

Dismantling the Racism Machine: Why White People Must Confront the Resurgence of the “Race is Biological” Myth and Its Perpetuation of White Supremacy

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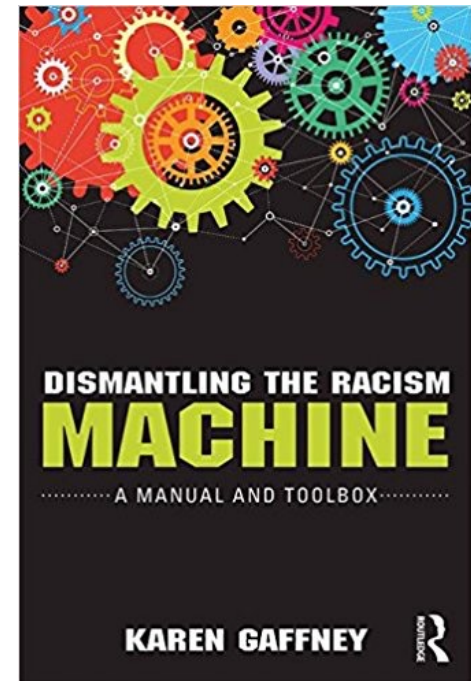
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Accessing slides & resources

- There are some printed copies of the slides for note-taking.
- You also have access to the webpage I created for this breakout, which includes the slides and links to resources.
 - Link: <https://dividednolonger.com/wpc2024-breakout/>
 - QR code:



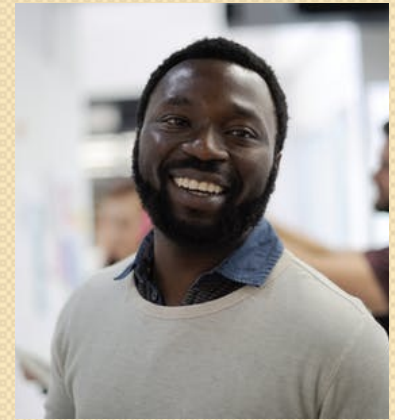
Racism Machine



- System of oppression and privilege that relates to category of race
- Perpetuated by false racial ideologies
 - Ideology = myth or belief people are unknowingly indoctrinated into believing
 - Power
- Damaging and false racial ideology blocks the view of the Racism Machine
- Today: 1 of these myths

Myth #1: Human races are biologically different

We might think that 2 random white people are closer biologically to each other than a random white person and Black person...



