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CHAPTER TWO

Race and History

The consensus view in the media and the social sciences is that "race" was constructed by Europeans in the Age of Exploration to justify colonialism and slavery. Our review of the art and literature of ancient Egypt, China, India, Greece, and Rome contradicts this social-constructionist view.

The early civilizations clearly depicted the distinctive physical features of the major races with which they were familiar. Their literature shows that they also attributed behavioral characteristics (fairly or unfairly) to the different races and explained them according to the knowledge of their day.

"Race," says science historian Evelyn Hammonds in the PBS documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, "is a human invention. We created it, we have used it in ways that have been, in many, many respects, quite negative and quite harmful. And we can think ourselves out of it. We made it; we can unmake it."

Is it true, as the PBS documentary website tells viewers, that "ancient societies did not divide people according to physical differences, but according to religion, status, class, even language?" We considered this question when we first began working on this

book, and Vince suggested that I (Frank Miele) search the anthropology library at the University of California–Berkeley for examples of the way ancient civilizations, non-European civilizations, and hunter-gather societies depicted and described themselves and other races in their art, their literature, and their oral tradition. Did they distinguish races, groups of people, sorting them on the basis of skin color, hair form, and facial features as we do today? The answer is an unequivocal yes.

Examination of the art and literature of non-European civilizations shows that race was not suddenly “constructed” out of thin air by Europeans in the Age of Exploration to justify dispossessing and oppressing people of color. Contrary to the claims of the PBS documentary and the consensus view of contemporary social science, the art of the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, and China, and the Islamic civilization from AD 700 to 1400 shows that these societies classified the various peoples they encountered into broad racial groups. They sorted them based upon the same set of characteristics—skin color, hair form, and head shape—allegedly constructed by Europeans when they invented “race” to justify colonialism and white supremacy. Not surprisingly, each civilization thought of itself as superior to all others and regarded its characteristics as being the ideal. Some attempted to explain the origin of race differences given the knowledge of their time, and at times, even made racial classification a basis of political policy.

Of course, it could be that the artists in these various societies were simply depicting individuals as realistically as possible. However, corroborating evidence of their belief in race, that is, their tendency to sort the many different peoples they encountered into a smaller number of basic categories, comes from the record of what ancient civilizations wrote about other groups, or, in the case of contemporary hunter-gatherers, what they say

about them. Again, it is evident that they relied upon a set of observable features (skin color, hair color and form, body build, facial features) quite similar to those used in the commonsense notion of race and the racial classifications of nineteenth-century anthropology to sort the many diverse groups they encountered into a smaller number of categories.

They also commented on the behavior of these groups. In the vast majority of cases, their opinions of other peoples, including the ancestors of the Western Europeans who supposedly "invented" the idea of race, are far from flattering, at times matching modern society's most derogatory stereotypes. In this chapter, we bolster our argument that race is not a recent European social construction by providing examples from both the art and the literature of the ancient civilizations of Egypt, India, China, and classical Greece and Rome.

Research in cognitive psychology supports this interpretation of the art and literature of these societies. A series of studies have shown that race acts as a prepotent cue. As noted in Chapter 1, by age three children can recognize the existence of race and racial differences without having to be taught to do so, and they think of the characteristics as being unchangeable. The emerging discipline of evolutionary psychology provides further evidence that there is a species-wide module in the human brain that predisposes us to sort the members of our species into groups based on appearance, and to distinguish between "us" and "them." Racial differences are emphasized, exaggerated, and stereotyped to the benefit of the in-group that is doing the sorting and to the detriment of the out-groups being sorted.

These converging lines of evidence disprove the claim that race is a mere social construction developed only recently by white Europeans. Although the evidence implies that humans have this innate sorting tendency, it does not prove that our concepts of

race, racial differences, or racial stereotypes—no matter how consistent across time or geography—reflect any biological reality. It could be that the human tendency to categorize people into different races says more about cognitive processes than it does about the way the world really is. It could be that the human mind evolved to categorize some things as having intrinsic, unchangeable properties—the sorts of things that lead different cultures around the world to have in their vocabulary essentially the same list of color terms (even though the visible light spectrum is continuous) or to recognize and name the animal and plant species as the same set of discrete kinds.

However, these racial categories match those produced by the DNA methods that did not come into existence until the senior author's work and its extensions (described in Chapters 4 and 5). Ancient civilizations and early anthropology would have had to have been clairvoyant to produce such agreement if there was no underlying biological reality to race.

