BREAKING DOWN ‘RACE’:
A Radical Retheorization of Racial Formation Theory

by

CHERYL LYNN CRAWFORD

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Abstract

This thesis is a retheorization of Omi's and Winant's (1986) racial formation theory, which addresses the implications, inconsistencies and limitations of the initial theory. It is argued that Omi's and Winant's theory is problematic insofar as it supports the notion of ‘race’ permanency despite being a social constructionist theory. Omi and Winant also largely ignore the naturalization of ‘race’ and ignore the role of ‘nature’ and science in knowledge production and the reproduction of ‘race’. This thesis proposes a radical extension of the theory that addresses these problems, calling itself a radical racial formation theory.

In this extension, the debate over the ‘race’ concept and the conundrum that the ‘race’ theorist finds him/herself in is discussed. The role of sociologists in maintaining ‘race’ is considered. ‘Race’ is argued to be an emergent and formative feature of modernity supported by liberalism. It is argued that ‘race’ is often tied to ‘nature’ and made to seem as though both precede history. It is argued that both ‘nature’ and science need to be contested. The notion that all scientific aims are altruistic is challenged given the embeddedness of science in the social. The doctrine of essentialism is confronted along with the belief that essences present themselves as secure ‘knowledge’. The production of racial knowledge is central to this thesis as it is seen as one of the least critiqued arenas in which ‘race’ is reproduced. A radical racial formation theory is situated theoretically in the camps of the Frankfurt school's critical theory and Foucault's poststructuralism and a rapprochement between the two is called for. There is a discussion of the ‘present’ in Foucault's genealogical use, where it is argued that the present exists as a powerful moment where there can be a discontinuity with the present social formation and a break with the racial past. Finally, the Gramscian use of ‘hegemony’ is used to understand racial dominance. It is argued that whiteness presents itself as hegemonic in racial formation and counter-hegemonic possibilities are entertained.
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Introduction

‘Race’ has long been debated in sociology. This debate has resulted in a division between sociologists wanting to jettison the concept and prevent social scientists from reifying ‘race’ and those wishing to preserve the concept, insisting it has analytical value. The problem with the concept of ‘race’ as Goldberg (1993) acknowledges, is the more general an expression becomes, the more ahistorical it can seem to be, resulting in a malleability that makes the expression “susceptible” to theoretical and practical “vacuity” (p. 3). Furthermore, the more theoretically fluid that the expression becomes the more likely it will assume the “significance of legitimate and established discursive practices and expressions” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 3). Such is the case with the notion of ‘race’. This thesis seeks to challenge the vacuity of ‘race’ and the ensuing set of social relations that the concept continuously arranges. It seeks to confront and reject essentialisms and ties to ‘nature’ that a commitment to ‘race’ has endorsed.

This thesis sets out to accomplish its goals through asserting the historicity of ‘race’ and by tracing several critically consequential debates. As such, this thesis grounds itself in *racial formation theory*, as theorized by Michael Omi and Howard Winant in 1986, and again in 1994. It should be noted at the outset, that all references to Omi’s and Winant’s racial formation theory, are to be assumed to be in reference to their 1986 edition, unless otherwise specified. Racial formation theory arose in 1986 out of a particular moment in critical race scholarship, during a time in which discussions about identity politics, ‘difference’ and Black feminism were taking place. Omi’s and Winant’s work was important during this period of time as racial formation theory presented itself
as one of the first comprehensive theoretical works that attempted to historicize ‘race’ and provide a framework within which to understand ‘race’ as purely sociohistorical. This theory, though dated, continues to offer an excellent foundation and lens through which to work through and make sense of ‘race’ and its basic premise underlies much racial theory today.

The main purpose of this thesis is to take the foundational aspects of racial formation theory and revise them in a way that makes sense in the present historical moment, by addressing the problems and limitations of the theory at this moment in critical race scholarship. Outlaw (1990) writes that Omi’s and Winant’s racial formation theory offers an important contribution to critical theory of ‘race’, whose strength is in its departure from reductionist theories of ‘race’, while preserving the “sociohistorical constructivist dimensions of ‘race’” and resituating ‘race’ as ‘formation’ (p. 77). Outlaw (1990) argues that racial formation theory understands ‘race’ as socially evolutionary where learning is key, and the “original promises of critical theory: enlightenment leading to emancipation” are possible (p. 77). Outlaw’s (1990) hope for racial formation theory is that an understanding of ‘race’ guided by critical social thought may function as a way to get beyond racism, without reductionism, to a state of pluralist socialist democracy (p. 77).

While Outlaw (1990) is correct in his assertion of the positive implications of the resituating of ‘race’ as ‘formation’, his statement demonstrates the precise problem with racial formation theory that this thesis seeks to dismantle. This thesis asserts the need to transcend the preservation of even the sociohistorical constructive dimensions of ‘race’ as
reified and maintained by the social sciences. Although this thesis understands ‘race’ as social formation and discursive practice and sees the sociohistorical understanding of ‘race’ as progressive, it argues the need to continue this progression. With the dismissal of any biological basis for ‘race’, what remains is the social reality of a concept that has proven itself analytically useless and ultimately dangerous. While it is important to acknowledge the historicity of ‘race’, it is equally as important to not stagnate there, as much social theory has and continues to do. This thesis argues that the present exists as a powerful moment where discursive formations and practices can be fundamentally altered, and even erased. The use of the term ‘present’ here is in reference to the present social formation and the possibility of discontinuity with the present social formation understood in relation to Hoy’s (1994) use of Foucault, where it is argued that there are lines of fragility in the present. Foucault’s ‘genealogy’ has called for investigation into those things that we feel are without history and such investigations allow us to challenge “that-which-is” as a potential emancipatory moment. The section on locating a radical racial formation theory theoretically will address this further through a rapprochement of the Frankfurt school’s “critical theory” and Foucault’s “poststructuralism”.

So although this thesis grounds itself in racial formation theory and uses this theory’s understanding of the formation of ‘race’, it does not accept the belief that ‘race’ should be preserved, that it will always exist (there are many problems with this which will be discussed in detail), or that it is the category of exclusion that matters most. As such, this thesis will work towards developing a radical extension of the theory, marking the creation of a Radical Racial Formation Theory. This has been deemed ‘radical’ racial
formation theory, because above all, this thesis seeks to impart the need and practice of thoroughgoing political reforms that would ultimately include an overhaul and eradication of the current racialized social order, by making ‘race’, although non-existent, obsolete.

This will be accomplished by discussing the debate over ‘race’ and the dilemmas of the ‘race’ theorist in the first section. The second section will discuss Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory and how it understands ‘race’. The third section will be a theoretical extension that responds to some of the limitations of Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory addressed in the second section. It will argue that ‘race’ is a modern conception, legitimized by liberalism, and will argue the importance of acknowledging the role of ‘race’ and science in essentializing ‘race’ and maintaining the concept. It will also address how this section will understand racisms. The fourth section will theoretically situate radical racial formation theory amongst the critical and poststructural theoretical camps. It will argue the importance of the sociology of knowledge in understanding ‘race’, how racial ‘knowledges’ are produced, how racist discourse operates and how ‘power’ is understood. The fifth section will address racial hegemony in the Gramscian use of the term, and suggest challenges to ‘white’ hegemony, namely ‘white’ abolitionism and the complicating factor of racial ‘hybridity’. The fifth section will be followed by a conclusion.

It should be noted that there is an emphasis on critical whiteness in this thesis as critical whiteness is presented as a way to challenge and subvert systems of racial
hierarchy and white hegemony. However, this is not believed to be the only or superior mode of action. The experiences and voices of racialized others and their commitments to modernity, history and knowledge have largely been omitted. There are several reasons for this. First, it is always a conundrum of a critical race theorist to know or to choose whose voices and whose experiences ought to be included. As a writer who would be categorized as ‘white’, I have chosen to write on the problems of whiteness and what white activists could do to challenge white hegemony as this is something that I feel I can know based on my own personal positioning. The obvious risk of this lies in recentering or reifying whiteness or marginalizing racialized others. I do feel, however, that there is a place for everyone in a radical racial formation theory in seeking to challenge ‘race’, whether it be challenging scientific reproductions of ‘races’, other racial knowledge production, or engaging in counter-hegemonic, anti-racist actions.

It is equally important to note at the forefront of this endeavour, that the extension proposed here is flawed and makes one particularly serious error. Any reductionist account of a singular category of social exclusion is immediately problematic, as no category exists in isolation. In theorizing ‘racial formation’ ‘identities’ are flattened and fragmented. The treatment of ‘race’ as an isolatable category of experience is fraught with problems. Thus, what may be more appropriate here is the development of a radical social formation theory and not one that errs again in failing to account for multiple systems of oppression that also mark bodies and lives in ways that exclude. A radical social formation theory, would understand “the articulation of multiple modalities of power—notably those of race, class, gender, and sexuality—whose naturalizing effects
work relationally and conjuncturally, as social assemblages rather than as isolated essences” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 5) forming a “matrix of domination” (Andersen & Collins, 1992). As Brah (1992) maintains, post-structuralist insights inform us how, “structures of class, racism, gender and sexuality cannot be treated as ‘independent variables’ because the oppression of each is inscribed within the other—is constituted and constitutive of the other” (p. 37).

The importance of this project is demonstrated by Mohanty (1991), who writes that as we develop more “complex, nuanced modes of asking questions” and as there is an increasing recognition of the interrelation between histories of colonialism, capitalism, ‘race’ and gender in scholarship, our “conceptual maps” are being “redrawn and transformed” (p. 3). Given this, a radical social formation theory may prove more useful. The error created by most ‘race’ theorists, is to prioritize ‘race’ over other social “modalities of power.” This is explained by Banton (1977), who argues that “race relations” are argued by some to be a “distinctive kind of social relations by the quality of hostility and dissociation that racism introduces into them” (p. 162). Banton (1977) argues that this must be contested as all of the features of “race relations”, minus their “label”, can be found in other social relations based on other categories and groupings of people (p. 162). This error is consistently made in racial formation theory, where it is argued that “crucial to this formulation is the treatment of race as a central axis of social relations which cannot be subsumed under or reduced to some broader category or conception” (Omi & Winant, 1986, pp. 61, 62). Although the authors argue that this is to keep ‘race’ from being treated as an epiphenomenon, the insistence on a treatment of
‘race’ as a “central axis” of social relations is lamentable at best. Furthermore, in keeping with Du Bois’ theorization that the ‘problem’ of the twentieth century is the ‘problem’ of the ‘color line’, and maintaining this sentiment to be true of the twenty-first century is evidence of a critical error and ignorance of the articulation and intersection of multiple “modalities of power”. Although Omi and Winant have consistently made this type of error in their theory, in their 1994 edition of racial formation theory, the authors write,

Race, class, and gender all represent potential antagonisms whose significance is no longer given, if it ever was … [R]ace, class, and gender (as well as sexual orientation) constitute ‘regions’ of hegemony, areas in which certain political projects can take shape (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 68).

Omi and Winant (1994) argue that it is important to see that in addition to ‘race’, class and gender are also socially constructed and are therefore not fixed and discrete categories (p. 68). Furthermore, no category exists autonomously, as there is intersectionality (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 68). This is the only passage devoted to intersectionality in their theory, but it is a notable attempt at recognizing that ‘race’ coexists amongst other “modalities of power” within an intersecting “matrix of domination”. Racism must also be understood in the same way. Hall (1980) has argued that racism, like ‘race’, cannot be reduced to any other type of social relation, but that it also cannot be explained autonomously from them.

However, given the purposes of this thesis, its space and scope, the focus will be solely on ‘race’, with the understanding that ‘race’ is not a “central axis of social relations”, but a “modality of power” in a “matrix of domination”. Before moving on to
an extension of racial formation theory, it is essential that the debate and problems with ‘race’ be taken up first.

**The ‘Race’ Debate**

Having been considered ‘man’s [sic] most dangerous myth’, the concept of ‘race’ has endured a long history (Montagu, 1942, p. 71). Goldberg (1990) argues that the concept of ‘race’ emerged in the European languages in the fifteenth century, peaking in popular and scientific usage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that the multiple redefinitions of ‘race’ and changes in racial classification and recognition partially reflect racisms that emerged with Enlightenment (p. 295). The present, however, marks a very significant break. As Guillaum (1999c) writes,

> While the meaning of the term has been constantly changing since its emergence, this is the first time any attempt has been made to destroy the very concept itself, which is extremely important. It is certainly crucial in that it marks a break with one of the most untouchable sacred cows of our time, but it becomes even more so when we look at the real significance of this attempted rejection (p. 40).

Much of this break has come from the natural sciences where it is claimed and has been proven that biologically, humans do not form genetically discrete groups. Furthermore, the range of genetic variation amongst human beings is too great to allow for any reliable or consistent system of racial classification. As Webster (2003) writes, “certain biologists and geneticists do not simply ‘question the utility’ of the race concept. They demonstrate that it is arbitrary and internally inconsistent—through migration, miscegenation and genetic redistributions” (pp. 8, 9). This rejection of biologicistic notions of ‘race’ has been
detailed in much of the literature surrounding the ‘race’ concept debate. Miles (1989) argues that, “the use of the word ‘race’ to label the groups so distinguished by such features is an aspect of the social construction of reality: ‘races’ are socially imagined rather than biological realities” (p. 71). Miles (1989) maintains that the concept should be abandoned, as it is nothing more than an ideological construction. He supports this by stating “there is no scientific justification for using the term to refer to a discrete hierarchy of ‘races’ as distinguished by phenotypical features such as skin colour, ...as far as the biological and genetic sciences are concerned, ‘races’ do not exist” (Miles, 1989, p. 70). Furthermore, when ‘race’ is employed, “it is the result of a process of signification whereby certain somatic characteristics are attributed with meaning and are used to organise populations into groups which are defined as ‘races’” and are “represented as possessing certain cultural characteristics” (Miles, 1989, p. 71). “The deterministic manner of this representation means that all those who possess the signified phenotypical characteristics are assumed to possess the additional cultural characteristics” (Miles, 1989, p. 71). Miles (1989) does not deny that there are somatic and genetic (although problematic) differences between human beings. He argues that, 

What is at issue is the scientific status of the terms used to analyse this representational process, this historical construction and reproduction of common sense in the European world, and its economic and political concomitants and consequences.

