José de San Martín, a prominent Latin American independence figure, observed in 1821 that in the future people native to the Americas would be called children and citizens of Peru, Peruvians, rather than “Indians” or natives (Santos de Quirós 1831). Discursively, at least, Latin American independence elites included all inhabitants in the emerging nations. The inclusionary rhetoric would not last and by the early 20th century most countries in the Americas formally excluded prospective immigrants and citizens by race or showed preference for European immigration. By then, the general sentiment among political elites in the hemisphere resembled that of then Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Navy Theodore Roosevelt’s view that “the whole civilization of the future owes a debt of gratitude … to that democratic polity which has kept the temperate zones of the new and the newest worlds a heritage for the white people” – even if “white” meant something different in their respective contexts. Democracies had seen the “race foe” and had kept out the dangerous aliens (Roosevelt 1897).

Yet Roosevelt’s discursive expression about who belongs in a democratic polity would not have been effective without organizations to implement it. The key point of this chapter is that, as an organization faced with the challenge of determining membership, the state has relied on, institutionalized, and legitimized ideas of race. Racial orders have, in turn, been shaped by official institutions and mechanisms of regulation and enforcement. The agenda is to systematically explore an explicit theorization of the relationship between political and racial orders. To that end, the following sections define political and racial orders, examine the state as a multi-level, variegated organization that encompasses a range of actors with disparate interests, and propose domains in which to examine the interconnectedness of political and racial orders. Connections among these orders are especially salient in the policy domain of immigration and nationality. The Americas is a fruitful region in which to observe these linkages because of the variation in regimes and types of racial orders over time.

**Why racism and politics?**

A rich literature describes how states made nationals of individuals they considered their own – whether or not these individuals lived within the relevant state’s borders (Choate 2008, Cook-Martín 2013, Fitzgerald 2009, Torpey 1998, Weber 1976). Imagining nations as deep horizontal comradeships was a common trope among political elites (Anderson 2006).
Yet the evidence shows that origins mattered a great deal in determining who could participate in that comradeship and on what terms. Choosing citizens and prospective citizens by perceived origins, has not been anomalous or exceptional, but rather the persistent trend, especially among major migrant receiving countries (Fitzgerald and Cook Martín 2014, Zolberg 2006). The selective impulse suggests the need for a sustained exploration of the relationship between the political orders in which states are embedded, and the ethnic orders prevalent especially since the advent of European colonial expansion and subsequent mass migration.

**Political and racial orders**

To understand the relationship between political and racial domains, it is useful to do some basic conceptual spadework. The following sections offer working definitions and theoretical perspectives on politics, states, ethnicity and race, the social fields in which these concepts play out, and the orders or configurations into which they crystallize. The conclusions reached are necessarily provisional, and not prescriptive, but suggestive of the analytic work to be done if we are to theorize the empirical relationship between state organizations and systems of social organization premised on ideologies of naturalized difference and sameness.

By politics I mean the exercise of influence to get one’s way (Dahl 2003, Jasper 2008; Lukes 2004). The players that vie to get their way in our analysis are organizational actors in the government, market and public spheres as well as individuals who engage in these spheres to maximize their life chances. From a Bourdieuan perspective, the “game” or competition happens on a field wherein the relationship between players has a particular quality and dynamic by virtue of who is there or may get their way (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). For example, in the field in which entry to and membership in a political jurisdiction are at stake, government bureaucrats from sending and receiving states, employers, domestic workers, prospective and actual migrants, migration industry actors, politicians, and policy makers vie to achieve their conflicting goals. The dynamic at point X in time affects what happens at point X + 1, but does not fully determine outcomes which are susceptible to contingent events and innovative actors.

