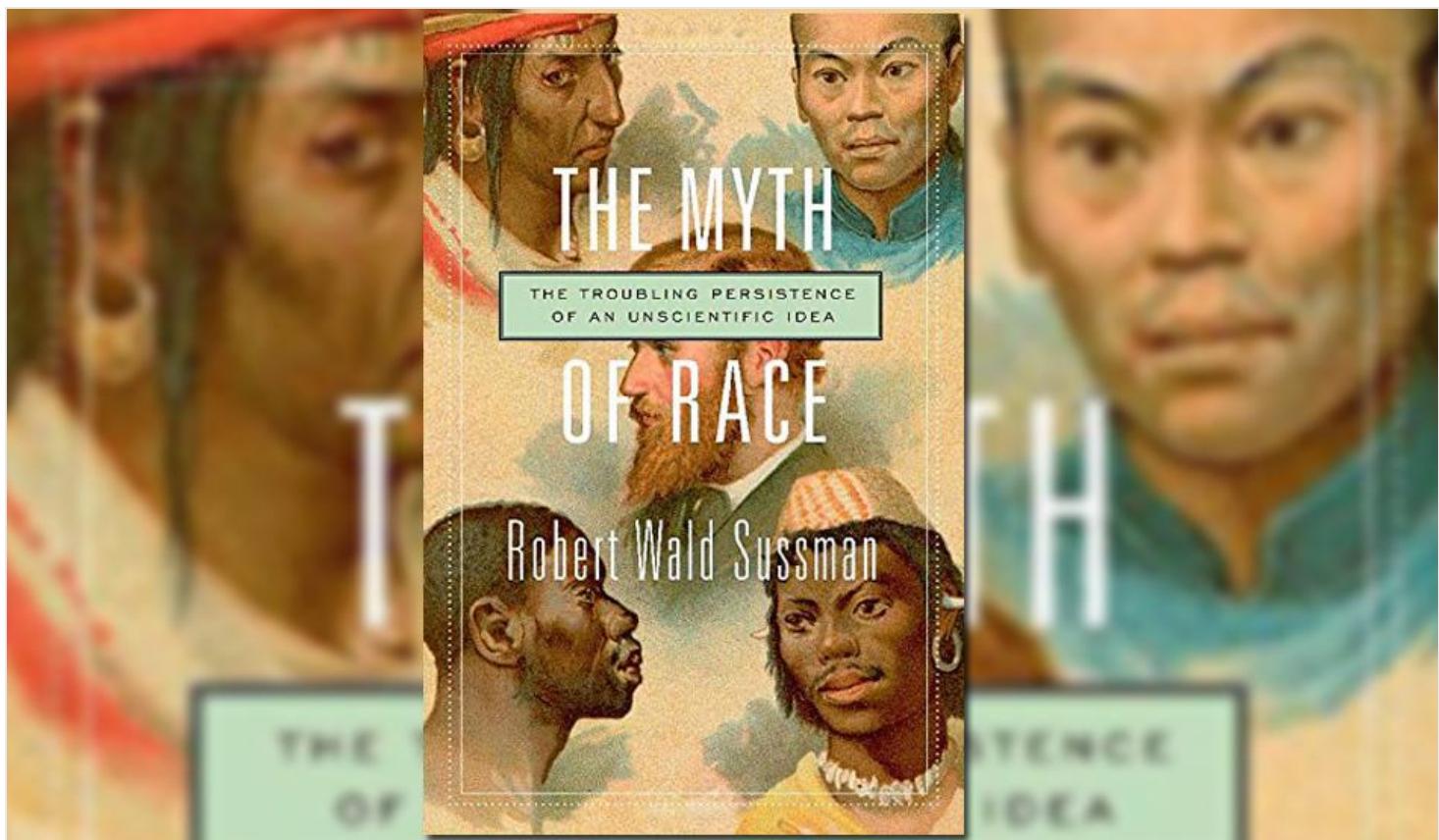


There Is No Such Thing as Race



In 1950, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued a statement asserting that all humans belong to the same species and that “race” is not a biological reality but a myth. This was a summary of the findings of an international panel of anthropologists, geneticists, sociologists, and psychologists.

