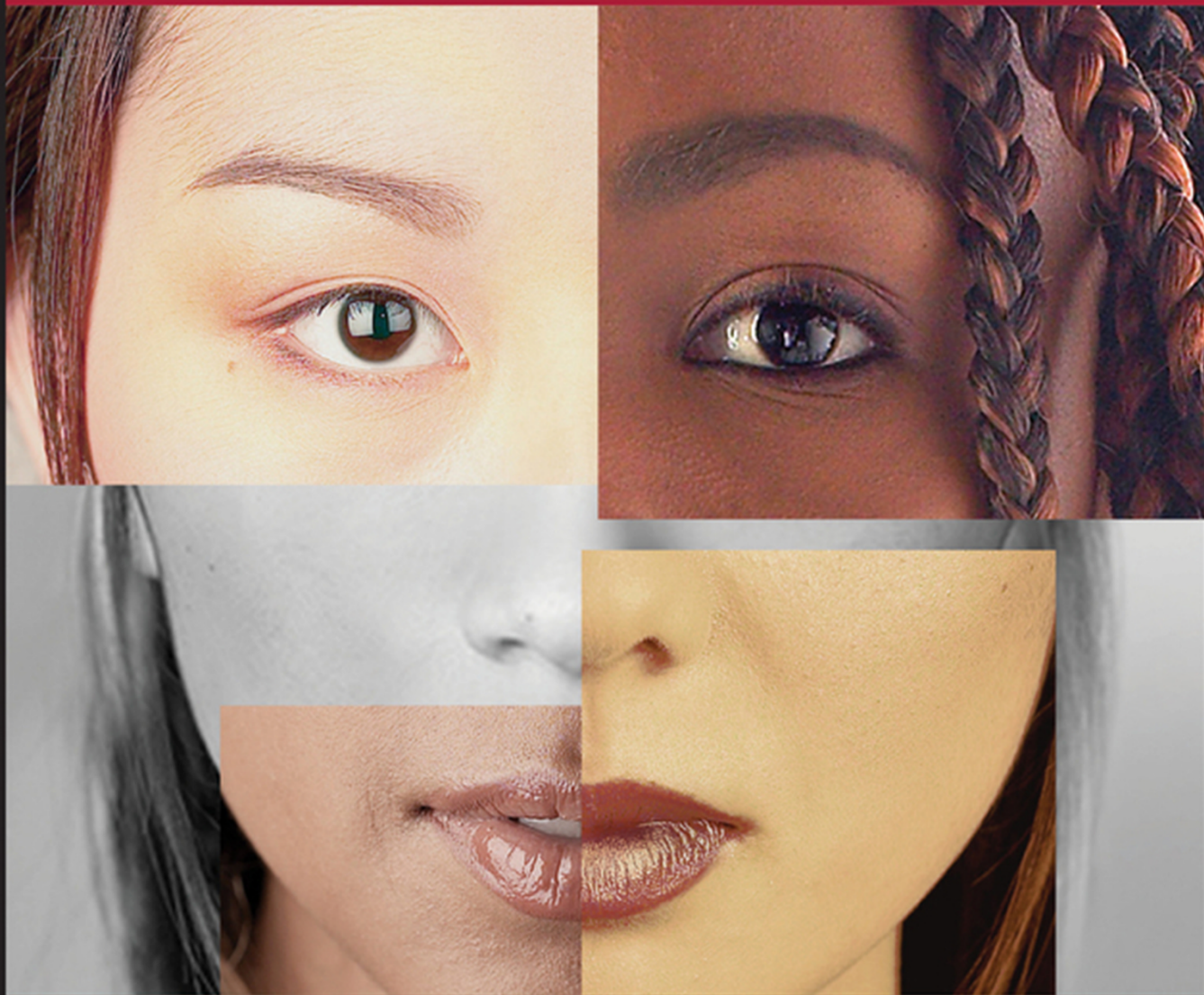


RACE

Are We So Different?

SECOND EDITION



Alan H. Goodman Yolanda T. Moses Joseph L. Jones

WILEY Blackwell

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AMERICAN
ANTHROPOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

Advancing Knowledge, Solving Human Problems

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Preface

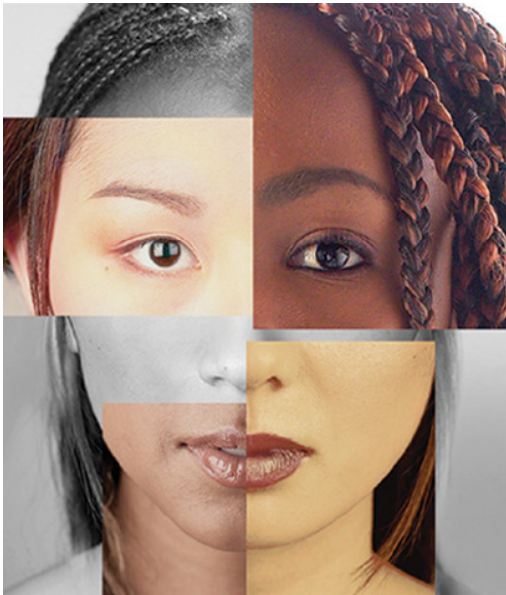


Figure 0.1 Are we so different?

