

Ad. Lecture 6:
Colonialism, Race and the Other

6 April 2006

History of racism

- seeing contemporary forms of racism in isolation from the past means ignoring the history of racism
- the idea of different ‘races’ emerged when European and non-European peoples came into contact (late 15th, early 16th century)
- European era of exploration and expansion
- the rise of the African slave trade
- European imperial domination and colonisation

What is 'the Other' like?

- all this resulted in articulation of ideas about the attributes of other races, 'what is the Other like?'
- from the 18th century onward proliferation of writing about race and the emergence of racism (racial ideas about black 'inferiority' and 'superiority' of some racial groups etc.)
- the importance of recognising the links between patterns of European expansion & the articulation of the ideas about the attributes of other 'races'
- the important influence of the European expansion on ideas about 'other' races
- 'race' started being used in scholarly and popular discourse to refer to the existence of distinct racial types

Lecture 7

Science and Racism

12 April 2006

Enlightenment Modernity

The changing meaning of 'race'

- Early use of the word 'race' was parallel to nation or people
- In late 18th and early 19th century the word acquired new meanings: a group defined as distinct because of its supposed common physical characteristics – one of great divisions of mankind
- It then followed that racial type determines social, cultural, moral, intellectual etc. characteristics

For example:

- “... This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (Immanuel Kant, 18th century)
- “... Negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) [are] naturally inferior to the whites” (David Hume *On National Characters*, 1754)

Classical aesthetic values and norms:

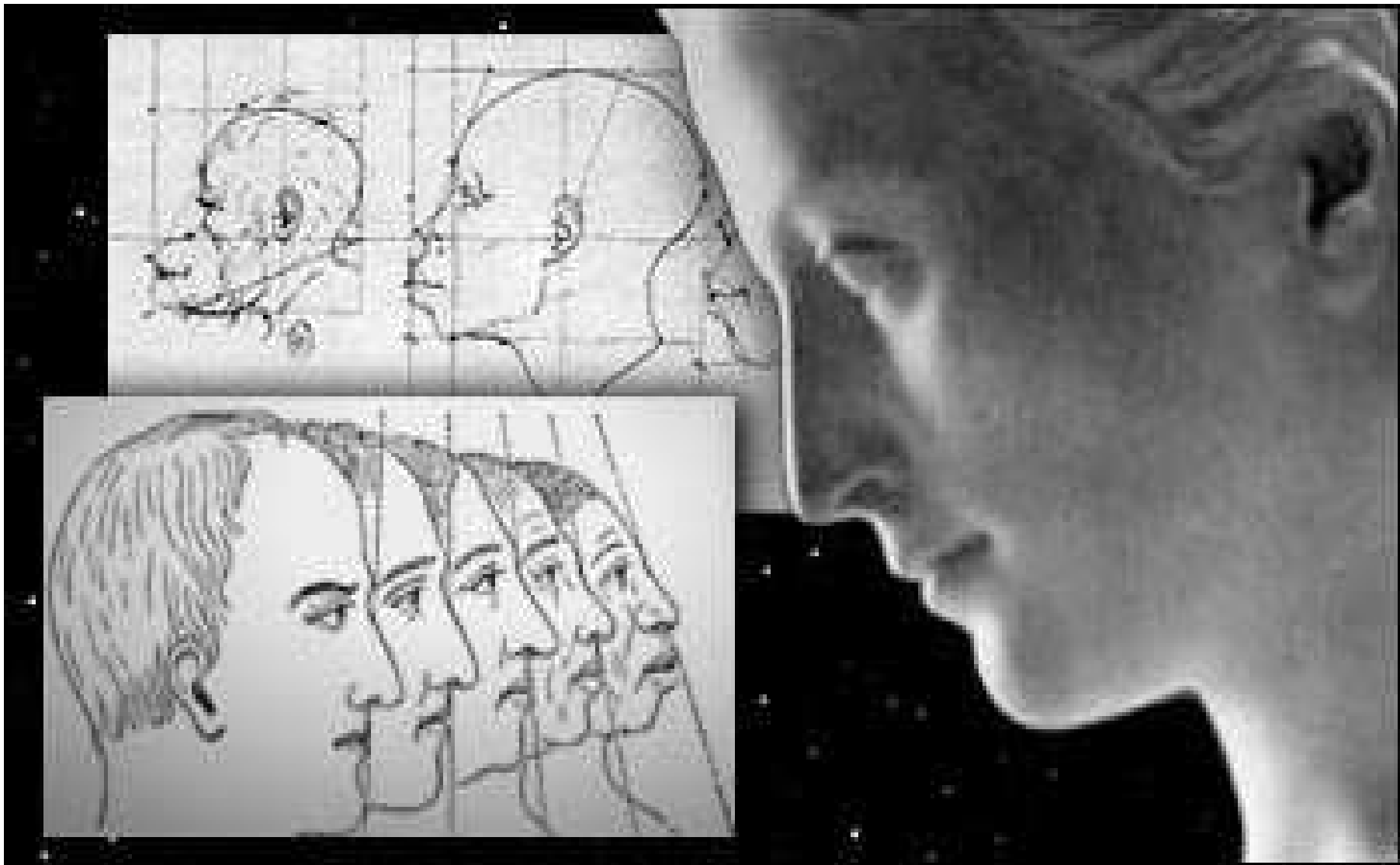
- Classical antiquity was recovered in the modern West as an ideal from which to order and compare observations.
- The ideal was drawn primarily from classical aesthetic values of beauty, proportion, and human form and classical standards of moderation, self-control, and harmony.
- These classical aesthetics and cultural norms played a role in the emergence of the idea of white supremacy!
- It was quite common to think that Greek proportions and stature were the example of beauty and perfection. A beautiful face, beautiful body, beautiful nature, beautiful character and beautiful soul were inseparable.

