

# **Class and state: the rise of state racism through nationalism**

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## **Abstract**

Contemporary historiography on racism suggests that this form of social aversion was rooted in the developing ideologies of the 18th century. In turn, ideologies seem to have been socially constructed as models of intersections of oppression. Ultimately, since social classes and nation-states as institutions have channeled civil phenomena through their union with patriotism, racism can be analyzed in its union with chauvinism. This research synthesizes the role of racism in its relationship with social classes and, in turn, their association with contemporary nation-states' position. It is suggested that there is a socially constructed State racism through patriotic feelings of belonging whose objective is to strengthen social classes' role. Ultimately, it is argued that classes, through narratives and images about the function, origin, and identity of the nation-state, sediment racist feelings, among other types of emotions, to reproduce and develop inequality.

**Keywords:** classism; ideology; patriotism; race; social class.

## **1. Introduction**

There is no definitive consensus on the relationship between social classes and the State. In the same way — and maybe as a consequence of it —, there is no definitive consensus on the nature of the "social classes." However, one of the undeniable premises about social classes refers to the economic principles that determine its essence. The concept "social classes" was popularized at the beginning of the 19th century and developed theoretically by Karl Marx in the 1840s and 1850s — in its contrast between "working" and "capitalist" classes especially within the work written in 1846 *The German Ideology*. After Marx's ideas, especially three authors, Max Weber, Georg Lukács, and Charles Wright Mills, theoretically developed its implications in relation to status and elites. Social classes are conceived based on the development of a social stratum — a social characteristic primarily determined by financial access and awareness of such access. Within a social stratum, there are different groups with different purposes and capacity for action. The idea of "class" implies a way of conceptually adding together the interests, privileges, and position of a set of groups that share a similar social status. The idea of "social class" forms a practical and manageable model of "rational" orientation within complex societies' frameworks. Social complexity is precisely one of the determining elements of the birth of social classes as they were conceived in the middle of the



19th century. Within nation-states, social classes served mainly to define different social groups' quality concerning their production and consumption capacity.

Contrary to what might be thought, legal and political interests, commonly called "public" interests, are not natural to nation-states. Nation-states embody the interests of social classes just as other forms of political organization did before. Modern states simply worked in favor of the possibilities of national reproduction — a form of reproduction traditionally called "territorial" and "spiritual." The "public" interests are typical of the social values promoted by the triumphant classes, and within these values are included images about the participation of daily life, shared morality, and scientifically reified ideas (or theoretical principles connoted as "scientific"). In this way, it can be understood that social values, among other cultural phenomena, emanate from the intrinsic tendency of social classes' purposes capable of reproducing the social hegemony of a nation, whose function is to channel class interests.

## **2. Correlation between chauvinism and racism**

From the relationship between social classes and nation-states, it can be concluded that the latter develop a reproductive function of ideas while the former develop a creative function of the same — always supported by "historical reason." Moral ideals are created, within modern societies, primarily by the needs of social classes. This phenomenon occurs because classes, as "collectors" or "aggregators" of particular ideas, make ideals collective and stable. In this way, linguistic nuances, aesthetic visions, and moral principles represent shared images about social history that nations channel through chauvinism. The use of the term "race," in fact, is remarkably late concerning nations' social stability. In Germany, France, and the Netherlands, the term "racism" began to become popular in the 1890s as a form of reinforcing native designation (respectively as *völkisch* ["folk" or "national"], *race*, and *ras*). In those same countries, as well as in the English language, the term received another meaning in the 1930s — marked by Nazi racial ideals —, as a way to designate the non-native or simply "the other" (Taguieff, 1987, Chap. 3).

In order to exacerbate ideals from nationalist images, chauvinism links nationalism with racist stereotypes to make it easily manageable. Contemporary racism (occasionally called "modern" racism, neo-racism and even post-racism) with its current intersections of oppression has its origins in the early part of the 18th century and is closely linked to the birth of nationalism (Mosse, 1990, p. 174-180; 1995, p. 164-165). Until the early seventeenth century, when nationalism was non-existent (at least as it is known today), racism was explained in biblical terms based on the dichotomy of "black" or "dark" as evil and "white" or "light" as good (Miles, 1993, p. 82) — generally about the purity of blood, culture, and spirit (associating the "Us" with the human, less animalized, and more rational). From the eighteenth century, however, the complexity of modern societies — where social classes were essential as a social division mechanism — made profound changes in the standard conceptions about human groups. The "racial" ideals continued to exist even though their social manifestations changed. The tendency

to divide between Us / others remains to be based on the French feudal aristocracy's notions of *politesse* and *civilité*, but turned to aesthetics intending to make oppressive possibilities more pragmatic. In the 18th century, racism would resort to the so-called "perceptual segregation" as a mechanism of conceptual discrimination, an idea popularized in the 1990s (Stocking, 1994; Mosse, 1995), which was expanded during the new century (see Robinson, 2008; Gross, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2019.)

Chauvinism used racism as a modern tool of division — and at the same time of control and discrimination — in its civilizing "mission" against the other-savage. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the exacerbation of national values was legitimized and strengthened by categorizing and qualification of human groups' status, a social mechanism developed by classism and reinforced by triumphant biological ideals. Thereby, ideological principles were used to develop social classes' purposes as a material force to achieve their goals.