This belief is false

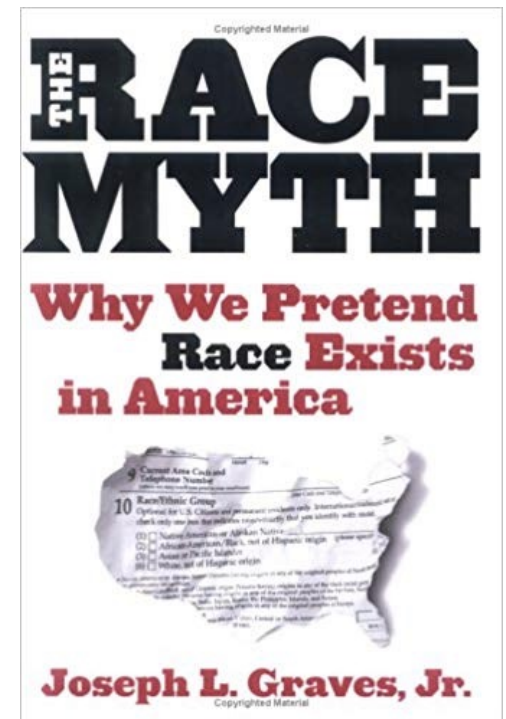
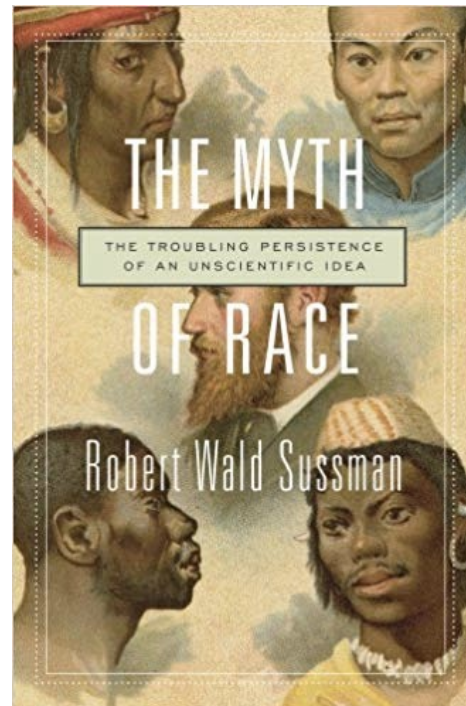
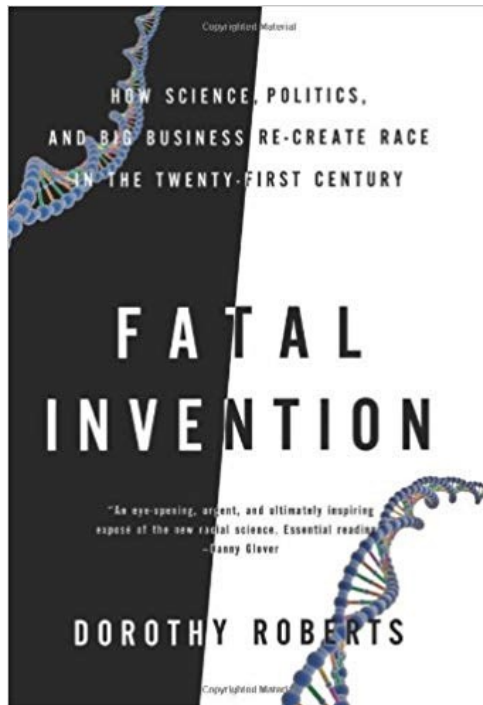
Myth #1: Human races are biologically different

Reality: Race is a social construct (a human invention)

- Human DNA is about 99.9% identical throughout the world
- .1% difference does not map onto racial categories
- No scientific, biological, or genetic way to separate humans into “races”
- Human beings are one of the most genetically similar of all species
- Race may be an invention, but racism is very real