Not unlike the networks of meaning and actions that coalesce and continually refashion the powerful idea of race, writing a multiauthored book on race comes about through the synergies of multiple personal, institutional, and professional connections. In writing this book, we have had the benefit of a large, complex, active, and supportive network. This has been invaluable in our project.

Race looks different depending on one's experience, place, and history. We expect, then, that this book will strike each reader in slightly different

ways. They may gravitate to areas that have particular, individual interest and meaning. However, this book is meant to be read from front to back as a sort of primer on race, human biological variations, and racism. It is unique with respect to the breadth of subjects covered, as well as the depth of information and analysis presented for each.

In three parts, we explain how politicians, scientists, and others created and made race biological as a justification for inequalities; why human biological categories of race are nothing more than science fiction; and how race and racism nonetheless continue to influence most aspects of our lives today. As a companion to the larger project called RACE: *Are We So Different?*, we have designed this book to show, in broadly accessible language, how these three topics are linked inextricably. Seeing these connections, whether they are obvious or hidden, is fundamental to any real understanding of race and racism. We hope that our main messages are expressed in ways that resonate with all readers.

The project that led to this book first took recognizable shape in 1997. One of us, Yolanda Moses, then president of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the world's largest and foremost organization of professional anthropologists, called together a group of scholars from the subfields of anthropology to talk to each other about what race means in each.

The participants came out of that session with a clear consensus that, rather than occupying conceptually different universes, we had many points of agreement: much more agreement than difference. We came to these points from different intellectual

histories and with different observations and data. We found that the subfields of anthropology, such as linguistic anthropology, archaeology, biological anthropology, and political anthropology, highlighted diverse aspects of the complexly protean idea of race and the dynamics of racism.

Remember the parable of the blindfolded individuals touching different parts of an elephant? One touches the tail and thinks she has a snake. Another touches the trunk and thinks he is feeling a wall. It was much like that. It was clear that working together, and ultimately with colleagues from other fields from physics to the humanities, was the best way of describing and understanding the whole of the elephant that is race and racism.

Finally, it was also clear just how harmful the idea of race had been and continues to be in the hands of individuals with the power to maintain and benefit from a racial status quo. Systems of inequalities were built and are maintained around the unchallenged idea that racial differences and inequalities are biological and natural. These notions reverberate even more widely today. However, it is apparent that they are refutable and simply based on bad science. This is why we felt compelled to educate that *race is powerful, but not based in genes or biology, rather on a deeply held cultural and therefore changeable concept*. We hope this book helps to change how we understand biological and cultural diversity.

We concluded then that we had the potential through anthropology and other sciences to talk to one another and to articulate to a larger public that race as we know it is a social construct. Through the lenses of biology (human variation), history, and lived experience, we created a multi-layered framework to talk about what race is, and what it is not. We needed to do more than talk to our colleagues about this approach. Our students have been invaluable in this process. This book would not have been possible without them, and we hope that we will reach more college classrooms in this second edition. We need to continue to elevate the public discussions about race, bringing it back to fundamental issues such as how race came about in history and was invented, and how race and human variation are different. And we needed to try and include everyone in the discussion.

The RACE public education program, of which this book is a part, was launched by a steering committee under the guidance of the AAA and the staff leadership of Dr. Peggy Overbey. The tangible results include a website (www.understandingrace.org), created by S2N Media, Inc. (led by Kathy Prusinski), and a museum exhibit, designed and built with our museum partners, the exceptional staff of the Science Museum of Minnesota (SMM), led by then president Eric Jolly, with the project headed by Robert Garfinkle and Joanne Jones-Rizzi. To them, we owe our first and deepest gratitude. This book simply would never have happened if not for Robert and Joanne, their creative and resourceful team, and their courageous and collaborative spirit.

Due to the success of the first edition of this book, and because race and racism remain all too salient, we undertook an expanded and updated second edition, designed to reach a wider audience. Many of the essays are revised and will help to shed new light on topics such as slavery, scientific racism, and health and educational disparities. The science section has been updated to reflect current information on human genetic diversity. New data and analyses appear rapidly, but reaffirm a basic structure of genetic diversity completely incompatible with the idea of race.

