Acton University 2022

**Course: Theories of Race**

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**General Purpose:** The purpose of the lecture is to offer a general overview of the main various approaches or theories that have dominated the discussion of the question of race in America. The lecture is not an exhaustive treatment of the various movements or events involving race in America. It is neither mainly about the validity of scientific theories of race, although the topic will be referenced. Instead, it is an attempt at understanding the assumptions underpinning various approaches to the questions of race and ethnicity in our society and how they still inform our approaches.

**Outline:** What is race, after all? The determinants of racial self‐identity, when explored systematically, show us that race is a complex social construct with biological elements connected to it. Racial identity is historically and contextually influenced. These findings challenge the hegemonic and static biological view of race that is prevalent in classical social science literature. But how can we outline this complexity usefully?

The important of a brief historical exploration of race and racism in history has its importance to us as a context to understand its reality in America. The interaction of various cultural approaches to questions of the meaning of freedom and the creation of a social cohgesion in light of those historical developments is crucial for our understanding of race in America today.

The sociology of race and ethnic relations is the study of the political, civic, cultural, and economic relations between races and ethnicities at all levels of society. This area of learning encompasses the study of racism and other complex social processes between different racial and/or ethnic groups and the underlying cultural narratives that inform various approaches to race. I propose the existence of two main a priori forms of cognition that filter the question of race in the American context and how important it is to understand these two approaches. The main purpose of the lecture is to outline these two main lines of thought as they inform our debates and often merge at the edges of understanding.

There are various ways to outline theories of race—in fact, dozens of proposals--but this one will be based on two distinct sociological approaches based on two distinct antecedent philosophical views of the human person and the idea of freedom. The first is the vision of personalism that gave way to the idea of integration (and assimilationism). The second is the corporatist or collectivist or separatist. Both lines of thought will be examined and briefly outlined for the primary purpose of understanding them.

Recommended Books:

Thomas Sowell: *Race & Culture: A World View; Migrations & Culture: A World View*; *The* *Economics and Politics of Race*

Orlando Patterson: *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture; Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*

Shelby Steele: *The Content of Our Character; A Dream Differed: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America; White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*

Cornell West: *Race Matters; The Cornell West Reader*

Michael Eric Dyson: *Debating Race with Michael Eric Dyson*

*The last three recommendations are for the purpose of offering examples that showcase one or the other of the two distinct visions of race in America.*