Multiculturalism in Western Europe and North America

ACQI n. 1 Dominik Vu

**the Quote:**

On the page 13 Cornel and Hartman show that categories certain groups of individuals are being put in can eventually change over time. They are using the example of the Irish, being labeled as “race” by the Englishmen or Americans in the 19th century.

„To the English of the 17th and much of the 19th centuries, the Irish although the same color as the English, were distinctly inferior race.“ (Cornel and Hartman, p. 13)

Nowadays Irish-Americans are a perfect fit for the category *ethnicity*, pretty much like the Jews. As it is practically impossible to recognize a difference in the appearance of an Englishman and of an Irishman, that implies skin color and visible physical differences are not always the key category when it comes to defining a *race*. Nevertheless, authors agree on many pages that those are the key elements of a race. (Cornel and Hartman p. 8-10) There is a lack of coherence in this matter, because earlier in the text they imply that races are created through mistakenly linking some qualities and cultural patterns with specific physical traits

**The Question**

The authors do not elaborate much on the other way a race is created, which means in cases without any significant physical differences between the minority and the majority population. How could the Irish have been considered a race if most scholars agree that skin color and hair texture play a key role in defining a race? Although they are arguing that blurry barriers and overlapping between ethnicity and race enables some identities to fall into both categories, the concept of race as a category that is physically defined (as stated in Cornel and Hartman p. 14) seems to be undermined by this concrete historical example.

**Everyday Life Example**

For example, the Jews (or the Irish) are not considered as separate races Today. This means that nowadays the main criteria are a color of skin (and other physical traits) and that race is a superset to ethnicities so that people sharing similar shades of a color of their skin are forming one race. In order to be able to define *race*, visible ingroup differences need to be ignored (such as the differences between the Italians and the Danes). That implies not only that the definition of *race* has shifted.

**The Textual Connection**

This lack of elaborated argumentation can be compensated if we have a look at the text from Pierre Van Der Berghe (p. 61) who argues that regarding neighboring communities which are coming from short distance migration whose physical differences are due the historical circumstances almost non-existing the differences can rather be found in culture. This was for example the case of the Jews living in Nazi Germany. The physical differences in order to be applicable need to be greater between different groups than within a group. In case of lack of physical differences some cultural differences are being taken into account, and then put forward. This seems like the reason for a scenario where the Irish and the Jews lost their “race” label simply because there was not sufficient physical justification for them to belong this category and it did not last in time. Especially when with better understanding of these terms and development in social sciences, 1970s introduced a more coherent and accurate term – *ethnicity*. (Eriksen, p. 21)

**The Outcome**

If there is something, we should learn from this example is the fact that terms like *race* and its meaning is constantly evolving through time and therefore the term *race* in the 19th century had very different connotations from the way we understand it Today. *Race* is always a product and a construct of a certain perceived “reality”, it does not exist on its own (to a large extend). Therefore, it is a category that is very volatile, constantly changing in time, which should be taken into account for the future. Regarding policies that could be inspired by those texts, the use of *race* in governmental and public sphere especially at an early age of education could make the scholarly debate more approachable and known for the people – what actually are the actors who eventually shape the terms and their meanings. Like this, overuse of the term should be avoided given its ambiguous nature. Myself at the age of 12 being taught at school I was presented the humanity divided into three races without any social aspect of races, racism, and the way they are collectively constructed. This needs to change in order to build a more open and tolerant society in a country which had been closed down for 41 years with its population being ethnically extremely homogenous. In this matter I can see the Czech high school system being outdated.

**Sample Self assessment form**

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**AQCI ASSESSMENT FORM**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Student’s name: | Dominik Vu | Name of assessor: | Dominik Vu | Date: | 26/02 |
| Essay title: |  | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Excellent | Good | Average | Poor | Not acceptable | Comments |
| 1) Is the chosen **quotation** central to the author’s argument? |  |  | X |  |  |  |
| 2) Has the main **argument** been fully understood (including its ‘for’ and ‘against’ sides, if applicable)? | X |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3a) Is the **question** raised important/relevant/interesting? | X |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3b) Has this **question** not been fully answered in the text? | X |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4) Is the **experiential connection** relevant/interesting? |  |  | X |  |  |  |
| 5a) Is the **textual connection** relevant/interesting? |  | X |  |  |  |  |
| 5b) Has it been cited properly? |  |  | X |  |  |  |
| 5c) Has it been adequately explained how the present text's argument contrasts with, contradicts, confirms, clarifies, or elaborates the other text's argument or point? |  | X |  |  |  |  |
| 6) Have the **implications** been well understood, can they have a practical impact for policy making? |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| **7) Expression/Presentation** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| a) Are the style, grammar and general use of English adequate? | X |  |  |  |  |  |
| b) Is the AQCI professionally presented? |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Essay grade:

Further comments: