TEN THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RACE

Our eyes tell us that people look different. No one has trouble distinguishing a Czech from a Chinese. But what do those differences mean? Are they biological? Has race always been with us? How does race affect people today?

There’s less – and more – to race than meets the eye:

1. **Race is a modern idea.** Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical distinctions, but according to religion, status, gender, class, even language. The English language didn’t even have the word ‘race’ until it turns up in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.

2. **Race has no genetic basis.** Not one characteristic, trait or even one 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 or isolated enough to evolve into separate subspecies or races. Despite surface appearances, we are among the most similar of all species.

4. **Skin color really is only skin deep.** Most traits are inherited independently from one from another. The genes influencing skin color have nothing to do with the genes influencing hair form, height, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence. Knowing one trait, like skin color, doesn’t necessarily tell you anything else about him or her.

5. **Most variation is within, not between, “races.”** Of the small amount of total human variation, 85% exists within any local population, be they Italians, Kurds, Koreans or Cherokees. About 94% can be found within any continent. That means 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 or war, even debt, but not because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Due to a unique set of historical circumstances, ours was the first slave system where all the slaves shared similar physical characteristics.
7. **Race and freedom evolved together.** The U.S. was founded on the radical new principle that “All men are created equal.” But our early economy was based largely on slavery. How could this anomaly be rationalized? The new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.

8. **Race justified social inequalities as natural.** As the race idea evolved, white superiority became “common sense” in white America. It rationalized not only slavery but also the extermination of Indians, exclusion of Asian immigrants, and the taking of Mexican lands by a nation that otherwise professed a deep belief in liberty and equality. Racial practices became institutionalized within American government, laws, and society.

9. **Race isn’t biological, but racism is still real.** Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. Our government and social institutions disproportionately, albeit often invisibly, channel wealth, power, and resources to the “unmarked” race - white people. This affects everyone, whether we are aware of it or not.

10. **Colorblindness will not end racism.** Pretending race doesn’t exist is not the same as creating equality. Race is more than stereotypes and individual prejudice. To combat racism, we need to identify and remedy social policies and institutional practices that advantage some groups at the expense of others.

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**RACE – The Power of an Illusion** is the provocative 3-part series challenging one of our most fundamental beliefs: that human beings come bundled into a few distinct groups. But just because race isn’t biological, doesn’t mean it isn’t real. The series also scrutinizes where the idea of race came from, how it took such a hold over our minds, and why race still matters.

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For video cassettes and background information: [www.newsreel.org](http://www.newsreel.org).

Visit the “Race” companion Web site at [www.pbs.org/Race](http://www.pbs.org/Race).

A reader just glancing at the cover might suppose Graves is in deep denial or is incredibly ignorant if he thinks racism hasn't shaped the American experience for people of color. But Graves, an internationally renowned evolutionary biologist, and dean of University Studies, as well as a professor of biological sciences at North Carolina A&T State University, is anything but ignorant as he documents how race's acceptance as a biological concept continues to bear harmful consequence for society.

Graves wants his readers to understand that race is a socially constructed concept designed to subjugate instead of a biological reality that justifies differences.

"The European colonists who founded the United States had a chance to start over with an egalitarian social order, but they blew it: They accepted the idea of racial hierarchy that was prevalent in Europe at the time," Graves writes. "It was just too convenient: The socially constructed concept of race was a powerful tool that aided them in the conquest of the continent."

Graves presents a strong case contrary to the many arguments in the medical community and among people of color who support race as a biological construct. Whether or not you agree with his point of view, he sheds light on racial disparities that stem from social dominance and manipulation. He literally looks skin-deep in challenging notions that may be assumed if we just rely on our eyes to decide what makes us similar or different.

For example, races identified outside of humans usually have about 20 percent total genetic distance between their populations, according to
Graves. For humans, the genetic distance is 2 percent, and only 4.62 percent of our genes are responsible for our individuality.

"For any group of humans to be a race, their genetic distance from another group, around 2 percent, would have to be greater than their unique genetic variability, around 5 percent," Graves writes. "Two is not bigger than five."

Passing judgment based on skin color may be easy, but it ignores the many factors that make, for instance, black people different. An African American and West African are the same color, but Graves reminds us that African Americans can have genetic mixtures from Europeans and Native Americans ranging from 10 percent to 21 percent. And do we ignore the fact that African Americans and West Africans have different cultures, diets and social experiences that can determine the susceptibility for a certain disease?

Graves is clearly disturbed at the popular notion that race-specific drugs can reduce health disparities, although his voice on this issue is in the minority. He poses serious questions about how racial typologists have garnered much of the media attention.

