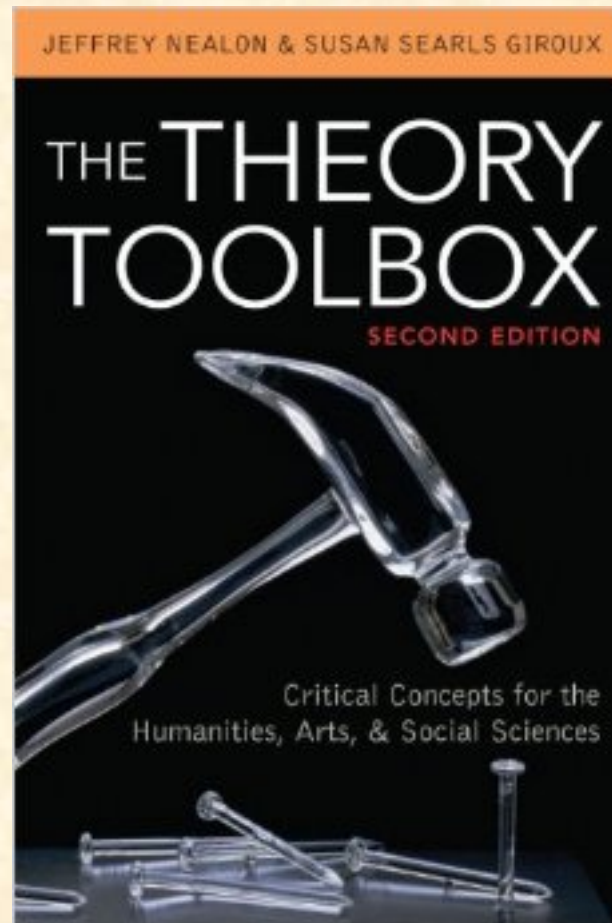


Race, Class, Postcolonialism

From *Theory Toolbox*



Race: Essential or Socially Constructed?

- What do the authors of *Theory Toolbox* mean when they say that the term “race” is “anything but natural and eternal” (191)?

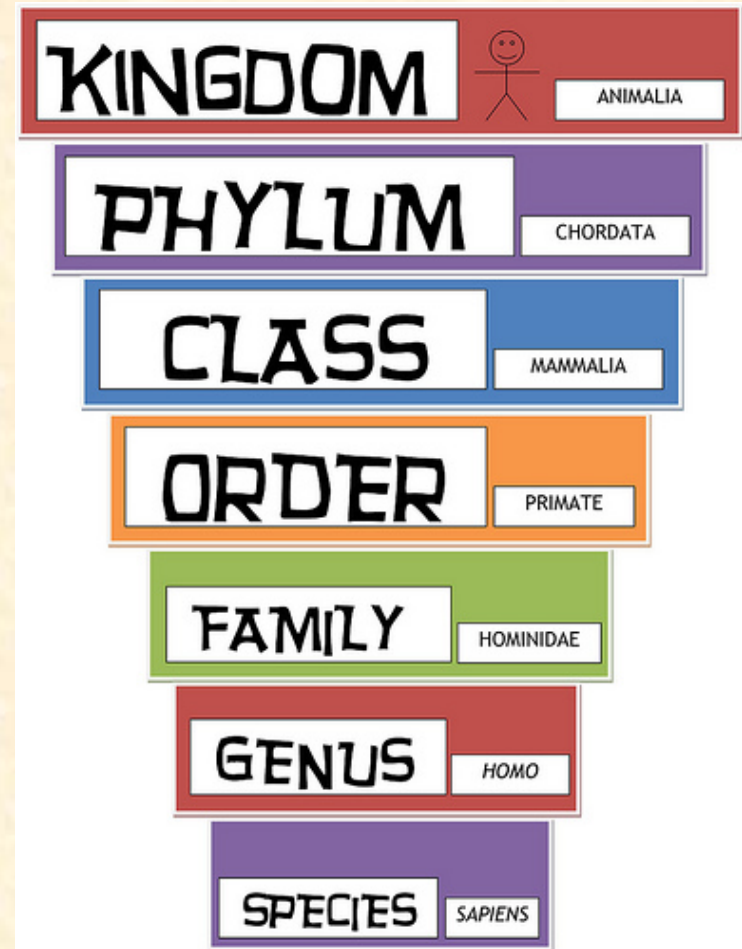




- Race *seems* like a natural difference, but science, history, and culture tell us differently
- Think of political definitions of race and how they've changed over time
 - How much blood makes a person black?

