

Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race

1. **Race is a modern idea.** Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical distinctions, but according to religion, status, class, even language. The English language didn't even have the word "race" until it turned up in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar referring to a line 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 or isolated enough to evolve into separate subspecies or races. Despite surface appearances, we are one of the most similar of all species.
4. **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 the genes influencing hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone's 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 a 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 principal 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 inequities as natural.** As the race idea evolved, white superiority became "common sense" in America. It justified not only slavery but also the extermination of Native Americans, exclusion of Asian immigrants and the taking of Mexican lands by a nation that professed a belief in democracy. Racial practices were 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 have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power and resources to 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 practices and institutional practices that advantage some groups at the expense of others.

“Read On, Right On”

“Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”

--- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The elegant words of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. focus like a laser beam of enlightenment on what the true enemies of humankind are—the twin devils of ignorance and stupidity—that have to be eradicated before peace and justice will prevail throughout the world.

People join the struggle with sincerity and good conscience but as Dr. King said, those just might not be enough. Homework is a necessity, which includes reading, which provides essential fuel for the mind, the spirit, the struggle and the movement.

The Black & White Reunion believes you should read if you are going to be effective in the struggle against racism. Many people who have a good heart come into the struggle with little knowledge of the history of Africans and other people of color in America. Dr. Asa Hilliard once said, “An African American male or female, going to a predominantly white university, graduates with a Ph.D. and never has an understanding of Oursstory.” That is also the same for White folks. Our educational system overall has failed in this regard. Therefore, it is essential that we fill the gap that our educational system has created.

This book list was compiled by two prolific readers: Bob Maddock and Major A. Mason III, Ph.D. These 27 authors use words and ideas to empower people to help them rise, overcome and “make a way out of no way.” These readings are included in most first year College Black Studies programs and can be obtained at your local library. Reading can broaden your perspectives, help you understand other cultures and transform your vision. READ ON, RIGHT ON!!

The Negro in our History, by Carter G. Woodson

Black Like Me, by John Howard Griffin

Black Looks: Race & Representation, by Bell Hooks

Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America, by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West, by

Dee Alexander Brown

Critical Race Theory: An Introduction, by Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic

Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America,

by Mamie Till-Mobley

Dreams From My Father, By Barack Obama

From Slavery to Freedom, by John Hope Franklin

LINCOLN: The Biography of a Writer, by Fred Kaplan

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, by Alex Haley

On Race and Philosophy, by Lucius Outlaw

Racial Formation in the United States, by Michael Omni & Howard Winant

The Audacity of Hope, By Barack Obama

The Destruction of Black Civilization, by Chancellor Williams

The Race Contract, by Charles W. Mills

The Souls of Black Folk, by W.E.B. DuBois

They Came Before the Mayflower, by Lerone Bennett

Against Race, by Paul Gilroy

Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison

Race & Racism, by Bernard Boxill

Rituals of Blood, by Orlando Patterson

The Fire Next Time, by James Baldwin

One Drop of Blood, by Scott Malcomson

Thinking About Race, by Naomi Zack

When we read the 25 books listed in RIGHT ON READ ON, we can become conscious of what they did and what you can do to make a difference and act with more understanding and sensitivity in the fight against RACISM. These authors speak “truth to power,” giving lessons we all need to know. To think and drink from their cups of wisdom daily strengthens our souls, making us “mo’ better,” not more bitter.

“Rarely do we find ... people who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think.”

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.