Race Names

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Abstract: This essay discusses the “race names” in the United States, including Black or African America as well as Negro; American Indian or Native American; Hispanic, Latino, Mexican American, Chicano; Asian American; White, European American, Caucasian; and umbrella terms such as “people of color.” It also discusses the insult terms and outdated terms, including a section specifically on the disappearance of “Negro.” Attention is also given to calling out the “colonial minorities,” groups that are part of the United States due to conquest and oppression rather than voluntary migration. Racial groups are socially constructed in the process of political conflict and the creation of and challenges to structures of domination. Group names are never fixed and are always contested as the process of naming is itself part of the political contestation. This essay is based on the author’s reading and discussion with members of the groups in question. It is intended to be useful for teaching and public discussion, but does not provide scholarly citations for the research that has been done in this area. 11/11/2017

Note: First posted to <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/soc/racepoliticsjustice/2017/09/16/race-names/> on 9/16/17 with subsequent edits and updates. The blog version is continuing to be updated. This version will be updated periodically if there are major changes.

When we teach race, we must have a vocabulary so we can talk about race. Students need to know which words are preferred, which are contested, which are now likely to offend but were never used as insults in their time, and which are unambiguous insults that should not be used unless your goal is to offend. Here is a version of my lectures on this topic. I go through the names for each of the major “groups” in the United States, discussing the political meaning of the different terms as they have changed over time, and highlighting the words that are offensive in today’s context. These names are always changing and contested in political struggle because racial groups themselves are the products of political struggle, so this lecture involves bits of history we will return to more in a later lecture.

There is no way to learn the “right” words once and for all, pass the quiz, and be PC forever. The names and their meanings are constantly evolving and changing and in any given period are generally contested. That is, the people in the group disagree about what names they prefer. Although White people often express frustration with the complexity (“just tell me what name you people want to use and I’ll use it”), it is important to understand that the complexity is not to confuse or annoy White people, but because what is at stake is core identities and political stance with respect to hierarchy and oppression. Once you understand why the names keep

changing, it is easier to follow the changes and conflicts. And it is really interesting sociologically.

In all cases, when I am talking about whether a race name is “preferred,” the people whose preferences matter are the members of the group being named. My sources are people who are in the group being discussed, or reports or research about the preferences of people in the group being named.

I should also say that I believe I’m correct in what I write but my knowledge is based on what I’ve read and conversations I’ve had and may be subject to correction. And, of course, these things are always changing and evolving. That’s the point.

This is about the United States. The preferred terms are different in other countries. I will also be highlighting which groups are colonial minorities who were involuntarily subjected to US rule, rather than voluntarily immigrating.

Notes: (1) As this essay contains more details than I necessarily have time for in an introductory lecture. I’m shocked to see it is over 11,000 words long! (2) I’m continuing to update this in light of feedback and the latest edits are more likely to be in the blog.

A Fast Cheat Sheet on Color Names

In light of a recent news story, here’s some “must know” information. White and Black are color names that some people in the group prefer. Red and yellow are NOT acceptable color names for people and will be heard as offensive. There were White Power, Black Power, Red Power, and Yellow Power movements in the late 1960s, but calling a person red or yellow was not polite even then. Latinos, South Asians, and Middle Easterners often refer to themselves as “brown,” but calling someone else brown is probably not a good idea if you are trying to be polite.

The easiest way to avoid serious offense is to stick with the continent names (European, African, Asian, American) although these are not always preferred.

Black/African American

Black and African American are the two preferred terms for people who can trace their ancestry to sub-Saharan Africa, especially those who are the descendants of North American slaves. The people who are called African Americans or Black Americans have skin tones ranging from various shades of dark brown to various shades of pale, with many shades of brown between these extremes. Their ancestors include various distinct ethnic groups from sub-Saharan Africa, but also indigenous Americans and people from Europe and Asia. Nevertheless, compared to most of the other groups we will discuss, they have a very strong sense of collective identity as

Black Americans or African Americans due to their particular history as the descendants of people who were involuntarily brought to North America and subjected to chattel slavery followed by the rules of segregation.

Research for the last three decades has consistently shown that about half of all people who fall into the Black/African American category prefer “Black” and about half prefer “African American,” but almost no one in this group views their non-preferred term to be offensive. They may, however, jump in and explain to you rather vigorously why they prefer the other term.

There are a large group of White young people who have been educated in predominantly-White schools who have been taught that Black is insulting or that the only correct term is African American. This over-correction can be so intense that there was a famous case of a US news reporter who called the South African president Nelson Mandela an “African American,” a description that made no sense at all. In South Africa, the only correct term is “Black,” because (a) everybody who lives there is African regardless of race and (b) the terms “African” and “European” were used by the European/White oppressors to classify people and are associated with apartheid.

Reasons to prefer African American are that the color names are illogical, since people come in many shades of brown, that the “continent” names for races are more consistent, and to express pride in African ancestry. Surveys generally say that younger and more educated people are more likely to prefer African American, and that preference for African American was going up over time, although I imagine this has shifted in the last few years with the rise of Black Lives Matter and renewed interest in Black Power ideologies.

Reasons to prefer Black include tracing ancestry to the Caribbean, a sense of affiliation with the Black Power movement (especially among older people who lived through the 1960s and 1970s) or the Black Lives Matter movement, and rejection of the idea that Black people are immigrants and not real Americans. I came of age in the Black Power era and was schooled by my Black friends and colleagues to say Black, and this is generally the word I use, although I switch to African American if I am among Black/African American people who are using that term and seem to prefer it.

The term Afro-American was used briefly in the 1970s. It is now out of fashion but nobody finds it insulting. In Latin American contexts, you will see usage of Afro-descent. Both in Latin America and in the US you will see terms like Afro-Cuban or Afro-Brazilian, which are understood as terms of either simple description or of ethnic pride.

American Blacks / African Americans are an ethnic group with a generally strong sense of collective identity forged in the experiences of slavery and post-slavery segregation. The African people who were originally kidnapped and sold as slaves had distinct ethnic identities and

languages such as Yoruba, Ibo, Wolof, Mandinka, and some families retain memories of their African ancestors through oral traditions, but in general these ethnic identities merged among the people born to slavery in North America.

