Second Edition

THE EVERYDAY LANGUAGE OF WHITE RACISM

Jane H. Hill

Edited by

Christina Leza · Barbra A. Meek · Jacqueline H. E. Messing

WILEY Blackwell

The Everyday Language of White Racism by Jane H. Hill

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Editors' Dedication

In memory of Jane, whose "precarious balancing act" remains an inspiration.

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Editors' Acknowledgments

We, the editors, would like to thank the Colorado College Crown Center for Teaching, the Colorado College Department of Anthropology, the National Endowment of the Humanities Professorship under Professor Victoria Levine, and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan for funding parts of this book project. We appreciate the guidance of Wiley's editorial staff, especially Madhurima Thapa. We are grateful to Ashley McDermott for research support, our essayists for their fabulous contributions, our families for their ever-present understanding and encouragement, and each other for the fruitful collaboration. J. Messing would like to thank her former Language and Racism seminar students at the Universities of Maryland-College Park and South Florida. We are especially grateful to the students in C. Leza's fall 2022 "Language, Power, and White Supremacy" class for sharing their ideas. Last but not least, we are thankful to Ken Hill for reuniting us through this project and sharing Jane with us.

Editors' Preface to the Second Edition

In 1998, Jane H. Hill offered for the first time her "Language and Race" seminar. Inspired by critical race theory and Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, Hill had begun investigating the linguistic landscape of "mock" Spanish in the United States and realized that her own and her Spanish-speaking interlocutors' insights intersected with this groundbreaking theory. Her seminar challenged her students (including Meek) to examine how linguistic differences appeared in "White" public spaces, such as advertisements, televised (streamed) programs, Hollywood films, Hallmark cards, and newspaper editorials. It was a call to bring a linguistic anthropological lens to everyday language and dislodge the covert racism(s) lurking in (seemingly) benign, ordinary turns of phrase. Her scholarship on "mock" Spanish paved the way for the study of linguistic racism(s) (see also Kroskrity 2011, 2021), and her book remains foundational, a cornerstone of contemporary language and race research (such as Alim et al. 2020; Alim et al. 2016; Dick and Wirtz 2011; Smalls et al. 2021).

In the first edition of *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, Hill provides an incisive analysis of everyday language to reveal the underlying racist stereotypes that continue to circulate in White American culture and sustain structures of White Supremacy. This singular book provides a detailed background on theories of race and racism, reveals how racializing discourse – talk and text that produces and reproduces ideas about races and assigns people to them – facilitates a victim-blaming logic, and integrates a broad, interdisciplinary range of literature from sociology, social psychology, justice studies, critical legal studies, philosophy, literature, and other disciplines that have studied racism. She deftly synthesizes this range into a linguistic anthropological approach that she uses to analyze language in media. Her unique approach provides a method for unpacking the ("White Supremacist") racializing and racist logics embedded in language as well as compellingly motivating the need to do so. This book continues to be essential reading for scholars and students of race, language, and media studies.

This new edition supplements Hill's classic yet still very relevant 2008 text with annotations, discussion questions, and essays by some of today's leading scholars in the language of racism. The editors' annotations clarify theoretical concepts presented in the text for undergraduate readers and readers outside of the discipline of

linguistics. The annotations also connect concepts presented by Hill to literature on racism published since 2008 as well as relevant events. The essays by John Baugh, Elaine Chun, Adam Hodges, and Norma Mendoza-Denton further bring Hill's text up-to-date with today's critical discussions on language and racism in the United States. These updates offer readers an opportunity for deeper engagement with critical racial issues such as racial profiling, police violence, the Black Lives Matter movement, White nationalism, White fragility, and the various forms of institutional racism that continue to limit and endanger the lives of people of color as well as other minoritized groups in the United States. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter provide guidance for analytical conversations in classrooms.

