

and social structures aimed to establish the hegemony of one group over another. Racial formation is the process "by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed." This definition implies that politically motivated conservative and liberal racial projects are always multiply determined. These projects occur not only at the macrolevel of social policy and state activity but also at the microlevel of everyday experience. "Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation." Race functions as a "common sense" way of "comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world." The process of racial formation has constantly changed over time. The present racial order is the outcome of this evolution and, for this reason, the meaning of race remains transient.

## THE CLASSIFICATION OF RACES

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### François Bernier, "A New Division of the Earth"

*"A new division of the earth according to the different species or races of men" was published anonymously in 1684. The author has since been identified as François Bernier, who was born in Anjou in 1620 and died in Paris in 1688. Bernier traveled extensively. In 1656 he set out on a twelve-year journey that took him to Egypt, India, and Persia. The record of this journey was published in 1670 as Voyages de François Bernier and is known in English as Travels in the Mogul Empire. Although many European travelers before Bernier noted the different physical characteristics of the various peoples they encountered, especially their skin color, he was the first to group those peoples specifically into "races" on that basis. For this reason, "A New Division of the Earth" can be described as the first text in which the term "race" is used in something like its modern sense to refer to discrete human groups organized on the basis of skin color and other physical attributes. Later writers, including Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, acknowledged Bernier's contribution to the classification of humanity along biological lines.*

A new division of the earth, according to the different species or races of men who inhabit it, sent by a famous traveller to Mons. \* \* \* \*, nearly in these terms.

Geographers up to this time have only divided the earth according to its different countries or regions. The remarks which I have made upon men during all my long and numerous travels, have given me the idea of dividing it in a different way. Although in the exterior form of their bodies, and especially in their faces, men are almost all different one from the other, according to the different districts of the earth which they inhabit, so that those who have been great travellers are often never mistaken in distinguishing each nation in that way; still I have remarked that there are four or five species or races of men in particular whose difference is so

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remarkable that it may be properly made use of as the foundation for a new division of the earth.

I comprehend under the first species France, Spain, England, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Poland, and generally all Europe, except a part of Muscovy. To this may be added a small part of Africa, that is, from the kingdoms of Fez, Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli up to the Nile; and also a good part of Asia, as the empire of the Grand Seignior with the three Arabias, the whole of Persia, the states of the Grand Mogul, the kingdom of Golconda, that of Visapore, the Maldivias, and a part of the kingdoms of Araucan, Pegu, Siam, Sumatra, Bantan and Borneo. For although the Egyptians, for instance, and the Indians are very black, or rather copper-coloured, that colour is only an accident in them, and comes because they are constantly exposed to the sun; for those individuals who take care of themselves, and who are not obliged to expose themselves so often as the lower class, are not darker than many Spaniards. It is true that most Indians have something very different from us in the shape of their face, and in their colour which often comes very near to yellow; but that does not seem enough to make them a species apart, or else it would be necessary to make one of the Spaniards, another of the Germans, and so on with several other nations of Europe.

Under the second species I put the whole of Africa, except the coasts I have spoken of. What induces me to make a different species of the Africans, are, 1. Their thick lips and squab noses, their being very few among them who have aquiline noses or lips of moderate thickness. 2. The blackness which is peculiar to them, and which is not caused by the sun, as many think; for if a black African pair be transported to a cold country, their children are just as black, and so are all their descendants until they come to marry with white women. The cause must be sought for in the peculiar texture of their bodies, or in the seed, or in the blood—which last are, however, of the same colour as everywhere else. 3. Their skin, which is oily, smooth, and polished, excepting the places which are burnt with the sun. 4. The three or four hairs of beard. 5. Their hair, which is not properly hair, but rather a species of wool, which comes near the hairs of some of our dogs; and, finally, their teeth whiter than the finest ivory, their tongue and all the interior of their mouth and their lips as red as coral.

The third species comprehends a part of the kingdoms of Aracan and Siam, the islands of Sumatra and Borneo, the Philippines, Japan, the kingdom of Pegu, Tonkin, Cochinchina, China, Chinese Tartary, Georgia and Muscovy, the Usbek, Turkistan, Zaquetay, a small part of Muscovy, the little Tartars and Turcomans who live along the Euphrates towards Aleppo. The people of all those countries are truly white; but they

have broad shoulders, a flat face, a small squab nose, little pig's-eyes long and deep set, and three hairs of beard.

The Lapps make the fourth species. They are little stunted creatures with thick legs, large shoulders, short neck, and a face elongated immensely; very ugly and partaking much of the bear. I have only seen two of them at Dantzic; but, judging from the pictures I have seen, and the account which I have received of them from many persons who have been in the country, they are wretched animals.

As to the Americans, they are in truth most of them olive-coloured, and have their faces modelled in a different way from ours. Still I do not find the difference sufficiently great to make of them a peculiar species different from ours. Besides, as in our Europe, the stature, the turn of the face, the colour and the hair are generally very different, as we have said, so it is the same in other parts of the world; as for example, the blacks of the Cape of Good Hope seem to be of a different species to those from the rest of Africa. They are small, thin, dry, ugly, quick in running, passionately fond of carrion which they eat quite raw, and whose entrails they twine round their arms and neck, as one sees here sometimes with our butchers' dogs, that they may eat them when they want; drinking seawater when they can get no other, and speaking a language altogether strange, and almost inimitable by Europeans. Some of the Dutch say they speak *turkey*.