Black immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean often have a different ethnic identity from Black Americans, although the larger White society generally just lumps them all together. Even with the legacies of European colonialism and racial slavery, people from majority-Black nations have typically developed a different kind of Black identity from people who have grown up in the United States, and there can be ethnic hostilities between American Blacks and African or Caribbean immigrants. Although refugees may be from any class, voluntary immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean are on average more highly educated than Black Americans. Caribbean people are also descendants of slavery and generally identify as part of the larger group of Black people, but at the same time see themselves as culturally distinct from Black Americans, as well as from Africans. Immigrants from African nations such as Nigeria, Somalia, the Sudan, etc. have distinctive national/ethnic identities and generally seek to teach their US-born children to distinguish themselves ethnically from Black Americans as well as to know their specific cultural/national heritage. The children of African immigrants may or may not fold their identity into a larger Black identity, although the experience of being treated as Black in the United States generally makes them very race-conscious. There have been pan-African movements that stress unity among different nations and ethnicities in Africa that have encompassed the African diaspora (i.e. the descendants of African slaves in the Americas). Pan-Africanism was politically important for Black Americans in the 1960s. Even if they are trying to distinguish themselves culturally from Black Americans, African immigrants generally see themselves as Black in this global pan-African sense.

People of African descent from Spanish-speaking countries in the Caribbean (e.g. Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic) or Central or South America are typically classified in the US as Hispanic/Latino, not as Black, while people from English- and French-speaking countries like Jamaica, Haiti, Grenada are classified as Black. “Officially” Hispanic is an ethnicity that cross-cuts race, so you can “officially” be a Black Hispanic, but in practice, “Hispanic” has been racialized, that is, treated as a category that is parallel to the other races. More on that below.

I also wish to highlight the roughly 100,000 residents of the US Virgin Islands, most of whom have at least some African ancestry, as they are NOT immigrants to the United States, but one of its “colonial minorities,” who are part of the US via imperialism, in this case through the purchase of the islands by the US from Denmark in 1916. Puerto Ricans, who also often have some African ancestry (but do not generally identify as racially Black), are also a colonial minority.

Outdated and Insulting Terms

The term Negro is now outdated. It can be viewed as offensive, especially by young people who do not know its history and especially those who think that it may be the n-word that they are

not allowed to say. In its time, the word Negro was often a word of political pride, especially by higher-class people, and the term was never used as an insult. There was a campaign in the 20th Century to insist upon capitalizing Negro. (Since the shift to Black in the 1960s, most Black people capitalize Black, and I follow this preference. For consistency I also capitalize White, which most Black people do not. I will explain later what is at stake in this.) Martin Luther King, Jr. called himself a Negro, and “The New Negro is not afraid” can be seen on the banners of 1920s rallies by followers of Marcus Garvey.

The word Negro went out of use very quickly after Dr. King was killed in April 1968. The Black Power movement had been gaining steam since 1966. The Black Muslims (Nation of Islam) had always used the word Black and mocked others for using “Negro” since it is just the Spanish word for Black. The choice of Black or Negro through the 1960s was a political choice tied to conflict between the integrationist politics of the Civil Rights Movement (which used Negro) versus the militant separatist politics of the Black Muslims and, after 1966, SNCC and other Black Power organizations, which used Black. Support among Blacks for integrationist Civil Rights politics collapsed after Dr. King was killed, and with it support for using the word “Negro.” I remember being in a Black literature class in the spring of 1968 taught by a Black law student (who later became a judge) who explained to our class why she preferred the term Negro because she felt the term conveyed that she was part of America. This was before Dr. King was killed. I’m sure that by 1969 she was using “Black” too. By 1971, the word Black was the only preferred term. I remember being in a grad seminar and using the phrase “light-skinned Negro” because at that time saying “light-skinned Black person” still sounded odd to me, and a Black friend passed me a note: “Pam, I thought you knew better than to say Negro.” (My recollection is that the phrase light-skinned was appropriate in context and not at issue.)

You will find offensive documents written by Whites that use the word Negro (capitalized or not), but the word itself was not an insult and was deemed to be the “scientific” or correct word.

You will also find the word Negroid in “scientific” documents written by Whites. These are nearly always part of what is now called “scientific racism,” which tried to document the physical differences between “races.” Negroid was never used as a term of political pride.

The term “colored” was also never used as an insult in its historical era but is now considered to be offensive by most Black people. The signs on the bathroom doors during segregation read “White” and “Colored.” “Colored” was the polite term used by segregationist Whites and is associated with segregation. There are many instances of Black teachers or students complaining about having to explain to White students why they should never use “colored people” in class, and most Black people will assume that any non-Black person who says “colored people” (or “colored lady” or “colored man” etc.) is at best very ignorant and probably racist. The last time I personally heard someone use “colored lady” was in the 1980s when a young White woman, who found out that I was a sociology professor, said: “I started a

sociology class once, but first they deported by instructor and then they brought this colored lady in to teach the class, so I just left.” That “colored lady” was Cora Marrett, a distinguished sociologist who, at the time, was the Associate Chair of the sociology department and had won a campus-level teaching award. But this young woman never knew that; she saw a Black face and was out of there. She used the word “colored.”

Some of my students have told me that their [White] teachers have told them not to say “black” and instead to say “colored.” Oh dear.

Nevertheless, “colored” was often used in a folksy friendly or casual way by Black people to refer to themselves, and I have often heard Black people my age or older use the term colored in that folksy way.

The National Association for the Advance of Colored People was founded in 1909 and still has that name.

“People of color” (often abbreviated POC in certain circles) may sound the same as colored, but has a different history and meaning. It is the political term signifying pan-racial unity among people who are not White and is often used in political or activist circles. While it may seem to some students illogical that two phrases, “colored” and “people of color,” that both refer to people who are not white, should have very different political meanings, this is how language works. A not-Black person using “colored” signifies that one is at best ignorant and probably racist, while a not-Black person using “person of color” signifies that one is a political activist who is trying to respect and form alliances with people of color. (Note that White political activists who use “people of color” or POC may still be criticized for their implicit White supremacy, but the term itself does not signify this. See the discussion of “minority” below for more on pan-racial terms.)

The big insult word is “nigger” and its variant “nigga.” This is the n-word. There are many people who believe I should not write that word even in an informative essay like this one, and I hesitate as I do it. I have written the word on PowerPoint slides (as in “nigger – always an insult”) so people know what we are talking about, but have been persuaded by Black sociologists that there is too much risk that even that pedagogic purpose can be experienced as a micro-aggression by students. I am hoping that in this context, buried in an article that builds up to it, the usage is acceptable. There are many people who view this word as vulgar and unspeakable and offensive. In the United States, it is the most loaded word one can utter, it is the nuclear weapon of racial epithets. There is no other word that comes even close in its explosive power. It is always insulting when said by a non-Black. It is the word that is linked with degradation and violence. It is the word linked to lynching and murder as in “die n-” It is the word White people use today when they want to wound Black people. A Black woman I know went into the post office in Madison and asked for the Martin Luther King commemorative stamps; the clerk said, “I’m not giving out any of those n- stamps.” That’s how the word is used: to insult somebody as they are going about their daily business, to make them feel like they

don't belong. It ruined her week and made her not want to have anything to do with White people for a while.