In the case of race, the consensus view in contemporary social science is that Western European culture, and it alone, falsely and self-servingly constructed such a view of human variation and then imposed it on the rest of humanity until our minds were liberated with the advent of deconstructionism. An outgrowth of postmodernist philosophy, deconstructionism denies that any science can establish ultimate meaning. It “deconstructs” scientific statements, claiming to reveal their hidden, underlying racial, sexual, and political biases.

In this chapter, we present evidence to show that all cultures that have been studied have categorized people into essentially the same set of races recognized by the average person and that being a member of one race means the individual can't change into a member of another race. Further, we show that race is associated with not only physical but behavioral traits as well. In later

chapters, we show that these statements are strongly supported by modern scientific research.

ANCIENT EGYPT

The civilization of ancient Egypt (circa 3000–300 BC) is a good place to start our survey, first because of its antiquity, and second because of its central location with regard to two of the three major races (whites, or Caucasoids, versus blacks, or Negroids) recognized by nineteenth-century European anthropology.

The walls of the royal tombs of the Egyptians are decorated with “representations of the four races of mankind, among whom the Egyptians of the nineteenth dynasty supposed the world to be partitioned—(1) The Egyptians, whom they painted red; (2) the Asiatics or Semites, yellow; (3) the Southerners or Negroes, black; and the Libyans, Westerners or Northerners, white, with blue eyes and fair beards.” The Egyptian monuments are not mere “portraits, but also an attempt at classification,” and “this facility for race discrimination was still earlier exhibited in the prehistoric or early historic palettes.” As early as the latter part of the third millennium BC, the Egyptians depicted “blacks with broad noses, thick lips, and tightly coiled or woolly hair,” the same characteristics by which European anthropologists of the nineteenth century would define the Negroid race.

The Egyptians considered their Pharaoh to be the master of the earthly world and decorated their temples with reliefs of peoples conquered or subjugated by him. The Egyptian conquerors appear larger than their enemies and with a ruddy complexion. The vanquished foe is usually shown in profile, arms tied behind the back, grouped racially, with the name of the conquered country written in hieroglyphics. The example from the tomb of Seti I shown in Figure 2.1 is just one of many such works. Captives from



FIGURE 2.1 Egyptian tomb painting showing four races.

the northern countries (Asiatics) are shown with beards and aquiline noses and light skins. Those from southern countries (Nubians or black Africans) are shown as dark-skinned with flat noses and thick lips.

Further evidence of the Egyptian awareness of racial differences can be found among the undisturbed treasures of the tomb of Tutankhamen (1379–1361 BC). A wooden chest shows the king slaughtering white Syrians on one side, while a corresponding massacre of his black African foes appears on the other. A footstool is decorated with alternating Asiatic (that is, Levantine white) and Kushitic (black African) captives, while a ceremonial throwing stick has at its top two heads facing in opposite directions, one a black African made of ebony, the other a bearded white Asiatic carved in ivory.

Are these and the many other similar examples evidence of racial sorting on the part of Egyptian artists, or were they adept at

recording the differences in their art but not assigning them any cognitive importance? Here they can testify through their written hieroglyphic record. The *Great Hymn to Aten* documents the earliest written account of both the origin of race differences (initial differences in climate) and their subsequent inheritance:

*O sole god, like whom there is no other:
Thou didst create the world according to thy desire,
...
The countries of Syria and Nubia, the land of Egypt,
Thou settest every man in his place . . .
Their tongues are separate in speech,
And their natures as well;
Their skins are distinguished,
As thou distinguishest the foreign peoples.*

The Egyptians also attributed behaviors to the different groups, some favorable, some derogatory and stereotyped. For example, a stele (an inscribed stone column that serves as a marker and looks somewhat like a tombstone) from Twelfth Dynasty Pharaoh Sesostri III (circa 1887–1849 BC) ridicules black Africans: “The Nubian [black African] obeys the man who puts him down. When you oppose him he turns tail; when you give ground he becomes aggressive. They are not a people of might, they are poor and faint-hearted.”

Another stele records history’s first color bar, forbidding blacks from entering Pharaoh’s domain: “Southern Boundary. Raised in the eighth year of the reign of Sesostri III, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, to whom be life throughout all ages. No Negro shall cross this boundary by water or by land, by ship or with his flocks, save for the purpose of trade or to make purchases in some post.”

Clearly, the Land of the Nile distinguished among broad racial categories, characterized their behavior (however accurately or inaccurately), and even based social policy on those classifications. All this sorting happened many millennia before Columbus sailed the oceans or slaves loaded barges along the Mississippi.