Miles’ and Brown’s (2003) basic argument is that if ‘races’ are not naturally occurring populations, then what requires explanation is how ‘race’ is constructed, reproduced and used to constitute and exclude social groups (p. 91). Racial formation theory attempts to
do this, thought not unproblematically (Omi & Winant, 1986). Omi and Winant maintain that ‘race’ cannot be jettisoned as it represents a social reality, and as such it is fair to say that Miles and Brown (2003) and Omi and Winant would be positioned against one another in this debate.

The significance of this historical break with ‘race’ has been marked by a widespread debate prompted in the social sciences, where, whether or not ‘race’ represents a social reality (Omi & Winant) and whether or not the concept should continue to be used or swept into the ‘dustbin of history’ is hotly contested (Miles, 1989). There is also an ensuing debate over the discussion of the ‘reality’ of ‘race’. Given that there is no biological existence of race and thus no scientific reality in the positivistic sense, several scholars caution against the danger of reifying ‘race’ by suggesting some social reality belonging to race. A counter-argument is that by not noticing ‘race’, and its social reality, colour-blind ideology is maintained and advanced, and much anti-racist theory and practice devotes itself to exposing just this. This divide is between sociologists seeking to jettison the concept and those seeking to maintain it because of a belief in some analytical value of ‘race’. This ensuing debate is one which this chapter takes an interest in, but due to the sheer magnitude of the debate, it would be nearly impossible to adequately address all of the arguments in a single chapter or thesis for that matter. Instead, this chapter attempts to locate the conceptualization of ‘race’ in racial formation theory within and amongst the complexities of this much larger debate.
Most of the contention behind the debate over the ‘race’ concept hinges on the binary created between social and natural theorizations of the concept. The result is a divide between essentialism and constructionism. The problem with this, as Fuss (1989) acknowledges, is that far too often social constructionists “presume that the category of the social automatically escapes essentialism, in contradistinction to the way the category of the natural is presupposed to be inevitably entrapped within it” (p. 6). Fuss (1989) argues that in order to intervene effectively in the divide between constructionism and essentialism, it is necessary to question the “constructionist assumption that nature and fixity go together (naturally) just as sociality and change go together (naturally)” (p. 6). Fuss (1989) states that “it may be time to ask whether essences can change and whether constructions can be normative” (p. 6).

Sociology as a discipline is assumed to be anti-essentialist, as “…the social sciences, except insofar as they are concerned with human beings, are not concerned with natural kinds” (Ellis, 2001, p. 178). Underlying this is the belief that only ‘natural kinds’ have ‘essence’. Spivak (1993) poses challenge to this, when she writes “why is the thought of the social free of essences?” (pp. 7, 8). In the case of ‘race’, this becomes a more complicated debate. It is known that ‘race’ has no essence and is ontologically illegitimate. However, oftentimes in social constructionist accounts of ‘race’, although the reification of a biologicist, ‘natural’ conception of ‘race’ is rejected, the social determinants of ‘race’ are reified. This is done by taking the abstraction of social determinants and regarding these as if they were concrete. The result of this has been a hostile debate amongst sociologists as to whether or not and to what extent their accounts
of ‘race’ perpetuate the continued use of ‘race’ despite its biological insignificance. It has been believed, as Montagu (1942) writes, that “the ‘race problem’ is essentially a problem of social relations and …is, therefore, fundamentally a social problem” (p. 71). The creation of ‘race’ as a “social problem” has made it an area of sociological analysis. As Guillain writes (1999c), “if the responsibility is indeed theirs, it is less because they had a part in the invention of ‘race’ than because they are the very disciplines on which the study of the phenomenon depends: as a social trait, it falls within their sphere of understanding and analysis” (p. 44). “Leaving aside the question of scientific or objective races, social scientists could be investigating a product of their own practices” (Webster, 1992, pp. 79, 80). Miles and Brown (2003) add to this by suggesting,

…perversely, social scientists have prolonged the life of an idea that should be consigned to the dustbin of analytically useless terms: ‘There are no ‘races’ and therefore no ‘race relations’. Unfortunately, social scientists have frequently assumed that it is possible to overcome the problems inherent in using the term ‘race’ analytically by simply using scare quotes—that is, substituting ‘race’ for race. This has the virtue of emphasising that ‘race’ is not a real attribute of human biology, but socially constructed and discursively perceived. However, ‘race’ is too often used as a code-word for race—even with quotation marks, the term is used to denote common-sense categories of human beings, usually identified by skin colour (p. 90).

Yehudi Webster writes, “sociologists continue to refer to ‘race’, when it is racial classification that is at the root of ‘racial formation’ and ‘racialization’ (Webster, 2003, p. 9). Webster (1992), like Miles, argues that social scientists are responsible for endorsing a continued system of racial classification in their studies, particularly when the labels associated with that classification system are used. Webster (2003) charges sociologists
with exercising ‘bad faith’ in attaching ontological status to ‘race’ (p. 9). Furthermore, Webster (2003) writes, “more significantly, if sociologists continue to scorn sound reasoning in the name of reality and racial liberation, what makes their practices so liberating” (p. 9)? “The argument that we must continue to collect racial data and study race because people believe in race and act out racial prejudices reflects an infantile level of reasoning and is particularly self-serving” (Webster, 2003, p. 9).

Carter (2003) maintains that two mistakes are made by sociologists who use ‘race’. The first is that they defend it as “a meaningful interpretive category employed by social actors,” and secondly by “regarding it as a discursive formation” (p. 151). Carter argues that what is maintained is not that beliefs of race are real, but that the claim being made is that ‘race’ is real (2003, p. 151). As Carter (2003) writes,

The problem with this is that once we stop talking about beliefs in a notion of race and instead talk about a reified something called race, structures of discrimination, and exclusionary practices generally, become the effect of people’s conscious understandings of them—race relations are those relations understood by individuals in race terms (would we define class relations as merely those relations understood by actors in class terms?) (p. 151).

Guillaumin (1999c) writes, “this awakening has come as a surprise for the social sciences, which thought that they had discreetly disposed of a category for which they were largely responsible by pushing it off into the domain of the natural sciences” (p. 44). So although classical racial formation theory is implicated in the reification of ‘race’, it is important to note, however, that this is one of the fundamental ways in which a radical racial formation theory would diverge from its classical counterpart. A radical racial
formation theory argues along with Goldberg (1993), “More generally, can we speak in either way at this historical moment without reifying race?” (p. 89). Classical racial formation and its theorists have failed to turn a mirror on themselves to see how their own efforts have worked to produce a concrete reality behind ‘race’. According to Roediger (2002), it is only a short leap to ascertain that it is antiracists themselves who are the “cause” of continued race-thinking (p. 15). As Roediger (2002) writes,

The charges made against us have decisively shifted. For a long time, such charges were clear: too visionary, too impatient, too little aware of the weight of history and tradition. Now the accusation becomes that we are atavistic—so eager to dwell on the bleak past that we miss the glorious future (Roediger, 2002, p. 15).

There have been ongoing debates over the reality of ‘race’. Claims argue that ‘race’ does not exist because there cease to be any real biological supports for existence, but yet we see physiological difference. ‘Race’ does not exist because we ought to be colourblind, but yet ‘race’ continues to factor into social relations. By discussing ‘race’ we actively reify ‘race’. By not discussing ‘race’ we dismiss the real consequences it has on peoples’ lives. ‘Races’ are incomprehensible given miscegenation and the increasingly global travel of groups of peoples throughout the world, but we can claim that if you possess certain traits linked to a certain ‘race’ grouping that you are at risk for certain diseases. A recent example is the commercials for the drug BiDil, the first drug approved for a specific racial group, marketed to the African American, “black” population for congestive heart failure. These arguments become the dilemma of the ‘race’ theorist. As St Louis (2005) acknowledges, the circularity of the dispute and the lack of a clear
consensus in the natural and human sciences over the reality of the ‘race’ makes it problematic to assess the conceptual and practical status of ‘race’ (p. 29). The result of this St Louis (2005) argues is a broad spectrum of both affirmative and negative statements on the use of ‘race’, arriving at the conclusion that “race does/does not exist and we should/should not use the concept” (pp. 29, 30).

Harding (2002) sums up the ways in which ‘race’ and racial differences are considered by identifying three lines of thinking. The first is that ‘race’ is ‘true’, natural, can be discovered by biology and has valuable social implications and consequences (Harding, 2002, p. 218). The second is the exact opposite of this, that ‘race’ is entirely socially constructed and that it is useless as a scientific concept (Harding, 2002, pp. 218, 219). The third, and potentially most interesting, is the thought that social constructionism inadequately address the “nature/culture dichotomy” that provides the basis for “scientific race difference debates” (Harding 2002, pp. 218, 219). In this third way of thinking through ‘race’, ‘race’ is always both biological and social, as physiological entities are shaped by social practice (Harding, 2002, pp. 218, 219). What Harding (2002) argues we need to learn is “just how social practices produce socially and biologically raced bodies” (pp. 218, 219).

There is no end in sight for this debate. The concept of ‘race’ has indeed endured a long history throughout both the natural and social sciences and despite ongoing biological rejection of the concept, scientific studies still emerge that claim a natural reality of ‘race’, particularly in recent disease research, as well as genetic research such as the Haplotype project (see http://www.hapmap.org for more information), and scholars
of the social sciences will continue to study the concept and its consequences. Let us now look at racial formation theory and where it is situated in this debate.

**Racial Formation Theory**

‘Racial formation’ “is a notion intended to displace that of ‘race’ as an ‘essence,’ or alternatively, as a ‘mere illusion, which an ideal social order would eliminate’” (Outlaw, 1990, p. 77). ‘Race’ is understood in racial formation theory as a fundamentally socio-historical and contested concept. Racial formation theory understands ‘race’ as a syncretic category formed at particular sociohistorical junctures. “Thus, human groupings are historically dynamic, culturally ordered, contingent social realities” (Outlaw, 1996, p.137). As Omi and Winant initially wrote,

> Once we understand that race overflows the boundaries of skin color, superexploitation, social stratification, discrimination and prejudice, cultural domination and cultural resistance, state policy ...it becomes possible to speak of *racial formation* (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 68).

Racial formation theory seeks to debunk any validity of the concept of ‘race’, proposing instead that ‘race’ is a social and historical construct which is used for political purposes, primarily to legitimate numerous asymmetries of power. The authors were concerned about the treatment of ‘race’ as an epiphenomenon, something that could be easily subsumed under some supposedly more profound and fundamental category of identity, namely ethnicity, class and/or nation, not as a continually evolving category in and of
itself (Omi & Winant, 1986). In trying to escape a reductionist account of ‘race’ where ‘race’ is treated as an epiphenomenon, the authors mistakenly at times reduce all other social relationships to ‘race’. “Rather we wish to detach racial theory from epiphenomenalism, from entanglements which in our view are superfluous and stifling, in order to grasp the complexities of racial identity, politics and social structure in the United States” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 54). Winant (2001) attempted to clear up his position on the matter when he wrote, “Racialized identities and social structures coexist with all other dimensions of social organization. Although arguing for the importance of race, I am not a racial determinist” (p. 19). However, racial formation theory seeks to treat race as “a fundamental organizing principle of social relationships” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 66, emphasis original). The authors hope was to alter this situation by outlining what they would call racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 66). ‘Racial formation’, refers to the “process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings” (Omi & Winant, 1986, pp. 61-62). Omi and Winant have committed their work to the production of a historical sociological theory of ‘race’.

Omi and Winant work to concretize the treatment of ‘race’ as an organizing principle by considering the implications of race at the micro and macro levels of social relations. At the micro-level, the authors argue that “race is a matter of individuality, of the formation of identity. The ways in which we understand ourselves and interact with others, the structuring of our practical activity… these are all shaped by racial meanings and racial awareness” (1986, pp. 66, 67). At the macro-level, the authors argues that
“race is a matter of collectivity, of the formation of social structures: economic, political and cultural/ideological” (1986, p. 67).

It is maintained in racial formation theory that the continued interplay of the micro and macro levels of racialized social relations organizes and enforces racial order, although it is recognized that these levels can only analytically be treated as distinct, as these levels are acknowledged to be ‘continuous and reciprocal’ in our everyday lived experiences (1986, p. 67). “The theory of racial formation, then, suggests that racial phenomena penetrate and link these two ‘levels’ of social relationships” (1986, p. 68). Thus the conceptualization of race as an organizing principle of social relations lends itself to describing the ‘classification’ and ‘continuity’ of racial phenomena (Omi & Winant, 1986). Racial formation, then, is a process of ‘political contestation over racial meanings’ (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 69). Winant (2001) argues in later work that the “key element” of racial formation is the link between “signification and structure” between determining what ‘race’ means in a specific discursive practice and how social structures are racially organized, and how this is all solidified by the notion of ‘racial projects’ that emerge in different historical contexts and intersect with one another (pp. 20, 21).