"Did they capture the media because of the validity of their ideas? Was it the percentage of their academic appointments and think tank associations? Or was it more insidious? Was it because they were saying what our racialized society wanted to hear?"
A Long History of Racial Preferences - For Whites
by Larry Adelman

Many middle-class white people, especially those of us who grew up in the suburbs, like to think we got to where we are today by virtue of our merit – hard work, intelligence, pluck, and maybe a little luck. And while we may be sympathetic to the plight of others, we close down when we hear the words “affirmative action” or “racial preferences.” We worked hard, we made it on our own, the thinking goes, why don’t ‘they’? After all, it’s been 40 years now since the Civil Rights Act was passed.

What we don’t readily acknowledge is that racial preferences have a long, institutional history in this country - a white history. Here are a few ways in which government programs and practices have channeled wealth and opportunities to white people at the expense of others.

Early Racial Preferences

We all know the old history, but it’s still worth reminding ourselves of its scale and scope. Affirmative action in the American “workplace” first began in the late 17th century when European indentured servants - the original source of unfree labor on the new tobacco plantations of Virginia and Maryland - were replaced by African slaves. In exchange for their support and their policing of the growing slave population, lower-class Europeans won new rights, entitlements, and opportunities from the planter elite.

White Americans were also given a head start with the help of the U.S. Army. The 1830 Indian Removal Act, for example, forcibly relocated Cherokee, Creeks and other eastern Indians to west of the Mississippi River to make room for white settlers. The 1862 Homestead Act followed suit, giving away millions of acres – for free - of what had been Indian Territory west of the Mississippi. Ultimately, 270 million acres, or 10% of the total land area of the United States, was converted to private hands, overwhelmingly white, under Homestead Act provisions.

The 1790 Naturalization Act permitted only “free white persons” to become naturalized citizens, thus opening the doors to European immigrants but not others. Only citizens could vote, serve on juries, hold office, and in some cases, even hold property. In this century, Alien Land Laws passed in California and other states, reserved farm land for white growers by preventing Asian immigrants, ineligible to become citizens, from owning or leasing land. Immigration restrictions further limited opportunities for nonwhite groups. Racial barriers to naturalized U.S. citizenship weren’t removed until the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, and white racial preferences in immigration remained in place until 1965.

In the South, the federal government never followed through on General Sherman’s Civil War plan to divide up plantations and give each freed slave "40 acres and a mule" as reparations. Only once was monetary compensation made for slavery, in Washington, D.C. There, government officials paid up to $300 per slave upon emancipation - not to the slaves, but to local slaveholders as compensation for the loss of their property.

When slavery ended, its legacy lived on not only in the impoverished condition of Black people but in the wealth and prosperity that accrued to white slaveowners and their descendants. Economists who try to
place a dollar value on how much white Americans have profited from 200 years of unpaid slave labor, including interest, begin their estimates at $1 trillion.

Jim Crow laws, instituted in the late 19th and early 20th century and not overturned in many states until the 1960s, reserved the best jobs, neighborhoods, schools and hospitals for white people for several more generations.

**The Advantages Grow, Generation to Generation**

Less known are more recent government racial preferences, first enacted during the New Deal, that directed wealth to white families and continue to shape life opportunities and chances today.

The landmark Social Security Act of 1935 provided a safety net for millions of workers, guaranteeing them an income after retirement. But the act specifically excluded two occupations: agricultural workers and domestic servants, who were predominately African American, Mexican, and Asian. As low-income workers, they also had the least opportunity to save for their retirement. They couldn’t pass wealth on to their children. Just the opposite. During old age, their children had to support them.

Like Social Security, the 1935 Wagner Act helped establish an important new right for white people. By granting unions the power of collective bargaining, it helped millions of white workers gain entry into the middle class over the next 30 years. But the Wagner Act permitted unions to exclude non-whites and deny them access to better paid jobs and union protections and benefits such as health care, job security, and pensions. Many craft unions remained nearly all-white well into the 1970s. In 1972, for example, every single one of the 3,000 members of Los Angeles Steam Fitters Local #250 was still white.

But it was another racialized New Deal program, the Federal Housing Administration, that helped generate much of the wealth that so many white families enjoy today. These revolutionary programs made it possible for millions of average white Americans - but not others - to own a home for the first time. The government set up a national neighborhood appraisal system, explicitly tying mortgage eligibility to race. Integrated communities were ipso facto deemed a financial risk, a policy known today as “redlining.” Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government backed $120 billion of home loans. More than 98% went to whites. Of the 350,000 new homes built with federal support in northern California between 1946 and 1960, fewer than 100 went to African Americans.

These government programs made possible the new segregated white suburbs that sprang up around the country after World War II. Government subsidies for municipal services helped develop and enhance these suburbs further, in turn fueling commercial investments. New freeways tied the suburbs to central business districts, but they often cut through and destroyed the vitality of non-white neighborhoods in the central city.

