

Race is Fake: Racism is Real

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**We Were All Humans Until
Race Disconnected Us,
Religion Separated Us,
Politics Divided Us,
And Wealth Classified Us.**

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How different are we...?

Early Civilizations

Recorded history strongly suggests that ancient societies have longstanding propensity toward distinguishing persons from one another. Ancient peoples made social distinctions along these three primary characteristics.

- Geography- where were you born or live
 - Language- what was your native tongue
 - Religion- which faith did you ascribe or associate
- *Skin color was not assigned any particular value or status.

Moses' Marriage to the Cushite Woman

There are a few incidental mentions of skin color in the Bible (Jeremiah 13:23), but there is nothing saying one race is superior/inferior to another. Moses was married to an Ethiopian (Numbers 12:1-16), and God was angry with Aaron and Miriam for criticizing that marriage. In fact, God inflicted Miriam with leprosy (which made her whiter than snow).

The Hebrews were forbidden to marry Canaanites and other pagan peoples (Exodus 34:11-16). The reason was because they worshipped idols, not because of skin color; the Hebrews, Amorites, Canaanites, etc. were ethnically similar. The apostle Paul encouraged Christians not to marry unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14), but, the reason was religious, not racial.

Noah's Curse on Ham's Descendants

Genesis 9 describing how Noah cursed the descendants of his son Ham with servitude remains a way to explore the complex origins of the concept of race.

In the biblical account, Noah and his family are not described in racial terms. But as the story echoed through the centuries and around the world, variously interpreted by Islamic, Christian and Jewish scholars, Ham came to be widely portrayed as Black; Blackness, servitude and the idea of racial hierarchy became inextricably linked.

By the 19th century, many historians agree, the belief that African-Americans were descendants of Ham was a primary justification for slavery among Southern Christians (Lee, 2003).

Created in God's image...?

Historical Context

Before the conquest of the Americas, there was no prevailing worldview that separated humanity into distinct categories according to race.

Until the 16th century, Northern Europeans had very limited knowledge of the world beyond their immediate communities. By contrast, Southern Europeans had extensive contact and interactions with other peoples.

Muslim, Christians & Jews

For instance, persons living in the Mediterranean region had many exchanges historically with people from Asia, Africa, and the Arab world. Ancient peoples did not divide the human world into distinct racial categories based on physical and cultural traits of any one group. Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived reasonably harmoniously in Spain for hundreds of years (Smedley, 2007).

Racial Precedents

Just the same, some early interactions between Europeans and other groups did provide important precedents for how human difference is conceptualized in more contemporary times. The Spanish Inquisition in 1480 was intended to ensure the orthodoxy of people who had converted from Judaism and Islam to Catholicism. The monarchs during this period ordered royal decrees to Jews and Muslims to either convert to Christianity or leave the country.

Although the discrimination against Jews and Muslims were clearly more religious than racial, ideas regarding the purity of blood emerged and helped to set the stage for establishing racial difference and European understanding of human difference (Smedley 2007).

**No one is born hating
another person because of
the color of his skin, or his
background, or his religion.
People must learn to hate,
and if they can learn to hate,
they can be taught to love,
for love comes more naturally
to the human heart than
its opposite.**

|
Nelson Mandela

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Enslavement of Africans

These 22 or 23 Africans who arrived 400 years ago were not the first to land in North America. Some Africans probably came before Christopher Columbus. During the 16th century, some probably accompanied Spanish explorers on expeditions to the Southwest and Southeast of the present-day United States. In 1526, a slave revolt stopped the Spanish from planting a slaveholding colony in present-day South Carolina. According to the historian Thomas C. Holt, “A muster roll for March 1619 shows that there were already thirty-two African slaves” in Virginia. But no one knows when and how they arrived. No one knows my ancestors’ exact birth date in this country.

Legalization of Slavery

The slave codes enacted in the 1660s spelled out the differences between African slaves and European indentured servants. In 1667, Virginia issued a decree that slaves who had converted to Christianity could continue to be enslaved because of their perceived heathen or savage ancestry. In 1705, the Virginia Assembly also prohibited any Negro, mulatto, or Indian from opposing or rebelling against any Christian (any white man).