THE ASSYRIANS AND THE ISRAELITES

Black Africans also appear in monuments from 7th century BC Assyria that depict its battles with 25th Dynasty Egypt. A victory stele shows two prisoners, one black, one white, kneeling and lifting their hands in supplication to the figure of King Esarhaddon (680-669 BC), who towers over them. A bas-relief from the palace of King Ashurbanipal (669-626 BC) depicts a procession of black captives. The captives are similar to representations of black Africans seen in earlier Egyptian art at a time when they were enemies rather than a part of the Egyptian army. The Assyrian artists "correctly observed the physiognomy of men from the Sudan" and distinguished their facial appearance from that of whites.

The ancient Israelites, who were forbidden from making graven images, left no visual record. However, the prophet Jeremiah's rhetorical question "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" shows that they considered skin color to be a permanent, inherited, racial characteristic. Its use as a literary device is comparable to the cliché "to wash an Ethiopian white," used in Greek and Roman literature to signify "futile labors or to illustrate the unchangeability of nature."

ANCIENT INDIA

India's caste system is well known, as are attempts to rid the country of it. The English word "caste" is not derived from Hindi but from

the Portuguese word *castas*. This is not, however, evidence that the Portuguese, who were the first Europeans to colonize India, constructed its caste system. The Hindi word for caste is *varna*. It means color (that is, skin color), and it is as old as Indian history itself.

The earliest civilization on the Indian subcontinent existed along the Indus valley between 2500 and 1750 BC at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. The race and language of its people are not known. However, the Vedas, the sacred texts of the Indo-Europeans (also known as Aryans) who overran the Harrapan civilization between 1500 and 900 BC, describe how "under the banner of their God, Indra, lord of the heavens and 'Hurler of the Thunderbolt,' fierce Aryan warriors stormed the ancient 'cities' of the hated 'broad-nosed' Dasas, the dark-skinned worshippers of the phallus." According to one scholar, "dasa" originally meant simply "enemy," but the term suffered a shift of meaning later, when it came to mean "dark-faced" and subsequently "slave."

Further evidence for the recognition of racial differences in India comes from the *Bhagavad Gita* (The Song of the Lord), a part of the *Mahabharata* (the Hindu analogue to the Homeric poems). In it Lord Krishna assumes the disguise of the charioteer of the warrior-prince, Arjuna. In Sanskrit, *arjuna* means silver or white, cognate to the Greek *argos* or the Latin *argentum* (as in Argentina, the land of silver).

When Alexander the Great's army reached India, the Greeks described the people they met as being blacker than all other peoples except the Ethiopians (black Africans). They also noted that those north of the Ganges were lighter in skin color, more like the Egyptians. Foreshadowing nineteenth-century anthropologists' racial classifications, the Greeks recognized that black Africans' hair form differed from that of even the darkest-skinned Indians. In other words, the Greeks believed in race and did not believe it was just "skin deep."

Over the course of history, the various racial groups in India have intermixed. Trying to guess the caste background of Indians by skin color is a dicey proposition. Today there are many dark-skinned Brahmans. And whereas dark-skinned Dravidian-speaking peoples from the south of India are extremely successful in high-tech industries not only in India but also in the United States, fair-skinned groups in the Northwest Frontier are primarily concerned with the use of high technology for weapons of war. In sum, the sacred texts of ancient India confirm the evidence from ancient Egypt that racial differences were recognized and that race was used as a concept and as a basis for policy long before the European Age of Exploration.

ANCIENT CHINA

Because of its large, relatively homogeneous population and its geographic location, China would seem an unlikely place to look for evidence of the recognition of race and race differences. However, important new evidence has come to light from mummies found in the remote Tarim Basin of Central Asia that date to around 2000 BC, long before the Silk Road, the famed artery of commerce linking China and Rome. The mummies have been remarkably well preserved because of the dry desert conditions. They are not Chinese or Asian but rather have Caucasoid facial features and auburn hair. DNA analysis of a later mummy (circa 1000 BC) matches that of Europeans more closely than it does any Asian (Mongoloid) group. Graves excavated just north of Beijing contain depictions of typical Caucasoid, rather than Mongoloid, faces. Art and literature from a later period show that when the Chinese encountered descendants of the Tarim Basin people, they recognized them as being a different race.