Today, Black and Latino mortgage applicants are still 60% more likely than whites to be turned down for a loan, even after controlling for employment, financial, and neighborhood factors. According to the Census, whites are more likely to be segregated than any other group. As recently as 1993, 86% of suburban whites still lived in neighborhoods with a black population of less than 1%.

**Reaping the Rewards of Racial Preference**

One result of the generations of preferential treatment for whites is that a typical white family in 2005 has on average ten times the net worth, of a typical African American family, according to the U.S. Census.
Even when families of the same income are compared, white families have more than twice the wealth of Black families. Much of that wealth difference can be attributed to the value of one’s home, and how much one inherited from parents.

But a family’s net worth is not simply the finish line, it’s also the starting point for the next generation. Those with wealth pass their assets on to their children - by financing a college education, lending a hand during hard times, or assisting with the down payment for a home. Some economists estimate that up to 80 percent of lifetime wealth accumulation depends on these intergenerational transfers. White advantage is passed down, from parent to child to grand-child. As a result, the racial wealth gap - and the head start enjoyed by whites - appears to have grown since the civil rights days.

In 1865, just after Emancipation, it is not surprising that African Americans owned only 0.5 percent of the total worth of the United States. But by 1990, a full 135 years after the abolition of slavery, Black Americans still possessed only a meager 1 percent of national wealth. As legal scholar john a. powell says in the documentary series Race – The Power of an Illusion, “The slick thing about whiteness is that whites are getting the spoils of a racist system even if they are not personally racist.”

But rather than recognize how “racial preferences” have tilted the playing field and given us a head start in life, many whites continue to believe that race does not affect our lives. Instead, we chastise others for not achieving what we have; we even invert the situation and accuse non-whites of using “the race card” to advance themselves.

Or we suggest that differential outcomes may simply result from differences in "natural" ability or motivation. However, sociologist Dalton Conley’s research shows that when we compare the performance of families across racial lines who make not just the same income, but also hold similar net worth, a very interesting thing happens: many of the racial disparities in education, graduation rates, welfare usage and other outcomes disappear. The "performance gap" between whites and non-whites is a product not of nature, but unequal circumstances.

“Colorblind” policies that treat everyone the same, no exceptions for minorities, are often counter-posed against affirmative action. But colorblindness today merely bolsters the unfair advantages that color-coded practices have enabled white Americans to long accumulate.

Isn’t it a little late in the game to suddenly decide that race shouldn't matter?

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Racial Preferences -- for Whites
The houses that racism built
By Larry Adelman

Thirteen years ago, my parents sold the house I grew up in. It was one of those suburban tract homes that sprouted across the nation after World War II. Our home was pleasant if undistinguished. It wasn't one of Malvina Reynolds' "little boxes made of ticky tacky" -- based on a drive the singer took past Daly City, CA in the '50s. It was a ranch house on a curving, leafy street in Merrick, Long Island, 25 miles east of Manhattan, about five miles from its more famous suburban neighbor, Levittown.

After turning 65, my father wasted no time retiring. He'd purchased our house back in 1952 for $20,000 thanks to a 4 percent mortgage made possible by the Veterans Administration. Now he was considering an offer of $300,000. With the money they'd get a place in the Berkshires and winter in Florida.

Ten years later, my colleague here at California Newsreel, Cornelius, sold the house he grew up in. Cornelius' folks had also purchased a place in the early '50s in Chester, just outside Philadelphia. A few years ago, after Cornelius' father passed away, his mother wanted to move back to Virginia. Cornelius sold the home in 2000 -- for $29,500.

That $270,500 gap reveals a microcosm of race in America. My family is white and Cornelius' is black.

On Monday, the Supreme Court finally issued its ruling on whether the University of Michigan should jettison its affirmative action program. The court upheld the law school program that sought a "critical mass" of minorities but struck down a "point system" used to increase affirmative action for undergraduates. While the decisions didn't fully satisfy advocates on either side, on balance they were less "anti-affirmative action" than feared. I wonder how many justices had experiences like mine.

Cornelius and I have worked together for 20 years, always making an identical salary, yet my net worth is several times his. My two brothers and I enjoyed good schools, parks and libraries because of rising property values. My parents' growing home equity not only provided for their retirement but sent the three of us to private colleges -- and even helped with the down-payments on our own homes. Today, thanks to them, my house is paid off and my 21-year-old daughter is about to graduate college with a nest egg of her own. When my parents pass away, we stand to inherit a tidy sum.

Cornelius had no such help. As American manufacturing declined, Chester became increasingly black and populated by people on fixed incomes, who faced higher taxes to maintain public services and schools. Cornelius' parents' expenses climbed as their city deteriorated. Cornelius attended college on scholarship, but worked his way through school. Today, rather than look to his mother for financial help, Cornelius helps support her.
What's this got to with race? It goes back to the postwar suburbs and the government policies and subsidies that made them possible -- and guaranteed they'd be segregated.

