RE-THINKING RACIALIZATION

The Analytical Limits of Racialization

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Abstract

This paper seeks to scrutinize the most recent definition of racialization, as proposed by Adam Hochman, and interrogate its utility as a productive analytic for social scientists. Due to theoretical conflations between race and racism, and analytical conflations of groupness and category, racialization functions as a tautological descriptive rather than an agenda-setting theoretical framework for scholars studying race. The most recent definition of the concept cannot, and does not try to, account for a mechanism for the process of racialization. Such an accounting is a necessary component of any conceptualization that aims to help identify the origins of racialization. Second, in the absence of locating an agent or mechanism, the concept is tautologized: racialization, with an inability to locate a mechanism, offers itself up as the mechanism. Third, this tautologizing leads to a profound conflation of racialization offered as both a descriptive and a causal concept. Not only does this conflation halt the analytic capacity of the term as it applies to social scientific uses, but this conflation proves harmful for the anti-realist agenda as proposed by Hochman. By conflating analyses of causality with description, the latest definition of racialization unknowingly countersigns a uniquely American ideological conception of race; that is, the latest definition allows a description of the appearance of race to stand in for an explanation for race.

Keywords: Racialization, Racialization Theory, Racial Formation, Race Anti-realism, Racial Essentialism

INTRODUCTION

The term racialization has long rattled the array of disciplines whose shared object of study is race. While the term has faced both criticism and praise, it continues to inspire new efforts and attempts at clarification. In the essay "Racialization: A Defense of the Concept," scholar Adam Hochman (2019) proposes the latest definition and defense of racialization that attempts to stabilize the contested ground on which the term has often been used to explain the increased discrimination against individuals who have become reified as members of a race. Hochman is explicit that his concept of racialization is meant to support a normative project that advances an "anti-realist" agenda: an agenda that understands race to be falsely constructed in both the biological and social

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constructionist sense, but that nevertheless can articulate the predicament faced by *racialized groups*, groups who are racially reified and face racial discrimination as a result.

This paper interrogates the utility of racialization as a useful analytic for social scientists, and especially as an analytic that can contribute to the anti-realist agenda as imagined by Hochman. In the remainder of the paper I center Hochman's latest conceptualization to position my response against his most recent attempt to definitively salvage the racialization concept from past criticisms. This paper argues that due to several analytical and theoretical conflations, the latest definition cannot advance a theoretical agenda for scholars studying race and racism. The proposed definition conflates racialization as both a descriptive concept and a causal mechanism for increased racial discrimination. If left unaddressed this conflation constrains the ability of social scientists to aptly apply the term to their research agendas since it muddles whether instances of racialization should be classified as empirical units of analysis or whether these instances should simply be considered units of observation—an essential clarification for theoretical advance. The definition's analytical fuzziness is eclipsed only by the fact that the descriptive capacity of the new definition fails to engage in the historical specificities of racism. Two constitutive components of Hochman's new definition of racialization—his elaboration of race versus racism, and the idea of the racialized group—rely on abstracted notions of race that fail to scrutinize the historically contingent conditions in which race originates: race cannot be treated as an ahistorical mechanism of social division; rather, it must be analyzed as a technology of social control and a category that developed out of the constraints and imperatives of specific social relations. Despite Hochman's commendable efforts to move the anti-realist agenda research program forward, several clarifications and distinctions are in order before the term can fulfill this promise.

RACIALIZATION AS A CONTESTED CONCEPT

While the use of the term racialization is abundant across fields of race scholarship, the merits of racialization as theory have long been contested. Karim Murji and John Solomos edited a volume dedicated to the topic in which they acknowledged the "confusion about what exactly is meant by racialization in every instance where it is used, and what is being claimed in explanatory terms," and how it is even "sometimes made to stand as an explanation itself rather than being applied vigorously" (2005, p. 2). Scholars have critiqued the theory on varying conceptual and definitional grounds: some scholars contend that the term is liable to obscure the relationship between race and racism (Goldberg 2005; Rattansi 2005); others express that the concept cannot disentangle the multiple factors involved in processes of race-making, and moreover that the concept cannot locate the agents or *racializers* who instigate the processes of racialization (Fields 2001, 2014; Goldberg 2005; Gonzalez-Sobrino and Goss, 2019; Rattansi 2005). Rohit Barot and John Bird subject the concept to rigorous critique in their piece, "Racialization: the genealogy and critique of the concept" (2001). Marrying an historical overview of the word's etymology with an overview of the concept as a sociological analytic, the authors ultimately argue that the diffuse definitions and implications of the concept have not contributed to the "enormous conceptual armamentarium in sociology to write and talk about issues of race and ethnicity" (Barot and Bird, 2001, p. 616). Given the contested meaning and understanding of the term racialization, scholars have proposed various research agendas and orientations that could better unpack these processes (Gans 2017; Gonzlez-Sobrino and Goss, 2019; Omi and Winant, 2015; Saperstein et al., 2013).

