



Employment of Negroes in Agriculture. Earle Wilton Richardson. 1934. Oil on canvas, 48 × 32 in. (*Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC/Art Resource, NY*)

The Origin of the Idea of Race

As You Read

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- 1.2 How old is racism? How is race distinct from previous ways of thinking about human difference?
- 1.3 How did the writers of the U.S. Constitution think of slavery?
- 1.4 How did the Indian Removal Act affect Native Americans?
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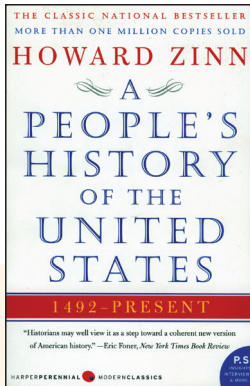
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Talking



In the 1600s, Native Americans, European colonists, and enslaved Africans found themselves together in the New World. Why did the Europeans believe they needed slaves? And what was the motivation for exploiting Africans in particular? In this excerpt from *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn provides some insight.

The Virginians needed labor, to grow corn for subsistence, to grow tobacco for export. They had just figured out how to grow tobacco, and in 1617 they sent off the first cargo to England. Finding that, like all pleasurable drugs tainted with moral disapproval, it brought a high price, the planters, despite their high religious talk, were not going to ask questions about something so profitable.

They couldn't force Indians to work for them, as Columbus had done. They were outnumbered, and while, with superior firearms, they could massacre Indians, they would face massacre in return. They could not capture them and keep them enslaved; the Indians were tough, resourceful, defiant, and at home in the woods, as the transplanted Englishmen were not.

White servants had not yet been brought over in sufficient quantity. Besides, they did not come out of slavery, and did not have to do more than contract their labor for a few years to get their passage and a start in the New World. As for the free white settlers, many of them were skilled craftsmen, or even men of leisure back in England, who were so little inclined to work the land that John Smith [leader of the Virginia Colony], in those early years, had to declare a kind of martial law, organize them into work gangs, and force them into the fields for survival.

There may have been a kind of frustrated rage at their own ineptitude, at the Indian superiority at taking care of themselves, that made the Virginians especially ready to become the masters of slaves. Edmund Morgan imagines their mood as he writes in his book *American Slavery, American Freedom*:

If you were a colonist, you knew that your technology was superior to the Indians'. You knew that you were civilized, and they were savages . . . But your superior technology had proved insufficient to extract anything. The Indians, keeping to themselves, laughed at your superior methods and lived from the land more abundantly and with less labor than you did . . . And when your own people started deserting in order to live with them, it was too much . . . So you killed the Indians, tortured them, burned their villages, burned their cornfields. It proved your superiority, in spite of

your failures. And you gave similar treatment to any of your own people who succumbed to their savage ways of life. But you still did not grow much corn . . .

Black slaves were the answer. And it was natural to consider imported blacks as slaves, even if the institution of slavery would not be regularized and legalized for several decades. Because, by 1619, a million blacks had already been brought from Africa to South America and the Caribbean, to the Portuguese and Spanish colonies, to work as slaves. Fifty years before Columbus, the Portuguese took ten African blacks to Lisbon—this was the start of a regular trade in slaves. African blacks had been stamped as slave labor for a hundred years. So it would have been strange if those twenty blacks, forcibly transported to Jamestown, and sold as objects to settlers anxious for a steadfast source of labor, were considered as anything but slaves.

Their helplessness made enslavement easier. The Indians were on their own land. The whites were in their own European culture. The blacks had been torn from their land and culture, forced into a situation where the heritage of language, dress, custom, family relations, was bit by bit obliterated except for the remnants that blacks could hold on to by sheer, extraordinary pressure.

Source: Zinn 2010, 25–26.

In the colonial Americas, no one would have described the population using the terms *Native American*, *white*, or *black*. Instead, people identified themselves by groups such as Shawnee, Irish, and Ashanti. How, then, did our current racial categories come to be? What distinguishes the idea of race from previous ways of thinking about human difference? These are the questions we will consider in this chapter.

In the contemporary United States, one of the first things we notice about someone we meet is race. When we aren't sure of someone's race, we may get inquisitive or begin to feel uncomfortable (Dalmage 2000). It is as if, before interacting, we have to know if the other person



▲ When people in the United States meet a person and are unsure of their race, many people feel compelled to ask: “What are you?”

social construction An idea or way of viewing people based not on biological differences but on social perceptions.

race A social construction to describe a group of people who share physical and cultural traits as well as a common ancestry.

racism (1) The belief that races are populations whose physical differences are linked to significant cultural and social differences within a hierarchy. (2) The practice of subordinating races believed to be inferior.

ethnicity Group identity based on notions of similar and shared history, culture, and kinship.

is white, black, Asian, Native American, or something else. The perceived race of the other person affects how we treat one another and what we expect the other person to say and do.

It may be hard to imagine a time when the idea of race did not exist, when we did not categorize ourselves and others this way. But this time was not so long ago: although humans have long used various factors to classify one another, the idea of race as a classificatory system is a modern invention. Ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, did not think that the world's population could be divided into races (Eze 1997). Their system of social classification was much different from ours. Race is a modern **social construction**, meaning that the idea of race is not based on biological differences among people, even though race has become important in determining how we interact. It is a particular way of viewing human difference that is a product of colonial encounters.

DEFINING RACE AND ETHNICITY

The word **race** refers to a group of people who share physical and cultural traits as well as a common ancestry. The idea of race implies that the people of the world can be divided into biologically discrete and exclusive groups based on physical and cultural traits. This idea is further linked to notions of white or European superiority that became concretized during the colonization of the Americas. **Racism** refers to both (1) the belief that races are populations whose physical differences are linked to significant cultural and social differences within a hierarchy, and (2) the practice of subordinating races believed to be inferior.

The idea of race is slightly different from the concept of ethnicity. Races are categories of people based on a hierarchical worldview that associates ancestry, descent, and appearance with cultural and moral attributes. **Ethnicities**, on the other hand, are group identities based on notions of similar and shared history, culture, and kinship (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). Ethnicity also has a distinct historical trajectory from race. People self-identify as belonging to an ethnic group on the basis of a perceived shared history and a concomitant set of cultural attributes. In contrast to ethnicity, race is often an externally imposed category. In the United States, people are placed into races based on socially constructed, ascribed characteristics often related to physical appearance, such as skin color or hair texture, regardless of self-identification. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997, 469) argues that “ethnicity has a primarily sociocultural foundation, and ethnic groups have exhibited tremendous malleability in terms of who belongs; racial ascriptions (initially) are

imposed externally to justify the collective exploitation of a people and are maintained to preserve status differences.”

It’s important to emphasize that race is a social construction, an idea we endow with meaning through daily interactions. It has no biological basis. This might seem an odd statement, as the physical differences between a Kenyan, a Swede, and a Han Chinese, for example, are obvious. However, these physical differences do not necessarily mean that the world can be divided into discrete racial groups. If you were to walk from Kenya to Sweden to China, you would note incremental gradations in physical differences between people across space, and it would be difficult to decide where to draw the line between Africa and Europe and between Europe and Asia. There may be genetic differences between Kenyans and Swedes, but the genetic variations within the Kenyan population are actually greater than those between Swedes and Kenyans (Smedley 2007). Although race is a social, as opposed to a biological, construction, it has a wide range of consequences in our society, especially when used as a sorting and stratifying mechanism.

Race is also a **historical construction**, meaning that the idea of race was formed in particular times and places. Of particular note in its development are the eras of **colonialism**—the practice of acquiring political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically—and slavery in the Americas. The idea of race involves classifying humans into distinct groups with particular cultural and moral traits. Through this classification, Europeans and their descendants have used the idea of race to justify exploitation, slavery, colonialism, and **genocide**, the mass killing of a group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic or racial group.

