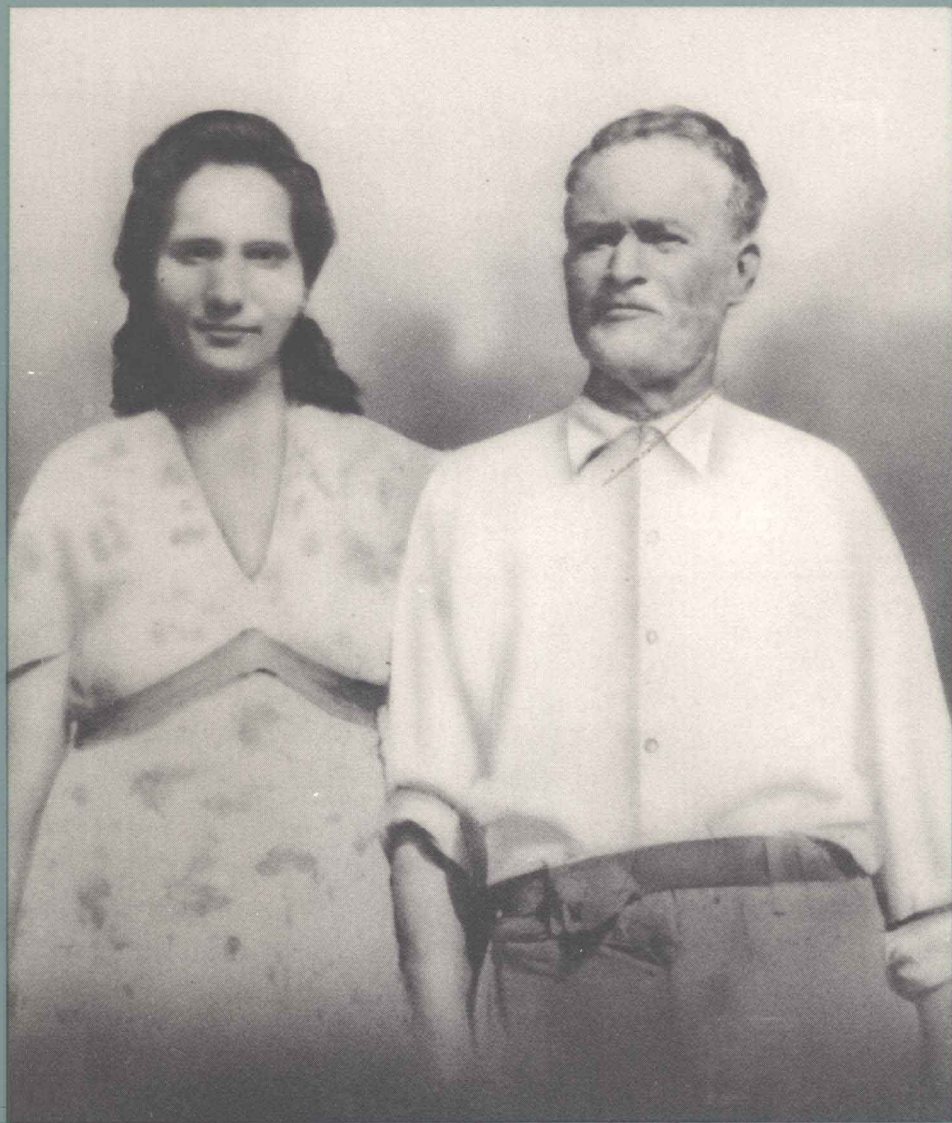


# RACE FOR THEORY



MELVIN D. WILLIAMS

# RACE FOR THEORY AND THE BIOPHOBIA HYPOTHESIS:

*Humanics, Humanimals  
and Macroanthropology*

*Sex Creates Life  
Death Holds Its Meaning  
And  
Digestion Its Measure*

Melvin D. Williams

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Cover Photograph: A father and his daughter born (1873 and 1912) in the South as “inferior” African Americans because of the perpetual search for human security.

