

# SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

## READING GUIDE #3

### RACE & EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE

WHEN doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

#### READING

Mills, C. W. (2007). White ignorance. In S. Sullivan & N. Tuana (Eds.), *Race and epistemologies of ignorance* (pp. 13–38). State University of New York Press.

#### QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. In section I, Charles W. Mills introduces the idea of a social epistemology.  
What is a social epistemology, and how is Mills' elucidation of white ignorance a project in social epistemology?
2. In section II, Mills suggests that white ignorance has been previously explored in works of classic fiction and nonfiction.  
What do these sources say about white ignorance? Of what exactly is white ignorance ignorant?
3. Section III lists out ten points of clarification about white ignorance.  
What are these ten points? What do they mean for the concept? Why is Mills mentioning all these?
4. Finally, in section IV, Mills proceeds through five components of cognition: perception, conception, memory, testimony, and motivational group interest.

For each of these (well, his analysis combines perception and conception together), he attempts to show how race may influence them, thereby causing and maintaining ignorance.

How does each component influence what we may (or may not) know, and how we come to know (or not know) it? As a result, how may race influence each of those component in order to cause and/or maintain white ignorance?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.