

Handout

Nine Things Everyone Should Know About Race

1. Race is a Modern Idea

Ancient societies, like that of the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical differences, but according to religion, status, class or even language. In fact, the English word 'race' was originally used to refer to lineage, not skin colour: in William Shakespeare's play *Richard III*, which was written around the year 1592, ghosts encourage King Richard to 'beget a happy race 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 Colour Really is Only Skin Deep

The genes for skin colour 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 colour doesn't necessarily tell you anything else about them.

5. Most Differences are 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. This 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, rather than because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Due to a unique set of historical circumstances, North America and the Caribbean had the first slave system where all slaves shared a common appearance and ancestry.

7. Race Justified the Slave Trade, Colonialism and Social Inequality

The modern definition of race was created in the 18th century as a means of justifying the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans: pseudo-science concerning the inferiority of Africans was circulated by slave traders, who sought to challenge the abolitionist movement. The idea of 'white superiority' then continued to be used to justify anti-democratic acts and colonialism.

8. Race is NOT Biological, but Racism is Still Real

Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. The way that the government and social institutions of the United Kingdom are structured disproportionately channels wealth, power and resources to white people.

9. Colourblindness will NOT End Racism

Pretending race doesn't exist is not the same as creating equality.