The use of ‘racial formation’ is not to be confused with the concept of ‘racialization’. The concept of racialization, used by Michael Banton initially in sociology, has been critiqued for being ill-defined and has been used in many ways, as “a problematic, a process, a concept, a theory, a framework and a paradigm” (Small, 1994,
p. 33). It has also been critiqued by Goldberg (2002) as being “a cliché, too easily
invoked and used in discussion and academic papers yet rarely explained or assessed
rigorously (Murji & Solomos, 2005, p. 3). Omi and Winant used the term as follows,

We employ the term racialization to signify the extension of racial meaning to a
previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group.
Racialization is an ideological process, an historically specific one (Omi &
Winant, 1986, p. 64).

St Louis (2005) has made a very strong argument determining ‘racialization’ from ‘racial
formation’ stating that,

[G]iven the fallaciousness of the race idea, racialization reinforces the originary
biological processes of constituting racial groups as real and establishing an
iniquitous racial hierarchy. And although it has been suggested that the concept of
racialization has sometimes been interchangeable with that of racial formation, its
biological variant carries an irreversible pejorative association... biological
racialization re-establishes the naturalized racial reality that subsequent more
explicitly social and political projects of racial formation encounter as a fait
accompli. However, in contrast, racial formation projects face the choice of either
reproducing or subverting the racial hierarchy laid down by processes of
biological racialization. As such, biological racialization is the original racial sin
that the actions of racial formation attempt to either redeem or compound.
Second, while its dominant association with racist political projects marks
biological racialization as irretrievably pernicious, racial formation (as
separate from this historico-material basis) is able to exploit the conceptual
slippage of race for the advancement of progressive as well as regressive political
projects. (St Louis, 2005, pp. 36, 37).

Oftentimes ‘racialization’ and ‘racial formation’ are used interchangeably, but as St Louis
(2005) notes the two are quite different in their uses. Racial formation is able to challenge
the process of biological racialization, has the ability to subvert racial hierarchies and has
a clearer political motive. This however, does not clear ‘racial formation’ from committing similar errors and a radical racial formation theory works to radically historicize ‘race’ in an attempt to subvert racial hierarchies and advance progressive political projects.

Omi and Winant’s Racial Formation Theory: Social Constructionist or Essentialist?

There are three problems with Omi’s and Winant’s racial formation theory that will be discussed below. Although these problems have been separated and treated as discrete for the purposes and ease of this discussion, it is understood that they are related to one another and not easily separated.

The first problem with racial formation theory is that it supports a notion of ‘race’ permanency. This is antithetical to the fluidity of something that is sociohistorical. Omi and Winant argue in the 1986 edition of their book that the racial myths and stereotypes produced by racial ideology are “too essential, too integral, to the maintenance of the US social order. Of course, particular meanings, stereotypes and myths can change, but the presence of a system of racial meanings and stereotypes, of racial ideology, seems to be a permanent feature of US culture” (Omi & Winant, p. 63). In more recent use of racial formation theory, Winant (2004) argues,

Race will never be “transcended.” Nor should it be, for it is both the product of a long history of oppression and of an equally extensive history of freedom struggle. The race concept is a product of human oppression, but it is also a key
marker of human variety and difference, of collectivity and solidarity. Will the world ever “get beyond” race? Probably not. But the entire world still has the chance of overcoming the stratification, the hierarchy, the taken-for-granted injustice and inhumanity that so often accompany the race concept (Winant, 2004, p. 165).

Although Winant’s (2004) argument makes sense in addressing the history of racial oppression, this seriously contradicts the basic understanding of ‘race’ as a social construct that is present in racial formation theory. If race is a social construct, and social constructs change over space and time and within a variety of contexts, how can it be theorized as something fixed that cannot be transcended? If ‘race’ cannot be transcended, then this essentializes ‘race’. This passage also identifies a related issue, that being the limitation for social action or change in the theory. If ‘race’ can never be transcended, as Winant (2004) suggests, the best case scenario is that social stratification is eradicated. However, as history has demonstrated, even when gains towards racial equality are made, there is a continuous recourse to find a justified biological racism that classifies ‘race’. It appears that making the argument that ‘race’ is sociohistorical is not enough to end the fascination and determination to find some biological ‘truth’ to ‘race’. By supporting ‘race’ permanency in order to embrace “difference”, discussed below, the only goal is to overcome the consequences of ‘race’ rather than to dismantle ‘race’. However, with the reconstruction and renewal of ‘race’ comes reconstructed and renewed racisms, so it is unclear how ‘race’ can be maintained and left unfettered with the expectation that this will be inconsequential.
The second problem contradicts Omi’s and Winant’s use of a social constructionist position. Although Omi and Winant seek to conceptualize ‘race’ as neither an ‘essence’ (something fixed, concrete, and objective) nor a mere ‘illusion’, (a ‘purely ideological construct’), they claim that ‘race’ is “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). The use of ‘difference’ is used not to refer to different social constructions of human bodies, but to different “types” of human bodies. This naturalizes ‘race’ as bodily difference and is not a constructionist approach. As St Louis (2005) argues, “the description of difference is never the benign recognition of something that ‘just is’” (p.46). Instead this allows ‘race’ to be seen as insurmountable (St Louis, 2005). “Difference” is ambiguous and dangerous because of it. The problem here lies in the use of ‘race’ then as both a social construct while maintaining some essential link to human bodies and permanency of ‘race’, as this poses a serious contradiction. To suggest that something is socially constructed means it has no physical essence, unless the social construction of an essence is being discussed.

The third problem, which is very much connected to the others, is that for a social constructionist theory of ‘race’, it largely ignores the role of ‘nature’ and science in creating and reproducing ‘race’. As such, it does not seek to explain the backdrop for much racial thinking and as such, cannot adequately explain or argue the sociohistoricity of ‘race’, nor does it ignore its resilience over time. Thus, it is unfortunate that, “the notion of race formation emphasises above all that race is not simply a concept that can be dispensed with” (Solomos & Back, 1996, p. 27). Perhaps this is the thrust behind
formulating a radical racial formation theory, in realizing the complex ways in which ‘race’ is reproduced, challenging this and seeking to move beyond ‘race’ rather than sustaining an analytical value of ‘race’.

**Radical Racial Formation Theory: A Response**

In order to respond to these problems, the development of a radical racial formation theory is being suggested. The following sections will address how ‘race’ and racism(s) would be understood by this theory, which will then be theoretically located. The response to the first problem of supporting ‘race’ permanency will be addressed first through an argument of ‘race’ as a modern invention that emerges with modernity and is backed by liberalism. The problem of limitations for social change will be addressed in the conclusion. A significant portion of this response will be dedicated to understanding knowledge production as well as the role of ‘nature’ and science in (re)constructing ‘race’.

‘Race’: A Modern Invention

In a thesis that seeks to argue the historicity of ‘race’ in the face of continuing essentialisms, it is necessary to historically locate ‘race’. ‘Race’ is conceived here, and within classical racial formation theory as being an emergent and formative feature of modernity and modern power, and even as one of its “central conceptual inventions” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 3). As Gilroy (2000) cautions, “we cannot remind ourselves too often
that the concept of ‘race’ as it is used in common-sense, everyday language to signify connectedness and common characteristics in relation to type and descent is a relatively recent and absolutely modern invention” (p. 31). Gilroy argues that we must acknowledge the “modern history of race and racism as the product of complex historical processes involving contact with and theorising about the ‘other’ which have been at work from the very beginnings of modernity” (Solomos & Back, 1996, p. 33).

‘Modernity’ is understood here, as the “general period” emerging from the sixteenth century in the “historical formation” called ‘the West’, which “becomes self-conscious in the seventeenth century, reaching intellectual and material maturity in the Enlightenment, and solidifies as Western world hegemony the following century” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 3). Goldberg (1993) argues that racial definition, articulation and expression “emerge only with the insititution of modernity” and change in accordance with developments and transformations within modernity’s “self-understanding and expression” (p. 1).

Furthermore, the emergence of independent scientific domains, namely anthropology and biology, came to fruition in defining a classification system of racial groupings in the Enlightenment that detail some racial groups as subspecies along “correlated physical and cultural matrices” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 29). The significance of ‘race’ being born with modernity in Goldberg’s (1993) argument is that, “race transforms theoretically and materially as modernity is renewed, refined, and redefined” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 3).

Winant (2001) adds to this in his argument that “modernity, then is a global racial formation project” (emphasis original, p. 20).
One of the most interesting aspects of modernity is how social subjects are formed. Goldberg (1993) argues that intrinsic to modernity’s ‘self-conception’ is the notion of a singular ‘Subject’,

...that is abstract and atomistic, general and universal, divorced from the contingencies of historicity as it is from the particularities of social and political relations and identities. This abstracted, universal Subject is commanded only by Reason, precisely because of its purported impartiality, is supposed to mediate the differences and tensions between particular social subjects in the domains of market and morality, polity and legality (p. 4).

Thus, the modern subject would appeal to ‘reason’ to understand the surrounding social world, not socially, politically and historically constructed identities and systems.

Goldberg (1993) links the creation of the social subject and the accompanying social relations that are arranged to the use of morality in modernity to legitimate and justify the acts of the social subject. Moral discourse, as far as Goldberg (1993) is concerned, refines racialized social relations and defines changes in social subjectivity.

The centrality of moral notions to social and self-conception enables and constrains actions of certain kinds. It also makes possible those basic categories of distinction between self and other that promote and sustain thinking in the terms of exclusionary discrimination… They serve to naturalize the concept of race, to render it basic to modernity’s (and so far, at least in transformed form, to postmodernity’s) common sense (Goldberg, 1993, p. 38).

Thus, it is the moral discourse that arises out of modernity that makes raced bodies ‘natural’ and ‘race’ and racism common sense. With the emergence of scientific fields discussing ‘race’, classifying ‘race’ and linking ‘race’ to differences that could be established within a hierarchy according to some racial logic or reasoning, the moral discourse follows that it is right to conceive of others and treat others in a certain fashion
according to an appeal to reason that is backed by moral discourse. Unfortunately, this means that if someone is classified as “subhuman” in a racial classification system that treatment of that person as “subhuman” would be ‘natural’ and common sense. Why would you treat them any differently? Moral discourse is used to justify and legitimize the acts of social subjects. Where racisms are concerned, Goldberg (1993) writes, “Racisms become normalized through modernity’s discursive technologies of subject formation; they acquire their ‘naturalism’ in the creation of modern selves and social subjects” (p. 60). This link can also be made through the appeal to reason in modernity that would also work to legitimate the ‘naturalism' in the creation of ‘race’, to create a common sense approach to ‘race’ as discussed above. Again, tied to modernity’s morality, Goldberg (1993) reminds us of what Hobbes once noted, that “a moral order permits those expressions it does not explicitly prohibit” (p. 39). As modernity evolves, so does its moral order and this is seen in expressions of ‘race’ and racism. An example of a changing moral order with respect to ‘race’ could begin with the institution of slavery as a ‘moral practice’ that ‘becomes immoral’, or the everyday use of ‘race’ and racial categories in language to a more acceptable use of colourblindness.

What this section seeks to impart and what is important in a radical retheorization of racial formation theory is that ‘race’ can be tied historically to the evolution of modernity, as a malleable, modern conception, that becomes prominent in a moral discourse and an appeal to reason that fashions ‘race’ as ‘common sense’ and racisms as ‘natural’.
The Role of Liberalism in Modernity’s ‘Race’

An important question in following how ‘race’ evolves with modernity is how a modern conception of ‘race’ is legitimized. Without legitimation, the concept of ‘race’ could be easily refuted and done away with. This brings us to a discussion of liberalism, as liberalism is “the political theory of modernity” (Gray, 1986, p. 82). As such, liberalism is tied to the process of articulating ‘race’ and racisms as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. As Goldberg (1993) writes, “as modernity’s definitive doctrine of self and society, of morality and politics, liberalism serves to legitimate ideologically and to rationalize politico-economically prevailing sets of racialized conditions and racist exclusions (p. 1)”. This is situated in classic liberalism as an historical “key element” in “promoting racial reasoning and its racist implications as central to modernity’s common moral, sociopolitical, and jurisprudential sense” (Goldberg, 2002, pp. 234, 235). Goldberg (2002) argues further that “racially conceived compromises regarding racist exclusions”, such as constitutional endorsements of slavery, affirmative action, etcetera, or formalized native residential schooling to provide a Canadian example, have been “instrumental in sustaining a consensual dominance of liberalism in modern state formation over the past century and a half” (Goldberg, 2002, pp. 234, 235). This is not without ironies though, as Goldberg (1993) acknowledges, that while modernity commits itself to progressively “idealized principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, as it increasingly insists upon the moral irrelevance of race, there is a multiplication of racial identities and the sets of exclusions they prompt and rationalize, enable and sustain” (pp. 4, 5). Furthermore, Goldberg (1993) argues that the more “ideologically hegemonic” liberal values become
and the more “open to difference” that liberal modernity claims itself to be, the more dismissive of difference it becomes (pp. 4, 5).

Outlaw (1996) notes that it was the social and political philosophy of liberalism in modern nation-states that was “supposedly irrelevant” to raciality and ethnicity (p. 150). Closer inspection revealed there were significant differences between modern liberal ideals and the reality of the modern project insofar as under the pressures of national (re)formation and the development of capitalism, ambivalences towards “different” non-Europeans became “outright contradictions of enlightened thought”, thought that declared such peoples as inferior in a multitude of ways (Outlaw, 1996, p. 150). Outlaw (1996) argues that “perverted ethnocentrism and racism” were “nurtured by rationalizations that drew on core aspects of Enlightenment philosophies even as much of this thought became the intellectual midwife of modernity” (p. 150). The modern project contradicted modern liberal ideals, such that while modern liberal thought and values held ‘race’ as irrelevant, it became quite relevant in nation building. Forming nations required uniformity in identity as a nation that racial difference complicated as far as most at the time were concerned. The result, as Outlaw (1996) identifies was “perverted ethnocentrism and racism”.

