



# What is "Race"

Fact Sheet Assignment-GNDR 332  
By: Hannah Worthen

Primarily in accordance with Michael Banton's book *What we know about Race and Ethnicity*.

What one will find in this factsheet:

1. We look different- is that race?
2. What has been considered to be race?
3. Why is "race" wrong?
4. Does "race" even exist?
5. Timeline of how race came to be-  
(according to Pages 22-27 of Michael Banton's book, *What we Know about Race and Ethnicity*.)
6. Bibliography

# We look different- is that race?

- We know as people we all look different but biologically, we are not all that different.
- How we look is more in accordance with our genes- which are inherited and passed down.
- As humans, we are very similar- Richard Lewontin in 1972 stated that as humans our, "differences attributable to so-called races are a minor part of human genetic variability (1–15 percent)" (Banton, 2018, p. 22). Therefore, the term "race" cannot define our human genetic differences despite the misconception that it does.

## What has been considered to be race?

- There is a misconception that the word "race" is archaic and thousands of years old- it is simply not. Banton refers to possibly the earliest roots of an idea regarding race in "the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries [when] the English people's ideas about themselves and about other peoples were structured by the anthropology of the Bible" (Banton, 2018, p. 11).
- The term race has associations with taxonomy and Carl Linnaeus's work observing the diversity within a species created evidence that God did not create each separate species. However, Linnaeus never used the word race in his observations.
- 1817 when Georges Cuvier's work *Le Regne* was published which, "used the ordinary language word 'race' as a synonym for variety." (Banton, 2018, p. 13).
- In 1839, Samuel Morton published a report regarding human skull capacity- he "concluded that whites had the biggest brains, blacks the smallest and that browns came somewhere in between"
- Through publications by Josiah C. Nott, George R. Gilddon, Gobinaus, Charles Hamilton Smith, Robert Knox, and Karl Vogt the term "race" had become a commonly used term with connotations of a racist hierarchy of humankind.



"it is more informative to start from a consideration of the purpose for which the word has been employed in order to examine how well it serves a purpose."

- Michael Banton

## Why is "race" wrong?

- Darwin contributed to the debunking of categorizing humans as scientific as he “had come to believe that the term ‘species’ was ‘one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety’” (Banton, 2018, p. 16).
- Darwin’s discoveries had essentially refuted any form of racial categorization
- by 1900 Gregor Mendel had experimented with peas which illustrated inheritance and what would later be coined as “genes.”
- In 1909 Wilhelm Johannsen termed “phenotype” and “gene” as a unit of inheritance, solidifying the falsity that is “race.”
- In 1930 mathematician R. A. Fisher completed the elimination of race as a scientific concept in his book, “The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection, showed, among much else, that it was the gene, and not the species, that was the unit of selection” (Banton, 2018, p. 17).

## Does "race" even exist?

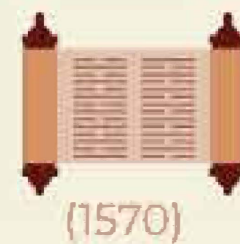
- Despite there being no clear definition of what is “race” it is still used in governmental and everyday vernacular. For example, common forms that one must fill out, asks for one’s race- and does not explain what “race” is in meaning or importance to the form.
- To clarify, in no means does the redundancy of the word race mirror it is oppressive and violent actions that stemmed from its understanding. Racism is very much real and abundant in today’s society and the lack of definition or existence of the term, “race” does not in any way diminish racism and the violence caused because of racism.
- The term race may not have validity in meaning but the effects that race and racism have should in no way be seen as less or demeaned within this fact sheet. Racism is very much alive and exists today.



# Timeline regarding "Race"

According to Michael Banton's Book:  
*What we know about Race and Ethnicity*, pages 11-27.

Timeline Created By: Hannah Worthen  
 GNDR 332, Factsheet Assignment



(1570)

John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* exemplified the English notion that people "were structured by the anthropology of the bible"



(1580)



1691

biologist John Ray published book, *Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation*



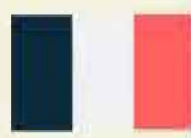
1667

John Milton's reference to the race of Satan' in *Paradise Lost*



1735

1735 was the publication of Carl Linnaeus's work. 1776 his evidence questioned god's role in species creation. His work never stated "race."



1817

German and French scholars begin to use the word race in research. Georges Cuvier used the word 'race' "as a synonym for variety."



1821

Charles Lamb's essay was published, "the two races of men"



1850

Robert Knox published *the races of man*



1848

Britain's pioneer of racial typology, Charles Hamilton Smith published *The natural history of the human species*



1839

Samuel George Morton Published a report regarding measurements of internal capacity of skulls and "concluded that whites had the biggest brains, blacks the smallest and that browns came somewhere in between"



1853

Gobineau's four volume essay is published "the inequality of human races"



1871

Darwin stated that 'it is almost a matter of indifference whether the so-called races of man... are ranked as species or sub-species'



1909

Gregor Mendel's experiment with peas explained "what determined the inheritance of their character"



1930

Fisher published *The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection*. He proved that gene, (not species!) was the unit of selection.



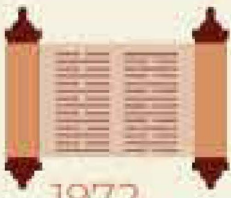
1920

eliminated race as a scientific concept when R. A. Fisher subsumed the biometricians' and the Mendelians' explanations in a new model of the processes of inheritance.



1909

Wilhelm Johannsen defined the concept of phenotype as well as created term "gene" for unit of inheritance.



1972

Richard Lewontin reported that the human population "differences attributable to so-called races are a minor part of human genetic variability (1-15 per cent)."



1978

the General Conference of UNESCO, Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice. 'All human beings belong to a single species.' Banton states that this was already well known prior to 1978.



2000

Craig Venter's sequencing of the human genome



2011

A New York Professor had to report her race when submitting various forms including that of governmental forms. These forms "rarely provide any definition of 'race'"



2002

ASA description of race as 'a principal category in the organization of daily social life' called up associations with the black-white divide



2001

Inherited diseases (sickle-cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, Down syndrome and Tay-Sachs disease) were a concern that the American Colleges of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and of Medical Genetics issued guidelines offering screenings for the cystic fibrosis carrier "to be offered to Caucasian couples, ... if they were planning a pregnancy."

## Bibliography

Banton, Michael. "The Scientific Sources of the Paradox." In *What We Now Know About Race and Ethnicity*, 11-30. NEW YORK: OXFORD: Berghahn Books, 2018. Accessed October 1, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctt130h8qv.5.

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