RACE: THE EVOLUTION OF AN IDEOLOGY

An **ideology** is a set of principles and ideas that benefits the dominant group. The racial ideologies that operate today reflect our times and are rooted in the history of the Americas. The way we understand the idea of race today is distinct from previous ways of thinking about human difference. Before the conquest of the Americas, there was no worldview that separated all of humanity into distinct races (Smedley 2007; Montagu 1997; Quijano 2000). Understanding what race means today requires delving into the historical process through which the idea of race was created. Once we understand that thinking of people as belonging to specific racial categories is not “natural” but constructed, we can begin to think about why and how these categories were created. As we will see, European thinkers created racial categories to justify

historical construction

An idea or view that was formed in particular times and places.

colonialism The practice of acquiring political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

genocide The mass killing of a group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic or racial group.

ideology A set of principles and ideas that benefits the dominant group.

mass genocide and brutal exploitation. This brutal history in turn raises the question of why we continue to use these categories.

Historical Precedents to the Idea of Race

Until the sixteenth century, Northern Europeans had limited knowledge of the world beyond their immediate communities. Southern Europeans, in contrast, had much more contact with other peoples. Alexander the Great traveled to India in the fourth century B.C., the Greeks established trade routes with Ethiopia in the third century B.C., and Islamic peoples conquered Spain in the eighth century A.D. Yet this contact did not lead to a racial worldview. Ancient peoples did not divide the world into distinct races based on physical and cultural traits. Instead, Greeks had great respect for the achievements of Ethiopians (Snowden 1970), and Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived in reasonable harmony in Spain for hundreds of years (Smedley 2007).

Although the idea of race did not develop until later, these early interactions between Europeans and other groups did provide important precedents for current ways of conceptualizing human difference. The Spanish Inquisition is one example. When the Catholic Church began to consolidate its power in Spain under the reign of monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile (1479–1504), Jews were expelled from Spain, and converted Jews were subject to scrutiny. In 1480, Ferdinand and Isabella established a tribunal called the Spanish Inquisition, which was intended to ensure the orthodoxy of people who had converted from Judaism and Islam to Catholicism. The monarchs issued royal decrees in 1492 and 1501 that ordered Jews and Muslims to convert or leave the country. During the Inquisition, Jews and Muslims were obliged to convert, but conversion did not ensure their safety, as converts continued to be subject to scrutiny and suspicion. Moreover, people believed to be the descendants of Jews and Muslims also faced persecution. Discrimination against Jews and Muslims was more religious in nature than racial, yet the ideas regarding purity of blood that emerged set the stage for ideas of racial difference that were to become part of the European understanding of human differences (Smedley 2007; Quijano 2000).

Another crucial precedent to the idea of race is the English view of the Irish and later of Native Americans. England and Ireland were involved in centuries of conflict before the English first settled in North America, and English soldiers often portrayed the Irish as savage, sexually immoral, and resistant to civilizing forces. Many English colonists had been deployed to Ireland before settling in the New World. The ideas the English developed about the Irish may thus have played a role in settlers' perception of Native Americans as savage

(Allen 1994; Smedley 2007). This perception was a precursor to the racial idea that some humans were less fit for civilization than others.

Slavery Before the Idea of Race

Slavery was not new or particular to the Americas: the practice of enslaving people has existed since antiquity. In African, European, and Middle Eastern societies, conquered peoples often became slaves in the aftermath of war. As agricultural societies grew, so did the demand for labor, leading peoples such as the Greeks and Phoenicians to raid other societies for slaves. Slavery existed not only across societies but also within societies: people lacking the support of a family often had no place other than as slaves, and some people became enslaved as a means of paying off a debt or as punishment for a crime. Slavery of this form almost always involved persons of the same ethnic group as their masters.

The prevalence of slavery in ancient societies does not imply that racism existed then as well. Although some ancient writings refer to skin color, these references are rarely derogatory and by no means represent the general ideology of any ancient society. On the contrary, Greeks and Romans held the Egyptians as well as the Ethiopians in high esteem and admired their culture and way of life. These ancient peoples developed no known stereotypes of blacks as primitives or lacking in culture (Snowden 1983). Marriages between Egyptians and black Africans were commonplace in ancient times, and Muslim conquerors regarded anyone they succeeded in converting as brethren (Franklin 1974).

The status of slaves varied across societies. In some instances, slaves were adopted as kin after serving for a certain number of years; in other cases, slaves were permitted to marry and own property (Smedley 2007; Morgan 1975). Many slaves were granted rights not found in the system of slavery in the New World. These rights included access to education, the potential to obtain freedom for themselves and their children, the right to marry, and the right to own property. Until the eighteenth century, no society categorically denied the humanity of slaves. It was not seen as necessary to rationalize slavery by denying that slaves were fully human. Although slaves were at



▲ Although slavery was common in Ancient Greece, the idea of race did not yet exist.

times treated brutally, the humanity of slaves was never put into question, and slavery was never attributed to racial inferiority (Smedley 2007).

European Encounters with Indigenous Peoples of the Americas

Before the arrival of European colonizers, the Americas were home to over 100 million indigenous people. As a result of warfare, slavery, and disease, about 95 percent of this population was decimated during the first two centuries of colonization (Stannard 1993; At a Glance 1.1). The excerpted accounts in the Voices sidebar on p. xx provide a small window into the depths of this massacre.

When Christopher Columbus encountered the native peoples of the Caribbean islands in 1492, he found them to be peaceable and generous. Despite the Spaniards' initial admiration for the indigenous people, the relations between the two groups soon deteriorated, as it became clear that the Spaniards' primary motive was to extract gold from the Americas. Intent upon taking as much gold as possible, the Spaniards used their weaponry to overpower and enslave the people indigenous to the Americas to compel them to

> When Christopher Columbus encountered the native peoples of the Caribbean, he found them to be peaceable and generous.



find gold and silver for the Spaniards to take back to Spain (Todorov 1984). The abuse the Caribbean peoples suffered at the hands of the Spaniards was devastating: the Arawaks of Santo Domingo, for example, were reduced from over 3 million people in 1496 to a mere 125 in 1570 (Jones 2003).

Reports of the Spaniards' extreme cruelty toward the indigenous people of the Americas made their way back to Spain and eventually became a subject of controversy. Fifty years after Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean islands, the enslavement of indigenous people was outlawed. The Spaniards continued to extract labor from indigenous people, however, by relying on other systems of forced labor (Wade 1997).

One of the most remarkable aspects of the conquest of the Americas is that many of the civilizations in the Americas were far more advanced than those from which the Europeans hailed. Europe in the sixteenth century was quite a ghastly place, with frequent famines and epidemic outbreaks of the plague and smallpox. Large cities were pestilent and dirty, with unsightly open sewers. Crime was rampant. Half of all children died before they turned ten. Thus, we can imagine the surprise and awe that the magnificent city of Tenochtitlán engendered in the Spaniards who arrived there. Tenochtitlán, an Aztec city in central Mexico, had about 350,000 inhabitants—many times the population of London or Seville at the time. When the Spanish explorer and colonizer Hernando Cortés (1485–1547) saw this city, he declared it to be the most beautiful city on earth. His companion and chronicler Bernal Díaz (1492–1585) agreed, calling it a “wonderful thing to behold.” Unlike European cities of the time, Tenochtitlán boasted clean streets, amazing floating gardens, a huge aqueduct system, and a market more extensive than any the Europeans had ever seen (Stannard 1993).