There was never a positive or even neutral public use of the word historically. No political movement ever formed around the identity n-. Under slavery and segregation Black people sometimes used the word themselves because they had no other word and you will often see the word used in literary fiction by Black people to convey the culture of a past period. None of that makes the word acceptable by non-Black people in modern usage.

What is confusing to young non-Black people is that they hear Black people using the term often among themselves, especially in rap music, and think they ought to be able to use it. The "rule" here is actually easy: you can insult yourself or your group in ways that others cannot. It is like the rule that I may insult my brother or sister, but if you do it I'm going to punch you.

Students also bring up singing along with rap music. I'll just say that the context of singing along isn't the same, although how people experience your choice of music is probably worthy of another conversation I'm not prepared to facilitate. When the topic was brought up, at least one minority student talked about being appalled at groups of White people listening to rap and singing the n-word together.

There is also a phenomenon in which a negative word gets turned positive by a radical or "edgy" movement. This has happened with the word Chicano (to refer to a Mexican American) or the words "dyke," or "faggot," insult terms for lesbians and gay men which are sometimes picked up and used by members of the group for radical effect. There are arguments among Black people about whether they should be able to use the n-word for this kind of edgy radical effect. Many Black political writers use the n- word in this way. I have read things written by Black people on both sides of this debate, some saying that they should be able to use the word and that avoiding it just gives it power, and others saying it just gives White people the idea it is OK to use the word. But these are debates about whether Black people should ever use the word, not debates about whether White people should be allowed to call Black people the n-word.

Non-Black students who have attended majority-Black schools and non-Black athletes on mixed-race teams may talk about context, and the subtleties of using racial insults with each other as a way of declaring friendship across boundaries. What I say about this is, first, yes this does happen, especially among men, and there are some subtle rules about this. Second, lots of times the it is the White people have initiated this; Black people put up with it, even though they don't like it and feel that it is a microaggression, because they do understand the rules of bonding through insult and don't want to rock the boat. Third, just because you have one relationship in which you use the n-word appropriately as insult bonding definitely does not give you the permission to go around insulting any other Black people you happen to meet. You do not get any kind of pass at all just because you happen to know a Black person who let you call them n-.

I have also heard some discussion of the difference between n-r and n-a, and all I can say is that this isn't White folks' business. If Black people want to make these distinctions, that is their business.

Randall Kennedy's book *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* traces the origins of the word, the history of its usage among Blacks, controversies about it, and how context affects the word. He argues that there are usages among Blacks that are entirely positive. He even argues that there are rare circumstances in which the n-word may be appropriately used by White people, but his examples convinced me that even when such usage is appropriate when you know the context, there will be plenty of people who are offended anyway. For example, there are people who believe the n-word should not be spelled out in this essay, even for the purpose of explaining why not to use it.

If you search the Internet a little, you can find dozens of articles and blog posts mocking White people for whining about not being allowed to say the n-word when Black people can use it. This is viewed as the ultimate example of White privilege in action: White people are so privileged they think there should not be even one word that somebody else can use that they can't.

There are dozens of other words that have been used historically and in the present to insult Black people that can generally be written without the same level of pain as the n-word but you should assume that if you use them you will be considered a racist, and I cannot imagine any way in which you would use these words except with insulting intent. The ones that come to my mind are shade, spook, darkie, coon, ghetto, jigaboo, welfare queen. I'm sure there are dozens of others. There are also dozens of racist stereotyped images that are considered insulting.

Although a lot of Black people, like everyone else, like watermelon and fried chicken, there is a long history of extremely racist images using watermelon or fried chicken, and use of these terms or images, especially watermelon, in association with Black people is often considered racist. And, in context, pretty obviously is.

Also, during slavery and segregation, Black adults were referred to as "boy" and "girl" and using these terms to refer to Black adults is likely to be seen as offensive. At the same time, there is a concern that Black children are not viewed or treated as children by Whites, so you will also see people calling teens boys or girls to reinforce their youth.

American Indian/Native American/Indigenous

These terms refer to the indigenous people of North America, the people who were here before the Europeans. Although there are scientific debates about how long the indigenous people have been in the Americas, the shortest estimate is 12,000 years, which would be

before the invention of agriculture in Eurasia and before writing was invented. The longer estimates range above 40,000 years. From the point of view of history, American Indians have “always” been in the Americas. Indigenous Americans are genetically most closely related to people in Asia. There are scientific debates about how they got to America from Asia. Many American Indian groups tell an origin story that their people arose on the land they were living on before the European invasion.

American Indian tribes are officially “domestic dependent nations” with rights of sovereignty. The term “tribe” is the official word in US law, and many nations/tribes still have “tribe” in their official name, but there are objections to its connotations of savagery. Each nation has a distinctive culture, language and history. People’s primary identity is typically to that specific group, the Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Anishinaabe (Ojibwe, Chippewa), Potawatomi, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Navajo, Hopi, Apache, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, etc. The term “American Indian” is a pan-ethnic or racial term that lumps all these distinct groups together. For people who are still associated with their nation/tribe, the specific identity is more important, and American Indian is a secondary identity, although the groups all have a sense of having a common situation and need to work together to pursue issues of general benefit to all the nations/tribes. Because of the policies in the US over history which have sought to destroy indigenous cultures and communities, many people who have American Indian ancestry have been disconnected from the tribe and may either identify as White or identify vaguely as American Indian without much specific tribal or cultural awareness.

The current “officially” preferred term is American Indian. Anthropologists often use the term Amerind or AmerInd for this group, but it is not used popularly. (I often abbreviate AmInd but that is just for convenience.) The term American Indian specifically refers to the descendants of original inhabitants of what is now the 48 states of the continental United States (excluding Hawaii and Alaska). The term “Indian” was given to the indigenous Americans because Columbus thought he had landed in islands near India, so it is all a big mistake and creates a great deal of confusion about Indians, who are people from India. In the past, people in Britain would refer to “East Indians” and “Red Indians” to make the distinction. This is NOT preferred in the United States, and “red Indian” is insulting.