A set of New Deal programs led by the Federal Housing Administration allowed millions of average white Americans to own a home for the first time. Down payment requirements were reduced from as much as 50 percent to 10 or 20 percent and the time to pay off the remaining mortgage was extended from five years to 30 years.

Federal investigators evaluated 239 regions for risk. Communities with a mere one or two black families were deemed ipso facto financial risks ineligible for low cost home loans. Government appraisal maps colored those communities red -- hence the origin of the term "redlining."

Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government backed $120 billion of home loans; more than 98 percent went to whites. Of the 350,000 new homes built with federal support here in Northern California between 1946 and 1960, fewer than 100 went to African Americans.

Barred from purchasing a home in the new post-War suburbs, Cornelius' parents had to buy in one of the few communities where black people could live.

Today, according to New York University economist Edward Wolff, the typical white family has eight times the net worth of the typical black family. Even when they make the same income, white families have over twice the wealth. Much of that gap is due to home equity and family inheritance.

Many whites who grew up middle class in the suburbs like to think we got where we are today on merit - hard work, intelligence, pluck and maybe a little luck. We wonder why non-white parents didn't just work hard, buy a home and pass on the appreciated value like our parents did. We tend to be blind to how the playing field has been - and continues to be - tilted to our advantage.

Racism doesn't just come dressed in white sheets or voiced by skinheads, but lies in institutions that, like the FHA, have quietly and often invisibly channeled America's wealth, power, and status disproportionately to white people. Those advantages are passed on and accumulate, generation to generation, giving us a head start in life. As Ohio State University law professor john a. powell observes: "The slick thing about whiteness is that whites are getting the spoils of a racist system without themselves being personally racist."

I sit on my back deck today, enjoying the blooms of the wisteria and reading an e-mail from my daughter about her post-college plans. My daughter certainly had nothing to do with slavery or Jim Crow. But the past still helps shape her future thanks to the many advantages my parents, me, and now she have accrued thanks to generations of racial preferences -- for white people.

Whites Swim in Racial Preference
By Tim Wise

Ask a fish what water is and you'll get no answer, and not only because fish can’t speak. Even if they were capable of vocalizing a reply, they wouldn’t have one for such a question. When water surrounds you every minute of the day, explaining what it is becomes impossible. It simply is. It's taken for granted.

So too with this thing we hear so much about called "racial preference." While many whites apparently are convinced that the notion originated with affirmative action programs, intended to expand opportunities for historically marginalized people of color, racial preference has actually had a long and very white history.

Affirmative action for whites was embodied in the abolition of European indentured servitude, which left black (and occasionally indigenous) slaves as the only unfree labor in the colonies that would become the U.S. Affirmative action for whites was the essence of the 1790 Naturalization Act, which allowed any European immigrant to become a full citizen, even while blacks, Asians, and American Indians could not. Affirmative action for whites was the guiding principle of segregation, Asian exclusion, and the theft of half of Mexico for the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny.

In recent history, affirmative action for whites motivated racially-restrictive housing policies that helped 15 million white families procure homes with FHA loans from the 1930s to the '60s, while people of color were mostly excluded from the same programs. In other words, on balance, white America is the biggest collective recipient of racial preference in history. Such preference has skewed our laws, shaped our public policy and helped create the glaring inequalities with which we still live.

White racial preference explains why white families, on average, have a net worth eleven times that of black families: a gap that remains substantial even when only comparing families of like size, composition, education and income status; and it also helps explain, at least in part, why a full-time black male worker in 2003 made less in real dollar terms than similar white men were earning in 1967. Such realities do not merely indicate the disadvantages faced by blacks, but indeed are evidence of the preferences afforded whites: the necessary flipside of discrimination.

Indeed, the value of preferences to whites over the years is so enormous that the current baby-boomer generation of whites is currently in the process of inheriting between $7-10 trillion in assets from their parents and grandparents: property handed down by those who were able to accumulate assets at a time when people of color couldn't. To place this in perspective, we should note that this amount of money is more than all the outstanding mortgage debt, all the credit card debt, all the savings account assets, all the money in IRA's and 401k retirement plans, all the annual profits for U.S. manufacturers, and our entire merchandise trade deficit combined.

Yet few whites think of our position as resulting from racial preference. Indeed, we pride ourselves on our hard work and ambition, as if we invented the concepts; as if we have worked harder than the folks who were forced to pick cotton and build levees for free; harder than the Latino immigrants
who spend ten hours a day in fields picking strawberries or tomatoes; harder than the (mostly) women of color who clean up messy hotel rooms, or change bedpans in hospitals, or the (mostly) men of color who collect our garbage: a crucial service without which we would face not only unpleasant smells but the spread of disease.