Relations among social actors and organizations in a field can take on particular patterns that endure over repeated interactions primarily because of institutionalization – the process by which rules regulating interactions in a field become formalized. By “orders”, then, I mean the arrangement of social actors and institutions in a particular pattern by virtue of the influence they exert over each other, their ideological underpinnings, and the effects of these patterns in a given time and place (cf. Emirbayer and Desmond 2015, Hochshild et al. 2012). Political order refers to a relational pattern or configuration resulting from a struggle over the exercise of the legitimate means of violence in a particular jurisdiction. The dynamic underlying that pattern is a field in the Bourdieuan sense. A field is an arena of social struggle, orders are the resulting configurations or systems that take shape within it. The dynamics of a field shape these orders which can take on a life of their own. Who belongs in a city, for instance, may have historically been determined by existing city dwellers with different interests, potential citizens and their attributes or capabilities (e.g. could they act in defense of the city or could they bring other resources to bear?), and external threats. Making formal rules about the eligibility requirements of citizens and developing a body of legal interpretations of these rules gives social struggles around the determination of citizenship a particular shape which in turn affects future struggles over belonging.
In the Americas and elsewhere, political orders have varied by the relationship between ruling elites and “the people”. In Robert Dahl’s well-known scheme, political orders range on a spectrum from polyarchies to non-polyarchies depending on the extent to which they allow for open contestation by or inclusion of people outside the ruling elite (Dahl and Stinebrickner 2003). Contestation refers to citizens’ unimpaired opportunities to formulate their preferences and to signify their preferences for fellow citizens and the government (Dahl 1971, 2). Inclusiveness refers to “the proportion of the population entitled to participate on a more or less equal plane in controlling and contesting the conduct of the government” (Dahl 1971, 4). Liberal democracies like the United States and Canada are presumed to allow political subjects within the national territory to contest or influence government decisions. The government is conceptualized as by and for the people. Non-polyarchies or authoritarian regimes like those of Argentina in the 1930s or late 1970s may purport to protect the nation but do not include citizens in the political process and repress expressions of contestation. At a midpoint on this spectrum are regimes that purport to rule on behalf of the people (perhaps to protect them from exploitative elites) through corporatist organizations and allow for little or no contestation outside authorized means like those organizations. When it comes to ethnoracial discrimination, a conventional expectation is that polyarchies are inclusive and that non-polyarchies are comparatively more discriminatory and exclusive. Empirically that has not been the case, but for the purposes of this essay, what matters is that political orders must determine who is an actual or eligible member of the political community. Who are “the people”?

Whatever the type of political order, relies on states to be effective in the world. The state can be thought of as an organization that exercises the legitimate means of violence over a political jurisdiction (Mann 1993). It is the organization that will execute the will of political leaders over a territory and its people. The state is not only a territorial organization, however, but also a membership association (Brubaker 1992, 22–23). One of its key roles is to determine who belongs, to vet claims to membership, and to monitor and enforce membership rules.

The critical domain of membership determination and oversight reveals an important characteristic of state institutions and organizations. Rules and schema of governance are not implemented mechanistically or unilaterally in a top-down manner. The state as an organization has, to borrow Morgan and Orloff’s imagery, many hands that work at micro, meso, and macro levels (Morgan and Orloff 2017). Moreover, there is a back and forth between state actors and the governed: states exert governance, people respond, states respond to people’s reactions, and so on (Bayat 2013, Chatterjee 2004).

Consider the sphere of immigration and nationality policy. In it, legislative and/or executive actors devise rules for entry and permanence as well as for citizenship in contexts of national and international politics. Judiciary actors may adjudicate among interpretations of these rules. Ministries or departments may be charged with implementing these rules, a responsibility which may in turn be delegated to smaller organizational subunits. These subunits devise administrative rules or guidelines about how to implement often vague charges. Ministries and subunits compete for scarce resources and recognition by high level decision-makers or simply against peers in other administrative entities. Implementers may receive a charge that cannot be carried out with the personnel or resources allocated. Front line bureaucratic actors who deal directly with people affected by immigration and nationality rules have discretion that may be affected by all of the factors named, as well as their own social prejudices and orientations. In turn, civil actors respond to governance efforts by means of workarounds, violations of legal norms, or fraud. Bureaucrats respond to these evasive efforts with new initiatives, or by relaxing enforcement of existing initiatives. In this iterative process, interactions at a given point in time are affected by past exchanges and affect future ones.
Political orders and states change over time in levels of legitimacy and infrastructural power. Typically, state-making elites and bureaucrats assert that they have the legitimate right to exercise their functions until such claims become a natural and taken for granted fact of life. In addition, state organizations accrue over time the practical means to exercise authority over a territorial jurisdiction and its inhabitants. In the domain of population governance, for instance, states have developed ways to count and individuate people, certify their “identities” through paperwork, surveil and control the execution of people’s obligations toward the state, and manage their movement across borders (Cook-Martín 2008, Torpey 1998).

