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To cite this article: David Delaney (2002) The Space That Race Makes, The Professional Geographer, 54:1, 6-14, DOI: [10.1111/0033-0124.00309](https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.00309)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.00309>



Published online: 15 Mar 2010.



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The Space That Race Makes

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This essay is a revision of a paper prepared for an NSF workshop on race and geography. Participants in the workshop were asked to offer their views on the topic and our suggestions for further research. This contribution explores some aspects of the relationship and relevance of geography to the question of race in North America. It touches on three “places” that constitute the discipline: the place of research, the place of teaching, and the workplace. With respect to research, it suggests some promising lines of inquiry. Among these are studies of the relationship of scale to the politics of identity and studies of “passing” in connection with studies of geographies of experience and geographies of power. **Key Words:** identity, race, scale, space, whiteness.

Introduction

In the past decade, geographers in the English-speaking world have turned their attention to questions of race, racism, and racialization to a degree that is unprecedented. A small, nonrandom sample of recent work includes Silvern (1995), Bonnett (1996, 1997), Delaney (1998), Jackson (1998), Dwyer and Jones (2000), Kobayashi and Peake (2000), Nast (2000), Pulido (2000), and Wilson (2000). (See also the useful reviews in Dwyer 1997 and Rundstrum et al. 2000.) In so doing, they have illuminated many previously neglected aspects of these topics. This engagement with race has enriched our general understanding of how space works to condition the operation of power and the constitution of relational identities. It may also help to highlight the critical importance of racialized space to other aspects of American life. The field of geography is well positioned to engage in this project. Its strengths include its methodological, theoretical, and ideological pluralism; geography has many voices, and these voices are addressing a variety of audiences. Its weaknesses include the deplorable level of involvement in it of nonwhite scholars, prospective scholars, and undergraduates.

This essay is a revised version of a position paper prepared for an NSF workshop on Race and Geography that was held in Lexington, Kentucky in November 1998. The organizers simply asked the participants to offer a view of the topic and suggestions for research directions. In this essay, I neither replicate literature

reviews nor pretend to anything remotely like a comprehensive treatment, even if such a thing were imaginable. I ask that it be read only as an initial contribution to a conversation, along with the other contributions that are presented in this issue. I aim to be merely suggestive. My strategy is to briefly touch on racialization in three of the discipline’s central places: the place of research, the place of teaching, and geography as a workplace. In an effort to highlight experiential aspects of racialized geographies, I rely rather heavily on sources drawn from the humanities.

The Place of Research

In *Playing in the Dark* (1992, 4), Toni Morrison suggests that we live in “a wholly racialized world.” She (5) focuses specifically on the “Africanist presence” at work in white consciousness as reflected in American literature, and the insight this provides into dominant constructions of American identity.

What does it mean for geographers to take this claim of a wholly racialized world seriously? How do our tasks become different? Among the central places of what might be called conventional geographies of race lie “the inner city,” “the reservation,” and “the border.” In contrast to some—perhaps imagined—normal or nonracialized places, these are all anomalous, localized places. However, “the outer city,” “the heartland” and the vastness of “unreserved” space are no less raced. The geographies of race we inhabit also include the gated community, the boardroom and the fac-

ulty lounge, the dish room, the locker room, the stitching room, the class room, the prison, the convenience store, the cafeteria, public spaces, and—perhaps especially—*home*. But there is no outside to a wholly racialized world. And where the Africanist presence may be recessive, the Latin, Asian, or Native-Americanist presences may be more prominent. In most cases, these presences enter into the processes that maintain or challenge the spatial conditions for the construction of whiteness.

