

Introduction to
Anthropology:
Holistic and Applied
Research on Being
Human

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live. Anthropologists and public health specialists now know that these differences are caused by social inequalities like racism and not by biological differences between groups.

Anthropologist Yolanda Moses argues that to think anthropologically about race, we must challenge three common misconceptions about race in U.S. culture. They are the fallacies that 1) human beings can be naturally divided into a small number of distinct races, 2) races have certain inherent strengths and weaknesses, particularly in terms of intelligence, morality, and character, and 3) racial differences are due to definitive and definable biological heritage. Over the course of our discipline, anthropology has been complicit with colonialist and racial hierarchies and is also actively working to dismantle these systems of oppression.

When faced with the information that race is not biologically real, one might think it is time for the U.S. to become a _____ society. However, scholars point out that racism still exists and to decide that race no longer exists would be inaccurate and deny people's voice in their experiences in a society with institutional racism. Instead, scholars like Michelle Alexander propose a position of color consciousness, wherein we celebrate ethnic differences and recognize social justice issues such as mass incarceration, environmental racism, and unequal access to healthcare as relevant to anthropologists and others studying race among human cultures.

In 1990, scientists began mapping the human genome as part of the Human Genome Project, and after 13 years, the mapping was completed in 2003. However, more recent advances in genetic mapping

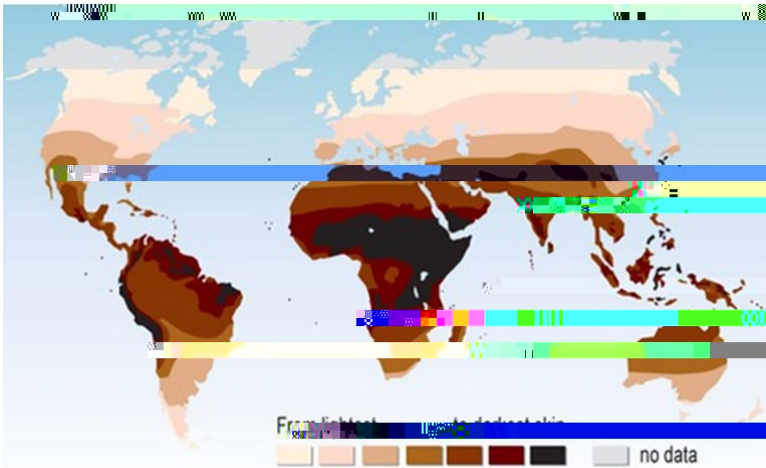
Anthropology, as a field, developed as people sought to legitimize ideas about race. Drawing in large part on the now-discredited science of phrenology, scientists (including some anthropologists) of the 18th and 19th centuries interpreted people with European ancestry as endowed with clear superiority to other races in both intellectual and moral faculties. Phrenology is a pseudoscience primarily focused on measurements of the human skull (see Figure 11.1). Of course, findings were based on their own social valuations and preconceptions, not actual data, because there is no

Instead, the scientific racism mindset was used extensively to defend forced migration, removal, segregation, missionization, and extermination of communities the world over. Dominant groups were afraid of immigrants and people with different appearances or skills. In fact, this can still be observed today through policies and practices that disproportionately impact people of color (see Module 19: Human Rights and Activism). Jim Crow segregation laws and _____ are only two well-known examples.

Racial eugenics in the early 20th century emphasized the inaccurate idea that human races could be “improved” or pruned through selective or planned breeding. Eugenics involves means such as involuntary sterilization, social segregation, and exclusion to remove “unsuitable” individuals from society and prevent them from reproducing. An “improved” or “suitable” society and individuals within that society, however, were determined from the inaccurate and detrimental perspectives of empowered groups in society at the expense of marginalized groups and without their consent. The state of Indiana was the first to pass a eugenics law in 1907. The law targeted individuals in state institutions such as “confirmed criminals,” “rapists,” “idiots,” and “imbeciles” and were among those t

Additionally, although socially we refer to categories like Black and white, skin colors are gradations of reds, yellows, browns, and other hues. There are not strictly white or black hues, and these categories are oversimplifications created by humans that ignore the diversity of appearances in the world. Lighter skin shades may be observed in people whose ancestors adapted to northern latitudes with less UV exposure, while darker skin shades typically are observed in people whose ancestors adapted to equatorial latitudes or sunnier regions where UV protection was critical.

In other words, skin color is not a discrete category (see Module 4: Evolution and Genetics). Instead, skin color is a clinal trait, where many genes contribute to the overall appearance. Many human traits, including skin color, exhibit clinal variation. Clinal traits cannot be unequivocally subdivided into discrete categories because they demonstrate gradual changes over geographic space. Therefore, many different, unrelated groups of people may exhibit similar shades of skin, but they may have few other traits in common genetically or culturally.



Clinal variation of skin color, predicted based on multiple environmental factors. Image modified from Flickr/GRID-Arendal.

Unfortunately, using racial categories only serve to reify their existence and perpetuate inequality. Furthermore, they incorrectly imply racial “purity,” and when people from different ancestral groups reproduce, their

Other historic legislation enforced social and racial separation between people. For example, prior to the Civil War, in Maryland, a white woman married to an enslaved Black individual was considered the owner of her husband and his parents. Any offspring from their union were also born into slavery. Although the particulars of these laws changed over time, many states continued to ban “mixed” marriages well into the 20th century. In 1967, the Supreme Court decision on *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) 388 U.S. 1 (1967) 11.3 (s)-7.5 (e)0.9 (p)



Example of microaggressions perpetuated in US society. Image from Eye DJ/Flickr.