We strike the pose of self-sufficiency while ignoring the advantages we have been afforded in every realm of activity: housing, education, employment, criminal justice, politics and business. We ignore that at every turn, our hard work has been met with access to an opportunity structure to which millions of others have been denied similar access. Privilege, to us, is like water to the fish: invisible precisely because we cannot imagine life without it.

It is that context that best explains the duplicity of the President's critique of affirmative action at the University of Michigan, during the recent court battle over so-called “racial preferences” at that institution.

President Bush, himself a lifelong recipient of affirmative action--the kind set-aside for the rich and mediocre--proclaimed that the school's policies were unfair. Yet in doing so he not only showed a profound ignorance of the Michigan policy, but also made clear the inability of yet another white person to grasp the magnitude of white privilege still in operation; an inability sadly ratified by the Supreme Court when it ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in the Michigan case, in June 2003.

To wit, the President, and ultimately the Supreme Court, attacked Michigan's policy of awarding twenty points (on a 150-point evaluation scale) to undergraduate applicants who were members of underrepresented minorities, which at U of M means blacks, Latinos and American Indians. To many whites such a "preference" was blatantly discriminatory. Yet what Bush and the Court failed to mention were the greater numbers of points awarded for other things, and which had the clear effect of preferencing whites to the exclusion of people of color.

For example, Michigan awarded twenty points to any student from a low-income background, regardless of race. Since those points could not be combined with those for minority status (in other words poor blacks don't get forty points), in effect this was a preference for poor whites. Then Michigan awarded sixteen points to students from the Upper Peninsula of the state: a rural and almost completely white area.

Of course both preferences were fair, based as they were on the recognition that economic status and geography (as with race) can have a profound effect on the quality of schooling that one receives, and that no one should be punished for such things that are beyond their control. But note that such preferences, though disproportionately awarded to whites, remained uncriticized throughout the litigation on this case, while preferences for people of color become the target for reactionary anger. Once again, white preference remained hidden because it wasn't called white preference, even if that was the effect.

But that's not all. Ten points were awarded under the Michigan plan to students who attended top high schools, and another eight points were given to students who took an especially demanding AP and Honors curriculum. As with points for those from the Upper Peninsula, these preferences may have been race-neutral in theory, but in practice they were anything but. Because of intense racial isolation (and Michigan's schools are the most segregated in America for blacks according to research by the Harvard
Civil Rights Project), students of color will rarely attend the "best" schools, and on average, schools serving mostly black and Latino students offer only a third as many AP and honors courses as schools serving mostly whites. So even truly talented students of color would have been unable to access those extra points simply because of where they live, their economic status, and ultimately their race, which is intertwined with both.

Then up to twelve points were awarded for a student's SAT score, which is itself directly correlated with a student's socioeconomic status, which in turn is highly correlated with race in a way that favors whites and disadvantages most students of color. Four more points were awarded to students with a parent who attended the U of M: a kind of affirmative action with which the President is intimately familiar, and which almost exclusively goes to whites.

In other words, Michigan was offering twenty "extra" points to the typical black, Latino or indigenous applicant, while offering various combinations worth up to 70 extra points for students who would almost all be white. But while the first of these were seen as examples of racial preferences, the second were not, hidden as they were behind the structure of social inequities that limit where people live, where they go to school, and the kinds of opportunities they have been afforded.

White preferences, by being the result of the normal workings of a racist society, can remain out of sight and out of mind, while the power of the state is turned against the paltry preferences meant to offset them.

To recognize just how blind so many white Americans are to the workings of white privilege, one need only consider the oft-heard comment by whites that "if I had only been black I would have gotten into my first-choice college." Such a statement not only ignores the fact that whites are more likely than members of any group, even with affirmative action, to get into their first-choice school, but it also presumes, as anti-racist activist Paul Marcus explains, "that if these whites were black, everything else about their life would have remained the same: that it would have made nonnegative difference as to where they went to school, what their family income was, or anything else."

But this ability to believe that being black would have made no difference (other than a beneficial one when it came time for college), and that being white has made no positive difference, is rooted in privilege itself: the privilege of not having one's intelligence questioned by books like The Bell Curve, or one's culture attacked as dysfunctional by politicians and so-called scholars; the privilege of not having to worry about being viewed as "out of place" when driving, shopping, buying a home, or attending the University of Michigan; the privilege of not being denied an interview for a job because your name sounds "too black," as a recent study discovered happens often to African American job-seekers.

So long as those privileges remain firmly in place and the preferential treatment that flows from those privileges continues to work to the benefit of whites, all talk of ending affirmative action is not only premature but a slap in the face to those who have fought and died for equal opportunity.

Tim Wise is the author of White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son (Soft Skull Press, 2005), and Affirmative Action: Racial Preference in Black and White (Routledge, 2005).
RACE LITERACY QUIZ
What differences make a difference?