The racial landscape has shifted since we wrote the first edition of *RACE*. Today, few would suggest we have entered a “post-racial” era of American life. Unfortunately, recent years instead have seen a resurgence of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of racism, especially since Donald Trump succeeded Barack Obama as U.S. president. Terms like “white nationalism” and “white supremacy” are once again common in public discourse amid increased police violence against communities of color and a sharp rise in anti-immigrant sentiment. With this edition, then, we thought it important to make even clearer the connections between racial ideology – beginning with the basic belief in human biological races – and racism. Thus, we greatly expanded the sections on the politics of race and the struggles for racial justice in policing, law enforcement, and related domains.

Once again, this book is about a bad but powerful idea. We tell the story of how, at a critical point

in history, some people managed to transform aspects of human variation into social vulnerability. We explore the consequences of this decision, which range from subtle but damaging microaggressions to public symbols, and from displays of hatred to state-sanctioned separation of families and even genocide. At the same time, we acknowledge that people have always fashioned from their troubled histories collective identities. These identities engender pride and take on shared meanings beyond whatever negative experiences or attributes

may be associated with them by others. Social racial identities are no different.

Ultimately, though, we ask: are we really so different, if human races never evolved but the idea of race did? For most, this question has no simple or single answer. So, we offer this book as a resource for discussing, reflecting on, and drawing your own conclusions about race and human diversity. We also invite you to join us in reclaiming human diversity from race and racism – and in celebrating the fact that our differences pale in comparison to what makes us the same.

Acknowledgments

The second edition of *RACE* is an outgrowth of almost two decades of work that went into the conceptualization, research, and construction of the website and especially into the creation of the components of the museum exhibit. Many people and organizations assisted AAA in developing, producing, and implementing the RACE: Are We So Different? public education program. They include the Project Advisory Board members: Michael L. Blakey (College of William and Mary), Louis Casagrande (Children's Museum of Boston), Robert Hahn (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), Faye Harrison (University of Illinois), Thomas Holt (University of Chicago), Janis Hutchinson (University of Houston), Marvin Krislov (formerly of Oberlin College), Richard Lewontin (Harvard University), Jeffrey Long (University of New Mexico), Shirley Malcom (American Association for the Advancement of Science), Carol Mukhopadhyay (San Jose State University), Michael Omi (University of California, Berkeley), Kyeyoung Park (University of California, Los Angeles), Kenneth Prewitt (Columbia University), Enid Schildkrout (Museum for African Art), Theodore Shaw (Columbia University), Marcelo Suarez-Orozco (New York University), David Hurst Thomas (American Museum of Natural History), Russell Thornton (University of California, Los Angeles), and Arlene Torres (City University of New York).

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controller; Susannah Bodman and Lauren Schwartz, former media relations associates; Lucille Horn, former meetings director; Khara Minter, former meetings coordinator; Stacy Lathrop and Dinah Winnick, former managing editors, *Anthropology News*; Oona Schmid, former director of publishing; Damon Dozier, former director of public affairs; Amy Goldenberg, managing editor, *Anthropology News*; Mark Booker, production editor, *Anthropology News*; and Carla Fernandez, meetings planner and exhibits manager.

Felica Gomez worked as an intern on the project and coauthored the family guide published on the RACE Project website. Amy Beckrich served as project assistant, helping to coordinate the massive project and keep everyone in line. Because of her excitement about the project, Mary Margaret Overbey left a permanent position at AAA and was for many years the force behind the project as its director through to the completion of the website and exhibit. Leslie Walker and Alexandra Frankel were invaluable in helping to pull together images for the second edition.

The exhibit and the book have benefited immensely from collaborations with California Newsreel. Under the directorship of Larry Adelman, California Newsreel produced the exceptional video "Race: The Power of an Illusion" (see www.pbs.org/race). This award-winning documentary film has been an inspiration to our project, and in fact we have portions of two interviews from it in this book.

A number of eminent scholars from a cross-section of disciplines graciously agreed, under tight

deadlines and time constraints, to write and include their voices in the form of guest essays; our profound thanks go to Kamari Clarke, Faye Harrison, Nina Jablonski, Kenneth Kidd, Ian Haney López, Carol Mukhopadhyay, Michael Omi, Nell Irvin Painter, Mica Pollock, Susan Reverby, Audrey Smedley, Deborah Thomas, Arlene Torres, Bonnie Urciuoli, and Joseph Watkins for participating in the first edition and for their timely updates to the second. Other individuals have been directly quoted or featured in the book via excerpts from “Race: The Power of an Illusion” or their inclusion in the museum exhibit. These include scientists Joseph Graves and Richard Lewontin. The story of sickle cell is movingly told by Frank and Vickie Giacomazza.