As Buddhism spread from India northward into China, its sacred texts were translated into the written languages of the local

inhabitants. Two scrolls found at one site turned out to be in previously unknown Indo-European languages, now called Tocharian A and B. Whereas the Tarim Basin mummies from 2000 to 1000 BC are “completely Caucasian in their features,” the paintings of religious acolytes found accompanying the Tocharian scrolls from the later period of AD 600 to 1000 (see Figure 2.2) depict clearly distinguishable “devotees of many races—Chinese, Indian, Mongol, and Turkic types, as well as fair-haired, blue-eyed, white-cheeked Caucasians.”

Like other civilizations, the ancient Han Chinese regarded other groups they came into contact with as barbarians. They were especially taken aback by the odd appearance of one group, the Yuezhi,



FIGURE 2.2 Buddhist painting showing European and Asian faces.

because of their hairy, white, ruddy skin and their prominent noses, which the Chinese likened to those of monkeys. (Compare the Romans' use of the term "simas" (monkeylike) to disparage black Africans, another example of a group seeing its racial features as being the ideal and those of other groups as not fully human.)

The Han Chinese applied the term "Hu" to barbarians like the Yuezhi who had "deep eye sockets, prominent noses, and beards." But they did not apply it to the Qiang, another barbarian group, who had a Mongoloid appearance and among whom some of the Yuezhi lived. Both groups were denigrated as uncivilized and inferior to the Chinese, but the Qiang were deemed to belong to the same racial stock, whereas the Yuezhi were viewed as being part of a very different stock, not only barbarian but ugly and monkey-like to boot.

From the Tarim Basin mummies of 2000 BC to the Buddhist cave paintings of a century to a century and a half later, the art and writings of Chinese civilization show that these people too recognized races and racial differences. Like the ancient Egyptians and Indians, the Chinese used the same set of physical features (skin color, hair, and facial form) as classical physical anthropology and the contemporary man-in-the-street used to sort people into groups. All this sorting came long before the arrival of European colonialism. Naturally, the Chinese considered their characteristics the ideal and often belittled people (in this case, Caucasians) who looked different.

ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

Greek and Roman depictions and descriptions of the black Africans to their south and the Scythians and Celts to their north provide further evidence that racial classification predated the advent of European colonialism. The classical artists and authors

contrasted the black skin, frizzy hair, flat noses, and thick lips of the Africans with the straight, often yellow or red hair and the pale white skin of the peoples to the north of them, while regarding their own features as ideal. Citing the opposite characteristics of the Scythians and the black Africans in appearance and behavior, the classical authors developed the first naturalistic explanation of the origin of racial differences: the decreasing intensity of sunlight as one moved from the southernmost to the northernmost regions of the world as they knew it. They used similar names for both the offspring of interracial marriages and for transitional populations with intermediate racial characteristics; this labeling shows that they also recognized that once these traits had been acquired, they were hereditary and transmitted from parents to children.

The first black Africans to appear in Mediterranean-area art outside of Egypt show up in Cretan frescoes from the early second millennium BC. "A procession of coal-black warriors appears in a fresco from Knossos (circa 1550-1500 BC) and another fresco of approximately the same period from the island of Thera carries the profile of a black whose Negroid traits are somewhat reduced—wavy hair, rather thick lips, and medium-broad nose."

Greek, Roman, and Etruscan artistic representations contrasting the skin color, facial features, and hair form of Africans with those of Europeans are plentiful. One striking type (Figure 2.3), of which there are many variations and examples, is a rhyton (jug) with the face of a Caucasoid on one side and that of a black African on the other.

The genitalia of black Africans were also deemed noteworthy to the Greek and Roman artists. Within the same art piece, black males are depicted with penises larger than those of white figures, and in others are shown as being erect.

The Barberini mosaic, a late Hellenistic (circa AD 200) copy of an earlier Ptolemaic original, is a racial map of the Nile region



FIGURE 2.3 Graeco-Roman jug with black and white faces

of Africa as the river flows to the Mediterranean. The people in the foreground are white, but the hunters shown on mountains at the top (the background), which represents the uppermost (southern) origin of the river, are black.

Greek and Roman Racial Classifications

In an early first century AD poem on astrology, Manilius classified the peoples known to the classical world according to skin color: Ethiopians, the blackest; Indians, less sunburned; Egyptians, mildly dark; and the Mauri (Moors), whose name derived from the color of their skin, mulatto. Xenophan in describing the flat noses of Africans was "the first European to apply to Africans a physical

characteristic other than color." To this Herodotus added that the hair of blacks was the "woolliest" of all mankind. Diodorus combined this suite of physical characteristics, noting that Africans were black-skinned, flat-nosed, and woolly haired. Petronius rejected the view of most of today's social scientists and PBS's *Race* documentary that "race is only skin deep." The satirist gibed that the idea that "a white man could pass for an Ethiopian merely by blackening his body was ridiculous, because color alone does not define the group. The white man would also have to change his hair, lips, and add facial scars" (the last being a purely cultural feature—our explanatory note).

