

The Social Construction of Race Categories

The history of our division,
and the ultimate truth.



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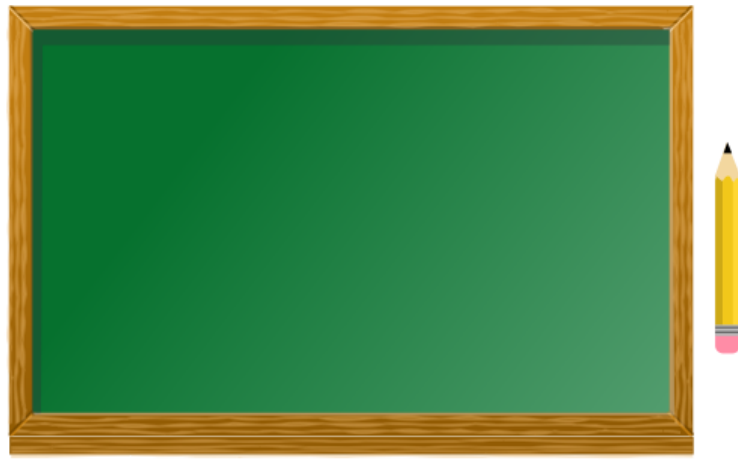


Learning the history of the social construction of race categories is important for our understanding of how people are treated and have been treated in our world. This history explains why many people have faced racialized violence and marginalization.

However, from studying this history, we are also enlightened on how we are ultimately similar, and how little our differences actually are. Before we dive into this history, we must understand what racial categories are.

Racial categories were developed to identify people based on where they are from. This identification process was made possible through grouping people by the pigmentation of their skin, as well as other physical features. Today, we know the general list of racial categories as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White, and Other.





Today, these race categories serve as a system of identification.

However, when racial categories were created in the 1700s, they were a lot more general, and were used not as a system of identification but to assert a false, racial hierarchy. Thus, racial categories, in history, have had a lot to do with racism, as they have divided us in the first place.

HOW DID RACE CATEGORIES DEVELOP?

In the 1700s, before the technological development of internet search engines or the development of more credible scientific research practices, people relied on scientist observations to explain natural history.

The scientific research that was being done in this time mostly had to do with observing, comparing, and measuring living things to reach conclusions. One subject in natural history that was widely studied in this time was racial categories.



The first list of race categories to ever be created had four major categories of humans: Europeans, Africans, Orientals, and Lapps.

Originally a system to identify both the origins and physical characteristics of humans, race categories soon became a system to rank the superiority of each race. This is also known as a racial hierarchy.

Following the development of race categories, scientists measured how close humans in each category were to the ancient Greek person. They looked at qualities such as skin color, or skin pigmentation, and physical makeup to determine which people looked most like the aesthetic of ancient Greeks.

On the contrary, the people whose skin color and physical features varied more widely were not only perceived as not ideal, but a part of a different species.

This assertion that people of certain race categories were closer to animals than humans based on their skin color became one of the earliest examples of racism.

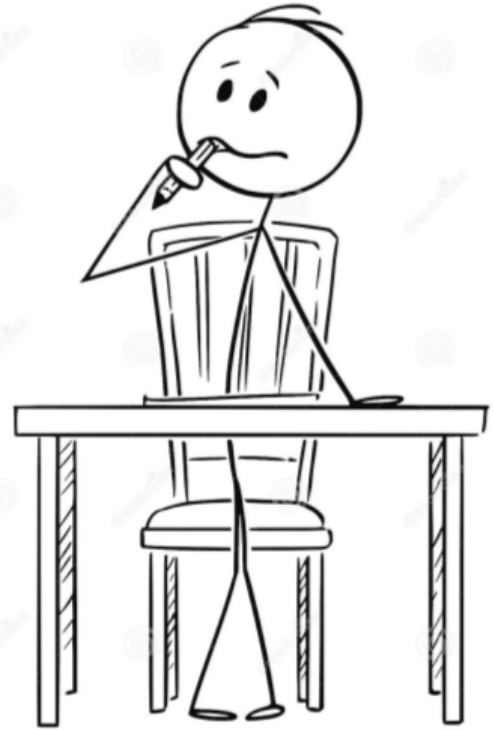


GOING FURTHER. . HOW WAS RACIAL SUPERIORITY ARGUED?

One way scientists argued that there was an “ideal” human makeup was through the study human skulls and faces. One natural historian named Pieter Camper argued that there was an ideal facial angle of 100 degrees.

This ideal facial angle was only achieved by White, Greek people of this time. After asserting this made-up argument, other historians started arguing that people of color and non-Greek people had skulls closer to

The fact of the matter is, people of all skin colors have a HUMAN physiological makeup, and “ideal” or “less ideal” features do not exist between races biologically or physiologically. So, modern day critical race theorists have wondered what other factors were at play when scientists came to these conclusions.



