as race. It becomes a naturally occurring difference [. . .] but this time around the ''fatal flaws'' in the Maori people do not lie in their genes but in their traditional practices, attitudes and values'. In the United States (Omi & Winant, 1986; Sears, 1988) Western Europe (Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) and Australia (Pedersen & Walker, 1997) it is argued that 'new racism' can be expressed openly in formal settings by denying the existence of racial discrimination in the society. As neither of these ideologies appears to rely on 'old-fashioned' expressions of racial inferiority and segregationism, formal expressions of the 'new racism' are characterized as 'subtle' (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), covert (Balibar, 1991; Durrheim & Dixon, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1986), 'symbolic' (Sears, 1988), and 'sanitized' (Reeves, 1983).

Although there is wide agreement that the formal expression of racism is now achieved through new means, I think there is reason to oppose this view. In a first line of opposition, I review quantitative and qualitative studies from social psychology, sociology and political science, as well as historical analyses, to show that the formal expression of 'old-fashioned' racial inferiority was not especially *popular* before *de jure* racial equality. This suggests that the formal expression of 'old-fashioned' racism was not as open, overt, blatant and direct as is commonly presumed. Indeed, well before the achievement of *de jure* equality, formal expressions of racial ideology were 'subtle', 'symbolic', indirect and covert. To corroborate this continuity in formal expression, I review recent evidence to show that the formal expression of presumably 'old-fashioned' racial inferiority continues today at levels not so different from the first half of the 20th century.

In a second line of opposition to the notion of 'new racism', I argue that there is nothing especially new about formal expressions of cultural difference or the denial of societal discrimination. I review historical and other evidence to show that the formal denial of societal discrimination is a long-standing feature of societies that espouse democratic egalitarianism. Thus, the formal expression of the presumably 'new racism' actually *precedes* the achievement of *de jure* racial equality in the 1970s. In essence, 'new racism' is quite old indeed.

By emphasizing an empty temporal distinction between old and new, the notion of a 'new racism' serves to obscure the important historical continuities in formal expressions of racism. By substituting the old-new distinction for a deeper conceptualization of racism, the notion of 'new racism' may actually work to prevent a much needed critical social psychological conceptualization of racism. Thus, I detail my opposition to the notion of a 'new racism' in hopes that its abandonment will spur the generation of alternative conceptualizations. In the conclusion of this paper I offer some initial thoughts on one possible direction.

'OLD-FASHIONED' RACISM

Central to the notion of a 'new racism' is the assumption that 'old-fashioned' racial ideology was openly expressed before the 1970s, before the achievement of *de jure* equality made genetic inferiority and segregationism seem 'old-fashioned' (for a discussion see Leach, 1998). For example, Schuman et al. (1997, p. 311) argue, 'Whereas

discrimination against, and forced segregation of, black Americans were taken for granted by most white Americans as recently as the World War II years, today the norm holds that black Americans deserve the same treatment and respect as whites, and in addition that racial integration in all public spheres of life is a desirable goal'. This implies that the blatant and direct discrimination and segregation practiced before the 1970s enabled the open expression of equally blatant and direct 'old-fashioned' racism in formal settings such as opinion polls, interviews, public discussions and civic engagement.

The available research does indeed suggest that the formal expression of segregationism was more popular before the 1970s. For example, Walker's (2004) review of qualitative and quantitative studies, suggests that just below 50% of white Australians formally expressed segregationism in interview studies in the 1950s and 1960s. Schuman et al's (1997) comprehensive review shows similar levels of formal endorsement amongst white Americans in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1942, 68% endorsed the view that blacks should go to 'separate schools' and 54% endorsed the view that they should use 'separate sections' of public transportation. In 1956, endorsement of these two forms of segregation were 50% and 38%, respectively.