Despite their admiration, the Spaniards did not preserve this city. The arrival of the Spaniards led to the destruction of not only this amazing city, but also many towns and cities across the Americas. The population of central Mexico was decimated in less than a century, declining from 25 million in 1519 to barely 1.3 million in 1595. This pattern continued throughout the Americas, so that nearly 95 percent of the native populations were destroyed in less than 200 years (Stannard 1993).

Slavery and Colonization

Africans were present in the conquest of the Americas from the beginning, both as slaves and as sailors and explorers. Spain and Portugal were slaveholding societies long before Columbus set sail in search of the Indies. Many, but not all, of the slaves in Spain in the fifteenth century were Africans. Some African

The Spanish Treatment of Indigenous Peoples

The following excerpts are from a 1519 report by the Dominican order about the Spanish treatment of indigenous peoples in the Carib Islands.

Some Christians encounter an Indian woman, who was carrying in her arms a child at suck; and since the dog they had with them was hungry, they tore the child from the mother's arms and flung it still living to the dog, who proceeded to devour it before the mother's eyes.

When there were among the prisoners some women who had recently given birth, if the new-born babes happened to cry, they seized them by the legs and hurled them against the rocks, or flung them into the jungle so that they would be certain to die there.

Each of them [the foremen] had made it a practice to sleep with the Indian women who were in his workforce, if they pleased him, whether they were married women or maidens. While the foreman remained . . . with the Indian woman, he sent the husband to dig gold out of the mines; and in the evening, when the wretch returned, not only was he beaten or whipped because he had not brought enough gold, but further, most often, he was bound hand and foot and flung under the bed like a dog, before the foreman lay down, directly over him, with his wife.

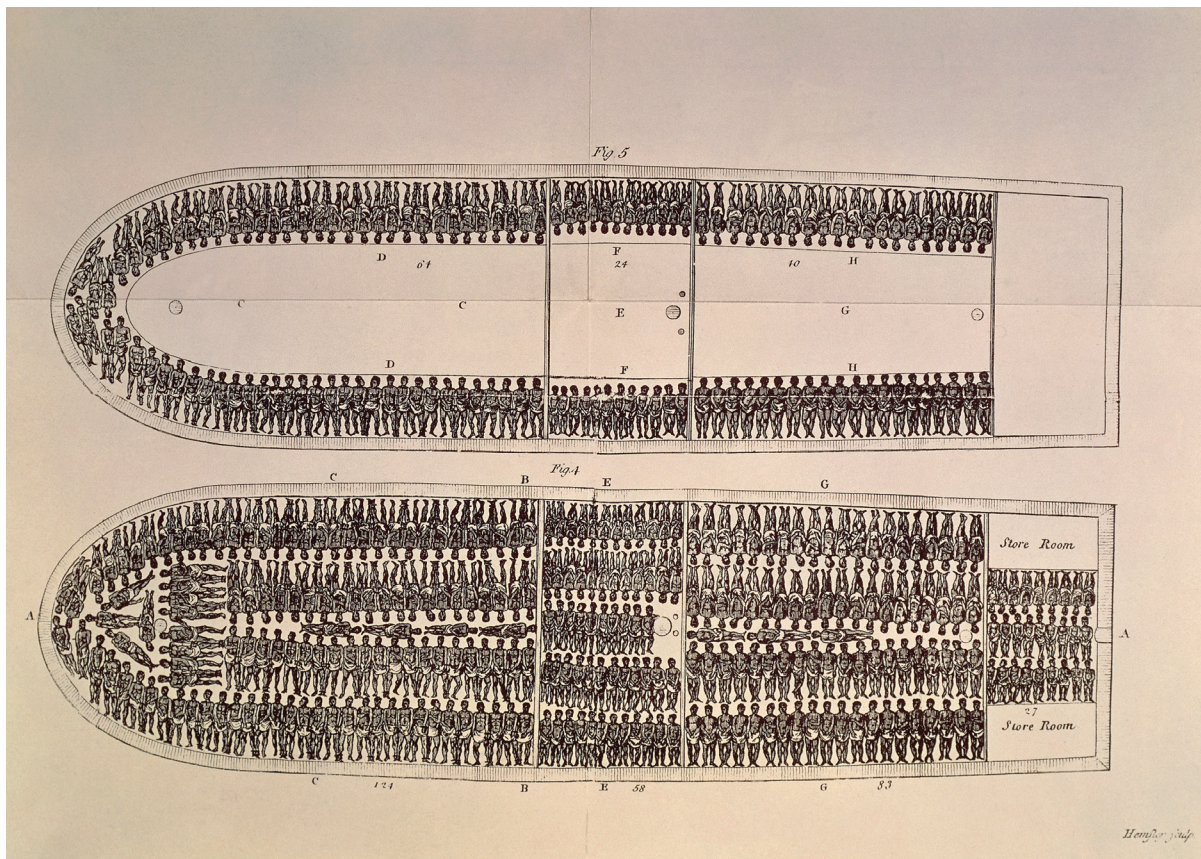
Source: Todorov 1984, 139.

residents of Spain and Portugal—enslaved as well as free—accompanied Spaniards on their initial conquest voyages to the New World. Juan Garrido (ca. 1480–ca. 1547), for example, was born in Africa and later traveled to Portugal and then to Spain, where he joined an expedition to Santo Domingo. Juan Garrido also participated in the conquest of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and then Mexico. Juan García (ca. 1495–date of death unknown), in contrast, was born in Spain as a free mulatto and traveled to Peru as a colonist (Restall 2000).

The Spanish colonists—often called *conquistadores*—endeavored to subdue native populations and to convert them into Catholics and subjects of the Spanish Crown. Their main goal, however, was to extract as much wealth as possible from the Americas. This extraction of wealth required labor, and the Spanish colonists enslaved the native populations to this end. The harsh conditions of this enslavement led to massive declines in the native populations,

and in 1550, the Spanish Crown outlawed the practice, although it continued to allow other forms of forced labor. The ban on enslavement of indigenous people did not end the need for labor, and the Spaniards turned to Africa in their search for workers. As they realized that agricultural exploitation, particularly the harvesting of sugarcane, could bring enormous wealth, they began to bring African slaves in very large numbers to their colonies in the Americas (Smedley 2007; Franklin 1974; Morgan 1975). The Spaniards and Portuguese had long been trading with Africans and thus could imagine the possibilities for slave trading with Africa. Notably, the Spaniards were well aware of the technological advances developed in Africa and did not seek Africans as slaves because they thought they were inferior. To the contrary, the Spaniards believed enslaved Africans would be a valuable asset. Consequently, tens of millions of Africans were brought over between the early 1600s and the nineteenth century as slaves (Bowser 1974).

▼ Between 10 and 30 million Africans were brought to the Americas on slave ships. Nearly a quarter died while at sea.



Whereas the Spaniards had had centuries of contact with Africans, the English who settled in North America had had no such contact until the arrival of twenty Africans in Jamestown in 1619. Slaves did not become an essential part of the workforce in North America until much later.

The form of slavery that eventually emerged in the North American colonies was unique in several ways. First, slaves had no human or legal rights. They were seen only as property, not as people who could marry or own property themselves. Second, slavery was permanent and the slave status was inherited. Third, slaves were forbidden to learn to read or write, thereby ensuring their inferior social status. Finally, slavery in North America was unique insofar as nearly all Africans and their descendants were enslaved, and only this group could be enslaved. This unique system of human exploitation laid the groundwork for a new idea of human difference (Smedley 2007). Before delving further into this point, let's take a closer look at the English settlements in North America.

research focus

Slave Flights and Runaway Communities in Colonial Angola

Slavery was common in Africa well before the transatlantic slave trade. And for as long as slavery existed, so did slave rebellions and runaway slave communities. Brazilian historian Roquinaldo Ferreira has studied these forms of resistance in colonial Angola, a country in southwestern Africa, focusing on the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

Ferreira argues that slave flight and the formation of runaway slave communities were frequent in Angola, which the Portuguese colonized in 1575. His work shows that these factors disrupted internal trade networks and impeded Portuguese plans to develop a plantation system there. Slaves played an important role in Angola's economy during this period, working in both urban and farm settings. Their resistance posed major problems for the Portuguese colonists.