The Race Literacy Quiz was developed by California Newsreel in association with the Association of American Colleges & Universities. The myths and misconceptions raised are explored in the acclaimed documentary series, RACE – The Power of an Illusion, available on video and DVD from California Newsreel at www.newsreel.org or 1-877-811-7495. Visit the RACE companion Web site at www.pbs.org/race.

1. Humans have approximately 30,000 genes. On average, how many genes separate all members of one race from all members of another race?

A. None
B. 1
C. 23
D. 142
E. 1008

Answer A. None. There are no characteristics, no traits, not even one gene that distinguish all members of one so-called race from all members of another race.

2. Which characteristic did the ancient Greeks believe most distinguished them from “barbarians?”

A. Religion
B. Skin color
C. Language
D. Dress
E. Hairiness

Answer C. Language. The word barbarian comes from the Greek word “bar-bar,” meaning stutterer, or unintelligible, or one who does not speak Greek. The Greeks, like most ancient peoples, did not attribute much meaning to physical appearance nor sort people into races. In ancient Greece, language and culture were the differences that mattered (along with property and gender) because they indicated who was not Greek. Some historians believe the first to be labeled barbarian were the Scythians of circa 500 B.C. who lived northeast of the Black Sea and were very fair skinned. Ideas of ‘race’ did not exist during antiquity.

3. In Medieval Europe (circa 1300-1400), Ethiopians were looked upon as:

A. Savages
B. Saviors
C. Barbarians
D. Infidels
E. Negroes

Answer B. Saviors. In medieval Europe, religion mattered most, not physical appearance. At the time, Christian Europe was at war with the Moslem Empire. Europe looked towards a mythical Christian Ethiopian kingdom, led by the fabled priest-king Prester John, to rescue them from the infidels. Theories of race didn’t emerge until the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
4. Members of a race can be identified by their:

A. Blood group  
B. Skin color  
C. Ancestry  
D. Genes  
E. None of the above

Answer E. None of the above. There are no traits, no characteristics, not even one gene that is present in all members of one so-called race and absent in another. The A, B, and O blood groups can be found in all the world’s peoples (the percentage of Estonians and Papua New Guineans with A, B, and O blood are almost exactly identical). Skin color tends to correlate with the earth’s geographic latitude not race; sub-Saharan Africans, the Dravidians and Tamils of southern Asia, and Melanesians from the Pacific all have very dark skin. Ancestry is difficult to trace; we all have two parents, four grandparents, etc. If you could trace your family back 30 generations, slightly more than 1,000 years, you’d find one billion ancestors.

5. Skin color correlates most closely with:

A. Hair form  
B. Risk for sickle cell, Tay-Sachs and other genetic diseases  
C. Geographic latitude  
D. Continent of ancestral origin  
E. Jumping and sprinting ability

Answer D. Geographic latitude. Skin color tends to correspond with ultra-violet radiation from the sun and hence latitude. People with ancestors from the tropics typically have darker skin while those from the higher latitudes have lighter skin. Sub-Saharan Africans, Asian Indians, Aboriginal Australians and Melanesians all have dark skin. But skin color really is only skin deep. Most traits are inherited independently from one another. The genes influencing skin color have nothing to do with those influencing hair form, eye shape, and blood type, let alone complex traits such as intelligence, musical ability or athletic ability. Genetic diseases are inherited through families, not race. Sickle cell, for example, confers resistance to malaria. It occurs in people whose ancestors came from where malaria was once common: the Mediterranean, Arabia, Turkey, southern Asia and western and central Africa - but not southern Africa. The presence of sickle cell is not an indicator of race but of having an ancestor from a malarial region.

6. When Jamestown colonist John Rolfe and his new wife Pocahontas traveled to the Court of London in 1619, it caused a scandal because:

A. An Englishman had married an Indian  
B. John Rolfe had cuckolded General John Smith, the leader of the colony  
C. Pocahontas, a princess, married beneath her station by wedding a commoner  
D. Londoners had never seen an Indian before  
E. A Christian had married a heathen

Answer C. Pocahontas, a princess, married beneath her station by wedding a commoner. 17th century England was a very hierarchical feudal society where people’s class status was fixed at birth. Status was so important that laws even regulated the clothing people could wear so they couldn’t “pass” as another class. When John Rolfe took his new bride Pocahontas (who had converted to Christianity) back with him to London in 1617, the English had not yet developed the racial ideology that later justified their taking of Indian lands. But it was unthinkable that royalty would marry a commoner.
7. The rise of the idea of white supremacy was tied most directly to:

A. Indian removal  
B. Slavery  
C. The Declaration of Independence  
D. The U.S. Constitution  
E. Ancient Greece

Answer C. The Declaration of Independence. Ironically, it was freedom not slavery that gave rise to modern theories of race. Until the Age of Revolution slavery was an unquestioned “fact of life.” It was only when Americans proclaimed the radical new idea that “all men are created equal” that slavery was first challenged as immoral. As historian Barbara Fields notes, the new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.