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It is in this particular context that Hochman (2019) advances a normative and stipulative definition of racialization, claiming that when the concept is defined on his terms, the critiques lodged against the concept are ineffective. Here Hochman is orienting his argument toward the body of work that critiques the concept at the theoretical level, rather than at the empirical. His concerns in defining racialization are not with the variance in how the term has been applied, but rather with the way that the term has been conceptualized[1]. His definition reads as follows:

> I define racialization as the process through which groups come to be understood as major biological entities and human lineages, formed due to reproductive isolation, in which membership is transmitted through biological descent. When racialization is defined in this way, the criticisms of the concept miss their target (Hochman 2019, p. 1246).

His project of defining racialization, he states, is motivated by his anti-realist position on race—that race is ultimately a pseudo-biological category that fails to refer to anything in the real world, or to any actual biological difference between people (Hochman 2017, 2019). He argues that his normative definition of racialization can serve scholars on two grounds: first, the concept accounts for the "process through which a group is understood to constitute a race," and as a result produces *racialized groups* which are "very much real,"[2] and second, the concept is politically useful "as it offers a way for groups that have been understood and treated as inferior 'races' to assert and defend themselves collectively" (2019, pp. 1248, 1245-1246). Hochman (2017, 2019) maintains that racialization by his definition can be a useful resource for scholars who accept the thrust of social constructionist arguments about race—that race has no grounding in biological truth and is a category insofar as it has been produced in the social realm—while maintaining a critical distance so as not to reify race as a transhistorical category.[3]

Hochman contrasts his definition of racialization to Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (2015) theorizations. In their project, Omi and Winant analyze how particular people acquire association with racial categories over time. For them, racial formation "refer[s] to the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings." (2015, p. 61). They define racialization in the same passage as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 61). Hochman (2019) argues that under his definition, racialization denotes not the process that leads a group to be labeled a race, but rather accounts for "the process through which a group is *understood to constitute a race*," and as such rises to the anti-realist's commitment by not reifying race (p. 1248, emphasis in original). Hochman seeks to make a distinction between a group that *is* thought of as racial in the sense of a pseudo-biological grouping—albeit one that fails to refer to any real biological difference—with a socially ontological character, and a group that is *racialized* in the sense that the consequences of such a grouping are real, but that the groupness itself is organized on biologically and socially illusionary grounds. This distinction, he argues, is the difference between Omi and Winant's use of racialization as a formulation that reifies, or believes in some ontology of race—even if only social—and his position, which takes as its focus the predicament of *racialized groups*, a reference to an illusionary condition without any socially or biologically ontologized referent that nonetheless can explain the discrimination faced by groups.

There is a prominent similarity, though, between Hochman's definition and Omi and Winant's formulation in that both their accounts hinge on understanding racialization as "a process." What is left unclear in these articulations is how, when, by whom, and

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why exactly particular processes of racialization are instigated. Delineating the causal mechanisms and agentic forces that drive racial group formation processes is key to the analytical capacity of racialization, especially if the term is to be productively applied to social science research. In the newest definition of racialization advanced by Hochman, there remains a temporal conflation and causal obfuscation of the group-formation process: are groups formed, then racialized, or are groups formed on account of shared racial characteristics? If the latter, what bestows on the group a cohesive racial character that can inform its groupness? The issue with this lapse is not simply a matter of "asking too much of the concept," as Hochman argues; rather, the definition of racialization as most recently advanced conflates the analytical distinction between racialization as a mechanism for an outcome and racialization as descriptive of an outcome. This conflation halts the efficacy of the term for scholars wishing to use it to study the increased importance of race and racism today: without clarification as to whether this new definition of racialization is productive because of its ability to describe a phenomenon or because of its capacity to explain the causality of a phenomenon, the term remains troublesome and theoretically unproductive.