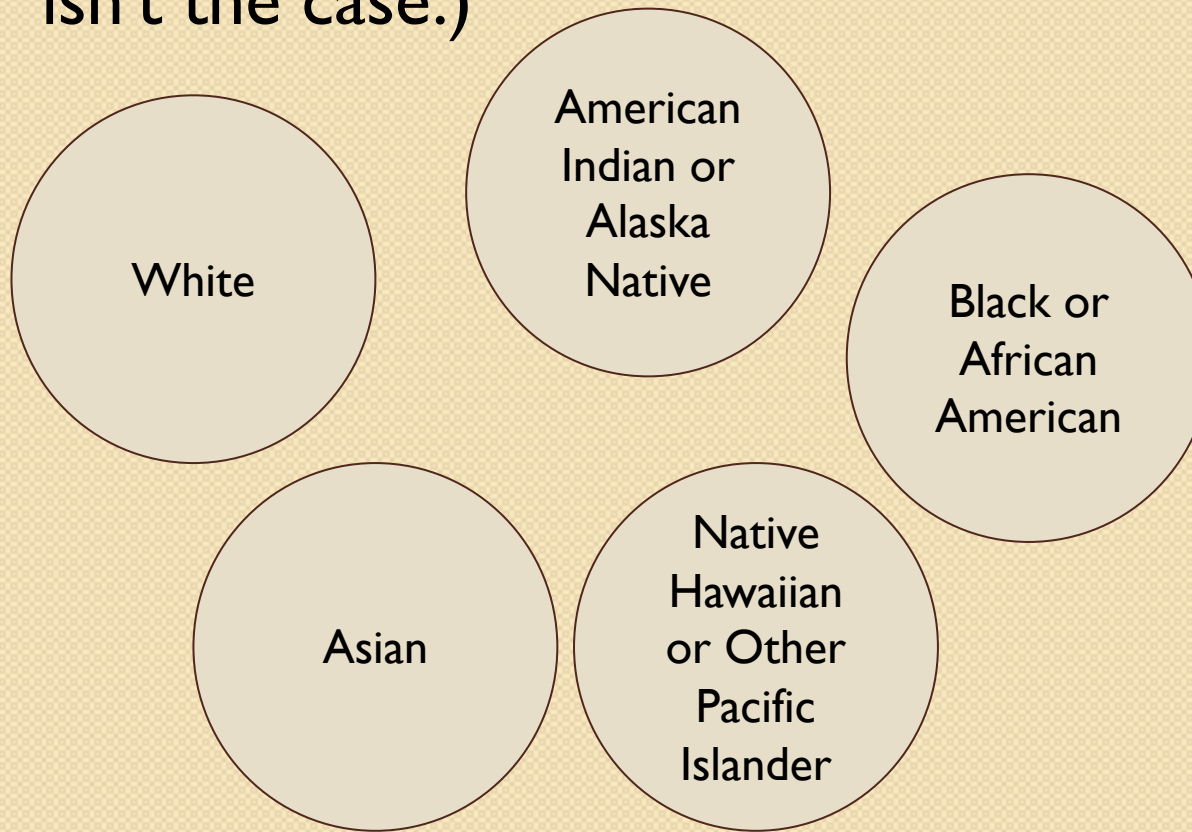


RACE - The Power of an Illusion



If race were biological...

then there would be something genetic or biological that only one race had, that no one else had. (That isn't the case.)



“The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically.”
-Census Bureau

Reality: human genetic diversity has incredible overlap

RACISM NOT RACE

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

JOSEPH L. GRAVES JR.
AND ALAN H. GOODMAN

“whole-genome studies confirm that modern humans do not contain biological races” (184)

“Maasai people [Kenya] are more similar [genetically] to Europeans than they are to the Khoisan [Namibia].... the Sandawe [Tanzania] are closer to Europeans than they are to the Hadza [Tanzania]” (184)

But what about . . .

- Sports?
- Sickle-cell disease?
- High Black maternal mortality rate in US?
- Skin color?

But what about sports?



LA Lakers, 2020



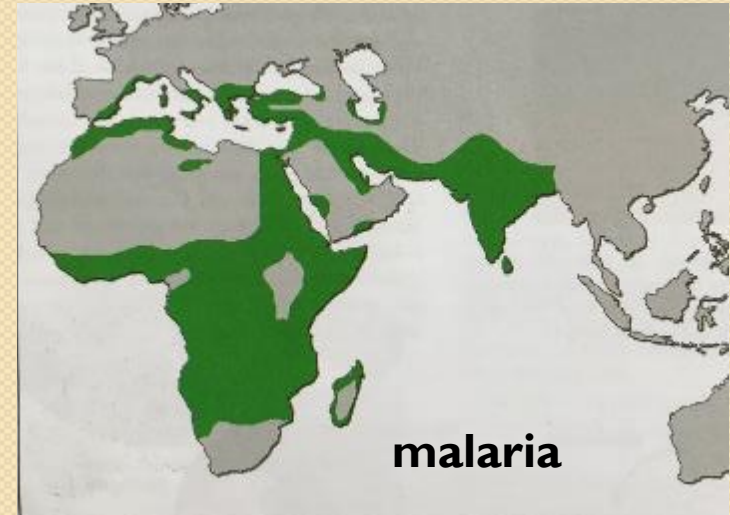
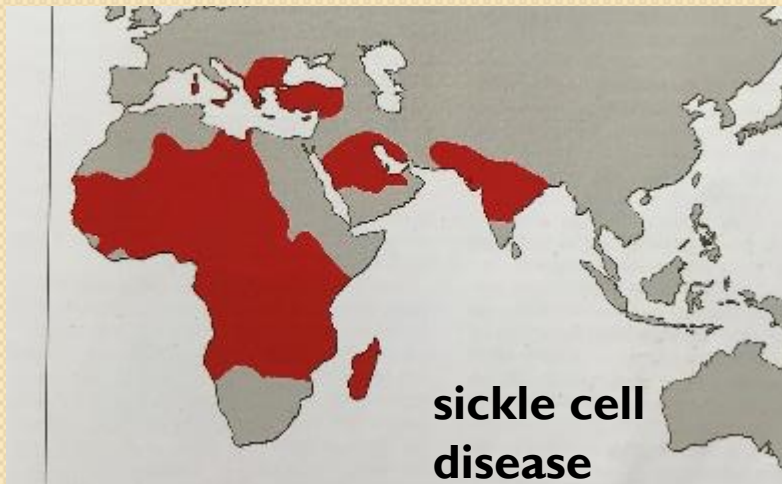
Jewish basketball team in Pittsburgh, 1929