Emerging Racial Classifications

By denying African slaves privileges extended to white servants, this became the first formal step in creating divisions between Blacks and whites (Zinn, 2010). By the 17th century, people in the Americas developed and acted on folk ideas about differences among Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans almost solely based on daily interaction and the dominating social order. African slaves were brought to the Americas to meet labor needs; racial classifications were institutionalized to justify slavery and colonization.

America's First Peoples

Prior to the arrival of European colonizers, the Americas were home to over 100 million indigenous people. Nearly 95% of the population was wiped out during the first two centuries of European colonization resulting from warfare, slavery, and disease. European explorers came to the "New World" of North America in the 1500s.

Before that time, the continent was an unknown place to them. This New World for Europeans was actually a very old world for the people that lived here for 40,000 years.

Slavery in the Americas

In African, European, and Middle Eastern societies, conquered peoples often became slaves following a war. Slavery existed across and within societies, and often persons lacking the support of a family had no other choice than to become slaves, and some became enslaved to pay off a debt. In the latter case, this normally involved persons of the same ethnic group of their masters. However, not until the 18th century did any society categorically deny the humanity of slaves (Golash-Boza, 2015).

Pseudoscience and Eugenics

The gradual emergence of racial difference is reflected in the laws passed and the decisions made by religious leaders in early America. However, during the 18th century, the concept of human difference evolved from the realms of religion and folk ideas to that of science (Golash-Boza, 2015).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scientists continued their quest to prove the superiority of the white race. The interface of institutional religion with this notion of racial superiority/inferiority is deeply rooted in Western culture, and also looms large around the world. Ethnic cleansing and the white nationalist movement are but two contemporary examples of this phenomenon.

Ten Things to Know About Race

1. Race is a modern idea. Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical differences, but according to religion, status, class or even language. The English word "race" turns up for the first time in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.

2. Race has no genetic basis. Not one characteristic, trait or even gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.

3. Human subspecies don't exist. Unlike many animals, modern humans simply haven't been around long enough, nor have populations been isolated enough, to evolve into separate subspecies or races. On average, only one of every thousand of the nucleotides that make up our DNA differ one human from another. We are one of the most genetically similar of all species.

4. Skin color really is only skin deep. The genes for skin color have nothing to do with genes for hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone's skin color doesn't necessarily tell you anything else about them.

5. Most variation is within, not between, “races.” Of the small amount of total human variation, 85% exists within any local population. About 94% can be found within any continent. That means, for example, that two random Koreans may be as genetically different as a Korean and an Italian.

6. Slavery predates race. Throughout much of human history, societies have enslaved others, often as a result of conquest or debt, but not because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Due to a unique set of historical circumstances, North America has the first slave system where all slaves shared a common appearance and ancestry.

7. Race and freedom were born together. The U.S. was founded on the principle that "All men are created equal," but the country's early economy was based largely on slavery. The new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.

8. Race justified social inequalities as natural. The “common sense” belief in white superiority justified anti-democratic action and policies like slavery, the extermination of American Indians, the exclusion of Asian immigrants, the taking of Mexican lands, and the institutionalization of racial practices within American government, laws, and society.

9. Race isn't biological, but RACISM is still real. Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. The government and social institutions of the United States have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power and resources to white people.

10. Colorblindness will not end racism. Pretending race doesn't exist is not the same as creating equality or equity.

Racism Defined

Commonly defined as “prejudice + power,” racism is prejudice or discrimination against someone based on his/her race. Underlying this is the belief that certain racial groups are superior to others. Racism can be manifested through beliefs, policies, attitudes, and actions.

Race and racism is a reality that so many of us grow up learning to just deal with. But if we ever hope to move past it, it can't just be on people of color to deal with it. It's up to all of us—Black, white, everyone—no matter how well-meaning we think we might be, to do the honest, uncomfortable work of rooting it out.

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Michelle Obama

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