Clearly, the level of segregationism expressed in formal interview settings has fallen dramatically in the United States and Australia in the last 60 years. What is surprising is that only about half of those queried appeared willing to make a formal expression of 'old-fashioned' segregationism in periods where segregationism is presumed to have been popular and normatively accepted. Indeed, formal expressions of segregationism do not appear to have been especially popular in periods where segregation was legally sanctioned and widely practiced both formally and informally. Thus, contrary to what is assumed by the notion of a 'new racism', the formal expression of 'old-fashioned' racism was not necessarily overt, direct and blatant. Even where segregation was a popular practice, there was great variation in its formal expression. Interestingly, the formal expression of the ideology considered most central to 'old-fashioned' racism appears to have changed in an even less dramatic fashion in the last sixty years.

The formal expression of racial inferiority

Proponents of the 'new racism' notion argue that the achievement of *de jure* equality in the 1970s made the formal expression of genetic racial inferiority seem 'old-fashioned' (Barker, 1981; McConahay, 1986; Winant, 2001; Sears, 1988). Thus, it is argued that whites had to replace the once popular expression of genetic inferiority with a more subtle expression. Given that genetic inferiority has long been considered the clearest expression of racism, the avoidance of it would indicate a marked change in formal discourse. Indeed, such a shift would necessitate a serious reconceptualization of racism and its formal expression (see Leach, 1998). However, I think there are at least three reasons to doubt this aspect of the notion of a 'new racism'.

First, the formal expression of racial inferiority was not especially popular before the 1970s, even when policy and practice made the targets of this ideology socially, economically and politically inferior. Second, the formal expression of racial inferiority has long taken more 'subtle' forms than the direct claim that groups defined as 'races' have a genetic inheritance that makes them inferior in an absolute sense. Third, a wide range of evidence suggests that the achievement of *de jure* equality did not make the formal expression of racial inferiority especially unpopular in contemporary societies.

Formal expression before de jure equality. Contrary to what is assumed by the notion of a 'new racism', the formal expression of racial inferiority was not especially popular before the achievement of *de jure* equality in the 1970s. For example, about 50% of a representative sample of white Americans expressed the view that 'negroes' were less intelligent than whites when interviewed in 1942. This kind of formal expression was made by about 20% in 1956 (Schuman et al., 1997). Myrdal's (1944) ethnographic examination also suggests that the formal expression of racial inferiority was not especially popular before the achievement of *de jure* equality in the United States. As he (1944, p. 97, italics in original) put it, 'the masses of white Americans even today do not always, when they refer to the inferiority of the Negro race, think clearly in straight biological terms [. . .] The Negro is said to be several hundreds or thousands of years behind the white man in 'development'. Studies in Australia suggest something similar. Walker (2004) reported that in 1969, 44–64% of white Australian samples queried in interviews formally endorsed the view that, 'One reason why the white and black races can never merge is that the white culture is so much more advanced'.

Subtlety before de jure equality. In my view, proponents of the 'new racism' notion exaggerate the demise of 'old-fashioned' racism by too narrowly focusing on the formal expression of a genetic conceptualization of racial inferiority. Although racial inferiority is central to most conceptualizations of racism, it is not necessary to assume that explicit reference to a genetic conceptualization of 'race' is required (see Balibar, 1991; Reeves, 1983; Guillaumin, 1995). Racial ideology may essentialize ethnic groups in terms of culture, religion, origin, or more general practice, to achieve much the same as is achieved by a genetic concept of race. For example, historical analyses of colonialism have detailed the ways in which the formal expression of racial inferiority was made in terms other than genetics (e.g. Betts, 1978; Todorov, 1984). For example, Stoler (1992, 1995) has documented the ways in which Dutch colonization proceeded through the formal expression of racial hierarchies based in ethnic and economic background, skin colour, and language and other social capital.

The role of racial inferiority in racism. In her classic discussion, Benedict (1942/1959, p. 97) defined racism as, 'the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority'. There are at least three ways in which this conceptualization of racial inferiority differs from the more narrow view that the proponents of the 'new racism' notion focus on as the defining feature of an 'old-fashioned' racism.