There are arguments that “Indian” is a mistake that implies the original inhabitants are somehow foreigners, and for a while Native American was the preferred term for this reason. The swing back to American Indian was for multiple reasons, but one is that “Indian” is the word in the U.S. Constitution and claims about sovereignty and special status are tied to that word and that Constitutional basis. There are still some people who prefer Native American.

The term “Indian” is used in everyday talk among American Indians and is not generally considered offensive by most groups, although there are many political tracts and academic works that talk about the “White man’s Indian” and criticize the way White people created the idea of the Indian. My student informants, the American Indians I know, and my perusal of various web sources suggests that there is some variability among people or groups in the

extent to which they like/prefer Indian or don't want the term used. The largest newspaper for American Indians is called Indian Country Today.

The people who are most consistently bothered by the US use of Indian to refer to American Indians are immigrants from India or their descendants, since they (with some justice) feel that the word "Indian" should apply to them. Thus, an American Indian is a descendant of the original inhabitants of the American continent, while an Indian American is an immigrant or a descendant of an immigrant from India.

In Latin America, the Spanish term "indio" is considered insulting and the correct non-insult term is indígena or indígenas (Spanish for indigenous.) Indigenous, not Indian, is also one of the preferred terms in Canada, and the term Indian is never used to refer to indigenous people in Canada. Although it is not common in casual use, many American Indian activists will use the term indigenous, especially if they are linking their movements to indigenous movements in Canada or Latin America.

The term "Native American" used to be preferred and is still often used. This term stresses that these people are the original inhabitants of this land, and everyone else is an immigrant (voluntary or involuntary). In the current "official" definition, "Native American" also includes native Hawaiians and native Alaskans, who are not included in the American Indian category. This is because the legal status of each of these groups is governed by different laws. Native Hawaiians are typically classified as Pacific Islanders and thus as part of the larger category "Asian and Pacific Islander," which they objected to politically because Native Hawaiians do not want to be lumped in with Asians, who are immigrants, and have political claims to land and rights in Hawaii based on being the indigenous people of those islands.

Anybody born in the Americas can claim title to the term "Native American," and when this was offered as a choice on the Census, many White people chose that option.

You will also hear American Indian activists use the term "Native people" or "Native women" or similar constructions to refer to American Indians. The unmodified term "natives" may be experienced as offensive (with echoes of old movies and "the natives are restless") but can also be used politically in phrases like "we are the natives of this land" as saying "we have more right to be here than you do."

In Canada, the term "aboriginal" is used to refer to the original inhabitants, who include both groups who are culturally and linguistically related to the American Indian groups (First Nations) and the Inuit of the Arctic. Canada also recognizes as aboriginal a third group, called the Métis, who are descended from French settlers and aboriginal people. The indigenous inhabitants of Australia are called Aboriginal Australians. "Aboriginal" is not considered insulting in most of the world today, but rather as a synonym (often preferred) for "indigenous" or "native people." But this usage is not common in the United States.

The term First Nations in Canada is the “official” and widely used term for the governments of the aboriginal groups who are related to the American Indians. It is not an official United States term, but I have heard American Indian activists refer to American Indian tribes as “first nations.”

In the color names, the American Indians are “red.” Native people often referred to themselves as red men in contrast to white men in their negotiations with the invading Europeans between 1600 and the late 1800s, and there was a Red Power movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, but there is today no common or non-offensive use of “red” to refer to American Indians as people.

Insult terms: All of these are now considered insulting when used to describe a person’s ethnic/racial group or affiliation. Buck, squaw, redman, redskin, warrior, chief, timber n-. Again, there are doubtless many others I am unaware of.

Hispanic/Latino + Mexican/Chicano Etc.

Hispanic and Latino [or Latin@ or Latinx] are essentially synonyms (like Black and African American) that refer to the same basic group of people, those whose origins are in Latin America or the Spanish-speaking islands of the Caribbean. Neither is an insult although some prefer one and some the other. In some cases, the preference is strong enough that they will raise objections if the “wrong” term is used. The most vociferous objections in my experience have come from Central Americans who prefer Latino, and there was also more of a sense in past decades that Hispanic was the term preferred by political conservatives while Latino was the term preferred by activists. The words slice different ways in terms of the criteria for definition, and “on the ground” get used in different ways in different communities to group people. As I explain below, there are also parts of the US where people use Hispanic and Latino to refer to different groups of people.

“Officially” Hispanic/Latino ethnicity is not a race, and both Hispanics and non-Hispanics can be of any race. Race is asked in one question, and a separate question asks whether the person is Hispanic or Latino. Unofficially, most people either think Hispanic/Latino is a race, or treat it as one in practice, by grouping all Hispanics regardless of race into one category that is parallel to the other groups, which are races. People who are Hispanic/Latino have a high percentage of people who mark their race as “other.”

The term “Hispanic” refers to the Spanish language and thus encompasses people from countries that speak Spanish. Strictly defined, this means that Europeans from Spain are Hispanic while Brazilians are not, and there is confusion and debate about the “correct” classification of Spaniards and Brazilians as Hispanic or not, but in general Spaniards are not understood as Hispanics for the purposes of US categories, while Brazilians are understood as Hispanics.

The term “Latino” refers to the people of Latin America, which is understood as Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Spanish-speaking islands of the Caribbean. It would never include people from Spain and easily includes the people from Brazil, but still excludes the people from the English- and French-speaking Caribbean islands. The people of the various Latin American nations are a mixture of indigenous American, African, European, and Asian ancestry, which each country having a different mix and a different way of grouping people into “races.” There were high rates of death among indigenous Americans after the European invasion, but places vary in how many people survived and people with indigenous American ancestry are a majority in some countries and specific regions of many more countries. Africans were brought as slaves throughout the Americas and their descendants are in the majority in some areas, especially Caribbean islands, northern Brazil, and specific parts of other countries. European nations claimed sovereignty over all American territories for a few hundred years, but European settlers became a majority in some places in Latin America, especially Chile, Argentina and southern Brazil, while they remain a small (elite) minority in others. Asians have migrated to the Americas since 1500, both as merchants and as laborers, and there are significant minorities of people of Asian descent in Mexico, Peru and other countries with a Pacific Coast, as well as many Caribbean islands.

“Officially” the Hispanic/Latino category is called an ethnicity, not a race, because people from Latin American have origins in many different places. The legalities of Mexican American citizenship after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo led to frequent definitions of Mexicans as White. In practice, these people whose ancestry is very diverse are lumped together and treated as a race in the United States.

