

WHITE NEGROES

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... The interplay of race, class, and gender, the main systems of domination, ... is a well-established theme, but most discussions concern the way these systems intersect rather than the way they interact. Comparisons are rare between racism, classism, and sexism in terms of their histories, ideologies, imageries, and underlying logic; we are offered a wealth of vignettes but systematic explorations are lacking. However brief an excursion into a large and difficult area, the focus here on images and stereotypes may shed new light. ...

◆ *Situations: Irishmen, Chinese, Jews*

Statements in which comparisons are made between blacks and other groups, without a reason why being given, seem to be relatively simple; presumably the comparison is in terms of status, treatment, or appearance. Thus Chamfort, in the eighteenth century: "The poor are the negroes of Europe." The British in India often referred to Indians as "niggers," mostly on the basis of skin colour. Of a similar nature is the statement ... by the Belgian socialist leader Emiel Vandervelde, who compared the way

NOTE: From *White on Black: Images of Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, by Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 1992, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Copyright © 1992. Reprinted with permission of KIT Publishers.

the working class was treated with the treatment of negroes.¹ John Lennon said, "Women are the niggers of the world." A little more complex is a statement by Francisco Cabral, superior of the Portuguese Jesuit mission in Japan (1570-81), about the Japanese: "After all, they are Niggers, and their customs are barbarous."² So to the pious Portuguese, after a hundred years of Portuguese experience in Africa, the Japanese were put in the same category as Africans.

In some cases comparison of blacks with other groups goes much further. In 1880 the Belgian essayist Gustave de Molinari noted, in a series of articles about Ireland, that England's most important newspapers and magazines "allow no occasion to escape them of treating the Irish as a kind of inferior race—as a kind of white negroes—and a glance in *Punch* is sufficient to show the difference between the plump and robust personification of John Bull and the wretched figure of lean and bony Pat."³

English views of Ireland display an interesting zigzag pattern. In the early Middle Ages Ireland was famed as a centre of Christian civilization: several English kings went there to be educated. Ireland's reputation declined, however, as England's interest in conquering and colonizing it increased. In the wake of the Anglo-Norman invasion and after the classic description of Ireland by Gerald of Wales in the twelfth century, which set the tone for later descriptions, Ireland was considered savage and barbarous. Down to the present this notion of the "wilde Irish" has hardly changed, although there have been marked shifts of emphasis. The distinction between Celtic and Anglo-Saxon "races" in the British Isles is one of long standing, but from the mid-nineteenth century onward the British image of the Irish was recast in biological racial terms.⁴ In addition, from about 1840, the standard image of the good-natured Irish peasant was revised, becoming that of a repulsive ape-like creature.

In cartoons and caricatures as well as prose, Paddy began to resemble increasingly the chimpanzee, the orangutan, and, finally, the gorilla. The transformation of peasant Paddy into ape-man or simianized Caliban was completed by the 1860s and 1870s, when for various reasons it became necessary for a number of Victorians to assign Irishmen to a place closer to the apes than the angels.⁵

Irishmen were depicted with low foreheads, prognathous features and an apelike gait by cartoonists such as Sir John Tenniel of *Punch*. In 1862 a satire in *Punch* attacked Irish immigration under the title "The Missing Link": "A creature manifestly between the Gorilla and the Negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, whence it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages: the lowest species of Irish Yahoo."⁶

What prompted the metamorphosis of Paddy the peasant to Paddy the ape was the stream of Irish immigrants, in the wake of the famines of the 1840s, along with the mounting Irish resistance to British domination. The "Fenian outrages" of the 1860s involved anti-English acts of sabotage and subversion. Thus, English images of the Irish hardened in the context of colonialism, migration, and resistance. About this time the first apes were brought to Europe (the first live adult gorilla arrived at the London Zoo in 1860), and as they made their first appearance in zoos, they began to appear in cartoons and as a new metaphor in popular imagery. . . .

. . . What is striking is how consistent the colonizer's cultural politics are, regardless of geography or ethnicity. Like Africans and blacks, the Irish have been referred to as "savages" and likened to "apes," to "women" and to "children," just as the Celts were often described as a "feminine" race, by contrast with the "masculine" Anglo-Saxons. . . .

Cartoons in periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly* (*A Journal of Civilization*) made a hostile equation of Irishmen with blacks a routine part of American culture.⁷

These comparisons, in England between Irish people and Africans, and in the United States between the Irish and blacks, were made under the heading of race, but this only serves as a reminder that, until fairly recently, the terms "race" and "nation" (or "people") were synonymous. The peoples of Europe, within regions as well as within countries, were viewed as much as rungs of the racial "ladder" as were peoples or "races" outside Europe. Indeed, virtually all the images and stereotypes projected outside Europe in the age of empire had been used first within Europe. However, when they were *re-used* within Europe the repertoire was infused with the imagery of empire, with other, wider logics of exclusion, of which the imperial construction of "race" was one. Thus in 1885 the English physician John Beddoe devised an "index of pigrescence," a formula for identifying a people's racial components. "He concluded that the Irish were darker than the people of eastern and central England, and were closer to the aborigines of the British Isles, who in turn had traces of 'negro' ancestry in their appearances. The British upper classes also regarded their own working class as almost a race apart, and claimed that they had darker skin and hair than themselves."⁸

This profile could be extended to other minorities. An example is the Chinese who entered the western United States in the nineteenth century as a cheap labour force, following in the footsteps of blacks. Imported on a contract basis to work on the railroads, the "coolie" had in common with the black slave that both were perceived as enemies of free labour and republicanism; what ensued has been termed the "Negroization" of the Chinese.