One goal of these updates is to support readers' continued engagement with this text, which we have been using in our own classes addressing language and social inequality, inviting further classroom discussion and productive debate. As the first edition of Hill's text continues to be used for undergraduate and graduate courses across various disciplines and the need to discuss systemic racism in the United States has become more pressing than ever, the time is ripe for this new edition of the text that helps to clarify and bring Hill's contributions to the study of racism into conversation with the most current literature on American racism. For example, Hill's discussion of the White American preoccupation with "White virtue" predates Robin D'Angelo's work on "white fragility" (2018), but readers should see connections between DiAngelo's and Hill's observations about White American sensitivities and denials regarding racism. At the same time, many readers may be taken aback by Hill's use of certain racial labels or other terminology that would be considered outmoded or even disrespectful in today's discourses about racism and racial identities. During Hill's career and at the time of the first edition's publication, the term "Indian" was commonly used by scholars such as Hill working with Indigenous peoples of the Southwest. We maintain Hill's use of "Indian" in her original writing, but the editors and essay contributors use the terms Indigenous, Native, or First Nations, as these are now considered more appropriate terms of reference. Hill also does not make use of the acronym BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) which appears to have emerged in social media discourse around 2013 (Garcia 2020). While opinions about BIPOC as a representative term differ among people of color, the editors use BIPOC in some annotations and discussion questions for this second edition as it is a broadly used and recognized term for people of color which highlights the distinct experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples under racism. In addition, as stated in her preface to the first edition included in this new edition, Hill believed it important to write out racial slurs under examination in academic studies, so many racial epithets appear fully spelled out in this work. Where appropriate, the editors also address histories and concerns about certain terminology through our annotations.

Each new essay engages with a chapter. Author Norma Mendoza-Denton draws on televised media and social media in her essay, exploring the ways in which public personalities' code-switching "gaffes" are forms of White racism. Following Hill's work, this analysis complicates slurs, slips, gaffes, and perception of speaker intentionality, raising up issues of mockery, appropriation, and "racial plagiarism" in

relation to the enregisterment of a racialized persona (and its circulation). Elaine Chun's essay interrogates the social work of unmasking the many "mock" linguistic varieties that grew out of Jane Hill's work, rendering them overt, and concludes by discussing the ideologies that underlay Jane's analyses of "mock" Spanish. John Baugh analyzes appropriation of linguistic constructs and their association with racialization, and situations of bigotry and controversies informed by linguistics in legal contexts. Adam Hodges' essay offers an investigation of slurs, place names, and current renaming practices as part of anti-racist discourse in circulation now, focusing primarily on Indigenous place names and political/governmental uptake. These essays advance the study of discourse and racism within the context of Jane Hill's groundbreaking work.

While there are many generative themes throughout this book and the new essays, we, the editors, would like to draw attention to three developments: the expansion of social media, the racialization of cultural practices (as appropriation), and the discursive shift to White Supremacy (M. Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre 2020). When Hill first published her book, it launched her into the public's eye. From news broadcasts to televised interviews, Hill's scholarship became controversial, denigrated by those who felt personally attacked, celebrated by others who realized the groundwork the book laid for dismantling covert forms of racism, and everything in between. However, these instantiations/debates remained limited to these public media forums – television, radio, and newspapers – rather than taking on a life of their own on social media. That is, Jane didn't have to deal with the inflammatory potential of the internet. That said, social media, and the internet more generally, provide opportunities to use and expand Jane's approach to interrogate covert, and not-so-covert, forms of linguistic racism (see Meek 2013, Mendoza-Denton this volume, for examples). During a recent collaborative talk with one of Christina Leza's classes at Colorado College, the students emphasized the need for this new edition to reflect the changes in social media and technology that have resulted in the constant production of and exposure to content since Hill's first edition. They and other student readers of Hill's book view social media as a primary site where people engage with issues of race and racism, encountering many instances of cultural appropriation in the video clips, memes, and comments that come across their media feeds on a daily basis, primarily in video and images on (as of the time of publication) TikTok, Instagram, and X/formerly Twitter, and to a lesser degree on Facebook. It is clear that social media is an important site for investigating White racism, racialization, and cultural appropriation of BIPOC language and culture ways (i.e. food, art, fashion). For example, a culinary recipe taken from a BIPOC source and shared by a White person is identified as an act of appropriation (See Norma Mendoza-Denton's essay for one example of this). Social media users experience the rapid circulation and uptake of racialized communication and the responding, intertextual uptakes in posted commentaries on racist comments and cultural appropriations. The critique of social media posts with racializing discourse grows through social media sharing and subsequent circulation of commentary on and offline. This new edition invites readers to further engage with the book's content as it relates to current social media trends. A website for this second edition

provides additional resources for instructional engagement and discussion, including current online media relevant to the language of White racism.

This book is being published at a time when the United States has emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic and has been deeply influenced by the Black Lives Matters movement, debates about critical race studies in public school curriculum (in California, Florida, and other states), and increased hatred and violence directed at Asian Americans / Pacific Islanders, Jewish Americans, Muslim Americans and others. While discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality persists, the Supreme Court recently ruled against the use of affirmative action in college admissions. The calls for "Say her/his name" and the George Floyd murder protests have forever changed US discourse about racism. This reissue comes at a time when hate speech and violent acts of racist hatred are on the rise in the United States, with as many as 250,000 hate crimes annually documented by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2023a,b).