Classical ideal of beauty



Examples:

- Dutch anatomist Pieter Camper, famous for his ‘facial triangle’, claimed that comparisons of human heads and faces showed that the ‘facial angle’ of Europeans measured about 97 degrees (a 100 degree angle was the ideal achieved only by the ancient Greeks), while those of black people were between 60 and 70 degrees which made them closer to the measurements of apes and dogs than to human beings!
- There was also an elaborate theory of noses. Again, Greek and Roman noses are the highest in the hierarchical ladder, associated with conquerors, people of taste...
- An important note is that many theoreticians of race and racism were trained as artists and writers



Race and science in the 18th c.

- European Enlightenment thinkers retained the Greek ideal of reason + this reason's categorical function of discriminating between the 'civilised' (for Greeks 'cultured') and the 'savage' or 'primitive' (before 'barbaric')
- The Enlightenment = the Age of Reason (based on the assumption that reason could historically only come to maturity in modern Europe)
- The rise of science, replacing the authority of religion
- Nature was conceptualised as a hierarchical system (the Great Chain of Being), in which every being (humans, flora and fauna) had a 'naturally' assigned position and status

Race and science in the 18th c.

- initially scholars focused on cataloguing and describing
- a strong tendency to rank all the things in the world (growth in the scope of the natural world to be classified – due to enormous amount of exploration and voyages around the world)
- influential natural historians (e.g. Carl von Linné, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon) took it upon themselves to classify the human races according to this ‘naturally’ ordered hierarchy (as well as all objects of existence)
- For example:

The System of Nature

Carl von Linné, 1735

- Homo Sapiens ...
- 1 Four-footed, mute, hairy. *Wild man*.
- 2 Copper-coloured, choleric, erect. *American*. *Hair* black, straight, thick; *nostrils* wide; *face* harsh; *beard* scanty; obstinate, content, free. *Paints* himself with fine red lines. *Regulated* by customs.
- 3 Fair, sanguine, brawny. *European*. *Hair* yellow, brown, flowing; *eyes* blue; gentle, acute, inventive. *Covered* with close vestments. Governed by laws [...]
- 5 Black, phlegmatic, relaxed. *Hair* black, frizzled; *skin* silky; *nose* flat; *lips* tumid; crafty, indolent, negligent. *Anoints* himself with grease. Governed by caprice.

Consequences:

- At the top of the human chain in this general schema they positioned the European
- Non-Europeans were positioned at lower points on the scale
- Popular travel writings contributed to the perception of Europe as familiar and ‘civilised’, living in the Age of Light, while the peoples of Asia, Africa, America had ‘strange’ habits and mores; Africa was the Dark Continent
- (notorious dependence on popular travelogues of explorers and missionaries!)

Race and science

- 18th century Europe = the cradle of modern racism; important turning point in the development of racial thinking (George Mosse)
- the authority of science promotes and encourages observation, comparison, measuring, ordering of physical characteristics of human bodies
- these ‘scientific activities’ are regulated by classical aesthetic and cultural norms (the Enlightenment brought a revived interest and appreciation of classical antiquity; for example the Greek ‘beauty ideal’)
- Phrenology emerged as a new discipline in the late 17th and 18th century Europe. It argued that human character could be read through the shape of the human head. The inner working of a brain could be determined by the shape of the skull.
- phrenology (reading the skull), physiognomy (reading the face) – combined with value judgements following aesthetic criteria →
- socio-political uses of science; hierarchical ordering of races

Modernity and racism

- racism is inseparable from modernity (Michel Wieviorka)
- the dialectic of Enlightenment (racial prejudice present in major writings of the era: Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Jefferson, Kant etc.)
- exploration, domination, science and Christianity
- the idea of race has been most influential in a period of European hegemony
- by the end of the 19th, start of the 20th century, the idea of white racial superiority was widespread – colonial racism postulated the inferiority of colonised people; the rise of modern anti-Semitism...

Scientific origins of National Socialism

- Ernst Haeckel (1834 – 1919): popular German scientist (biologist, zoologist); a self-appointed spokesman of Darwin and Darwinism in Germany
- German Monist League: internationally influential organisation that Haeckel launched in 1906 but formulated already in the 1860s
- Haeckel's evolutionary Monism played a determining role in the emergence and development of National Socialist and fascist ideology
- Nazism closely paralleled the teachings of Haeckel

Ambivalence of modernity

- Racism as a form of social engineering (Zygmunt Bauman) – designing the ‘perfect society’
- Eugenics = the study of methods of improving genetic qualities by selective breeding, especially as applied to human mating (e.g. USA, Scandinavia, Germany)
- Implementation of modern bureaucracy; division of labour, efficiency of the modern state etc.
- National Hygiene Department
- Bureau for Enlightenment on Population Policy and Racial Welfare

Readings for Lecture 8

(27 April 2006)

- From the “*Ethnicity*” Oxford reader (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996):
- Clifford Geertz ‘Primordial Ties’
- Jack Eller & Reed Coughlan ‘The Poverty of Primordialism’
- Steven Grosby ‘The Inexpungeable Tie of Primordiality’
- Pierre van den Berghe ‘Does Race Matter?’ (full article available on the info system)
- Walker Connor ‘Beyond Reason: The Nature of the Ethnonational Bond’ (or read directly from his book *Ethnonationalism*, 1994)
- Eric Hobsbawm ‘Ethnic Nationalism in the Late Twentieth Century’
- From “*People, Nation and State*” (Mortimer & Fine, 1999):
- Robin Cohen ‘The Making of Ethnicity: A Modest Defence of Primordialism’