

RACE LITERACY QUIZ

What differences make a difference?

Developed by California Newsreel in association with the Association of American Colleges and Universities. These myths and misconceptions are explored in the documentary series *RACE – The Power of an Illusion*, available on DVD from California Newsreel at www.newsreel.org.

For more information, visit the RACE companion Web site at RacePowerofanIllusion.org.

1. Members of a race can be identified by their:

- A. Blood group
- B. Skin color
- C. Ancestry
- D. Genes
- E. All of the above
- F. None of the above

Answer: F. None of the above. There are no traits, no characteristics, not even one gene that distinguishes all members of one so-called race from all members of another. The A, B, O blood groups can be found in all the world's peoples (Estonians and Papua New Guineans, for example, have the same frequencies). Skin color tends to correspond with latitude not race; sub-Saharan Africans, Dravidians and Tamils from Southern Asia, and Melanesians from the Pacific all have very dark skin. Ancestry is difficult to trace. Go back 30 generations, less than 1,000 years, and you have a billion ancestors.

2. Which species has the most genetic variation?

- A. Humans
- B. Chimpanzees
- C. Penguins
- D. Fruit flies
- E. Elephants

Answer: D. Fruit flies. Fruit flies have been around for a very long time, but they also have a short life span, so lots of genetic mutations have accumulated over many generations. In contrast, modern humans are one of the most genetically similar of all species. This is because we are a relatively young species, and we simply haven't been around long enough to accumulate a lot of genetic variation. Also, humans have always moved, mixed and mated, so genetically speaking, we're all mongrels. Beneath the skin, we're all very similar.

3. Which two populations are most likely, on average, to be genetically similar?

- A. Italians and Ethiopians
- B. Senegalese and Kenyans
- C. Italians and Swedes
- D. Chinese and Lakota (Sioux)
- E. Saudi Arabians and Ethiopians

Answer: E. Saudi Arabians and Ethiopians. Populations that live near each other geographically tend to be more alike than populations that live far apart. This is because they are more likely to have intermixed in the past and therefore share genetic similarities. Often when variation seems to follow racial lines, it is more accurately explained by geographic distance.

4. Which continent has the greatest human genetic diversity?

- A. Europe
- B. Asia
- C. South America
- D. Africa
- E. North America

Answer: E. Africa. All modern humans originated from Africa, and we spent most of our evolution as a species together there. All the other populations of the world can be seen as a subset of Africans – every human trait found elsewhere can also be found in Africa, with the exception of a few recent variations favored by the environment or sexual selection – such as light-complected skin.

5. The characteristic that Greeks felt distinguished them from “barbarians” was:

- A. Religion
- B. Skin color
- C. Language
- D. Customs
- E. Hairiness
- F. Intelligence

Answer: C. Language. The word barbarian comes from the Greek word “barbar,” for stutterer, or unintelligible, or he who does not speak Greek. The Greeks, like most all ancient peoples, did not attribute much meaning to people’s physical appearance. For Greeks it was language that was the difference that made a difference. It is thought that those whom the Greeks first called barbarians were the Scythians, who lived north of the Black Sea and were fair complected. Race is a recent idea that did not exist in antiquity.

6. When Jamestown colonist John Rolfe traveled to the Court of London in 1619 with his new wife Pocahontas, it caused a scandal because:

- A. An Englishman had married an Indian
- B. A Christian had married a heathen
- C. Pocahontas, a princess, married beneath her by marrying a commoner
- D. Londoners had never seen an Indian before

Answer: C. Pocahontas, a princess, married beneath her by marrying a commoner. Seventeenth-century England was a very hierarchical feudal society where people’s class status was fixed at birth. Status was so important they even had laws, called sumptuary laws, that regulated the clothing people could wear so they couldn’t “pass” as another class. When John Rolphe took his new bride, Pocahontas (who had converted to Christianity) back to London, the English settlers, though in conflict with the Indians over land, had not yet developed the ideology of race that would later help justify Indian removal. But it was unthinkable that royalty would marry a commoner.

7. Which of the following was NOT an important reason why African slavery first took root in North America:

- A. As non-Christians, they had no legal protections
- B. They were skilled semi-tropical farmers
- C. The supply of indentured servants from Europe was becoming unreliable
- D. They were deemed innately inferior
- E. Unlike Native Americans, they were resistant to European diseases
- F. They couldn’t easily run away

Answer: D. They were deemed innately inferior. Throughout much of history societies have enslaved people, often as a result of conquest, war or even debt. People were not enslaved because they were first deemed inferior. African slaves were well-suited to labor in North America. Unlike the Indians, they were resistant to European diseases; they couldn't easily run away; they were not Christians (and hence unprotected by English law); and they were skilled semi-tropical farmers. Over time, the degradation of slavery became identified with blackness, giving white Americans the idea that Africans were a fundamentally different kind of people.