Should Hill be writing today, she would likely be using the term "White supremacy" more and perhaps as an alternative term to "White Racism" (Roth-Gordon, 2022, 2023) in describing the cultural and systemic forms of racism addressed by her in this book. Yet it is worth considering whether Hill's use of "White racism" communicates something distinct from, although related to, White supremacy as it is understood in contemporary discourses about racism. As Elaine Chun points out in her essay (this volume), "Hill invited students and scholars to question the taken-for-granted ideologies of race that interpretations of our discourse necessarily require us to accommodate, if not accept." This invitation of *The Everyday Language of White Racism* to engage with the linguistic data we all can access through observation of racialized communication in our everyday lives is what makes this work unique among others in critical discourse analysis. Implicit in Hill's invitation is the fact that readers have agency and can accomplish antiracist change by engaging with the ideas in this book, and perhaps further open the eyes of and evoke empathy from people who had themselves never experienced racism first-hand. Yet, Hill also argues in her concluding chapter that change will not be easy as White Americans actively resist acknowledging covert racism, because White privilege and a White American desire to protect "White virtue" are valued by White Americans above people of color's well-being. We leave it up to the readers to observe and discuss in light of your life experiences what forms your antiracist agency may take. We hope that this updated edition will encourage a future generation of readers to consider how the book's themes surface in class, at home and work, on their social media feeds, and other areas of everyday life.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Some members of audiences for talks about the topics I treat in this book have accused me of presenting an overly negative view of the state of race relations in the United States. I do insist that racism remains an active force in White American culture in the twenty-first century. However, I write this in my 69th year. I grew up in segregated schools and neighborhoods, listening to the frankly racist talk of friends and family members. My dear grandmother and grandfather, my beloved father and his three brothers and their wives, my delightful aunts, all of them (except a couple of the aunts) highly educated, could hardly be together for half an hour without the conversation turning to "the jigs"[a] – their preferred epithet for African Americans. My mother and my husband and my sister and brothers, and I dreaded these offensive conversations, and we did our best to steer the talk toward harmless topics, but it often seemed that no theme existed that did not provide new openings to return to their obsession. While my life is still spent almost entirely among other White people, I rarely hear that kind of talk today. And I have found that White Americans are today relatively honest in talking and thinking about the place of race and racism in their own lives, compared to people of similar class and status in many other countries I have visited. Furthermore, people of color now encounter opportunities in the United States, including positions at the very highest levels of power and visibility in government, business, and the professions, that were unthinkable 25 or 30 years ago, and that would be unlikely in most White-dominant countries today, even in Europe. So there has been positive change. But every serious study shows that White racism continues to be a deadening and oppressive fact of life for the vast majority of people of color in the United States. This book is an effort to understand why this is so. Why does racism persist in so many forms in a country where to call a person "racist" is a deep insult, and where "equal opportunity" is a universally articulated value? In this book, I use the tools of my trade – linguistic anthropology – to try to understand this puzzle. Linguistic anthropologists believe that to use language – to speak, to write, to sing, to joke, to listen, to read – is the most important way that human beings make the world, and make it meaningful. So everyday talk and text should be the single most important way that White Americans come to understand the world in terms of race, to practice racism, and to learn to tolerate its effects, sometimes in full consciousness of

what they are doing and sometimes in reduced consciousness or denial. So I focus on the ways that White racism is, as anthropological jargon has it, "produced and reproduced" through everyday talk and text. Many examples in this book come from language in mass media, but, given the way that American lives are utterly saturated with talk and text from such media, I insist that media language must count as yet another form of "everyday language."