The following section of this paper engages with the key elements of Hochman's (2019) definition. First, I summarize Hochman's explication of race and subject it to a more expanded critique using the work of historian Barbra Fields. Second, I examine Hochman's conceptualization of the racialized group and specifically his reliance on Lawrence Blum's theorizations of the term. I argue that due to theoretical conflations within the definitions of race and racism, and analytical conflations of groupness and category in the conceptualization of the racialized group, the analytical efficacy of this newest definition of racialization is limited. Through a cursory application of the newest definition of racialization to the historical case of American slavery, I argue that the latest conceptualization understands inheritable race as not an ideological, but factual outgrowth. This results in the implicit co-signing of a uniquely American and essentialized understanding of race.

A CRITIQUE OF THE RACIALIZATION CONCEPT

Clarifying a Definition of "Race"

In defining racialization, Hochman sets out to "not merely [be] descriptive," but instead to "show how the concept *ought* to be defined and used" (2019, p. 1247). In order to advance his stipulative definition, Hochman reviews the previous ways in which the racialization concept has been subject to misuse, namely through its oft conflated "thick" and "thin" definitions. He explains how "thin" definitions of racialization rely on the semantic presence of the word "race"—resulting in the identification of kings and lineages of bishops as instances of racialization since these groups were at times referred to with the word "race." "Thin" definitions can also result, he says, in false negatives, as when Muslims are understood to be a potentially racialized group despite the lack of phrases such as the Muslim "race." As a result of the unreliability of "thin" uses, he advocates for a "thick" understanding of racialization, a racialization that can more accurately determine when "a group is *understood to constitute a race*" (2019, p. 1248). Such a "thick" understanding, then, requires a better and more clear articulation of what constitutes a "race."

Hochman argues that a "thick" definition of racialization should rely on Immanuel Kant's scientific conceptualization of race, suggesting that Kant's 1777 lecture "Of the Different Races of Human Beings" provides the grounds for the "racial taxonomy we recognize today," since it helped originate the idea of race as a taxonomic level below the

human species that could be formed in reproductive isolation (2019, p. 1249). Hochman explains how his definition of racialization as "the process through which groups come to be understood as major biological entities and human lineages, formed due to reproductive isolation, in which membership is transmitted through biological descent" is in fact a "thick" definition because it is clear about exactly what kind of "race" it invokes, namely Kant's biological scientific conceptualization.[4] He argues that with this "thick" definition scholars will be able to "identify the origins of racialization" while not producing any false positives or negatives:

> The thick definition of racialization above has the right level of vagueness. It is precise enough that we can, for instance, identify the origins of racialization. Yet it is vague enough that the right things are left open. It does not, for instance, stipulate the racializing agent. This is a task for the racialization scholar. In some cases it will be easy, as with the example of Kant above. In other cases, it will be more difficult. Think again of the possible racialization of Muslims, post 9/11. In that case, it may be difficult to specify the exact racializing agent or agents. I take this to be a fact about the world, rather than a problem with the racialization concept (Hochman 2019, p. 1250).

Hochman's innovation in advancing the racialization concept rests in the clarification of the correct understanding of race—specifically Kant's conceptualization. Yet, Hochman's claim that this innovation solves all issues with the previous conceptualizations requires further scrutiny. Specifically, Hochman's claim that the newest definition of racialization "has the right level of vagueness," since it "does not…stipulate the racializing agent" belies a theoretical conflation of race and racism that is of significant analytical consequence for the racialization term.

The Race/Racism Evasion: The Theoretical Limits of Racialization Without an Agent

Barbra Fields' (2001) critique of racialization has centered on the concept's inability to locate a specific agent in the process of racialization. She explains that,

> racialize, like most adjectives passing for verbs, does not denote a precise action. What, exactly, do scientists, immigration officials, ballot reformers, intelligence testers, newspaper cartoonists, employers and potential employers, WASP snobs, and middle- and working-class nativists do when they racialize immigrants? The question itself is part of the answer: Not all racializers do the same thing when they racialize (2001, p. 50).

When the concept of racialization is invoked as a verb—as in to racialize someone—or used in its abstracted noun form—racialization—the term *grammatically necessitates* an agent. Yet, in Hochman's definition, racialization is said to be a process without a specific mechanism or agent. In fact, Hochman argues that it is actually a benefit of his concept "that I do not attempt to define racialization in terms of a 'precise action' for the very reason Fields suggests: racialization works differently in different contexts and depending on who is doing the racializing" (2019, p. 1257). However, Hochman's response is not operative at the same level of Fields' critique: Fields critiques racialization on the level of the explanatory, while Hochman answers to her critique on the level of the descriptive. Fields points out the concept's grammatical masquerade, where, lacking an explanation for the agent of racism, the concept self-personifies as verb, i.e. racialization

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is the process. Indeed, we see this logic in Hochman's phrase, "racialization works differently in different contexts" suggesting that racialization—a thing out there in the world—does *its work* differently in different contexts. Hochman's non-specified racializers cause an outcome without doing an action. Curiously, the concept produced in text—rather than specific agentic forces—operates to produce a material outcome. Defining racialization in this way is as explanatory as the sentence: wind blows differently in valleys than it does in mountains; racialization racializes races differently in different contexts.

