

Skin,

System & Structure



Race
Health
Power

Race, identity and ethnicity through
an anthropological lens



RACE & ATHLETICISM

Old Belief

Before the 1930s, whites believed they were both the **smartest** and **most athletic**, especially Europeans at elite universities (Harvard, Yale, Princeton). They dominated sports mainly because other races were barred from competition, not because of biological ability.

(Graves & Goodman 2021)



When **African American** Jesse Owens won **4 Olympic gold medals** in Hitler's Berlin Olympics (1936) and **Joe Louis** defeated the German champion Schmeling, it proved non-Europeans **were athletic equals**.

(Graves & Goodman 2021)

New Myth

Instead of admitting athletic equality, a fresh myth emerged: "Black and brown people are athletic; whites are intelligent." This **reinforced** racial stereotypes **without** scientific basis.

(Graves & Goodman 2021)

SCIENTIFIC FACT

No biological racial group is more athletic than another. Athleticism is a complex quantitative trait shaped by:

- hundreds of **interacting genes**
- **culture**, opportunity, training access
- coaching, **environment**, nutrition

The same athletic performance gene variants are **distributed** across **all populations** and are not clustered racially.

(Graves & Goodman 2021)



Jesse Owens

RACE & ATHLETICISM

WHY Stereotypes Persist

Elite performance patterns are cultural, not racial:

- **Jamaican** sprinters → long-standing national sprint culture and opportunities
- **Ethiopian/Kenyan** long-distance runners → walking/running as part of daily life and altitude adaptation
- **African Americans** in basketball → low-cost inner-city sport opportunities
- **Europeans** in swimming → historical access to pools; African Americans were systematically excluded from aquatic spaces and coaching

(Graves & Goodman 2021)



race



biology

Evolutionary Dispersal of Human Variation

Humans reached the Americas much earlier than the old "**Clovis first**" story (13,250–12,800 years ago). New archaeological evidence shows **multiple migrations**, probably at different times and along different routes, possibly including coastal seafaring.

(Glannon, 2019)



Joe Louis vs. Schmeling 1938

Consequences of Dispersal

Body proportions, metabolism, climate adaptation, altitude tolerance evolved locally after populations dispersed. These create variation, but **NOT biological races**. Because dispersal happened millennia ago, genetic diversity is **highest inside continents**, not between racial groups.

(Graves & Goodman 2021)

Cultural Evolution Shaped:

muscle use
growth patterns
sport specialization
nutrition
body mass

Intelligence

brains & behaviours

what is intelligence?

Intelligence is not a single inherited trait. It develops through schooling, nutrition, stress, safety, language exposure, and opportunities to learn. A test score reflects lived environment more than innate cognitive talent.

(Graves & Goodman 2021)

IQ tests: not neutral

Early intelligence testing emerged from eugenic research that treated poverty, crime, sexuality, and “feeble-mindedness” as **hereditary defects** rather than social conditions. These same ideas shaped how intelligence tests were used to sort people into “**fit**” and “**unfit**” groups. The tests measured access to education, safety, and cultural familiarity rather than true innate cognitive ability.

(Graves & Goodman 2021)

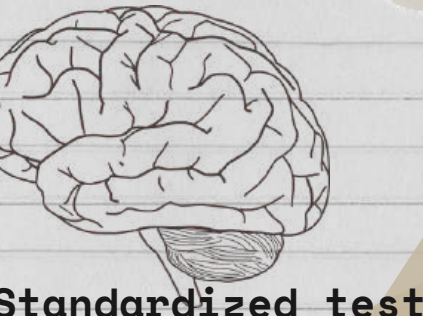
Why Test Scores Change

Test performance rises or falls with nutrition, sleep, trauma, school quality, tutoring access, and stress. If intelligence were purely genetic, environmental improvements would not change scores, but they do. Standardized tests therefore capture the **consequences of inequality**, not natural limits of ability. (Graves & Goodman 2021)

Mental Health and “Criminal” Behaviour

Mental distress and behaviors labeled “criminal” are **tied to social life**: poverty, racism, unsafe housing, colonial trauma, and lack of care. Early eugenicists misread these conditions as **inherited biological defects**, which justified confinement instead of social change. Anthropology now understands behavior as situational and structural, not rooted in “bad heredity.”

(Rafter 1988)



Standardized tests measure inequality, not innate intelligence.

THE realities of

Institutional & Systemic Racism

systemic & institutional racism

Systemic racism happens when rules, structures, and everyday practices deliver unequal outcomes to racialized groups—even when individual people don't intend harm (CBC News, 2020). Canada frequently denies its existence, but the video materials show that policing, housing, education, justice, and employment were built around white advantage from the start (CBC News, 2020).

(TVO Today, 2024)

Indigenous
account for

32%
of federal
inmates.

racial injustice in education & employment

In Thunder Bay, Indigenous youth must leave home to attend high school, face racism in the city, and **receive slower police response** when they go missing or die (Ohm, 2024). Their experiences reflect **educational neglect** and unequal safety. In employment, Black federal workers report being denied advancement, subjected to discriminatory tasks, and **underrepresented** in leadership, leading to a class-action lawsuit demanding systemic reform (Black Action Secretariat, 2020).

systemic disparities in criminal justice

Indigenous and Black people face a criminal justice system that **responds to them differently** at every stage: surveillance, arrest, bail decisions, sentencing, incarceration, and segregation (TVO Today, 2024). Overrepresentation has nothing to do with higher criminality. It reflects generations of colonial surveillance, family disruption, poverty, underfunded services, foster care removal, and racist assumptions in policing and courts. Indigenous people represent only 5% of Canada's population yet account for 32% of federal inmates, and are **disproportionately** placed in solitary confinement and maximum-security facilities (TVO Today, 2024). These outcomes reveal how the justice system turns structural inequality **into punishment** rather than support or treatment (TVO Today, 2024).