1. *Genetics in the concept of race*? First, in Benedict's conceptualization, a genetic concept of race is not necessary to racism. Racism is described as a dogma referring to ethnic groups. Consistent with this, a great deal of historical research suggests that 'race' has not always had the implications formalized by 19th century science (see Guillaumin, 1995; Stoler, 1995; Todorov, 1984). For the last five centuries at least, 'race' was used to distinguish groups in terms of class, culture, religion, region and complexion (Banton, 1987; Miles, 1989; Stoler, 1992). Thus, it has only very rarely been used to refer to the idea that there are a fixed number of 'races' amongst the human population who possess traits determined by genetic transmission. For example, Orientalist ideologies that represented Islam as essentially inferior to Christian Europe date back to at least the 11th century crusades (Miles, 1989; Said, 1994). This makes it clear that racism need not be directed at those groups who have been most subject to a genetic concept of race.

Although the notion of 'race' has long been applied across the globe, the term racism was first used in English in the late 1930s to describe the Nazi doctrine that identified the 'Aryan' people as superior to all others (Banton, 1987; Miles, 1989; Reeves, 1983). That the concept of racism was not initially designed to rely on pre-existing notions of race is apparent in its first application to Nazi ideology (Balibar, 1991). Although the Nazis relied on formal expressions of congenital inferiority, they directed them at groups that had never been conceptualized as the major human 'races' of 'Caucasoid', 'Mongoloid', and 'Negroid' (see Banton, 1987). Religion, culture, language, custom, nationality and physical appearance were all important dimensions of the ideology directed at Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Poles and others (Guillaumin, 1995; Miles, 1989). Thus, formal expressions of racial inferiority have less to do with a genetic concept of 'race' than with the notion that some groups are less good, moral and able than others (Leach, Peng, & Volckens, 2000; Todorov, 1984).

2. *Flexible essentialization.* Second, rather than utilizing the limited notion of a genetic transmission of attributes, Benedict argued that racism assumes that a group has *congenital* characteristics. A congenital trait is inherent to an entity but not predetermined by genetics. For example, a congenital health defect, while present at birth, is the result of fetal development rather than genetic endowment. Although a congenital inferiority is no less essentialized than a genetic one, it can be seen as resulting from environmental influences that lead particular people to be inferior (e.g. bad parenting, cultural influence, poor living conditions). This allows a flexible essentialization of ethnic groups that is free to cite environmental, cultural, or sociological influences, rather than genetics. Benedict presaged more contemporary discussions of the multiple ways in which attributes may be essentialized, and thus seen as definitive of a group, without the assumption of genetic transmission (see Fuss, 1989; Todorov, 1984; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

3. *Relative inferiority.* Third, Benedict's definition views racism as based in an ideology of relative, rather than absolute, group inferiority (see also Banton, 1987, chap. 4; Miles, 1993). The ideology of a relative hierarchy has social force mainly because it suggests that inferior groups deserve inferior life chances, housing and treatment (Benedict, 1942; Reeves, 1983). In this way the formal expression of racial inferiority is prescriptive—it suggests where a group should be located in the society and how it should be treated (Reeves, 1983; Todorov, 1984). As such, the formal expression of relative inferiority aligns perfectly with the practice of racial inequality. The two mutually reinforce each other (Hall, 1980; Myrdal, 1944).

Taken together, the available evidence suggests that it is incorrect to define racism as the formal expression that a fixed set of races are genetically inferior. The historical and conceptual work reviewed above suggests that racism has long relied on non-genetic expressions of essentialized relative inferiority. Thus, in contrast to its characterization as 'old-fashioned', overt, direct, and blatant, the formal expression of racial inferiority has long been advanced in subtle, indirect, and covert ways. This makes the distinction between 'old-fashioned' and 'new racism', on which the notion of a 'new racism' relies, appear to be little more than a temporal description. If 'old-fashioned' racism could be subtle, covert and indirect, the notion of a 'new racism' fails to adequately conceptualize the formal expression of both past and present racial ideology.