Whatever the combination of inclusiveness and openness to contestation that define a particular political order, it faces the challenge of determining the subjects of its governance. Historically, states have determined who is to be governed by examining a range of behavioral, religious, and moral attributes. Especially in the age of nation-states and mass migration – where the nationalist presumption has been that every individual belongs to a state and, preferably, inhabits its territory – ethnicity, and in particular, race, has been a widely used means of determining the relationship of states to actual or prospective subjects. For instance, ethnic selectivity has operated within national borders to determine who has access to public goods (Fox 2012). The policies of major immigrant receiving countries during the 19th and first half of the 20th century – Argentina, Australia, Canada, Cuba, and the United States, among others – used ethnicity to show preference toward or discrimination against prospective immigrants and citizens. Even states with low levels of immigration such as Mexico selected among prospective immigrants by race (Fitzgerald and Cook Martín 2014). After World War II, states have also acted to create a deracialized order through civil rights offices, deracialization of immigration and nationality policies, and affirmative action among other domains. The following section examines more closely how ideas about and institutionalizations of race have interacted in the determination of subjecthood.

Racial orders

Ideas about ethnicity and race have been key means of determining eligibility for membership in a range of political orders. Analytically, race can be conceptualized as a special case of ethnicity. If ethnicity is a long-standing and ubiquitous mode of social classification by people’s perceived and felt origins, race and nation are relatively modern categories linked to the emergence of capitalism and colonial forms of exploitation in particular contexts. In Weberian terms, ethnicity and its special cases of race and nation are ways of effecting closure around valued material and symbolic resources (Stone 1995). By “special” I mean that race and nation capture phenomena with particular historical characteristics and outcomes that merit distinct consideration. Racism is an ideology of hierarchically categorizing humans into immutable groups – typically by phenotype – as a justification for the unequal distribution of resources and treatment (see Fields and Fields 2014). Immutability implies the mistaken belief that membership in a racial category cannot be changed because it is rooted in biology or nature. The assumption of immutability distinguishes the idea of race, and the proto-racisms discussed below, as a special case of ethnicity.

Race as a way of distinguishing among humans is a relatively modern construct institutionalized by governments and legitimated by science. Counting people and sorting them into categories has been a key feature of modern state-making. Population statistics enumerate inhabitants based on governance goals – for instance, institutionalizing racial domination in the case of the United States prior to 1965 or the redistribution of public goods – and/or on the
perception that modernity calls for counting. In the Americas and elsewhere, classifying people by ethnoracial categories has been common (Loveman 2014). In the United States, the institutionalization of ethnoracial categories and their legitimation by science and by the implication of the state was central to legal racial domination (Marks 1995). As Loveman (2014) notes, while Latin American countries did not create an architecture to institutionalize legal racial domination as in the United States, they did engage in some form of ethnoracial classification. Sometimes countries engaged in the development of such systems for purposes of appearing modern (modern nations must have censuses) and sometimes with redistributive ends (public goods are to be distributed equitably to underprivileged categories of people).

The modernity of race as a construct does not mean, however, that it came out of the blue. There were precursors to the modern notion of race dating to antiquity (Dikötter 2015, ix). A notion from past proto-racisms that resonates with contemporary racisms is that belonging to a racial category is unchangeable (FitzGerald 2017, Isaac 2006). Racial categories that became prevalent after the mid-19th century resonated with proto-racist ideas. Still, the implication of states and science in forging, consolidating, and institutionalizing modern racisms makes these ideologies distinct from their precursors.