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who helped in thinking through the best way to communicate ideas around race and human variation: In the early 1990s, my colleagues and I helped organized “teach-ins” on race, not because of any crisis but just to educate about the myriad ways that race permeates our (mostly white) lives. My father taught me to be critical and always question my position. I learned about the power of stories from filmmakers Larry Adelman, Christine Sommers, and Lew Smith and exhibit developers including Joanne Jones-Rizzi and Robert Garfinkle. In addition to advisory board members, many colleagues have helped me, including, but not limited to, Larry Adelman, George Armelagos, Lee Baker, Michael Blakey, Joseph Graves, Faye Harrison, Evelyn Hammonds, Thomas Leatherman, Richard Lewontin, Jonathan Marks, Michael Montoya, Lynn Morgan, Leith Mullings, Dean Robinson, and Banu Subramanian. Chaia Heller, my spouse and a cultural anthropologist, added tremendous insight into how to communicate the power of the idea of race, not to mention giving me daily moral support. I hope this book will help to unveil some of the systems behind race and racism, and why racism hurts.

Yolanda Moses wishes to thank the many people who have helped to make this project a reality for her and who have given her personal support over the years: At UC Riverside, the intellectual contributions of Tom Patterson, Wendy Ashmore, Christine Gailey, Sang Hee Lee, T. S. Harvey, and Juliet McMullin have been invaluable to me as I have worked on ideas for this book. I thank them for that support. A special thanks goes to the students in my classes who challenged me to explain the intricacies of the social construction of race and human variation in ways that tracked with their everyday experiences of race and racism. I want to thank the following graduate students who helped me with various tasks connected to this book, from basic research to helping to track down numerous permissions: Scott Smith, John Gust, Jenny Banh, Priscilla LoForte, Isabel Placentia, Richard Alvarez, Linda Hall, Holly Okonkwo, and Doris Logan. Special thanks to staff members Felecia Garrett and Sonia Zamora who helped me to type early drafts. And finally, thanks to my family, my husband of almost 45 years James F. Bawek, and my two grown daughters, Shana and Toni, who

have been my sounding board for my ideas, research, and activities for this project since its inception. To my 97-year-old mother, Willie Lee Moses, I give thanks for her encouragement to complete this project so that others may know what it means “to not live a day of your life without thinking about race.”

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Introducing Race, Human Variation, and Racism



Figure 1.1 White supremacists in Charlottesville, VA, 2017. They marched through the streets while shouting “White Lives Matter!” and “Jews Will Not Replace Us!” The Charlottesville protests spurred the need to better understand race, racism, and human variation (Getty Images).

Telling me that I'm obsessed with talking about racism in America is like telling me I'm obsessed with swimming when I'm drowning.

Hari Kondabolu

I don't see color. People tell me I'm white and I believe them because police officers call me "sir."

Stephen Colbert

Talking about race or being afraid to talk about race; talking too much or too little. It doesn't matter. We never seem to get very far.

How do we get out of this gridlock? How do we get beyond misunderstandings?

Our answer: Start asking and resolving different questions about race.

Most people think race is real, and they are obviously right. *Race is real*. But race isn't real in the way we have come to think of it as being real: as deep, primordial, and biological. Race, rather, is a powerful idea about biological variation that has been used to separate and rank groups.

The purpose of this book is to lead readers to understand how race is and is not real. Simply focusing on diversity and acceptance, as is common today, misses the deeper roots of race, racial thinking, and overt racism. On the other hand, a purely scientific and objective approach to human variation fails to tell the full story of how the idea of race has shaped historical events and continues to be a powerful influence on all our lives. Importantly, it does not provide insight into the varied ways that being "raced" is experienced by individuals in different places and over time. Neither approach helps much in dislodging centuries of racial thinking and distrust.

In this book, we aim to bring together a combination of science, history, and personal experiences. The result we are hoping for is surprisingly liberating. Race has come to be a knotted ball of history, culture, identity, and biology. We aim to untangle that ball. Once unraveled, we hope you, the reader, will come to better understand the origins and significance of the biological differences among us and how the idea of race – how we misguidedly came to conceive of those differences – became such a formidable worldview.

We know that race seems obviously real to anyone immersed in North America's dominant culture. Race seems visually real. Every day, one can observe difference in outward form between individuals. Interestingly, rather than biology, race is real because of the everyday ways in which we

interpret differences and invest *meaning* into them. It might seem counterintuitive, but race is also biological because living in a racial society with differential access to resources has effects on the body. The constant stress of racism and the economic effects of living in a racial society continue to lead to gross racial inequalities in nearly every measure of health and longevity. If race is an illusion, then it is an unusually powerful one.

Yet, what we have internalized as evidence that we have seen with our own eyes the "facts" of race, such as differences in skin color and other so-called markers of race, simply have no inherent or deeper sociopolitical significance other than what our culture attaches to them. There is human linguistic, cultural, biological, and genetic variation. But such variation is not racial in that it does not "naturally" partition individuals into races.

