

Ethnocentrism and Racism
BST “White Supremacy and the Bible” - BSRS 2400
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Are ethnocentrism and racism different or the same, and what difference does this make?

I engage these terms regarding American social structures, biology, and power / domination, as well as considering to what extent ethnocentrism and racism are mutually exclusive or overlapping. I will focus on two of our class books that examine these and related concepts, the Rev. Canon Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas’s *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*,¹ and Dr. David M. Goldenberg’s *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*.² This paper starts by reviewing definitions of ethnocentrism and racism from a variety of sources, followed by a section on what Douglas and Goldenberg write and seem to mean by those concepts, concluding with a section that considers how these meanings make a difference.

In this paper, I capitalize the skin color / racial group terms *Black* and *White* in my own text but keep the original usage in quoted texts. The use and non-use of this convention seems to represent language and racial identity in transition.³ I use *America* to refer to the United States of America, a convention also followed by Douglas and others.

What Do Ethnocentrism and Racism Mean?

¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

² David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Case for Capitalizing the *B* in Black,” *The Atlantic*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159/>.

In this section, I present several definitions of *ethnocentrism* and *racism*. Before addressing this, I want to consider *race* itself, a many-faceted and controversial concept in the United States. At the beginning of our class, the Rev. Dr. LeAnn Snow Flesher presented this definition of race, “A race is a grouping of humans based on shared physical or social qualities into categories generally viewed as distinct by society.”⁴ The biological definition of race presented by Dr. Flesher was, “In biological taxonomy, race is an informal rank in the taxonomic hierarchy for which various definitions exist...Races may be genetically distinct populations of individuals within the same species, or they may be defined in other ways, e.g. geographically, or physiologically.”⁵ These two texts present race as including physical or biological differences, and seem more descriptive than definitive.

In *The Myth of Race*, Physical Anthropology Professor Robert Wald Sussman rejects race as a biological term. He asserts in his “Introduction,” that “Racism is a part of our everyday lives...For the past 500 years people have been taught how to understand and interpret racism...We are born into a racist society.” He continues, “What many people do not realize is that this racial structure is not based on reality. Anthropologists have shown for many years now that there is no biological reality to human race.”⁶ Sussman writes later, “given current scientific data, biological races do not exist among modern humans today, and they have never existed in the past...the concept of human races is real. It is not a biological reality, however, but a cultural one.”⁷ Sussman is contributing, as we shall see, to a venerable and continuing controversy:

⁴ Wikipedia, “Race (human categorization),” accessed 17 August 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_\(human_categorization\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_(human_categorization)).

⁵ Wikipedia, “Race (biology),” accessed 17 August 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_\(biology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_(biology)).

⁶ Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 2.

⁷ Sussman, 8.

whether race is only cultural, or is primarily physical / biological, or is cultural with an associated physical / biological reality. He presents racism as a usual part of human (or at least, Western) society.

Often in discussions of race in the United States and the West, whiteness is treated as the assumed default or the norm. One tool to recenter these conversations is to address and confront the concept of white fragility. In 2011, Dr. Robin DiAngelo coined the term *white fragility* to describe White people's defensiveness regarding race. Her article of that name was followed by the 2018 book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* which was a *New York Times* bestseller for over a year. DiAngelo defined *racism* in 2011 as, "economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between White people and people of color. This unequal distribution benefits Whites and disadvantages people of color overall and as a group."⁸ DiAngelo's definition of racism includes social structures (economy, politics, culture, etc.) used to exert power and domination, as well as the biological characteristic of skin color. She asserts a definition of racism in which Whites benefit to the disadvantage of people of color. In her 2018 book DiAngelo also writes, "a positive white identity is an impossible goal. White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy."⁹ In a recent interview about her new book, *Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm*, DiAngelo expanded on her views,

The foundation of the United States is structural racism. It is built into all of the institutions. It is built into the culture, and in that sense we've all absorbed the ideology. We've all absorbed the practices of systemic racism, and that's what I mean when I say

⁸ Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3 no. 3 (2011): 56, <https://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/viewFile/249/116>.

⁹ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 149.

we are racist. I don't mean that individuals have conscious awareness of anti-Blackness, or that they intentionally seek to hurt people based on race...What I mean is that all white people have absorbed racist ideology, and it shapes the way we see the world and the way we see ourselves in the world.¹⁰

DiAngelo seems mostly to see racism in terms of Black versus White and does not include the term *ethnocentrism* in her 2011 article or 2018 book.