A variant that emerged in the late 19th century and remained in effect into the 1940s, scientific racism viewed biological origins, among other axes of distinction, as a means of social categorization. Scientists in this period inferred social differences from visible expressions of biological variation even if mechanisms of heredity were largely a black box for anything other than Mendelian traits wherein genotype and phenotype are strongly correlated. For instance, eugenicists in the first four decades of the 20th century filled in gaps in their knowledge of heritability mechanisms with either the logic of how mendelian traits are expressed or with common sense notions of heredity—for example, from animal husbandry. They had no clear understanding of how complex traits were inherited and certainly not of additive and interactive genetic effects. If positive and negative behavioral and moral traits could be inherited like eye color or height, and these traits could be grouped with bodily appearance, then it was a small step to inferring these complex traits from categorical group membership. Scientists and health professionals expressed and promulgated these notions authoritatively and policymakers conferred on them official recognition, especially when science reinforced existing racial classification systems.

Since World War II, the idea that race has a biological reality has been largely discredited by biologists and anthropologists. Yet the racial logic of deeply rooted cultural difference persists in institutions and in spaces where state agents have discretion. The advent of genomics, especially the massive amounts of data and studies generated over the last decade, has also contributed to a resurgence of claims that race does indeed have a biological reality (e.g. Reich 2018). To be clear, these claims do not deploy, and explicitly reject, the racist rhetoric of one putative group’s superiority over others as was the case in the age of eugenics. However, given the power of institutionalized racial categorizations and easy conflations of social categories and populations defined by shared genetic variations, there is at least a potential for the return to a scientific racism that is progressively minded but exclusionary in effects. I take up this point again in the conclusion.

Race in the Americas

An analysis of race across the Americas suggests that this idea of how to parse humanity is characteristic of (though not exclusive to) the region, its colonization, and exploitation. While there are ancient precursors to the idea of race as deployed in racism, some authors
argue that it emerged in its modern form in the Americas (Isaac 2006, Quijano 2000, 534). The encounter of Europeans with indigenous populations and the forced movement of Afro-origin slaves to the hemisphere provided the backdrop to ideologies that legitimated the ranking of people by perceived natural and biological differences and into powerful categories. Those at the top of the hierarchy – primarily ruling liberal elites in the early independence period – assigned desirable qualities and capacities to those with whom they shared the top rungs and less desirable ones to those on the bottom ones. In the Americas, European-identified elites consistently inferred moral and civic capacities from categorical membership which was in turn inferred from phenotype.

Racial orders are configurations of social actors and institutions which result from a struggle to sort people into hierarchically arranged categories by perceived origins. Social actors misperceive these categories as natural and relatively unchanging. Basic historical knowledge of how racial categories have been used in struggles over who could be a member of the polity and who could rule suggest that the racial order is a separate configuration within the political order. While it is true that *demos* have since antiquity been interpreted through the lens of *ethnos*, the historical particularity of race as an idea, and its legitimation by states and science call for special consideration. Moreover, racial orders span multiple fields of symbolic and material struggle – another reason to avoid the reduction of such orders to epiphenomena of the political. If political and racial orders are distinct, but closely linked, what have been the specific connections among them?

**Boundaries or hierarchies?**

Current conceptual debates among sociologists of race and ethnicity are hampered by a theoretically unproductive contraposition of analytic approaches that stress hierarchy and those that emphasize boundaries. Rogers Brubaker and Andreas Wimmer are often credited with (or accused of, depending on standpoint) drawing attention to how boundaries are constructed through social interaction and away from groups as things in the world (Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov 2004, Brubaker 2004, Wimmer 2008a, 2008b). Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) characterize scholars in this camp as “cognivists” – a designation which obscures the extent to which institutions and history play a role in their view of racial ideology formation (e.g. Loveman, 2014). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997), and Omi and Winant (Omi and Winant 2014), are cast in the role of stressing “hierarchy”: that racial categories have historically been ranked with the purpose of including some and excluding others from access to resources (Omi and Winant 2014:106 ff.). Scholars in this camp are likely to underscore the historical particularity of race in the Americas, and to show how racial hierarchies are entwined with political, particularly state struggles.