8. Which group has the most genetic variation?

A. Humans  
B. Chimpanzees  
C. Penguins  
D. Fruit flies  
E. Elephants

Answer: D. Fruit flies. Fruit flies have been around for a very long time plus they also have a short life span, so lots of genetic mutations have accumulated over many generations. In contrast, modern humans are one of the most genetically similar of all species. On average, only one of every 1,000 nucleotides (the “letters” that make up our DNA) differ one individual from another. This is because we are a relatively young species (approximately 150,000 – 200,000 years old). We simply haven’t been around long enough to accumulate much genetic variation. Also, humans have always moved, mixed and mated, further homogenizing our gene pool. Beneath the skin, we’re all very similar.

9. Which two populations are most likely, on average, to be genetically similar?

A. Italians and Ethiopians  
B. Senegalese and Kenyans  
C. Italians and Swedes  
D. Chinese and Lakota (Sioux)  
E. Saudi Arabians and Ethiopians

Answer: E. Saudi Arabians and Ethiopians. Populations that live near each other geographically tend to be genetically more alike than populations that live far apart. That’s because they are more likely to have intermixed in the recent past and therefore share more genes. So even though Senegalese and Kenyans or Italians and Swedes are traditionally placed in the same “races,” they live farther apart from each other and have had less contact and intermixing than Saudis and Ethiopians.

10. Most human genetic variation can be found:

A. Within any local population - for example, among Zulus or among the Hmong  
B. Between two populations on the same continent - for example, between Irish and Poles  
C. Between two populations on different continents - for example, between Koreans and Zulus  
D. Between tall people and short people  
E. Between the darkest and the lightest-skinned people

Answer. A. Within a local population. 85 percent, or almost all human variation, can be found within any single local population, whether they be Malay, Irish, Zulu or Korean. There is FAR more variation within groups than between groups. This means that there may be as many - or more - genetic differences between two random Koreans as between a random Korean and a Zulu. On average, approximately 94 percent of all genetic variation can be found within any continental area.
11. Which continent has the greatest human genetic diversity?

A. Europe  
B. Asia  
C. Africa  
D. North America  
E. South America  

Answer: C. Africa. We are all Africans. Modern humans (Homo sapien sapiens) originated in Africa, and we spent most of our evolution as a species together there. Some modern humans first left Africa 50,000 – 70,000 years ago and spread out around the world. All the other populations of the world can be seen as a subset of Africans. Every human genetic trait found elsewhere can also be found in Africa, with the exception of relatively few recent variations favored by the environment, genetic drift, or sexual selection - such as light skin.

12. Who was the first American public figure to suggest, albeit “as a suspicion only,” that black people might be inherently inferior to whites?

A. Thomas Jefferson  
B. Sir Walter Raleigh  
C. George Washington  
D. Robert E. Lee  
E. Capt. John Smith, founder of the Jamestown colony  

Answer: A. Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson was the first prominent American to speculate that black people might be innately inferior to Europeans. Until then, most Enlightenment figures believed that differences between groups were not inborn but due to environmental factors. It wasn’t until Jefferson introduced the radical new ideas of liberty and equality that slavery had to be justified and prejudices against the enslaved began to crystallize into a doctrine of white supremacy. American freedom and the idea of innate racial difference were born together. Historian Barbara Fields calls them “Siamese twins.”

13. Which of the following was NOT an important reason why African slavery first took root in North America:

A. As non-Christians, they had no legal protections  
B. They were skilled semi-tropical farmers  
C. The supply of indentured servants from Europe was becoming unreliable  
D. They were deemed innately inferior  
E. Unlike Native Americans, they were resistant to European diseases  
F. They couldn’t easily run away  

Answer: D. They were deemed innately inferior. Throughout much of history societies have enslaved people, often as a result of conquest, war or even debt. People were not enslaved because they were first deemed inferior. African slaves were well-suited to labor in North America. Unlike the Indians, they were resistant to European diseases; they couldn’t easily run away; they were not Christians (and hence unprotected by English law); and they were skilled semi-tropical farmers. Finally, in the late 17th century, African slaves became available in large numbers just as the original labor force on Virginia's tobacco plantations - English indentured servants - began to rebel and immigration from England slowed. Over time, the degradation of slavery became identified with blackness, giving white Americans the idea that Africans were a fundamentally different kind of people.
14. Which was NOT introduced to Indians by whites?