Many people in the group consider “Latino” to be a race of the people who are descendants of indigenous Americans.

Although Latinos are often thought of as immigrants or descendants of immigrants to the US, and many are, there are two groups that are not: (1) Puerto Ricans are US citizen residents of the Spanish-speaking island of Puerto Rico who are part of the US because of colonialism. They did not move; the US took them over. Most Puerto Ricans have a mixture of Taino Indian, African, and European ancestry. (2) Some Mexican Americans are descendants of people who were living in what is now the Southwestern US when it was Northern Mexico. As they say, they did not cross the border, the border crossed them in 1848. Also, many Mexicans were driven out of those territories by Anglo mobs after the cession, and some of the people who migrated into that area after 1848 were people who had been driven out, or their descendants.

In Spanish, the word Latino is masculine, and activists often write Latino/a or Latina/lo or Latin@ or Latinx to be gender inclusive. In Spanish grammar, both latino (latina) and hispano (hispana) would not be capitalized, but they are capitalized in English. I have been asked why not switch to the gender-neutral English word Latin, which was actually popular in the 1950s and 1960s. I don’t know the answer.

In the 1990s my sources said that people from the Caribbean (especially Cubans) generally preferred Hispanic, while Mexicans and Central Americans preferred Latino. Because of who lives where in the continental US, this meant that Hispanic was generally preferred on the East Coast, and Latino in the Southwest, but it appears this has changed. Many people associate Hispanic with White and Latinx with indigenous.

There are a lot of confusions around the edges with these categories. I know that there was a period of time in which California Department of Corrections was classifying Mexicans as Hispanic and non-Mexican Hispanics/Latinos as “Hispanic ethnicity unknown” in the data submitted to the federal government, apparently because it was important in their system to distinguish Mexicans from Central Americans.

My students and others I have talked to who are from Los Angeles and Chicago inform me that it is common in Los Angeles and Chicago to use Latino to refer to Central Americans and Hispanic to refer to Mexicans. I do not know how South Americans or Puerto Ricans are classified in these places. This is enough to tell me that there is probably much more variation in local practice that I just don’t know about.

Hispanics who are not immigrants or children of immigrants often do not speak Spanish, but only English. Mexican American movements of the 1950s and 1960s stressed the politics of full integration and emphasized English.

Many migrants from Mexico and Central America are from indigenous groups whose first language is not Spanish; some may not speak Spanish only poorly if at all. In Mexico and Central America, indigenous communities are at the bottom of the racial pecking order and are often discriminated against and have lower levels of income and education than other people. At times, they have been subject to violent attacks that have led them to flee as refugees. Central Americans generally migrate to the United States through Mexico. Both Mexicans and Central Americans tend to seek to distinguish themselves from each other in the US.

Puerto Rican

Puerto Rico is a subordinated part of the US. The US has claimed sovereignty over Puerto Rico since 1898, but Puerto Rico is treated as a separate country for some purposes (e.g. the Olympics). Puerto Ricans have been US citizens since 1917. Most Puerto Ricans have some indigenous Taino Indian ancestry in addition to African and European. Spanish is the preferred language in Puerto Rico, but all Puerto Ricans learn English as a second language. I have heard references to Puerto Ricans as Boricua, but did not know what it meant so I looked it up. Boriquen (also spelled Borinquén Borikén) is the name given to the island by the original Taino Indians, and inhabitants are called Boricua. The Puerto Rican national anthem is “La Borinqueña. Boricua is a term of ethnic pride. Some sources say it applies more to people living in the mainland US, and other sources say it applies to Puerto Ricans in general. I believe it is used among Puerto Ricans themselves, and it is not expected that outsiders will use the term. I

have also heard of the term NewYorican for Puerto Ricans living in New York, but I do not know whether this is widely used and whether it is considered positive or negative.

Mexican/Mexican American/ Chicano

First, and I have never understood why this is difficult for people, not all Hispanics/Latinos are of Mexican descent, and the ones who are not should not be called Mexican or Chicano. This is the same thing as not all Europeans are French, and you should not call a German person French, although they are both European. A German person does not have to hate France to tell you that it is incorrect to call them French. This does not seem hard to me, and I do not know why it is confusing for some people, but it is. By the way, the same issue applies to Asians: Chinese people are not Japanese, Vietnamese are not Chinese, etc. More about this later.

The people we are talking about are those with Mexican ancestry. Most people's Mexican ancestors are from the territory that is now the country of Mexico, but some have ancestry from territories of the United States that used to be Mexico and were annexed in 1848, including California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Texas, and parts of other states. Some Mexican-descent people have ancestry that is primarily European-Spanish, but most Mexican-descent people have ancestry that is partially or primarily indigenous American, so Mexican-descent people can and often do claim an entitlement to be in the territory of the United States based on being the native people of the American continent. There was 350 years of Spanish colonialism in what used to be New Spain then Mexico (encompassing both modern-day Mexico and modern-day southwestern US) that involved a lot of mixing between Spanish and indigenous people. Some of the indigenous people resisted Hispanicization and are still identified as indigenous (in Mexico) or American Indian (in the United States), while others adopted Spanish as their language and became the Mexican people.

There are also people in Santa Fe who are descendants of Jews who fled Spain after the expulsion in 1492 who identify as Spanish or Hispanic rather than Mexican. These people also count as Mexican American for our purposes.

A Mexican is a person who lives in Mexico or an immigrant to the United States from Mexico. Mexican is a strong positive identity for most Mexicans, and many Mexican immigrants to the United States teach their children to have a strong positive identity as Mexican. Some Mexicans are of predominantly European descent. Some Mexicans in Mexico are elites who are wealthy and highly educated. Although Mexican immigrants to the US are disproportionately lower income people seeking low wage work, some Mexican immigrants are highly-educated elites. There are also many immigrants from Mexico who are from indigenous groups in Mexico whose first language is not Spanish, and some who do not speak Spanish well at all.

A Mexican-American is an American of Mexican descent. This includes everyone born in the territory of the United States and those who have become naturalized citizens of the United

States. There have been Mexican people in what is now the United States since before there was a United States, and Mexican Americans whose families have been in this territory for generations deeply resent the implication that they are foreigners. This includes Spanish-speaking communities along the Mexican border. Many other Mexican Americans are grandchildren or great-grandchildren of Mexican immigrants who are at least as American as the White descendants of European immigrants. There has been a rise in immigration from Mexico since the 1970s, so there are also many young Mexican Americans who are children of Mexican immigrants. And there are people who have been raised in the United States who immigrated as small children who also consider themselves to be Mexican American.

