

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE

April 13, 2008

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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 five races plus “other,” and multiple race combinations

THE FIRST “SCIENTIFIC” RACIAL TAXONOMY

Linnaeus’ races	Alleged characteristics	Ruled by:
<i>Homo sapiens Americanus</i>	Red, ill-tempered, subjugated	Custom
<i>Homo sapiens Asiaticus</i>	Yellow, melancholy, greedy	Opinion
<i>Homo sapiens Afer</i>	Black, impassive, lazy	Caprice
<i>Homo sapiens Europaeus</i>	White, serious, strong	Laws
<i>Homo sapiens Monstrosus</i>	Includes coneheads, flatheads, troglodytes, dwarves & other unusual variations	

