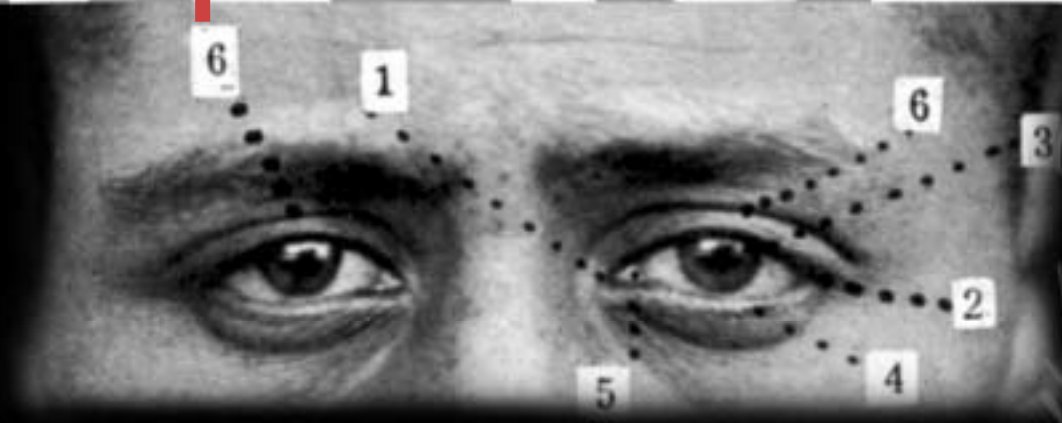


RACE

the power of an illusion



What is
this thing
called race?

itvs community connections project



Ten Things everyone should know

Ten Things Everyone Should Know about Race

There's less—and
more—to race
than meets
the eye.



- 1 Race is a modern idea.** Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical differences, but according to religion, status, class or even language. The English word "race" turns up for the first time in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.
- 2 Race has no genetic basis.** Not one characteristic, trait or even gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.
- 3 Human subspecies don't exist.** Unlike many animals, modern humans simply haven't been around long enough, nor have populations been isolated enough, to evolve into separate subspecies or races. On average, only one of every thousand of the nucleotides that make up our DNA differ one human from another. We are one of the most genetically similar of all species.
- 4 Skin color really is only skin deep.** The genes for skin color have nothing to do with genes for hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone's skin color doesn't necessarily tell you anything else about them.
- 5 Most variation is within, not between, "races."** Of the small amount of total human variation, 85% exists within any local population. About 94% can be found within any continent. That means, for example, that two random Koreans may be as genetically different as a Korean and an Italian.
- 6 Slavery predates race.** Throughout much of human history, societies have enslaved others, often as a result of conquest or debt, but not because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Due to a unique set of historical circumstances, North America has the first slave system where all slaves shared a common appearance and ancestry.
- 7 Race and freedom were born together.** The U.S. was founded on the principle that "All men are created equal," but the country's early economy was based largely on slavery. The new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.
- 8 Race justified social inequalities as natural.** The "common sense" belief in white superiority justified anti-democratic action and policies like slavery, the extermination of American Indians, the exclusion of Asian immigrants, the taking of Mexican lands, and the institutionalization of racial practices within American government, laws, and society.
- 9 Race isn't biological, but racism is still real.** Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. The government and social institutions of the United States have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power and resources to white people.
- 10 Colorblindness will not end racism.** Pretending race doesn't exist is not the same as creating equality.

Name: _____

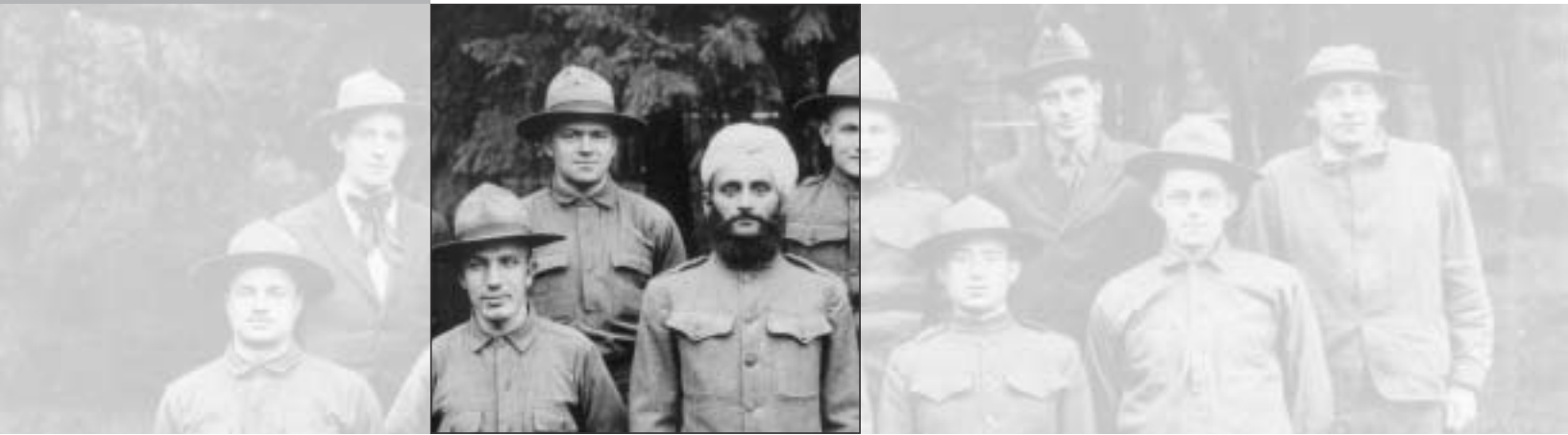
episode 1 — *The Difference Between us***Discussion Starters****Episode I—The Difference Between Us**

