

# RACE: NOT WHAT YOU'D THINK

## RACE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

The concept of 'race' is...

- NOT about the body but rather is a social idea about the body
- A made-up, empty and elastic concept that constantly changes and is weaponized throughout history

'Race' is a modern idea, invented in northern Europe by people with little knowledge and understanding of the peoples they attempted to classify

### Starting with anthropology...

Within 18th century Europe, anthropologists began to look at different characteristics in humans (nose shape, chin angle, skin colour, etc.) and assign cultural and behavioral meanings to these characteristics. Scholars at the time were predominantly English, French, and German; therefore, they assumed the superiority of certain features that they possessed (white skin, lower angle chin, small nose, etc.) while making different features unwanted and inferior.

### Prejudice embedded in science...

The word “race” was used by these scholars to classify different genus, species, and varieties of humans – this was done without any scientific backing (Banton, 2015). Due to this history, race is generally understood as something biological while it is actually a construct (it is made up!). It is actually genetic variation that determines the physical appearance of people, NOT race. ALL people belong to the same species – race is an illegitimate category that is based on the misconceptions and prejudice of scholars in 18th century Europe.

## RACE AS A TOOL FOR WHITE SUPREMACY

### Craniology

As the science of 'race' progressed through the 18th century, multiple influential scientists (like Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Petrus Camper, Carl Gustav Carus, William Edwards & Anders Retzius) studied skulls in an attempt to find anatomical features to differentiate different groups of people; this was called craniology (Jahoda, 2009).

The basis of craniology was to distinguish different 'races' by skull size and shape, and it always pointed to a superior 'race'. As all craniologists were racialized white, belonged to elite classes within European society and were the ones in scholarly positions, the 'scientists' deemed their 'race' of superior standing compared to all others.

### Hierarchies of race

Craniologists studied skulls from all over the globe through made-up scientific procedures. Skulls were inspected in an attempt to find intellectual and physical identifiers of 'races' and to promote 'Nordic' superiority. For example, the "noble" Aryan race was distinguished by long skulls; therefore, they were (arbitrarily) assigned a knack for leadership, common-sense, and intelligence.

Harmful misconceptions and perceptions about skull types and race morphed into perceptions of skin colour and hair type, effectively creating hierarchies of physical traits with people of the Aryan race at the top. This hierarchy thus enabled groups at the top to justify the exploitation, colonization, genocide, and religious conversion of people at the bottom, who they see/saw as biologically less able.