History of Race

- Term “race” first used to refer to speakers of a common language
- Then to national affiliation
- Not until 17th C did the term get used to talk about observable physical traits
- Starting in 19th C, “race” used in a taxonomic sense to talk about populations genetically differentiated by biological traits

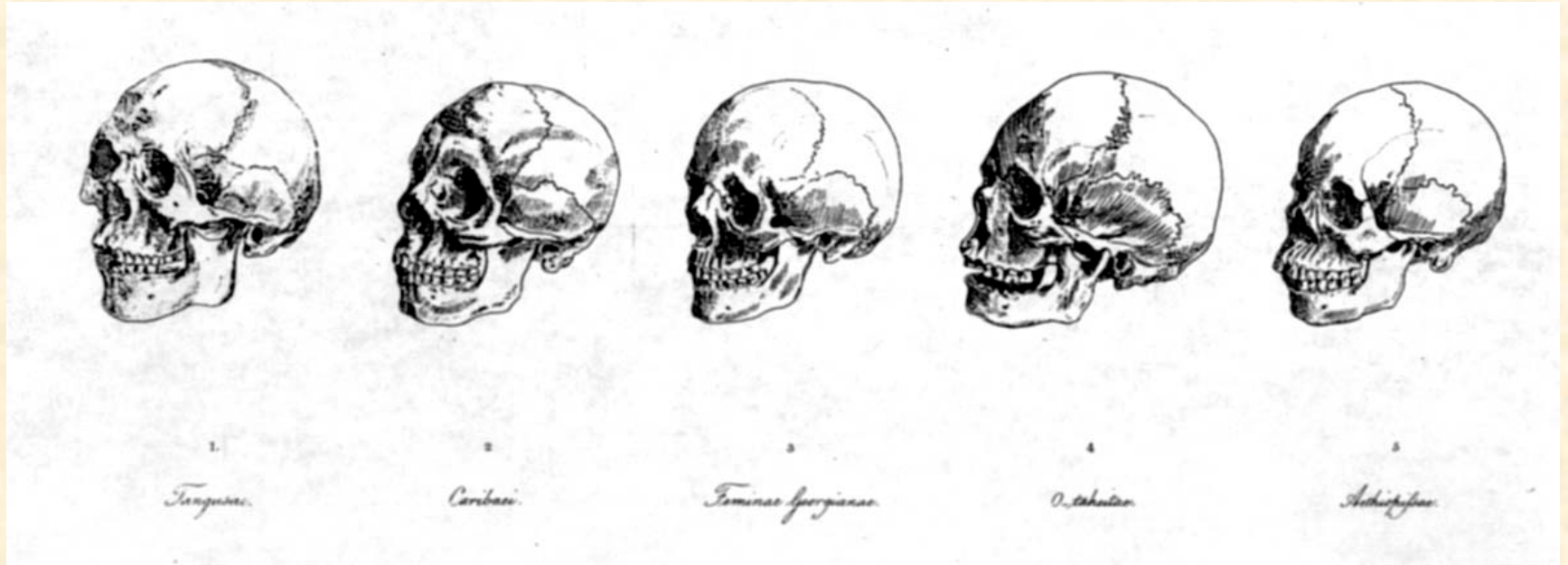


Biological Notions of Race



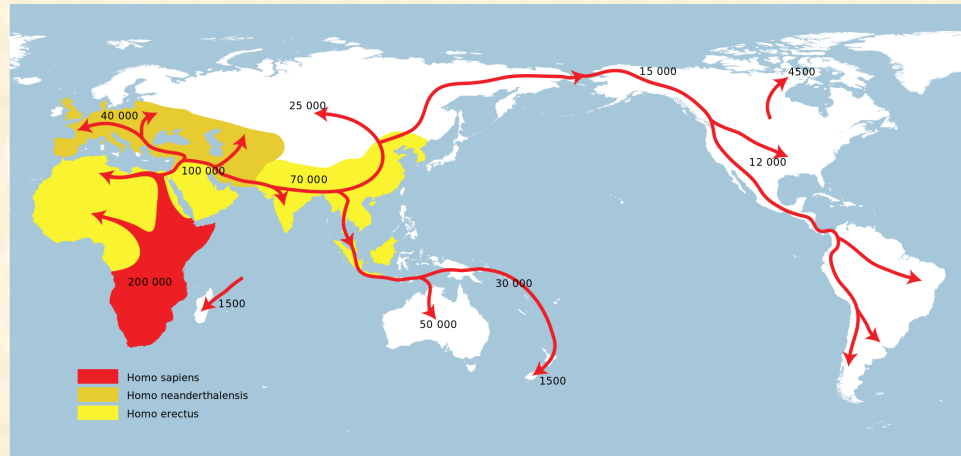
- European concept of race arose during the Scientific Revolution
- Interest in the biological study of natural kinds
- Also at the time of European imperialism and colonization
- Established political relationships between Europeans and peoples with distinct political and cultural traditions

Polygenism



- Arose in last two decades of the 18th C
- Belief that different races evolved separately on different continents
- No common ancestor

