



A Project of the American Anthropological Association
Funded by the Ford Foundation & National Science Foundation

The Story of Race

the educational goal of the *RACE* project is to help individuals of all ages better understand the origins and manifestations of race and racism in everyday life by investigating race and human variation through the framework of science

The *RACE* exhibition explores three primary themes:

The science of human variation

and where current scientific understanding is inconsistent with popular notions of race.

The history of the idea of race,

with an emphasis on the role of science in shaping the concept of race.

The contemporary experience of race and racism in the United States,

and the often-invisible ways race and racism have infiltrated laws, customs, and institutions.



Exhibit Walkthrough

*entrance & introductory experience • exploring human variation • challenging misconceptions about race
history of the idea of race • theaters • experience of race in the United States
resource center and conversation space • race in the U.S. Census*

entrance & introductory experience

Greeting visitors to the exhibit, the **Title Panel** rests inside a large photo by Minneapolis photographer Wing Young Huie. As visitors enter the exhibit, they hear the recorded voices of people answering the question, **“What is Race?”** These voices speak to the complexity of the topic and invite visitors to consider their own answers. As they listen to these speakers, visitors can watch **Face Morphing**, a provocative and beautiful video created by artist Teja Arboleda.

Photographs by Wing Young Huie

Wing Young Huie's remarkable photographs capture in ways large and small the diverse ethnic and socioeconomic communities of his home state, Minnesota, and across the United States. His most well-known work is *Lake Street USA*, which transformed six miles of a well-known Minneapolis thoroughfare into a remarkable public art project. *RACE* is fortunate to have a number of Wing's photos in the exhibit.



“I want to reveal not only what is hidden, but what is plainly visible and seldom noticed.”
—Wing Young Huie

exploring human variation

This area investigates what current science and scholarship tell us about human variation and its connection to ideas about race. A large **World Map** printed on the floor provides an interactive centerpiece for a cluster of components about human migration, gene flow, genetic drift, and the continuous distribution of human traits across the globe. In one key experience, **Traveling Genes**, visitors use a computer simulation to experiment with the dynamics of gene flow. The nearby **Human Variation Video** features scientists discussing what their research reveals about human variation and how it differs from common conceptions of race.

African Origins

Facing the map area, **African Origins** highlights the contemporary scientific understanding about human origins. This interactive animation uses colored dots to represent the geographic distribution of human genetic diversity over time. The animation illustrates how humans emerged from Africa and then spread to populate the world. Using a wheel, visitors can control the rate of change on the map, pause to read interpretive text on a screen, and even move backwards in time.



“Historically, the concept of race was imported into biology...from social practice.”

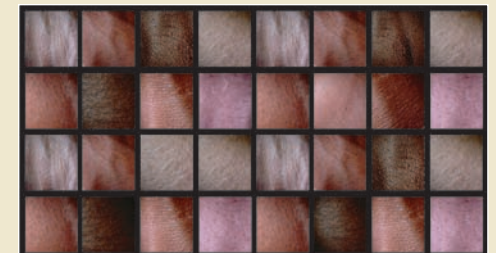
— Richard Lewontin, geneticist

challenging misconceptions about race

The idea of race has a complex and convoluted history in the United States and its development over the past few hundred years has left a legacy of misconceptions and confusion about race among many Americans. In a country founded on ideals of freedom and justice for all, notions of race served to rationalize slavery, justify the near-elimination of Native Americans and their cultures, and privilege people viewed as white. Science played a key role in the construction of race, with scientists attempting to classify humans into a taxonomic system on the basis of presumed biological and other differences. Linking race to biology led to a “race science” that attempted to legitimize race as biological fact and account for differences in peoples’

The Colors We Are

The Colors We Are is an engaging experience for adults and children alike. Here visitors scan their skin and watch their image appear on the screen next to skin images from dozens of other visitors. Questions inserted on the screen challenge visitors to consider what skin shade reveals about themselves and others. “Where does one ‘draw the line’ to categorize people?” “If the lines are hard to draw, how valid are the categories?” “Does skin color equal race?”





“The increasing visibility of ‘mixed race’ and multiracial individuals challenges popularly held notions of race, racial classification and racial identity, and renders them suspect.”

— Michael Omi, sociologist

capabilities and their supposed superiority or inferiority. Not surprisingly, with this confounding history, misunderstandings about race abound.

Components in this area challenge perceived connections between race and biology. The **Sickle Cell** story clarifies that this commonly perceived “black” disease is actually related to malaria resistance. At the **Science of Skin** component visitors use a microscope to view their skin up close and explore the evolutionary story of skin color variation. Here, they discover that race is not found in our skin. At the **Forensics** component, *CSI* fans hear from a real forensic anthropologist about the challenges of using racial identification in detective work.