Despite the role that modern liberalism has played in national formations, Goldberg (1993) argues that the racialized history responsible throughout this political theory is denied as well as the “attendant histories of racist exclusions” (p. 7). He argues that these are hidden behind the idealized dismissal of ‘race’ as a morally irrelevant
character, claiming we have progressed beyond racist social formations (Goldberg, 1993, p. 7). Based on this, the response to racism is one where racist expressions are reduced to “personal prejudices of individuals, to irrational appeals to irrelevant categories, to distinctions that delimit universal liberal ideals” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 7). This focus on individualism is at the heart of liberalism as a political theory. As such, “isms” come to function as a result of problemed individuals, not as part of a larger system of social relations. Racism is treated as a singular phenomenon where errors are made by individuals who invoke ‘race’ to differentiate between people in the distribution of power, social status and goods (Goldberg, 1993, p. 7). The result is the ability of liberal social scientists to “admit race as a given, a natural social identity” that “works its way between social identities before rationality” shifting the concern to managing “race relations” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 7). One does not have to look far back in sociological literature that discusses ‘race relations’ to confirm this. Modern liberalism factors into more than nation-forming for several race theorists who understand modern liberalism as pivotal to the creation of ‘racial states’ and who discuss an intimate relation between the history of the modern state and subsequent racial definitions (Goldberg, 2002). As Goldberg (2002) identifies, “the modern state has always conceived of itself as racially configured. The modern state, in short, is nothing less than a racial state” (Goldberg, 2002, p. 233). Furthermore Goldberg (2002) argues that, ‘race’ is integral to the creation and transformation of the modern nation-state, the state apparatuses and technologies subsequently create the terms of racial expression, racist exclusions and subjugations (p. 234).
What makes a state ‘racial’, according to Goldberg (2002) is, “the structural position they occupy” in “producing and reproducing, constituting and effecting racially shaped spaces and places, groups and events, life worlds and possibilities, accesses and restrictions, inclusions and exclusions, conceptions and modes of representation” (p. 239). They are racial in their “modes of population definition, determination and structuration” and are racist to the extent that these modes “operate to exclude or privilege in or on racial terms, and in so far as they circulate in and reproduce a world whose meanings and effects are racist. This is a world we might provocatively identify as a *racist world order*” (Goldberg, 2002, p. 239). Racial states define populations racially through “census taking, law, and policy, in and through bureaucratic forms, and administrative practices” (Goldberg, 2002, p. 242). The result is the management of racialized populations including surveillance of certain ‘races’ and economic management through the distribution of resources. Certainly not the least of these is the governance of bodies. “In Foucauldian terms, the state not only invades the body of subjects. It goes a long way in making bodies what they are, and by extension who they are” (Goldberg, 2002, p. 245). As a result, bodies come to bear meanings according to their racial production. As modern social subjects, individuals must learn how to understand themselves, others and their expressions in order to respond to racist culture in racial states (Goldberg, 1993).

There is something else that comes out of modern liberalism much to the dismay of sociologists theorizing about ‘race’. In attempting to make ‘race’ the problem of prejudiced individuals, ignoring its own “historical legacies and contemporary politics of
exclusion”, modern liberalism has sprouted colour-blind ideology (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 43). Colour-blind ideology is just what it seems then, a claim that ‘race’ is not seen, that ‘race’ is irrelevant and no longer exists while permitting perpetuating racisms by averting attention from the largely systemic ways that ‘race’ and racisms operate. ‘Race’ and racisms are individual problems, not systemic ones under modern liberalism. This accomplishes also being blind to the largely historical and systemic ways that racisms operate and creates racist expressions as the acts of morally wrong individuals. This is strengthened through the use of colourblindness as the polite and politically correct means to address ‘race’ in much of North America.

Winant has argued that modernity is a “global racial formation project” (p. 20). The racial state is held responsible by many race theorists for (re)producing ‘race’ and racisms. ‘Race’ has historically factored into state definition and organization (Goldberg, 2002). The racial state normalizes ‘race’ into institutions, and Goldberg (2002) would argue “almost always to hierarchical purposes”, setting limits on social possibilities, through law and “routinization”, making these practices ‘normal’ through repetition and rendering them ‘natural’, givens that are unalterable (pp. 244, 255). The racial state brought about through modern liberalism has used its abilities to make ‘race’ invisible through “osmotic infusion into the everyday”, “penetration into common sense”, and “pervasion (not to mention perversion) of the warp and weave of social fabric” (Goldberg, 2002, p. 235).
Although historicizing ‘race’ is important in racial formation theory, it is important that the ways in which conceptions of ‘race’ are able to operate and how they are legitimated be examined. By examining liberalism as the political theory of modernity, it becomes clear how liberalism works to legitimate modern conceptions of ‘race’ as common sense, though deemed morally irrelevant, and how racism is ignored as a systemic issue by a focus on the individual. This is important in clarifying the sociohistorical in a radical racial formation theory. Now that we have examined how ‘race’ is historically brought about, through modernity, and how it is legitimized politically, by liberalism, let us now look at the role of science and ‘nature’ in creating ‘race’.

‘Nature’s’ Role in ‘Race’

In the making of ‘racial formations’, the concept of ‘nature’ is bound to that of ‘race’. This bind has been premised on a link that has been made over time between ‘nature’, biology, ‘race’ and the body, and granted social authority by the sciences. The UNESCO Statement on Race and Racial Prejudice, drafted in Paris in September of 1967 discounted all biological accounts of race and the biologism that misinforms racism. In this statement, the historical ‘roots’ of racism are announced; race and racism are treated as social construct and practice respectively. However, there has been a longstanding history of scientists looking for and drawing biological connections between ‘nature’ and ‘race’. Science will be understood here as the study of learning through applying the
scientific method as well as any ‘knowledge’ produced through the use of such methods. Science is deployed in this thesis to understand how racial ‘knowledges’ have been produced through the use of scientific methods. The critique of science here is against the general understanding that the aims of scientific inquiry are purely altruistic and it is argued that science is itself a sociohistorical product and that all scientific claims must recognize their embeddedness in the social. One might recall the litany of attempts to connect ‘natural’ physical differences between human beings with ‘race’, and even the charting of such differences as in Philippe Rushton’s often criticized work. A more recent example is medical literature that is connecting certain diseases to certain ‘target populations’ who are identified by descriptors used to classify ‘race’. This will be discussed later in this section.

But what is it about ‘nature’ and ‘race’ that allows the two to be bound to one another time after time? Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) argue that it is the sense of their universality that makes both ‘race’ and ‘nature’ “continually available for naïve rediscovery” obscuring the historical by seeming as though they “precede history” (p. 4). The importance of this bind between ‘race’ and ‘nature’ is that it becomes an effective means through which ‘race’ can be used and justified. ‘Nature’ is “imagined as an ontological foundation”, appearing to precede history, serving as the “generative terrain from which assertions of essence emerge” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 2, 3).

Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) argue that ‘race’ provides a “critical medium” through which “ideas of nature operate”, and that together, ‘race’ and ‘nature’ work to “legitimate particular forms of political representation, reproduce social hierarchies, and authorize
violent exclusions” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 2, 3). As Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) write, “The naturalization of identities and differences is one of the most powerful means by which race works” (p. 9). That ‘nature’ is not only the material environment and that ‘race’ is not just social—both are material and symbolic, acting through bodies and metaphors— are written into discourse, flesh and the geographical landscape (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 2). This naturalization cements racialized identities into objective givens following the laws of ‘nature’ such that “racial subjects, while active agents, are not sovereign selves free to choose any nature as their own” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 46). Subjects thus are racially constituted through naturalized categories arranged by scientific discourse on ‘race’.

Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) make use of Stuart Hall’s understanding of ‘articulation’, as they write that articulation joins together disparate elements in a ‘formation’, an assemblage that gives the formation “a particular form and potential force” (p. 3). How this looks and the impact it will have on cultural, social and political process is argued to be historically contingent, undetermined by any “underlying structural logic” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 3). The importance of this lies in how certain historically contingent formations “come together in particular historical contexts” as well as the “heterogeneity of practices and cultural forms they authorize” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 3). The authors argue that articulation “offers a means for understanding emergent assemblages of institutions, apparatuses, practices, and discourses” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 4). The importance of using ‘articulation’ here is to develop an understanding of ‘race’ as an assemblage of scientific
discourse that filters into institutions, apparatuses, practices and discourse. As Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) argue, the “discursive contours” of ‘race’ and ‘nature’ are critical in shaping historical identities.

The association of ‘nature’ and ‘biology’ with ‘race’ is important in developing a radical racial formation theory that seeks to operate as anti-essentialist and non-reductive. This is so because ‘nature’ articulates racial formations. It gives ‘race’ a “particular form and force” as Stuart Hall argues above. ‘Nature’ forms ‘race’ as essential, fixed, permanent and unalterable. ‘Nature’ gives the use of ‘race’ force because ‘nature’ is able to go uncontested. ‘Nature’ forces acceptance of things that ‘just are’. However, ‘nature’ is only a singular constellation, to use Hall’s term, but when joined with another constellation, say modern liberalism, with a political project such as nation-forming and the advancement of capitalism, it is easy to see how several constellations may come together to form in particular historical contexts, racial formations. Initially, the concept of ‘nature’ was addressed in racial formation theory as follows,

...we tend to view race as something fixed and immutable – something rooted in ‘nature.’ Thus we mask the historical construction of racial categories, the shifting meaning of race, and the crucial role of politics and ideology in shaping race relations. Races do not emerge full-blown. They are the results of diverse historical practices and are continually subject to challenges over their definition and meaning (Omi & Winant, 1986, pp. 63, 64).

This excerpt emphasizes the desire of Omi and Winant to reframe everything in terms of the historical. ‘Nature’ is viewed as a “mask” for the historical. What is considered
essential about the concept of ‘nature’ as it is used in connection to ‘race’, in a radical retheorization of racial formation theory is that, as Braun (2003) writes, “…nature continues to be a material and discursive site through which the effects of race are produced and naturalized even after the apparent dismantling of biological racism” (Braun, 2003, p. 176), that ‘nature’ itself is a product of social practice (Guillaumin, 1999).

It is important to note, however, that both ‘race’ and ‘nature’ operate in similar fashions. Both are “historical artifacts”, “assemblages of material, discourse, and practice irreducible to a single timeless essence” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 42). “[N]ature is at once social construct and material artifact” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 6). ‘Race’ is also argued to work alongside ‘nature’, “at times providing a means of biologizing the cultural, and at other times racializing the biology of nonhuman species” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 8).

It is equally important and pressing that the scientific field, in which identities become naturalized, be contested. The scientific evidence that suggests that ‘race’ is not real needs to be restated and positioned within an understanding of the construction of racial knowledge and racist discourse that gives force and makes ‘race’ tenable and ‘natural’. It is argued by Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) that it is the “taxonomic orders through which nature and race are made intelligible as objects of knowledge” (p. 16). It is argued elsewhere that it is racial taxonomies that precede racist theories (Guillaumin, 1999). To restate scientific evidence contrary to ‘race’ alone, however, is “insufficient as a singular strategy” (St Louis, 2005, p. 45). What is important here is that
the connection between ‘nature’ and ‘power’ be made. As Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) note, “nature... works as a contested arena and an effective means for the exercise of power” (p. 14). ‘Nature’ sets the grounds for justified exercise of power, as ‘nature’ is irrefutable, it simply is, as was discussed in the section on liberal ideology. In terms of how this works in a more practical sense, Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) write,

We suggest that power works on and through nature in several overlapping ways: through violent acts of domination, through the constitution of subjects and truths, and through the maintenance of these identities and differences across time and space ...race and nature are constitutive features of modern power (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 15).

This is the reason why this thesis emphasizes a radical form of racial formation theory, one that insists on historically locating racisms and naturalisms, robbing both of their “naturalizing powers” (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 3).

Let us go back now to the recent development in the scientific literature briefly referred to in the beginning of this section, that of ‘target populations’. Target populations are used to identify racial groups as ‘populations’ in order to reaffirm some biological racialization, particularly in disease research. The problem with the ‘new’ biological description of ‘special’ or ‘target’ populations is that although it is meant to distinguish these populations as distinct from racial groups, the categorizations used run parallel to existing racial groups. St Louis (2005) argues then that even though the “complex formation” of populations is suggested to render ‘races’ extinct as scientifically categorized, “the informal possibility of a racial ideal is resuscitated through the rhetoric of ‘populations of considerable interest’” (p. 40).
‘Populations’ are identified and described in relation to shared genetic markers (St Louis, 2005). St Louis describes this in relation to the Human Genome Diversity Project, successor of the Human Genome Project which found no biological significance to ‘race’ (St Louis, 2005). As St Louis (2005) suggests there is an important question to science here, “if ‘races’ do not exist biologically but populations do then how can we explain the persistent conceptual slippage between the two categories and stubborn durability of the former” (p. 41)? St Louis (2005) calls on two critiques of science, first, that there is “no necessary equivalence between conceptual and practical intent” and second, that “scientific ideas and practices cannot be separated from the social context they emerge within” (p. 41).