In the 1600s, a global trend arose that involved appreciating Greek life and culture. As Greek art, heritage, philosophy, and politics were admired, so were White, Greek people.

Many scientific observations and comparisons may have intentionally or unintentionally kept these Greek-superior ideals in mind when creating race categories and defining them. This is known as bias.



You may be asking yourself why people did not stop these scientists and historians in the first place.

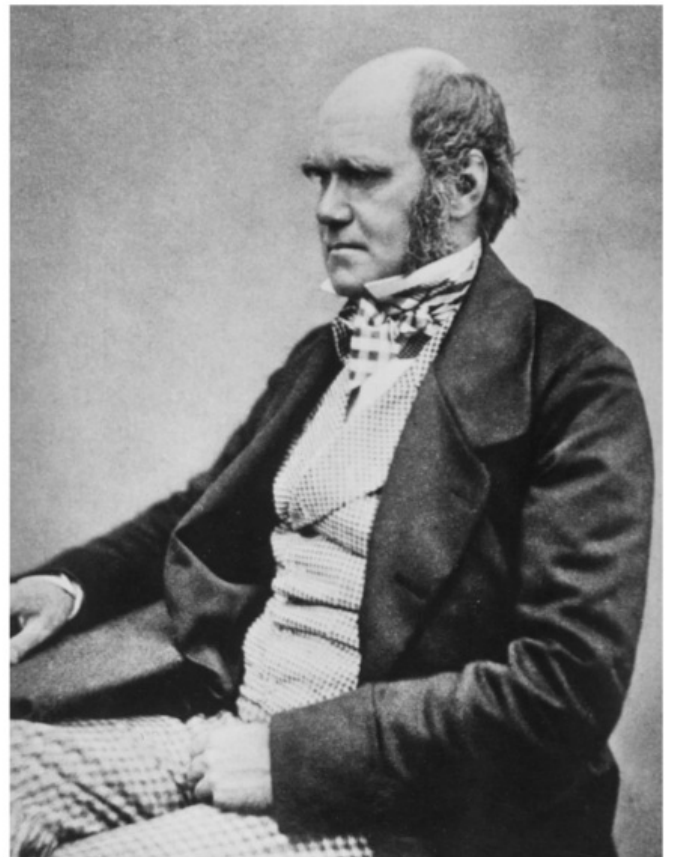
Several years after racial categories were defined, many still did not have access to more advanced and credible educational resources and technological resources.

People instead relied on consuming literature and philosophy from this time to develop their views. However, in this time period, authors and philosophers continued to assert racist ideas.

The race divisions people grew accustomed to had a negative effect on how people of color were treated in society. The scientific-based evidence that was thought to be valuable at the time became responsible for the rise in racism.

Ultimately, race categories have both worked to divide us and have been responsible for creating unfair advantages and disadvantages.

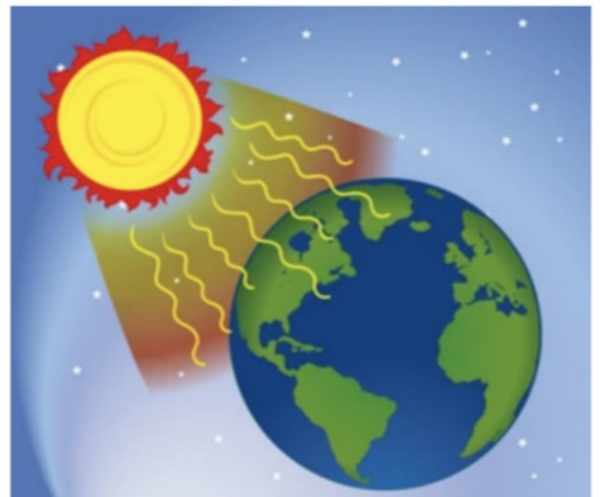
While racist philosophies, writings, and legal documents were being produced because of science, natural history, and the universal admiration of ancient Greek culture, theorists also began to rediscover what made us different in the first place. Philosopher Charles Darwin was one of the first to reassert that the main difference between races was in fact our different skin colorations.



Hundreds and hundreds of years ago, humans' skin learned how to adapt to the UV sun exposure in their environment.

Darkly pigmented people were found closer to the equator and lightly pigmented people were found closer to the poles.

Overtime, scientists started to discover that our skin colors are different because we've adapted to different levels of UV exposure overtime.



People who have Black and Brown skin are darkly pigmented, and people with Whiter skin are more lightly pigmented. In the end, this was the only difference that once separated us into categories.

Our skin tones do not define how smart, capable, worthy, or ideal we are as humans; they only define where we have come from.



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"The Social Construction of Racial Categories" is a short excerpt explaining race categories and the science of skin pigmentation for 6th graders.