Contemporary expression of racial inferiority. Consistent with the notion of a 'new racism', recent studies suggest that there is little formal expression of racial inferiority

when respondents are asked to simply agree or disagree with a direct statement of absolute inferiority. In the United States, only 20% of white Americans formally agreed with the statement that blacks were 'less intelligent than whites' by 1967. In 1996, only 10% of white Americans agreed that blacks had less 'in born ability' than whites (for reviews Schuman et al., 1997; Kluegel & Bobo, 1993). A similar statement yielded similar agreement in Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn's (1993) study in the Netherlands (see also Hraba, Hraba, & Hagendoorn, 1989). However, such direct expression of absolute inferiority do no fit the widely shared definition of racism offered by Benedict.

Attention to the relative ethnic inferiority central to Benedict's (1942) definition of racism suggests that the formal expression of this 'old-fashioned' ideology is not especially unpopular today. Thus, in contrast to what is suggested by the notion of a 'new racism' that avoids the formal expression of racial inferiority, in 1994 Walker found 27% of a sample of white Australians to explicitly agree with the statement 'One reason why the white and black races can never merge is that the white culture is so much more advanced'. In their analysis of a series of coordinated surveys of attitudes toward seven different ethnic minority groups in Western Europe, Leach et al. (2000) found white agreement that they 'may not do as well as the majority' because they come from 'less able races' and 'less well developed cultures' ranged from 26% (in France, regarding North Africans and Southeast Asians) to 41% (in Britain regarding African Caribbeans and Asians).

In the United States, several recent surveys have used another relativistic method to assess the formal expression of racial inferiority (e.g. Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). For example, Bobo and Kluegel (1991) asked a representative sample of whites to use bi-polar response scales to indicate the degree to which they saw blacks, Latinos, and Asians as 'unintelligent-intelligent', 'prone to violence-not prone to violence', and 'lazy-hardworking'. Each group was judged independently without reference to whites. 31% of whites rated blacks as unintelligent to some degree whereas 54% rated blacks as to some degree 'prone to violence'. 47% rated blacks as 'lazy' to some degree. White Americans' characterization of Latinos was only slightly less extreme. In contrast, very few whites judged their group (or Asians) to be unintelligent, lazy or prone to violence. For example, only 6% of whites rated their own group as unintelligent to some degree.

Few formally express the view that other groups are absolutely inferior when faced with a stark contrast between agreement and disagreement. However, the formal expression of racial inferiority is much greater when it can be made in terms that fit Benedict's (1942) conceptualization of racism as a relativistic notion of ethnic inferiority. Importantly, this formal expression of racial inferiority is tied to the formal endorsement of important societal policies. Those who formally express racial inferiority also tend to formally express opposition to affirmative action in the Netherlands (Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993) and the United States (Sidanius et al., 1996) as well as support for the illegal return of immigrants in Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands (Leach et al., 2000). Contrary to what is claimed by the notion of a 'new racism', formal expressions of racial inferiority remain active and consequential in contemporary societies.

THE FORMAL DENIAL OF SOCIETAL DISCRIMINATION

Claims that the formal expression of 'old-fashioned' segregationism and racial inferiority were abandoned serve mainly as a predicate to the argument that in the 1970s new expressions became a more psychologically effective, and less politically suspect, form

of racism. The notion of a 'new racism' claims that the elimination of *de jure* racial inequality had the perverse effect of leading whites to believe that racial inequality itself was eliminated (see Balibar, 1991; Omi & Winant, 1986). As such, the elimination of *de jure* inequality allowed whites to formally deny racial discrimination as a continuing source of societal inequality (McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1988). Thus, according to the notion of a 'new racism', in the 1970s whites became able to engage in a motivated denial of racial discrimination that operates without reference to 'old-fashioned' segregationism or racial inferiority. In Australasia, the formal denial of racial discrimination has been suggested as a new form of racism by both qualitative (Augoustinos et al., 1999; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and quantitative (Pedersen & Walker, 1997) research on non-Indigenous views of indigenous people. In Western Europe, Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) have argued that a similar view is prevalent in the 'subtle racism' they examined in Britain, France, Western Germany and the Netherlands.

