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Racism

Racism is the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioral traits corresponding to physical appearance and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another.] It may also mean prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against other people because they are of a different race or ethnicity.Modern variants of racism are often based in social perceptions of biological differences between peoples. These views can take the form of social actions, practices or beliefs, or political systems in which different races are ranked as inherently superior or inferior to each other, based on presumed shared inheritable traits, abilities, or qualities.

In terms of political systems (e.g., apartheid) that support the expression of prejudice or aversion in discriminatory practices or laws, racist ideology may include associated social aspects such as nativism, xenophobia, otherness, segregation, hierarchical ranking, and supremacism.

While the concepts of race and ethnicity are considered to be separate in contemporary social science, the two terms have a long history of equivalence in popular usage and older social science literature. "Ethnicity" is often used in a sense close to one traditionally attributed to "race": the division of human groups based on qualities assumed to be essential or innate to the group (e.g. shared ancestry or shared behavior). Therefore, racism and racial discrimination are often used to describe discrimination on an ethnic or cultural basis, independent of whether these differences are described as racial. According to a United Nations convention on racial discrimination, there is no distinction between the terms "racial" and "ethnic" discrimination. The UN Convention further concludes that superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous. The Convention also declared that there is no justification for racial discrimination, anywhere, in theory or in practice.[6]

Racism is a relatively modern concept, arising in the European age of imperialism, the subsequent growth of capitalism, and especially the Atlantic slave trade,[1] of which it was a major driving force.[7] It was also a major force behind racial segregation especially in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and South Africa under apartheid; 19th and 20th century racism in Western culture is particularly well documented and constitutes a reference point in studies and discourses about racism.[8] Racism has played a role in genocides such as the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, and genocide of Serbs, and colonial projects including the European colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia as well as the Soviet deportations of indigenous minorities. Indigenous peoples have been—and are—often subject to racist attitudes.

During the past 500-1000 years, racism on the part of Western powers toward non-Westerners has had a far more significant impact on history than any other form of racism (such as racism among Western groups or among Easterners, such as Asians, Africans, and others). The most notorious example of racism by the West has been slavery, particularly the enslavement of Africans in the New World (slavery itself dates back thousands of years). This enslavement was accomplished because of the racist belief that Black Africans were less fully human than white Europeans and their descendants.

This belief was not "automatic": that is, Africans were not originally considered inferior. When Portuguese sailors first explored Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries, they came upon empires and cities as advanced as their own, and they considered Africans to be serious rivals. Over time, though, as African civilizations failed to match the technological advances of Europe, and the major European powers began to plunder the continent and forcibly remove its inhabitants to work as

slave laborers in new colonies across the Atlantic, Africans came to be seen as a deficient "species," as "savages." To an important extent, this view was necessary to justify the slave trade at a time when Western culture had begun to promote individual rights and human equality. The willingness

of some Africans to sell other Africans to European slave traders also led to claims of savagery, based on the false belief that the "dark people" were all kinsmen, all part of one society — as opposed to many different, sometimes warring nations.

One important feature of racism, especially toward Blacks and immigrant groups, is clear in attitudes regarding slaves and slavery. Jews are usually seen by anti-Semites as subhuman but also superhuman: devilishly cunning, skilled, and powerful. Blacks and others are seen by racists as merely subhuman, more like beasts than men. If the focus of anti-Semitism is evil, the focus of racism is inferiority — directed toward those who have sometimes been considered to lack even the ability to be evil (though in the 20th century, especially, victims of racism are often considered morally degraded).

In the second half of the 19th century, Darwinism, the decline of Christian belief, and growing immigration were all perceived by many white Westerners as a threat to their cultural control. European and, to a lesser degree, American scientists and philosophers devised a false racial "science" to "prove" the supremacy of non-Jewish whites. While the Nazi annihilation of Jews discredited most of these supposedly scientific efforts to elevate one race over another, small numbers of scientists and social scientists have continued throughout the 20th century to argue the inborn shortcomings of certain races, especially Blacks. At the same time, some public figures in the American Black community have championed the supremacy of their own race and the inferiority of whites - using nearly the identical language of white racists.

All of these arguments are based on a false understanding of race; in fact, contemporary scientists are not agreed on whether race is a valid way to classify people. What may seem to be significant "racial" differences to some people — skin color, hair, facial shape — are not of much scientific significance. In fact, genetic differences within a so-called race may be greater than those between races. One philosopher writes: "There are few genetic characteristics to be found in the population of England that are not found in similar proportions in Zaire or in China....those differences that most deeply affect us in our dealings with each other are not to any significant degree biologically determined."

Since the mid-20th century many conflicts around the world have been interpreted in racial terms even though their origins were in the ethnic hostilities that have long characterized many human societies (e.g., Arabs and Jews, English and Irish). Racism reflects an acceptance of the deepest forms and degrees of divisiveness and carries the implication that differences between groups are so great that they cannot be transcended.

Racism elicits hatred and distrust and precludes any attempt to understand its victims. For that reason, most human societies have concluded that racism is wrong, at least in principle, and social trends have moved away from racism. Many societies have begun to combat institutionalized racism by denouncing racist beliefs and practices and by promoting human understanding in public policies, as does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, set forth by the United Nations in 1948.

In the United States, racism came under increasing attack during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, and laws and social policies that enforced racial segregation and permitted racial discrimination against African Americans were gradually eliminated. Laws aimed at limiting the voting power of racial minorities were invalidated by the Twenty-fourth Amendment (1964) to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited poll taxes, and by the federal Voting Rights Act (1965), which required jurisdictions with a history of voter suppression to obtain federal approval ("preclearance") of any proposed changes to their voting laws (the preclearance requirement was effectively

removed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013 [see *Shelby County v. Holder*]). By the 2010s more than two-thirds of the states had adopted varying forms of voter ID law, by which would-be voters were required or requested to present certain forms of identification before casting a ballot. Critics of the laws, some of which were successfully challenged in the courts, contended that they effectively suppressed voting among African Americans and other demographic groups.

Despite constitutional and legal measures aimed at protecting the rights of racial minorities in the United States, the private beliefs and practices of many Americans remained racist, and some group of assumed lower status was often made a scapegoat. That tendency has persisted well into the 21st century.

Because, in the popular mind, "race" is linked to physical differences among peoples, and such features as dark skin colour have been seen as markers of low status, some experts believe that racism may be difficult to eradicate. Indeed, minds cannot be changed by laws, but beliefs about human differences can and do change, as do all cultural elements.