Two other interactive exhibits challenge visitors’ beliefs about distinguishing people by race—that sense of “I know who’s German (or East African or Chinese or Mexican or Scandinavian) when

I see ‘em.” **The Non-Concordance Sorting Game** invites visitors to sort people according to traits that scientists historically used to demarcate races. When these categories fail, visitors learn about the inadequacies of these outdated theories. **Who’s Talking?**, previously seen in Ontario Science Centre’s *A Question of Truth* exhibit, upends visitors’ assumptions of racial and ethnic differences. Here, visitors will be surprised when they try to match the voice they hear to one of the photos they see in front of them. Artist Kip Fulbeck’s **Hapa Project** explores the issues of race and racial categories through photographs and the words of people who describe themselves as multiracial.

theaters

Two mini-theaters anchor either side of the gallery. Near the entrance, **Race Is an Idea** introduces the themes and story lines at the heart of this exhibition. This five-minute overview of the exhibit from the American Anthropological Association invites visitors to explore the complex history of race and racism. On the other side of the gallery, the **Living With Race Theater** tells stories of common people's experience of race and racism in the United States today.

Living with Race Theater

At the **Living with Race Theater**, visitors hear people telling personal and intimate stories about race and racism. Each story addresses a different experience of race in the United States today. One person talks about becoming aware of her privilege as a white person. A couple talks about living as a multi-racial couple. An adoptee from Korea speaks to growing up in a white family and a predominantly white community. These and other personal portraits bring to life contemporary experiences of race and racism in the United States.

“**Not everything that is faced can be changed,** but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

— James Baldwin, author

history of the idea of race

No story of race and human variation in this country is complete without an understanding of how race evolved in the United States. To emphasize the centrality of history in understanding race, four **History Stations** form the spatial centerpiece of the exhibition. Each station includes collages of images, video, and text positioned to reflect and comment on other exhibit areas.

Facing the Entrance and serving as primer for the history area is **Creating Race**. Here, a large monitor, photos, objects, and text reflect on the origins of our ideas about race in the United States. The second station, **Human (Mis)measure**, focuses on the pursuit of “race science” in the 19th and 20th centuries to legitimize racial and ethnic inequalities. **Separate and Unequal** traces

History Station: Creating Race

Creating Race tells the story of how the idea of race in the United States was forged in response to economic, social, and political forces. An increasing dependence on forced labor in the 17th and 18th centuries resulted in the transition from indentured servitude to a legalized system of permanent slavery of Africans, imported in increasing numbers to the United States. This system of oppression did not go unchallenged; many pointed out the hypocrisy of slavery in light of an American Revolution espousing equality and democratic ideals. To rationalize this contradiction, white political elites raised questions about whether blacks were somehow biologically different and inferior. Scientists, embedded in the culture of their time, presumed existing human variation supported this notion.



“

How can it be that so many well-meaning white people have never thought about race when so few blacks pass a single day without being reminded of it?

”

— Patricia J. Williams, columnist and legal scholar

the history of inequality and privilege. It centers on the second half of the 19th century, when segregation and ideas of distinct racial categories were set firmly in place. During this time and beyond, white Americans instituted laws and social practices that unapologetically disenfranchised American Indians, many immigrants, and people of African descent. The last station, **The Invention of Whiteness**, considers “white” as a racial category normalized and sustained over many years. Finally, historical sidebars throughout the exhibit connect the contemporary expression of race and racism with historical antecedents.

experience of race in the United States: housing, land, and wealth

This is the first of three areas that highlight a different aspect of race and racism in contemporary life. Here visitors encounter a **Rowhouse** as a setting for stories about housing practices, land ownership, and wealth. Facing the rowhouse stoop is a **Newspaper Box**, where “news” arrives in the form of video segments about racism in U.S. housing practices. These video clips highlight the post-World War II era, when federal, state, and local governments fostered middle-class home ownership, but systematically excluded or “redlined” qualified African Americans. In a box on the stoop are **Reading Cards** that tell more stories about housing, land, and wealth. At a window in the

“ [Racism] is not about how you look,
it is about how people assign meaning to how
you look. ”

— Robin D.G. Kelley, historian

rowhouse is the story of the **Taking of Native American Lands** in the 19th century and the racism that attempted to justify the near-genocide of American Indians. **Piles of Cash** shows in graphic form the vast wealth disparities between whites and other ethno-racial groups, while text and photos reveal the story of how those disparities came to be.

Reading Cards on the Rowhouse Stoop

Reading cards can be picked up and held in your lap like a book or magazine. These cards are strategically placed within the exhibit so adults can read while their children do other exhibit activities.