The most detailed surviving description of the racially defining characteristics of black Africans from the classical world appears in *The Moretum*, a poem attributed to Virgil (circa 1st century AD). A female character named Scybale is described as "African in race, her whole figure proof of her country—her hair tightly curled, lips thick, color dark, chest broad, breasts pendulous, belly somewhat pinched, legs thick, and feet broad and ample." In his book *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*, Frank M. Snowden compared that description with portrayals by twentieth-century anthropologists E. A. Hooton and M. J. Herskovits (Table 2.1). For example, Hooton described the "outstanding features of the ancient and specialized Negro division of mankind" as "narrow heads and wide noses, thick lips and thin legs, protruding jaws and receding chins, integument rich in pigment but poor in hairy growth, flat feet and round foreheads, tiny curls and big smiles."

Snowden concluded: "While the author of *The Moretum* was writing poetry, not anthropology," his description of the distinguishing racial characteristics of black Africans "is good anthropology; in fact, the ancient and modern phraseology is so similar that the modern might be considered a translation of the ancient" (emphasis added). In his survey of the depiction of black Africans in

TABLE 2.1 Comparison of racial traits of black Africans in the Roman poem *The Moretum* with observations by anthropologists E. A. Hooton and M. J. Herskovits

Racial Trait	Virgil's <i>The Moretum</i> (circa 1st century AD)	E. A. Hooton's <i>Up from the Ape</i> (1946)	M. J. Herskovits in <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i> (XVI, 1960)
Skin color	Dark ("fusca colore")	Integument rich in color	Reddish-brown to deep brownish-black
Hair	Tightly curled ("torta comam") First described by Xenophan and Herodotus	Tiny curls	Hair wiry, tightly curled, and lying close to the scalp
Lips	Puffy ("labro tumens")	Thick lips, puffy, everted	Lips thick
Shoulder or pectoral area	Broad ("pectore lata")	Omitted	Broad shoulders
Waist	Belly somewhat pinched ("compressior aluo")	Omitted	Narrow waist
Legs	Thin ("cruribus exilis")	Thin legs	Arms and legs slender and long in proportion to stature
Feet	Broad and ample ("spatiosa prodiga planta")	Flat feet	Omitted
Breasts	Pendulous ("iacens mammis") Also noted by Roman writer Juvenal	Omitted (but mentioned in J. H. Lewis, <i>The Biology of the Negro</i> , 1942)	Omitted
Other	Omitted (but mentioned by other classical writers and depicted in classical art)	Wide noses, narrow heads, round foreheads, protruding jaws and receding chins, integument poor in hairy growth	Broad nostrils, high cheekbones; prognathous faces, with an acute facial angle; short stocky build and heavily muscled, triangular-shaped torso

SOURCE: Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934).

Egyptian, classical Greek, and Roman art in a second book, *Before Color Prejudice*, Snowden noted how "the ancient artists have furnished vivid pictorial definitions of blacks, a kind of anthropological 'carte d'identité.'"

Greek and Roman Theories of the Origin of Racial Differences

Beginning with Hippocrates, the principal theory used to explain the origin of these differences was climate. Blacks to the south were scorched by the sun, whereas people like the Scythians who lived to the north were subjected to frost. Diodorus, for example, concluded that because of differences in climate, "both the fare and the manner of life and the bodies of the inhabitants [of the other regions] should differ very much from such as are found among us." Sextus Empiricus stated that black Africans aged early because their bodies were aged by the scorching sun, and Britons aged later (a clearly exaggerated 120 years) because their natural heat was maintained longer.

Once formed, however, racial differences were considered to be inherited and not easily changed. For example, Herodotus cited the dark skin and kinky hair of the inhabitants of Colchis (in the Caucasus) as support for the tradition that they were descended from the African soldiers of the Egyptian Pharaoh Sesostris.