The following examples are provided to acknowledge specific cases where perceptions of race have impacted real lives and extended beyond implicit bias.

Designed to study the impact of syphilis, the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment was active for 40 years but unethical and built upon scientific

racism. Participants, specifically African American, were intentionally misled (believing that they were receiving treatment rather than placebos) and were never informed about the purpose or the proceedings of the experiment. This study indubitably crossed ethical boundaries in 1947 when penicillin became an effective and widely available treatment for syphilis but was withheld from participants. Instead, researchers observed the long-term impacts of untreated syphilis (blindness, severe health problems, insanity, and death) on “participants” and their families.

Also troubling, participants were not allowed to quit the study. They were never informed about their rights and never offered the option to stop participating and seek alternative treatments. This study continued for decades, and researchers justified their actions through scientific racism. In the 1960s, a Public Health Services Employee discovered the ongoing experiment and voiced concern to his superiors. The organization reviewed the syphilis study and did not stop the proceedings. Instead, they allowed the study to continue, reasoning that they should track the last few participants through death and autopsy to understand the long-term effects of syphilis.

The employee leaked the story to the *Associated Press*, and the ensuing public outrage finally led the project to cease. This is just one of many examples of racial injustice and health-based racial profiling that have been done and continues to perpetuate in society. It has led to increased distrust of medical practices among Black communities. However, the Tuskegee Syphilis study resulted in reform regarding how studies with human participants are conducted including the use

(Module 19: Human Rights and Activism). Studies must provide confidentiality for participants, research cannot cause harm to participants, and participants must be informed about the purpose of the study so they can make an informed decision regarding participation.

In more recent studies, the anthropologist and legal scholar Khiara Bridges demonstrates how race continues to be reconstructed as biological

ob/gyn. Based on 15 months of ethnographic research at a New York City

anthropological analyses help investigators reduce the universe of possible unknown individuals.

Forensic anthropologists are trained to interpret ancestral associations in skeletal remains and are proficient in assessing visual traits and measurements to determine if an individual was likely of European, African, Asian, Native American, or other ancestral background. This analysis, however, is tricky and potentially treacherous for several reasons. First, as noted above, ancestral traits are continuous, not discrete. There is no clear-cut difference or threshold in ancestral traits. Second, ancestry is not race, but when law enforcement and investigators use anthropological analyses, they may conflate ancestral assessments with racial categories.



Historically in the U.S., we have conflated the terms race, ethnicity, and ancestry. This has led to continued confusion and misuse of these terms today. Race is a sociocultural construct that has significant impacts on people's lives and is not based on biological or scientific fact. Rather, it is imposed upon people based on superficial traits. Additionally, racial categories change through time and space. Recall that while, initially, many European immigrants were not considered white in the US, through acculturation processes, their descendants have achieved the status of white. Furthermore, what it means to be Black in the United States is not the same as what it means to be Black in Brazil, which differs from France, which also differs from South Africa.

Ancestry describes geographic and genetic based differences in populations, but it does not align with race. We do not exhibit a high degree of genetic diversity, and our diversity has no genetic concordance. It is used to describe why people have different traits like skin pigmentations, nose morphologies, and body proportions. Conversely, ethnicity offers a third way to describe human difference. Ethnicity refers to one's heritage and cultural associations and may have nothing to do with appearance, race, or ancestry. Regardless of ancestral, race, and ethnic labels, we are all one human species with more commonalities than differences. Anthropologists must be conscious of the how their work interfaces with racial issues, and the potential implications of their work on living peoples.

- Race, ancestry, and ethnicity have distinct meanings and cannot be used interchangeably.
- Institutional racism is pervasive in the U.S. today.
- President Barrack Obama is considered the first Black president for social reasons.
- All people have implicit racial biases, whether intentional or not.
- Forensic anthropologists have perfected ancestry assessments so they can be 100% confident in their interpretations.
- Define race, ancestry, and ethnicity. How are these terms different?
- How do current practices in the U.S. contribute to misconceptions and misuse of race and ancestry?
- How do past policies, laws, and perceptions continue to impact people and reify the idea of race?
- Should medical treatment be streamlined based on race?
- Should forensic anthropologists assess the ancestry of unknown skeletal remains? What social concerns must be addressed when interfacing with non-anthropologists?

: Genetic or geographic differences among populations that reflect the evolution of one's ancestors.

: Laws that enforce racial segregation by criminalizing interracial marriages and intimate relationships between members of different races.

: A political and social movement dedicated to raising awareness of racial injustices committed against Black people, in order to end racial inequality and discrimination.

: A not-so-subtle racial un-privileging that is constituted through underprivileged class status.

: Gradual changes in traits and inherited characteristics amongst groups and species that correlate with defined geographical or ecological spaces.

: The historical practice of more powerful countries claiming possession of less powerful ones through full or partial political control, occupation, and economic exploitation.

: A person employed in collecting the census data of a population.

: Self-determined cultural differentiations among populations, usually based upon attributes such as language, religion, lifestyle, cultural heritage, and/or nationality o

: State and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the

racism, and to discourage intervention and reform.

: Non-medical factors that influence health, including the conditions into which people are born, develop, live, and work,

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