Importantly, the argument that the formal denial of societal discrimination is a new form of racism presumes that such denial was not especially prevalent before the 1970s. If the contemporary denial of societal discrimination is to be taken as evidence of the rise of a 'new racism', it must have been the case that in previous periods there was little formal denial of societal discrimination. Although this assumption remains implicit in the notion of a 'new racism', it is necessary to most conceptualizations. However, there is a wide range of evidence that the denial of societal discrimination was central to the formal expression of racial ideology well before the 1970s.

Quite remarkably, societal discrimination has *never* been a popular formal explanation of racial inequality in the United States, even in historical periods where it should have appeared obvious (Leach, 2002a). For example, in 1946, about 60% of whites formally expressed the view that blacks were treated 'fairly' (Pettigrew, 1971, ch. 8). Thus, a majority of white Americans formally denied societal discrimination in the years before the *de jure* equality offered in 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, or the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Consistent with this, Myrdal (1944) noted the *in*frequency with which white Americans acknowledged the degree to which African Americans were subject to racial discrimination (see Leach, 2002a). Contemporary surveys of the United States show that discrimination remains an unpopular formal explanation of racial inequality. In their comprehensive review, Kluegel and Bobo (1993) showed that across a number of polls in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, about 60% of white Americans formally express the view that blacks are treated fairly. This is almost the same number that believed blacks to be treated fairly in 1946. Thus, the denial of societal discrimination in the United States appears to have increased little after *de jure* equality.

Historical research suggests that the formal denial of discrimination in Western democracies goes even further back than the 1940s. Indeed, as Balibar (1991) points out, most of the democracies formed between the middle 18th and 20th centuries, formally espoused equality for all at the same time as endowing groups with different rights and privileges (see also Winant, 2001). Never did these states openly express racial discrimination as a founding principle. Rather, rights to liberté, egalité and fraternité, were simply contradicted by the use of education, language, literacy or property ownership to limit equality (Balibar, 1991; Guillaumin, 1995).

A great deal of historical research also documents the formal denial of discrimination at work in European colonialism. Even in the 16th and 17th centuries, colonial powers rarely made formal expressions of their racial discrimination. Throughout the Dutch,

British, French, Spanish and Portuguese colonies, formal expressions often described colonial domination as a benefit to indigenous populations and to imported slaves (Betts, 1978; Stoler, 1992, 1995; Todorov, 1984). In many cases, formal expressions of state ideology emphasized the 'white man's burden' to civilize the 'backward' peoples in the colonies, not to discriminate (see Todorov, 1984). Paternalism was the dominant model of formal discourse, encouraging colonists to make formal expressions of custodial concern, rather than brutal domination (Betts, 1978; Stoler, 1992, 1995). Of course, these formal expressions often bore little resemblance to the brutal practice of colonization. This only makes it all the more clear that the formal expression of racial ideology was rarely as crude and blatant as the practice of what some characterize as 'old-fashioned' racism.

In the early development of the colonies that turned into the United States, it was also not the case that the policy and practice of discrimination was openly and forthrightly expressed as such in formal settings (Myrdal, 1944). The critical race theory approach to jurisprudence argues that, like most modern democracies, the United States followed an official principle of egalitarianism at the same time as actively promoting racial discrimination (for a review see Crenshaw et al., 1995). Thus, as in most Western states that espoused egalitarianism while practicing discrimination, the very founding of the democracy required a formal denial of societal discrimination. In sum, the preponderance of evidence suggests that whites in the Americas, Western Europe and throughout the former colonies, have long engaged in the formal denial of societal discrimination. Thus, a contemporary denial of racial discrimination does not indicate a dramatic change in the formal expression of racial ideology as is claimed by the 'new racism' notion. This is simply the continuation of a long-standing trend that is central to the operation of democracies that fail to live up to the principle of equality (Leach, 2002a).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the formal practice of racism has become less acceptable all across the globe in the last 60 years (Miles, 1993; Winant, 2001). Especially since the 1970s, an unprecedented degree of legal protection has been afforded those long subjected to racism and discrimination. While this achievement of *de jure* equality has not fully guaranteed *de facto* equality, it does seem to have made the formal expression of the 'old-fashioned' segregationist ideology less normatively acceptable (Schuman et al., 1997). Indeed, in many societies today the formal expression of ideologies such as forced segregation is a criminal offense as well as a moral one. That few people now openly express segregationism is an important change in the formal discourse of Western Europe, North America and Australasia. The question, however, is what does this change tell us about the nature of racism, past and present?