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*To My Grandchildren:*

*Christopher, Calvin and Melvin,  
who can conquer their biophobias and be prepared  
for life during the Ecological Revolution*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“There is no health in a society afflicted by Racism and Discrimination.”—Justice Thurgood Marshall Foreword to *Racism and Mental Health*, 1973

As most readers know, authors' efforts are supported and facilitated by many people and agencies. Listing them usually means omissions. This volume is the result of a long career and much support. Most of it has been acknowledged in my other books:

*Community In a Black Pentecostal Church: An Anthropological Study*

*On the Street Where I Lived*

*The Human Dilemma: Another Decade in Belmar*

*The Black Middle Class: The Production and Reproduction of Social Inferiority*

*An Academic Village: The Ethnography of an Anthropology Department*

One important aspect of my experiences is that of an African American working and living among predominantly white populations. That exposure and a lifelong interest in race has provided long and critical observations of race as “THE HUMAN DILEMMA.” In this book I attempt to give the reader the benefit of those observations. I have some ambivalence about acknowledging that strange and lifelong trek.

I have never been inferior but I have always been socialized so and

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treated as such. It is a great personal comfort to understand this human pathology called race that E. Franklin Frazier (1927) began to explain to us 70 years ago. But he, too, was an African American and the power elite in scholarship rarely accepts such white-focused hypotheses from “inferior” Black scholars. So in 1996 we continue “learn” and experience what African-American scholars have already taught us many years ago. I thank them again.

My family remains intact and continues to support and enable me. I do have two more grandsons to acknowledge, Melvin and Calvin.

## PREFACE

In approaching this task, it seems wise, if only to head off needless argument, to deny any intention of supplying a single master key to a lock that has defied the efforts of great talents from the time of the Classical civilizations to the present. It seems obvious that other sequences of events than those sketched here could, under proper circumstances, have had similar results. Indeed, the writer is eager to entertain other possibilities and hopes hereby to stimulate others to offer counter suggestions. It will also be obvious to the reader that substantial trains of thought herein stated are merely borrowed and not created by the writer.

Fried 1968:251

This volume continues the development of the themes that were introduced in my previous books—*Community in a Black Pentecostal church: An Anthropological Study*; *The Human Dilemma*; *The Black Middle Class: The Production and Reproduction of Social Inferiority* and *The Academic Village: The Ethnography of an Anthropology Department*. We have arrived at a time in human history when the problems of human identity—classism, racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, sectarianism, ageism, nationalism and speciesism (CRESSANS) threaten the survival of the human species. For more than a million years humans have adaptively interpreted birth, struggle and death or sex, death and digestion by denying defying and defiling these “lower” animal characteristics in themselves. Because of the resulting human divisiveness and destruction (of Earth), humans must now learn to celebrate their animal kinship and their magnificent bodies if they would live in peace with “races,”

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classes and genders and even with Earth itself. Humans can no longer deny and domesticate their own insecurities by means of denying, defying and defiling their animal kinship (DDDAK). That state of denial undermines the lives, health and planet of human beings.

In this volume the author continues his evolutionary analysis of the origin, development and demise of human denial. He offers an evolutionary alternative (the Ecological Revolution) to human divisiveness and extinction. That alternative will eliminate all of the artificial and contrived categories of human inferiority, denigration and degradation. Humans will finally discover the pervasive influence of DDDAK in the creation of those categories: the poor, homeless, wretched, unhappy, criminals, delinquent, convicts, illiterate, uneducated addicted and CRESSANS. The author's over-arching theory suggests that human divisiveness has been an adaptive strategy but that in the 21st century humans must establish their security and survival by means of new and different human nature. Humans are components of Earth and they cannot continue to "conquer" it and its people and avoid human extinction.

The volume is a new evolutionary approach to comprehending race, class, and gender. As the subtitle suggests the book is an approach that sets the problems within a global context.

The central argument of the volume is that race, class, and gender are the culmination of human biophobia (e.g., the fear of sex, death, and digestion). That adaptive phobia has resulted in a human inferiority complex that dominates human behavior. The book describes some of that behavior and the hopelessness of treating the symptoms of this global malady. The volume suggests some solutions—the end of biophobia, the creation of biocentrism—that will culminate into the Ecological Revolution.

In the process of presenting the argument, the volume takes a different and critical look at the pain and suffering generated by race, class, and gender in America.

Race remains a second-class concept in the quest for social theory. Like poverty, African Americans and class, race has been over-studied in this Century with few salient results. Americans and others seem obsessed with race. It helps to define their own identity. Like the "lower" animals, race has become a major symbol of human identity. As with pornography, victimography and ethnography, raceography seems to satisfy a primal scholarly urge to study the "inferior." But the study and practice of pornography contributes little to understanding the marginality of women in the social world. Feminist theorists had to take the helm

of that theoretical ship to get wind in the sails. Today there are a whole new breed of neoconservatives who are establishing their careers and fortunes as “intellectual” hustlers and pimps of race. But there is little theory.

