

AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion
Humans and Race Discussion Guide
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Science, Race, and Racism

The impact of racism can be found in all sectors our society, including science. Like those other sectors, science has been used both to support and to refute racist ideas throughout the history of America. This video series traces the complicated relationship between science and racism in our country, detailing how it contributed to racism and how modern biology currently understands our common humanity. Biologists, geneticists, anthropologists, historians, and African American studies scholars convey the importance in acknowledging science's role racism and the ways our understanding of these narratives can help us have better conversations about race.

Humans and Race

<https://sciencereigiondialogue.org/resources/humans-and-race/>

Approaching the Conversation:

- i. What is race? How do you understand the concept?
- ii. How is race real? Is it biological or social? Is it structural or interpersonal? Is it political or economic? Or is it something else?
- iii. In what ways has science contributed to racist ideas? In what ways has it refuted them?

Watch video (3:06): Humans and Race

Diving Deeper

- i. What did you learn from this video about race? What did you learn about the ways science has contributed to racism?
- ii. Revisit the opening questions. What is race and how is race real? How is the way you answer those questions different after watching this video?
- iii. Why is it important to emphasize that race is not biology, but it does have impacts on our biology?
- iv. How did the ideas presented in this video change the way you will approach persons in different racial groups?

Science as Mastery: A Story about Race and Power

<https://sciencereigiondialogue.org/resources/science-as-mastery-a-story-about-race-power/>

This video traces the role of science in narratives around race – how science contributes to those narratives and how science changes them. It examines polygenism, eugenics, and more ending with the late 20th century discovery that all humans are 99.9% the same genetically. The story of science and race is also a story of power – the rising power of science and the dynamics of power that feed our nation's history of racism.

Approaching the Conversation:

- i. Describe the power that science has in our contemporary culture. How is that power used for good? How is it used for ill?
- ii. What is the role of power in racism?
- iii. How have our beliefs about race been bolstered by science?
- iv. In what ways do our racial beliefs continue to impact science?
- v. Can science help us to better understand race? If so, how?

Watch video (27:20): Science as Mastery

Diving Deeper

- i. Identify three things that you learned from this video about science, race, and the interplay between them. How do each of those three things impact the way you understand race and racism?
- ii. Compare the narrative described in this video with your own understandings of race in America. How are they similar? How are they different?
- iii. What are some of the ways science contributed to racism? What are some of the ways science has dismantled racist ideas?
- iv. Dr. Terrence Keel tells us, “Our science continues to translate the beliefs in our culture.” How can we change that? What are some ways we can undo damaging belief systems or reduce the impact harmful beliefs have on the practice of science?
- v. How did the ideas presented in this video change the way you will approach persons in different racial groups?
- vi. At the conclusion of the video, Dr. Erik L. Peterson says, “If we can’t even talk about [race], then there is no hope of ever making it any better.” When and where can you talk about the history of racism and what you learned from these videos with others?

Additional resources:

- To understand how scientists understand human genetics, origins, and identity, [this 9-minute video](#) will introduce many key ideas. Specifically, it talks about how to understand questions of unity and diversity within our human species.
- Learn more about science and race from scientists such as [Dr. Jada Benn-Torres \(2:21\)](#) and [Dr. Joseph Graves \(2:36\)](#).
- The Greater Good Science Center has [a number of resources](#) that connect the human and social sciences to questions of race and difference.
- The video noted the interplay of Christianity and science in the history of racism. Two organizations that are helping Christians better engage science, [Science for the Church](#) and [BioLogos](#), have collected resources on science, race, and Christian faith.
- Publications from the scientist and scholars in the film:
 - [Dr. Myrna Sheldon](#)
 - [Dr. Jada Benn Torres](#)
 - [Dr. Deirdre Cooper Owens](#)
 - [Dr. Joseph Graves](#)
 - [Dr. Terence Keel](#)

- [Dr. Agustín Fuentes](#)
- [Dr. Aaron Panofsky](#)
- [Dr. Erik Peterson](#)