Britannica takes a different view from DiAngelo. In that online encyclopedia, *ethnicity* “refers to a sense of identity and membership in a group that shares common language, cultural traits (values, beliefs, religion, food habits, customs, etc.), and a sense of a common history.” Britannica continues, “The most significant quality of ethnicity is the fact that it is unrelated to biology and can be flexible and transformable.” *Race* is defined as “a form of identity that is perceived as innate and unalterable. Ethnicity may be transient and even superficial. Race is thought to be profound and grounded in biological realities.” Britannica concludes its section “The Difference Between Racism and Ethnocentrism” by asserting “Ethnocentrism holds skin colour and other physical features to be irrelevant as long as one is a member of the same culture, or becomes so. The racial worldview holds that, regardless of behaviour or cultural similarities, a member of an inferior race (who is usually perceived to be so by means of physical features) can never be accepted.”¹¹ In summary, Britannica’s definition of ethnocentrism pertains to neutral (non-negative, non-positive) social structures, specifically separated from biology. Unlike Sussman, Britannica says that race has “biological realities” such as skin color and physical features.

¹⁰ Isaac Chotiner, “Robin DiAngelo Wants White Progressives to Look Inward,” *New Yorker*, 14 July 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/robin-diangelo-wants-white-progressives-to-look-inward>.

¹¹ Britannica, “Race - ‘Race’ as a Mechanism of Social Division,” accessed 16 August 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human/Race-as-a-mechanism-of-social-division>.

A long-running controversy on ethnocentrism and race is associated with the much-honored anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), who is called the father of modern anthropology.¹² The booklet *Race and History* was the first of three of his publications on that topic published by UNESCO - the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (in 1952, 1971, and 2005). Staffan Müller-Wille states that in 1950, Lévi-Strauss's provocative central claim was that race is only a social myth. With regard to ethnicity Müller-Wille writes that as of 1952, "the paradox consisted for Lévi-Strauss in the fact that to recognize others as racially or culturally different - whether to refute them as inferior or even non-human, or to endorse them as individual contributors to a common human heritage - reflected a propensity towards 'ethnocentricity' that was shared universally by humans."¹³ In addition to seeing ethnocentricity as universal, Müller-Wille later says Lévi-Strauss saw racial diversity as an expression of cultural creativity.¹⁴ He writes, "Lévi-Strauss' 1971 intervention emphasized 'the right of every culture to remain deaf to the values of the Other' - a kind of stubbornness and single-mindedness-as a condition for cultural creativity."¹⁵ According to Lévi-Strauss, "Far from having to ask whether culture is or is not a function of race...we are discovering that race - or what is generally meant by this term - is one function among others of culture."¹⁶ Lévi-Strauss seemed to value ethnocentricity as a means of cultural differentiation and creativity that included race as well as social structures.

¹² Patrick Wilcken, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Father of Modern Anthropology* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

¹³ Staffan Müller-Wille, "Claude Lévi-Strauss on Race, History, and Genetics," *Biosocieties* 5 no. 3 (1 September 2010): 330-347, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4326674/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Race and Culture," *International Social Science Journal* 23 (1971): 608-625.

To get another perspective on the concept of The Other raised by reading about Lévi-Strauss, I watched lectures by New York University Sociology Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, Harvey Molotch. Molotch initially takes a more negative view of *otherness* in social science than does Lévi-Strauss. He says when you study people, “you always have the possibility of, in effect, rendering them as strange, as odd, as irrational, as inferior...as Other with a capital O. They are not like me. They are different - they are Other, and Other implies inferiority in one way or another.”¹⁷ Molotch presents both the positive and negative aspects of the field of Anthropology. He says on the negative side, in European history Anthropologists served as a “Handmaiden of Colonialism” through the collection of social and cultural knowledge that allowed invasion, exploitation, and dominance of other peoples. On the positive side, Anthropology has been about learning the context of what initially seems odd and unusual in other cultures, and perhaps in the process identifying new material and social ways that are better. You can learn, Molotch says, “how different parts of the world that you may regard as Other are worthy of your respect.”¹⁸ Molotch raises the example of the United States’s government system of federation in the Articles of Confederation which are said to be modeled after the democratic mechanisms of organization of indigenous Indian tribes¹⁹ observed by the colonial British.²⁰ Molotch thus presents studying and engaging with Other cultures as potentially being either positive or negative.

¹⁷ Harvey Molotch, “Introduction to Sociology - Culture and Ethnocentrism - Part 1,” OpenEd Introduction to Sociology, Lecture 3, *New York University*, 21 December 2010, video, 41.22-41.50, https://youtu.be/c_YFdX2m0mE.

¹⁸ Molotch, video, 44.41.

¹⁹ Alaka Wali, “Democracy and the Iroquois Constitution,” *Field Museum Blog*, 1 November 2016, <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/blog/democracy-and-iroquois-constitution>.

²⁰ Molotch, video, 45.01 - 45.30.

In his groundbreaking book *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said wrote that it is common for cultures to deal with Otherness through imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism,

Every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric. Some of the immediate sting will be taken out of these labels if we recall additionally that human societies, at least the more advanced cultures, have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with “other” cultures.²¹

Said seems to consider imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism as three aspects of one customary cultural response to encountering others who are different.