A key insight from anthropology is that what we see as real is often due to what our worldviews predispose our minds to see. In much the same way that we used to think the sun revolved around the earth, we see variation as race only because the idea is all around us and is unquestioned. As former Spellman College president Beverly Tatum says, race is like smog. If we are in it, it is all we see. Moreover, it obstructs a clear vision of the true nature of difference. It is time to lift the smog.

If you are white, generally speaking you do not need to think much about your race. You might be able to think race is about others. The comedian Stephen Colbert jokes that he doesn't see race or color. Because he is white, he does not daily confront race. But then he says, "People tell me I am white and I believe them because police officers call me 'sir'." Colbert, here, demonstrates an insight into the fact that he does have a race. But, of course he does. It is just that his white race is "unmarked."

While white individuals may not see or understand the salience of race, the United States and the world are most certainly enveloped in racial smog, as Tatum says. Or, to use another metaphor, race in the United States is like water for fish: it is

everywhere. As Hari Kondabolu says, “Telling me that I’m obsessed with talking about racism in America is like telling me I’m obsessed with swimming when I’m drowning.”

In this book, we hope to show how the idea of race continues to have consequences, every day, for all of our lives. Race is not just a *social construct*, it is a *social contract* that has changed our minds, our bodies, and our world. The Constitution of the United States listed enslaved Africans as three-fifths of a person. While the Thirteenth Amendment changed this formulation,¹ the racial worldview is much deeper than laws and “official” statements. It is particularly enduring because the idea of race is deeply etched into our minds and institutions. We want to expose the social contract and thereby the deep roots of racial thinking. Just as weeds will return if they are not pulled out by the roots, so we will not get beyond racism unless we pay attention to its foundational ideas.

Since the first edition of this book in 2012, a series of events and actions have shown all too clearly that racial thinking is alive in well. In 2017, we witnessed the Unite the Right march in Charlottesville, with the death of Heather Heyer and chants of “Jews Will Not Replace Us” (see Figure 1.1). And in just one week in October 2018, Trump railed against immigrants from Central America and the Middle East, two African Americans were shot in a supermarket, and eleven Jews were shot in a temple in Pittsburgh.

As fundamentally woven into our minds and institutions as the idea of race is, we can change the way we understand it, and even how it is embedded in institutions. We will not do so by avoiding race or pretending that it is not salient. Rather, we will do so by engaging with the science of human variation, the history, culture, and politics of race, and everyday lived experiences of race and racism.

Our students and those who visit the exhibit that helped launch this book often have “a-ha” moments in which they come to forever see race differently. Suddenly, race is not natural but an idea and a product of culture. Amazing! Fortunately, these insightful moments do not require advanced training in genomics, anthropology, philosophy, or

any other discipline. Rather, the only requirement is openness to questioning assumptions that one thought were obviously true.

Imagine that you have lived your life in a landscape that has never led you or those around you to question that the earth is anything but flat. You go to a mountaintop and you look into the clear distance and notice that the horizon appears to bend down. That bend is a sign that the earth is round. It is time to pay attention to signs like that. However, be forewarned. The results are mind-bending. Changes like going from seeing the earth as flat to round are what scientists call paradigm shifts. A paradigm shift, or a change in worldview, can be disorienting, and it takes a while to readjust. The good news is that paradigm shifts are how societies can become more just and how science advances.

The book in your hands aims to be a fundamental primer on the idea and reality of race and how it connects to institutional and everyday racism. Human races, we argue, are not “out there, in nature.” Rather, humans invented race. This book is organized around sections on history, science, and lived experience. The main themes are that: (1) race is a recent human invention; (2) race is about culture and not about biology;² and (3) race and racism are imbedded in institutions and in everyday life.

Combining insights and examples from the realms of science, history, and individual stories, our aim was to write and assemble a book that is serious yet engaging and lively. Our main goal is to move readers beyond the false dichotomy of human races as being real or not. We want readers to appreciate *how* contemporary social and biological analyses show that race is real and how they show that it is surprisingly outmoded (chiefly, as a way to think about genetic differences among us). We want this to be a book that deeply transforms its readers. We want everyone to have an “a-ha” moment.

Five central arguments of this book are as follows:

- 1 *The idea of race was invented.* Race was invented as a way to categorize and rank groups and, by extension, individuals. The invention did not happen in an isolated laboratory or at one place and one time. Rather, this scientific and social

² Paradoxically, race is not a biological or genetic construct, but it does have biological consequences. Some of these consequences of race, especially for health and wealth, will be highlighted in this book.

¹ Additional laws were also passed by most states against miscegenation (interracial marriage).

idea slowly took hold and became more and more real through European exploration and colonization, and slavery in the Americas. In the 18th century, race may have made sense because the physical (or phenotypic) differences between Europeans and others seemed to be great.