8. In America, the rise of the idea of white supremacy was tied most directly to:

- A. Indian removal
- B. Slavery
- C. The Declaration of Independence
- D. The U.S. Constitution
- E. Ancient Greece

Answer C. The Declaration of Independence. Ironically, it was freedom not slavery that gave rise to modern theories of race. Until the Age of Revolution slavery was an unquestioned "fact of life." It was only when Americans proclaimed the radical new idea that "all men are created equal" that slavery was first challenged as immoral. As historian Barbara Fields notes, the new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.

9. Which was NOT introduced to Indians by whites?

- A. An Indian identity
- B. Democracy
- C. Identity by "blood quantum"
- D. Horses
- E. Measles

Answer: B. Democracy. United States' representative democracy drew upon the traditions of the Iroquois Confederacy. Indians didn't think of themselves as Indians when European settlers arrived, but rather as members of separate nations, divided by language, custom and religion. The idea of "blood quantum," i.e., the determination of Indian identity by ancestry, was imposed by the federal government. In contrast, tribal membership traditionally was open to anyone, even Europeans, as long as they accepted tribal customs and authority. There were no horses in the New World until they were brought over by Europeans. Measles, small-pox and other communicable diseases were also unknown in the Americas prior to European exploration. Some historians estimate that up to 90% of all Eastern seaboard Indians died from diseases contracted from European traders and explorers by the time of the first Plymouth settlement.

10. Of the \$120 billion in home loans underwritten by the federal government between 1933 and 1962, what percentage went to white homeowners?

- A. 45 percent
- B. 64 percent
- C. 75 percent
- D. 88 percent
- E. 98 percent

Answer: E. 98 percent. Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government created programs that subsidized low-cost home loans, opening up home ownership – and wealth accumulation– to millions of Americans for the first time. But government underwriters introduced a national appraisal system tying loan eligibility and property value to race, inventing "redlining," and effectively locking people of color out of home-buying just as white Americans were beginning to purchase homes and build net worth.

11. Which of the following is NOT a result of federal government policies?

- A. Redlining
- B. Urban renewal
- C. Deterioration of inner cities
- D. Affirmative action quotas
- E. The wealth gap between black and white families

Answer: D. Affirmative action quotas. Federal affirmative action guidelines specifically prohibit quotas. Beginning in the 1930s, the Federal Housing Administration and related programs made it possible for millions of average white Americans to own a home for the first time and set off the post-WWII suburban building boom. The government established a national neighborhood appraisal system, explicitly tying mortgage eligibility to race, a policy known today as “redlining.” The FHA and other government policies made possible the post-World War II all-white suburbs, while people of color and in central cities were denied loans. Government policies and practices helped create two legacies that are still with us today: segregated communities and a substantial wealth gap between whites and nonwhites, much of which can be traced to the differential value of their homes and inheritance from past generations.

12. Today, the net worth of the average white family is how much compared to the average Black family?

- A. Three times as much
- B. Eight times as much
- C. Half as much
- D. Twice as much
- E. The same

Answer: B: Eight times as much. Probably no one statistic better captures the cumulative disadvantage of past discrimination than wealth. Even at the same income levels, whites still have, on average, twice as much wealth as nonwhites. Much of this difference is due to the different rates of home ownership and the different values of homes in white and Black neighborhoods. But wealth is not only the end point, it's the starting line for the next generation – helping finance your children's education, helping them through hard times, or helping with the down payment of their own home. Economists estimate 50-80% of one's lifetime wealth accumulation can be traced to this head start.

13. According to a 1993 study, 86% of suburban whites lived in a community where the Black population was:

- A. Less than 5%
- B. Less than 10%
- C. Less than 1%
- D. More than 10%
- E. More than 15%

Answer: C. Less than 1%. According to the 2000 Census, whites are more likely to be segregated than any other group. This is largely a result of past housing discrimination, but it is perpetuated today by unfair practices such as predatory lending, racial steering and a substantial wealth gap between Black and white families. Today, 71% of whites own their own home, compared to 44% of African Americans. Black and Latino mortgage applicants are 60% more likely than whites to be turned down for loans, even after controlling for employment, financial, and neighborhood characteristics. On average, nonwhites who are approved for mortgages still pay higher rates. The accumulation of wealth in America has historically been tied to property ownership, differentially available to Americans of color.

14. Which is NOT an example of a government racial preference program?

- A. 1964 Civil Rights Act
- B. 1862 Homestead Act
- C. 1790 Naturalization Act
- D. 1934 Federal Housing Administration
- E. 1935 Social Security Act

Answer: A. 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Civil Rights Act made racial discrimination in public places illegal. The other programs are all examples of racial preferences - for white people. Over a 40-year period, the Homestead Act gave away, for free, 270 million acres of land, formerly Indian Territory, almost all of it to white people. The Naturalization Act allowed only "free white persons" to adopt citizenship, thus opening voting rights and property ownership to European immigrants but barring Asians and other groups. Racial barriers to citizenship were not removed until 1952. The Federal Housing Administration made it possible for millions of average white Americans – but not others – to own a home for the first time. (see #11 above). And the Social Security Act specifically exempted two occupations from coverage: farm-workers and domestics, both largely non-white.