Lévi-Strauss’s views on racism, ethnocentrism, and the Other were controversial seventy years ago and the dispute continues. For example, anthropologist Michel Giraud wrote, “The particular problem with Lévi-Strauss’ analysis is his banal use of the term ‘ethnocentrism.’ By reiterating one of the ‘primary truths’ of *Race and History*, namely, that ethnocentrism is universal, he is led to conclude, curiously enough, that such attitudes are inevitable and legitimate.” Giraud continues, “I view ethnocentrism as the (poisonous) fruit of particular systems of sociocultural relations based on relations of force and hostility, of domination and exploitation...it is a socially determined and historically-defined phenomenon and consequently has no intrinsic necessity and no inevitable characteristics.” Giraud’s evaluation equates ethnocentrism with racism as a system of domination. He quotes M. Labelle, “Racism, which is par excellence ideological...is the language of domination: ‘race constitutes in racist ideology a biological *form* used as a *sign*... A category which carries the mark of biology but which is essentially sociological, one whose object is to mask its relations with power in society.’” Giraud concludes, “To incorporate ethnocentrism and xenophobia into racism undoubtedly, from an

²¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 204.

academic point of view, leaves unresolved the terminological confusion, but it nonetheless constitutes an undeniable *practical truth*.”²² Giraud includes race and biology as well as social structures in his purely negative view of ethnocentrism.

This section has presented the views of Robert Wald Sussman, Robin DiAngelo, Britannica, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Edward Said, Michel Giraud and others on ethnocentrism and racism. Their various understandings were mostly in the areas of social structures, biology, and power / domination. Several considered to what extent ethnocentrism and racism were mutually exclusive or overlapping. Racism was seen as negative by all but considerations about ethnocentrism were positive, neutral, or negative. Ethnocentrism and racism have been variously defined and, as Michel Giraud writes above, there is terminological confusion.

What Do Douglas and Goldenberg Mean by *Ethnocentrism* and *Racism*?

In this second section, I consider what Douglas and Goldenberg write about ethnocentrism and racism, compared to the above definitions, and to each other. In *The Curse of Ham*, historian David M. Goldenberg considers the story of Noah and his sons in Genesis and its very long-term use as a justification of the terrible circumstances of Black slavery and racism. Goldenberg defines the Curse of Ham as “the assumed biblical justification for a curse of eternal slavery imposed on Black people, and Black people alone.”²³ He often refers to Lloyd Thompson’s *Romans and Blacks* (1989) in which Thompson asserts that classical Rome was ethnocentric but not racist. Thompson goes on to argue, “[Racism is evidenced by] reactions to an ideologically ascribed...social significance of a given set of somatic characteristics” but

²² Michel Giraud, “The Distracted Look: Ethnocentrism, Xenophobia or Racism?” *Dialectical Anthropology* 12 no. 4 (1987): 413-419, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29790251>.

²³ Goldenberg, 168.

ethnocentrism is “a natural and universally evidenced human response.”²⁴ Goldenberg writes “that the ancient world was not racist hinges on...acceptance of the definition of racism as a socially defined creation.”²⁵

In an analysis similar to that of both Thompson and Britannica, in his introductory section “The Question of Racism” Goldenberg writes, “Racism exists when social structures assign ‘inferior and unalterable roles and rights’ to a specific group.” He continues, there are “two crucial differences between racism and ethnocentrism: biology and socially embedded discrimination.” Goldenberg acknowledges that there are other definitions of racism, some consider “any kind of social discrimination to be racist. Not biological hierarchy, but any hierarchy defines racism...Still others would keep the biology and remove the social structures.”

²⁶ In the book’s concluding chapter, Goldenberg quotes theologian Gayraud Wilmore, “the difference between ethnocentrism and racism is ‘a self-justifying concomitant of economic, political and cultural domination and exploitation.’ Without it the seeds of racial prejudice will not germinate and take root.”²⁷

Goldenberg’s book is “about the ancient link between black skin color and slavery...how negative associations attached to the color black were played out on the stage of history, and how the connection between blackness and slavery became enshrined in the Curse of Ham.”²⁸ In his Conclusion, Goldenberg asserts, “In short, no negative evaluations of real Blacks (as opposed to

²⁴ Lloyd Thompson, *Romans and Blacks* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 5-8.

²⁵ Goldenberg, 9.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Goldenberg, 199.

