

SOCU 450
Lecture 7
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Race and Racism in America

Race is a touchy subject in America because, starting with the mass genocide of Native Americans, racism has deep roots in our soil. For hundreds of years, slavery existed in America which was based on the belief of the inferiority of African-Americans. The legal system in America fortified the racial dictatorship. Indeed, the U.S. Constitution defines slaves as subhuman, as 3/5s of a person. To this day, well into the 21st century, we are still arguing about affirmative action, equality before the law, racial equality, and other related issues. Race matters, and all the more so when we try to pretend it doesn't.

Before we go any further, it is important to define some basic terms. What is race? Race is a **socially constructed** category that is intended to group individuals according to observable differences. The term race also refers to groups of people who have differences and similarities in biological traits **deemed by society** to be socially significant, meaning that people treat other people differently because of them. Both of these definitions draw attention to the socially constructed category of "race."

What is racism? Racism refers to the belief that one race is superior to another as well as the practices that institutionalize this type of oppression and racial inequality. What is discrimination? Discrimination can be defined as granting particular privileges to a class arbitrarily designated from a sizable number of persons, where no reasonable distinction exists between the favored and disfavored classes. What is affirmative action? This can be defined as a policy or a program that seeks to redress past discrimination through active measures to ensure equal opportunity, as in education and employment. What are reparations? Reparations refer to the act or process of making amends.

Whether race matters depends to a large extent on one's knowledge of history as well as on one's selection of race as a socially significant topic of discussion. How race matters differs for each major racial group in the U.S.: Native Americans, Latino Americans, White Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans.

Does race matter to you? Why or why not? Which do you think matters more, race or class? Why? Does the answer vary according to racial group?