This disregard in attempting to locate a specific agent in the definition of racialization is possible because of the common theoretical lapse made by lay people and scholars alike where "substituted for *racism*, *race* transforms the act of a subject into an attribute of the object" (Fields 2001, p. 1). Fields terms this the race/racism evasion, the operative logic that disappears the act of a subject, racism as mechanism, and reappears it as a seemingly neutral characteristic of the object—someone's racial group. Fields explains this process in more detail:

> *Racism* always takes for granted the objective reality of *race*, as just defined, so it is important to register their distinctness. The shorthand transforms *racism*, something an aggressor *does*, into *race*, something that the target *is*, in a sleight of hand that is easy to miss. Consider the statement 'black Southerners were segregated because of their skin color'—a perfectly natural sentence to the ears of most Americans, who tend to overlook its weird causality. But in that sentence, segregation disappears as the doing of segregationists, and then, in a puff of smoke—*paff*—reappears as a trait of only one part of the segregated whole. In similar fashion, enslavers disappear only to reappear, disguised, in stories that append physical traits defined as slave-like to those enslaved (2014, p. 17, emphasis in original).

Fields' critique here highlights both the immanent relation between race and racism and what is lost analytically in their conflation. Namely, she shows how the mechanism through which race is *imposed* on someone (racism) is obscured when we attribute the *cause* of discrimination as an attribute of the discriminated. The conceptual lapse that disassociates racialization from its causal counterpart, racism, is highly operative in Hochman's definition. Hochman explicitly disaggregates the concepts of race and racism, and proposes instead that the term posing a "hostage to clarity" in racialization is in fact race:

> Racialization is indeed hostage to clarity in defining a key term, but I have argued that this term is race (which I define above, defusing the hostage situation), not racism. On my definition of racialization, there is no mention of racial hierarchy. Racialization is, of course, complex in terms of its intents and outcome (2019, p. 1256).

Hochman makes a fairly strong claim that racism does not figure into his specific theory of racialization. In fact, he suggests that his theory of racialization has "no mention of racial hierarchy," and that the outcome of racialization "is complex," implying that its outcome is not necessarily racist. What is puzzling in this elaboration is Hochman's theorization of race as a category without necessary connection to racism. For Hochman, it would seem that race and racism are produced independently of each other, and thus racialization may occur outside of the reaches of racist practice or action. This signals a very fundamental disjuncture in Hochman's articulation of the racialization concept from other theorists of race: for him, racialization can happen without racism;

or, racism does not necessarily produce race; or, since Hochman does not make the order of causation clear, it is very possible that one could understand his theory here to suggest that *racialization causes racism*, rather than *racism causes racialization.*

A theory of racialization that understands racism and race to be theoretically disconnected is unable to provide scholars direction in trying to apply the concept to the empirical world. While Hochman argues his account of racialization benefits from the flexibility of not denoting a precise action, the race/racism evasion implicit within his understanding of racialization demonstrates that what Hochman believes is a benefit is actually an obfuscation of the necessary agentic process and causal order that impose racialized status on a person or group. Without locating an agent instigating a racialized condition, Hochman's conceptualization understands group formation process as a natural or even metaphysical phenomenon, rather than phenomena generated and re-created within particular social context and history. The lack of any empirical or theoretical exploration of the connection between race and racism, coupled with the lack of a theory of a causal direction between race and racism, undermines Hochman's definition of what racialization *is*—is it a concept that can be analytically productive for social scientists, or is it simply a description of an otherwise inexplicable phenomenon? To explore this question in more detail, I will turn my focus toward the complement element in Hochman's racialization concept, his theory of the racialized group.