Reading cards in this area feature stories on the U.S. Government’s possession of Cherokee lands in the 19th century and the resulting Trail of Tears, the fate of the *Californios* in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War, the land lost by many Japanese Americans interned during World War II, and a contemporary story of recent Hmong immigrants and their struggles in the Minnesota housing market.

Illustration by Natascha Alex



Housing and Wealth Area. The setting of a front stoop provides a comfortable place to engage visitors in this often-complex topic.



*experience of race in the
United States: health
and medicine*

A re-created pharmacy provides the setting for stories of race and racism in the health care system. At the prescription pick-up window, visitors follow a debate about **BiDil**, the first drug approved by the FDA for one specific ethno-racial group. Nearby, a **Blood Pressure Machine** allows visitors to test their blood pressure while reading about high blood pressure, a disease that disproportionately affects African Americans. In the waiting room, a table and chairs are home to **Reading Boards**, which include additional stories about racism in health care access, implicit bias in medical treatment, and other issues.

Blood Pressure

It is a statistical fact that high blood pressure, or hypertension, has a higher incidence in African Americans than in the population as a whole. But a look behind these numbers reveals much of the complexity about race, racism, and medicine. This story peels back the layers of assumptions, questions about data collection, and institutional racism to both complicate and potentially explain this important health disparity. Here, as elsewhere in the exhibit, the complexities of race are revealed in approachable, understandable language and experiences.



Race is so deeply embedded in our lives

it appears to be the natural order of things.
We must challenge that notion with all the
power of our science and our society.



— Yolanda Moses, anthropologist and chair,
RACE project advisory board

experience of race in the United States: education, schools and young people

A high school cafeteria provides the backdrop for the **Youth on Race Video**. Displayed on a large projection screen, here young people talk about race, identity, and growing up in contemporary U.S. culture. Nearby, in the **Student Lockers** display, five students use their own words, pictures, and objects to express their relationship to race, identity, ethnicity, each other, and the world in which they live. A blackboard describes differing views on **Affirmative Action**, and invites visitors to consider their own opinions. Sit at the **School Desks** to read other stories on race, racism, and education, including those dealing with segregation, disparities in tracking students, and standardized testing biases.

Youth on Race Video

A multiracial high school theater troupe from Central High School in St. Paul, Minnesota, developed the **Youth on Race Video**. This video gives visitors a glimpse inside the world of one set of young people. Many young people view race, racism, and identity very differently than previous generations that grew up during and soon after the Civil Rights Movement. Younger visitors to the exhibit will discover their peers talking about these issues in terms they can relate to. This is a key component for high school students, one of the exhibit's target audiences.

Illustration by Natascha Alex



Education Area. Here, young people can hear their peers discuss race, racism, and identity in this rapidly-changing society.

resource center and conversation space

In the center of the exhibition is the **Resource Center**. Here, visitors can find children's books about race and racism, visit the *RACE* project website, watch short videos on race from a variety of sources, and browse through books and articles about race in the United States today. There's also a small play area for young children, so parents can participate in the exhibit while their children are safely engaged and in plain view. The Resource Center also serves as a way station and resting place where people can sit, talk, and consider the powerful ideas in the exhibit.

Ask an Anthropologist Feedback Station

One of four exhibit **Feedback Stations** sits inside the Resource Center. Each offers the visitor an opportunity to comment on some aspect of the show and read responses from other visitors. These experiences create "conversations" between present and future visitors, asking them to think and talk critically about race and racism amongst themselves. At this feedback station visitors can ask anthropologists and other scholars their questions about race. Selected questions will be answered by knowledgeable experts and posted for everyone to read.

Illustration by Natascha Alex



The Resource Center. A variety of media and comfortable seating encourage groups to sit and talk.

“**The increasing presence of Latinos in communities** traditionally inhabited by Blacks and Whites is challenging the meaning of ‘race’ in the Americas.”

— Arlene Torres, anthropologist

race in the U.S. Census

Since 1790, the U.S. Government has collected racial data in a biennial Census. Racial categories, rules, and regulations resulting from the Census have huge effects on law, policy, medicine, employment, and many other critical realms of American life. Visitors will find an overview of the Census’ influential role in American race policy on a panel that describes **Why We Have Race on the Census, Anyway**. A personal view of the Census comes from profiles of individuals in the **Shifting Categories** component. Visitors can consider the future of race and its role in our public life at the **Future of the Census**, where they can vote for how race should be considered in the next Census.

Shifting Categories

In this area visitors discover a large photograph of a group of college students. Each student is wearing a t-shirt imprinted with three Census years and the corresponding racial categories they would have been assigned in that year. Nearby stories focus on each student, his or her ancestors, and the social and political motivations throughout American history that caused the frequent changes to Census categories. Taken together, these stories illustrate how race is a fluid concept that has enormous social, political, and personal ramifications.