While just a human invention, as explored in the first part of this book, the idea was politically powerful because the belief in separate and unequal races was the only potentially moral and ethical justification for the inhumanities of colonization and slavery. In Part 1, we will tell the gripping story of the interlinked social, religious, political, and scientific histories of race. Closely following the exhibit, the story is outlined in four parts.

- 2 *Human biological variation is real, obvious, wonderful, and necessary.* We do vary. Part 2 provides a primer on human genetic variation; that is, how variation is patterned within individuals and among individuals and groups. Evolutionarily speaking, even if it is not the spice of life, variety is certainly a required ingredient for the survival of our species.
- 3 *The idea of race does not explain human variation.* The biggest myth of race is that we humans have biological races and that on a biological or, more precisely, a genetic level our race determines a good deal about how we differ from one another and our potentialities. The science of human variation, however, tells us otherwise. Race-as-genetic-variation is a myth.

Race neither explains variation, nor is it a useful genetic construct. In this book, we will use a number of interrelated examples to show why this is so.

- 4 *Race is both stable and protean.* The idea of race is something we all share – to a degree. We argue that race today is much the same, on a fundamental level, as it was a hundred or even three hundred years ago. But the realities of race – how the ideas get into lived experiences – morph from place to place and time to time. Here, we have the opportunity to explore how some of those diverse lives were lived racially. What was it like to be a Native American and to see Europeans for the first time? What was it like to be a Japanese American during World War II? It is our expectation that understanding how race differs among diverse groups provides a deeper understanding of each group and about the idea of race itself.
- 5 *We own the future of race.* How we continue to understand and use race is up to us. We hold the core belief that our book will contribute to a fundamental overhaul of how various publics think and talk about race. By explaining how the power of race was used in the past to divide us, we will show how this knowledge provides the power to understand and reunite. Once we understand what race is and is not, it ceases to become a ready excuse for the intolerable differences in our wealth, health, and other core indicators of equality and life experience.

Race is a Recent Human Invention

It's only a few hundred years old, in comparison to the lengthy span of human history. Although not scientific, the idea of race proposed that there were significant differences among people that allowed them to be grouped into a limited number of categories or races. Yet, are we so different? All humans share a common ancestry and, because each of us represents a unique combination of ancestral traits, all humans exhibit biological variation.

From the beginning, the idea of race was tied to power and hierarchy among people, with one group being viewed as superior and

others as inferior. Despite disproving notions of hierarchy and removing social, economic, and political barriers, the legacy of race continues to shape the lives and relationships of people in the U.S. and around the world.

This book may challenge popular understandings about race, raise questions, and spark critical thinking. We hope the exhibition, public website, and educational materials produced by the *RACE* Project will foster dialogue in families and communities around the U.S. and help better relations among us all.

From American Anthropological Association (AAA) Exhibit on RACE

RACE Exhibit Introductory Video Transcript (2007)

Race.

What is race?

What do we really know about race?

Here's what we do know: Race is a short word with a long history in the United States of America. Think of the history of America and our ideas of race together, mixed up, and ever changing. Just like this painting, race was created. It is a powerful idea that was invented by society.

Race is an enduring concept that has molded our nation's economy, laws, and social institutions. It is a complex notion that has shaped each of our destinies. Many of the ideas we now associate with race originated during the European era of exploration.

Europeans like Christopher Columbus traveled overseas and encountered, and then colonized or conquered, peoples in Africa, Asia, and the Americas who looked, talked, and acted much differently from them. Naturalists and scientists then classified these differences into systems that became the foundation for the notion of race as we know it today.

In the American colonies, the first laborers were European indentured servants.

When African laborers were forcibly brought to Virginia beginning in 1619, status was defined by wealth and religion, not by physical characteristics such as skin color.

But this would change.

Over time, physical difference mattered, and with the development of the transatlantic slave trade, landowners began replacing their temporary European laborers with enslaved Africans who were held in permanent bondage. Soon a new social structure emerged based primarily on skin color, with those of English ancestry at the top and African slaves and American Indians at the bottom.

By 1776, when "all men are created equal" was written into the Declaration of Independence by a slaveholder named Thomas Jefferson, a democratic nation was born with a major contradiction about race at its core. As our new nation asserted its independence from European tyranny, blacks and American Indians were viewed as less than human and not deserving of the same liberties as whites.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the notion of race continued to shape life in the United States. The rise of "race science" supported the common belief that people who were not white were biologically inferior. The removal of Native Americans from their lands, legalized segregation, and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II are legacies of where this thinking led.

Today, science tells us that all humans share a common ancestry. And while there are differences among us, we're also very much alike.

Despite these advances, the legacy of race continues to affect us in a variety of ways.