Ideologies of race, racisms, and forms of racial consciousness form elements of a more pervasive “racial formation,” which is an integral, if complex and shifting, part of American culture more generally (Omi and Winant 1994). As such, they are integral to the formation and revision of *all* American spatialities at all scales of reference, from the international (constructions of the foreigner, the wetback, the American) to the corporeal. As Farah Griffin (1995, 102) states, “the contest over space is symbolic of the larger contest over black bodies.” However, even if there is no “outside” to racial geographies, the ways in which the racial formation is given spatial expression remain extremely variable and shifting. Spaces may be produced in accordance with ideologies of color-blindness or race consciousness, of integrationism, assimilationism, separatism, or nativism. These race-centered ideologies combine with other ideological elements—such as those centered on public-private, ownership, sexuality, citizenship, democracy, or crime—and with other axes of power to produce the richly textured, highly variegated, and power-laden spatialities of everyday life. The questions for geographers might then be: how does the racial formation shape space, give meanings to places, and condition the experience of embodied subjects emplaced in and moving through the material world?

These questions proceed from the premise that changing views of race have consequences for how geographers might connect race and space. Contemporary geographical theories have stressed the mutual constitutivity of the social and the spatial. According to this line of thought, elements of the social (race, gender, and so on) are not simply *reflected* in spatial arrangements; rather, spatialities are regarded as *constituting* and/or *reinforcing* aspects of the social. In the present context, this suggests that

race—in all of its complexity and ambiguity, as ideology and identity—is what it is and does what it does precisely because of *how* it is given spatial expression.

Some Critical Race theorists (Ford 1992; Goldberg 1994) have explored the idea of space as an “enabling technology” through which race is produced. This argument suggests that the territorial division of continuous social space into dichotomous “insides” and “outsides” facilitates the polarization of a continuous range of colors (browns, beiges, tans, and pinks) into “white” and “black” and hence the freezing of identities into “we” and “they.” This is the difference that space makes. A more familiar version of this argument might emphasize the irreducible spatial aspects of slavery (Delaney 1998), indigenous “removal” (Anderson 1991; Spence 1999), Asian exclusion (Gyory 1998; Wong and Chun 1998), and Mexican deportation (Garcia 1980; Calavita 1992), of Jim Crow and Japanese-American (and Japanese-Canadian) internment (Tateishi 1984), of community surveillance and “native administration.” Then, too, the politics of alterity have frequently stressed inherently spatial strategies such as colonization (Straudenroux 1961), separatism (Hall 1977; Brooks 1996), nationalism (Moses 1978), and integration-assimilation. In the latter case, ideologies of integration are often bound up with a vision whereby propinquity breeds familiarity, recognition of commonality, and the eventual disappearance of race as a meaningful social category and racism as a significant social force. I might also note that the critical distinctions between documented and undocumented aliens, on-reservation and off-reservation Native communities, and various strands of the African diaspora are clearly a function of space.

Scaling Race

Race and space intersect and condition each other, not only horizontally but “vertically” as well. Like race itself, scale may be an important device for inscribing or effacing difference: that is, the politics of scale may be an important component of the geopolitics of race and racism more generally. Racial identities, for example, may be differentially constructed at various scales, and this process may have political significance. A given subject might be “raced” dif-

ferently in the context of national (black, Hispanic, Native American) or local (West Indian, Southern; Chicana, Salvadoreña; Hopi, Ute) scales of reference.

The very terms “Indian” and “Native American” may be seen to position indigenous peoples and individual subjects within and in relation to Euro-American colonial frames of reference centered on the taken-for-granted scale of “the nation,” meaning the Euro-American state. It may also have the effect of reducing native peoples to the status of a “minority” or “ethnic group” *within* the American or Canadian polity. It may, therefore, tend to elide significant local differences and divergent interests among the various tribes. At the same time, it may obscure commonalities with other colonized peoples. One recent response to the scalar containment effected by “Native Americanizing” indigenous peoples of North America is to “jump up scale” (Smith 1993). Using sovereignty, international law, and international organizations and forums as vehicles, indigenous activists can position themselves and their struggles within more global frames of reference. Peter d’Errico (1999, 24–25) writes that “Native Americans are increasingly turning toward a global international perspective. In light of the history of treaty making and with an eye toward restoring a sense of equality between nations that justified the treaty process to begin with, Native Americans—in concert with indigenous peoples worldwide—are asserting their own sense of sovereignty.”