The remarks I have made also on the beauty of women are not less peculiar. It is certain that beautiful and ugly ones are found everywhere. I have some very handsome ones in Egypt, who recalled to my memory the beautiful and famous Cleopatra. I have also seen some very handsome ones among the blacks of Africa, who had not those thick lips and that squab nose. Seven or eight of them whom I met in different places were of a beauty so surprising, that in my opinion they eclipsed the Venus of the Farnese palace at Rome. The aquiline nose, the little mouth, the coral lips, the ivory teeth, the large and ardent eyes, that softness of expression, the bosom and all the rest, is sometimes of the last perfection. I have seen at Moka many quite naked for sale, and I may say that I have never seen anything more beautiful; but they were very dear, for they wanted to sell them three times dearer than the others.

I have also seen very handsome women in the Indies, and may say that they are beautiful brunettes. Amongst others some are coloured of ever so little a yellow, who are very much prized, and whom I found also very much to my taste; for that shade of yellow is vivid and brilliant, and has none of that ugly and livid paleness of jaundice. Imagine to yourself a beautiful and young French girl, who is only just beginning to have the

jaundice, and instead of that sick, pale visage, and those yellowish eyes, dull and languishing, give her a healthy face, soft, laughing, and beautiful brilliant and very amorous eyes, and you will have as near an idea of them as I can give you.

The Indians are quite right in saying that you do not find handsome women in the countries where the water is bad, or where the soil is not vigorous and fertile. In fact, the goodness of the water, and that of the diet, doubtless, have a great deal to do with beauty. It is not, however, generally true, that wherever these two things are found, there the women are always handsome. In my opinion, that depends upon some other conditions, which make beauty more scarce and more dispersed about. It arises not only from the water, the diet, the soil, and the air, but also from the seed which must be peculiar to certain races and species.

The women who live in the Ganges at Benares, and downwards towards Bengal, are generally esteemed. Those of the kingdom of Cashmere are still more so; for besides being as white as those of Europe, they have a soft face, and are a beautiful height; so it is from there that all those come who are to be found at the Ottoman Court, and that all the Grand Seigniors keep by them. I recollect that as we were coming back from that country, we saw nothing else but little girls in the sort of cabins which the men carried on their shoulders over the mountains. But although the women of Lahore are brown like the rest of the Indian women, still they seemed to me more charming than all the others; their beautiful figure, small and easy, with the softness of their faces, quite surpassed by a great deal that of the Cashmerians.

It cannot be said that the native and aboriginal women of Persia are beautiful; but this does not prevent the city of Isfahan from being filled with an infinity of very handsome women, as well as very handsome men, in consequence of the great number of handsome slaves who are brought there from Georgia and Circassia.

The Turks have also a great number of very handsome women; besides those of the country, who are by no means ugly, they have those Greek beauties of whom you have heard so much said, and besides that an immense quantity of slaves who come to them from Mingrelia, Georgia, and Circassia, where, according to all the Levantines and all the travellers, the handsomest women of the world are to be found.

Thus the Christians and Jews are not allowed to buy a Circassian slave at Constantinople. They are reserved for the Turks alone. When our friend speaks of them he is in raptures, and declares he has seen nothing so handsome in Europe. I shall say nothing of European beauties, you doubtless know as much of them as I do.

## François-Marie Voltaire, "Of the Different Races of Men" from *The Philosophy of History*

*François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778) first published The Philosophy of History in 1765 using the religious pseudonym of the Abbé Bazin as protection. In 1769, when preparing a collection of his works, Voltaire made of it a "Preliminary Discourse" when he added it to a work that he had initially published in 1756 under the title Essay on General History and on the Customs and Spirit of Nations since Charlemagne until Our Times. In its new form, the whole was given the now familiar name Essay on Customs and the Spirit of Nations. In 1655, Isaac de la Peyrère published Præ-Adamitæ, a work that argued that Adam and Eve were not the first human beings. His ideas were heavily criticized, but a century later, polygenesis was again being advocated by Voltaire in various works, including The Philosophy of History from which the following extract is taken.*

What is the most interesting to us, is the sensible difference in the species of men, who inhabit the four known quarters of the world.

None but the blind can doubt that the whites, the negroes, the Albinoes, the Hottentots, the Laplanders, the Chinese, the Americans, are races entirely different.

No curious traveller ever passed through Leyden, without seeing part of the *reticulum mucosum* of a negro dissected by the celebrated Ruish. The remainder of this membrane is in the cabinet of curiosities at Petersburg. This membrane is black, and communicates to negroes that inherent blackness, which they do not lose, but in such disorders as may destroy this texture, and allow the grease to issue from its cells, and form white spots under the skin.

Their round eyes, squat noses, and invariable thick lips, the different configuration of their ears, their woolly heads, and the measure of their intellects, make a prodigious difference between them and other species of men; and what demonstrates, that they are not indebted for this difference to their climates, is that negro men and women, being transported into the

From *Traité de Métaphysique*, 1734. Translated in Voltaire, *The Philosophy of History*, 1766.