The epistemological, methodological and substantive issues being negotiated by feminist theorists around gender make race pale into conceptual inferiority, notwithstanding its longer history among sociological theorists. Feminist theory is a result of political movements responding to changing situations and experiences of women (Alway 1996). Where is the corresponding race theory?

Race theory does not have to be race-centered or seek to end racial subordination. It can be formalized, public explanations (hypotheses) of the social world that produces and reproduces subordinate races. Race need not be the central analytical category of race theory. There can be a variety (e.g., biophobia) of them. But the location, voice and experience of race theory can revolutionize sociological theory. Much of feminist theory is being ignored (Alway 1996). Race theory remains largely invisible. The Afrocentric marginality and exclusion, inside and outside the academy, has left it theoretically sterile. Race is ripe for a major contribution, not from its pimps and hustlers, but from its scholars and sufferers who are committed to comprehend the humanics that keep them subordinated in the social world.

Race is a reflection of a social life that is hierarchical. Race is a phenomenon, not only of individuals and their behaviors, but also of social structures and conceptual systems. If race can be understood, then, those structures and systems become accessible to our analytical tools. The species becomes comprehended in its origin, development and future. This can lead to a general theory of social life or a coherent theoretical framework. My complex theory attempts to begin this trek. It proceeds by preventing race as a central problematic but by using it as one component of human divisiveness. It embodies social actors. Like feminist theory it forces the biological—the body, the natural into the social domain (Alway 1996). “It upsets a very basic opposition—that of nature and culture” (Alway 1996: 217) which fundamentally brings biological and cultural anthropology together.

African Americans are called roving packs, monkeys, coons, water buffalo, *Gorillas in the Mist* and other “lower” animals. Black Americans are believed and treated by many to be “uncivilized,” hot-blooded, wilding, oversexed, large-penisised (accompanied by a cruel history of mob castration) and promiscuous. Much of this is a part of the enterprise

of producing and reproducing social inferiority. But neither the “lower” animal referents nor the other characteristics are inherently inferior. What kind of humanimal behaves this way? A different look at race and human divisiveness will help to provide some answers.

Race theory neglects the emphasis on signs, symbols, symptoms and circumstances. It deconstructs the quest of arbitrary oppressed populations for power, position, and prestige under the guise of the demand for equality. Race theory focuses on what has become the human pathology, the inferiority complex.

If human being differed from animals only in degree, then how did one defend equal rights for all persons without also including at least the higher mammals? People also differed in degree from one another; if one could deny rights to a dog or an ape, one could also deny them to a child or an idiot. The Rev. W. C. Gannett glimpsed this when he associated the growing recognition of animals' rights with the new rights acquired by "women, children, the poorer classes, slaves and criminals." Black people, yellow people, Eastern Europeans, women, children, and other groups were all widely regarded as intellectually, and often morally, inferior to full-grown Anglo-Saxon males. If inferiority deprived animals of rights, could the same not be said about the "lower orders" of human beings? Defending animal rights meant standing up for human rights, for "when the rights of dumb animals shall be protected, the rights of human beings will be safe." Clearly the old, restricted utilitarian basis for animals' rights no longer sufficed. But what was to replace it?

Here the new ecological mentality fitted in. Since all creatures formed one seamless, mutually interdependent web of life, the existence of each deserved respect.

Turner 1980:132

Anthropologist tell us that primitive people commonly call themselves simply "people" or "folk," thereby seeing other human beings who may stumble upon them as something other than people. Such ethnocentrism, as we would denominate terminology like that today, is the root of the concept of human nature. It defines the group by separating it from other living things, most especially animals.

Degler 1991:3

DDDAK (denial, defiance and defilement of our animal kinship) is the human (with his/her unique perceptive ability) response (including fear) to his/her animal heritage and destiny (death). Humans fear what they are (animals) and what may happen to them—hunger, violence, homelessness, meaninglessness, loneliness, illness and death. Thus, humans substitute myth (including superiority) and power (to enforce and validate myth) for their history, their present and their future. Superiority requires comparisons and contrasts, so humans create "inferior" ("lower") animals and "inferior" people ((classes, races, ethnicities, sexes, sects, ages, nations and species—CRESSANS) races, classes, genders and "devils").

