

## Week 1 - Defining Race

Race in the US was once described as being purely biological. How do sociologists define race today? What other factors (other than biology) is/can be used to define race? Being a young sociologist, how would **you** define race and what would you use to define it? Lastly, **in your informed opinion**, why is it so difficult for sociologists to define race?



**Thread:** D. R.: Race is Arbitrary

**Post:** [D. R.: Race is Arbitrary](#)

**Author:** D. R.

**Posted Date:** July 2, 2008 9:22 PM

**Status:** Published

Race is a slippery concept with many definitions. The only thing that sociologists seem to agree on about race today is that it is a social construct that separates the human race into different sections. Many factors can be used to determine what race a person is. The primary one that we use today is skin color. However, area of ancestry, personality, conformity to stereotypes, sexuality, intelligence, and preferences can also be used as indicators of race in our society. I think, though, that many of these indicators of race were based on stereotypes that were developed after race already had meaning in the US. Once we had decided that people with dark skin should be labeled as black, then we came up with a bunch of other characteristics that blacks embodied. As a result these characteristics themselves came to be indicators of race. There is a fluid quality to race, which leaves it always changing.

I would use a definition of race that gives it some meaning but at the same time try not to give it very much credibility. For example, I would say that race is a social construct generally based on skin color and other physical characteristics that acts as a central axis to differentiate between different groups of people. I hope that this definition would also show how important this created concept has become in our society. However, this definition should also demonstrate that race is our creation and the vagueness of the definition, I hope, implies that race is a very hard concept for us to fully understand, even with we think that we do. Even when we think that we understand race, we are operating under our definition of race, which is likely very different from the definition that others would use.

Race is hard to define because it is arbitrary. Race is a made up concept that must be used to understand our world because it has been used for so long that there are social systems based upon it. As race is a social creation, there are many different definitions of race across cultures. For example, black in Britain means all non-whites. In the US on the other hand it is more commonly defined as people whose ancestors lived in Africa. Some people that we consider black are white in other countries. This arbitrary nature of race makes it very hard to pin down and talk about.

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**Thread:** D. R.: Race is Arbitrary

**Post:** [RE:D. R.: Race is Arbitrary](#)

**Author:** Antwan Jones

**Posted Date:** July 3, 2008 3:34 PM

**Status:** Published

Good post!

Would you say that race is also historical? Does how people treat people in the past also impact how we define race today?

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**Thread:** D. R.: Race is Arbitrary

**Post:** [RE:D. R.: Race is Arbitrary](#)

**Author:** K. G.

**Posted Date:** July 3, 2008 6:01 PM

**Status:** Published

I like the way you related stereotypes with the way race is defined today. I definitely agree that once different races were established, other stereotypes also got put together with them. I also really like your definition of race. I think it is important that people know it is socially constructed and in fact, is not very credible. It's interesting to think that a person's race can change just by going to another country.

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**Thread:** D. R.: Race is Arbitrary  
**Post:** [RE:D. R.: Race is Arbitrary](#)  
**Author:** J. S.

**Posted Date:** July 4, 2008 3:08 AM  
**Status:** Published

I think you did an excellent job with your definition of race on this post. By adding the example of the British calling all "non-whites" black, solidifies your point of race being arbitrary.

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**Thread:** D. R.: Race is Arbitrary  
**Post:** [RE:RE:D. R.: Race is Arbitrary](#)  
**Author:** D. R.

**Posted Date:** July 5, 2008 12:05 AM  
**Status:** Published

I would definitely say that race is historical. History has made race what it is our society. It is not as if we woke up yesterday and decided that squinty eyes make people good at math and that dark skin makes people lazy. It took us a long time to embed stereotypes into our ideologies. I think that the political and economic tensions in America's past have definitely contributed to the way that we define races. Historically, if a group of people were threatening to the dominant group's assets they were discriminated against. In order to discriminate against a group effectively you must have some schemas about them that justify this discrimination.

In this way I think that how the dominant group has treated a minority group still effects how they are viewed today. Often, these stereotypes linger after the threat is gone because the dominant group does not want to lose their position of power. Conversely, the minority group keeps a stereotype of the dominant group as oppressive and judgemental. Some groups that have been oppressed hold on to this stereotype even when the dominant group is no longer actively oppressing the minority. I think this tension that is left over is one of the reasons that racial divide persists. One group never really knows when the other group is ready to give up stereotyping and discrimination. It is even harder to know these days since overt racism is so politically incorrect. There isn't really a forum for discussion that is trusted to not be in any way deceptive.

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**Thread:** D. R.: Race is Arbitrary  
**Post:** [RE:D. R.: Race is Arbitrary](#)  
**Author:** A. D.

**Posted Date:** July 5, 2008 10:59 PM  
**Status:** Published

I really liked your post. You made a lot of good points talking about stereotyping and everything. I also really liked your definition of race. You made me look at it from a different perspective. I thought your post was very informative. Good Job!