Black Employee Protest Due
to Human Rights Commission
Discrimination

Unequal outcomes are not accidents; they are
evidence of systems designed to advantage some
and disadvantage others.

DNA

& Ancestry Testing

3 types of ancestry

cultural

the traditions, languages, beliefs, and identities we inherit and practice, even if our DNA and geography change
(Graves & Goodman 2021)

geographical

connects us to places where our ancestors lived, migrated, and built community. can sometimes be traced through evidence like water and soil chemistry in ancient bones and teeth.
(Graves & Goodman 2021)

genetic

the DNA passed down from parents and earlier generations
(Graves & Goodman 2021)

(New Scientist, 2025).

Ancient DNA

Modern research in ancient DNA, cave sediments, and fossil proteomics has **reshaped** how we understand **human evolution** (New Scientist, 2025).. Ancient humans–Neanderthals, Denisovans, early Homo sapiens, and other species–intermixed much more than older physical “race” models suggested, and many early populations **disappeared** during severe climate shifts.

DNA preserved in caves now helps us map where groups lived even when fossils are gone, and fossil proteins survive longer than DNA, revealing evolutionary relationships beyond **100,000 years**. This shows that **we were never divided** into isolated biological races–humans have always mixed, migrated, and adapted in overlapping waves (New Scientist, 2025).

genetic ancestry



race

DNA ancestry tests identify **geographic origin**, not biological races (Graves & Goodman 2021). Human genetic variation is tiny and mostly shared across populations, meaning skin color does not map onto clear genetic groups. Race is a **cultural** and **political idea**, not a genetic category, and no population has unique “**racial DNA**.”

(Graves & Goodman 2021)

Environmental Racism & Climate Disparities

Environmental racism places **toxic industries**, **unsafe housing**, and **polluted land** near Indigenous and racialized communities while protecting white neighborhoods. In Canada, cases like Boat Harbour, Aamjiwnaang, and Wet’suwet’en show how land, health, and climate risk are **unevenly distributed**, and

Indigenous land defenders face criminalization when protecting territory (The News Forum, 2022). Environmental racism is **systemic** and requires **anti-racist environmental policy and community leadership**.

Race Names, The Census & Intergenerational Wealth



Race Names Change Over Time

Race labels shift with politics, power, and identity movements. U.S. census categories moved from **"Indian, slave, and white" in 1790** to later adding "free colored person," "mulatto," "quadroon," "octoroon," and then **shifting again to "Black," "African American,"** and multiracial options. The categories never reflected biology—they reflected social hierarchy and historical needs. Even personal identity terms change across generations, such as "colored," then "Black," then "African American," showing how **naming follows community identity**, not genes (Graves & Goodman 2021).

Intergenerational Wealth Disparities

Racial wealth gaps today are **rooted** in histories of segregation, redlining, unequal hiring, incarceration, underfunded schools, and environmental burdens.

Lower wages, poorer housing access, unsafe environments, and over-policing **prevent**

families from building assets.

Because wealth transfers across generations, the gap compounds: children inherit fewer savings, less home equity, fewer educational

opportunities, and more debt. The **cycle repeats** because poverty limits future wealth-building,

while white households benefit from earlier homeownership, safer neighborhoods, and institutional access.

Structural racism, not personal failure, creates **unequal wealth accumulation across time.**

Census Categories

Census categories **show population counts**, representation, and inequality, not biological ancestry (Chatelaine, 2020). They are unstable and shaped by government definitions rather than lived identity. In Canada, weak race-based data **created major gaps** during COVID-19, especially when Indigenous and racialized cases were **undercounted**. Poor or broad census data can erase real inequality (Chatelaine, 2020).



Intersectional Racism

in Higher Education

Eternity Martis shows that racism on university campuses is **racial** and **gendered** at the same time. Black women face stereotypes in classrooms, hostile residence culture, tokenization, and unequal emotional labor when **educating** peers and professors. Their experiences are **shaped by safety concerns**, sexual violence, social exclusion, and campus policing—all tied to race and gender together, **not separately** (Martis, 2020).



Western's

EDIDA PLAN

Western's EDIDA plan responded to London's racial history, anti-Black racism, and community harm by **outlining** equity hiring, safer reporting systems, Indigenous learning commitments, and campus accountability. It **aims for long-term structural change** rather than symbolic inclusion—recognizing past failures in representation, student support, data transparency, and belonging. EDIDA emphasizes anti-racism training, curriculum reform, and improved services for marginalized students **to make Western safer and more culturally responsive** (Western EDIDA Strategic Plan, 2024).



Western Pride Awareness March

Diversity in Universities

Sara Ahmed argues that universities use “diversity” as evidence of institutional commitment, but the language of diversity **often hides racism** rather than repairing it (Ahmed, 2012). Diversity becomes symbolic—appearing in brochures, committees, and policy statements—while actual structural change is slow, resisted, or delegated to racialized staff and students who already feel excluded. Diversity work is **emotional, repetitive, and exhausting** because institutions benefit from its image without transforming their power structures (Ahmed, 2012).

Linguistic Racism

The NBC report shows how Black students are penalized for accents, dialects, and language styles rooted in cultural identity. Teachers often treat Black English as incorrect rather than legitimate linguistic expression, leading to grade penalties, stigma, self-censorship, and barriers to academic confidence. Linguistic racism limits belonging, shapes classroom expectations, and **reinforces racial hierarchy in education** (NBC, 2020).

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