A great deal of evidence had accumulated by that time to support this conclusion, and the scientists involved were those who were conducting research and were most knowledgeable about the topic of human variation. Since that time similar statements have been published by the American Anthropological Association and the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, and an enormous amount of modern scientific data has been gathered to justify this conclusion.

Today the vast majority of those involved in research on human variation would agree that biological races do not exist among humans. Among those who study the subject, who use and accept modern scientific techniques and logic, this scientific fact is as valid and true as the fact that the earth is round and revolves around the sun.

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Yet as recently as 2010, highly acclaimed journalist Guy Harrison wrote:

One day in the 1980s, I sat in the front row in my first undergraduate anthropology class, eager to learn more about this bizarre and fascinating species I was born into. But I got more than I expected that day as I heard for the first time that biological races are not real. After hearing several perfectly sensible reasons why vast biological categories don't work very well, I started to feel betrayed by my society. "Why am I just hearing this now? . . . Why didn't somebody tell me this in elementary school?" . . . I never should have made it through twelve years of schooling before entering a university, without ever hearing the important news that most anthropologists reject the concept of biological races.

Unfortunately, along with the belief in the reality of biologically based human races, racism still abounds in the United States and Western Europe. How can this be when there is so much scientific evidence against it?

Most educated people would accept the facts that the earth is not flat and that it revolves around the sun. However, it is much more difficult for them to accept modern science concerning human variation. Why is this so?

It seems that the belief in human races, carrying along with it the prejudice and hatred of "racism," is so embedded in our culture and has been an integral part of our worldview for so long that many of us assume that it just must be true.

Racism is a part of our everyday lives. Where you live, where you go to school, your job, your profession, who you interact with, how people interact with you, your treatment in the healthcare and justice systems are all affected by your race.

For the past 500 years, people have been taught how to interpret and understand racism. We have been told that there are very specific things that relate to race, such as intelligence, sexual behavior, birth rates, infant care, work ethics and abilities, personal restraint, lifespan, law-abidingness, aggression, altruism, economic and business practices, family cohesion, and even brain size.

We have learned that races are structured in a hierarchical order and that some races are

better than others. Even if you are not a racist, your life is affected by this ordered structure. We are born into a racist society.

What many people do not realize is that this racial structure is not based on reality. Anthropologists have shown for many years now that there is no biological reality to human race. There are no major complex behaviors that directly correlate with what might be considered human “racial” characteristics.

There is no inherent relationship between intelligence, law-abidingness, or economic practices and race, just as there is no relationship between nose size, height, blood group, or skin color and any set of complex human behaviors.

However, over the past 500 years, we have been taught by an informal, mutually reinforcing consortium of intellectuals, politicians, statesmen, business and economic leaders and their books that human racial biology is real and that certain races are biologically better than others.

These teachings have led to major injustices to Jews and non-Christians during the Spanish Inquisition; to blacks, Native Americans, and others during colonial times; to African Americans during slavery and reconstruction; to Jews and other Europeans during the reign of the Nazis in Germany; and to groups from Latin America and the Middle East, among others, during modern political times.

In my book, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea*, I have not dwelt upon all of the scientific information that has been gathered by anthropologists, biologists, geneticists, and other scientists concerning the fact that there are no such things as human biological races. This has been done by many people over the past fifty or so years.

What I do is describe the history of our myth of race and racism. As I describe this history, I think that you will be able to understand why many of our leaders and their followers have deluded us into believing these racist fallacies and how they have been perpetuated from the late Middle Ages to the present.

Many of our basic policies of race and racism have been developed as a way to keep these leaders and their followers in control of the way we live our modern lives. These leaders

often see themselves as the best and the brightest. Much of this history helped establish and maintain the Spanish Inquisition, colonial policies, slavery, Nazism, racial separatism and discrimination, and anti-immigration policies.

