Race is socially constructed

✔ Race: category of people labeled and treated as similar because of some common biological traits, such as skin color, texture of hair, and shape of eyes (p. 379)
✔ These traits are culturally determined
✔ Race has no “scientific” basis, e.g., DNA
  • Biological variability exists, but doesn’t conform to our “race” categories; racial characteristics aren’t transmitted as complexes
✔ Race was invented in the 18th Century
✔ Race and racism have always been connected
Some racial taxonomies

✓ The ancients: us vs. “barbarians”
✓ Linnaeus’ taxonomy
✓ Nazis: important distinction was Aryan vs. Jew
✓ South African apartheid: four categories (white, black, colored, Indian)
✓ Brazil: wider range of fluid skin color designations
✓ United States
  • Most important distinction historically has been white vs. non-white
  • U.S. officially recognizes fives races plus “other,” and multiple race combinations
The first “scientific” racial taxonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linnaeus’ races</th>
<th>Alleged characteristics</th>
<th>Ruled by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Homo sapiens Americanus</em></td>
<td>Red, ill-tempered, subjugated</td>
<td>Custom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Homo sapiens Asiaticus</em></td>
<td>Yellow, melancholy, greedy</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Homo sapiens Afer</em></td>
<td>Black, impassive, lazy</td>
<td>Caprice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Homo sapiens Europaeus</em></td>
<td>White, serious, strong</td>
<td>Laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Homo sapiens Monstrosus</em></td>
<td>Includes coneheads, flatheads, troglodytes, dwarves &amp; other unusual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>variations</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The U.S. racial system has focused on the white-nonwhite dichotomy

- The one drop rule: one drop of black blood (i.e., any percentage of ancestry) makes someone black.
- Until 1967, many states had laws against miscegenation (marriage or sexual relations between a man & a woman of different races).

People and groups move from one racial category to another

- Because of the one-drop rule, many blacks throughout U.S. history have looked white enough to “pass” as white; this has resulted in a large percentage of whites with black ancestry.
- New immigrant groups, e.g., Irish, Slavs, have been successful in becoming white.

Census categories

- Races: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Some other race.
- Ethnic category: Hispanic or Latino.