Ultimately, the problem and need for examination lies in an incongruence between the “ideal” and “real” where St Louis (2005) is concerned. The ideal of course is the “altruistic principles and aims of scientific inquiry”, where the real is “the manipulation of scientific procedure in accordance with socially embedded racial ideologies” (St Louis, 2005, p. 41). As St Louis (2005) notes, there is a categorical discrepancy made that allows for the ongoing “descriptive project of biological racialization” (p. 42). He argues that the term “population” has been misappropriated in order to classify inherited genetic disorders as specific to racial groups (St Louis, 2005, p. 42). The term ‘population’ is used as a substitute for ‘race’. This subsequently endorses a “biopolitical regulation of racial groups through the genetic screening of ‘target populations’” (St Louis, 2005, p. 42). As St Louis notes (2005) this is an obvious
example of where “the discursive processes have evolved yet the exclusionary principle remains” (St Louis, 2005, p. 42).

The bond constructed between ‘race’ and ‘nature’ lays the foundation for racial hegemony and is continually renewed, re-created and defended by those who have an interest in maintaining racial dominance when challenged. As such, this is one of the most important aspects in retheorizing racial formation theory which previously had largely ignored the role of ‘nature’ and science and its importance of creating and sustaining systems of racialized hierarchies and understandings. Moreover, because there are continually renewed attempts by the scientific community to prove the bond between ‘race’ and ‘nature’, in the re-creations of how we speak and know about ‘race’ (‘race’ as ethnicity, identity, difference or as ‘target populations’) and the ongoing defenses to maintain this, if nothing else, a radical racial formation theory functions in its ability to continually historicize ‘race’.

Brah (2005) argues that the continued efforts to believe in the idea of ‘racial difference’ despite contrary evidence, should not surprise us, as biological discourses of ‘race’ have been “imbued with value judgements” through the classificatory procedure which “remains a technology of power independent of the intentions of those who deploy it” (Brah, 2005, p. 70). Perhaps this is why there is so much disbelief in evidence to the contrary that suggests ‘race’ has no biological basis and why the “eternal fascination with biological racial difference” persists (St Louis, 2005, p. 46). This fascination leaks into our everyday interactions with one another and pervades our understanding of our social world. As Gates (1990) rightfully acknowledges, “inasmuch as we ritually decry
essentialism, we remain conceptually sutured to it. Inasmuch as we ritually decry techniques of ‘naturalization’, we remain wedded to a certain ideology of the natural as contrastive” (Gates, 1990, p. 323). Ultimately we are faced with a pathology of essentialism despite the best efforts of some to dismantle essentialism.

The Pathology of Essentialism

Before arguing the pathology of essentialism, it is important that essentialism is conceptualized first. Hallet (1991) writes, “‘Essentialism’ can mean many things, as can its root term *essence*. In one sense, ‘an essence is the ‘quiddity’ of a thing…An essence is any character of a thing whereby that thing is what it is” (p. 2). Furthermore, “Essences in the traditional sense are core properties or clusters of properties present, necessarily, in all and only those things which bear the common name” (Hallett, 1991, p. 2). “Traditional essentialists often assumed, wrongly, that a perfectly accurate definition, restricting a term to all and only members of some class, would demonstrate or reveal an essence” (Hallett, 1991, p. 41). Most importantly, essentialisms “…assume that all members of a class have *something* in common—however various, irregular, or ill-defined—that makes them all members of that class” (Hallett, 1991, p. 2). As such, essentialism is understood here as the grouping of members into classes on the assumption that each member of an assigned class has a similar or distinct trait(s).

Essentialism is the basis for any racialized order. As Marcuse (1968) noted quite some time ago it is under the name of ‘essence’ that beings are made into “the object of
‘authentic’, certain, and secure knowledge” (Marcuse, 1968, pp. 43, 44). This has left us questioning how essentialism has come to acquire its power and persist (Hallett, 1991). Hallett (1991) argues that those who philosophize in an essentialist manner are permitted to “eliminate rivals” and “construct their own systems” through using essentialism (p. 135). Furthermore that by appealing to essences, the desire for understanding is gratified as “understanding unifies, through principles, laws, and definitions; it clarifies, by drawing precise boundaries; it furnishes a comprehensive view, bringing order to myriad details. Essences do all these things” (Hallett, 1991, p. 138). Hallett (1991) quite insightfully argued that only “hidden structure establishes natural kinds” (p. 139).

Essentialism, however, is a fundamentally problematic doctrine (McMichael, 1986). As McMichael (1986) argues, “among its adherents, serious disputes arise concerning what the essential properties of individuals are, and there exists no consensus on methods for resolving such disputes. There is lacking, in other words, an adequate and generally accepted epistemology for essentialist claims” (p. 34). So what appears to be the comfort in relying upon essentialism, “authentic, certain and secure knowledge” quenching the “desire for understanding” is problematic as there is no way to know that such claims satisfy ‘true’ ‘knowledge’. Hallett (1991) challenges the notion of ‘essence’ and the subsequent words used to identify essences,

If an essence, to qualify as an essence of X, must be present in all X’s, then there is no telling from any single member of the class that the essence present in it is the essence of X”… “So the question arises: What relation is the purported essence supposed to have to the current or past use of the term applied to it? What relationship holds between the essence of X and the use of the word X? Must the
essence be found in all the things so named, or just in some of them? If just in some, in which ones, and why? Or does usage matter? If not, why speak of the essence of X rather than Y or Z?… How does the essence of X relate to the word X? (pp. 9, 10).

Hallett (1991) argues that it is the concept of X that either confirms or denies the existence of nonexistence of the essence of X (p. 12). Hallett (1991) recognizes however that the concept belongs to a language and that since this is “common property and common creation of a vast and varied population” the employment of a concept of X is used in various expressions, occasions and for differing purposes and “cannot be expected to manifest the austere uniformity required to establish or perpetuate essences” (p. 12). This is most definitely the case in the concept of ‘race’. In belonging to language and being socio-historically specific, ‘race’ has been employed differently over time for a variety of purposes and this demonstrates the inability to “manifest the austere uniformity” of ‘race’ required to establish or perpetuate it as essential. Essentialistic thought is pervasive, and as Hallett (1991) notes “…significantly it affects our thinking about important matters: morality, natural kinds, language, knowledge, meaning, truth, understanding, human nature, and so forth” (p. 125). But the problem—and I intentionally use the word ‘problem’—is its pervasiveness in the face of its error. So if we take ‘race’, it is undoubtedly a pervasive concept that most people have some understanding of and conviction to, one that has subsequently impacted their understanding of the above “important matters”. So despite the fact that ‘race’ does not exist, its social reality is perpetuated via the pervasiveness of its essentialist conceptualizations. As Hallett (1991) notes, “Essentialism… has been a prominent
feature of Western thought and, I think, for the most part a regrettable one. As my comparisons suggest, I incline to call it pathological. In any case, its history has been so long and its influence so great, that its current status merits scrutiny” (Hallett, 1991, p. 3).

‘Race’ essentialism has indeed been a prominent feature of modernity and has endured a long history. As Marcuse (1968) writes, “in philosophy, there are fundamental concepts whose metaphysical character sets them far apart from the sociohistorical roots of thought…. Yet even these loftiest conceptions of philosophy are subject to historical development” (p. 43). Such is the case with essentialism, hence the need to pull essentialism back into the sociohistorical root of thought and to incorporate it into a radical retheorization of racial formation theory and to argue its pervasiveness and pathological nature in much of Western thought. This leads us now to a discussion of racism(s).

Racism(s)

This thesis understands racisms as multiple and not singular, hence the use of “racisms” and not “racism”, and as recourse to some essential, natural ‘truth’ about ‘race’ or racial ‘difference’ in order to establish relations of power and to rationalize whichever hierarchies, inequalities or exclusions that are being justified, produced or reproduced. As Brah (2005) notes, racisms attribute superiority or inferiority on the basis of a view that racialized bodies are the “embodiment of some inherent and immutable difference” (p.
72). Furthermore, Brah (2005) argues that racisms naturalize socially constructed differences and point to the emergence of modern scientificity to account for this (p. 72).

Stemming from modern power and a manifestation of modern rationality, racisms seek out natural explanations and justifications to invoke and deploy ‘race’ in scripts for social conduct that license violence against the marginalized. Gilroy (2000) emphasizes the connection between racism, modernity and an appeal to the ‘natural’ via the body when he writes that the “order of active differentiation that gets called ‘race’ may be modernity’s most pernicious signature. It articulates reason and unreason. It knits together science and superstition” (p. 53). This is seen as the result of “lazy essentialisms” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 53).

Racisms have long been the topic of sociologists, despite some authors’ wishes to define racisms historically and not sociologically. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1982) worked against sociological approaches to racism that viewed racism as static and sought to explain “how racism is a contradictory phenomenon which is constantly transformed, along with the wider political-economic structures and relations of the social formation” (p. 11). The result of many sociological accounts of racisms have problematically attempted to create an overarching definition of racisms, often numbering the acts that could count as such. A concrete example of this is the definition of racism supplied in classical racial formation theory,

*Racism* can be defined as inhering in one or more of the following: (1) signifying practice that essentializes or naturalizes human identities based on racial categories or concepts; (2) social action that produces unjust allocation of socially
valued resources, based on such significations; (3) social structures that reproduce such allocations (Winant, 2004, p. 225n7).

It is argued that this sort of definition errs because it attempts to give a broad definition of racism as a singularity by numbering things that it may include and limits itself to a list of possible racist expressions which are often only the very obvious examples of racisms and not those subtle, systemic forms of racist expressions. Sociological accounts of racisms also tend to focus on allocation of resources and more macro accounts of racisms. Thus, it seems that The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies’ (1982) cry for an historical understanding of racisms was warranted. The group was also correct in arguing that there is no singular “racism” and that we ought to avoid such homogenous definitions. What exists instead, are multiple racisms, that are wide-ranging, dynamic, and numerous, that are historically specific, in flux with modernity, and articulated according to place, time and other practices within a social formation (Stuart Hall in Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003, p. 6; Goldberg, 1997, p. 12; Gilroy, 1990; Stuart Hall in Solomos, Findlay, Jones & Gilroy, 1982, p. 14; Hall, 1978).

There has been an interesting, more recent move in the sociological literature to account for new types of racisms that appeal to ‘difference’. “The culturalism of the new racism has gone hand in hand with a definition of race as difference rather than a question of hierarchy” (Gilroy, 1990, p. 266). As is often the case, terms that are chosen to define a marginalized group or even a particular movement can often be co-opted and misappropriated to another group seeking to use a particular term to an entirely different purpose. As such, it is easy to see how a term such as ‘difference’ could be used as a regression away from anti-racism, codifying ‘race’ as some apolitical difference while
using it for political purpose to insist upon ‘difference’. As Taguieff’s (1990) work demonstrates, there has been a significant rhetorical shift in right-wing racism towards a ‘positive image’ by means of a ‘differentialist argument’ (St Louis, 2005). Balibar (1990) argues,

Differentialism shifts the discrimination of classified groups toward the criteria of classification themselves—it is a ‘secondary’ racism—just as it shifts the naturality of ‘races’ toward the naturality of ‘racist attitudes.’ Classification and hierarchy are above all else operations of naturalization, or more accurately, the projection of historical and social differences onto an imaginary nature (p. 290).

Balibar (1990) illustrates the ongoing problem of the naturalization of phenomenona which are sociohistorical and the ability to commit acts of discrimination on the basis of this naturalization. This is one way of framing racisms in a more palatable form through an appeal to ‘natural differences’. What St Louis (2005) argues is that regressive political projects that are glaringly obvious in their racist appeals are becoming increasingly questionable to most, resulting in a reframing and mutation of racisms under the guise of more “palatable forms” and through “largely inoffensive sentiments” that instead manage a reversal of anti-racist discourse through “sophistry and political dexterity” (pp. 31, 32). This ultimately obfuscates a departure point for critique and makes analyses of racisms evermore difficult (St Louis, 2005). As St Louis (2005) argues, “This poses the problem of differentiating between separate and opposed modes of racial formation that share the same racial conceptual frameworks and rhetoric of cultural distinctiveness yet reflect morally opposed racial ideologies” (p. 33). The result is an embracing of difference as a form of antiracism in and of itself versus an acknowledgement of difference as a tool for
racist expression. This has been an ongoing problem where ‘race’ rhetoric has been concerned as other terms continuously come to stand in and denote the same meanings as ‘race’ or be coopted by others for the opposed purpose. It is no surprise then to see ‘difference’ be used this way when other terms such as ‘ethnicity’, ‘population’, and others have come to fill in in the same fashion.

It is essential that in any critical race theory an understanding of racism be developed. In radical racial formation theory, it is understood that there are multiple racisms, not a homogenous, monolithic and singular racism. It is also important that the problems with anti-racist language, namely cooption for opposed purposes be recognized, as in the use of the differentialism. Now that an understanding of ‘race’ and racisms have been developed, let us look at how a theory of radical racial formation theory would situate itself within the theoretical camps of critical theory and poststructuralism.

Theoretically Situating Radical Racial Formation Theory

This section discusses where radical and classical racial formation theories are situated and what has informed them in both the Frankfurt school’s “critical” and Foucault’s “post-structural” theory. Situating racial formation theory, and subsequently a radical racial formation theory, squarely in any single theoretical camp is difficult. This is because racial formation theory is an eclectic theory informed by both critical and post-structural theory.