A comprehensive understanding of racial and political orders requires both approaches. Understanding the formation of ethnic and racial categories calls for analytic attention to the bounds of categories, their negotiation and contestation in different settings, as well as their permeability. How racial categories have been used in mundane encounters and/or for purposes of determining access to resources and of governance suggests the hierarchical dimension is no less important and goes a long way to explaining the hardness or immutability of categories. Conceptually, we need a focus on boundaries to understand the genesis, persistence, and mutability of social categories, not to be confused analytically with groups of actual people, and an understanding of how the hierarchical arrangement of categories has excluded people from resources in a political community (Brubaker 2004). Scholars of Latin American history have already moved in this direction (see Pérez Vejo 2015, Yankelevich 2015).
An approach that assumes a range of classificatory phenomena at different levels would shift attention to linkages between racial and political orders by examining how states adopt racial categories prevalent among intellectual and political elites and/or advanced by science. Moreover, if the idea of race has provided a means of determining membership in the polity, states have also served a role for racial orders: they institutionalize ideas about biological differences, enforce boundaries among social categories, and at times redistribute resources accordingly. In the next section, I sketch the contours of political and racial orders in the Americas over the long run and illustrate how these orders were linked by scientific cultural entrepreneurs before and after World War II.

The interconnection of orders in the Americas

The independence movements that began in the late 18th century with the United States and extended throughout the Americas resulted in the establishment of some form of polyarchic configuration in most of the newly formed republics – mostly with a liberal flavor. Political orders in this country oscillated between polyarchy and non-polyarchy in the decades after independence. Most of the newly independent republics looked to the United States, but also to France and Spain (e.g. the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the Constitución de Cádiz) for constitutional models as well as for other accoutrements of modern nationhood. Many of the republics faced the issue of populating and protecting from imperial threats vast territories.

Liberal elites undertook the work of creating extractive, military, educational and social institutions through which to make state organizations and to advance ideas of nationhood among inhabitants of national territories. As Miguel Centeno and others have demonstrated, the “wars make states” model that has been used to explain the rise of European states does not work well in Iberian America (Centeno 2002: Centeno and Ferraro 2013). Weak as states may have been south of the United States, they did adopt models from other latitudes and grew state capacity in particular domains like population and migration control (Cook-Martín 2008).

Political orders across national jurisdictions have faced the challenge of determining who its members were and could be. Pronouncements by independence leaders, constitutions, and immigration and nationality policies reveal a range of criteria for determining who could belong to the political community, and, by implication if not explicit statement, who could not. Religion, nationality, moral character and socioeconomic characteristics were among some of the most commonly cited criteria in constitutions of the region.\(^5\)

Ethnicity and race figured prominently in institutional texts, but especially in immigration and nationality policy. In the early independence period, the United States and Haiti were on one end of the spectrum with explicit racial preferences and exclusions, though for very different reasons. The United States constitution defined slaves as only counting for three-fifths of free (white) persons for purposes of determining electoral apportionment and restricted naturalization to free whites (1790 Uniform Rule of Naturalization, 1 Stat. 103, Sec. 1). The Act of Feb, 28, 1804 (ch. 10, 2 Stat. 205) restricted black immigration. Haiti was exceptional in giving preference to any black person or to Amerindians who came to Haiti, and in banning citizenship for whites unless they were already Haitians.\(^6\) Some form of preference for the naturalization of people of African descent remained until 1987. Ethnic selection in Haiti’s nationality and immigration policies, however, did not come from a sense of racial superiority. Rather Haitian leaders intended to secure the gains of an unprecedented and successful slave rebellion against French oppressors and to assert sovereignty in the face of European and U.S. hostility (C.L.R. James 1963).
On the other end of the spectrum, early Latin American liberal leaders dismantled colonial racial distinctions in formal law. Most countries in Latin America also banned slavery at or shortly following independence (Andrews 2004, 57). Leaders of newly independent Latin American republics viewed nationality as the bases for political membership. South American independence leader Simón Bolívar extolled the “sovereignty of the people, the division of powers, civil liberty, the proscription against slavery, the abolition of monarchy and privileged classes” (Bolívar 2003, 40). In his view, liberal republicanism and slavery could not coexist: “Can there be slavery where equality reigns? Such a contradiction would demean not so much our sense of justice as our sense of reason” (Bolívar 2003, 62). The Venezuelan Constitution of 1811, heavily influenced by Bolívar, abolished slave trade and ownership.\(^7\)

Post-independence liberal elites, including South American independence hero José de San Martín, strongly opposed the ethnic categorizations on which the Spanish Crown had built its extractive policy towards the colonies. Like Bolívar, San Martín saw the extraction of tribute from “Indians or natives” as a shameful demonstration of tyranny by the Spanish government, which went against the rights of reason and justice (e.g. San Martín, Supreme Decree of August 27, 1821). Even if Creole elites continued to discriminate against the indigenous, black, and mixed populations in practice, they discursively sought to include their entire populations in the construction of the nation. An exception is in the treatment of Spaniards, who were for a time banned from nationality in a number of Latin American countries who had gained independence from Spain and worried about allowing a constituency of nationals who would support former imperial rulers.