Although policies related to racism seem to be improving over time, I hope to help clarify why this myth still exists and remains widespread in the United States and throughout Western Europe by describing the history of racism and by exploring how the anthropological concepts of culture and worldview have challenged and disproven the validity of racist views.

Over the past 500 or so years, many intellectuals and their books have created our story of racism. They developed our initial ideas of race in Western society and solidified the attitudes and beliefs that gradually followed under the influence of their economic and political policies.

Then, approximately 100 years ago, anthropologist Franz Boas came up with an alternate explanation for why peoples from different areas or living under certain conditions behaved differently from one another. People have divergent life histories, different shared experiences with distinctive ways of relating to these differences. We all have a worldview, and we all share our worldview with others with similar experiences. We have culture.

It took many years for Boas and his few followers to develop this idea and pass it on to others. However, over the past fifty or sixty years, anthropologists, biologists, and geneticists have written many articles and books explaining why biological race in humans is nonexistent.

At first, scientists attempted to classify human races based on variations in characteristics such as skin color, hair color and form, eye color, facial anatomy, and blood groups. In the recent past, various scientists, such as Franz Boas, have divided us into anywhere between three and more than thirty different races, without any success. Most of these hypothetical “races” were developed using assumptions about genetic relationships and distributions among different human populations.

In 1942, Ashley Montagu, a student of Franz Boas, claimed that “there are no races, there are only clines.” Traits considered to be “racial” are actually distributed independently and depend upon many environmental and behavioral factors. For the most part, each trait has

a distinct distribution from other traits, and these traits are rarely determined by a single genetic factor.

This type of distribution of a biological trait is referred to as a cline. For example, skin color is related to the amount of solar radiation, and dark skin is found in Africa, India, and Australia. However, many other genetic traits in peoples of these areas are not similar. Furthermore, similar traits such as skin color are convergent; different genes can cause similar morphological and behavioral characteristics.

For example, genetic pathways to dark skin are different in Tamil Nadu and in Nigeria. Genetic traits usually do not correlate with one another and are not distributed in the same place or in the same way over time.

Race is supposed to tell us something about our genetic history. Who is related to whom? How did populations evolve over time and how isolated were they in the past?

Recent studies have shown us that humans have been migrating since *Homo sapiens* evolved some 200,000 years ago. This migration has not been in one direction but had happened back and forth. Our genes have been mixing since we evolved, and our genetic structure looks more like a complex, intermixed trellis than a simple candelabra.

It is very difficult to tell what our particular genetic background is over human historic time. We humans are more similar to each other as a group than we are to one another within any particular racial or genetic category. Many anthropological books have been written to explain this phenomenon.

Our view of genetics has also changed in recent times. Although many people still believe that genes, or a series of genes, directly determine some of our most complex behavioral or cognitive characteristics, the reality is more complicated.

Studies now show that each gene is only a single player in a wondrous, intricate drama involving non-additive interactions of genes, proteins, hormones, food, and life experiences and learning that interact to affect us on different levels of cognitive and behavioral functions. Each gene has an effect on multiple types of behaviors, and many behaviors are affected by many genes as well as other factors. The assumption that a single gene is causative can lead to unwarranted conclusions and an over-interpretation of any

genuine genetic linkage.

Before beginning this story, however, it is important to understand how scientists define the concept of race. How is race defined in biological terms? What do we mean by the term race when describing population variation in large mammals such as humans? Do the criteria used in describing these variations hold when we examine human population variation?

In biological terms, the concept of race is integrally bound to the process of evolution and the origin of species. It is part of the process of the formation of new species and is related to subspecific differentiation. However, because conditions can change and subspecies can and do merge, this process does not necessarily lead to the development of new species.

In biology, a species is defined as a population of individuals who are able to mate and have viable offspring; that is, offspring who are also successful in reproducing. The formation of new species usually occurs slowly over a long period of time.

For example, many species have a widespread geographic distribution with ranges that include ecologically diverse regions. If these regions are large in relationship to the average distance of migration of individuals within the species, there will be more mating, and thus more exchange of genes, within than between regions.

Over very long periods of time (tens of thousands of years), differences would be expected to evolve between distant populations of the same species. Some of these variations would be related to adaptations to ecological differences within the geographic range of the populations, while others might be purely random.