This book is about White racism,[b] for two reasons. The first is that I live in a White world, and I have not undertaken formal fieldwork in order to observe everyday discourse about race among Americans of color. I have benefited enormously from conversations with colleagues who can offer insight into White racism from a non-White perspective, and from writing by anthropologists of color, from W. E. B. Du Bois to Audrey Smedley, Faye Harrison, and Ana Celia Zentella, who have made significant contributions to theorizing racism.[c] The second reason is that I believe that the (understandable) distrust and even hatred that many non-White Americans feel when they think of or interact with White Americans, sometimes called "racism," is not very important in the great scheme of things. Of course this distrust and hatred is painful for Whites at an individual level. Like most White Americans, I can think of times when I or my children have suffered pain in interactions with people of color who disliked and distrusted us, or even abused us, just because we were White. But these experiences have been both few and ephemeral. They have occasioned no enduring withdrawals of privilege, no consequences beyond a moment of hurt and anger. These experiences cut deep, and I continue to remember a few with some pain. But they have very limited structural consequences. When a White person chooses to avoid a "bad neighborhood," this choice has few costs for them.[d] In contrast, should a person of color choose to avoid all of the environments where they are likely to be hurt emotionally or even physically, the costs would be devastating, since these environments – the admissions office of a school, the reading room of a library, the human resources department of a corporation, the aisles of a discount store, the sidewalks of a neighborhood – will include nearly all of the sites where significant symbolic and material resources are distributed in our society. And, since they cannot possibly avoid these, the moments of painfully unjust rejection – like those that sometimes trouble me, even though they were minor incidents that occurred years ago – are multiplied and multiplied into an endless and acute source of stress that it is difficult for any White person to imagine. I try to think about how I would feel, about what kind of person I would be, if the half-dozen very negative experiences in my entire long life that happened because I am White were multiplied into threats that would loom for me every single day. When we consider this, we are required to conclude that, among the many appalling consequences of life in a racist society, the occasional discomforts and restrictions felt by Whites because they are stereotyped by people of color surely rank very low. And we must also be struck by the extraordinary toughness, courage, and fundamental strength of character that must be shared by the vast majority of people of color.

Because I have not conducted research on racism in other countries, this book is about White racism in the United States. Furthermore, I will focus here on the

way it plays out among the people I know best – middle- and upper-middle-class White professionals, the kinds of people who read newspapers and use the Internet, and who produce the kind of talk and text that might be heard or read beyond the sphere of immediate family and neighbors. For want of a better term, I will refer to these people as White elites, even though only a very few of them are movers and shakers at the highest level. While the comparative literature shows that there are many kinds of racism, I believe that elite White racism in the United States is the most important and influential form of racism in the world. The global power of elite White Americans means that everyone in the world must reckon with what they think and do. The forms of racism that they accomplish – and, indeed, their forms of anti-racist practice – influence how people think and act around the globe.

White American racism is an inspiration for racists globally, but it is also one of the great puzzles for people in other countries. Most White American anthropologists who have worked outside the United States have been asked about it, in tones ranging from the accusatory to the merely curious, by interlocutors at all levels of society. Doing fieldwork in Mexico, I have had conversations about *racismo norteamericano* with interlocutors ranging from illiterate peasants to distinguished professors (working-class Mexicans, who have to navigate White racism as part of the trick of coming to the United States as undocumented migrants, are especially knowledgeable and aware about it). I speculate that around the world White American racism is considered to be at least as typical a feature of life in the United States as is American wealth. People in other countries measure their own local experiences of racism against what they believe to be American patterns, deplore the global influence of American racism, and wonder how it is that American life can encompass such a contradictory combination of the best and worst in human nature.

Regrettably, this book does not treat anti-Semitism, which is obviously closely linked to racism, shares much of its logic, and figures in the prejudices of most racists. Anti-Semitism around the world is apparently on the rise, and must be carefully watched. But this is a vast subject in its own right, and falls beyond the scope of this book.[e]

One last warning. In speaking, I do not use racist epithets. As a teacher, I have learned that uttering them, even when they are carefully framed as examples, may cause great pain to students. However, writing and reading are a different kind of context. I am concerned that the moment of collusion between writer and reader when the reader encounters "k..e" or "n….r" may be an even more powerful site for the reproduction of racializing practice than is the moment of shock when the reader encounters the words spelled out. With the ellipses, both writer and reader share a false comfort – we are not the sort of people who would ever spell these words out – that is immediately contradicted by what is silenced in a deep presupposition – we both know these words. So racist epithets, spelled out, will appear in this book. I prefer the shock, the confrontation with ugliness, and the recognition that these words and what they mean are in our world. I have thought carefully about the fact that writing the words out may be, at a deep level of self-construction for me, a moment of shamefully pleasurable catharsis, as much as it is a conscious choice made on theoretical grounds; I accept that responsibility. I also accept

responsibility for the pain that seeing these words will bring some readers, and I apologize.

I owe thanks to many people for helping me develop the ideas in this book. I thank the many students, including especially Laura Cummings, Elizabeth Krause, Jacqueline Messing, Andrea Smith, Gayle Shuck, Elea Aguirre, Barbara Meek, Adam Schwartz, and Elise DuBord, who have found these ideas exciting and have encouraged me to work on them, and who have themselves contributed both new materials and exacting criticism. Among colleagues to whom I owe special gratitude are Ana Alonso, Barbara Babcock, Charles Briggs, José Cobas, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Susan Philips, Jennifer Roth-Gordon, Carlos Vélez Ibáñez, Kathryn Woolard, and Ana Celia Zentella. Other colleagues and students, too numerous to mention, have sent me e-mails and clippings for my collection of materials, and I thank them all. I should especially mention Greg Stoltz, Luis Barragan, and Lori Labotka, who have checked bibliography and transcribed interviews, and Dan Goldstein, who did most of the interviews cited in Chapter 5.