The classical writers also noted that the gradations of color and other physical features found among peoples as one traveled north or south were the same as those found in the children of black-white crosses, and they made the connection in attributing an origin to intermediate groups such as the Mauri (Mauretanians, or Moors). Black-white crosses were described as "neither *nigri* [black] nor *fuscus* [dark], but *decolores*, corresponding perhaps to the modern usage of the word 'mulattoes.'" Aristotle made the first reference to mixture between a Greek woman and an Ethiopian: He noted that

the descendants of such unions were "mulattoes," and that should such intermarriage continue, the lines distinguishing the parental races would become blurred.

The reduced African features in the "brown babies," most probably the offspring of black soldiers in the army of the Persian emperor Xerxes that invaded Greece in 480 BC, attracted the eye of artists in the next century and were cited as evidence for the transmission of racial features, as were mixed children from Elis and Sicily.

Race and Slavery in Greece and Rome

The Greek and Roman descriptions and depictions of blacks were not uniformly negative. Slavery was not associated with a particular skin color or race. Many Greek slaves were better educated than their Roman masters, and some black Africans achieved distinction. The fact that the classical authors and artists identified races based on the same traits, on occasion engaged in some derogatory stereotyping, and called attention to the breasts and genitals of black Africans, however, shows once again that these practices long predated European colonialism or American slavery.

ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Islamic civilization offers yet another test of whether the race concept arose only with European colonialism in order to justify white supremacy. The Islamic scholars provide descriptions of the physical and behavioral characteristics of the black Africans to their south and the Europeans to their north. Like the Greeks and Romans, they typically attributed these differences to climate, especially the effects of varying amounts of sunlight.

Despite the Koranic prohibition on graven images, some Islamic art provides further evidence of the portrayal of racial groups. More valuable is the literature. The Koran itself provides

no sanction for racial prejudice. Only two verses directly address the race question. Chapter 30, verse 22, echoes the much earlier Egyptian *Great Hymn to Aten*, quoted earlier. It states: "Among God's signs are the creation of the heavens and of the earth and the diversity of your languages and of your colors. In this indeed are signs for those who know."

Later, chapter 49, verse 13, makes it clear that piety and obedience to Allah are more important than any racial, ethnic, or tribal difference: "O people! We have created you from a male and a female and we have made you into confederacies and tribes so that you may come to know one another. The noblest among you in the eyes of God is the most pious, for God is omniscient and well informed."

Authors as diverse as historian Arnold Toynbee and Malcolm X have therefore praised Islam for its inclusiveness, tolerance, and absence of race prejudice. A more detailed study by Bernard Lewis, however, shows that this judgment may be true only in comparison to its European Christian counterpart. Even then, a careful examination reveals derogatory characterizations of other races, especially black Africans, and an increasing tendency to demean their intellectual abilities. Slavery in the Islamic world was not restricted to blacks. However, over time, it became less common among whites, and those who were slaves could rise to higher positions, whereas blackness became increasingly associated with the most menial and abject forms of servitude.

In *The Arabian Nights*, for example, blacks, whether free or slave, are rarely shown in roles above those of porters, household servants, cooks, bath attendants, and the like. They are also attributed great sexual prowess and appetites. One tale characterizes the sexuality of black slaves as so primal and irresistible to the wife of King Shahriyar and the other women in his harem that the king was possessed of "sexual fantasies, or rather nightmares" that Lewis goes so far as to say have "an Alabama-like quality."

Islamic Racial Classification

As the religion of the Prophet spread from its origin in Arabia, it remained confined to peoples of a similar Middle Eastern racial background. The Islamic conquest of parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe brought very different peoples into the fold. Arabic literature originally used color terms on a personal, within-group basis, much as "Philip the Fair" or "Edward, the Black Prince" referred to complexion or armor rather than race. With the Islamic world eventually spreading from the Atlantic coast of Africa to the Pacific, the only color terms to remain were black, red, and white, each denoting racial, not personal, characteristics. Arabs, along with Persians, Greeks, Turks, and Slavs, were classified as being white or light red, though sometimes the European peoples to the north were described as bright red, pale blue, or dead white. Sub-Saharan Africans were termed "black," and that term was only rarely applied to Indians.