The Author

. . . Farmers are plowing under paths and posting 'no access' signs on their pastures. The rambles are fighting back, prosecuting landowners and demanding the right to roam as they wish—on or off footpaths—cross all uncultivated land.

'It's war out here on the moors,' say Benny Rothman, a 78-year-old Rambler, clutching a tuft of heather on a precipice of the so-called Dark Park in north-central England. Catching his breath, Mr. Rothman mimics the bleat of a passing sheep and answers the shout of a grouse. "Man is descended from animals that wandered at will," he says. 'Private property can't change that.'

Horwitz 1990

Science, Charles Peguy said, is perpetually uncertain while, on the contrary, teaching demands imperturbable assurance. I hope that the confidence with which I assert certain ideas, definitions and viewpoints will be understood as the mask of a teacher.

By including in this book events of our own time I do what Edward B. Tylor, pioneer anthropologist, branded as unwise. Cultural anthropology has changed since Tylor's day. It needs very much to test its strength on things 'of high importance' rather than on 'dead old history.' Anthropology can be of greatest service when it treats issues 'alive with intense party feeling,' even though such issues invite judgment 'biased by the pressure of personal sympathy.'

John J. Honigmann 1963:vii

"Every man is a mad man; but what is a human destiny for if not to unite the mad man with the universe.'

André Malraux

The most important point in Darwin's teachings was, strangely enough, overlooked. Man has not only evolved, he is evolving. This is a source of hope in the abyss of despair. In a way Darwin has healed the wound inflicted by Copernicus and Galileo. Man is not the center of the universe physically, but he may be the spiritual center. Man and man alone knows that the world evolves and that he evolves with it. By changing what he knows about the world in which he lives man changes himself. Changes may be deteriorations or improvements; the hope lies in the possibility that changes resulting from knowledge may also be directed by knowledge. Evolution need no longer be a destiny imposed from

without; it may conceivably be controlled by man, in accordance with his wisdom and his values.

Dobzhansky 1966:346

If you don't have this feeling of personal identity, you must work all the harder to regain your self-possession when moving out of exceptional circumstances. Ethnographic experience is an experimental form of research on something which escapes you. If I had a strong idea of who I was, perhaps I wouldn't have needed to go looking for myself in these exotic adventures.

Levi-Strauss 1991:168

A unique and interesting conference on the anthropology of the body, sponsored by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth and held in Belfast, Northern Ireland, April 2–5, 1975, gave life to a number of new ideas and issues that are gradually coming to the fore in British social anthropology. The symposium's unusual theme must not be understood, however, to constitute a new expression of interest in physical anthropology. Instead of exploring the physiology of the body, participants were solely concerned with what might be called the "interface" between the body and society. The problems addressed were thus twofold: how do the givens of the human body form constrain or delimit societal variation, and how do they, in equal measure, inspire the elaboration of social or cultural codes? It is important to note here that living forms are characterized by their pliability and constant movement, their shifting coloration, and their multi-textured surfaces. Yet, at the same time, the parameters of such fluctuations are always constrained by certain species-specific givens. The requirements of biological life demand that there be structure: that is, a certain specialized subdivision and patterned, functional interrelationship of body parts and capabilities. The exploratory discussions at the conference were about the nature of such structural confines. At no point were the grosser problems of interspecies similarities at issue.

For example, the fact that the musculatures of our third and fourth fingers are linked was used to illustrate the existence of a constraint on the range of fingering patterns that may be employed by the player of a stringed instrument. At the same time, the cultural elaboration of strumming rhythms and playing postures in music has exploited the natural flexibility of the human wrist joint. More important than these purely formal bodily features, however, was the stress that all conference par-

ticipants laid on bodily affect and movement. It was in this context that the convenor (John Blacking), in his opening paper, tried to focus subsequent discussion on our very limited knowledge of human somatic states. This emphasis was intended to provide a counterbalance to the more traditional concern of social anthropologists with mental phenomena. To what extent, then, does human culture rest on the use of iconic, that is, non-verbal and even sub-cognitive, forms of communication? Might these even be the primary building blocks for our elaborate social codes? Such a view is particularly persuasive when we consider how a child first learns about social norms and expectations, or when we stop to study the course of human evolution more generally.

Beck 1975: 486

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