“Race is not based on biology, but race is rather an idea that we ascribe to biology.”

— Alan Goodman,
biological anthropologist

Before Viewing

- > How would you define race? What does it mean to you?
- > How many races do you think there are? What are they? How do you decide which race someone belongs to?
- > Look around the room or around your community. Who do you think is likely to be most similar to you, biologically or genetically? Why?
- > Where do your ideas about race come from? What are the sources of your information?



Directions: On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions. Your responses should be detailed and not one line answers.

Comprehension Questions

- > What is the difference between a biological and a social view of race?
- > Excluding your immediate family members, are you more likely to be genetically like someone who looks like you or someone who does not?
- > Why is it impossible to use biological characteristics to sort people into consistent races? Review some of the concepts such as "non-concordance" and "within-group vs. between group variation."
- > Who has benefited from the belief that we can sort people according to race and that there are natural or biologically based differences between racial groups?
- > Besides race, what other things explain why some people might be more susceptible than others to disease? Think about the girl in the film with sickle cell anemia. How is ancestry different from race?

Discussion Questions

At the beginning of the film, the students are asked to predict whom they will be most like when they compare their DNA samples. How did the results compare with your expectations? Did you share the students' surprise? If so, why?

Anthropologist Alan Goodman says that "to understand why the idea of race is a biological myth requires a major paradigm shift." Do you agree? Did the film present anything that shifted your thinking in a major way? If so, what? Is it difficult to make this shift? Why?

episode 1 - The Difference Between us

Discussion Questions continued

Web Site Tip:

Prior to viewing, visit the companion Web site at www.pbs.org/race and take the "Genetic Diversity Quiz" in the Human Diversity section. As you watch, see if any of your answers change. To follow up on the suggested activities, try the site's Sorting People activity. See if you can match people with their backgrounds just by looking at them.

Should doctors and other health professionals take biological race into account when diagnosing and treating illness? Why? Can you think of a situation where thinking about race as biological might be misleading or have a negative effect? How would considering social race be different?

Towards the end of this episode, the students are asked if they would trade their skin color. Would you trade your skin color? How do you think your life would be different if you looked like someone of a different race?

Turn-of-the-century scientists like Frederick Hoffman drew scientific conclusions based on what they believed to be true. How are scientists today influenced by their beliefs or their social context?

For many people, race is an important part of their identity. How do the following two comments from the film affect the way you think of yourself:

- > "There's as much or more diversity and genetic difference within any racial group as there is between people of different racial groups." - Pilar Ossorio, microbiologist
- > "Every single one of us is a mongrel." - student

Athletics is one arena where talking about ideas of inborn racial differences remains common. Why do you think some populations or groups seem to dominate certain sports but not others? What does it mean that the groups that dominate those sports have changed over time?

Try This Activity

Use the following list of inherited, biological traits to divide people into groups (i.e., first group people by hair color, then regroup by blood type, etc.):

- Hair color
- Blood types (A, B, O, A/B)
- Whether or not your tongue curls
- Lactose tolerance or intolerance (ability to digest milk products)
- Left-handedness or right-handedness
- Fingerprint types (loop, whorl, arch or tented arch)
- Skin color (compare the inside of your arm)

Does the composition of the groups remain consistent from one criterion to the next? If the groups change depending on the criteria, what does that tell us about "group racial characteristics"? What are some reasons why we might classify using some traits, but not others?

Key References

- 1896 - Frederick Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*
- 1972 - Richard Lewontin, "The Apportionment of Human Diversity," *Evolutionary Biology*, Vol. 6, 381-398.