Local resistance to slavery also posed a threat to the transatlantic slave trade. Angolan slaves feared being sent on ships to Brazil and would do whatever they could to avoid that fate, including running away. Angolan slaveowners were thus reluctant to sell into the transatlantic slave trade, fearing that the sale of one slave would cause others to flee.

Some runaway slaves were taken in by African rulers. For example, in 1805 a ruler named Caculo Cachenda hired a runaway who was a scribe literate in Portuguese. The scribe helped his new employer correspond diplomatically and commercially with the Portuguese in Luanda, Angola's capital.

Runaway slaves sometimes joined together in communities called quilombos in Portuguese, some of which became large and powerful. One was led by a former slave named Calumba, who commanded widespread respect from African rulers. In a Portuguese military campaign against Calumba, sixty-four individuals were captured, which gives us an idea of how large his quilombo may have been. There were at least five quilombos in Angola in the 1820s, and the population of these communities may have been in the thousands.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Portuguese colonial government consistently tried to break these quilombos. They were unsuccessful, and in the late nineteenth century, the Luanda administration signed a treaty that allowed the quilombos' existence and promised to cease attacks on them.

For Discussion

1. What are some differences between the Angolan slave trade and the transatlantic slave trade?
2. Why do you think the Portuguese tried to break the quilombos?

Source: Ferreira 2014.

Exploitation in the Thirteen English Colonies

In the late fifteenth century, Europeans began to explore parts of North America where indigenous peoples had lived for thousands of years. The English, learning of the great wealth the Spanish had accrued in the New World, were anxious to fill their coffers with riches as well. England first sent colonists to Roanoke Island in the late sixteenth century, but that attempt at settlement failed. The first permanent English settlement was at Jamestown in 1607. Much as Columbus had recounted in 1492, these English settlers reported that the local Native Americans were kind and generous and helped them to survive the unfamiliar conditions. Amicable trade relations did not last long, however, as it became clear that the Englishmen's intentions were not benign: they planned to take over indigenous land and resources (Zinn 2010; Morgan 1975).

Takeover of Indigenous Lands

European colonists engaged in constant warfare with Native Americans, often burning their lodging and crops and enslaving entire tribes. The English colonists justified their takeover of indigenous lands in religious terms. They interpreted their successes as God's will. For example, John Winthrop (1588–1649), a leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the mid-seventeenth century, wrote that the death of so many Native Americans as a result of smallpox showed that “the Lord hath cleared our title to what we possess” (quoted in Wood 1991, 96). It is important to note that when the English colonists interacted with Native Americans, they did not see them as belonging to a separate race; this idea did not yet exist. Instead, the English saw themselves as superior in religious and moral terms. These religious justifications, however, laid the groundwork for racial distinctions that emerged later (Smedley 2007; Jordan 1968).

The first fifty years of the new settlement in Virginia were full of hardship. Disease, starvation, and war caused extremely high death rates among both Native Americans and English colonists. There were severe food shortages, partly because the first settlers did not plant enough corn. Morgan (1975) points out that most of the settlers in Virginia were not farmers but nobles or gentry who thought food cultivation was beneath them. Although the settlers were too proud to grow corn to eat, they were willing to take up the enterprise of growing tobacco to sell and expected to make their riches in this manner. As there was no shortage of land in this vast country, the only commodity lacking was labor power (Zinn 2010).

The English colonists were notoriously successful at decimating the Native American population, yet less so in their attempts to use Native Americans for labor. When the English realized they would not become rich instantaneously through gold or silver mining, as it appeared the Spaniards had done, they turned to agricultural production to seek wealth. For this, they needed labor—lots of it. The English were able to enslave Native Americans they captured in warfare, but most indigenous slaves either died or ran away, leaving the English in need of more labor in order to accumulate wealth (Zinn 2010).

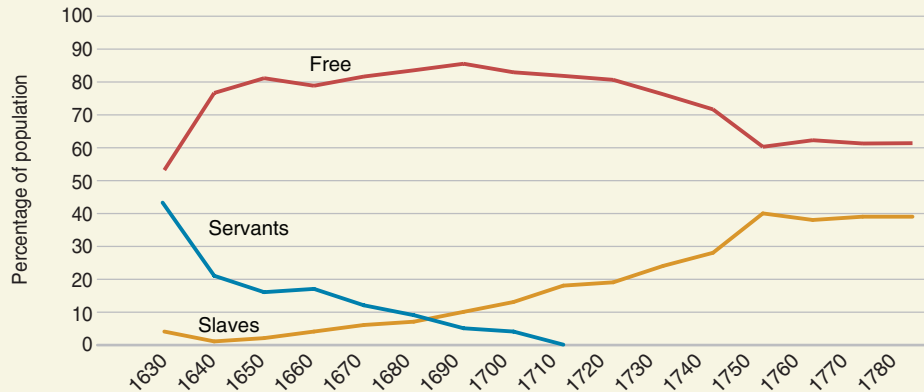
Indentured Servitude

The lack of success at enslaving Native Americans led the colonists to turn to Britain, where they recruited poor men, women, and children from the streets of cities such as Liverpool and Bristol. Englishmen also rounded up Irish and Scottish peasants who had been conquered in warfare, banished, or released from prison. Indentured servants from Europe who were willing to work for four to seven years to pay off their passage and debt soon became the primary source of labor for the colonies (At a Glance 1.1). The harsh treatment

AT A GLANCE 1.1 Servitude, Slavery, and Genocide in the Americas

Slaves and Servants in Population: Chesapeake Colonies

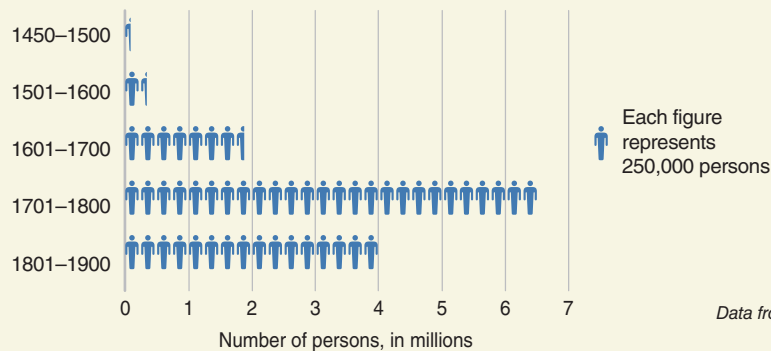
The enslaved population increased as the indentured servant population declined.



Data from Tomlins 2001

The American Slave Trade

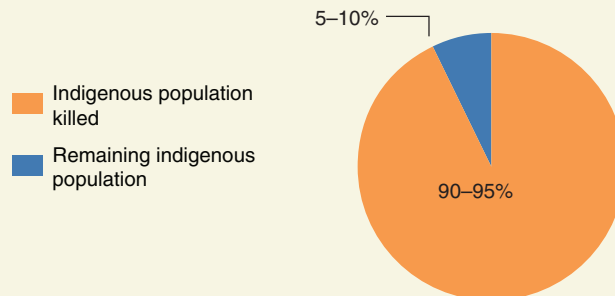
Between 1450 and 1900, 12,817,000 Africans were brought to the New World as slaves.



Data from Lovejoy 2012

Genocide of Indigenous People

Between 1492 and 1600, as many as 138 million indigenous people were killed—90 to 95% of the pre-1492 population.