Substituting "Race" with Racialized Group

Delineating the racialized group as distinct from the concept of race is of central importance to Hochman's theoretical gesture: "by making a distinction between 'race' and 'racialized group,' the racialization theorist is able to offer separate terms for what is claimed to be real and what is claimed to be an illusion" (2019, p. 1248). The racialized group is posited to evade what Hochman views as the pitfall of social constructionists' reification (even if only inadvertently) of social race. While he critiques social constructionist accounts of race, he maintains that the theory "is still an attempt to capture something very real and important, something which cannot be reduced to categories such as ethnicity, nation, or class," and that "anti-realism about race needs to be supplemented with realism about racialized groups" (2017, p. 63). Hochman invents a theory—which he calls "interactive constructionism"—to explain the predicament of racialized groups without the reifying quality of other theories of race. He argues that interactive constructionism first meets the "need to be able to talk about—and write policy about—the groups we have been calling races," and second, "offers an inclusive interpretation of the construction process, which involves a broad range of interactants, none of which are 'racial,' but together can produce racialized groups" (2017, pp. 63-64). Interactive constructionism grafts developmental systems theory (DST)—a biological framework that investigates "the processes of development, inheritance and evolution"—onto the phenomenon of racialization:

> I take the idea of constructive interactionism from DST and apply it to the companion concepts of "racialization" and the "racialized group." I retitle it "interactive constructionism" because this phrasing highlights the fact that racialized groups are real but contingent products of human practices. Interactive constructionism posits that groups we call "races"—but which I argue are really racialized groups—emerge out of the ongoing interaction between a number of factors: administrative, biological, cultural, economic, geographic, gendered, historical, lingual, phenomenological, political, psychological, religious, social, and so on (2017, p. 62).

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Hochman overlays developmental systems onto his concept of racialization and argues that this hybridized theory can explain how the racialized group is produced in a particular social, political, biological, etc., context.

Borrowing from developmental systems theory means that Hochman necessarily draws some equivalency between the biological application of DST and the social phenomena of racialization: for scientists, DST is used to explain cell genesis and development; for Hochman, it is used explain the development of the racialized group (Hochman 2017; Oyama et al., 2001). But carrying a theory from biology into sociology presents a troubling teleology of social life: the "racialization of groups" becomes analogous to the "development of cells," classifying racialization as if it is a biological condition of human development.[5] Moreover, simply stating that racialized groups "emerge out of the ongoing interaction between a number of factors: administrative, biological, cultural, economic, geographic, gendered, historical, lingual, phenomenological, political, psychological, religious, social, and so on," does not actually clarify the mechanisms of group formation, a determinative factor if racialization theory is to point scholars to the "origins of racialization" (2017, p. 79-80; 2019, p. 1250). Drawing equivalency between a natural process of ontogenesis and the interactive process of racialized group formation remains at the level of the declarative, rather than the analytic. The term "racialized group" is only analytically meaningful if one investigates under what historical and social conditions groupness is formed, and how this groupness maintains its boundedness across time.

This analytical underdevelopment of Hochman's racialized group may also be due to his direct reliance and citation of Lawrence Blum's conceptualization of the same term.[6] In his piece "Racialized Groups: The Sociohistorical Consensus," (2010) Blum argues that the language of "racialized group" ought to replace "race," since there is often occlusion and debate about how the latter term is understood in various fields studying the subject. Blum is responding to a lack of clarity, in his view, about race as it is used in social constructionist accounts. Blum delineates several different invocations of the social constructionist account of race—its use in the 'falsehood' sense (usually understood to be against classical racist ideologies), in the 'social' sense (that race is manufactured and dependent on social context and action), and in the 'contingent' sense (race is socially manufactured, but acknowledging that some treat it as natural). He argues that the potential confusion about which kind of constructionist case is being invoked can be partially addressed by replacing the word race with the label racialized group. The language of racialized groups is compatible with all three senses of social constructionist thought, he argues, and can thus advance the debate on how race should be conceptualized. While Blum points to a potentially interesting typology of the different applications of social constructionist accounts, his proposition that a semantic delineation—replacing "race" with "racialized groups"—will solve these debates remains largely underdeveloped. What Blum understands to be an innovation in descriptive accuracy does not actually translate into a productive analytical advance for sociologists carrying the burden of explanation. That is, while typologies may be productive for practitioners of philosophy, typologies in sociology are simply that—descriptions that can help schematically categorize, but that alone do not and cannot explain causality.[7]

The Limits of the Racialized Group: Conflations of Groupness and Category

In Blum's advocating for the use of the term racialized group, he engages in an analytical conflation between groupness and category that severely limits the term's promise as a

panacea for previous debates on the theorization of race. Blum (2010) lays out the following definition of the racialized group, advocating for its greater terminological use as compared to race:

> First, 'racialized group' more decisively jettisons the implication that the groups being referred to are actual *races* (in the classical sense)…whereas racialization refers to a *process* largely imposed by others (but sometimes self-generated also), that a group undergoes…Racialized groups are characterized by forms of experience they have undergone and a sociohistorical identity that they possess *because of* the false attributions to them…of innate biobehavioral tendencies" (p. 300, emphasis in original).