First we will begin by examining the use of critical theory in a radical racial formation theory, its classical counterpart and what is meant by “critical”. The “critical”
in critical theory and in a theorization of a radical racial formation theory, here refers to a dismissal of ‘race’ on the basis that as a construct it fails to attain ontological legitimacy, and as such, it is possible to reject it. However, the “critical” in classical racial formation theory is that of Kant’s “critique” in The Critique of Pure Reason, in that it seeks to understand how the social comes to function as its own reality. ‘Critical theory’ was first defined by Max Horkheimer in 1937 in an essay entitled Traditional and Critical Theory. Horkheimer distinguished between ‘traditional’ theory as theory which only sought to understand and explain social phenomena and ‘critical’ theory which served as a radical and emancipatory form of Marxist theory. As Rasmussen (1996) writes, “critical theory derives its basic insight from the idea that thought can transform itself through a process of self-reflection in history” (pp. 11, 12).

Critical theory will be understood in the more general sense as the “attempts to promote the project of emancipation by furthering what it understands as the theoretical effort of the critique of domination begun by the Enlightenment and continued by Karl Marx” (Poster, 1989, p.1). This understanding of critical theory is divergent from those with “…an insistence on framing critical discourse in relation to some stage of capitalism” (Poster, 1989, p. 1). Poster (1989) argues that when an understanding of critical theory is based upon the critique of capitalism, this “serves to obscure the understanding of new forms of domination which have emerged during this century” (p. 1). Therefore, this particular understanding of critical theory, one that moves beyond a critique of capitalism, lends itself to racial formation theory. It does this by seeking to avoid epiphenomenalism particularly where capitalism is concerned which subsumes
racial domination as part of class struggle within the development of capitalism rather than as a form of domination in and of itself. The defining characteristic of critical theory, however, remains the goal of emancipation, that, “a critical theory can change society” (Rasmussen, 1996, p.11). Andrew Sayer (1997) argues that critical social scientists insist on critical explanations in order to be explanatory, but that the necessity of critique gives social science “a potentially emancipatory character” (p. 473).

According to Poster (1989), critical theory presents itself as an antagonist to contemporary social formation and maintains an effort to theorize the present, “thus holding up a historicizing mirror to society”, compelling the recognition of the “fallible nature of society” and insisting that “what is can be disassembled and improved considerably” (p. 3). This is essential to the development of a radical racial formation theory which seeks to theorize the present as an alternative emancipatory moment, a disruption where a break with the racial past can be established, and where ‘race’ and subsequently, racism(s), could be destroyed.

Poster (1989) calls for a rapprochement between critical theory and French poststructuralism due to the “inability of critical theory to sustain a critique of the present social formation in face of the need for such a critique” (p. 1). By wedding the two, the goal of emancipation emerging from critical theory is sustained and joined by the practicality of an ongoing critique of the present afforded by French poststructuralism. McCarthy (1991) argues that the two schools of thought have much in common as they both hold that the “heart of the philosophical enterprise” is the critique of reason that finds its “continuation in certain forms of sociohistorical analysis” seeking to distance
itself from “presumably rational beliefs and practices that inform our lives” (p. 48). Both schools are interested in a critique of reason that acknowledges the embeddedness of what we call reason in culture and society, as well as its entanglement with power and interest (McCarthy, 1991, pp. 43, 44). It is thus argued that both theoretical camps could be of use to a radical racial formation theory that seeks to critique the use of ‘reason’ in constructing ‘race’ and producing racial knowledges, while also acknowledging the “entanglement with power and interest” where ‘race’ is concerned.

Hoy (1994) argues that “French poststructuralism is an alternative way of continuing the tradition of critical theory,” although he notes that, “to make a case for the continuation of critical theory in poststructuralism is difficult since the connections are not obvious” (p. 144). The sentiments of reconstructing critical theory with the use of poststructural theory are also echoed elsewhere in Poster (1989). Interestingly, however, it seems the schools of thought had little exposure to one another. Foucault discusses this in an interview, when he says, “now obviously, if I had been familiar with the Frankfurt School, if I had been aware of it at the time, I would not have said a number of stupid things that I did say and I would have avoided many of the detours which I made” (Cited in Hoy, 1994, p. 145). Furthermore, Foucault remarks that critical theory and the Frankfurt School were barely known of in France, such that the understanding that might have been established between the two, the history of science and rationality, never occurred (Hoy, 1994, p. 145). As noted, both schools of thought challenge the history of science and rationality, precisely what a radical racial formation theory seeks to accomplish. It does this by challenging the ongoing commitment of scientists to finding
biological ‘truths’ to ‘race’, despite contrary evidence, and challenging the way in which racial knowledges are constructed through an appeal to a questionable ‘reason’.

What Foucault is discussing above is the Frankfurt School’s shift away from the traditional conception of ‘reason’ in theory, to an understanding that “a conception of rationality that appeared to be the one and only possible form of reason has a history, with a beginning and an actual or possible end” (Hoy, 1994, p. 146). This understanding of ‘reason’ serves to “remind us that reason’s assumption of its own necessity and universality may be an illusion that ignores its historical formation in the past, its precariousness in the present, and its fragility in the future” (Hoy, 1994, p. 147). This understanding underlies Foucault’s conception of ‘genealogy’, which he writes, “serves to show how that-which-is has not always been,” which further illustrates that, “why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is” (Hoy, 1994, p. 148). Although these may seem to be spurious relationships to be drawn for our purposes, the connection between critical theory of the Frankfurt school and French poststructuralism is important to conceiving a theory of radical racial formation, which in accordance with Hoy (1994) follows that poststructuralism can be an alternative way of continuing the tradition of critical theory. As mentioned above, critical theory seeks emancipation and what a radical racial formation theory has to take from the combination of critical and poststructural theories is precisely emancipation and an understanding of the present as an important historical moment where change is possible. This continuation can be founded on Foucault’s bridging in the conception of ‘reason’ and an understanding of genealogy.
There are significant similarities between Foucault’s genealogy of power/knowledge and the program of critical social theory advanced by critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Habermas. Foucault characterizes his ‘genealogy’ as the “history of the present” (McCarthy, 1991, p. 45). What marks radical racial formation theory is the belief that ‘race’, which has historically been understood as a “that-which-is” does not need to be. Radical racial formation theory seeks to do what genealogy is said to do by Foucault in “following lines of fragility in the present” (Hoy, 1994, p. 148). This will be discussed further in the conclusion. The recreation of “that-which-is” occurs through knowledge production and as such, necessitates a discussion of the sociology of knowledge(s) and the creation of racial ‘knowledges’ and discourses.

The Sociology of Knowledge in Radical Racial Formation Theory

The sociology of knowledge is imperative to devising a radical racial formation theory. This branch of sociology examines how something comes to exist as ‘knowledge’, the social origin of ideas, and gives us insight into the prevailing effects of ‘knowledge(s)’ and the social purposes they serve. Obviously, this is crucial to understanding racial inequality, which has been historically informed by socially and scientifically (re)constructed ‘knowledge(s)’ that have been responsible for the origin of ‘race’ and the prevalence of racial inequalities.

The construction of ‘knowledge’ also informs what we come to understand as ‘real’. Peter Berger has written extensively on this topic. Berger (1967) argues that “the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with everything that passes for ‘knowledge’ in society” (Berger, 1967, pp. 14, 15). That, “a ‘sociology of knowledge’ will have to
deal not only with the empirical variety of ‘knowledge’ in human societies, but also the processes by which any body of ‘knowledge’ comes to be socially established as reality” (Berger, 1967, p. 3). Furthermore, Berger (1967) contends that “the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality” (p. 3).

With respect to ‘race’, something that is argued here to be nonexistent, socially (re)constructed and discursively (re)produced, it is necessary to understand how racial ‘knowledge(s)’ and a subsequent racial reality are produced. The production of racial ‘knowledge(s)’ marks ‘racial formation’.

Racial ‘Knowledge’ and Racist Discourse

The importance of knowledge production in a radical racial formation theory is paramount. This is because that it is through knowledge production that ‘race’ is renewed and reproduced as a sociohistorical construction and racial hierarchies are created. It is also where ongoing critique by critical ‘race’ theorists is needed.

Knowledge production does not occur in a vacuum. It is delimited and limited by culture, society and political economy. Knowledge is informed through the invocation of categories and classification systems, and these frame what can be known, how it can be known and how what is known can be articulated. The production of knowledge, social or other, forms the foundation for ‘power’. ‘Power’ is understood here in the Foucaultian use of the concept, as omnipresent and produced from one moment to the next, in every relation (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). As Foucault (1978) writes,

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere ...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a

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certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1978, p. 93).

In the case of the production of racial ‘knowledge’, ‘race’ essentialism forms the basis from which racial categories are fabricated, racial ‘truths’ are asserted and racial ‘knowledge(s)’ are subsequently produced. The content of racial ‘knowledge’ has tended to emerge from the sciences, but is often distorted and used for the political purposes and domination by some over others. Racial ‘knowledge’ is very broad and includes classification systems for ‘race’, ‘knowledge’ about cultural differences between ‘races’, interpretations of the abilities of others and their attributes, as well as how these ought to be ranked. This knowledge production sets up a foundation for the constitution and exercise of social power on the basis of the racialized epistemological categories invoked. Racial ‘knowledge’ acquires its authority, as Goldberg (1997) writes, by expressing itself similarly to the authority of the scientific disciplines that emerged as a result of ‘race’ being a “basic categorical object”, a “founding focus” of scientific analysis (p. 28). The implications of this are grim. Modern society has entrusted science with producing ‘truths’. The aim of science is understood to be entirely altruistic, creating ‘truths’ in the name of doing so, and the embeddedness of society, culture and politics in science is left unconsidered. Where ‘race’ is concerned science has been used as a political tool to arrange social relations of power around ‘race’ and to justify them. This has historically been demonstrated time and again. Even in our current, politically correct, colourblind reality there is an insistence that science continue to ‘prove’ a biological reality of ‘race’. There is no end to this. When the Human Genome Project reported that there was no
biological significance of ‘race’, other scientific projects emerged to try to find other biological connections, such as the Haplotype Project, or the recent interest in ‘target populations’ in disease research.

With the seventeenth century and Enlightenment, classification became fundamental to scientific methodology. There was an epistemological drive to categorize phenomena (Goldberg, 1993). The process of categorizing phenomena was supported by a widespread belief in, and association of rationality with the scientific method. Thus, it is unsurprising that the anthropological classification of ‘races’ would form an “objective ordering” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 50). This is important, because as Goldberg (1997) writes,

Epistemologically, power is exercised in naming and evaluating. In naming or refusing to name, existence is recognized or refused, meaning and value are assigned or ignored, people and things are elevated or rendered invisible. Once defined, symbolic order has to be maintained, serviced, extended, operationalized. In this sense, the racial Other is nominated into existence (p. 29).

Goldberg (1997) refers to Said’s book *Orientalism*, where he argues that the Other is “constituted through the invention of projected knowledge” (p. 29). Subsequently, the construction of knowledge and the practice of naming rob those named of autonomy, “extending over them power, control, authority, and domination” (Goldberg, 1997, p. 29).

An episteme lays down the foundation for what is possible in knowledge and discourse in a particular epoch. As Goldberg (1990) writes, “each episteme is characterized by a ‘regime of rationality’ (p. 305). This is where Foucault’s ‘general politics of truth’ fits in to explain the tension over producing ‘truths’, as there is a discursive set of rules that “emerges from an economy of epistemological production in
virtue of which ‘truth’ may be differentiated from ‘falsity’” against competing knowledges (Goldberg, 1990, p. 305). The ‘regime of rationality’ that informs much of what we know relies on fundamental systems of classification, order and value and informs our ‘field of discourse’ (Goldberg, 1990). Goldberg (1990) argues that “a well-defined field of discourse arises out of a discursive formation” (p. 297). Furthermore, that, this consists of a “totality of ordered relations”, and a range of rules, that “define an object that can be spoken of”, dictates how it can be spoken of, and determines the mode in which the object can be named, analyzed, classified and explained (Goldberg, 1990, p. 297).

Without the examination of racialized discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systemic way in which racial formation occurs and dominance operates.

Dominant discourses—those that in the social relations of power at some moment come to assume authority and confer status—reflect the material relations that render them dominant. More significantly, they articulate these relations, conceptualize them, give them form, express their otherwise unarticulated and yet inarticulate values. It is this capacity—to name the condition, to define it, to render it not merely meaningful but actually conceivable and comprehensible—that at once constitutes power over it, to determine after all what it is (or is not), to define its limits. To control the conceptual scheme is thus to command one’s world (Goldberg, 1993, p. 9).

Goldberg (1997) states that, “epistemologically, power is exercised in naming and evaluating” (p. 29). However, epistemologically, power, where ‘race’ is concerned, is also exercised in making bodies visible or invisible.
The analysis of racial (in)visibility has been a prominent feature of Frantz Fanon’s theorizing. “Underlying Fanon’s analysis of visibility and its delimitation stands the Hegelian concept that human beings assume self-consciousness in and through recognizing themselves in those they recognize to be their others” (Goldberg, 1997, p. 81). This is evidenced when Fanon (1968) writes, “Man [sic] is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him” (p. 154). As Goldberg (1993) acknowledges, the bodies of Others, “are unproblematically observable, confronted, and engaged”, a system of boundaries are formed by skin, “at once porous but received as inviolable and impenetrable” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 54). “By extension, the body comes to stand for the body politic, to symbolize society, to incorporate a vision of power” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 54). “As a mode of exclusion, racist expression assumes authority and is vested with power, literally and symbolically, in bodily terms” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 54). Racist discourse and expression is argued to be grounded in the relations of bodies to one another, in seeing Othered bodies, finding authority based on the classificatory system used and the values demarcated by it (Goldberg, 1990, 1993). The body comes to represent material currency as, “the body materially grounds racialized expression” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 54).