### **3. State racism as an ideological mechanism**

Swiss sociologist Andreas Wimmer from Columbia University distinguishes five ideological constructions capable of articulating the anthropological distance between Us / others (2019, p. 47-48; see also Miles, 1991): fears of inundation by foreigners, phobia of interbreeding and creolisation (mixing), idea of impregnation of cultural characteristics, hierarchisation of different entities, and the perception of a zero sum. Its five principles define the classic strategies of division between human groups commonly used by State racism as an ideological mechanism. The nation-states, through chauvinism, articulated the ideological needs of the privileged classes, whose objective was to develop and expand the possibilities of reproduction of nations as institutions capable of defending their interests. For this purpose, racism was a cultural tool. The assumption that there are "human races" constitutes an exercise in aggregating moral conceptualization. At the beginning of the 20th century, given the sociological juncture, ideologies carried much of what the American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois defines as "the problem of the color line." Du Bois, paradoxically, used the Chicago School categorical framework of race relations — fed back in Europe by the (younger, 'jünger') German historicist school of economics (*Historische Schule der Nationalökonomie*) of intellectuals such as Werner Sombart or Max Weber. After Du Bois and other intellectuals (especially Robert Ezra Park), various authors supported ideas regarding the relationship between race relations and nation-states. However, this idea has certain reservations for the neutral researcher. The "apparatuses" of the State seem to have shown that the channeling of racism does not respond to ethnic principles, while it does so on cultural instruments capable of mobilizing social domination through extended ideals. Moral and legal beliefs have codified class conflict through prejudices regarding racial identity during the last two centuries. Domination between classes needs to control the flows and sensitivity of social conflict to achieve its goals, and not necessarily relying on the classical conceptions of the "human races."

#### 4. State racism through nationalism

State racism expert David Theo Goldberg exposes how the "socialization of arbitrariness" is "a cementing of the unnecessary, partial, and partisan, the dominating and coercive, to the benefit of one racial class at the expense of all others" (2009, p. 48.) Following Goldberg's ideas, "the labor of race is" created to "rationalize social arrangements of power and exploitation, violence and expropriation," and works socially as "a foundational code" whose purpose is "to advance racial representation — scientists and philosophers, writers and literary critics, public intellectuals and artists, journalists and clergy, politicians and bureaucrats" (2009, p. 4; see also Goldberg, 1993, 2002, 2006).

Goldberg's ideas expose how "race" constitutes an arbitrary and artificial cultural construct, created to divide through the collectivization of "rationality." It is important to note that, traditionally, the social sciences have ultimately divided social classes into two large segments — just as Karl Marx guessed — based on the oppressive capacity exerted by one against another. As the British historian James Mill (James Milne) put it, the societies are "divided into two classes", one corresponding to *Ceux qui pillent* (those who pillage) and other to *et Ceux qui sont pillés* (those who are pillaged) (2018/1835, p. 63). From a racial perspective, the state is only a medium whose objective is to normalize and rationalize the division frequently via intersections of oppression such as phenotype, cult, and language — but always, under the ideas of the present research, behind economic phenomena. Around the same time that Mill wrote, the famed French Liberal MP Frédéric Bastiat, in his 1845 work *The English Oligarchy* stated that "the history of the two races that tread the soil of Britain and who fought each other in so many bloody battles over civil, political, and religious matters, it is appropriate here to recall their respective positions from the economic point of view. [...] The question is simply: have they used that power in the interests of the community or in their own interests?" (2018/1945, p. 96.) As the scholar in historiography of racism Anthony W. Marx put it in his work *Race-Making and the Nation-State*:

The construction of racial domination requires clearly established boundaries of physically distinct categories. History, physical differences, and economic development may reinforce such categorical domination, but they do not preordain it or the form it will take. It is state policy that officially categorizes people as black, white, or mulatto and that enforces legal discrimination (1996, p. 192.)

It is not unreasonable to remember that racism is a social construct. As such, it must be viewed through the prism of relativity that accompanies its nature. The "official categorization," as Anthony W. Marx calls it, is not only a form of categorization, but a way of assimilation of normality. This form of cognitive normalization causes the human mind to associate behavior patterns with aesthetic preferences, thereby creating a channel between the morally acceptable, hostility, and membership.



## 5. Conclusion

The historian Carl Degler, for example, still used race relations as an explanatory model after the second half of the 20th century — just as many other authors did. This model was based on the strict division between supposed "human races" and the final assimilation (within the fourth step exposed by Park in the cycle of race relations) of the disadvantaged groups. Likewise, race relations gave strong prominence to ethnicity, that is, to consider the existence of ethnic groups and their nature as a phenomenon of conceptual division. The recurrence of race relations as a model of analysis was probably due to the excessive investigative preeminence of internal conflicts in the United States. There, a large part of the intersections focused on the phenotype and especially on the color of the skin. Carl Degler, in one of his famous works, considered that the existing racial mixture in Brazil had created a type of racism different from that existing in the United States or South Africa (Degler, 1971; see also do Valle Silva, 1978; Hasenbalg, 1978.)

This explanation, as well as others of the exact nature, present certain reservations when accepted. In the first place, given the existing genetic crossbreeding and hybridization in Brazil and in many other regions where there is a supposed genetic homogeneity. Second, given that racism occurs both in places where there is a greater racial mixture and where the mixture is less. Third, both the United States and South Africa also have solid genetic hybridization. The reason Degler makes this assessment — in our opinion a wrong statement — is that he takes consequences as causes. By analyzing the nature of racism, it can be understood that there are institutional mechanisms designed to reify the social stereotypes that the classes need to preserve their position. Since the Late modern period, and given the technical possibilities on public opinion and collective sensitivity, social classes have reinforced the role and influence of nation-states to have a tool capable of mobilizing cultural principles efficiently. The primary mechanism of coercion of a nation-state concerning anthropological generalizations is nationalism (occasionally named to its strong expressions as "chauvinism".) What interests, capacity, and mechanisms do nation-states have to "stimulate" sensitivity racial not an easy question to answer. This question could be answered by stating that State racism through nationalism can channel through extraordinarily diverse oppressive intersections. Furthermore, in this way, the States can channel any cultural phenomenon and attribute a particular meaning to it.

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