Over time, if little or no mating (or genetic exchange) occurs between these distant populations, genetic (and related morphological) differences will increase. Ultimately, over tens of thousands of years of separation, if little or no mating takes place between separate populations, genetic distinctions can become so great that individuals of the different populations could no longer mate and produce viable offspring.

The two populations would now be considered two separate species. This is the process of speciation. However, again, none of these criteria require that speciation will ultimately occur.

Since speciation develops very slowly, it is useful to recognize intermediate stages in this process. Populations of a species undergoing differentiation would show genetic and morphological variation due to a buildup of genetic differences but would still be able to breed and have offspring that could successfully reproduce.

They would be in various stages of the process of speciation but not yet different species. In biological terminology, it is these populations that are considered “races” or “subspecies”. Basically, subspecies within a species are geographically, morphologically, and genetically distinct populations but still maintain the possibility of successful interbreeding.

Thus, using this biological definition of race, we assume that races or subspecies are populations of a species that have genetic and morphological differences due to barriers to mating. Furthermore, little or no mating (or genetic exchange) between them has persisted for extremely long periods of time, thus giving the individuals within the population a common and separate evolutionary history.

Given advances in molecular genetics, we now have the ability to examine populations of species and subspecies and reconstruct their evolutionary histories in an objective and explicit fashion. In this way, we can determine the validity of the traditional definition of human races “by examining the patterns and amount of genetic diversity found within and among human populations” and by comparing this diversity with other large-bodied mammals that have wide geographic distributions.

In other words, we can determine how much populations of a species differ from one another and how these divergences came about.

A commonly used method to quantify the amount of within -- to among -- group genetic diversity is through examining molecular data, using statistics measuring genetic differences within and between populations of a species. Using this method, biologists have set a minimal threshold for the amount of genetic differentiation that is required to recognize subspecies.

Compared to other large mammals with wide geographic distributions, human populations do not reach this threshold. In fact, even though humans have the widest distribution, the measure of human genetic diversity (based on sixteen populations from Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Australia-Pacific region) falls well below the threshold used to

recognize races for other species and is among the lowest value known for large mammalian species. This is true even if we compare humans to chimpanzees.

Using a number of molecular markers has shown that the degree of isolation among human populations that would have been necessary for the formation of biological subspecies or races never occurred during the 200,000 years of modern human evolution.

Combined genetic data reveal that from around one million years ago to the last tens of thousands of years, human evolution has been dominated by two evolutionary forces: (1) constant population movement and range expansion; and (2) restrictions on mating between individuals only because of distance.

Thus, there is no evidence of fixed, long-term geographic isolation between populations. Other than some rare, temporary isolation events, such as the isolation of the aborigines of Australia, for example, the major human populations have been interconnected by mating opportunities (and thus genetic mixture) during the last 200,000 years (as long as modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, have been around). As summarized by A.R. Templeton, who is among the world's most recognized and respected geneticists:

Because of the extensive evidence for genetic interchange through population movements and recurrent gene flow going back at least hundreds of thousands of years ago, there is only one evolutionary lineage of humanity and there are no subspecies or races. . . . Human evolution and population structure has been and is characterized by many locally differentiated populations coexisting at any given time, but with sufficient contact to make all of humanity a single lineage sharing a common, long-term evolutionary fate.

Thus, given current scientific data, biological races do not exist among modern humans today, and they have never existed in the past. Given such clear scientific evidence as this and the research data of so many other biologists, anthropologists, and geneticists that demonstrate the nonexistence of biological races among humans, how can the "myth" of human races still persist?

If races do not exist as a biological reality, why do so many people still believe that they do? In fact, even though biological races do not exist, the concept of race obviously is still a reality, as is racism. These are prevalent and persistent elements of our everyday lives and generally accepted aspects of our culture.

Thus, the concept of human races is real. It is not a biological reality, however, but a cultural one. Race is not a part of our biology, but it is definitely a part of our culture. Race and racism are deeply ingrained in our history.

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