Once the threat of a return to Spanish rule subsided, however, Latin American liberal elites restricted any meaningful political participation by indigenous or black populations. Racial distinctions became important in official domains like national censuses. Loveman (2014) has shown how Creole elites in Latin America initially renounced colonial racial categories in efforts to construct independent nations, only to recover these categories when trying to enumerate like other modern countries. Elites who aspired to whiteness began to promote ethnic selectivity in immigration law soon after independence. Indeed, most countries in the Americas began negative ethnic discriminations in their immigration policies after the United States introduced restrictions on Asian labor in 1856, a full ban on “coolie trade” in 1862, and outright Chinese labor exclusion in 1882. By 1905, seventeen Latin American countries had adopted racialized preferences or exclusions in their immigration policies.

FitzGerald and Cook-Martín (2014) have examined the close link between liberal and populist political orders and racism, but the key point here is that by the 20th century political orders had converged on race as fundamental means of assessing the suitability of prospects for full membership or for entry as immigrants. A large body of historical work shows how the racial conceptions of political elites and policymakers were expressed in a number of policy domains (Hsu 2000, McKeown 2008, Ngai 2014, Putnam 2013). This work suggests the need to carefully trace the connection among policymakers, the science on which they relied to legitimate notions about race, heredity, and the moral worth of actual and prospective citizens and immigrants.

By way of illustration, the corpus of literature on eugenics as well as new archival research on immigration and nationality policy formation in the Americas may throw light on the interstitial or connective role of scientific experts and especially advocates. Such actors linked political and racial orders by fashioning biologically distinguishable categories of people, the hierarchical arrangement of which could be justified on authoritative scientific grounds. Policy makers and state bureaucrats were eager to adopt scientifically informed
means of constituting populations and these ambassadors of science provided legitimacy and acceptable justifications. The archives contain many examples of scientific ambassadors who were interstitial actors, bridging state imperatives of distinguishing and governing actual and prospective members. Before World War II, the role of these actors was to advance scientific rationales for a racial hierarchy to which policies should adjust. After World War II, a number of key scientific actors played a key role in dismantling scientific legitimations for racist systems of social classification.

**Directions for future research**

The central claim advanced in this chapter has been that the state – as a complex organization that operates at multiple levels and encompasses a range of actors with disparate interests – has relied on and institutionalized ideas of race to determine who could be a political subject. Across policy domains – from migration and membership, to population enumeration, to health and welfare – race has been a key notion that allowed state actors to determine the position of individuals in a polity. The relationship between racial and political orders has not received sustained theoretical attention or has become mired in debates about the relative importance of boundaries or hierarchical arrangements of racial categories. Scholars who cluster around competing claims have much to teach us about the analytical importance of understanding how people make boundaries and how the categories created in social interaction become institutionalized and used for political purposes. A focus on the linkages among political and racial orders and, specifically, of interstitial organizations and actors does not reconcile these positions. It is instead a strategy to recognize the importance of both at different analytical moments and the involvement of social and other scientists in the very object of study.

The type of approach suggested in this chapter has important analytical, policy, and ethical implications. One important analytical takeaway is that the relationship between racial and political orders may be opaque to those of us embedded within them. These relations have become so naturalized and taken for granted that it is difficult to see, much less analyze them. Paying close attention to the categories advanced in the work of experts, in public discourse, and in state practices is a starting point. Identifying the criteria by which human beings are distinguished and sorted for the purposes of resource allocation or distribution is a step in understanding how categories are arranged into hierarchies. Identifying non-state actors that link the political and racial orders is yet another important step to throw light on otherwise unclear mechanisms.