²⁸ Goldenberg, 1-2.

imaginary literary constructs) were found either in biblical or post biblical sources. Race did not matter.”²⁹

In *The Curse of Ham*, Goldenberg carefully analyzes dozens of instances where the Bible includes blackness as a color, Black people, or geographic areas (such as Kush or Ethiopia) traditionally associated with dark skinned people. Sometimes, it seems that he gets carried away by enthusiasm for his thesis that race did not matter. For example, Goldenberg considers the story in Numbers 12:1-16 in which Moses’s siblings, Miriam and Aaron, speak against him for marrying a Kushite woman (some translations call her an Ethiopian woman).³⁰ God punishes Miriam (but not Aaron) by giving her a white skin disease (traditionally identified as leprosy), for which she is excluded from the camp for seven days. Goldenberg writes, “Many scholars became convinced of the Black or racist interpretation of Numbers because of the punishment of leprosy God inflicted on Miriam for speaking against her brother Moses...The ‘snow white’ leprosy is seen as an apt response to a racial slur about a black African.”³¹ After a detailed analysis, he asserts, “the interpretation of Num 12:1 that sees Miriam and Aaron deprecating black Africans is a product of modern assumptions read back into the Bible...There is no evidence here that biblical Israel saw black Africans in a negative light.”³² Goldenberg associates Moses’s new wife with Zipporah the Midianite (Exodus 2:21) and says that Miriam and Aaron were talking against Moses because he took a non-Israelite wife rather than because she was Black or African.³³ He also writes that the association of Kush with Midian “has become very

²⁹ Goldenberg, 196.

³⁰ Goldenberg, 26-29.

³¹ Goldenberg, 27.

³² Goldenberg, 28.

³³ Goldenberg, 29.

well accepted among modern-day biblicists.”³⁴ However, a footnote on that sentence leads to a half page long commentary in the end notes which includes, “To be sure not all modern biblical scholars agree that Kushite in Numbers means Midian.”³⁵ That is, although Goldenberg advances his strong opinion, he acknowledges that there are several ways of interpreting why Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses marrying a Kushite and there is no unanimity among biblical scholars as to which is right.

In a 2003 radio interview about *The Curse of Ham*, Goldenberg discusses this story in Numbers, asserting “in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, there is no anti-black sentiment, on the contrary there is a very positive attitude toward the black African.”³⁶ He ignores Miriam and Aaron’s opposition to their brother Moses’s wife (perhaps because it can be interpreted in a variety of ways) and passionately supports his assertion by saying that in Jewish literature of late antiquity and the rabbinic period, it was understood that Moses married a Black African and, as he says, “no one objected, no one cared, and everyone was fine with it.” That is, Goldenberg supports his view that there was no anti-Black sentiment in the Hebrew Bible (written about 1200 to 165 BCE) by saying that those who lived hundreds of years later, during late antiquity and the rabbinic period (about 100 CE to 600 CE), did not object to Moses marrying a Black African. This seems to be an instance of Goldenberg letting his enthusiasm move his argument beyond the case he has demonstrated.

An interesting aspect of Goldenberg’s argument is that he treats several of the concepts discussed in this paper as overlapping. Being a Kushite or a Midianite might be interpreted to

³⁴ Goldenberg, 28.

³⁵ Goldenberg, 229.

³⁶ Tavis Smiley, “‘The Curse of Ham’: Slavery and the Old Testament,” *National Public Radio*, 15 December 2003, audio 6:36, <https://www.npr.org/2003/12/15/1548811/the-curse-of-ham-slavery-and-the-old-testament>.

refer to a nation, ethnicity, race, or religion. In *Race, Ethnicity, and Nation*, Anthropology Professor Peter Wade writes that race, ethnicity, nation, and kinship are “overlapping and mutually informing domains.”³⁷ Wade continues, “Racism can become a ‘super-nationalism’ that plays on the existing themes of roots in ideas about national culture and evokes themes of genealogical roots and purity of blood, often expressed in aesthetic ideals of the body (for example, as nonblack).”³⁸ As will be seen below, Wade’s view on racism is one which seems to align with that of Douglas in *Stand Your Ground*.

That the concept of *nation* has been a touchy subject for a very long time is reflected in this dialogue from Shakespeare’s play *The Life of Henry the Fifth* from about 1599. It is set at the siege of Harfleur, where the English Captain Gower, Scottish Captain Jamy, Irish Captain Macmorris, and Welsh Captain Fluellen are in debate about the discipline of war (Act III, scene ii, lines 121-133),

Fluellen: Captain Macmorris, I think, look you, under your correction, there is not many of your nation-

Macmorris: Of my nation! What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal. What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?

Fluellen: Look you, if you take the matter otherwise than is meant, Captain Macmorris, peradventure I shall think you do not use me with that affability as in discretion you ought to use me, look you: being as good a man as yourself, both in the disciplines of war, and in the derivation of my birth, and in other particularities.³⁹

At the start of *Henry V*, the Chorus told us that the stage is too small to hold armies and that we in the audience must use our imaginations and “Into a thousand parts divide one man” (Prologue, line 24).⁴⁰ So we can interpret these debating captains as representing the men in King Henry’s

³⁷ Peter Wade, *Race, Ethnicity, and Nation: Perspectives from Kinship and Genetics* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 5.