There are several presumptions in this definition that have been problematized by scholars studying race and ethnicity. First, Blum argues that the imposition of a racial category translates to shared "forms of experience" that provide the grounds for a stable and coherent group identity. This definition suffers from a lack of engagement with the empirical occurrences of group-formation. Because of the historical variability in which race and ethnicity come to be a legible basis for group association, "it is not axiomatic that membership in a category will correspond directly to experienced group boundaries or social identities" (Loveman 1999, p. 892). For this reason, many scholars have questioned the efficacy of conceptualizing ethnic and racial groups (whether imposed from above or substantiated from below) as markers of stable or coherent analytical units (Brubaker 2005; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Brubaker et al., 2004; Loveman 1999). Further underdeveloped in Blum's definition is how the groupness of the "racialized group" itself can be conceptualized if the race-based categorization did not predate a group's existence. Put another way, it would be impossible for a category to apply to a group if the group's existence hinged on its possession of the imputed category. Here, Blum skirts this paradox of causality in his definition by conflating the concept groupness with the concept of category. In doing so, he obscures, rather than clarifies, how and why groupness forms and its relation to racial categories. By "treat[ing] as natural and automatic the move from the imposition of racial categories to the existence of concrete groups that embody those categories," Blum prevents his definition from making a theoretical advance toward studying the causal forces of group formation and cohesion (Loveman 1999, p. 891).

Secondly, Blum's insistence on the reality of racialized groups engages in another analytical conflation that limits his definition: his assumption that categories of practice can directly translate into categories of analysis poses a problem for scholars needing to apply the idea to research. Blum argues that membership in a racialized group "carries implications of similarities with members of one's own group, but the similarities are of experience, not inherent nature," and that this membership also "carries a sense of inheriting a certain history and a sense of peoplehood connected to that history" (2010, p. 302). This definition is made in an attempt to prove the empirical reality of such groups—groups exist that understand themselves in this frame—and thus cement the viability of the term racialized group to describe that empirical occurrence. While group identity is surely a real category of practice, it is not necessarily a salient category for analysis (Brubaker 2005; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). There are many instances where racialized group identity may be empirically central to claims of self-realization and redistributive politics, for example, but its existence as a reified category of practice does not qualify it as a category of analysis. The task of the researcher is to "seek to *account* for this process of reification," rather than rely on the reified practice itself in the course

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of analysis (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p. 5). Scholars have applied this same line of critique to studies of ethnicity:

> Instead of conceptualizing the social world in substantialist terms as a composite of racial, ethnic, and national groups—instead, that is, of uncritically adopting the folk sociological ontology that is central to racial, ethnic, and national movements—cognitive perspectives address the social and mental processes that sustain the vision and division of the social world in racial, ethnic, or national terms. Rather than take "groups" as basic units of analysis, cognitive perspectives shift analytical attention to "group-making" and "grouping" activities such as classification, categorization, and identification" (Brubaker et al., 2004, p. 45).

In other words, the task of sociological analysis is the task of interrogating how and why a person may come to be legible as a particular racial or ethnic identity in the first place, rather than take as given that identification as a category of analysis. For Blum—or for Hochman who relies on this same conceptualization of the racialized group—the consequence of the aforementioned conflation may not matter much.[8] But for the social scientist hoping to apply the term to empirical work, the analytic promise of the term is limited when racialized groups are conflated as both units of observation and units of analysis.

Historicizing Racialization

The theoretical conflations of race and racism, and the analytical conflations of groupness and category, point to a more fundamental issue with the racialization concept as it has most recently been defined: what makes possible and unproblematic the disarticulation of a causal order between race and racism, and the analytical conflations of groupness and category, is the implicit acceptance of a certain folk wisdom derived from a particular and unique American history. Imagining the racialized group as either conduit for sociohistorical inheritance—in Blum's conception—or as a predictable outgrowth of social, historical, and *biological* factors—in Hochman's conception—disseminates, if only implicitly, an ideology about the biological realism of race without questioning the particular social and property relations in which the ideology of biologically inheritable race was first devised. Rather than functioning as a stagnant category of analysis for scholars, racialization, and its constitutive term, racialized group, should be contextualized as historical categories born out of specific social and political relations.[9]

Forcible conscription of only one category of persons, those of African descent, into a racial category occurred on account of the historically unique imperatives of American slavery. Hypodescent rules—which held that any admixture of "Negro blood" (no matter the so-called proportion) conscripted a person into a monolithic racial category—developed in accordance with the particular property relations of American slavery (Fields 1982; Handlin 1950; Hollinger 2003; Reed 2013). These rules, while on the surface dealing with (assuredly false) matters of biology, were in fact undergirded by logics derived to organize and secure particular economic and property relations in the age of mass agricultural production:

> The uniqueness to the United States of this principle of hypodescent…[is that] the principle originates in the property interests of slaveholders. Children begotten upon slave women by their owners or by other white men would grow up as slaves, adding to the property of their owners (Hollinger 2003, p. 1369).