Underlining the significance of this more expansive framing, Winona Stevens (1998, 34) says, “The term *Third World* movement emphasizes that racially oppressed peoples in North America share ‘essential conditions with third world nations abroad,’ namely ‘economic underdevelopment, a heritage of colonialism and neocolonialism, and a lack of real political power and autonomy’” (quoting Blauner 1987, 159). Interestingly, she resists the Euro-American centered national scaling of identity from both “below” and “above,” simultaneously localizing and globalizing identities and identity politics. With respect to the former, she (34) says, “Self-determination requires us to take back control of our lives and reclaim our identities. We are not an ethnic minority. We are not even ‘Indians.’ We are Métis, Déné, and Nehiyow, Lakota, Nakota, Pexoché, Nuu cha nulth.” With

respect to the latter, she (34) says, “What is clear is that I, a Cree woman, have more in common with a [Koori] man from Australia than I do with non-Indigenous women in Canada or the United States, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.” For activists such as Vine Deloria (1998, 27–28), however, these scalar moves occasion a measure of ambivalence: “Conceiving Indians on a hemispheric basis is a good idea, as it enables us to see that we are not alone in our oppression . . . [But] too much concentration of things hemispheric will prevent us from understanding the latest proposal to quantify ground water rights, bolster community colleges or even develop new courses about American Indians in this country.”

Of course, it is by no means necessary that indigenous politics be confined to only one scale, especially when neither the forces of oppression nor the vectors of solidarity are so confined. As in any other context, basic considerations include who is doing the scaling, for what purpose it is done, and what potential intended or unintended consequences the practice might have. My immediate point is simply to illustrate the role of the politics and pragmatics of scale in the geopolitics of race and racism.

And scale is not solely a device for the political framing of identities. Racial politics in the United States and Canada also engage the scalar architecture of power associated with federalisms (Delaney and Leitner 1996). This is particularly salient in contexts in which legal action is a component of political strategies. Historically, both the antislavery and civil rights struggles—as well as the resistances they encountered—were tactically oriented toward and profoundly shaped by the scalar structures through which power circulates. Likewise, these structures underwent profound revision as a consequence of these encounters (Delaney 1998). Similarly, forms of nativist racism may articulate “the local,” “the regional,” “the national,” and “the international” in complex and shifting ways (Martin 1999; Silvern 1999).

Of Mixing, Passing, and Refusing

Geographers might productively work both sides of the problem and bring our theoretical resources to bear on the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. Jones and Natter

(1997, 149) assert that “. . . subjects achieve and resist their systems of identification in and through social space.” We might do so, for example, by examining the spatial conditions and techniques involved in the reproduction and transformation of whiteness (Bonnett 1997; Dwyer and Jones 2000). Such an examination might begin with reflection on the spatial conditions under which one learns, first, that she *is* “white,” and second, what—in practical terms—it *means to be* white (Frankenberg 1994).

Pushing further, we might envision historical studies of the distinctive experiential and relational spatialities of passing or of “mongrels,” “half-breeds,” and other border identities whose very being challenges inherited conceptions of race. These identities give the lie to the inherited categorical template through which racialization occurs. They are commonly understood through spatial metaphors. For example, in *Mixed-Blood Messages* (1998, 27) Louis Owens argues that

Euramerica remains involved in an unceasing ideological struggle to confine Native Americans within an established territory defined by the authoritative utterance “Indian.” Native Americans, however, continue to resist this ideological containment and to insist upon the freedom to re-imagine themselves within a fluid, always changing frontier space . . . For those of us who . . . are mixed-bloods, the hybridized, polyglot transcultural frontier is quite clearly internalized. For all of us territory remains a constant threat, an essential feature of the colonial mind . . .