³⁸ Wade, 5-6.

³⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Life of Henry the Fifth*, Edited by Sylvan Barnet, *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), 779.

⁴⁰ Shakespeare, 766.

army, with their different origins and accents, and perhaps even in their opinions about each other's nations.⁴¹

Coming back to Numbers 12 story and Miriam, it is surprising that her defiling “white as snow” skin is not mentioned in Goldenberg’s Chapter 6 “The Color of Health” which presents examples of both blackness and whiteness being associated with illness.⁴² Goldenberg is the only source I found in my research for this paper who presented both positive and negative views of both blackness and whiteness. Other sources presented blackness as potentially positive or negative depending on point of view, but whiteness is seemingly always associated with racism and White supremacy. While DiAngelo, as quoted above, seems most polarized in her opinions, Douglas discusses the complexity of the circumstances of whiteness, particularly for poor European immigrants, in her section on “The Construction of Whiteness.”⁴³

The “Index of Ancient Sources” in *The Curse of Ham* includes references to texts in twelve New Testament books;⁴⁴ However, surprisingly not mentioned is Romans 9 in which Paul reflects on what it means to be part of the people of Israel. The New International Version (NIV, dated 1978) translation uses the word *race*, seemingly in the modern sense, “I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Rom. 9:3-4, NIV). The King James Version (KJV, dated 1611) uses “my kinsmen,” and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, dated 1989) uses “my kindred” where the NIV uses *race*.

⁴¹ “Study Guide - Fluellen, Jamy, and MacMorris in Henry V - by William Shakespeare,” *Shmoop*, accessed 4 September 2021, <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/henry-v/fluellen-jamy-macmorris>.

⁴² Goldenberg, 93-94.

⁴³ Douglas, 34.

⁴⁴ Goldenberg, 422.

Historically, the word *nation* seems to have held many of the meanings that *race* does today. For example, in the Bible, *nation* is sometimes used to mean *extended descendants* (as in, “These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations,” Gen. 10:20, NIV), or something like *people who are not us* (as in, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” Matt. 28:19, NIV). The importance of the word *nation* is demonstrated by a search of the Bible Gateway website.⁴⁵ Search results show that the KJV used *nation* 438 times, while the NIV has 677 uses, and the NRSV has 790 uses. While this word usage data comes from a search of translated texts (with all the potential for error inherent in such a process), the concept of nation still seems to be well represented in the Bible. In summary, notions of groups, peoples, nations, and what we today call *race* seem to have been complex as early as biblical times. The truth of Goldenberg’s assertion that “Race did not matter” may depend on how *race* is interpreted or translated.

Unlike DiAngelo and Douglas, Goldenberg does not exclusively connect racism with pro-White, anti-Black social structures. For example, Goldenberg discusses the 1981 study of Veronika Görög-Karady of the Vili in the Congo in which she writes that Black people are the prototype and normal human condition. (This research may have identified the prejudice against albinos in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries that continues today.⁴⁶) Goldenberg writes, “In both light-skinned and dark-skinned societies ethnocentric-driven folktales saw the origin of ‘non-normal’ skin color in divine punishment for disobedience. Only

⁴⁵ Biblegateway, accessed 6 September 2021, <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.

⁴⁶ Mehdi Meddeb, “In the Democratic Republic of Congo, protecting and empowering children with albinism in schools,” *UNICEF*, 26 September 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/stories/democratic-republic-congo-protecting-and-empowering-albino-children-schools>.

the colors were reversed.”⁴⁷ In his Conclusion, Goldenberg proposes a universal bias for the somatic norm (physical characteristics accepted as normal in a group). He writes, “In our investigation of skin color as a signifier of a person...we found an ethnocentric partiality for the skin color of one’s own ethnic group.”⁴⁸ Later, Goldenberg writes of aesthetic preferences and responses to otherness, “Disparagement of black somatic features is not in and of itself racist. Only when a society’s internal structures are discriminatory, and its ideology justifies such discrimination can that society be considered racist. Otherwise, we are merely looking at ‘ethnocentric’ reactions to black otherness.” He argues, “Ethnocentrism is not tantamount to racism. The former recognizes physical reality, the latter orders that reality into a hierarchy of domination.”⁴⁹

In *The Curse of Ham*, Goldenberg presents ethnocentrism and racism as separate. He interprets ethnocentrism as a usually neutral preference for one’s own ethnic and somatic group. Racism, however, is negative and expressed in social structures that dominate and exploit other groups.