Sports teams depend on:

- What are young people of a particular racial group encouraged to pursue? What are they not encouraged to pursue?
- What messages do they see and hear from popular culture, from teachers, and from family?
- Who has access to training? What type of training?

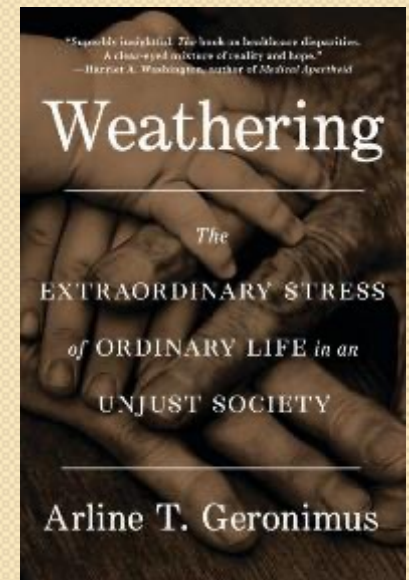
But what about sickle cell disease?

- the sickle cell disease is genetic, but that doesn't mean race is biological

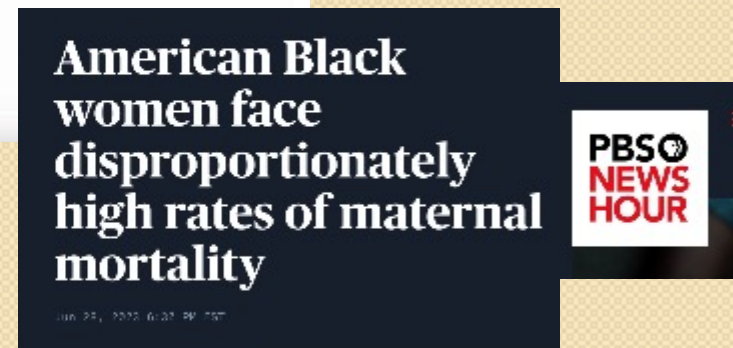


- the sickle cell trait helps protect against malaria, so if one's ancestors lived in a part of the world prone to malaria, one's likelihood of having the sickle cell trait or sickle cell disease is much higher (affecting some but not all of Africa, some of southern Europe, some of Asia)

But what about the high Black maternal mortality rate in the US?



while race is a social construct,
racism has a biological impact



But what about skin color?