Valerie Smith (1994, 45) puts the matter significantly differently. “The light-skinned black body,” she writes, “thus marks and transgresses the boundaries between the races and the sexes that structure American hierarchy.” Drawing out the implications of the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality, she (45) says that “those boundaries that demarcate racial difference are best policed by monitoring the congress between members of opposite sexes of different races.” These boundaries are not solely metaphorical; they have material referents in the lived-in world.

Most enlightening for gaining an appreciation for the geographical contingency of racialization in the U.S. is the historical phenomenon of “passing” and its contemporary refusals. Passing for white is a prominent theme in twentieth-century African-American literature

(Bennett 1996; Ginsberg 1996). However, it was also a historical, experiential reality for thousands of people. In either case, it may be of value in coming to understand imaginative geographies. The phenomenon and performance of passing presupposed the either/or structure of the prevailing racial formation as it was given official expression in the “one-drop rule” and antimiscegenation laws. Passing also implicated complex notions of deceit, betrayal, suspicion, and anxieties concerning threats to white purity. Most importantly, participants in passing understood it as a form of escape. Bennett (1996, 36) highlights this in her discussion of the etymology of the term: “Passing is an inellegant term that most probably comes from the ‘pass’ given to slaves so that they might travel without being taken for runaways.” Kawash (1996, 64) draws out some of the implications of this: “The very word pass contains the trace of its origins in movement . . . This etymological origin in movement is recorded in the case of race-passing in the United States, in the implicit reference to a metaphoric geography of race: one crosses, or passes over, the color line dividing white and black.”

The connection between the metaphoric and the material is explicitly brought out by Ginsberg (1996, 3) who writes in “The Politics of Passing” that

[a]s the term metaphorically implies, such an individual crossed or passed through a racial line or boundary—indeed *trespassed*—to assume a new identity, escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing the privilege and status of the other. Enabled by a physical appearance emphasizing “white” features, this metaphorical passing necessarily involved geographical movement as well; the individual had to leave an environment where his or her “true identity”—that is, parentage, legal status, and the like—was known to find a place where it was unknown.

Kawash (1996, 63) also brings out this aspect in her analysis of James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*.

The Autobiography does not take place in a fixed locale; rather, it traverses multiple locations . . . [The narrator] . . . is perpetually homeless, traveling light . . . He is never so much *in* place as he is, to turn a phrase, passing through. The coincidence of the thematics of geographical mobility and race passing is not accidental. Practically, if

one is to pass, one must go somewhere else, where one's identity is unknown.

That passing may now be a more salient issue in its refusal can be taken as a signal transformation in the American race formation (Piper 1996). One particularly telling illustration of both the complexities and geographical contingencies of racialization and racism comes from Karla Brundage's recent essay "Passing" (1996). Brundage, who has a white father and a black mother, was born in Berkeley in 1967. When she was young, she moved with her parents to Hawaii, "to try to escape the racism that they had once been willing to fight" (1996, 118). She (118) writes:

I did not grow up knowing what it is to be Black. I had no Black culture or community. In Hawaii, there are many brown people. I was brown, so I fit right in. I basically grew up as local girl. If people asked I would tell them I was Black, but people rarely asked. In a weird way, I have been passing for something or another all my life.

When she was in the seventh grade, she moved to the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York to live with her father. There, "I told my friends I was Hawaiian . . . I didn't even have to lie; it was easier than that. When they asked where I was from, I said 'Hawaii,' And they said, 'Oh, so you're Hawaiian then.' And I just smiled, my killer Hawaiian smile" (119). Her mother would call from California and implore her not to lie about her identity. "But," she (119) writes, "I was thirteen, I had never been Black before, and I wanted to have friends. I was in a new place completely foreign to me. It was too hard." In ninth grade she moved to Oakland. There, "[f]or the first time I was immersed in Black culture . . . What I did not know about was the deadly lines drawn between dark and light within the Black community itself . . . I looked more Chicano [sic] than anything else" (120).