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Only within the exploitative arrangements of chattel slavery and in conditions where property ownership over another human being was legal did the "value" of an inheritable ancestry take on social meaning. The rules of hypodescent were born out of the particular political arrangements between slave and master—where clear lineages of descent as passed from mother to child could subject someone to life of abject toil for the profit of an appropriator.

The particularities of this "one-drop rule" did not develop in parallel in other contexts.

> [While] color emerged as a token of the slave status…it had not always been so; as late as the 1660s the law had not even a word to describe children of mixed marriages. But two decades later, the term mulatto is used, and it serves, not as in Brazil to whiten the Black, but to affiliate through the color tie the offspring of a spurious union with his inherited slavery (Handlin 1950, p. 216).

Blackness, as a biologically inheritable and socially legible attribute, developed meaning in the particular context of the reproduction of private property ownership transferred through lineage. This is a development that is unique to the U.S. and distinct from other logics of racism, as in Brazil, but has been uncritically accepted as a description of social life today. Fields (1982) points out the vestige of this anomaly in which racial membership in the United States is not recognized reciprocally: "American racial convention … considers a white woman capable of giving birth to a black child but denies that a black woman can give birth to a white child" (p. 149).

Once subjected to the historical specificities of racism, as traceable through the American one-drop rule for example, the limits of the racialization as an analytic become starkly apparent: racialization assumes as descriptive fact, rather than ideology, the logic of inheritable race. Race is a condition that only becomes legible as a biologically inheritable trait because of the material imperative of a particular historical location; but race, as theorized in the latest definition of racialization, lies outside of the *racist* interests of the planter class in the case of the United States, for example. The consequence is that race, and by association racialization, is asserted as a self-evident phenomenon of social division—abstract and apart from its root in specific historical time and particular social relation. While the racialization concept's universality is intended to be of benefit, the consequence of this abstraction is that the latest definition unknowingly co-signs a uniquely American logic of racism, a logic that requires a biologically essentialized understanding of race.[10] In order for the concept of racialization—or its complementary concept, the racialized group—to provide analytical purchase for social scientists, the concept must engage with the actual mechanisms that instigate either forcible conscription or self-identification into racial categories. However, Hochman's conceptualization explicitly avoids such engagement. By simply relying on the appearance of race in the social world, the latest conceptualization of racialization unknowingly co-signs racist American logics of the past, regurgitating their tenants without subjecting them to critical inquiry.

THE LIMITS OF RACIALIZATION AS AN ANALYTIC

This paper has sought to interrogate the analytical utility of the racialization concept as it has most recently been defined (Hochman 2019). Hochman's explicitly normative conceptualization of the term relies on an alleged disarticulation of the causal order between race and racism, which is meant to render the concept

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sufficiently general. Yet, I have argued that this dissociation of race and racism leads to at least three analytical problems. First, the most recent definition of the racialization concept cannot, and does not try to, account for a mechanism for the process of racialization. Such an accounting is a necessary component of any conceptualization that aims to identify the origins of racialization. Second, in the absence of locating an agent or mechanism, the concept is tautologized: racialization, with an inability to locate a mechanism, offers itself up as the mechanism. Third, this tautologizing leads to a profound conflation of racialization as both a descriptive and a causal concept. In defining "racialization as the process through which groups come to be understood as" racialized groups, the concept invariably functions both as a description—describing *how* groups come to be racialized—and a mechanism—racialization *causes* groups to become racialized (Hochman 2019, p. 1246). This third conflation also proves harmful for the anti-realist agenda. By conflating analyses of causality with description, Hochman unknowingly co-signs an ideological conception of race; that is, the latest definition allows a description of the appearance of race to stand in for an explanation for race.

