

The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea

By Robert Wald Sussman

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Biological races do not exist?and never have. This view is shared by all scientists who study variation in human populations. Yet racial prejudice and intolerance based on the myth of race remain deeply ingrained in Western society. In his powerful examination of a persistent, false, and poisonous idea, Robert Sussman explores how race emerged as a social construct from early biblical justifications to the pseudoscientific studies of today.

The Myth of Race traces the origins of modern racist ideology to the Spanish Inquisition, revealing how sixteenth-century theories of racial degeneration became a crucial justification for Western imperialism and slavery. In the nineteenth century, these theories fused with Darwinism to produce the highly influential and pernicious eugenics movement. Believing that traits from cranial shape to raw intelligence were immutable, eugenicists developed hierarchies that classified certain races, especially fair-skinned “Aryans,” as superior to others. These ideologues proposed programs of intelligence testing, selective breeding, and human sterilization?policies that fed straight into Nazi genocide. Sussman examines how opponents of eugenics, guided by the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas’s new, scientifically supported concept of culture, exposed fallacies in racist thinking.

Although eugenics is now widely discredited, some groups and individuals today claim a new scientific basis for old racist assumptions. Pondering the continuing influence of racist research and thought, despite all evidence to the contrary, Sussman explains why?when it comes to race?too many people still mistake bigotry for science.

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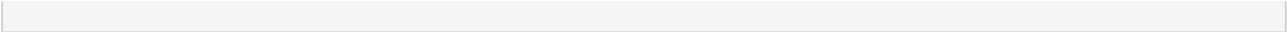
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Editorial Review

Review

Not only is this book a significant contribution to the view of race and racism in traditional ‘four-field’ anthropology in the U.S., but it is also important to the understanding of global notions of contemporary racism...*The Myth of Race* encourages us to understand where stereotypes and misinformation fit in our consideration of whether and how notions of biological race remain pervasive in today’s discourse and policy. (Yolanda T. Moses *Times Higher Education* 2014-12-11)

Explores how the faulty concept of race embedded in our culture affects where we live, go to school and work. It influences our choice in friends and our treatment in the healthcare and justice systems. (Jeff Adachi *San Francisco Examiner* 2016-04-21)

Sussman does a masterful job of tracing racist thought in western Europe and the U.S. from 15th-century polygenics through the eugenics of the 20th century to the continued racism and anti-immigration stances of today’s radical Right...Although the racists at whom Sussman directs his message are unlikely to read it or to credit it if they do, this book should be in every library, from high school through public to university, in hopes that it will affect some minds before they become completely shuttered by prejudice. (L. L. Johnson *Choice* 2015-04-01)

The idea of race, writes the author, is a cultural rather than biological reality. Tribes always believed that strangers were subhuman, but they could overcome their inferiority by joining the tribe?e.g., converting to Christianity or adopting Roman citizenship... Today, since racism is politically incorrect, Sussman maintains, supporters have migrated en masse to the anti-immigration movement... Sussman delivers a lucidly written, eye-opening account of a nasty sociological battle that the good guys have been winning for a century without eliminating a very persistent enemy. (*Kirkus Reviews* 2014-08-15)

Sussman, an anthropology professor at Washington University in St. Louis, explores and explodes the concept of race. He contends that, in the face of a longstanding scientific consensus that race possesses no biological basis, many people still mistakenly believe that traits like aggression, intelligence, and generosity can be traced to it. Noting that racial distinctions between humans have no biological basis is not new, Sussman makes his contribution by exposing the ways that academic ‘science’ is invoked to authorize an outmoded concept. He traces the history of ideas about race, moving briskly from the Spanish Inquisition to Linnaeus and Kant, and offering a detailed discussion of eugenics. Lest readers imagine this is all in the distant past, Sussman devotes his last three chapters to the funding mechanisms that keep racist research alive today. He shows that ‘science’ has been used in efforts to overturn civil rights legislation, and he examines the ways racist discourse has become intertwined with immigration policy. This book, which is both provocative and commonsensical, will be useful to scholars, but may also spark a broader conversation. (*Publishers Weekly* 2014-08-25)

Robert Sussman’s penetrating study of the major figures who constructed concepts of race lays bare the personal biases, enmity, and corruption that influenced the intellectuals and politicians who framed modern industrialized societies. It also reveals unexpected heroes whose clear-minded insights into human diversity presaged our modern understanding. *The Myth of Race* is a suspense-filled and richly scholarly tour de force. (Nina G. Jablonski, Evan Pugh Professor of Anthropology, Pennsylvania State University)

What is most remarkable is how Sussman manages to tie in past attitudes toward race with ongoing political developments. He demonstrates a seamless continuity of current attitudes with past ones in a way I have not seen attempted elsewhere, and in my view he succeeds brilliantly: the final chapters, in particular, make chilling reading. This is a book written straight from the heart, and it reads that way. (Ian Tattersall, author of *Race? Debunking a Scientific Myth*)

About the Author

Robert Wald Sussman was Professor of Physical Anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis.

Users Review

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Chris Robins:

People live in this new morning of lifestyle always try and and must have the time or they will get wide range of stress from both way of life and work. So , once we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely indeed. People is human not just a robot. Then we request again, what kind of activity do you have when the spare time coming to anyone of course your answer will unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative inside spending your spare time, typically the book you have read is usually The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea.

Sheila Searcy:

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