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## Week 3 - Color-Blindness and Transcending Race

Given that institutional structures would still exist in society, what would you envision a race-absent (i.e., color-blind) society to look like? How would it operate? What would be some of the issues that may arise in this kind of society? Are these issues minor enough in comparison to our current issues that we should strive for a color-blind society (In essence, I am asking if the cons in the color-blind society are less in number or significance than the cons in our contemporary society.)? Defend your answer.



**Thread:** Color-Blind Society  
**Post:** [Color-Blind Society](#)  
**Author:** D. P.

**Posted Date:** July 18, 2008 2:09 PM  
**Status:** Published

A race-absent society today would change the lives of everyone. If we lived in a color blind society then there would definitely be less discrimination and less racism at least for a while until society comes up with another way to categorize people. I guess what I'm trying to say is that no one will ever look the same, people will always have differences between one another whether it be skin color, culture or even type of clothing and if there are differences then there will always be some sort of racism or prejudice. If people could not discriminate by skin color I just feel that they would find something else to discriminate about. Though the idea of a color-blind society sounds good and it may stop racial discriminating but it won't stop all the other discriminations our society holds, like class discrimination for example. I'm not saying a color-blind society would not bring some equality to our society because it most definitely will but just because you can't see it does not mean it's not there. There will always be differences between races and skin color is the primary one but it's not the only one.

Some issues that would arise in a society like this would be new ways to discriminate if not by skin color then by something else. Class structures will always remain and when there is a difference in class there has to be an explanation for it. For example in today's society the dominant group's explanation for why blacks do not make as much as whites and do not have good jobs like whites, is because they are lazy. The dominant group always has reasons for why it has the most money and the most power. The dominant group will continue to give reasons for why they have some sort of power over minorities. They feel like they can justify anything that happens in the world today, when all the good things happen to them and not to the minorities. I agree with Eduardo Bonilla-Silva from Issue 9 of Taking Sides, in saying, "How do whites explain the contradiction between the notion of a color-blind society and the color-coded inequality that persists in America. I feel that a color-blind society wouldn't stop racism, it may stop racism by skin color but not all the others.

Any steps made to improve race relations are better than our society today. I think there would be issues that would arise in a color-blind society but those issues are here now and why not try something to see if some of those race-related issues can be resolved. The cons are less in a color-blind society but not that much less. If society was color-blind would people lose their culture and their beliefs because if that was the case then it's not worth it in my eyes. I love that our country is diversified, yes there are race-related problems but there are always some sort of problems between people. I would not want to lose the originality and individuality that every person in this country carries. This country has all types of people and all these different people have different foods, different clothes, different ideas, different ways of doing things and that's what makes us a super power. I want there to be more equality but at the same time I do not want everyone to be the same. I argue that this idea of a color-blind society is used just to hide the racism that is occurring day in and day out. Things need to be changed and in order for them to be changed people are going to have to unite and fight for equal opportunities just like people did throughout history. Things will not change just through words, some things will change but in order to bring a stop to this inequality a lot of people will have to work together and fight for the rights they deserve. "If you want something good out and get it".

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**Thread:** Color-Blind Society  
**Post:** [RE:Color-Blind Society](#)  
**Author:** J. S.

**Posted Date:** July 18, 2008 4:47 PM  
**Status:** Published

I agree with some of your views towards a color blind society. If you look at our own society today, it agrees with your thoughts. President Bush enacted a regressive tax system which burdens the lower and middle classes with taxes, while it decreases taxes for the wealthy. This essentially shifts discrimination away from race and compensates with socio-economic status. Since life opportunities have progressively opened for minorities (i.e. financial assistance and college opportunities), the power elite needed to find ways to keep their status. Even though our society claims to be color blind, subconsciously and consciously, we are not.

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**Thread:** Color-Blind Society  
**Post:** [RE:Color-Blind Society](#)  
**Author:** M. M.

**Posted Date:** July 18, 2008 5:17 PM  
**Status:** Published

I agree that a color-blind society would be a step in the right direction. Although it will help relations among the different races, people will be looking for other ways to categorize people and to discriminate them but I believe that if someone does try hard enough they can succeed and I think it is ridiculous every time I have to mark my race or ethnicity on a job application or school application because how does that matter? I am who I am because I go to school I come from a good family, not because I come from a white family, we struggle as much as any other family black or white and I think people need to see that we all are the same and give equal opportunities.

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**Thread:** Color-Blind Society  
**Post:** [RE:RE:Color-Blind Society](#)  
**Author:** J. L.

**Posted Date:** July 18, 2008 5:50 PM  
**Status:** Published

I certainly agree with a number of the points made. It's clear that our nature, as human beings, is to notice our differences. That's not even necessarily a bad thing. The concern is that these differences (our individual independence) can then in turn be used in a negative way. Color blind/race nullification just brings other differences to light. And that's not a problem.

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**Thread:** Color-Blind Society  
**Post:** [RE:Color-Blind Society](#)  
**Author:** A. S.

**Posted Date:** July 18, 2008 6:20 PM  
**Status:** Published

I agree with you on the fact that if skin color is not the issue at hand something else would be and people in society would be judged by it. Judgment by class I think will almost always exist and I do believe that the dominant race/group always has reasons for why they have the most money and power.

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