Theologian Kelly Brown Douglas’s *Stand Your Ground* focuses on “stand-your-ground culture and the religious canopies that have legitimated it.” She continues, “This stand-your-ground culture has produced and sustained slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crow, lynching and other forms of racialized violence against black bodies.”⁵⁰ Douglas asserts that America’s democracy was founded on a value of individual rights and freedom tied to racial (or blood) purity, based on the valorization of the Germanic tribes by the Roman historian Tacitus (c.

⁴⁷ Goldenberg, 110.

⁴⁸ Goldenberg, 196.

⁴⁹ Goldenberg, 198.

⁵⁰ Douglas, xiii.

56-120 CE), which was adopted by the American founding fathers. She writes, “Tacitus’s ethnological description spawned the construction of the Anglo-Saxon myth...it seized on Tacitus’s characterization of the ancient Germans as ‘free from taint,’ and it suggested that the superiority of their institutions was a result of their blood.”⁵¹ *Blood* as used by Douglas seems to be a stand-in term for *race*.

In contrast to Goldenberg, Douglas ties purity of blood and socially embedded discrimination to ethnology.⁵² Douglas describes the invention and construction of ethnicity in a way that is reminiscent of Claude Lévi-Strauss.⁵³ She refers to the article “The Invention of Ethnicity,” which says, “Ethnic groups in modern settings are constantly recreating themselves, and ethnicity is continuously being reinvented in response to changing realities both within the group and the host society.”⁵⁴ She sometimes uses the words *ethnocentric* and *ethnocentrism*⁵⁵ but also uses related terms that include race, such as *racial chauvinism*,⁵⁶ and *racial preferentialism*.⁵⁷ Although Douglas occasionally refers to brown people and people of color, her primary focus is Black versus White people. In her 2018 lecture to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Douglas says that “it is this oppositionality between whiteness and blackness that forms the basis of a white supremacist ideology.”⁵⁸ She quotes legal scholar Cheryl I. Harris who writes that the “American identity was facilitated by an oppositional definition of Black as

⁵¹ Douglas, 6.

⁵² Douglas 5-6.

⁵³ Douglas, 35.

⁵⁴ Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska et al., “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the USA,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 no. 1 (Fall 1992), 5, <https://eportfolios.macaulay.cuny.edu/napoli12/files/2012/01/Conzen-Invention-of-Ethnicity-excerpt.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Douglas, 11, 23, 50.

⁵⁶ Douglas, 23, 25, and 166.

⁵⁷ Douglas, 24.

⁵⁸ Kelly Brown Douglas, “Black Bodies and the Justice of God Kelly Brown Douglas,” *Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*, 27 February 2018, video, 26:57, <https://youtu.be/m0rYDQWb-M8>.

‘other.’”⁵⁹ Goldenberg supports this Black versus White differentiation in a less negative way when he writes of the sixteenth century origins of skin color being used to designate ethnic groups, “After England’s encounter with black Africans, white and black became the terminology for ‘self’ and ‘other.’”⁶⁰

Douglas asserts, “The English considered themselves the descendants of the Germanic tribes identified by Tacitus. They believed that those tribes were their Anglo-Saxon ancestors.”⁶¹ This understanding of Anglo-Saxon heritage may be based on a distortion of history. Mary Rambaran-Olm and Erik Wade recently wrote for *Smithsonian*, “scholars of medieval history have explained that the term Anglo-Saxon has a long history of misuse, is inaccurate and is generally used in a racist context.” Rambaran-Olm and Wade continue, “Between the 17th and 19th centuries, English historians were using the term as an ethnoracial identifier...During the era of British (and later American) imperialism and colonization, this racially charged meaning became the most prominent use of the term.”⁶²

In a section called “A Matter of Blood,” Douglas connects this English origin story to America in the person of one of the most famous founders, Benjamin Franklin, who in 1751 wrote an essay in favor of *Anglifying America*.⁶³ He wrote,

“The Number of purely white People in the World is proportionably very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new Comers) wholly so...the Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth. I could wish their Numbers were increased.”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 105 no. 8 (June 1993), 1742, https://harvardlawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/1993/06/1707-1791_Online.pdf.

⁶⁰ Goldenberg, 197.

⁶¹ Douglas, 7.

⁶² Mary Rambaran-Olm and Erik Wade, “The Many Myths of the Term ‘Anglo-Saxon:’ Two Medieval Scholars Tackle the Misuse of a Phrase that was Rarely Used by its Supposed Namesakes,” *Smithsonian* (14 July 2021), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/many-myths-term-anglo-saxon-180978169/>.

⁶³ Douglas, 16-17.

⁶⁴ Benjamin Franklin, “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind,” *National Archives* - Founders Online, accessed 6 September 2021, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0080>.