Mexican Americans who are not the children of immigrants from Mexico typically do not speak Spanish and do not identify culturally with Mexico, but rather with being Mexican American. Even the children of immigrants may not speak Spanish very well. Thus, there are often cultural clashes and differences of interest between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. In the past, Mexican American political organizations often opposed immigration from Mexico, for example.

However, the larger Anglo [non-Hispanic] White society typically fails to acknowledge these differences. While “White” Mexican Americans who have no Spanish accent are often simply treated as White, Mexican Americans whose physical appearance exhibits indigenous ancestry often experience racial discrimination, and Mexican Americans are often targeted in the periodic waves of anti-Mexican immigrant attacks that have happened in the US in the past 150 years. This leads Mexican Americans to often have a stronger sense of identity as Mexican American and a stronger sense of kinship with Mexican immigrants than, say, the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of German immigrants have with a German American identity or German-speaking immigrants from Germany.

The term “Chicano” refers only to Mexican Americans, never to Mexicans. Its origin is somewhat debated. It was used as an insult to refer to lower class people of Mexican origin living in the United States from the early 20th Century. Some sources I have read say that wealthy Mexican Americans called lower class Mexican Americans Chicanos, and others say that the term was used by higher class Mexicans to insult Mexican Americans, especially lower class Mexican Americans who could not speak Spanish very well. Some say the word is a variant of Meshico, an indigenous Nahuatl term that is the origin of the word Mexico.

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, Chicano became the radical term of pride for Mexican Americans, especially after the publication in 1972 of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’s epic poem “I am Joaquín”. The political ideology of that time stressed that the Chicano people were native to what is now the Southwestern United States, used Aztec imagery and the ideology and history of the Mexican people to construct a political identity that claimed the right to be in the United States as original inhabitants. The Chicano movement was the Mexican-American movement of that era. It was influenced by and ideologically parallel to the Black Power movement. In that context, “Hispanic” was seen as a conservative White-oriented identity, and Mexican American

as assimilationist. By the 1990s, the term Chicano had lost its radical political edge and many Mexican Americans now use the term to refer to themselves as a racial minority in the United States, especially if they lack a sense of cultural connection to Mexico.

A Mexican person, a person from Mexico, is never a Chicano, and would see the term as an insult. There are Mexican parents who stress to their US-born children “you are not a Chicano,” which emphasizes the importance of learning their Mexican culture. A Latino who is not from Mexico and not descended from Mexicans is never a Chicano. As with Latino, Chicano is often spelled Chican@ or Chicanx to express gender inclusiveness.

La Raza is Spanish for “the race” and one name in Mexico for the Mexican people is “La Raza.” During the Mexican revolution, Mexican ideologists created the ideology of Mexicans as the mestizo (mixed) people who combine Spanish and indigenous ancestry and culture. In this ideology, Mexican is a race, a people, a nation. These ideas fed into Chicano ideology. La Raza Unida (the united race, or the united people) was the name of a Chicano political party in Texas.

I have been told that there are parts of the US where “Mexican” is used as an insult among Whites and some White students have been taught not to use the word. To a Mexican, the word Mexican is NEVER an insult, it is a term of pride. There are inter-ethnic conflicts among different Latino groups and some Latinos will express prejudice toward Mexicans, but even in this case, the word Mexican itself is not an insult.

In the past, there were people, particularly in New Mexico but also in California and Texas, who preferred to be called Spanish, who traced their ancestry to Spaniards and the era of Spanish colonialism rather than to indigenous people. Such people today might be assumed to prefer the name Hispanic to Latino, but I have not read or heard anything to let me know whether this is true. In the 1980s, there was some use of Spanish surnames to classify people, but that had too many problems, including the fact that many people from the Philippines and other parts of Asia have Spanish surnames, dating from the 400 years of Spanish colonialism.

The color name for Mexicans or Latinos is “brown” and there was some discussion of a “Brown Power” movement in the 1960s, but no organizations ever took the name “Brown” and brown is not an acceptable race name in the United States. It has never been used as an insult to my knowledge, and you will sometimes hear activists speak of “brown people” to refer generally to people who are neither white nor black, but this is a casual usage that is not common.

Insult terms: wetback, beaner, greaser, spic,

Asians, Asian Americans, “APIA”

The category “Asian American” and “Asian and Pacific Islander American” is a great example of the social construction of race. Nobody thinks that the people from India, Pakistan, China,

Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, Samoa, Guam, and Hawaii are all the same “race,” but they are lumped together in the US. Since 2000, Pacific Islanders are sometimes distinguished from Asians. Pacific Islanders on average have low incomes and high incarceration rates, which only show up if there is disaggregation.

Since 1977, the US government has required compiling statistics for the “Asian and Pacific Islander” group. The 1980 Census separately counted Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan. Other races were White, Black or Negro, Indian (Amer) Print Tribe, Eskimo, Aleut, Other (Specify). The 1990 survey had the same categories, but a label “Asian or Pacific Islander (API)” over the set of specific options. The 2000 and 2010 surveys removed the label but grouped the “API” options to imply they were part of a set. The 1990, 2000, and 2010 surveys all had an “Other API” option distinguished from “Other” to reinforce the idea that Asians should be grouped.

One of the reasons for the creation of this category as a group of groups was that Asian Americans wanted to be enumerated rather than being lumped together as “other.”

There are ambiguities about the boundaries of Asian or Pacific Islander. Are Aboriginal Australians “Pacific Islanders” or their distinct “race”? Are the inhabitants of the Philippine Islands and Indonesia “Pacific Islanders” or “Asians”? Many people in southeast Asia may be classified as “Malay.” They are all lumped in the “Asian” category in the US.

What about Central Asians? Where exactly is the boundary between White/European and Asian in terms of Eurasian Ancestry? At one point, the boundary was Western Europe, and people from the Middle East were classified as Oriental/Asian.

The large majority of people in this category do not use it to describe themselves. Instead they prefer an ethnic or national identity such as Hmong or Chinese or Chinese American or Indian/Desi. (Desi is the informal Indian term for a person from India. I know Indians use it for themselves, but I don’t know whether it is appropriate for a non-Indian to just start using it.) There are many people who object to even thinking of this as a group because the people in this category are so diverse in their language, cultural backgrounds, and physical appearance.