Deeply held assumptions about race and enduring stereotypes make us think that gaps in wealth, health, housing, education, employment, or physical ability in sports are natural. And we fail to see the privileges that some have been granted and others denied because of skin color.

This creation, called race, has fostered inequality and discrimination for centuries.

It has influenced how we relate to each other as human beings. Consider how your view of a painting can change as you examine it more closely.

We invite you to do the same with race. Examine and re-examine your thoughts and beliefs about race.

PART 1

HISTORIES OF RACE, DIFFERENCE, AND RACISM



The imaginary of whiteness, captured here, is too often not considered part of the invention of races. Whiteness is taken for granted as a standard of beauty and normalcy, thus providing access to power, yet is a relatively recent invention. Courtesy of the Science Museum of Minnesota/C. Thiesen.

Inventing Race

The world got along without race for the overwhelming majority of its history. The U.S. has never been without it.

David Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon*

Race: The Unnatural History of an Idea

A social contract ... cognitive smog ... a dangerous myth ... a powerful illusion ... Race metaphors abound, and these examples express as well as any the reality of race in contemporary society in the U.S. and globally. Race, today, is everywhere. Whatever confusion and disagreements exist around its definitions or delineations, few would argue this point. And understandably so! We live in a society saturated with race. Racial thinking has infiltrated and now influences in some way or another everyone's experiences of health, education, romance, friendship, work, religion, politics – virtually every arena and aspect of our lives. These influences can be painfully obvious or virtually imperceptible, but they are ever-present. As a result, over time, most of us develop strongly held racial beliefs based on these accumulated experiences and a steady stream of images and other forms of information that reinforce our confidence in our ability to believe what we think we see in race. Eventually, we become

race experts, or at least experts on how we see and experience “the races” – their physical characteristics, their behaviors, and especially their inherent or *essential* differences.

We debate the nature and extent of contemporary racism among family and friends, in online forums, and even through intermittent “national conversations,” usually prompted by current events and plagued by predictable sound bites. Occasionally, the shared experiences and beliefs of others may cause us to revisit and rethink our own ideas. Yet, rarely do these exchanges reveal or probe the powerful cultural underpinnings of our collective commitments to race and racism. Think about it. How often do the second glances required to guess someone's “proper” race lead us to second-guess the premise of race-as-biology or the notion of racial *phenotypes* – or to question our desire to “race” them in the first place? We are much more likely to puzzle over such individuals' nonconformity to racial criteria that were disproven long ago. Sure, those of us still counting may quibble over whether humanity divides into three, four, five, or more races. However, few take the

logical leap of allowing this apparently minor detail to challenge our belief in race as a way of defining, categorizing, and inevitably ranking human difference. Taking this step can prove challenging even for those of us who struggle to void the “racial contract” (Mills 1997) and reject notions of racial supremacy. In failing to engage such basic questions and issues, or in doing so only superficially, we undermine our ability to understand race and unlearn racism.

Coming to terms with our varied and shared histories of race and racism is a good starting point for those who would reverse this trend. There is more at stake in our collective ability or failure to face our racial pasts squarely than the repetition of past mistakes or misdeeds, because these are living histories. They live with and within us, and they keep us from moving forward together as equals. At times, historic episodes of race and racism resurface, quite literally, to reshape both past and present. This was the case in the early 1990s when construction workers “rediscovered” Lower Manhattan’s 17th- and 18th-century New York African Burial Ground. The subsequent unearthing of artifacts and skeletal remains of over 400 individuals from this early African American cemetery helped to spur broad interest in the underexplored and underappreciated history of northern slavery (Blakey 2010).

More often, our racial legacies persist in classrooms, workplaces, banks, courtrooms, and a host of other institutional spaces, where life chances and material realities are significantly enhanced or diminished. In such settings, the seemingly impersonal nature of procedures and interactions may easily conceal underlying race-infused assumptions, biases, and power relations. Especially through the enactment of “race neutral” and “colorblind” policies, these routine interactions can invoke and reinforce racial stereotypes and power relations in subtle but potent ways (see essay by Haney López, Chapter 6). We embody our racial pasts most profoundly through contemporary identity formations and classifications and associated health, wealth, and educational opportunity disparities, as discussed in Part 3 of this book. Thus, while some today are eager to declare the United States a “postracial” society, this refrain rings untrue and problematic for many, especially those targeted by and dedicated to eradicating

racism (Harrison 2005; and essay in Chapter 17). Indeed, perhaps for better and for worse, most find it difficult to imagine a time before race or to envision life without it. Instead, we tend to extrapolate from its current pervasiveness and power – in institutions, popular culture, language, and so on – that race has always been and always will be with us. Race, it appears, is an inevitable part of our own past and destiny.

Is this truly the case? Just how deep into human history do the roots of race run?