My husband, Kenneth C. Hill, and my sons Eric and Harold, have as always contributed sustaining love and patience. I thank especially the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences for a residential fellowship in 2003–2004, and the University of Arizona for granting me sabbatical leave during that year, permitting me to pull together the many scraps of more than a decade of attention to the questions developed in this book.

Editor's Annotations

a "jigs" is a derogatory term for Black Americans that emerged in the United States in the early 1900s; likely a shortened variant of the racial epithet "jigaboo," a word with possible African origins, but may also derive from White American derogatory reference to racialized people who dance the quick-paced Irish folk dance known as the jig.

b As noted in our Preface to the Second Edition, White supremacy would be another term to describe the institutional power and related racist actions of White Americans that Hill is referring to through "White racism."

c From cultural criticism, the editors recall Hill's recognition in the classroom and private conversations of bell hooks and Toni Morrison in their call for more scholarly attention to White American beliefs and practices in the study of racism.

d In the original 2008 edition, Hill here uses the pronoun "she," a gender inclusivity strategy at the time that countered the common use of "he" to refer to a generic person. The editors have opted for the usage of gender-neutral "they/them" to be inclusive of non-binary identities.

e Chapters one and four include examples of anti-Semitic slurs. As noted in our Preface to the Second Edition, all forms of hate speech are on the rise.

About the Companion Website

The Everyday Language of White Racism by Jane H. Hill, Second Edition is accompanied by a companion website

www.wiley.com/go/hill/2e

The companion website offers instructional support with content links and assignments complementing the Text's discussion questions.

Chapter 1

The Persistence of White Racism

Introduction: Racism, Race, and Racial Disparities

I began to write this chapter in the early months of 2004, 140 years after the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1864, 80 years out from the establishment of citizenship for Native Americans in 1924, and during the 50th anniversary of the US Supreme Court's great decision of 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ended official segregation in US public schools. The US Civil Rights Act of 1964, which proscribed racial discrimination in broad areas of American life, was 40 years old.

The people who made these landmarks live in daguerreotypes, in flickering black and white film, and in reunions of graying veterans of the Civil Rights movement. Today, most Whites see White racism as a part of the American past and anti-racist struggle as largely completed. Yet people of color – African Americans, Native Americans, Americans of Latin American, or Asian or Middle Eastern ancestry – consistently report that they experience racism (Alter 2004; Bobo 2001; Feagin and Sykes 1994). These reports are not the product of oversensitivity or paranoia. Instead, they may even understate the impact that White racism has on the everyday lives of people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Feagin and Vera 1995).

While American workplaces and public institutions are increasingly integrated, very few Whites have social friends among people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 107–111). White isolation makes it easy for them to dismiss the complaints of people of color as "whining" and "playing the race card." Whites do not themselves experience harassment for "driving while Black," or the stony inattention encountered when "ordering a restaurant meal while Indian." Their conversations with family

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and friends are never interrupted by perfect strangers telling them to "Speak English! This is America!" Nobody has ever tried to seduce them by confessing that they've "always wanted to make it with a hot Asian chick." And they don't have the kinds of conversations with people of color where they would hear about such incidents, which are so frequent as to be stereotypical. Everyday moments of discrimination are only part of the picture, though. Statistics for a wide range of indicators stratified by three major racial groups in the United States, shown in Table 1,[a] reveal a consistent picture of gross disparities.[1]

The numbers in Table 1 capture quantitatively what is obvious to anyone who drives through an American city, attends a college graduation, visits a corporate headquarters, sits in a hospital emergency room, or accomplishes any other kind of everyday engagement with the world. What might explain these vivid inequalities? Brown et al. (2003) argue that they result from two opposing dynamics, "accumulation" that favors Whites and "disaccumulation" that continues to disadvantage people of color. Yet we know that ordinary White people do not feel that they enjoy any benefit due to their race. Nor do they believe that people of color continue to face disadvantage. So, how do White people explain these numbers, and the visible evidence that they quantify, given that they think that racism has ended in the United States?

