

Hotz, R.L. (1995, April 15). Is Concept of Race a Relic? Los Angeles Times, p. A1.

OVERVIEW

Scientists traditionally use race as a classification of study, but recent research is causing much of the scientific community to rethink the use of race as a biological term: "Some scientists suggest that people can be divided just as usefully into different groups based on the size of their teeth, or their ability to digest milk or resist malaria...[these traits] are no more—and no less—significant than skin tones used to popularly delineate race." (p. A1)

No one denies the reality of race as a concept, but it must be recognized as more social than biological. If the concept of race were biological, it would, by definition, require that significant genetic traits be shared by people of the same skin color and population groups: "When scientists examined human genetic inheritance in detail, however, they found that inherited traits do not cluster and do not stay within any particular group, debunking the idea of homogeneous races." (p. A14)

From where did the concept of race come? Why are humans of diverse colors? There is much debate among scientists on this question. Some hold to the idea that racial differences are more than a million years old, while new studies suggest that modern humans all originated in Africa, and race is determined by how far they migrated from the homeland and what resulting circumstances they encountered there. There are not many concrete answers, and there are a lot of emotions running high: "Queasiness about the scientific study of race is understandable. In the past, scientists have done much to foster misguided ideas of racial biology and inherited inferiority. Biological concepts of race easily became tools of intolerance." (p. A14)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- If race is not biological, how does that affect racism? What arguments can racists, black or white, use to support their perceived superiority?
- Many biological factors occur more frequently among one race than another—can these be explained by anything other than race?

- What relevance does this research have to the issue of victimization and enablement?

IMPLICATIONS

- If race is not biological, we have fewer differences than have traditionally be assumed. Human responsibility bears a greater responsibility for racial separation.
- If race is not biological, we all have more equal potential than has often been suggested. There are still many social barriers that affect minority races, but they cannot be blamed on the individuals as a result of their race.

Amy Allison Moreau cCYS