Although it is important to recognize how bodies are ‘raced’ and ‘race’ is embodied, there is an enormous corpus of literature devoted to this topic alone and there is not enough space here to do the area justice. What is important to take away from this however, is the importance of the physically ‘raced’ body in terms of social relations of power, because it is bodies that engage with one another and are observed by one another
and form the basis for any demarcation or discussion of ‘race’. Without the noticeable physicality of ‘race’, there would be no such thing as ‘race’, ‘difference’, racial ‘knowledge’, racisms or racist expressions.

Goldberg (1990) argues that racist discourse bases itself on a set of foundational claims. These claims allow for the establishment of difference “as an objective basis of inclusion and exclusion, whether natural or historical” (Goldberg, 1990, p. 307). The result is a “primary ground of entitlements”, accessibility and endowments or the contrary; of denial, prohibition and alienation (Goldberg, 1990, p. 307). As Goldberg (1990) argues, racist discourse sets foundational claims for racist expression. But how is such expression maintained? The common sense claims of racial difference produced by racial knowledge, as discussed previously, and discourse forms the foundation for the practice of cultural domination, gaining consent through the naturalization of ordered, racial differences, via hegemonic control.

‘Hegemony’

The Gramscian concept of ‘hegemony’ is important to a theoretical extension such as the one that this thesis proposes, not only because it is so heavily relied upon in classical racial formation theory, but because it offers a way of explaining how cultural control works and subsequently how social actors come to think about a topic; how entire patterns of thought can be accepted or rejected and naturalized as ‘common sense’.

Hegemony is understood here in the Gramscian use as the state of “total social authority”
of “‘domination’ and ‘intellectual and moral leadership’” of a social group at a specific conjuncture, which is attained through the coercion and active consent of the major groups in society (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 57, 58) and it involves both the state and civil society. For Gramsci (1971), the state is “the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules…” (p. 244). The given social group becomes dominant when it exercises power (Gramsci, 1971). As Bocock writes, “[t]he Gramscian notion of hegemonic leadership requires that millions of ordinary people come to accept, in the sense of really giving their free consent to, the political, economic and cultural policies being pursued by the dominant ruling group” (p. 76). The result of hegemony is the elevated status of some cultural values, beliefs and practices to the exclusion of others. More importantly, when hegemony is successfully achieved, it is said to be “unnoticeable in everyday political, cultural and economic life” (Bocock, 1986, p. 76). Bocock argues that the concept of hegemony “has been thought useful by some social theorists in order to pose questions about how moral and philosophical leadership is produced in a social formation” (p. 12). In keeping with the tradition of racial formation theory, Gramsci’s use of the term has been used.

Conceptual hegemony is said to define the social subject and their acceptance of the terms of conceptual hegemony in their own self-conception (Goldberg, 1993, p. 9). In a theory of racial formation whiteness is understood as the hegemonic racial position.
Confronting ‘Whiteness’: An Historical Example of Hegemony in Practice

There is a considerable amount of potency and power to ‘whiteness’ in racial formation. A sociology of ‘race’ and racialized relations remains inadequate without an understanding of the systemic inequalities that result from a particular form of racialized hegemony and its resultant production of inequitable social relations. Thus, it is imperative to study what is dominant as much as it is to study what is not. It would be ridiculous to assume that one could understand gender inequality or class inequality without an understanding of the systems of patriarchy or capitalism. The question then becomes, how can sociologists understand racial inequality without analyzing a system that is organized around white hegemony? As Andersen (2003) notes, “analyzing structures of white privilege must be part of the analysis of racial stratification” (p. 21). Although it is important to note, that whiteness needs to be understood within the experiences of racialized minorities (Andersen, 2003). Although the concept of ‘whiteness’ has provided as many problems for sociologists as that of ‘race’, it is irrefutable that the epistemological power to name, evaluate and to make in/visible has historically been the social production and discursive practice of those bearing ‘white’ skin.

What is ‘whiteness”? Doane (2003) argues that “whiteness” must be understood as a position in a specific set of social relationships—a “racialized social system”—and as a historically contingent social identity” (p. 9). ‘Whiteness,’ like ‘race’, is argued to be a social construction, but a social construction that reflects a particular set of social relations. ‘Whiteness’ has had the ability to redefine itself, and this can be especially
noted in the historical developments of “who” has been considered ‘white.’ At particular historical moments, Italians, Jews and the Irish, groups that are largely considered ‘white’ today, were previously considered non-white (Frankenberg, 1993; Dyer, 1997).

‘Whiteness’ is understood as in Frankenberg’s (1993) conceptualization of ‘whiteness’ as a set of three, linked dimensions.

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint,” a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1).

Frankenberg’s (1993) conceptualization of ‘whiteness’ corresponds with the way in which ‘whiteness’ would be understood from a racial formation perspective. As Frankenberg (2000) writes,

Whiteness changes over time and space and is no way a transhistorical essence. Rather, as I have argued, it is a complexly constructed product of local, regional, national, and global relations, past and present. Thus, the range of possible ways of living whiteness… is delimited by the relations of racism at that moment and in that place. And if whiteness varies spatially and temporally, it is also a relational category, one that is coconstructed with a range of other racial and cultural categories, with class and with gender. This coconstruction is, however, fundamentally asymmetrical, for the term “whiteness” signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage (p. 454).

There are several important ideas in this understanding of ‘whiteness’. First and foremost, that ‘whiteness’ exists as a racial formation. It has no essence, and is altered over time and place. As Frankenberg (1993) writes, ‘whiteness’ “refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced,” and “intrinsically linked” to
the “unfolding relations of domination” (Frankenberg, 2000, p. 451). This fits with Omi’s and Winant’s theorization of racial formation as a sociohistorical, cultural and political production. As with racial formation, ‘whiteness’ is understood to change over time and space and in keeping with radical racial formation theory, ‘whiteness’ does not represent a transhistorical essence. Frankenberg also provides a conception of the material and discursive dimensions of whiteness, and argues that, “the material and discursive dimensions of whiteness are always, in practice, interconnected. Discursive repertoires may reinforce, contradict, conceal, explain, or “explain away” the materiality or the history of a given situation” (Frankenberg, 2000, p. 448). The understanding of ‘whiteness’ that Frankenberg (1993) provides attempts to locate the many ways (temporal, spatial, historical, economical, political, cultural and social), in which ‘whiteness’ is produced, as well as its relational nature and the ways in which it secures its hegemony.

Hooks (1997) argues that in contemporary society, both white and black people frequently believe that racism no longer exists, adopting colour-blind ideology, and she writes that, contemporary society provides a hiding place for racisms, replacing “racisms” with “evocations of pluralism and diversity that further mask reality” (p. 176). One of the goals of whiteness studies is to revolt against the ideology of colour-blindness. Colour-blind ideology, as noted by Andersen (2003), “assumes that society is organized along race-neutral structures” (p. 23). It silences discussion about the continued persistence of racial inequalities and attempts to assert that race no longer matters (Andersen, 2003, p. 23). Furthermore, as Doane (2003) argues,
“[C]olor-blind” ideology plays an important role in the maintenance of white hegemony. As an organized set of claims about race, “color blindness” rests on the seemingly unassailable moral foundation of “equality,” which is the basis for its political strength. What is overlooked—or deliberately masked—is the persistence of racial stratification and the ongoing role of social institutions in reproducing social inequality. In essence, the “color-blind” society is not a utopia where racial inequality has been eliminated; it is simply a discourse in which it is not permissible to raise issues of race—except perhaps to condemn *individual* acts of racism (p. 13).

Colour-blind ideology is obviously problematic, as it espouses false precepts, as racial inequality is still an issue. This is a target it would seem for whiteness studies, as it is for the most part dominant whites that produce, reproduce, and ultimately support colour-blind ideology. Andersen (2003) calls on us to destabilize the hegemony of the colour-blind framework, as she argues that race cannot just be deconstructed away.

“Whiteness studies was born in the context of persistent racial inequality” (Hartman, 2004, p. 24). Having been born into this particular context, whiteness studies seek to acknowledge the role whiteness has in racial domination and white racism. As Frankenberg notes, “To speak of whiteness is… to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism. It is to emphasize that dealing with racism is not merely an option for white people” (Frankenberg, 2000, p. 451). Whiteness studies represent an antiracist shift towards an understanding of racism and racialized relations that include whites in the analysis. Far too often, whites escape responsibility for the ways in which social relations are racialized, and the subsequent consequences that result from this racial arrangement of domination. As Doane (2003) notes, “the emergence of whiteness studies is grounded in social change, particularly changes in the social relations reflected in the idea of “race”
He continues by noting, “the significance of racial discourse is twofold: it reflects existing social relations and cultural understandings and, more important, it is part of the process through which racial understandings or ideologies are created and redefined” (Doane, 2003, p. 12). Thus, whiteness studies as part of racial discourse, has the ability to impact social change with respect to racial inequality.

Hooks (1997) sees a possibility for critical intervention with white people who are antiracist, as they “might be able to understand the way in which their cultural practice reinscribes white supremacy” and the association of whiteness as terror in the black imagination, and through deconstructing it, she writes that, “without the capacity to inspire terror, whiteness no longer signifies the right to dominate. It truly becomes a benevolent absence” (p. 178). Whiteness studies seems to provide a solution to the dilemma of where progressive, antiracist whites can find their place in an antiracist movement (Andersen, 2003). With a development of whiteness studies, “it may be more difficult for white people to say “Whiteness has nothing to do with me—I’m not white” than to say “Race has nothing to do with me—I’m not racist” (Frankenberg, 2000, p. 451).

As Frankenberg (1997) noted in her later work, “if focusing on white identity and culture displaces attention to whiteness as a site of racialized privilege, its effectiveness as antiracism becomes limited” (p. 17). Furthermore, that,

Analysis of the place of whiteness in the racial order can and should be, rather than an end in itself, only one part of a much broader process of social change leveled both at the material relations of race and at discursive repertoires. It is not, in any case, realistic or meaningful to reconceptualize whiteness outside of racial
domination when, in practical terms, whiteness still confers race privilege (Frankenberg, 2000, p. 457).

The point of origin for much of the work done in ‘whiteness’ studies is an acknowledgement that ‘whiteness’ is a particular social position that for the most part has been largely unexamined and has served as a normative position or filled a normative space. “Because whites have historically controlled the major institutions of American society, they have been able to appropriate the social and cultural “mainstream” and make white understandings and practices normative” (Doane, 2003, p. 7). More specifically, ‘whiteness’ has not been understood as part of the process of racial formation. As Dyer (1997) notes, “as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people” (p. 1). The “structured invisibility” of white racial “privilege” is argued to create a power relation, whereby ‘whiteness’ has the power to define and construct racialized “others”, embracing “the gaze of ‘whiteness’ as the unacknowledged norm” (Frankenberg, 2000; Morrison, 1992, p. 90). It is argued, that by evading an examination of ‘whiteness’, we ignore how ‘race’, racism and racial inequality are constructed (Andersen, 2003). As such, ‘whiteness’ studies attempts to locate ‘whiteness’, so that the “problem” of ‘race’ now includes ‘white’ racialization in the same way that people of colour are racialized, understanding that those who are racialized as ‘white’ or as ‘other’, are situated in distinctly different social locations. It seeks to locate ‘whiteness’ in racial formation as a product of racial formation, as ‘whiteness’ has largely escaped being situated in racial formation by taking on a neutral, normative position, ultimately a nonposition in racial formation.
In understanding racial formation theory, it is necessary to locate ‘whiteness’ in formation to understand how hegemony operates in racial formation theory. The whiteness-as-norm theme argues that ‘whiteness’ is culturally hegemonic, and maintains this hegemony by seeming ‘natural’ or normative. Thus, one of the tasks of ‘whiteness’ studies is to “destabilize” white identity, in effect “to expose, examine and challenge it” (Andersen, 2003, p. 25). Frankenberg states that “[n]aming ‘whiteness’ displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance” (Frankenberg, 2000, p. 451). It is irrefutable that ‘whiteness’ is hegemonic, in the Gramscian use of the term, and occupies the position of dominance in a racial hierarchy. The process of locating ‘whiteness’ is understood by ‘whiteness’ scholars as a move towards antiracism and creation of racial justice. This process is taken further by the white abolitionist project as detailed in the 1996 edited book Race Traitor.

**Race Traitor: A Consideration of White Abolitionism**

In considering ‘white’ hegemony, it necessitates an examination of what counter-hegemonic possibilities exist. White abolitionism presents itself as counter-hegemonic and is a response that would flow out of a radical racial formation theory, insofar as it destabilizes the notion of a ‘white’ identity and challenges the sociohistorical reproduction of ‘race’ and racial hierarchies.

It is the responsibility of all ‘race’ theorists not to simply discuss ‘race’, but also to point towards direction for change. The introduction suggested that the ‘radical’ in radical racial formation theory would argue for continuous political change. If
‘whiteness’ is understood as the hegemonic position in racial formation theory, then it is important that we not only discuss this, as above, but look at ways to change this. One such way is through white abolitionism. A white abolitionist project has been laid out in Ignatiev and Garvey’s (1996) Race Traitor. Its slogan is “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). It is argued that the existence of a white race depends on those assigned to it to put their racial interests before any other interests that they hold, and subsequently the “white club” relies upon the support of all of its constituents, such that it only takes defection of so many members before the white race will collapse (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). It is maintained that this project is not meant to “convert whites” but to provide alternatives to those who are “dissatisfied” with whiteness (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). The goal is not for whites to individually abandon privileges, as this would not be possible, but to “blow apart the social formation known as the white race”, to violate the rules of whiteness, “so that no one is ‘white’” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1997, p. 348).