Douglas writes, “It was not now enough for a people to carry on Anglo-Saxon institutions. They also had to be carriers of Anglo-Saxon blood. In fact, the ability to build Anglo-Saxon institutions was a function of blood.”⁶⁵ Considering this assertion, I would be interested to know how Douglas would respond to Molotch saying that aspects of America’s 1777 Articles of Confederation were modeled on democratic mechanisms of organization of the indigenous Indian tribes.

In over fifty mentions of the word in *Stand Your Ground*, Douglas uses the word *blood* in two ways, both with a negative tone. As said above, she uses it to stand in for race, particularly when racists speak of the superiority or purity of blood. This is explicit when Douglas discusses Ralph Waldo Emerson when she writes, “With his romantic emphasis on the specialness of peoples, Emerson wonders if the unique traits are in the blood. He asks, ‘Is this power due to their blood, or to some other cause? Men hear gladly,’ he says, ‘of the power of blood or race.’” She continues, “Emerson’s discussion of the blood origins of racial traits reflected the ongoing interest in the origins of humankind that flourished simultaneously with the romantic movement.”⁶⁶ The other way Douglas uses *blood* is in a few references to the actual body fluid, either regular human blood, or the blood of Jesus on the cross (as in Douglas’s quote of womanist theologian Delores Williams, “I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and stuff...Jesus came for life and to show us something about life and living together and what life was all about.”).⁶⁷ Goldenberg does not use *blood* in this way - in fact, the word is not in the subject index of *The Curse of Ham*.

⁶⁵ Douglas, 18.

⁶⁶ Douglas, 19.

⁶⁷ Douglas, 186-187.

One of Douglas's themes is that in America, "The faith claims of the nation rest on the notion that Anglo-Saxons are the 'chosen' people of God. In this instance, as we have seen in our discussions, chosenness is connected to blood." She continues, "any suggestion that God's identification with a particular people is a matter of blood ruptures the distance between human beings and God."⁶⁸ Douglas rejects that claim of Anglo-Saxon *chosenness* when she writes, "God is not to be known by being identified with any particular people...That is, no one people can have an exclusive claim on God. In the end, the movement that is God's very identity is defined in terms of a deliverance from bondage into the freedom that is life."⁶⁹ Douglas's concept of chosenness feels similar to ethnocentrism, that is, a belief that one's own group is better. By rejecting chosenness connected to blood, Douglas seems to reject both racism and ethnocentrism.

What Difference Do These Definitions Make?

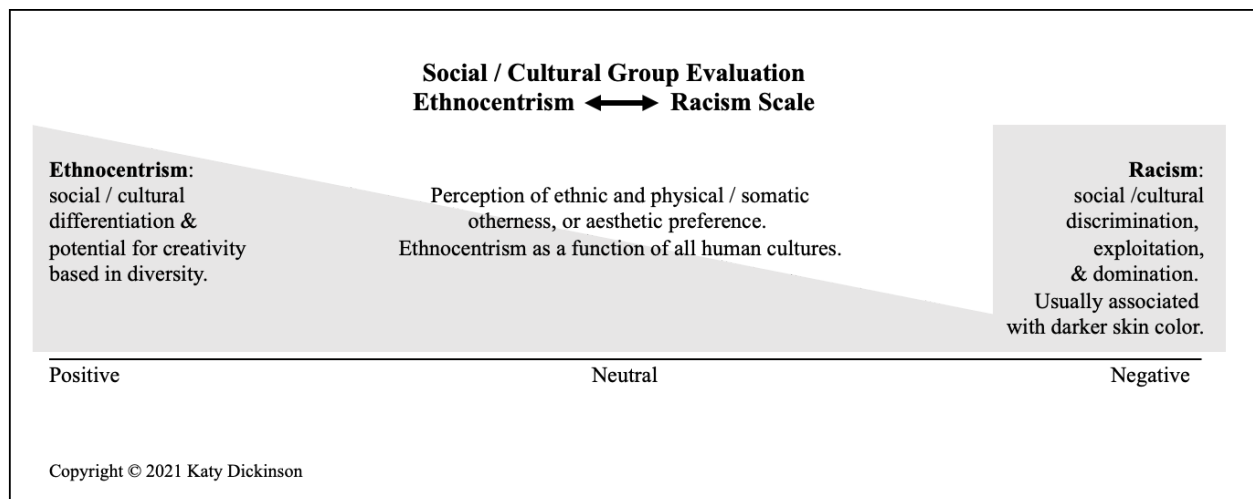
For this third section, after considering the opinions and assertions above, I created the following graphic of a social / cultural evaluation scale to summarize views of ethnocentrism and racism. In this chart, ethnocentrism can be thought of as in-group sociological preference, and racism as out-group derogation.⁷⁰ This graphic does not present all the views of every author discussed in this paper. It focuses on the opinions and valuations of Robert Wald Sussman, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Lloyd Thompson, and David M. Goldenberg. Other authors disagree. For example, Michel Giraud and Edward Said present ethnocentrism and racism as equivalent and write of them in similarly negative terms. Some authors say that biological / physical differences

⁶⁸ Douglas, 159.

