



What Causes Racism? An Overview

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Genes responsible for what people perceive as “racial” differences are an insignificant part of the human genome.¹ Therefore, perceived group differences in intellectual performance or other behavioral traits cannot be attributed to race.¹

Indeed, the notion of race is a manufactured idea, for the purpose of allocating resources according to a hierarchy.²

Scholars disagree on the precise timing of the development of the notion of race as it is used in our current era.^{3,4} Yet, there is a consensus that the idea of race pre-dates the 15th century^{3,4} and was [codified](#)^{3,6} in the 18th century, thus, enshrining the system of global racial caste that persists today.³

Causes and History

Throughout most of human history, we lived as hunter-gatherer people spending considerable time searching for and acquiring, food.⁵ Hunter-gatherer societies generally do not engage in arbitrary stratification processes because of their limited resources and time.⁵ Nevertheless, arbitrary stratification processes (e.g., caste, immigrant status, social class) began to emerge when humans developed the ability to store food, about 10,000 years ago; and therefore, made decisions about the allocation of surplus resources, and had the time to make tools, and engage in warfare.⁵ In other words, humans developed arbitrary stratification processes to allocate surplus resources to people belonging to groups designated as high status and to restrict resources to people belonging to groups designated as low status.²

Evolutionary Motivations

Stratification behaviors are found in all primates.² A need for high status underlies the human need to engage in stratification behaviors such as developing a racial hierarchy.² High status is associated with the selectivity of mates and better outcomes for offspring for both males and females.²

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