Most White Americans do admit that isolated pockets of White racism persist – perhaps in northern Idaho, or southern Georgia. However, the disparities

Table 1 Disparities in economic, health, and social indicators by "race" in the United States

Indicator type	*Statistic*	*Hispanic*	*African American*	*White*
Economic	Per capita income (2004)	14,106	16,035	25,203
	Median family income (2004)	35,401	35,158	56,700
	Household net worth (2000)[3]	9,750	7,500	79,400
	Home ownership[4]	49.5%	48.2%	72.7%
	Unemployment (2005, with high school degree, no college)	4.5%	8.5%	4.0%
	Poverty rate	21.9%	24.7%	10.8%
Health	Private health insurance (under 65)[5]	41.7%	53.9	71.4
	Life expectancy[6]	79.5 (2001)[7]	73.3	78.3
	Infant mortality	4.00/1,000	13.65/1,000	5.65/1,000
Social	Married	57.0%	41.0%	61.0%
	Female-headed family with children under 18	25.0%	52.0%	18.0%
	Women never married	25.6%	39.5%	18.7%
	High school degree	58.5%	81.1%	85.7
	B.A. degree	12.0%	17.6%	28.0%
	Incarceration per 100,000[8]	742	2,290	412

Source: Adapted from note 2.

charted in Table 1, which are consistent across every region of the United States, are unlikely to result from the actions of those very few members of the White community – openly declared White supremacists – that all Whites categorize as "racists." A few thousand Ku Kluxers can hardly claim responsibility for the fact that the average household net worth of African Americans is less than one-tenth that of White households.[9 b]

Since common sense requires White Americans to reject the idea that these racial disparities are due to racism as they understand it – that is, as overt expression of White supremacy – they often conclude that they result from some fault of those who suffer. So they are credulous when the long-discredited idea that there might be a biologically based difference in intelligence among the races was revived in the last years of the twentieth century, in the bestseller *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray 1994). However, while differential intelligence might explain the disparities in educational accomplishment seen in Table 1, it hardly accounts for the two-fold disparity in figures for unemployment. Surely the labor market offers enough grunt jobs that this difference should be no more than 11 percent or so, as predicted by *The Bell Curve*'s figures for differential intelligence.[10] Instead, the table shows a 100 percent disparity, with African American unemployment twice that of Whites. Nor can the alleged average difference in IQ explain an African American infant mortality rate two and a half times that of Whites. The Hispanic figures contradict such an association: Hispanics have rates of school completion similar to those of African Americans and yet exhibit lower rates of infant mortality even than Whites.[11]

A White American trying to account for these statistics might turn to ideas about cultural differences among ethnic groups, believing, for instance, that Hispanics typically enjoy large, close-knit extended families that provide good support for expectant mothers, explaining their low figures for infant mortality. Or they might believe that African Americans do not value higher education, but seek success in fields like sports and popular music, thus explaining their low rate of completion of bachelor's degrees. But, as we shall see below, these ideas about "culture" do not survive critical attention from an anthropological point of view.

Of course, we cannot ignore the weight of history. African Americans were never compensated for their exclusion as slaves[c] from the wealth of the nation built with their labor, for being terrorized by Whites out of such small property as they might accumulate in the dark years of Jim Crow, for their formal exclusion from resources distributed by twentieth-century government programs such as the GI Bill, FHA mortgage assistance, aid to small businesses, and support for farmers, through the mid-1960s and even later (Lipsitz 1998). Disparities in household net worth, or life expectancy, might be a residue of this history. But "history" does not explain differences in short-range phenomena such as median per capita income, unemployment, college graduation, or incarceration. If discrimination has been largely vanquished for the last 40 years, two generations, the racial stratification of these factors should surely have disappeared.

Along with many other scholars who have investigated the question, I suggest that what does account for these numbers is the persistent culture of White racism

in the United States. White racism is not just part of American history. Instead, White racist culture today organizes racist practices in White-dominated institutions such as schools and health-care facilities, and everyday choices and behaviors by the vast majority of Whites operating as individuals. White racist culture is shaped by a "White racial frame," "an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate" (Feagin 2006:27), along with interpretations that rationalize the discrimination against people of color that is indeed old (dating back to the earliest stages of the oppression of people of African descent by Whites in the New World), but continues as a vivid fact of life in the contemporary United States. The impacts shown in Table 1 are of such generality, and such a magnitude, as to suggest strongly that racism must be practiced in some way by a very substantial number of Whites, at every level of class and status. To render their practices invisible, and to tolerate or to discount their effects, Whites must share negative stereotypes of people of color, permitting them to blame these victims. How are such stereotypes produced and reproduced among people who deny that they are racist and who claim to abhor racism in word and deed (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Feagin and Vera 1995)? How does White racism actually work today?[12] This book aims at a partial answer to these questions by examining how White Americans produce and reproduce the culture of White racism through their use of language, from high literary text, to language in every sort of mass media, to everyday talk and text produced by ordinary people.