⁶⁹ Douglas, 160.

⁷⁰ American Medical Colleges and Khan Academy, "Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism In Group and Out Group," *Khanacademymedicine* 2014, <https://youtu.be/HIXAeOnU520>.

are excluded from ethnocentrism, but others say the opposite. All the authors seem to agree that racism is negatively associated with physical differences, especially with darker skin color.



In this graphic, ethnocentrism and racism are presented as intersecting ends of one scale. Because opinions on racism are uniformly negative, it is shown as a shaded square. The views of ethnocentrism vary widely, so it is represented by a shaded right triangle. The shading is not data-driven but reflects the views presented above that ethnocentrism may be positive when expressed in social diversity and cultural creativity, or it can be neutral, or negatively expressed as racism. Racism is always negative because of its exploitation and domination of other peoples. The scale shows the shaded triangle and square overlapping, depicting that ethnocentrism is sometimes positive but other times is the same as racism. The neutral center is bisected by shading to reflect the possibility of a nondiscriminatory perception of ethnic or physical / somatic otherness. The scale answers my opening question, “Are *ethnocentrism* and *racism* different or the same?” In this scale, there are diverse ways of expressing cultural differentiation, different or the same depending on the degree of positivity or negativity.

In writing on race, racism, and ethnocentrism, Goldenberg, Douglas, and many others seemingly focus on Black versus White. Considering my personal experience in ministry as a Santa Clara County chaplain at Elmwood Jail, I observe that at least two-thirds of the inmates in my weekly classes are men of color, mostly Latino, plus a minority who are Black, Asian, or Pacific Islander or a mix of several racial or ethnic groups. Jeffrey F. Rosen, the Santa Clara County District Attorney, wrote in 2020, “We know that communities of color have been disproportionately housed in jails and prisons throughout the Country. We also know that our County’s defendant population is not reflective of the community, insofar as there is a persistent over-representation of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino people charged with crimes.”⁷¹ The assumption that racism mostly pertains to Black versus White may be more representative of the social circumstances in the American East and South rather than here in California, in the West where people of Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, and mixed race or ethnicity are a larger part of the population. It is interesting to consider how ethnocentrism and racism may be expressed differently when not just focused on Black and White. Being sensitive to cultural and social differences is important for jail chaplains engaging with and supporting prisoners, particularly to avoid being associated with one or another gang or power group.

I am sometimes able to bring songs into our jail classes. Recently, two of the popular songs among Elmwood Jail prisoners have been “We All Bleed the Same” by British-American-Nigerian Alex Boye,⁷² and “One World (We are One)” by IllumniNative and

⁷¹ Jeffrey F. Rosen, “Race and Prosecutions - 2020 Update,” Santa Clara County District Attorney’s Office, accessed 20 August 2021, <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/da/newsroom/newsreleases/Documents/2020NRDocs/Race%20and%20Prosecutions%202020%20Update.pdf>.

⁷² Alex Boye, “We All Bleed the Same (Healing America Edition),” *Alex Boye* 2016, <https://youtu.be/at5NcbvDKLc>.

Mag 7, set on the Pechanga Indian Reservation in Temecula, California.⁷³ A repeated refrain in “One World” is “It’s who you are. It’s who I am. We all bleed the same blood.” These songs of social unity expressed in blood seem more hopeful than the polarized racial rivalries presented by Goldenberg and Douglas. The songs represent a more positive point of view of blood that reminds me of Julian of Norwich’s visions in the fourteenth century. As Caroline Walker Bynum writes, “blood is to Julian neither substitute for debt owed nor sacrifice offered up...Flowing blood is the locus of life and joy. As Julian says explicitly, love is the answer. Blood is love.”⁷⁴

This paper has considered racism and ethnocentrism from many points of view and aspects, including blood, nation, kinship, and chosenness. By remembering Giraud’s “terminological confusion,” and prioritizing points of view from a broader spectrum of races than just Black and White, we may become more aware of the potential for creative differentiation in ethnocentrism. All too often, jail prisoners must pick a side, be in one gang or another for safety and mutual defense. We who are not incarcerated have the chance to consider a more complex scale of interpretation of cultural and social differences that permit a nuanced response. After reading the variety of views presented by the sources for this paper, I have come to hope that our society can learn from Edward Said and offer something more than just racist, imperialist, and ethnocentrist interpretations of other cultures. The way we define and internalize ethnocentrism and racism can give or take away choices in engaging others.

⁷³ Taboo, IllumiNative and Mag 7, “One World (We Are One) - Official Video,” *Taboo* 2019, <https://youtu.be/XHhbeRJudY4>.

⁷⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2007), 207.

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