“Asian American” is a primary self-identity of some 3rd+ generation people (mostly of Chinese and Japanese descent) who have little or no real cultural tie to their ancestors’ homelands and, like European Americans, are culturally and linguistically integrated into the United States but, unlike Whites, experience racism. We will study how the Asian American identity was fostered by the Vincent Chin case in the 1980s, when Vincent Chin was beaten to death by White men who thought he was Japanese.

“Asian American” is also used as an umbrella term of political unity and coalition among people of different Asian ethnic backgrounds. API (Asian and Pacific Islander) is the preferred term if one is being inclusive of Pacific Islanders.

One issue that is important to all Asian Americans born in the US and especially those whose parents were born in the US, is constantly being treated as a foreigner in their own country. While White children of immigrants and even White immigrants can pass easily into being treated as “just American,” Asians have historically been subject to hostility and exclusion and been called “unassimilable.” Today, Asian Americans repeatedly experience being asked “where are you from?” Even when the answer is “Milwaukee” or “New York” they get the insulting follow-up “No, where are you REALLY from?” And are complimented on how good their English is. These “other-izing” experiences reinforce a racial identity as Asian American.

Because of recent immigration patterns, many Asian Americans are the children of immigrants or migrated themselves as children. Young people from immigrant families typically have strong ties to their parents’ immigrant communities even as they also see themselves as American. They often view themselves as negotiating two cultural worlds.

Our campus has both many Asian Americans and many Asian international students. These groups are not the same. Asian international students are here on student visas. They are Chinese or Korean or Indonesian etc. They identify with their home country and view the US as a foreign place. In general, they have “foreign” accents. Asian Americans are citizens or permanent residents who have the right to live here and, in general, grew up here.

There are cultural differences between Asians and Asian Americans. It is common for people from the “homeland” to feel that American-born children of immigrants are ignorant and lack proper knowledge of their culture and even language. Chinese refer to ABC – American Born Chinese. This can just be a description, or it might have a derogatory edge. Almost certainly influenced by awareness of the term ABC, Indians refer derisively to ABCD – American Born Confused Desi. (Desi is an informal Indian name for India and an Indian person.) For many historical reasons, there are many Korean extended families who have both US and Korean branches who are in close contact with each other, and I’ve had many students (both Korean and Korean American) talk about the cultural conflicts within their families and their awareness of the cultural differences between themselves and their cousins.

South Asians (people from Indian, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and, more variably, other surrounding countries) are understood by everybody involved except those constructing official US race categories, to be a different “race” than East Asians (people from China, Japan, Korea).

Immigrants and Colonial Minorities

Although Asians and Pacific Islanders are generally understood as being immigrants, this is not correct. Pacific Islanders including Hawaiians, American Samoans, Guamanians and Chamorros and other indigenous residents of the Northern Marianas are part of the US because they were colonized, not because they moved. They are often economically disadvantaged when in the mainland US. These specific groups are very aware of their colonial status and identities in their home countries, and each has social movements on behalf of their group, but I am not aware of any broader “Pacific Islander” coalitional mobilization. Nor do I know whether Pacific Islanders in the “mainland” US join “Asian American” or “API” organizations.

The Philippines was also colonized and the history of Filipinos as part of the US is also a history of colonialism, not just immigration. This gave Filipinos a different status from other Asians in many laws, sometimes to their benefit and sometimes to their detriment. Even since its formal independence from the US in 1946, the Philippines has had a neo-colonial relation to the US that has created distinctive immigration patterns. We will discuss these issues.

Outdated and insult terms

“Oriental” was not used as an insult, but since 1970, Asian Americans have insisted that the proper term is Asian, not Oriental, will object to the use of the term Oriental, and frequently consider it insulting. They will say “Oriental is a type of rug, Asian is a type of person.” Asian people never asserted the name Oriental for themselves; there were never any “Oriental Pride” movements. There is a critique of Orientalism by Edward Said and others that is “about” the Middle East as much as Asia that stresses the way Oriental was always used to be “Other.”

The term “Oriental” is Latin for “Eastern,” and is parallel with “Occidental” which means Western. Many people around the world, including White people who travel a lot, use Westerner as a name for White people from North America and Europe. The implicit dichotomy still seems to lurk in usage.

The color name for East Asians was yellow. Anti-Asian political movements often used the phrase “Yellow Peril.” There was a Yellow Power movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s that was allied with the Black Power movement. The color name yellow is not used today except as in intra-Asian insults (e.g. calling someone a “banana,” yellow on the outside, white on the inside). Using yellow to refer to an Asian person is considered insulting.

South Asians often use “brown” to describe themselves. This color name has no history of use as an insult that I know of, but I see no good reason to call somebody else brown except in careful lecture contexts that are talking about the politics of people who are not Black but experience racism in the US.

Insults: Jap, Chink, Gook.

Note: JAP=Jewish American Princess is also an insult, for a different group.

White/Caucasian/European American

These terms refer to people of European descent living in the US. It includes people who have mixed ancestry who “look White” and are socially accepted as White, typically by their choice or those of their ancestors.

The ability to be a naturalized citizen was restricted to White people until the 1940s. The word “White” was in the law. (Blacks but not Asians were allowed to naturalize in an 1876 law.) There were many lawsuits between 1900 and 1940 about who was White, because the right to citizenship was at stake. Light-skinned people from Japan were ruled to be “not White.” Light-skinned people from Northern India, who were classified as Caucasian by “scientific racists” were deemed to be not White.

Subgroups of Europeans, such as Jews, southern Europeans, Irish, were seen as different “races” that were subordinate to Northern Europeans, although they were still seen as a kind of White, not a kind of Black in the White-Black dichotomy that organized the US. Before the 1940s and the Holocaust, Jews were generally seen as a distinct race both by themselves and others, because Jewishness is inherited from your mother by Jewish law, but after the Holocaust, this idea became unacceptable in public.

Recent immigrants from Europe and their children often identify with their ethnic/national identity and may object to being lumped in with other White people. People whose parents are not immigrants generally do not strongly identify with their ethnicity, although they may carry a few cultural practices and family stories. Whites practice “optional ethnicity.” They can select the parts of their ethnicity that they like and discard others. People from mixed ethnic backgrounds often choose the group they prefer. The largest White ethnic group is German. (In fact, German was more commonly spoken than English at the time of the American Revolution.) However, there are more people who claim to be Irish than is mathematically likely, presumably because being Irish is a positive thing so any Irish background will be drawn on to “count.”