Today



- Today, most anthropologists believe all modern humans developed in North or East Africa and migrated to the other continents
- Genetics have determined that any two individuals from different populations are almost as likely to be more similar to each other genetically than to a member of their own group
- Scientists today consider biological essentialism obsolete. Racial groups cannot be biologically defined

1998 Statement on Race from the American Anthropological Society

- "In the United States both scholars and the general public have been conditioned to viewing human races as natural and separate divisions within the human species based on visible physical differences. With the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century, however, it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups. Evidence from the analysis of genetics (e.g., DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies within so-called racial groups. Conventional geographic "racial" groupings differ from one another only in about 6% of their genes. This means that there is greater variation within "racial" groups than between them. In neighboring populations there is much overlapping of genes and their phenotypic (physical) expressions. Throughout history whenever different groups have come into contact, they have interbred. The continued sharing of genetic materials has maintained all of humankind as a single species."

But, what about observable biological variations? (Hair, skin, shape of facial features, especially?)

Next Paragraph from the AAA Statement:

Physical variations in any given trait tend to occur gradually rather than abruptly over geographic areas. And because physical traits are inherited independently of one another, knowing the range of one trait does not predict the presence of others. For example, skin color varies largely from light in the temperate areas in the north to dark in the tropical areas in the south; its intensity is not related to nose shape or hair texture. Dark skin may be associated with frizzy or kinky hair or curly or wavy or straight hair, all of which are found among different indigenous peoples in tropical regions. These facts render any attempt to establish lines of division among biological populations both arbitrary and subjective.

Or, from anthropologist Jason Antrosio, in an article called "*Race Reconciled* Re-Debunks Race" (2013)

Any racial terminology related to skin color, even in Brazil, must have some categories, or ways of marking off groups. However, what do these categories look like when compared to skin tones around the world? In a discussion of [Race and global patterns of phenotypic variation](#), John Relethford plots human skin color variation:

The result is a continuous straight line ranging from the darkest extremes to the lightest extremes in skin color. There are no identifiable clusters. . . . Researchers are of course free to subdivide this continuum into different groups, but such clustering would be arbitrary and subjective in terms of the number of groups and the cutoff points used to distinguish them. The lack of apparent clusters is a reflection of the fact that skin color shows a classic pattern of clinal variation. (2009:17)

There are no clusters or clumps of black, white, yellow, or red skin colors. Like many traits used to measure race, skin color exhibits clinal variation, along a cline or smooth gradient between the extremes. A walk from the African tropics to northern Europe reveals this gradual variation in skin color. Some people postulate one reason for extreme racial classifications is because Europeans were traveling by sea, and so would meet an extreme example at each stop. The simple categories used in the U.S. may in part be a result of a small initial sample, drawn from the extremes of skin variation.

Or, from Harvard University Professor of Zoology, R. C. Loewontin, in an article called “Confusions About Human Races” (2006)

- “Over the last thirty five years a major change has taken place in our biological understanding of the concept of human “race,” largely as a consequence of an immense increase in our knowledge of human genetics. As a biological rather than a social construct, “race” has ceased to be seen as a fundamental reality characterizing the human species.”
- Genetic traits such as skin color, hair form, nose shape, (and a relatively few proteins like the Rh blood type), when mapped geographically by weighted averages, “have not borne out the claims for racial divisions.” Such maps “show continuous variation over the whole world with no sharp boundaries and with no greater similarity occurring between Western and Eastern Europeans than between Europeans and Africans.
- “The . . . last fact about genetic differences between groups is that these differences are in the process of breaking down because of the very large amount of migration and intergroup mating that was always true episodically in the history of the human species but is now more widespread than ever.”

And yet...does that mean race doesn't matter or that we can freely choose our race?

- No
- Ideas of race still structure American society
- Recognizing the social constructedness of race doesn't change the fact that it's a powerful social determinant



Question

- How are some racial categories marked while others are invisible? In other words, why are “people of color” thought to have race while whites often aren’t?

Class

CEOs, politicians	\$200,000	
Professionals	\$100,000 \$72,500	Graduate Degree
Professional Support & Sales	\$50,000 \$32,000	Bachelor's degree
Clerical, Service & Blue collar	\$25,000 \$20,000 \$15,000	Some college
Part time & unemployed	\$7,000	High School

Sources: Thompson & Hickey, Society in Focus, 2005;
US Census Bureau Personal income & education of individuals 25+, 2005

- Nealon and Giroux argue that, while “gender and ethnoracial distinctions” are often noted and discussed as “crucial social...determinants,” class is seldom referenced in similar ways and has led something of an “underground existence” (194). Why do they think this is? Do you agree?

Possible Reasons



- Myths of America as a classless or egalitarian society?
- Class seems more malleable than race or gender?
- Tradition of rugged individualism, self-reliance?
Expectation of individuals to make it on their own?