Indeed, it is ultimately unclear whether Hochman himself understands his concept to be useful on the level of description, or whether he understands racialization to be an analytical theory. He refers to his definition of racialization as normative, as the way people "ought" to use the term, and that on his use the past criticisms are no longer applicable, implying that the term is impervious to past criticisms of its explanatory capacity. Yet, his failure to engage in the particular causes of racialization occludes this potential explanatory function. Perhaps recognizing this limitation, Hochman, in other instances, distances himself from claims about what the concept could be useful for. In response to critics who argue the limits of a racialization concept that does not make explicit its connection to racism, Hochman (2019) says:

> This is asking too much of the concept. "Racialization" tells us that groups are being understood as biological races. It cannot tell us what racism is: only a definition of racism can help do that. Nor can "racialization" tell us how many forms of racism exist, or which forms are most important, let alone tell us how to deracialize the world. It is not clear that these are even things that a concept can do (p. 1256).

Yet, the proposed definition's lack of concern with racism and conflation of description and analysis allow the conceptualization to uncritically adopt an ideological conception of racism as biologically, as opposed to politically, motivated. So, when Hochman explains that racialization "cannot tell us what racism is," he is correct. But this, unfortunately, is the very problem with his concept.

While my critiques have been directed toward the most recent definition of racialization, they may also apply to usages of the concept more broadly. There are numerous studies that have applied the term to recent ethnographic, historical, and comparative empirical work, especially as it relates to the increased discrimination of those who are forcibly identified to be in association with Islam or the Middle East (Cainkar and Selod, 2018; Garner and Selod, 2014; Husain 2017, 2019; Rana 2011; Selod and Embrick, 2013). Many of the above works have attempted to identify the various agents (state, civil society organizations, individuals, etc.) and mechanisms (war-on-terror regimes, integration into labor markets, etc.) that instigate what could be described as processes of racialization. But also common in some applications of the racialization term is the claim that racialization is a useful "concept," "tool," or

"vocabulary" for understanding the predicament of increased discrimination or ostracization of people. Left unclear in the latter articulations is whether racialization is valuable for its theoretical, and thus explanatory power, or whether it is useful on the level of a descriptive concept—something that can help broadly understand, but that cannot posit fundamental causes for, a social phenomenon (Mahoney 2004, p. 204). Scholars who use racialization in their future work must be clear if they deploy the concept as a self-explanatory mechanism of discrimination or particularization, or whether they use it to simply describe a process of reification and race-making. Ultimately, racialization used as an explanatory concept engages in the same theoretical and analytical conflations discussed above: racialization, understood as mechanism, engages in a common theoretical lapse that posits race as an attribute of an object (a racialized group), rather than the action of a subject (an agent or mechanism). This race/racism evasion disarticulates race as the consequence of a particular social and historical context and reappears it as a natural or metaphysical condition of an object. In other words, if the distinction between racialization as a descriptive concept, and racialization as a mechanism, is not made clearly—or worse, if the two are conflated—then racialization will prove to be an analytically unproductive concept for social scientists since it will be liable to reproduce ideological conceptions of racism as descriptive fact.

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NOTES

1. See Hochman 2019, p. 1255
2. Hochman makes a reference here to potential criticisms of the ontology of racialized groups and suggests his theory, interactive constructionism, as a way to reconcile the (in his estimate incorrect) social/biological dichotomization of race. I will address his position of interactive constructionism in the following section of the paper.
3. See Hochman 2017, p. 63; 2019, pp. 1253-1254.
4. See Hochman 2019, p. 1246.
5. For more on this tendency, see "And You Thought We Had Moved Beyond All That: Biological Race Returns to the Social Sciences" (Morning 2014).
6. See Hochman 2019, p. 1248.
7. For more on this see Wimmer's "Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making" (2008).
8. Indeed, for Blum this seems to explicitly be the case: "These points about how blacks and whites were treated according to the ideology of racial inferiority are not meant as an historical explanation of slavery, segregation, and colonialism as political/economic systems. That historical question is not relevant to my purposes here. It is perfectly consistent with the terminology I am proposing here that, for example, slavery arose as an economic system for reasons of social control and economic efficiency, and that it did so before there was a notion of race salient enough to provide a widely-accepted ideology to rationalize it. According to that historical account the ideology of race arose as an after-the-fact rationalization for slavery, not a reason for its establishment. Nevertheless, once it did arise, treatment of blacks

and whites fit that logic of the ideology, and it is that treatment that I am calling 'racialization'" (2010, p. 301).

9. Michael Banton (2005) makes a related and helpful clarification here, distinguishing "historical" conceptualizations of racialization from "contemporary" forms. Banton's historical mode of racialization aligns more closely with the type of contextualization I am arguing is necessary.
10. The tendency to impose American conceptions or theorizations that totalize particular cases has been a practice critiqued by other social theorists (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1999).

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