From Oakland, Brundage went to Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. "It was like no place I had been before" (1996, 120). Here, the social dynamics of racialization became very difficult for her. "Those who were mixed were forced to choose sides, and most of us chose white" (120). But what she found at Vassar was that she (120) "could never be part of the elite white world, and worse, the Blacks there resented me for even trying." Returning to Oakland, she repudiated her whiteness.

Here again, "Instead of answering that I was part Black, mixed, *bapa*, half, or mulatto . . . I found myself saying I was Black. I wanted so desperately to be accepted as Black, but still no one would believe me" (121). At the close of her essay, she (122) writes that "[a]t the age of twenty-five, I finally realized that I am mixed. Not definable, not in any box, and probably not all that new a phenomenon. But certainly an enigma."

Brundage's story is inseparable from her path. It reveals some of the complexities and geographical contingencies of relational identities in "Multi-America" (Reed 1996); as well, it suggests that these are historically specific and conditioned by age, class, and gender. More generally, it shows that an adequate understanding of race and geography has to take place seriously. This means acknowledging the significance of the qualities and particularities of different specific places in the unfolding of race. Harlem is not New Orleans, Oakland is not Corona, Simi Valley is not Great Neck. Taking place seriously alerts us to the contextualities and contingencies of power, identity, and community. It allows us to ask questions about the role of race in the practices of place-making and the phenomenology of belonging. Recent work on place provides important tools for crafting richer depictions of our wholly racialized worlds. Houston Baker (1991, 104) expresses part of the relationship between space, place, and power in this context:

[F]or place to be recognized by one as PLACE, as personally valued locales, one must set and maintain the boundaries. If one, however, is constituted and maintained by and within the boundaries set by a dominating authority, then one is not a setter of place, but a prisoner of another's desire. Under the displacing impress of authority even what one calls, and perhaps feels is one's *own place* is, from the perspective of human agency, *placeless*. [emphasis in original]

Taking place seriously also means taking displacement, dislocation, and relocation seriously as race-making events, and inquiring after their generative processes. These are some of the elements that might inform a more a critical approach to racial geographies.

However, the question must be raised: what good are these new understandings? The problem with geographies of race—or, at least, with crucial elements of these geographies—is not a

matter of insufficient information or even incomplete theorization. We know what the problem is, and we have known since long before Du Bois studied *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). The problem is precisely why it matters in the first place: the role of spatialities in the maintenance of structures of domination, subordination, and inequality, and how these are experienced in body and being. While perhaps provocative and challenging, the ideas I have been discussing seem rather removed from the worlds they purport to describe.

A portion of what we know about the problem goes by the name of intersectionality. While usually spoken of in the context of identity—the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, rurality, and so on—each of these dimensions of the social have their own spatialities. It should be stressed that geographies of race are embedded within other geographies of (economic, political, cultural) power. I have to say that retheorizing the nexus is unlikely, on its own, to disturb the effects of this embeddedness in any significant way.

Race and the Place of Teaching

So what is geography—specifically the production of knowledge about racial geographies—*for*? Where in the world does it work? What work do we want it to do? These are all political and moral questions. Answering them presupposes answering still more basic questions: what is desirable? what is feasible? how much of the given do we need to accept? and, of course, who are we? Some of what geographers say is addressed to policy, some to activists, and most, perhaps, to like-minded scholars. Another core audience is our students. One thing that geographers do, for better or worse, is teach. We teach (usually) young people to critically engage different perspectives on how the world is put together and how to find their place in that world. We work on their consciousness and their imaginations. I want to emphasize that the work of a teacher includes challenging students' imaginations by bringing to critical awareness complexities of the race-space nexus and guiding them to their own questions.