Data from Stannard 1993;
Taylor 2002

of European indentured servants needed no justification, as servitude was a way of life in Britain at that time (Smedley 2007; Zinn 2010).

Throughout the seventeenth century, indentured servants endured harsh conditions as laborers in the colonies. Hopeful laborers continued to come to the Americas, despite the difficult circumstances, because there were possibilities for social and economic advancement in North America that did not exist in England. The flow of English laborers began to decline, however, with the restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660, as King Charles II implemented policies that discouraged emigration (Smedley 2007).

The Enslavement of Africans

In addition to bringing English laborers, colonists brought Africans to the colonies as slaves (At a Glance 1.1). Most African slaves brought to North America were from West Africa and were Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, or Mada. In 1619, English colonists brought the first group of Africans to the North American colonies. These twenty Africans occupied nearly the same social status as European indentured servants and were soon joined by African slaves brought over by Dutch and Spanish slave ships. All of these early Africans were granted rights that were later denied to all blacks in Virginia. There is no evidence that African slaves during the period before 1660 were subjected to more severe disciplinary measures than European servants. Some slaves were allowed to earn money of their own and to buy their freedom with it. There are several cases recorded in which masters set up conditions in their wills whereby Negro slaves would become free or could purchase their freedom after the master’s death. The terms of these wills imply that the freed slaves would become regular members of the community (Morgan 1975; Smedley 2007; Zinn 2010).

The enslavement of Africans turned out to be particularly profitable in part because Africans brought with them agricultural and craft experience. In addition, unlike people indigenous to the Americas, Africans had immunities

The American Slave Trade

1492	1619	1660	1676	1863	1865
Christopher Columbus lands in the Caribbean	First African slaves arrive in Jamestown	First slave codes enacted	Bacon’s Rebellion	Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation	Slavery is abolished in the United States

to Old World diseases and thus could live longer in slavery. The initial justifications for bringing Africans to the colonies were not racial in nature. At the time, slavery was an accepted social system. To the extent that a justification was offered, it was that Africans were heathens and their enslavement would ensure their salvation (Smedley 2007). Over time, racial justifications for the enslavement of Africans emerged.

The Legal Codification of Racial Differences

Slave codes of the 1660s spelled out the legal differences between African slaves and European indentured servants. In 1667, Virginia issued a decree that slaves who had converted to Christianity could continue to be enslaved because of their so-called heathen ancestry. Whereas earlier justifications for slavery were primarily religious, the idea that ancestry could be used to determine social status set the stage for the development of the idea of race. In the late seventeenth century, Virginia and Maryland each passed a series of laws that solidified the status of blacks. The strongest indicator of the solidification of the status of Africans was the prohibition of manumission: masters were not allowed to free their slaves, thereby establishing a permanent slave class. Other laws established lifelong servitude, forbade interracial marriage, and limited the rights of blacks to own property and bear arms. These laws specific to blacks both reflected the social order and solidified the status quo. For most of the seventeenth century, European indentured servants and African slaves had shared a similar social status. The slave codes gradually changed this social classification.

slave codes Laws enacted in the 1660s that clearly spelled out the differences between African slaves and European indentured servants.

Laws against Intermarriage

The shared social position of African and European servants and slaves in the early years of the colonies meant that these groups intermarried and fraternized. The fact that Africans and Europeans had amicable relations can be seen in the laws passed that forbade these relationships. In 1661, Virginia passed a law that imposed harsh conditions on English servants who ran away with African slaves. In 1691, Virginia passed another law that prohibited free whites from intermarrying with blacks and Native Americans. Had these groups been naturally disinclined to intermarry or to fraternize, these laws would not have been necessary. As the 1661 law shows, plantation owners were concerned that European indentured servants and African slaves would see that they shared a common interest in fighting for more rights and better conditions. As historian Howard Zinn puts it, “only one fear was greater than the fear of black rebellion in the new American colonies. That was the fear that discontented whites would join black slaves to overthrow the existing order” (2010, 37).

When Africans and Europeans first found themselves together in the Americas, sexual relations and even marriage between these two groups were not uncommon. African men and women married European men and women (Smedley 2007). Various laws were passed, however, both to prevent and to control these relationships. The aforementioned 1662 law made it clear that when African women had children, the child's status as slave or free would be in accordance with the condition of the mother. The law also indicated that when Christians—here meaning Europeans—had sexual relations with Africans, they would pay double the normal fine for adultery. The European men who wrote these laws perceived it to be important to prevent sexual relations between Europeans and Africans and to ensure that the children of enslaved

African women would also be slaves. This law effectively prevented the formation of families by enslaved African women and European men.



▲ In Bacon's Rebellion, white indentured servants joined forces with enslaved Africans to protest their conditions.

Bacon's Rebellion

Bacon's Rebellion, which occurred in September 1676, provides one example of what could happen when blacks and whites joined forces to fight for their interests. The rebellion itself was not particularly successful, but the coalition that emerged between poor whites and African slaves and freedmen became a cause for concern among the elite planter class, who depended on these groups for cheap labor. In Bacon's Rebellion, white indentured servants joined forces with enslaved Africans and freedmen to protest their conditions. This massive rebellion, in which protestors demanding an end to their servitude burned Jamestown to the ground, was a clear threat to the status quo. One of the last groups to surrender was a mixed group of eighty black and twenty white servants. This multiracial coalition indicates that blacks and whites were willing to join forces to fight for their common interests as laborers. After Bacon's Rebellion, an official report arguing for the continued presence of British soldiers in Virginia stated: "Virginia is at present poor and more populous than ever. There is great apprehension of

a rising among the servants, owing to their great necessities and want of clothes; they may plunder the storehouses and ships” (Zinn 2010, 37).

Howard Zinn and other historians argue that Bacon’s Rebellion stirred up fear in the hearts of the elite planter class and that this fear led these elites to pass laws that worked to divide blacks and whites. For example, in the aftermath of the rebellion, the Virginia Assembly gave amnesty to the white servants who had rebelled but not to the blacks. By extending this and other privileges to whites that were denied to blacks, the elites succeeded in preventing future class-based alliances between blacks and whites that would threaten the social order.

Wealth Imbalance and the Tenuous Social Order

Wealth in colonial North America was concentrated in the hands of very few people. In 1700, there were about 250,000 colonists, most of whom lived in horrendous conditions. In Virginia, there were only about fifty wealthy families, who depended on the labor of the other 40,000 poor colonists. This imbalance of wealth made for a tenuous social order (Zinn 2010). It soon became clear to the rich elite and the governing body that they could not continue to disregard the interests of the majority of the population. In 1705, a law was passed requiring masters to provide white servants whose indenture time was completed with ten bushels of corn, thirty shillings, a gun, and fifty acres of land (Morgan 1975, 344). This tactic of giving servants a piece of the American Dream was intended to avoid rebellion by convincing poor whites that the rich landowners were not extortionists or enemies, but protectors of their common interests. To reinforce this impression, it was further mandated that servants had the right to possess property but that slaves did not (Morgan 1975, 333). The Virginia Assembly in 1705 also prohibited any Negro, mulatto, or Indian from raising his hand in opposition to any Christian, which meant any white man (Jordan 1968). By denying black slaves privileges extended to white servants, the first step was taken in creating a division between blacks and whites (Zinn 2010).

In New York in 1708, a group of slaves was accused of murdering a farmer and his family. Shortly afterward, a law was enacted preventing the conspiracy of slaves. This meant, in effect, that slaves could not gather in private to talk about anything. In 1712, a slave rebellion involving about fifty slaves left nine whites dead and six others wounded. Immediately thereafter, New York’s repressive laws were reinforced. For example, arson committed by a slave was made into a crime punishable by death (Szasz 1967).