Racial qualities that had been assigned to blacks became Chinese characteristics. Calling for Chinese exclusion, the

editor of the *San Francisco Alta* claimed the Chinese had most of the vices of the African: "Every reason that exists against the toleration of free blacks in Illinois may be argued against that of the Chinese here." Heathen, morally inferior, savage, and childlike, the Chinese were also viewed as lustful and sensual. Chinese women were condemned as a "depraved class" and their depravity was associated with their almost African-like physical appearance. While their complexions approached "fair," one writer observed, their whole physiognomy indicated "but a slight removal from the African race." Chinese men were denounced as threats to white women. . . .⁹

Thus virtually the whole repertoire of anti-black prejudice was transferred to the Chinese: projected on to a different ethnic group which did, however, occupy a similar position in the labour market and in society. The profile of the new minority was constructed on the model of the already existing minority.

Americans often drew comparisons between national minorities (blacks or Native Americans) and peoples overseas. When the U.S. annexed or colonized Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Cuba at the turn of the century, the American popular press characterized the native populations by analogy with either "red Injuns" or blacks. The *Literary Digest* of August 1898 spoke casually of "Uncle Sam's New-Caught Anthropoids."¹⁰ On the American conquest of the Philippines, Rudyard Kipling, the bard of imperialism, characterized the native inhabitants as "half devil and half child." The American press regularly presented Filipinos and other peoples *as* blacks—images which suggest graphically that the sensation of power and supremacy was the same, whether on the American continent or overseas, and was being expressed through the same metaphors. Again, it is not ethnicity, or "race" that governs imagery and discourse,

but rather, the nature of the *political relationship* between peoples which causes a people to be viewed in a particular light.

A similar dynamic was at work during the Vietnam war. A common expression among American GIs in Vietnam was "The only good gook is a dead gook," with "gook" (the term of abuse for Vietnamese) replacing "nigger" or Indian ("Injun") in the existing formula.¹¹ The underlying logic of dehumanizing the enemy by means of stereotyping is the same. These examples of dehumanization and victimization illustrate what Ron Dellums has called, in a phrase, the "niggering process."¹² . . .

. . . What racism, classism, sexism all have in common is social inequality: the key to all the social relations discussed above is the pathos of hierarchy. While the common denominator is power—the power that arises from a hierarchical situation and the power required to maintain that situation—it is also a matter of the anxiety that comes with power and privilege. Existing differences and inequalities are magnified for fear they will diminish. Stereotypes are reconstructed and reasserted precisely when existing hierarchies are being challenged and inequalities are or may be lessening. Accordingly, stereotyping tends to be not merely a matter of domination, but above all, of humiliation. Different and subordinate groups are not merely described, they are *debased*, degraded. Perceptions are manipulated in order to enhance and to magnify social distance. The rhetoric and the imagery of domination and humiliation permeate society. They concern processes in which we all take part, as receivers and senders, in the everyday rituals of impression management, in so far as taking part in society means taking part in some kind of status-ranking.

As the negative of the denigrating images sketched above, there emerges the top-dog position, whose profile is approximately as follows: white, western, civilized, male, adult, urban, middle-class, heterosexual, and so on. It is this profile that has monopolized the definition of humanity in

mainstream western imagery. It is a programme of fear for the rest of the world population.

Notes ♦

1. Quoted in Vints (1984, p. 26).
2. Boxer (1978, p. 23).
3. Quoted in Curtis (1971, p. 1).
4. A classic source is J. Beddoe, *The Races of Britain* (1885). See MacDougall (1982) and Rich (1986, pp. 13-20).
5. Curtis (1971, p. 2).
6. Curtis (1971, p. 100). See cartoons by Tenniel and others (pp. 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62).
7. During a visit to America in 1881, the English historian Edward Freeman wrote: "This would be a great land if only every Irishman would kill a Negro, and be hanged for it. I find this sentiment generally approved—sometimes with the qualification that they want Irish and negroes for servants, not being able to get any other" (Curtis, 1984, p. 58).
8. Curtis (1984, p. 55) and Beddoe (1885).
9. Takaki (1980, pp. 217-218). "The 'Negroization' of the Chinese reached a high point when a magazine cartoon depicted [one of] them as a bloodsucking vampire with slanted eyes, a pigtail, dark skin, and thick lips. White workers made the identification even more explicit when they referred to the Chinese as 'nagurs.'" One may add that there were also differences between the stereotypes of Chinese and blacks.
10. See Drinnon (1980, pp. 276-277) and Jacobs and Landau (1971).
11. Lifton (1973/1985, p. 204).
12. Dellums (1978).

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