Many White Americans feel that they have “no ethnicity” and “no culture.” Sociologically, everyone has an ethnicity. But the feeling of having no distinctive ethnicity or culture is a product of two things. First, if you are part of a majority and everyone around you is similar to you, it is hard to recognize your distinctive ethnic culture. Secondly, the “Americanization” movement in the early 1900s explicitly worked to strip European immigrants of their European ethnicities. This has given many White Americans a “thin” sense of their own ethnicity.

The term Caucasian has its origins in scientific racism and is drawn from Caucasoid, parallel to Negroid and Mongoloid. Many people use it today because it seems more official or scientific, especially if they are trying to avoid the color names.

The term European American arose naturally in parallel as the term African American became more popular in the 1990s, but few White people use the term to describe themselves. Many reject the term, saying they are not Europeans, they are Americans.

There is a nice parallelism in European American, African American, Asian American, etc. as it decenters everyone. In this context we would say Native American and probably Latin American.

Many White people identify as “American” or “just plain American.” They generally do not recognize the implicit political claim in equating White American and American.

Many White students say they are uncomfortable identifying as White or Caucasian or even European American because they associate a White racial identity with White supremacy, which they do not agree with. These students often say they do not know why anybody identifies themselves with a race and wonder whether using racial designations at all isn’t itself racist. We will talk about these issues as the class progresses.

About capitalizing

Most style manuals in the US will tell you that white is not capitalized, nor black. Asian, Hispanic, Latino, and American Indian are all capitalized, as are African American and European American and, for that matter, Negro and Caucasian. I capitalize both White and Black for the following reasons. (1) Most of the Black people I know prefer to capitalize Black, following the precedent set by the struggle to get Negro capitalized. I defer to them in capitalizing Black. Many Black people capitalize Black but not white and will explain to you why. (2) Consistency as names of groups in capitalizing White, since all the other group names are capitalized. (3) What is at stake in English grammar is that “proper” nouns or adjectives referring to a specific group or place are capitalized. So “children” is not capitalized, nor “sociologists” nor “rich people.” In choosing to capitalize, I am essentially asserting in English that both Black and White people are named groups. If you think about it, this is a pretty deep political claim. But since all the other “race names” are capitalized anyway for various reasons, I think the symmetry of rounding it out and capitalizing all the race names in the US makes a lot of sense.

Global Terms

People in the US usually refer to themselves as Americans, but many Latin Americans resent this usage as everyone in the Americas is an American. The term North Americans also includes Canadians.

In Spanish, United States is Los Estados Unidos, and Mexico and much of Latin American refers to people from the US as estadounidenses (United Statesians). As far as I know, nobody except me calls themselves a United Statesian, but I often use the term in class (often abbreviated USian) to refer to people in the United States.

An Anglo is an English-speaking White person in the Americas. This term is especially important in discussing US politics around Mexican Americans and Spanish-speakers and Latinos more broadly.

As noted above, Westerner is a global word for a White person from Europe or North America.

Insults & conflicts

UW Madison: Coasties are people from the East Coast who are sometimes stereotyped as Jews and rich. Sconnies are people from Wisconsin who are stereotyped as rural and not cosmopolitan. The Coastie vs. Sconnie conflicts go up and down over time.

Insults: honkey, cracker, whitey, peckerwood, redneck

What About People from the Middle East? Etc.

US racial categories should not be understood as “correct” but as mapping the fault lines that have been important in US history. This is why the groupings make little sense outside of the US context, and are arbitrary and unreasonable when adjusted to fit a changing population mix.

There are many distinct groups on the globe that have no particularly good classification in the US because they have not historically been a significant part of US political history.

Both Muslims and non-Muslims have advocated the creation of a Muslim category. However, (1) Islam is a religion and the US does not officially categorize people by religion. (2) Muslims are of many races. The largest majority-Muslim nation is Indonesia, which has more people than all the Arab nations combined.

Others have advocated a Middle Eastern category, again both people who would be in that category and others. People from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, etc. are told to categorize themselves as “White” in the US Census, but they are often not treated as White in the US and resent the categorization. Many who advocate the “Middle East” category want to use it to apply to everyone from Syria (or perhaps even Turkey), across North Africa, and east through Central and South Asia (encompassing India). They basically want to use it as a category to mean “brown people who we don’t want to count as White and we think might be Muslim.”

Among other things, one problem with the idea of a “Middle Easterner” category is that Israel is in the Middle East, but nobody wants to count White Israeli Jews as “Middle Easterners” although they do want to count Arab Palestinians as Middle Easterners. Given their own politics, I believe that White Israeli Jews would object vigorously to being classified as European.

Minority or Person of Color (POC) or Nonwhite

These are terms that lump together people whose only common trait is what they are not. They are not White. Many people object to these terms all together for this reason, but they have their uses in coalition politics in the US context.

These are all “secondary” identities. That is, nobody’s core sense of self is one of these, but people may have this identity as part of seeing themselves sharing circumstances with people of other racial/ethnic groups that are oppressed by White supremacy.

Historically, a lot of statistical data was presented using the categories White and Nonwhite. The use of Nonwhite has largely passed away.

Minority contrasts with majority. Calling someone “a minority” sounds dismissive, but people often speak of “minority students” in the collective to refer to people from various groups. “Minority” is not anyone’s identity, but it can be very helpful to discuss majority-minority dynamics or the needs of minority people to refer to the diverse set of needs of people who are not part of the majority. Organizations like “Minority Student Coalition” are political groups uniting across ethnic/racial lines. Many people object to “minority” as a synonym for not White because in the globe as a whole, Whites are the minority.

“Person of color” has a very different connotation and usage from “colored person.” There are awards for “Outstanding Woman of Color,” which are open to anyone who is not White. The term is often used in activist circles and is often preferred to “minority” as the umbrella term, although I cannot think of organizations that have “of color” in their names. The abbreviation POC (also WOC or MOC) is often used in writings by POC to talk about race relations. (In case you are wondering, in these contexts WP is the abbreviation for White people.) Person of color or people of color can also refer to the global unity of all people oppressed by White/European domination.

In a discussion with an African American friend about this post, I was informed that many people appear to be using “person of color” as a synonym for Black, as the “correct” alternative to “colored person.” She states that people will say: “BI ... person of color.” And there is a historic usage of “person of color” to refer to Black free people that was used by these people both before and after slavery was abolished. This person also reported objections among Black people to using “person of color” to refer to all non-White people, where the objection appears

to be to be failing to acknowledge the depth of anti-Black racism. As this is the first I have heard of this critical discussion about the term “people of color,” I will put it here without additional comment pending further information.