Before turning to my main topic, the reproduction of White racism in language, I want to introduce the theories that anthropologists and other scholars today find most productive in thinking about race and about White racism. These critical theories challenge what I call the "folk theory" of racism. The folk theory is an interpretation, a way of thinking about racism, that is crucial to the perpetuation of White racist culture. Since for most White people the folk theory is undeniable common sense, ideas that contradict it require careful discussion. The folk theory interacts with the linguistic ideologies discussed in Chapter 2 in intricate ways that make possible the simultaneous reproduction and denial of White racism. Since one of the goals of this book is to show how this works, we need to know what the folk theory of racism is, and why it is inadequate to explain racial disparities in American society today. And we need to understand the critical theory of White racism as culture, which underlies the ideas presented in this book.

Two Theories of Race and Racism: Folk Theory and Critical Theory

Cognitive anthropologists (e.g. D'Andrade 1995) use the term "folk theory" or "folk model" to label the everyday understandings of the world, found in all societies, that are revealed by ethnographic analysis. Folk theories influence scientific theories and vice versa. But real differences exist between folk theories and the theories developed by scholars and scientists. Folk theoreticians are not

unreflective, but they have not been trained in the tough discipline of searching for contrary evidence. Instead, folk theoreticians often handle contradictions by "erasure" (Gal and Irvine 1995), a kind of inattention that makes contradictory evidence invisible. Consider a sentence invented by the sociologist Stanley Lieberson: "Americans are still prejudiced against blacks." Lieberson found that, even though about 12 percent of Americans *are* Black, Whites seldom notice the contradiction in this statement. This is erasure. In contrast, Lieberson's respondents were startled by another sentence: "Americans still make less money than do whites" (Lieberson 1985:128). For these subjects, "Whites" could stand metonymically for "Americans," but "Blacks" could not.

Folk theorizing uses what scholars call "ad hoc" or "stipulative" explanations for contradictory evidence. For instance, Bashkow (2006) found that Orokaiva people in New Guinea were acquainted with White people who did not match their stereotypes of "Whitemen" (for instance, as very soft-skinned, or as never doing hard physical labor). But they did not conclude from this evidence that their stereotypes were mistaken. Instead, they decided that these White people were simply untypical. Some Orokaiva said that they were probably not real "Whitemen," but reincarnations of dead Orokaiva relatives returned in disguise.

People use folk theories to interpret the world without a second thought. They are a part of everyday common sense. But they are also more than this. Since common sense is valued, folk theories and categories are not only taken for granted, they are the objects of considerable intellectual and affective investment. I have found on many occasions, in teaching and lecturing, that to question the folk theory of racism elicits from my fellow White Americans a defense of it that is acutely felt and even angry. To challenge this common sense is to become an oddball or a divisive radical.

The folk theory of race and racism

While anthropologists usually prefer to emphasize diversity, my research suggests that most White Americans share a single set of folk ideas about race and racism. These ideas, which I refer to as the "folk theory of race and racism," attend to so much that is irrelevant, erase so much that is important, and create so many traps and pitfalls that it is probably impossible to develop anti-racist projects within their framework. The folk theory shows up in the talk and text that I will analyze in later chapters. Even more importantly, it shows up in classes and courtrooms, in the deliberations of legislative bodies, and in programs on television. Most White readers of this book, and their friends and families, will have invoked it in their own talk and text. It is ubiquitous, and it is taken for granted. So I outline the folk theory here in order that readers can learn to recognize and critique its terms.

The first part of the folk theory holds that "race" is a basic category of human biological variation, and that each human being can be assigned to a race, or, sometimes, to a mixture of races. The folk theory holds that these races are biologically real, the obvious trace of the origins of the American population in historically and

biologically distinct geographical populations formed in human evolution. Folk theoreticians do argue that these races may not be permanent, because intermarriage and biological mixing will gradually erase their differences. Thus, racism will disappear by itself, since there will be no differences left for racists to notice.

In contrast, most human biologists and social scientists find that the everyday-language category of "race" labels a sociopolitical phenomenon, not the dimensions of human biological diversity that are revealed by research in human genetics and related fields. The everyday-language "races," as products of history and culture, are very real, and they can even have biological effects. But categories like "White" and "Black" are not categories of biological evolution.