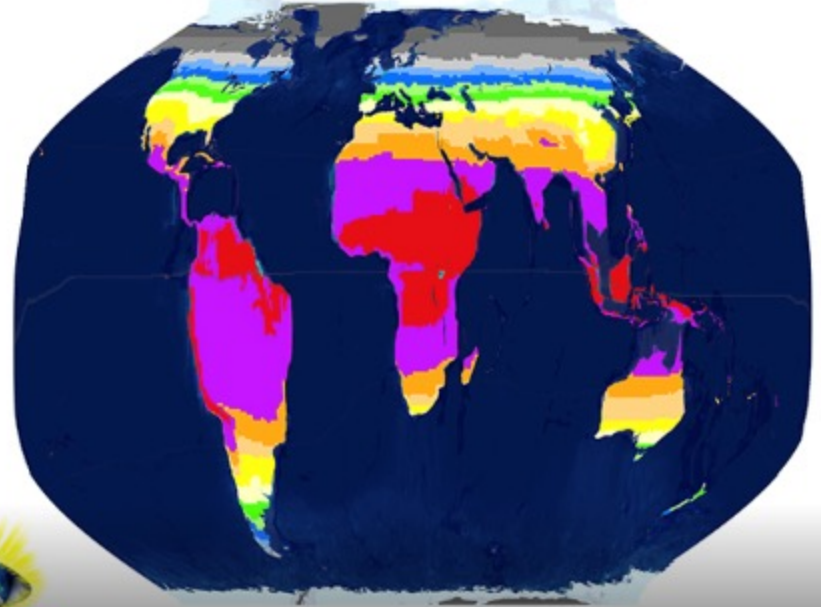


- Yes, skin color varies, and there are genes that influence skin color
- But skin color varies gradually along a spectrum
- Skin color variation is a relatively recent trait that reflects where one's ancestors settled in relation to the equator

Map Of Human Skin Colors

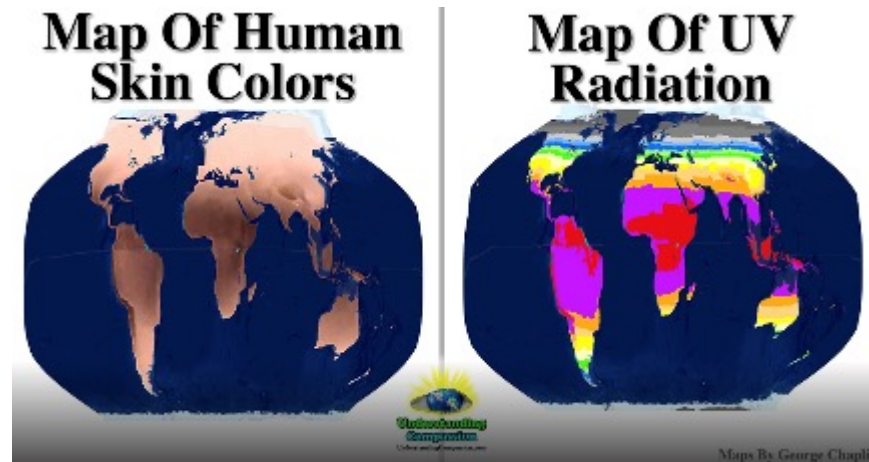


Map Of UV Radiation

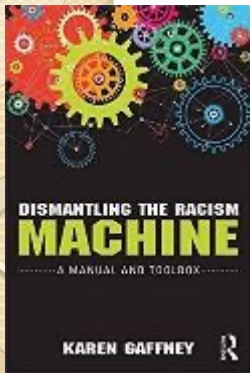


Maps By George Chaplin

- Sunlight is strongest at equator
- Modern humans evolved in equatorial Africa and had dark skin
- Dark skin color was needed to protect against harmful UVR from sun, specifically to protect fetus in development



- Much later, when some groups of humans migrated north and south away from the equator, they were in places with less direct sunlight. This was good for fetal development but bad for processing Vitamin D needed for bone health. Lighter skin therefore was helpful adaptation because it absorbed more sunlight in regions further away from equator.
- We have been taught to focus on skin color as a sign that there are biologically distinct human racial groups, but that's a myth.



invention of race depends on **two false and dangerous beliefs**

FALSE

“humans can be subdivided into **biologically distinct** groups, often based on skin color” (12-13)

FALSE

“these groups are **hierarchical**, meaning that they can be positioned on a racial hierarchy from superior to inferior” (13)

Why is the myth that race is biological dangerous?