One way to do this is to disrupt “white racial bonding” (Sleeter, 1996). By “white racial bonding”, Sleeter (1996) is referring to the “interactions that have the purpose of affirming a common stance on race-related issues”, legitimating racial classifications and “drawing we-they boundaries” (p. 261). White racial bonding occurs through communication patterns such as “race-related ‘asides’ in conversations, strategic eye-contact, and jokes. Often they are so short and subtle that they may seem harmless” (Sleeter, 1996, p. 261). White racial bonding comes about as a social learning process, whereby we learn to talk about ‘race’ and related issues in a way that renders the “status
quo as ‘natural’, remove ourselves from complicity, and secure approval from other whites. We learn to do this so well that it takes some effort to become aware of strategies we use to deflect attention from white racism (Sleeter, 1996, p. 259). In addition to this, Sleeter (1996) argues that we evade our own role in white racism by “constructing sentences that allow us to talk about racism while removing ourselves from discussion. One such semantic evasion is to personify racism, making it (rather than ourselves) the subject of sentences (Sleeter, 1996, p. 260). Sleeter (1996) provides an example of how white racial bonding may appear. She writes,

Inserts into conversations may go like this. Two white people are talking casually about various things. One comments, “Did you hear about the Black guy who tried to rape a woman near here yesterday?” This comment serves as an invitation to white bonding: it names race as something ‘they’ have (the woman in the sentence is rendered raceless), it links Blacks with crime, and it highlights the historic fear that whites have had of black sex. The other person is being invited to respond in a way that legitimizes a field of thinking in which these associations are accepted” (Sleeter, 1996, p. 261).

There are a multitude of examples here. This author has experienced white racial bonding through also being told stories where racialized characters are identified by ‘race’ descriptors and white characters are not. Similarly, are conversations where there are vague references given to see whether or not someone is open to a bonding experience. For example, a stranger once commented that there were a lot of “Orientals” moving into a particular area. When this author suggested that the entire area was comprised of several cultures (trying politely not to correct the person’s use of “Orientals”, which in and of itself may be deemed white racial bonding), this stranger mistook this as an open invitation to comment on “their” (the “Orientals”) “problems” with drugs and crime and
inferred that this particular group was a drain on the Canadian health care system. When this author reacted to the comments made in a way that would not support a white racial bonding experience, this stranger ceased to speak to this author. As Sleeter (1996) notes, there are several ways in which the other person can respond which would have completed this interaction of white bonding. What is important here, and which Sleeter (1996) acknowledges, is that “even silence can serve as tacit acquiescence for the purpose of winning approval” (Sleeter, 1996, p. 261). Sleeter (1996) argues that knowing an exchange has served the purpose of racial bonding is clear when one does not give the desired response. The person may press the issue more explicitly, assuming that you might not have understood the purpose their exchange served, or in more severe cases, the person may no longer contact the person who does not respond desirably to such bonding (as seen in the example above) (Sleeter, 1996, pp. 262, 263). For the skeptic, this author suggests trying a tactic that fits with white abolitionism as well as white racial bonding. The next time someone tries to white racially bond with a white reader, try the phrase “I'm sorry, you must have assumed I was white”. This serves as a very simple social experiment that effectively works to further destabilize the notion of a “white” racial identity and demonstrates what happens when one does not give the desired response.

Stuart Hall advocated a pedagogy of whiteness that went beyond identifying whiteness as privilege and domination, and argued instead that whites use their position as “a resource for resistance, reflection, and empowerment” against white hegemony (Andersen, 2003, p. 31). This may be one of the most useful pieces of insight and
weaponry that can be used as an attack on white hegemony in the future, insofar as the responsibility shifts from Others to advocate for themselves in power relations of ‘race’, to ‘whites’ challenging a system of hegemony in which they are rewarded. The ongoing debate here by some is that there is no incentive for ‘whites’ to give up positions of relative power and privilege, but the hope is that a growing majority would abandon whatever privileges they have been afforded to support an unraced world. What Race Traitor leaves its reader with is that “…what was historically constructed can be undone” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996, p. 35). In addition to destroying whiteness, there is another challenge that is posed to modern reconstructions of ‘race’ and that is hybridity or “mixed race”.

Hybridity: A Challenge to Modernity’s ‘Common-Sense Lexicon of Alterity’

In a system of ‘white’ hegemony, racial hierarchy operates on the basis that ‘race’ is a discernible category of difference that can be clearly distinguished. The concept of ‘hybridity’ or ‘mixed race’, then, is a challenge to the notion of ‘pure’, discernible ‘races’, challenging hegemonic conceptions of ‘race’.

How is the concept of ‘mixed race’ understood in the racializing project of modernity? ‘Hybridity’ arose near the end of the 18th century as a term used to construct a fearful discourse around ‘racial mixing.’ Miscegenation was feared to dilute the European ‘race’. Those who were seen as racial ‘hybrids’ were considered substandard to the ‘inferior races’, an aberration assumed to be diseased, impure, and weak. This is likely due to the perceived threat of ‘difference’ as a contaminate that must be guarded
against. The problem this creates as Gilroy (2000) notes, is in not being able to locate “the Other’s difference in the common-sense lexicon of alterity” (p. 106). Gilroy (2000) argues that although ‘different people’ are hated and feared, this is nothing compared to the hatred and fear towards the “greater menace of the half-different and the partially familiar” (p. 106). To be of mixed ‘race’ is to have committed betrayal and unsecured the “safety of sameness” that is recovered by this “dismal logic” through “separation and slaughter” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 106). Racial ‘hybridity’ threatens the modern racial classification system. ‘Hybrid’ identities have defied the ‘pure,’ racial categories constructed by these classificatory systems and have challenged the use of ‘race’ as an intelligible concept. Of this, Goldberg (1997) asks, “Why, then, is it necessary or desirable to create a mixed-race identity, given that mixed race-ness denies race any status but construct?” (p. 72). The creation of a category of ‘mixed-race’ identity, as often used in state census collections, marks a reclamation of modernity’s racial classification system, a tired effort to locate the un-located, to sustain a futile concept that holds no meanings, the fight to retain a ‘pure’ culture. Fissures and displacements in racial formations enable emergent discourses of hybridity that pose a challenge to essentialist conceptions of ‘pure’, ‘race’ and culture.

The use and understanding of ‘hybridity’ has been transformed in post-colonial and post-structural discourse. ‘Hybridity’ is posed as a challenge to essentialism. In contrast to a discussion of ‘mixed race’ identities, in this discourse, “hybridity implicitly rejects the idea of pre-existing pure categories” (Anthias, 2002, p. 24). The term is central to post-structuralist cultural theory and is used as an anti-essentialist framework to
understand culture and identity (Anthias, 2002). In considering the dialogical potential of both diaspora and hybridity, Anthias (2002) writes, “For it is in the concept of dialogue, the focus on interaction and communication, and the shifts in position that become possible through this process, that a potential may be found in revealing the fluidity of boundaries and their social rather than natural construction” (p. 23). It is argued then, that, racisms need to be countered by dismantling fixed identity boundaries, allowing diaspora and hybridity to create spaces for forms of anti-racism that “can harness notions of multiple belongings”, and challenge the fixity of boundaries that characterize racist culture, practice and identities (Anthias, 2002, p. 23).

Although Anthias (2002) illustrates the potential utility of ‘hybridity’ in anti-essentialist and anti-racist discourse, namely the rejection of fixed identity and ‘races’ as “pre-existing pure categories,” this is not how the term is commonly used and understood. ‘Hybridity’ falls prey to the same sorts of problems as most language does in anti-essentialist discourse. ‘Hybridity’ is understood as ‘racial mixing’, and as such, this accepts that ‘races’ exist. Furthermore, the use of ‘hybridity’ is likely to make the same mistakes by being positioned within and necessarily using the language of an essentialist framework in its engagements. Goldberg (1997) makes this point, when he writes, that mixed-race formation constitutes an “ambivalent challenge” as “it tugs dangerously at the limits of the racializing discourse it at once invokes, straddling ambiguously the sites of double-consciousness, rejecting as it defines itself in and through racial terms, dismissing as it reifies the racial project (p. 76). This illustrates the precise problem with this concept. It continues to invoke racial discourse and define itself in accordance, reifying
the racial project it seeks to dismiss. That being said, the challenge posed by racial ‘hybridity’ to a modern racial classification system remains. It serves as a reminder of the impossibility of ‘races’ as ‘pure’ and ‘natural’ groups, and subsequently, the impossibility of any system that attempts to categorize on this basis and as such supports a radical racial formation theory that seeks to destabilize the naturalization of socially constructed racial hierarchies.

**Conclusion**

What makes a radical racial formation theory “radical,” is the break from a reliance upon ‘race’ being reconstructed time and again. As Garvey and Ignatiev (1997) have argued, “the ‘social construction of race’ has become something of a catchphrase in the academy, although few have taken the next step” (p. 346). This sentiment has also been echoed in Andersen’s (2003) statement that “…if we see race as overly constructed, then we engage in intellectual games that are meaningless in the society beyond the academy” (p. 33). The point of a radical racial formation theory is to say “yes, ‘race’ has been sociohistorically constructed, but it does not mean that it has to be continually renewed”. The current status of radical racial formation theory is to sustain a commitment to historicize ‘race’ and seek emancipatory breaks in history where ‘race’ can go without being reproduced. The great thing about historically constructed phenomena is that they do not need to be reconstructed if there is a significant break away from the thing being constructed. We have seen this throughout history with ‘race’, with the partial abolition of slavery, the achievements of the civil rights movement, the closure of native
residential schools and the acknowledgement of native land claims and several other examples. We know change is possible and we also know that it is hard won.

Stuart Hall (1988) said that “the hope of every ideology is to naturalize itself out of History into Nature, and thus to become invisible, to operate unconsciously” (p. 8). ‘Race’ has tried and continues to try to accomplish this. What we need is a continual and radical historicizing of ‘race’ and to rob science of the authority to try to naturalize it. In writing the history of the present, we engage a politics of the possible. This is not to underestimate the “historical sedimentations” of the past or their continuing effects; it is meant to question the power that the present may have for those seeking change (Moore, Pandian & Kosek, 2003). This conclusion is meant to echo sentiments of Foucault’s theoretical subject, which “confronts the present as difference from and rupture with the past” (Poster, 1989, p. 63). What a radical racial formation theory maintains, could be inspired by McCarthy (1991) as he writes,

Situated in the very reality it seeks to comprehend and relating the past from the practically interested standpoint of an anticipated future, it is anything but a view from nowhere… In this version of critical social theory, there is an essentially prospective dimension to writing the history of the present in which one is situated. And the projected future, which gives shape to the past, is not a product of disinterested contemplation or of scientific prediction but of practical engagement; it is a future that we can seek to bring about (p. 45).

The argument here is to use thoroughgoing political reforms—the ‘radical’ in this racial formation theory to—embrace the present as the moment to build a future where ‘race’ is irrelevant and its former consequences are no longer felt.
This thesis has set out to accomplish a theoretical extension of Omi’s and Winant’s racial formation theory. It set out to do this by first embracing the complexities of the debate over ‘race’ and the conundrum faced by social scientists seeking to theorize about ‘race’. It then moved on to discuss Omi’s and Winant’s racial formation and their understanding of ‘race’. This set the foundation for an extension, as it was argued that Omi and Winant promoted ‘race’ permanency in their theory despite the conviction the theorists have that ‘race’ is a sociohistorical construction. This contradiction was echoed in other areas of Omi’s and Winant’s theory of racial formation, where the authors argued that ‘race’ would never be transcended. My response has been that if ‘race’ cannot be transcended, then this supports an essentialist understanding of ‘race’, not a sociohistorical one. I have also argued that if it is stated that ‘race’ can never be transcended, that this then limits the possibilities for social action and change, and ultimately is a self-fulfilling prophecy. I have argued that it is unrealistic for the authors to think that ‘race’ can be maintained and embraced where identities are concerned as ‘race’ has never been fixed and is continuously renewed and redefined. Moreover it is dangerous to maintain ‘race’ as a positive category, when there are those who are waiting to use the same conception as a means to an opposite end, as in the right-winged, racist use of ‘difference’. The authors also appeal to ‘race’ as identifying “different types of human bodies” which contradicts their constructionist approach (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 55). Despite adopting a social constructionist approach, Omi and Winant do not adequately address the role of ‘nature’ and science in creating and reproducing ‘race’ and racial knowledge production. There is an absence of this sort of critique in their work.
My response to Omi and Winant has been to provide a strong historical location of ‘race’ as a modern conception that has been legitimized through liberalism as its political theory. No theory of racial formation would be complete without stating how it sees racism. In a radical racial formation theory, I have argued for an historical understanding of multiple racisms and against a monolithic conception of a singular racism that misses the subtle and systemic ways that racisms operate.

I then went on to theoretically locate racial formation theory as a combination of critical and poststructural theoretical schools of thought, as radical racial formation theory seeks to critique science and reason in the hopes of emancipation and grasping the present as a powerful moment for change. I moved then to a discussion of the sociology of knowledge and an explanation of how racial ‘knowledges’ are produced and in the Foucaultian use of the term, how ‘power’ operates in the production of ‘knowledges’. Dominant ‘knowledges’ were argued to be maintained by ‘hegemony’ in the Gramscian use of the concept. It was argued that ‘whiteness’ is the hegemonic position in racial formation. I then suggested ways in which to combat ‘white’ hegemony, through white abolitionism, and through obscuring ‘race’ by an appeal to the concept of ‘hybridity’. The purpose of writing this has been to develop a theoretical extension of racial formation that does not stagnate at the statement that ‘race’ is a sociohistorical construction, but elaborates on how this came to be and indicates the opportunity for change.
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