

# Racism

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Racism is the belief that there are inherent differences in people's traits and capacities that are entirely due to their race, however defined, and that, as a consequence, justify the different treatment of those people, both socially and legally. Moreover, racism is the practice of the different treatment of certain a group or groups, which is then justified by recourse to racial stereotyping or pseudo-science.

Those who disagree with the proposition that there are races or that there are such inherent (i.e., non-personal, social, or cultural) differences regard any differences in treatment of people on the basis of those criteria as being racial discrimination. Some of those who argue that there are such inherent differences also argue that one race is inferior to another race. In the case of institutional racism, certain racial groups may be denied rights or benefits, or receive preferential treatment.

Racial discrimination typically points out taxonomic differences between different groups of people, although anyone may be discriminated against on an ethnic or cultural basis, independent of their somatic differences. According to the United Nations conventions, there is no distinction between the term racial discrimination and ethnicity discrimination.

There is some evidence that the meaning of the term has changed over time, and that earlier definitions of racism involved the simple belief that human populations are divided into separate races. Many biologists, anthropologists, and sociologists reject this taxonomy in favor of more specific and/or empirically verifiable criteria, such as geography, ethnicity, or a history of endogamy.

## **Definitions**

Racism involves the belief in racial differences, which acts as a justification for non-equal treatment (which some regard as "discrimination") of members of that race. The term is commonly used negatively and is usually associated with race-based prejudice, violence, dislike, discrimination, or oppression, the term can also have varying and contested definitions. Racialism is a related term, sometimes intended to avoid these negative meanings. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, racism is a belief or ideology that all members of each racial group possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, in particular to distinguish it as being either superior or inferior to another racial group or racial groups.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines racism as the "belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races" and the expression of such prejudice, while the Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines it as a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority or inferiority of a particular racial group, and alternatively that it is also the prejudice based on such a belief. The Macquarie

Dictionary defines racism as: "the belief that human races have distinctive characteristics which determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule or dominate others."

## Legal

The UN does not define "racism", however it does define "racial discrimination": According to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

the term "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

This definition does not make any difference between discrimination based on ethnicity and race, in part because the distinction between the two remains debatable among anthropologists. Similarly, in British law the phrase racial group means "any group of people who are defined by reference to their race, colour, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origin".

## Sociological

Some sociologists have defined racism as a system of group privilege. In *Portraits of White Racism*, David Wellman has defined racism as "culturally sanctioned beliefs, which, regardless of intentions involved, defend the advantages whites have because of the subordinated position of racial minorities". Sociologists Noël A. Cazenave and Darlene Alvarez Maddern define racism as "...a highly organized system of 'race'-based group privilege that operates at every level of society and is held together by a sophisticated ideology of color/'race' supremacy. Sellers and Shelton (2003) found that a relationship between racial discrimination and emotional distress was moderated by racial ideology and public regard beliefs. That is, racial centrality appears to promote the degree of discrimination African American young adults perceive whereas racial ideology may buffer the detrimental emotional effects of that discrimination. Racist systems include, but cannot be reduced to, racial bigotry,". Sociologist and former American Sociological Association president Joe Feagin argues that the United States can be characterized as a "total racist society"

- : "Police harassment and brutality directed at black men, women, and children are as old as American society, dating back to the days of slavery and Jim Crow segregation. Such police actions across the nation today reveal important aspects of . . . the commonplace discriminatory practices of individual whites . . . white dominated institutions that allow or encourage such practices.."

## **Xenophobia**

Dictionary definitions of xenophobia include: deep-rooted antipathy towards foreigners (Oxford English Dictionary; OED), unreasonable fear or hatred of the unfamiliar, especially people of other races (Webster's) The Dictionary of Psychology defines it as "a fear of strangers".

## **Supremacism**

The Middle Ages Crusades have been described as an example of white supremacist colonialism. Centuries of European colonialism of the Americas, Africa and Asia was excused by white supremacist attitudes. During the 19th century, the phrase "The White Man's Burden" was widely used to justify imperialist policy as a noble enterprise.

## **Segregationism**

Racial segregation is the separation of humans into racial groups in daily life. It may apply to activities such as eating in a restaurant, drinking from a water fountain, using a bath room, attending school, going to the movies, or in the rental or purchase of a home. Segregation is generally outlawed, but may exist through social norms, even when there is no strong individual preference for it, as suggested by Thomas Schelling's models of segregation and subsequent work.

## **Evolutionary theories about the origins of racism**

Biologists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides were puzzled by the fact that race is one of the three characteristics most often used in brief descriptions of individuals (the others are age and sex). They reasoned that natural selection would not have favoured the evolution of an instinct for using race as a classification, because for most of human history, humans almost never encountered members of other races. Tooby and Cosmides hypothesized that modern people use race as a proxy (rough-and-ready indicator) for coalition membership, since a better-than-random guess about "which side" another person is on will be helpful if one does not actually know in advance.

Their colleague Robert Kurzban designed an experiment whose results appeared to support this hypothesis. Using the Memory confusion protocol, they presented subjects with pictures of individuals and sentences, allegedly spoken by these individuals, which presented two sides of a debate. The errors that the subjects made in recalling who said what indicated that they sometimes misattributed a statement to a speaker of the same race as the "correct" speaker, although they also sometimes misattributed a statement to a speaker "on the same side" as the "correct" speaker. In a second run of the experiment, the team also distinguished the "sides" in the debate by clothing of similar colors; and in this case the effect of racial similarity in causing mistakes

almost vanished, being replaced by the color of their clothing. In other words, the first group of subjects, with no clues from clothing, used race as a visual guide to guessing who was on which side of the debate; the second group of subjects used the clothing color as their main visual clue, and the effect of race became very small.

Some research suggests that ethnocentric thinking may have actually contributed to the development of cooperation. Political scientists Ross Hammond and Robert Axelrod created a computer simulation wherein virtual individuals were randomly assigned one of a variety of skin colors, and then one of a variety of trading strategies: be color-blind, favor those of your own color, or favor those of other colors. They found that the ethnocentric individuals clustered together, then grew until all the non-ethnocentric individuals were wiped out.

In *The Selfish Gene*, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins writes that "Blood-feuds and inter-clan warfare are easily interpretable in terms of Hamilton's genetic theory." Dawkins writes that racial prejudice, while not evolutionarily adaptive, "could be interpreted as an irrational generalization of a kin-selected tendency to identify with individuals physically resembling oneself, and to be nasty to individuals different in appearance". Simulation-based experiments in evolutionary game theory have attempted to provide an explanation for the selection of ethnocentric-strategy phenotypes.