Earlier I mentioned the classroom as a location in the wholly racialized world. In the discipline of geography, most of the teachers are

white, most of the students are white, and most of the discussion of race in these contexts is among white folk. In these places, there is virtually always a white majority. For now, this is a given. I use two key, if paradoxical, thematic ingredients to create the sort of critical awareness about which I am talking here. The first ingredient is *white privilege* as it is expressed or reinforced by inherited or changing spatialities. The second is *white self-interest in dismantling the patterns of racism*. The pedagogic question is: how does the world look different if we take these ideas seriously as a basis for discussion? The tension that exists between these themes is revealed when self-interest is rationally seen as requiring the maintenance of privilege.

The white privilege theme focuses on the transparency of whiteness as a race (Haney-Lopez 1996; Lipsitz 1998). To be white is to be unmarked in the cultural economy of race. This is why it is so easy for white people to feel that if there are only white people around, then “race” is somewhere else—say, in the inner city. As part of the positive content of whiteness, transparency facilitates invisibility of white privilege. Not the least important element of privilege is that white people usually have the option of thinking about race or not. The effects of privilege are rendered invisible, so whiteness itself takes on the appearance of normal (ordinary, unremarkable, neutral, fair, orderly, objective, and so on). In turn, unmarkedness facilitates the misrecognition of people, places, and situations that are raced “not white” as exceptional, if not abnormal. It also makes plausible the notion that racism consists in anomalous acts of discrimination. This then renders as natural, neutral, or innocent the spatialities through which whiteness—and white privilege—are maintained. Discussing white privilege in this context can call into question ideas of race neutrality (merit, individualism) associated with transparency. In a classroom setting, this raises normative issues of fairness to a different level.

The white self-interest theme goes at the question from another angle. Against the prevalent idea that racial progress is a zero-sum game—“their” gains must be “our” losses—it looks at questions of reform (or progressive spatial restructuring) in connection with the *costs* of whiteness. The idea is to guide students toward seeing how racisms and the mainte-

nance of racial hierarchies have structured space in ways that are detrimental to almost everyone's interests. Specific topics might include urban form, transportation, environmental degradation, geographies of fear and anxiety, the militarization or disappearance of public space, the spatial inequalities of public education, and the barbaric state of landlord-tenant law and its effect on geographies of shelter. That these might be the consequences of living in a wholly racialized world would, of course, require arguments, and these arguments might or might not be persuasive. The objective is not to induce "guilt," but to stimulate imaginations (Giroux 1996; Roman and Eyre 1997). The political and moral conclusions that students can draw are indeterminate. I present these ideas as part of one interpretive framework among others for understanding the topic.

Geography as Workplace

Geography is a field of study. Geography is also a social institution and a workplace. I have the impression that, as an institution, geography is nearly as white an enterprise as country and Western music, professional golf, or the Supreme Court of the United States. It seems to me that, even in comparison with other academic disciplines, geography and people of color are not particularly interested in each other. If this is so we need to ask: is this a problem for Geography? If it is, what can be done to change the situation? Can the discipline and the departments that constitute it make a stronger commitment to the recruitment and retention of students and scholars of color?

In addition to vigorous outreach and meaningful affirmative action measures, perhaps the development of teaching materials organized around some of the themes I have addressed in this essay might be useful in recruiting undergraduates and potential graduate students to the field. It might be helpful, for example, to produce a set of interdisciplinary readers, one on race and space and another on race and place. The former could document and demonstrate the utility of the twin "centrality" themes (that space is central to the construction of race and that race is central to the unfolding of spatialities) in a variety of racial contexts. Though scattered, there is enough material available for a provocative collection.

The latter might assemble autobiographical and other first-person narratives of the experiences of living in our wholly racialized world. It might also include a selection of "place biographies." Part of the objective would be to highlight the complex connections between place, identity, and experience and thus provide students with a wide range of discussion topics relevant to why "place matters." The key is to both disseminate such materials outside of geography and integrate them into geography curricula. Without some real commitment to making the institution and workplaces more diverse and responsive, though, what we study is perhaps not as important as who "we" are. ■

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