COVERT RACISM IN THE U.S. AND GLOBALLY

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The feeling that relegation of the Negro to a subordinate status was in fact the covert end of legislation prescribing unequal treatment seems to have underlain the uniformity with which such laws have been struck down. (Columbia Law Review 1949, 636)

While race is unarguably a social construction, it is also a means of social control (Coates 2003). This particular form of social control differentially serves to restrict and regulate the behavior of specified racial groups to the advantage of other specified racial groups. Systems of inequality and oppression must be preserved and perpetuated by societal control mechanisms (Coates 2003). More specifically, race, as a socially constructed means of social control, serves to perpetuate economic, social, political, psychological, religious, ideological, and legal systems of inequality. If you could imagine a series of concentric circles, each labeled according to the above (not exhaustive) list, which serve to define, structure, and limit the varied racialized group experiences – then a more dynamic conceptualization of race can be realized.

As concentric circles, these constraints appear to be much like Frye's 'bird cage' (1983, 1–16). To the casual observer, each wire does not appear to be sufficient to retain the bird. But when viewed from either within or as a whole we see a finely constructed cage. The problem, from a pedagogical, policy, research, or activist perspective, is that we tend to concentrate on only one wire – or phenomenon – the removal of which leads to great anticipation that the war has been won. Unfortunately, in systems of racialized oppression, as one wire is removed from the cage, even more insidious wires are being constructed and still others are left intact. Elsewhere, I argue that:

Race is neither an event nor a specific series of events. Race is a process of structured events which over time demonstrate a system whereby

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1 “Covert Racism in the U.S. and Globally” by Rodney Coates is a revised version of a paper of the same title originally published in Sociology Compass 2/1 (2008):208–231.
groups and individuals are racialized. Race, consequently, must be studied from a socio-historical frame of reference which provides the critical rubric by which and through which systems of racialism may be understood. Absent such an analysis one is more likely to confuse events which may have racial overtones with processes which are racialized. The mere fact that outcomes may be categorized within racial terms does not a priori lead to the conclusion that these outcomes are a result of racialization. (Coates 2006, 5)

Racist indictments have a long and sordid history in our world. One of the earliest of which can be found in the 14th century CE writings of the Tunisian Ibn Khaldun:

The Negro nations are, as a rule, submissive to slavery, because [Negroes] have little that is [essentially] human and possess attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals. (Muqaddimah 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racism#_ref-bboxhill_0, last accessed July 17, 2007)

Al-Abshibi (1388–1446), during the same period in Egypt, wrote: ‘It is said that when the [black] slave is sated, he fornicates, when he is hungry, he steals’ (Bernard 2002).

Race is a multilayered, multidimensional beast that, although socially constructed, has a momentum and inertia of its own. The deeper we go, the more we see. The beast has a life of its own primarily because we (all of us) are indoctrinated from birth and enmeshed in this viscous interacting web of confusion. What makes race and its analysis so difficult is that often it is treated as a constant when in reality it is a variable. Any historical and/or cross-national examination of race and systems of race would reveal its variability (Branton and Jones 2005; Carlson, Armelegos and de Laubenfels 1971; Cartmill 1998; Coates 2002). Racial domination as a means of social control appears to be quite agile or adept at adjusting to changing social climates (Omi and Winant 1994). When under attack, it can be found deeply submerged in the societal psyche. To the extent that these psyches are obvious across several generations and institutions – we can talk not only about the social construction but also the cultural production of race and racialized systems. Thus, from the cultural production of race and racialized systems, we suggests that as social, political, economic, psychological, and/or situational conditions change – new pressures emerge that insist on sacrificial lambs, thus race reemerges – fresh, clean, and newly adorned (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Carr 1997). The most significant process in the cultural production of race is seen in the process of socialization (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001).