A wide variety of work argues that the achievement of *de jure* equality forced whites in the 1960s and 1970s to find new ways to formally express their racism. As they could no longer openly express the discredited ideologies of segregationism and genetic inferiority, they had to express their racism through criticizing others' cultural differences (Balibar, 1991; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) or denying the existence of societal discrimination (McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1988). It was argued that these 'new' formal expressions of

racism were markedly different from the 'old-fashioned' expressions because they were subtle rather than blatant, symbolic rather than literal, and covert rather than overt. Although contemporary social science work on racism differs widely in method and perspective, there is a surprising consensus on the notion of a 'new racism'.

My effort in this paper has been to disrupt this consensus. Although I agree that formal expressions of racial ideology now often take the form of a denial of societal discrimination (or a criticism of cultural difference), I think there is little reason to characterize this as new. Indeed, both ideologies have long been expressed in western Europe, Australasia, the Americas and throughout the former colonies. There is, in fact, good reason to believe that a denial of societal discrimination is endemic to societies that formally espouse equality but practice discrimination. This means that the 'new racism' of a denial of societal racial discrimination is likely to be as old as democracy itself (see Balibar, 1991; Myrdal, 1944).

To buttress my argument against the notion of a 'new racism', I offered a variety of evidence against the idea that racism before the achievement of *de jure* equality was marked by the widespread formal expression of racial inferiority. Both quantitative and qualitative studies suggested that the formal expression of racial inferiority was not especially popular in places like Australia and the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. And, recent evidence in Britain, western Europe and the United States suggests that the formal expression of racial inferiority is nearly as popular now. Thus, contrary to the notion of a 'new racism', the formal expression of racial inferiority was not especially *popular* before the achievement of *de jure* racial equality and it did not become especially *unpopular* afterwards.

In my view, continued adherence to the notion of a 'new racism' serves only to prevent the generation of alternative conceptualizations that may better characterize racism of the present and of the past. As long as researchers (and activists and politicians and neighbours) continue to think of the formal expression of contemporary racism as distinct from the presumably overt, blatant, and 'old-fashioned' expressions of the past, they may continue to mischaracterize formal expressions of contemporary racism as covert, subtle, symbolic and new. This arbitrary distinction between 'old' and 'new' provides an unsatisfactory substitute for a more substantive social psychological conceptualization of racism (Leach, 1998; 2002b). Instead of a simple temporal distinction between 'old' and 'new' formal expressions of racism, a critical social psychology of racism needs a social psychological conceptualization of the phenomenon. A number of specific conceptualizations of how racism is achieved in contemporary settings are offered in the other contributions to this issue. What I offer below is a first step towards a general conceptualization of racism that may be used to advance a critical social psychology of the topic.

Towards a critical social psychology of racism

I think social psychologists have tended to offer poor conceptualizations of (past and present) racism because we have given little direct attention to the concept of racism (see also Leach, 1998, 2002b). Although racism has been extensively theorized across the social sciences and humanities, social psychologists tend not to use these conceptualizations. Instead, we tend to conceptualize racism as ('old-fashioned' or new) prejudice, stereotypes, ethnocentrism, or discourse that is somehow hostile, biased, pejorative or derogatory (for reviews see Condor, in press; Duckitt, 1992; Durrheim & Dixon, 2004).

However, few other fields define racism in this way. As long as psychologists continue to mis-theorize racism, we will continue to misapprehend how racism worked in the past and how it works in the present.