One purpose of the slave codes was the prevention and deterrence of slave rebellions, which were becoming more and more of a real danger with the

increasing number of slaves, especially in the southern colonies, where slaves often outnumbered whites. In 1730, in Virginia, the governor ordered that all whites should bring their guns with them to church on Sunday so that they would be prepared for a slave uprising in the event that slaves took advantage of their absence to conspire (Jordan 1968). The idea of a slave rebellion was even more distasteful to whites because of the widespread idea that any slave insurrection would have as its ultimate goal not only the emancipation of slaves but also the dominance of blacks over whites (Jordan 1968).

Solidifying the Idea of Race

Eventually, the entire slave class was composed of black Africans, and, as a result of manumission restrictions, most blacks were enslaved. The creation of



From *Bullwhip Days*

My mother's mistress had three boys—one twenty-one, one nineteen, and one seventeen. One day, Old Mistress had gone away to spend the day. Mother always worked in the house; she didn't work on the farm, in Missouri. While she was alone, the boys came in and threw her down on the floor and tied her down so she couldn't struggle, and one after the other used her as long as they wanted, for the whole afternoon. Mother was sick when her mistress came home. When Old Mistress wanted to know what was the matter with her, she told her what the boys had done. She whipped them, and that's the way I came to be here.

—*Mary Peters describing the brutal circumstances of her own conception*

I saw slaves sold. I can see that old block now. My cousin Eliza was a pretty girl, really good-looking. Her master was her father. . . . The day they sold her will always be remembered. They stripped her to be bid off and looked at. . . . The man that bought Eliza was from New York. The Negroes had made up 'nuf money to buy her off theyself, but the white folks wouldn't let that happen. There was a man bidding for her that was a Swedeland. He allus bid for the good-looking cullud gals and bought 'em for his own use. He ask the man from New York "What you gonna do with 'er when you git 'er?" The man from New York said, "None of your damn business, but you ain't got money 'nuf to buy 'er."

—*Former slave Daniel Dowdy*

Source: Mellon 2002, 297; 287.

this sort of color line, alongside the introduction of the concept of hereditary slavery, was an important step toward solidifying the idea of race. Notably, it was not until the eighteenth century that negative beliefs about Africans became widespread among the English settlers. Even then, there is ample evidence that blacks and whites continued to fraternize. In 1743, a grand jury in Charleston, South Carolina, denounced “The Too Common Practice of Criminal Conversation with Negro and other Slave Wenches in this Province” (Zinn 2010).

The stories of Mary Peters and Daniel Dowdy (Voices: From *Bullwhip Days*) elucidate the cruelty and dehumanization that were part and parcel of colonialism and enslavement in the Americas. These two phenomena—colonialism and slavery—have left a strong mark on the way people in the United States view the world. Our contemporary racial worldview is a relic of the systems of human classification that were first used in the context of the colonization of Native American territories and the enslavement of Africans in the Americas. Although such brutal practices are no longer morally or legally permissible, the ideas of racial difference that emerged from those practices persist.

SLAVERY VERSUS THE IDEAL OF FREEDOM IN THE UNITED STATES

The Declaration of Independence famously begins by stating that all men are created equal. The question was, then, why were some enslaved? Although the concept of liberty was at the core of the American Revolution, nearly half of the fifty-five men who made up the 1787 Constitutional Convention owned slaves, and most of the rest profited from slavery through their business practices. A prominent member, George Washington (1732–1799), was one of the richest men in the colonies and the owner of many slaves. These men struggled with the contradictions inherent in advocating for freedom in a slaveholding society, yet they were unwilling to outlaw slavery (Feagin 2001).

The writers of the founding documents of the United States were not willing to end slavery in part because most of them profited directly or indirectly from it. The wealth generated by slave labor in the United States had made the American Revolution possible: a significant amount of the funds that financed the American Revolution came from profits from slavery (Feagin 2001). The contradiction between the ideals of freedom and the prevalence of slavery led to justifications of slavery in terms of blacks’ alleged racial inferiority. Writings by people such as Thomas Jefferson validated the belief that people of African

descent were less than human. In 1787, Thomas Jefferson wrote in *Notes on Virginia*: “Blacks, whether originally a distinct race or made distinct by time and circumstance, are inferior to whites in the endowment both of body and mind” (Jefferson [1787] 2004, 98–99).

Slavery was an immensely profitable enterprise for a small number of slaveholders. In 1860, the twelve wealthiest counties in the United States could all be found in the Deep South. The profits were not evenly divided, however: about 7 percent of Southerners owned three-quarters of the 4 million slaves in the South. This concentration of wealth meant that slaveowners constituted a powerful planter class that went to great lengths to protect its property, which included humans: slaveowners saw enslaved Africans and African Americans as an investment they did not want to lose. Additionally, many whites who did not own slaves profited indirectly from the slave system. In the southern

GLOBAL VIEW

The Idea of Race in Latin American Nation-Making

Contradictions surrounding racial ideologies are not unique to the United States. During the nineteenth century, Latin American countries sought their independence from colonial rule. As in the United States, such calls for political freedom seemed at odds with these nations’ long histories of slavery and servitude.

From 1870 to 1940, Latin American countries were engaged in nation-making. That is, Latin American intellectual and political elites attempted to build national unity for their fledgling nations (Knight 1990). In this process, they endeavored to prove that their countries were modern nations with a unique identity. They had to contend, however, with European scholars who viewed them as racially degenerate (Stepan 1991). Many European scholars looked down on Latin America, which they perceived as having high levels of racial mixture and a relatively small number of whites.

Latin Americans countered European intellectuals’ impression of them with claims that racial mixture (*mestizaje*) would lead to progress. Latin American intellectuals argued that racial mixture was not only beneficial but also the hallmark of Latin American nations. According to this logic, the mixture of Iberians (those of Spanish or Portuguese descent) with other races was what made countries such as Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil great nations. Although Latin Americans developed their own brand of racial ideology, they did not reject the belief that whiteness was superior. Instead, they expanded the idea of whiteness to include racially and culturally mixed people in order to accommodate their own realities. Faced with different racial demographics, Latin American intellectuals developed racial and national discourses that suited their countries. A consideration of Latin American racial ideologies and discourses reveals that ideas of white superiority come in many forms.

United States, slavery was part of the economic and social fabric of society. There were fewer slaves in the northern states, but many Northerners had strong economic ties to slavery insofar as they consumed and manufactured products made on slave plantations. These strong economic interests in slavery meant that the practice was not ended in the United States until the victory of the North in the Civil War (Wilson 1996; Feagin 2001).

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves held in the rebel states of the Confederacy. His willingness to issue this proclamation was not hindered by his belief that blacks were inferior to whites. Five years earlier, in 1858, Lincoln had declared: “I am not nor ever have been in favor of the social and political equality of the white and black races: that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters of the free negroes, or jurors, or qualifying them to hold office or having them to marry with white people. . . . I as much as any other man am in favor of the superior position being assigned to the white man” (quoted in Feagin 2001, 83–84).

In 1865, the United States finally abolished slavery. Slavery was one of the main reasons for the long and bloody Civil War that had pitted the North against the South. From the perspective of plantation owners in the South, slavery was a profitable institution that ensured the proper place of blacks in society. From the perspective of capitalists in the North, slavery gave southern capitalists an unfair competitive advantage (Feagin 2001). The end of slavery marked the end of an era of extreme exploitation. The racist ideologies that had justified the enslavement of Africans and the massacre and removal of Native Americans, however, would endure.