- the belief that white people are the only people who are fully human, the foundation of:
 - white supremacy, anti-Blackness, colonialism, genocide, land theft, slavery, segregation, eugenics, and more

criminal
justice system

education

media

housing

healthcare

finance

Thomas Jefferson

- His only published book, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1788), was considered one of the most important books of early America, helping to lay the foundation for the myth that race is biological
- He wrote, “the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind” (153)
- Over his lifetime, he enslaved more than 600 Black people



*Beyond the Myth
of Benevolence*
(2014)
By Titus Kaphar

from *The Washington Post*, “The disturbing reason some African American patients may be undertreated for pain” (4/4/16)

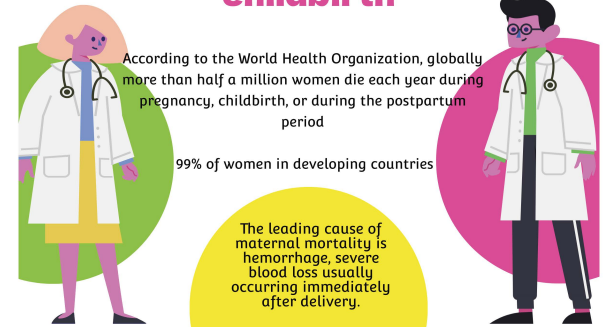
“Researchers at the University of Virginia quizzed white medical students and residents to see how many believed inaccurate and at times ‘fantastical’ differences about the two races -- for example, that blacks have less sensitive nerve endings than whites or that black people's blood coagulates more quickly. They found that fully **half** thought at least one of the **false statements** presented was possibly, probably or definitely true. Moreover, those who held false beliefs often **rated black patients’ pain as lower** than that of white patients and made **less appropriate** recommendations about how they should be treated.”

College students created materials to debunk the myth that race is biological

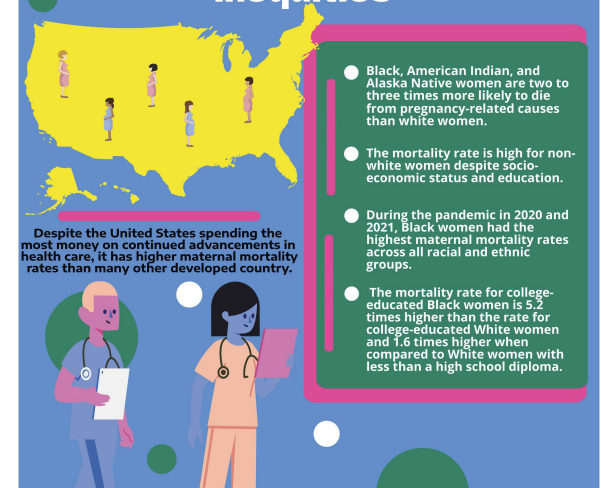
Funded by the RIOS Institute



Addressing Opportunities to Improve Maternal safety during childbirth



Disparities in U.S. Maternal healthcare suggest racial inequities



<https://qubeshub.org/publications/4675/1>

Activity – small group discussion and share back

1. Is there anything you want clarified further to help you understand why this myth is false and/or dangerous?
2. How do you think this myth impacts your life?
3. What can you do to help debunk this myth in your family, community, workplace, etc.? Can you practice what you might say? With this in mind, is your group willing to create a small role play where you would engage a skeptical person about debunking this myth?

Thank you!

- Use the resources on my website:
dividednolonger.com
- Feel free to email me:
dividednolonger@gmail.com
- If you'd like to get my book *Dismantling the Racism Machine*, this coupon code will work at the Routledge website: SS254

<https://www.routledge.com/Dismantling-the-Racism-Machine-A-Manual-and-Toolbox/Gaffney/p/book/9781138037229>