Based in Reeves (1983 chap. 1) and Todorov (1984, chap. 4), I think social psychology could build on Benedict (1942) to define racism in a way more consistent with the other social sciences. Thus, I think social psychology can define racism as a categorical *ascription* of relative inferiority that suggests a *prescription* of inferior treatment. While not necessarily leading to actual treatment, the ascription of inferior intelligence, effort, culture or morality suggests that the ethnic group *should* be treated less well than one's own group. Thus, unlike prejudice, racism may be accompanied by positive or negative feelings. And, unlike prejudice, racism has an obvious importance in societies that have achieved *de jure* equality because the ideology of racism presents a direct challenge to the practice of equality (Leach, 2002a). This means that the first step towards a *critical* social psychology of racism requires a social psychology of racism, rather than of prejudice or hostility or bias.

In my view, one of the most important tasks for a social psychology of racism is the examination of how the (formal and informal) expression of relative inferiority relates to the (formal or informal) operation of group inequality (see also Hall, 1980). As relative inferiority is the psychology that aligns perfectly with the practice of inequality, together they form a perfect whole (see Blumer, 1958; Myrdal, 1944). Where relative inequality is practiced, relative inferiority should be preached. And, where inferiority is preached, inequality should be practiced. A social psychology of racism that takes seriously its role as ascription and prescription would be better positioned to examine how the psychology of inferiority and the practice of inequality mutually constitute each other in both the small-scale and large-scale workings of human interaction. Conceptualizing racism as 'old-fashioned' or 'new' hostility, bias, dislike or derogation, does little to identify how the psychology of racism relates to the social reality of racial inequality (see also Leach, 2002b).

Local or global?

> [t]he question is not whether men [or women]-in-general make perceptual distinctions between groups with different racial or ethnic characteristics, but rather, what are the specific conditions which make this form of distinction socially pertinent, historically active (Hall, 1980, p. 338).

In this paper I made an effort to engage work done in North America, Western Europe and Australasia. Although my own knowledge, as well as the corpus of work, did not allow an equal treatment of these varied contexts, this 'globe trotting' aimed to highlight the importance of examining racism across social, political, cultural and economic contexts. Although my aims required less attention to the particularities of these contexts, I think that a critical social psychology of racism should embrace *both* local and global approaches.

At present, approaches to racism are either too general or too specific. Thus, the notion of a 'new racism' that characterizes all societies that have achieved *de jure* equality minimizes attention to the particular ways in which contemporary racism has developed in societies with different ethnic mixes and different legal and institutional histories. In an opposite way, some studies of local discourse appear to show their commitment to contextualism by necessarily assuming that contemporary racism

in Australia cannot be anything like that in the United States, for example. However, a broad conceptualization of racism may serve to identify where local contexts produce local racisms and where they do not.

Despite great temporal, political and other differences, it is entirely possible that white Californians in the early 1970s came to oppose government efforts against African American disadvantage in a way similar to white Western Australians' opposition to government efforts for Aborigines in the mid 1990s. As political candidates appealed to disaffected whites in both places by arguing that the relevant ethnic minority was unfairly gaining from government 'largesse' (see Rapley, 1998; Sears, 1988), it is not surprising that opposition to such efforts was expressed in similar ways. Although it does not seem correct to suggest that this similarity across decades and continents establishes the generality of a 'new racism', a social psychology of racism should be able to theorize how the psychology and the politics are similar and how they are different in these two examples.

Understanding the global aspects of racism is increasingly important, as some have suggested that globalization may be feeding a globalizing 'supra-nationalist' racism that reaches right across the world (Balibar, 1991). As the world increasingly turns on a North-South axis that sets the rich, white Northern societies above the poor Southern societies (see Winant, 2001), supra-national bodies such as the European Union the 'G8', the United Nations security council, and the International Monetary Fund may be setting the stage for a global racism where the 'inferior' economies and polities of the South face a prescription of inferior wealth, health and rights. A narrow focus on, and emphasis of, local racisms could miss the machinations of this kind of global racism.

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