THE INDIAN REMOVAL ACT: THE CONTINUATION OF MANIFEST DESTINY

The **Indian Removal Act of 1830** enabled the administration of President Andrew Jackson to use military power to displace at least 70,000 Native Americans, killing tens of thousands in the process. Indian removal is often associated with the Cherokee of Georgia, but there were actually many more “**Trails of Tears**,” including the forced displacement of the Apalachicola of Florida, the Peoria of Illinois, the Shawnee of Ohio, and a host of other tribes (Littlefield and Parins 2011). These removals violated treaties the United States had made with Native Americans, even though the Indian Removal Act contained a clause guaranteeing that “nothing in this act contained shall be construed as authorizing or directing the violation of any existing treaty

Indian Removal Act of 1830 Act that enabled the administration of U.S. president Andrew Jackson to use military power to displace at least 70,000 Native Americans, killing tens of thousands in the process.

Trails of Tears The forced displacement of the Cherokee of Georgia, the Apalachicola of Florida, the Peoria of Illinois, the Shawnee of Ohio, and a host of other tribes.

> Under President Jackson's administration, tens of thousands of Native Americans died as a result of forced displacements known as the Trails of Tears.



between the United States and any of the Indian tribes” (quoted in Cave 2003, 1335). These forced displacements, which continued until 1859, when the Seminoles were removed from Florida, wreaked havoc on indigenous communities (Littlefield and Parins 2011).

During these treacherous journeys, tens of thousands of Native Americans died from disease, cold, starvation, and exhaustion. Approximately 17,000 Cherokee were forcibly removed, and nearly half of those who embarked on the Trail of Tears died in the process. Large numbers of indigenous people died in other removals: about 6,000 of the 40,000 Choctaw did not survive the journey, and only about half of the Creek and the Seminole peoples survived their removals (Churchill 2002).

The justifications for Indian removal were distinct from those used for slavery, as whites tended to see Africans as a vital source of labor. Native Americans, in contrast, were construed as hindering white expansion, and thus the racial ideologies surrounding Native Americans tended to explain and predict their gradual extinction. Notably, this extinction was imagined as occurring through both assimilation (marriage to whites) and natural selection

(death from disease). Whereas colonists' ideas about Africans served to justify their hyperexploitation of slaves, whites' ideas about Native Americans aimed to justify the assimilation and gradual extinction of these groups, enabling whites to appropriate Indian lands (Berger 2009).

THE RISE OF SCIENCE AND THE QUESTION OF HUMAN DIFFERENCE

In the seventeenth century, people in the Americas developed and acted on folk ideas about differences among Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans that were based on daily interactions and the prevailing social order. The slow emergence of the idea of racial difference can be seen in the laws passed and the decisions made by religious leaders. However, the rise of science in the eighteenth century would fundamentally alter this conversation. The question of human difference began to move from the realms of religion and folk ideas to that of science.

European Taxonomies

Before the rise of science, Westerners understood the world primarily in biblical terms. Theology provided explanations for nearly everything. Thus, when Europeans encountered the Americas, they attempted to place these peoples into their understanding of the history of the world, as described in their scriptures. This led to debates over which of the three sons of Noah was the ancestor of the Native Americans and even over whether Native Americans were fully human. The strong belief in the biblical scriptures carried over into scientific thought, which became the central arena for shaping understandings of race (Smedley 2007).

One of the key features of the rise of science was the emergence of taxonomy. Scholars endeavored to classify all flora and fauna known to them. Soon, scientists began to attempt to classify human beings into types. One of the first efforts to develop a classificatory system for humans appeared in a French journal in 1684. The author, François Bernier (1625–1688), divided humans into four groups: Europeans, Far Easterners, Negroes, and Lapps (people from Lapland in northern Scandinavia). His system used physical traits such as skin color and hair texture, which would later become prominent determinants of racial status, to categorize different groups. Other scholars worked on developing classificatory schemes, but it was not until 1735 that we begin to see the development of a comprehensive system of classification that resembles the modern concept of race (Eze 1997).

In 1735, the Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778) proposed that all human beings could be divided into four groups. These four groups are consistent with the modern idea of race in two ways: all of them are still used today, and Linnaeus connected physical traits such as skin color with cultural and moral traits such as “indolence.” Linnaeus described these four groups, which correspond to four of the continents, in *Systemae Naturae* in 1735:

Americanus: reddish, choleric, . . . obstinate, merry, free; . . . regulated by customs.

Asiaticus: sallow, melancholy, . . . black hair, dark eyes, . . . haughty, . . . ruled by opinions.

Africanus: black, phlegmatic, relaxed; women without shame, . . . crafty, indolent, negligent; governed by caprice.

Europaenus: white, sanguine, muscular; inventive; governed by laws.

Other European men elaborated on this schema. For example, Johann Blumenbach (1752–1840), a German professor of medicine, proposed a classificatory system that divided humans into five varieties that also were associated with geographical origins: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Both Blumenbach and Linnaeus endowed Europeans—their own group—with the most admirable qualities. It bears repeating that the idea of race is an idea that was initiated by European men and that, not surprisingly, consistently has been used to explain and justify European superiority. The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), for example, asserted in 1748 that whites were the only “species” to have created civilized nations and to have developed arts and sciences. European explanations of white racial superiority espoused by Blumenbach, Linnaeus, and Hume soon reached the Americas, where they were used to explain and justify the enslavement of Africans and the continued takeover of indigenous lands (Eze 1997).

Scientific Racism in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century was an age of emancipation from slavery and liberation from colonial powers. It also saw the rise of industrial capitalism and the emergence of **scientific racism**—the use of science or pseudoscience to justify or reproduce racial inequality. For intellectuals in the Americas and Europe, scientific racism was central to most human and social inquiries. Eighteenth-century scientists had developed elaborate systems of human classification. In the nineteenth century, scientists built on these classification systems by developing anthropometrics—tools designed to measure the qualities of humans.

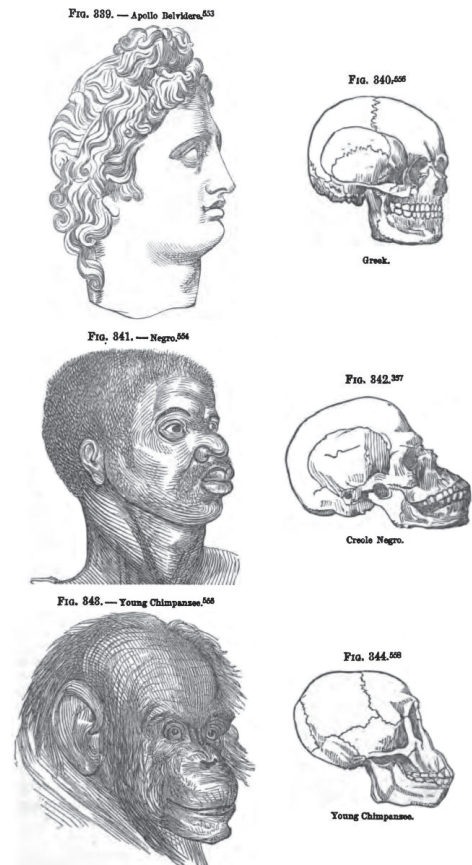
scientific racism

The use of science or pseudoscience to justify or reproduce racial inequality.

With the publication between 1853 and 1855 of Comte Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau's four volumes entitled *Essays on the Inequality of the Human Races*, it is safe to say that by the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of race was fully in place. Gobineau (1816–1882) divided humanity into three races—white, yellow, and black—and argued that racial differences allow us to explain fundamental differences among people. Gobineau's thinking was in line with that of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), who contended that the superiority of the European race explained its dominant position. He pointed to the natural inferiority of Native Americans as an explanation for their decimation. Spencer's ideas of the “survival of the fittest” would hold great sway for many years to come. Both Spencer and Gobineau used ideas, arguments, and rudimentary evidence from travel accounts to make their claims. Other scientists, however, were developing anthropometric techniques that enabled them to measure differences between people (Gould 1996).