The second part of the folk theory holds that racism is entirely a matter of individual beliefs, intentions, and actions. In the folk theory, a racist is a person who believes that people of color are biologically inferior to Whites, so that White privilege is deserved and must be defended. Racism is what this kind of White supremacist thinks and does. The folk theory holds that such people are anachronisms, who are ignorant, vicious, and remote from the mainstream. Their ignorance can be cured by education. Their viciousness can be addressed by helping them to enjoy new advantages, so that they can gain self-esteem and will not have to look down on others. Since education and general well-being are increasing, racism should soon disappear entirely, except as a sign of mental derangement or disability.

One of the most difficult exercises that this book recommends is to move away from thinking of racism as entirely a matter of individual beliefs and psychological states. White Americans generally agree that things happen in the world because individuals, with beliefs, emotions, and intentions, cause them to happen. They consider this understanding to be the most obvious kind of common sense. Yet not everyone approaches the world from this perspective, and it is very interesting to try to think about racism from outside the framework that it imposes. Critical theorists do not deny that individual beliefs figure in racism. But we prefer to emphasize its collective, cultural dimensions, and to avoid singling out individuals and trying to decide whether they are racists or not. Furthermore, critical theorists insist that ordinary people who do not share White supremacist beliefs can still talk and behave in ways that advance the projects of White racism. I will try to show, in chapters to come, how racist effects can be produced in interaction, in an intersubjective space of discourse, without any single person in the interaction intending discrimination.

These first two parts of the folk theory predict optimistically that racism should disappear because intermarriage will blur racial differences and because better education and advances in human well-being should eliminate the conditions that produce White supremacists. The third major premise of the folk theory, however, is not optimistic. It holds that prejudice is natural to the human condition. All people are thought to make invidious distinctions and "to prefer to be with their own kind." Certainly, anthropologists have documented that people around the world make invidious distinctions about every possible dimension of human difference, and the individual and cultural preferences and prejudices shared by many White Americans are no different. But for critical theorists, what is interesting about

White racism is not so much its system of invidious distinctions. Instead, of most interest is how Whites are able to use these to distort the allocation of resources among different kinds of people. The magnitude of White power, and the enormity of this distortion, makes White racism a very distinctive phenomenon. Furthermore, critical theorists see that this part of the folk theory, the idea that prejudice is natural, invites Whites to focus, not on their own practices, but on those of their victims. Whites often point out that non-Whites prefer to be with one another. A stereotyped example is self-segregation by seating patterns in school cafeterias, where, it is said, African American students all sit at the same tables by preference. The folk theory locates this behavior on exactly the same moral plane as the preference by all White students to sit together at other tables and permits Whites to speak of "Black racism" as if it were exactly like White racism. Whites are very fond also of the idea that African Americans often discriminate among one another by color, valuing light skin and wavy hair. Similarly, the political conflict between African Americans and Latinos receives a great deal of attention in White-dominated media. Clearly, reflection on such conflicts is important and satisfying for White Americans, since it relieves them of any distinctive guilt or responsibility.

We can see the folk theory at work in an opinion piece by a young White journalist that was published in the *Arizona Daily Wildcat*, the student newspaper of the University of Arizona (Buchheit 1997). The essay, titled "People even more ignorant than I," was a strongly worded attack on racism as "bunk," which all intelligent people have rejected and only ignorant people have sustained. The author claims to have known three examples of "racists": "Crazy Running Bear, a.k.a.: Scott," a Native American, who "hates the white race," "Nip," a "Korean White Supremacist" (the author assures us that "Nip" really is the nickname of this person and is not intended as a slur), and "mindless, inbred-to-keep-that-white-Aryan-purity-surviving, ignorant skinheads." These examples are contrasted with a "Mexican-American" who is "proud of his heritage and who he is," but who does not "feel superior to other races" or hate them. These examples illustrate the folk-theory view that racism is a matter of belief held by ignorant people, as well as the idea that anyone can be a racist. The idea of the biological reality of race that will disappear with mixing is presented at the climax of the essay as an argument against the logic of racism: If every racist individual looks into their genealogy, the author writes, "I GUARANTEE that you will find at least one example of some 'inferior' blood line infecting your system, turning you into all that you hate" (Buchheit 1997:5).

This author clearly desires an end to racism and wants to educate "those few with good hearts, and bad rearing, who are just a bit confused and need a push in some direction." However, the folk theory does not provide him any purchase toward this goal. Instead, it leads him to miss almost completely the ways that racism really works in his world. The essay is notable for its exclusive focus on individual hatreds as opposed to institutional racism and its obvious effects. For instance, the University of Arizona had in 1997 (and unfortunately still has) very small numbers of students of color, especially given the demography of its region. Yet two out of three of the supposed racists mentioned in the essay are people of color, who in real life are much more likely to be the victims of racism than they