In the earliest Arabic references, Lewis noted,

black Africans are called either Habash or Sudan, the former designating the Ethiopians and their immediate neighbors in the Horn of Africa, the latter (an Arabic word meaning black) denoting blacks in general. It sometimes includes Ethiopians, but never Egyptians, Berbers, or other peoples north of the Sahara. Later, after the Arab expansion into Africa, other and more specific terms are added, the commonest being Nuba, Bujja (or Beja), and Zanj. Nuba, from Nubia, usually designates the Nilotic and sometimes also Hamitic peoples south of Egypt, i.e., roughly in the present area of the republic of the Sudan; the Bujja were nomadic tribes between the Nile and the Red Sea; Zanj, a word of uncertain origin, is used specifically of the Bantu-speaking peoples in East Africa south of the Ethiopians, and sometimes, more loosely of black Africans in general. The term Bilad al-Sudan—"land of the blacks"—is applied

to the whole area of black Africa south of the Sahara, from the Nile to the Atlantic, and including such West African black states as Ghana and Songhay.

As evidence that the Greeks and Romans also recognized the subgroups of black Africans, Snowden cited two plates. The first shows the striking similarity between a fifth century BC terra-cotta head and a contemporary photo of a Shilluk from the Sudan, whom traditional anthropologists considered representative of the "pronounced Negroid or 'pure' type." The second shows the remarkable resemblance between a bronze head-vase from the third or second century BC and a Somali from east Africa, considered representative of the mixed or intermediate type by racial anthropologists. (The photographs are taken from Carleton Coon's books *The Origin of Races* and *The Living Races of Man*. We discuss Coon and his critical role in the post-World War II debate over the reality of race at the end of Chapter 3.)

Together with the specialization and fixing of color terms, Lewis noted, "comes a very clear connotation of inferiority attached to darker and more specifically black skins." Citing a poem in which one character begs for mercy even though "My color is pitch-black, my hair is woolly, my appearance repulsive" [that is, his facial features were typically Negroid rather than Semitic], Lewis pointed out that this reveals the association of "blackness, ugliness, and inferior station" in Islam. It had become the convention by medieval times "to use different words for black and white slaves. White slaves were normally called mamluk, an Arabic word meaning 'owned,' while blacks slaves were called 'abd. In time, the word 'abd ceased to be used of any slaves but black ones and eventually of a black man, irrespective of whether he was slave or not."

Mas'udi (d. AD 956) quoted Galen as allegedly having listed "ten specific attributes of the black man, which are all found in

him and in no other; frizzy hair, thin eyebrows, broad nostrils, thick lips, pointed teeth, smelly skin, black eyes, furrowed hands and feet, a long penis and great merriment. Galen says that merriment dominates the black man because of his defective brain, whence also the weakness of his intelligence." In fact, only two of these traits, black skin and woolly or frizzy hair, can be found in any existing text of Galen. More likely, Mas'udi was simply summarizing the consensus views of the Islamic writers of his time.

The non-European author of this derogatory portrait of black Africans, which for disparagement matches anything to be found in tracts defending slavery in the American South in the days of slavery or Jim Crow, died in AD 956. Given this evidence, one would have to argue that the European colonizers did not construct "race" as a justification for slavery, but picked up an earlier social construction of Islam, which took it from the classical world, which in turn took it from ancient Egypt. Either that, or each of these civilizations independently "constructed" the same worldview, and the civilizations of ancient China and India independently "constructed" similar worldviews, even though they were looking at different groups of people.

Islamic Theory of Racial Origins and Race Differences

The Islamic physician and philosopher Avicenna in a poem offered a racial-classification scheme that took into account both physical and behavioral characteristics, which he explained in terms of climate:

*Do not draw inferences from the color of the skin
if it is conditioned by the country.
Among the Zanj [black African] heat has
transformed their bodies*

*until blackness covers their skins.
While the Slav have become so pale
that their skins are soft and white.
If you define the seven climates
you will know their various temperaments.
The fourth climate is balanced and temperate
and their color depends on temperament.*

The jurist Sa'id al-Andalusi (AD 1029–1070) named the Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Arabs, and Jews as the only peoples who have produced science and learning, and conceded certain accomplishments to the Chinese and the Turks. Following the climatic-zone theory of racial origins and race differences, he dismissed the races of the far north and far south as barbarians “more like beasts than like other men”:

For those who live furthest to the north between the last of the seven climates and the limits of the inhabited world, the excessive distance of the sun in relation to the zenith line makes the air cold and the atmosphere thick. Their temperaments are therefore frigid, their humors raw, their bellies gross, their color pale, their hair long and lank. Thus they lack keenness of understanding and clarity of intelligence, and are overcome by ignorance and dullness, lack of discernment, and stupidity. Such are the Slavs, the Bulgars, and their neighbors. For those peoples on the other hand who live near and beyond the equinoctial line to the limit of the inhabited world in the south, the long presence of the sun at the zenith makes the air hot and the atmosphere thin. Because of this their temperaments become hot and their humours fiery, their color black and their hair woolly. Thus they lack self-control and steadiness of mind and are overcome by fickleness, foolishness and ignorance. Such are the blacks, who live at the extremity of the land of Ethiopia, the Nubians, the Zanj, and the like.