A Recent Human Invention

As the epigraph suggests, and as impossible as it now seems, there was a time before race colored perceptions of human diversity. In fact, most anthropologists, historians, and others who study and compare cultural and societal systems agree that that time was not so long ago (Smedley 2007). They do not recognize race among humans as the product of biological evolution or divine design. Instead, scholars have produced a vast and growing literature that documents race as a social/historical/*cultural construct*: a system of ideas, identities, and material relations that emerged slowly in the context of Western European imperialism and colonial expansion, beginning in the 15th century. In contrast to the popular belief in race as an empirically validated, innate, and defining human quality, they point out that the first laws designed to establish and patrol racial boundaries and hierarchy did not appear until the middle of the 17th century, when the “racial worldview” was a new thing under the sun (Smedley 2007). From this perspective, human races are not biological units. Although referenced through presumably shared physical (and, increasingly, cultural) attributes, races are in fact political entities resulting from our social actions (Blakey 1999; Harrison 1995; Mukhopadhyay et al. 2007).

We concur. The information in the chapters and sections that follow clearly supports this view of race as a recent human invention. Current scholarship suggests that *human races exist solely because we created them, and only in the forms in which we perpetuate them*. Furthermore, echoing historian Barbara Fields (1990, 2003), we emphasize that recognizing race and racism as sociocultural rather than

biological facts is only the tip of the analytical iceberg. What academics call the “constructivist” approach affords a perspective from which to investigate critically the ideological and material manifestations, connections, and consequences of race, racism, and related phenomena (Harrison 2005; Smedley 2007). Simply put, this approach represents the means, not an end, to understanding race. Thus, it is not our intention simply to convince the reader *that* human races are sociocultural constructs; rather, our goal in this first part of the book is to show precisely *how* and *why* race – like class, gender, and other “axes of oppression” (Farmer 2003) – came to be and continues to be such a durable and dynamic stratifying element in U.S. society and culture. As the title of this part implies, the difficult history of race in this country is in actuality a set of stories or interwoven narratives illustrating how forces of tradition, religion, law, and science conspired, and at times competed, to define and influence human diversity (e.g. through miscegenation laws). Realizing its “unnatural” political origins and ongoing development as the product of human activity is the vital *first* step towards a comprehensive understanding of race: what it has been, what it is today, and what we might make of it in years to come.

In this book, we chart our journey through the historical origins and evolution of the very idea of human races. First, however, a brief excursion into that “time before race” is in order. Surely, the claim that race enters the scene so late in human history, perhaps just several hundred years ago, leaves wide open the question of how earlier peoples processed human difference. How *did* our ancestors understand cultural and biological diversity until then? If race is recent in human experience, what preceded racial thinking?

To be sure, past peoples were *ethnocentric*. They frequently believed themselves culturally superior to others and sometimes exhibited the nasty habit of painting others as uncultured and brutish or savage, even to the point of justifying enslavement and killing on this basis. Yet, as any introductory cultural anthropology text will illustrate, ethnocentric and later racial logics differed significantly. These differences are most obvious with respect to the characterization of human potential and the perceived connection, or lack thereof, of cultural and physical

traits. Prior to the inception of race, people were much less likely to link cultural practices instinctively and irrevocably to physical differences, which were often attributed to distinct environmental conditions (Brace 2005). Nor were people necessarily inclined to believe that phenotypic diversity across groups represented inherent or essential (i.e. unbridgeable) differences in ability or character. Indeed, before race, people more readily saw through phenotypes to find deeper, behavioral similarities, if not common ground. Moreover, where they deemed others to be culturally backwards in language, religion, food, adornment, or other behaviors, they tended to view these deficits as correctable. With time, learned behavioral deficiencies could be overwritten through “proper” enculturation – while inherent racial inferiority, by definition, could not.

Again, cultural biases are far from benign, and it is not our intent to rank stratification systems according to their perniciousness. In fact, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between ethnocentrism and racism because of the increasing conflation of culture and race (essay by Harrison, Chapter 17). The point here is to show the critical shift that race represents in the nature of human relations; an unfortunate shift in primary focus from learned practices and traditions toward static or fixed notions of physical and essential characteristics. In general, pre-racial conceptions of diversity did not inhibit one from recognizing and acknowledging the shared human capacity to learn and participate fully in *any* culture or society – irrespective of the phenotypic characteristics later used to distinguish races.

Classicist Frank Snowden (1983) clearly illustrates this fact in *Before Color Prejudice*, his seminal study of “the black image” in Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and early Christian art and literature. Warning against the temptation to read contemporary social issues into the historical record, Snowden observes that interactions in the ancient Mediterranean between peoples today classified as black or white – even among political and military rivals – were devoid of “acute” color consciousness and any type of racial discrimination. He points out that these societies never observed blackness as the basis of slave status.

Nor is ancient history white race history (Painter 2010). Not surprisingly, the argument