A. An Indian identity  
B. Democracy  
C. Identity by “blood quantum”  
D. Horses  
E. Measles  

Answer: B. Democracy. United States’ representative democracy drew upon the traditions of the Iroquois Confederacy. Indians didn’t think of themselves as Indians when European settlers arrived, but rather as members of separate tribes or nations, divided by language, custom and religion. The idea of “blood quantum,” i.e., the determination of Indian identity by ancestry, was imposed by the federal government. In contrast, tribal membership traditionally was open to anyone, even Europeans, as long as they accepted tribal customs and authority. There were no horses in the New World until they were brought over by Europeans. Measles, small-pox and other communicable diseases were also unknown in the Americas prior to European exploration. Some historians estimate that up to 90% of all Eastern seaboard Indians died from diseases contracted from European traders and explorers by the time of the first Plymouth settlement.

15. Of the $120 billion in home loans underwritten by the federal government between 1933 and 1962, what percentage went to white homeowners?

A. 45 percent  
B. 64 percent  
C. 75 percent  
D. 88 percent  
E. 98 percent  

Answer: E. 98 percent. Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government created programs that subsidized low-cost home loans, opening up home ownership to millions of Americans for the first time. At the same time, government underwriters introduced a national appraisal system tying property value and loan eligibility to race, inventing “redlining,” and effectively locking nonwhites out of home-buying just as middle class white Americans were beginning to purchase homes.

16. Which of the following is NOT a result of federal government policies?

A. Redlining  
B. Urban renewal  
C. Deterioration of inner cities  
D. Affirmative action quotas  
E. The wealth gap between black and white families  

Answer D. Affirmative action quotas. Federal affirmative action guidelines specifically prohibit quotas. Beginning in the 1930, the Federal Housing Administration and related programs made it possible for millions of average white Americans to own a home for the first time and set off the post-WWII suburban building boom. The government established a national neighborhood appraisal system, explicitly tying mortgage eligibility to race, a policy known today as “redlining.” The FHA and other government policies made possible the post-World War II all-white suburbs, while people of color and in central cities were denied loans. Government policies and practices helped create two legacies that are still with us today: segregated communities and a substantial wealth gap between whites and nonwhites, much of which can be traced to the differential value of their homes and inheritance from past generations.
17. Today, the net worth of the average white family is how much compared to the average black family?

A. Three times as much
B. Eight times as much
C. Half as much
D. Twice as much
E. The same

Answer: B: Eight times as much. Probably no one statistic better captures the cumulative disadvantage of past discrimination than wealth. Even at the same income levels, whites still have, on average, twice as much wealth as nonwhites. Much of this difference is due to the different rates of home ownership and the different values of homes in white and Black neighborhoods. But wealth is not only the end point, it’s the starting line for the next generation – helping finance your children's education, helping them through hard times, or helping with the down payment of their own home. Economists estimate 50-80% of one’s lifetime wealth accumulation can be traced to this head start. As wealth gets passed down from generation to generation, the legacy of past discrimination accumulates, giving whites and nonwhites vastly different life chances.

18. When white and black families of similar incomes are compared, what is the difference in their net worth?

A. No difference
B. Black net worth is slightly greater
C. White net worth is more than eight times greater
D. White net worth is more than two times greater
E. Black net worth is twice as great

Answer: D. White net worth is more than two times greater. See above (Question #17) for explanation.

19. According to a 1993 study, 86% of suburban whites lived in a community where the black population was:

A. Less than 5%
B. Less than 10%
C. Less than 1%
D. More than 10%
E. More than 15%

Answer: C. Less than 1%. According to the 2000 Census, whites are more likely to be segregated than any other group. This is largely a result of past housing discrimination, but it is perpetuated today by unfair practices such as predatory lending, racial steering and a substantial wealth gap between black and white families. Today, 71% of whites own their own home, compared to 44% of African Americans. Black and Latino mortgage applicants are 60% more likely than whites to be turned down for loans, even after controlling for employment, financial, and neighborhood characteristics. On average, nonwhites who are approved for mortgages still pay higher rates.

20. Which is NOT an example of a government racial preference program?

A. 1964 Civil Rights Act
B. 1862 Homestead Act
C. 1790 Naturalization Act
D. 1934 Federal Housing Administration
E. 1935 Social Security Act

Answer: A. 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Civil Rights Act made racial discrimination in public places illegal. The other programs are all examples of racial preferences - for white people. Over a 40-year period, the Homestead Act gave away, for free, 270 million acres of what had been Indian Territory, almost all of it to white people. The Naturalization Act allowed only “free white persons” to adopt citizenship, thus opening our doors to European immigrants but barring Asians and other groups. Racial barriers to citizenship were not removed until 1952. The Federal Housing Administration made it possible for millions of average white Americans – but not others – to own a home for the first time. (see #16 above). And the Social Security Act specifically exempted two occupations from coverage: farm-workers and domestics, both largely non-white.