

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORD "RACE"

You might have heard people say that **race does not exist**.

Could *race* be just a made up idea?

If that is true, where did the word *race* come from, and why does it have such a profound impact on our society?



How "race" is usually defined

Today, people think of the so-called "different races" as clear cut, distinct categories of people.

The truth is, people have not always seen it that way!

The concept of race through the centuries

15th century

Back when most English Christians believed that all humans descended directly from Adam and Eve, biblical scholars thought that the differences between humans could be explained by the way their ancestry traced back to the Genesis story.

To these scholars, "race" simply described a person's ancestry. Unlike today, "race" was not based on skin colour!

15th – 18th century

Scholars studied nature to help them provide evidence for the Bible's account of creation and to help them understand "God's plan".

They created categories of all things, including humans, and this led to the false belief that there are different types of humans.

18th century

Georges Cuvier, a famous scholar of the time, believed that humans belonged in three categories: *Mongolian*, *Ethiopian*, and *Caucasian*.

Did you know: it was created by people who thought the "white race" was superior. The word Caucasian has no basis in science!

19th century

Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Petrus Camper, William Edwards, Carl Gustav Carus & Anders Retzius began studying the shape of human skulls to try to prove that the "white race" was somehow superior. **(Hint: they were wrong!)**

In contrast, some scientists, such as Charles Darwin, argued that race was an inaccurate concept.

People in power increasingly used the idea of race to justify their dominance and divide society.

20th century

Science made it clear that the concept of race is socially and culturally constructed and that there are no genetic features that differentiate one "race" from another.

Regardless, the concept of "race" continued to be used to try to prove the false idea that white people are somehow naturally superior.

21st century

The definition of "race" continues to change to benefit people in power, just as it has been changing for more than 100 years.

Biological ancestry and DNA testing does not map 'race'!

So how does history this affect us today?

This history shows us how the idea of "race" was developed based on a misunderstanding of the world and human biology.

In reality, no person is better or worse than another based on the colour of their skin or the shape of their eyes. The very idea that "different races" have different abilities and features is rooted in white supremacy.

Prejudice, discrimination, and hatred are routinely justified based on the invented category of "race", and this impacts people of colour in drastic and deadly ways every day.

Even though "race" may not be real, racism definitely is.

References

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