In the realm of contemporary population and especially migration governance, the absence of explicitly racial criteria for sorting actual or potential immigrants is a serious analytic challenge. It is a challenge to uncover, catalogue, and explain categorical distinctions mediated through ostensibly neutral language (sometimes even adopting the language of public good), and/or operating in official spaces less visible to public and scholarly scrutiny and in which bureaucratic discretion creates an opening for all manner of prejudices and discrimination. For instance, immigration policies in many western countries are facially neutral but may disproportionately affect people of a particular origin. The actions and logic of bureaucrats who adjudicate entry or citizenship are often hidden from public scrutiny.

Another challenge is how new and complex knowledge about human genetic variation shapes ideas about racial categories and hierarchies. The state of the art clearly demonstrates that humans are more similar as a species than any other primate (e.g. Conley and Fletcher 2017; Marks 1995). Yet scholars, policymakers, and the public have fixated on our differences. These differences,
some of them significant from a health perspective, tend to cluster in populations of different geographic regions. The discursive move of conflating these regional “populations” – defined by biologists along very specific dimensions of interest – and “races” – defined in a long and messy historical process of state and nation making – is imperceptible but underlies the reemergence of the argument that there are “real races”. “Races” are real in their consequences because people think they are real, to draw on Thomas and Swain’s sociological maxim (Thomas and Dorothy Swaine 1928). They are not real as biological phenomena. Yet the discursive conflation of “race” and “populations” in the work of experts can have serious policy consequences, such as associating complex negative traits with ethnoracial categories particular to a specific political context rather than regional populations. In the domain of biomedical research, Epstein (2008) has shown that even well-intentioned policies of inclusion in biomedical research can have unanticipated and sometimes negative consequences. The unexpected challenges of analyzing linkages between political and racial fields are more relevant than ever. How are policy makers understanding very complex genetic science and to what uses will they put such knowledge in governance and with what unanticipated consequences?

The stakes in understanding connections among political and racial orders are high, both analytically and practically. Future work should strive to make advances in three areas. First, scholars may want to deepen historical research on the role of interstitial actors both for the sake of understanding the empirical pattern, and also to see if this suggests dynamics to which we should be alert in contemporary contexts. Second, analysts should focus on bureaucratic spaces in which ideas of race result in categorizations and hierarchies for the purposes of allocating material and symbolic resources. To the extent that bureaucratic spaces are inaccessible to social scientific scrutiny, such efforts will require creative methodological approaches. Finally, social scientists should move beyond condemnations of spurious claims made about the biological bases of race to understand the science of contemporary genomics, its implications, and the role of genomic experts who span social, economic, and political fields.

Notes

1 By regime I mean “basic patterns in the organization, exercise, and transfer of government decision-making power” (Higley and Burton 1989, 18). As noted below, I follow Dahl in distinguishing regimes by the combination of contestation and inclusion which they express.

2 On migration industries see Hernandez-Leon (2013) and Andersson (2014).

3 The many hands and levels of the state are illustrated in a number of studies of immigration and nationality bureaucracies and their interactions with immigrants and would-be citizens. Anthropologist Anna Tuckett (2018) has demonstrated how street-level bureaucrats in Italy make law in their interactions with immigrants in search of a legal status. Historian Deborah Kang (2017) has meticulously documented how US immigration officers have used administrative discretion at the micro level that then became national policy. My own work shows how Latin Americans seeking an ancestral homeland state nationality in Europe navigate discretionary spaces managed by bureaucrats who make decisions about nationality (Cook-Martín, 2013).

4 In this chapter, race refers to an idea that varies, yet preserves common features across contexts. It does not refer to biological differences across groups. For a useful overview of how race and ethnicity have been conceptualized across Latin America, see Wade (2010, 4–23). The definitional work done here is not without its politics or effects on the racial field of which it is a part. Still, it seems heuristically and theoretically useful to maintain some analytical distance from race as an idea.

5 Preliminary analysis by the author of positive preferences and negative discriminations in constitutional texts of the Americas between 1804 and 1999.


7 Although Bolívar was not unprejudiced, especially against so-called mulattoes (Helg, 2003).
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