Samuel George Morton (1799–1851), a scientist and physician who worked in Philadelphia, amassed an impressive collection of human skulls. He began his collection in the 1820s, and by the time of his death in 1851 he had over 1,000 skulls. Morton used these skulls to test his hypothesis that brain size could be used to rank the various human races. In his initial efforts to measure brain size, Morton filled the cranial cavity with mustard seed. Later, when he realized that mustard seed did not provide consistent measurements, he switched to lead shots with a one-eighth-inch diameter that produced less variable results. Using both mustard seeds and lead shots, Morton's measurements consistently showed that Europeans had larger brains than Africans or American Indians. In 1977, evolutionary biologist and scientific historian Stephen Jay Gould reanalyzed Morton's raw data and found several examples of unconscious bias in his work (Gould 1996).

Morton found that American Indians had the smallest skull sizes. Gould explains that Morton arrived at this conclusion because he had included 155 skulls of Peruvian Incas, who had an average brain size of seventy-five cubic inches, yet he only included three skulls of Iroquois people, who had, on average, a much larger skull size. In contrast, in the Caucasian group, Morton eliminated the Hindus, who had the smallest skulls, from his sample.



▲ Illustration from Josiah Clark Nott and George Robert Gliddon's *Indigenous Races of the Earth* (1857), showing perceived distinctions between the white man, the black man, and the chimpanzee.

Had Morton ensured equal representation from each of the American Indian and Caucasian groups, he would have found no significant differences in skull size.

Stephen Gould explains that skull size is related to body size, and yet he contends that Morton never took body size into account when he measured skulls. As women tend to be smaller than men, women often have smaller skulls. When Morton compared the brain sizes of Africans and Europeans, his African sample was entirely female and his English sample entirely male. Of course, he found that Europeans had larger brains. What is remarkable about Morton's research is not just that it is full of unconscious bias, but also that his biases are consistently in favor of his expectations. Morton set out to prove, through science, that Europeans were superior. All of his miscalculations turned out in favor of his hypothesis. In this sense, Morton was similar to nearly all of his contemporaries: European and American male scientists of the nineteenth century developed a plethora of methods to measure human abilities and consistently found that white men were superior to all other groups.

Paul Broca (1824–1880), a French anthropologist, built on the work of Samuel Morton to develop more elaborate techniques to measure humans. Broca believed strongly that there was a direct correlation between brain size and intelligence, and he spent much of his career measuring the brains of dead people. Broca eventually ran into trouble with his arguments when he discovered, by measuring the brains of eminent scholars who had passed on, that many people considered to be highly intelligent turned out to have small brains. Broca, however, accounted for those anomalies by asserting that they died very old or that their brains had not been properly preserved. When a study of criminal brains revealed that criminals had abnormally large brains, Broca argued that their sudden death by execution meant that their brains did not atrophy, as did those of people who died of natural causes. Broca eventually went on to measure other characteristics of brains and bodies; however, his scientific measurements always showed what he set out to prove: that Europeans were superior to other groups (Gould 1996).

Ideas of European racial superiority emerged during a time when colonists were advocating radical ideas of freedom for themselves. Justifications for Indian removal often were couched in terms of perceived lack of civilization: Native Americans would not make as good use of the land as whites would and thus did not deserve to live on the land. The supposed natural inferiority of Africans began to be used as a justification for slavery. In the late eighteenth century, Americans such as Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) grappled with a

fundamental contradiction: they were advocating for liberty, justice, and the rights of men at the same time that they depended on African slavery.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The brutal, troubled history of the idea of race clearly demonstrates the power of ideologies about human difference. The idea that the world’s population can be divided into discrete racial groups is a product of a specific series of events: colonialism, slavery, and the rise of science. Because Europeans wished to take land from indigenous peoples in the Americas and to extract labor from Africans, they developed ideologies of inferiority as justification.

Alongside this large-scale theft of land and exploitation of labor, science began to emerge as a field of study concerned largely with the classification of all objects and species into specific groups. Scientists rushed to develop taxonomies of flora and fauna, including classifications of humans. Europeans who proposed these classifications put their own group at the top of the hierarchy.

This subjective (and overt) bias of Europeans continued with the development of anthropometric and other measurement techniques in the nineteenth century. European scientists measured human skulls, brains, and many other parts of the human body and arrived at the same conclusion: Europeans were superior. This recounting of history offers a revealing look at not only the past but also the present. We cannot simply look at the past and point fingers at those “racists” of yesteryear. Instead, we should also be compelled to explore the assumptions and ideologies that govern our behavior today.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Key Terms

social construction	6	historical construction	7	slave codes	19
race	6	colonialism	7	Indian Removal Act of 1830	25
racism	6	genocide	7	Trails of Tears	25
ethnicity	6	ideology	7	scientific racism	28

1.1 What are race and ethnicity? What is racism? (pp. xx-xx)

- *Race* refers to a group of people who share physical and cultural traits as well as a common ancestry. It is a social construction and has no biological basis.
- *Ethnicity* refers to a group identity based on notions of similar and shared history, culture, and kinship.
- *Racism* refers to the belief that some races are superior to others, as well as the practice of subordinating races believed to be inferior.

Review

- » Why do sociologists argue that race is a social and historical construction?

Critical Thinking

- » Why is it important to understand that the idea of race is a modern invention?

1.2 How old is racism? How is race distinct from previous ways of thinking about human difference? (pp. xx-xx)

- There are historical precedents to the idea of race, including the Spanish Inquisition and the subjugation of the Irish by the English.
- Slavery existed long before the invention of the idea of race.
- When the Spanish colonists arrived in the Americas, they displayed extreme cruelty to the native people of the Americas.
- African slaves were brought to the Americas to meet labor needs.
- The idea of race emerged to justify slavery and colonization.

Review

- » When was the idea of race invented?

Critical Thinking

- » Can you imagine a world in which racial classifications had no importance? Why or why not?

1.3 How did the writers of the U.S. Constitution think of slavery? (pp. xx-xx)

- Although the Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal,” nearly half of the authors were slaveowners.
- Slavery was not abolished in the United States until 1865.

Review

- » Why were slavery and freedom in tension during the writing of the Declaration of Independence?

Critical Thinking

- » What are today's prevailing racial ideologies in the United States?
- » In what ways do those ideologies work to justify the current racial hierarchy?

1.4 How did the Indian Removal Act affect Native Americans? (pp. xx-xx)

- The Indian Removal Act of 1830 resulted in the death of tens of thousands of Native Americans due to forced displacements.

Review

- » How were the justifications for Indian Removal distinct from those used for slavery?

Critical Thinking

- » How and why do racial ideologies related to Native Americans and African Americans differ?

1.5 What role did science play in the propagation of racism? (pp. xx-xx)

- The idea of race was originally based on simple taxonomies. However, as science developed, scientists created more complex explanations of the differences among racial groups.
- In the nineteenth century, scientists measured skulls to assess differences among racial groups.

Review

- » How did the unconscious bias of nineteenth-century scientists influence their measurements of various racial groups?

Critical Thinking

- » What biases toward race might be present in today's sciences and social sciences?

Talking about Race

Imagine someone said to you that African Americans are naturally gifted at basketball. How could you respond in a constructive way to such a statement? The first step is to ask for further explanation. Listen to any evidence provided to support the claim. The person who made the statement may provide anecdotal evidence or possibly cite national trends. You should be able to draw from the knowledge you gained in this chapter to respond to the contention that there are natural or genetic differences between racial groups. Use your sociological imagination to encourage your conversational partner to think of explanations other than genetics for racial differences in basketball skills.