

Rodriguez Ch.5 “The Shifting Color Line”**Main Point**

-Race is socially constructed and therefore a highly malleable concept. Race lines often reflect the extent to which political and cultural power shape the conception that human beings belong to fundamentally different races. As social conditions change, the interpretation of racial differences is reflected in the rulings of the court. Race is also seen to be associated with right to equal citizenship. The census is another example of the manner in which racial categories are created. The creation of ‘other’ racial categories on the census is one way in which the white race is kept exclusive, and the types of racial categories created reflect the differences of appearance which Americans find socially relevant.

Central Issues and Concepts

-Native Americans- The census initially counted Taxed Indians as part of the citizenry, and the U.S. constitution essentially equal to whites, provided they paid taxes. They then made the transition to the “other races” category before being granted a Native American Indian category in 1970. Untaxed Indians were seen as perpetual inhabitants with no right to citizenship. The taxed Indians served as a buffer class between whites and untaxed Indians.

-African Americans- Before emancipation, Negroes were differentiated into free and slave. Slaves and ex-slaves alike were property. Free African Americans were considered ownerless property. This “third class” was denied citizenship on the basis that they were “so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” Free African Americans, like the taxed Indians served as a buffer class between whites and slaves. These groups of partial citizens were granted varied types of rights through time and across the country.

-Asian Indians- Asian immigrants were denied citizenship in some states for 162 years because the federal government’s naturalization law required an immigrant to be classified as ‘free white’ in order to become a naturalized citizen. Though Asian Indians are certainly Caucasians, they had the appearance of dark skin, and so the term “white” was redefined as European *and* Caucasian rather than just Caucasian. Thus the category “Hindu” was added to include those who are Caucasian but not European, and the category “Asian and Pacific Islander” was added for those who have white skin, but are neither Caucasian nor European.

-Hispanic racial classification centers more on cultural criteria such as language, surname or origin. Initially Mexicans were deemed white by appearance. The census began using “persons of spanish surname” and “persons of the Spanish mother tongue” and “origin” in order to establish someone as racially Hispanic. With Manifest destiny, Latin peoples were homogenized and grouped as the ‘conquered race’. Nationality became confused with race, and Hispanic peoples were seen as a lesser race than the ‘conquering race.’

Two Key Quotes

-“the Constitution... differentiated between ‘the citizen race, which formed and held government, and the African race, which they held in subjection and slavery, and governed at their own pleasure.’ In essence those of the African race, whether slave or free, were never intended to be citizens. Rather, the citizen race was the white race.” (97)

-“With Latin Americans continually cast as persons belonging to a less advanced and different race, the confusion of race for nationality continued.” (104)

Two Questions

-Who, exactly, has the most to gain from the addition of racial categories to the census?

-If racial categories are clearly seen to be so arbitrary, why do we have so much trouble eliminating them?