

Racism in America

<http://www.umich.edu/~kshawkin/talks/20050512.pdf>

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Before I begin

- I don't really like PowerPoint. If you don't either, or you're interested in finding out why I don't like it, read Peter Norvig, "PowerPoint: shot with its own bullets," <http://www.norvig.com/lancet.html>.
- But I'm using it today because some people read English better than they understand it when spoken.

What is race? (1)

- Let's start by defining *race*.
- *Race* is a term invented during the 18th century, referring to local populations encountered during this era of European colonialism, as opposed to the colonizers.
- It has always been used to justify unequal distributions of power between two groups.

See “American Anthropological Association Statement on ‘Race’ (May 17, 1998),” available at <<http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm>>.

What is race? (2)

- Use of the term *race* often focuses on inherited physical characteristics, but geneticists have confirmed that “there is greater variation within ‘racial’ groups than between them.” That is, there’s no genetic justification for racial classification.
- In America in particular, *race* was used to justify the continuation of slavery and the conquering of Native Americans (Indians).

See “American Anthropological Association Statement on ‘Race’ (May 17, 1998),” available at <<http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm>>.

Legal definitions of *race* in the US

- Following the abolition of slavery (1865), many US states passed laws that defined a person's race based on ancestry.
- These laws made various forms of discrimination and segregation legal, but all such laws were overturned by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Today, many documents ask people to *self-identify* by race, but by law you are never required to answer this question.

1997 federal standard

- In 1997, a federal rule change required federal government agencies to use a minimum of the following five race categories on forms to be filled out by citizens:
 - American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
 - White
- You self-identify (choose your own race), and you may choose more than one.

Census 2000: race and ethnicity

- The US Census in 2000 had a sixth race category: *Some other race*. We've realized that the five historically based categories don't work.
- There was a separate question for *ethnicity*:
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Not Hispanic or Latino

For information on the 1997 rule change and the Census 2000 categories, see “Racial and Ethnic Classifications Used in Census 2000 and Beyond,” available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race/racefactcb.html>.

Census 2000: ancestry

- You can also indicate your ancestry from a long list, including:
 - Acadian/Cajun
 - American
 - Arab
 - British West Indian
 - French Canadian
 - ... and many more, including almost every European nationality.

A note on “Jewish”

- Note that “Jewish” is considered a religion, not nationality, in the US.
- The US Census is forbidden from asking about religious confession.

So, what is racism?

- Generally speaking, *racism* is the holding of a prejudice against someone based on race (a social classification) and acting on this prejudice by discriminating.
- In counseling psychology as studied in America, *racism* includes only discrimination dependent on social, economic, or other power. So *reverse discrimination* is not a form of racism.

Effect of Civil Rights Movement

- The American Civil Rights Movement, particularly since the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision (1954), has made people more aware of discrimination and prejudice.
- The movement grew out of the struggle for equal rights for Black Americans; however, many have been trying to expand discussions of race in America beyond “black versus white.”

Use of language

- Today, it is not appropriate to mention a person's race, but it can sometimes be used as an identifying characteristic, as you would for hair color or height. Culturally aware people try to avoid doing this.
- Likewise, you should not identify someone by ethnicity, ancestry, religion, and—for those not born in the United States—country of origin, unless it's directly relevant.

Race as social construction

- As you can see, *race*, especially in the American context, is almost entirely a social construction: a cultural concept rather than one that exists abstractly.
- Among younger generations, race has become more of a social identification with a weak connection to physical characteristics.

Race for young people

- Various impolite expressions and slang terms:
 - “acting white”
 - “acting black”, yo
 - oreo, coconut
 - banana
- These are based on the way you:
 - dress
 - act
 - talk

Contentious issues

- Discussions of race are always very contentious in America:
 - Is Barak Obama black?
 - *Racial profiling*
 - *Affirmative action* (preferential access)
 - *Reparations* for slavery

Does racism still exist in the US?

- While racism may rarely be overt any more, it still exists in more subtle forms:
 - *Redlining* (discriminating in offering loans or insurance based on where a person lives)—illegal if based on race
 - Names on résumés (2003 study): black-sounding names were 50% less likely to be called for interviews

For more information

- “American Anthropological Association Statement on ‘Race’ (May 17, 1998),” available at <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm>.
- UnderstandingPrejudice.org:
www.understandingprejudice.org
- Anti-Racism.net: www.antiracismnet.org
- Институт толерантности:
<http://www.tolerinst.ru/>