Sa'id reserved his greatest contempt for the latter people, whom he dismisses as "rabble," "savages," and "scum," barely part of the human order, lacking any semblance of government or religion.

The fourteenth-century geographer and historian Ibn-Khaldun noted that unlike the Arabs, the Greeks and Romans did not apply a special term based on skin color to describe the northern European peoples with whom they came in contact because "whiteness was something usual and common (to them) and they did not see anything sufficiently remarkable in it to cause them to use it as a specific term."

The Islamic scholars also followed the Greek and Roman philosophers in believing that once racial differences were caused by the differing amounts of sunlight, they were inherited (an early form of Lamarck's theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics). For example, Ibn Habib, the ninth-century jurist from Islamic Spain, wrote that "A black woman may be repudiated if there is no blackness in her family; likewise a scald-head [that is, scabrous], because such things are covered by kinship." Since according to strict Muslim practice, a woman is to remain veiled and unseen by her prospective groom until they are married, the meaning of Habib's ruling is that a husband may repudiate a new wife (that is, annul the marriage) if, upon removing her veil he finds her to be black or scabrous, because both conditions were considered not only undesirable but hereditary as well.

Islamic View of Black Africans

The poet and satirist Jahiz of Basra (circa AD 776-869), in a manner not unlike that of the white defenders of slavery and colonialism who allegedly invented "race," described Africans (termed Zanj) as "the least intelligent and the least discerning of mankind, and the least capable of understanding the consequences of

actions." Like his later counterparts, Jahiz credited black Africans, "despite their dimness, their boundless stupidity, their crude perceptions and their evil dispositions," with the ability to "make long speeches."

Ibn Khaldun had this view: "The only people who accept slavery are the Negroes, owing to their low degree of humanity and their proximity to the animal stage. Other persons who accept the status of slave do so as a means of attaining high rank, or power, or wealth, as is the case with the Mameluke Turks in the East and with those Franks and Galicians who enter the service of the state [in Spain]."

In addition to the pejorative of not knowing their own fathers, practicing cannibalism, and having little understanding or intelligence, Maqdisi (circa tenth century AD) described the Zanj as "people of black color, flat noses, kinky hair." Similarly, the geographer Idrisi disparaged black Africans as having "stinking sweat" as well as a "lack of knowledge and defective minds such that men of learning are almost unknown among them." The thirteenth-century Persian writer Nasir al-Din Tusi went even further, claiming that the Zanj differed from animals only in walking on two rather than four feet, and that "Many have observed that the ape is more teachable and more intelligent than the Zanji." In addition to lack of culture and intelligence, Islamic writers also disparaged black Africans as being hypersexual, yet also filled with simple piety and carefree, happy, and with a natural sense of rhythm. Without knowing the source, one could easily believe such characterizations came from the Cotton South of the United States.

The Arabs, "like all other conquerors before and since, were reluctant to concede equality to the conquered, and for as long as they could they maintained their privileged position." In short, white European society was not the first to apply abusive stereotypes to black Africans.

Islamic Black Slavery Preceded Slavery by White Europeans

Although there were black slaves, as well as slaves of other races, in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, "the massive development of the slave trade in black Africa," according to Lewis, dated "from the Arab period." He further noted: "The total identification of blackness with slavery which occurred in North and South America never took place in the Muslim world. There were always white slaves as well as black ones. Nevertheless, the identification of blackness with certain forms of slavery went very far—and in later centuries white slaves grew increasingly rare."

Anticipating the claims of Southern slave holders, one Muslim legend attributed the servile status of blacks to their being descended from Ham, one of the three sons of Noah. Ham and his descendants, it was claimed, were cursed because of his skin color rather than for his having looked on his father's drunken nakedness, as offered in the much later biblical rationalizations for black slavery.

Ibn Hazm (AD 994–1064) at the beginning of a treatise on genealogy stated, "God has decreed that the most devout is the noblest even if he be a Negress's bastard, and that the sinner and unbeliever is at the lowest level even if he be the son of prophets." As Lewis commented, "The sentiment is impeccably pious and egalitarian—yet somehow does not entirely carry conviction." Another story tells of a black African king who is kidnapped by his Muslim guests and then sold into slavery. When he meets them years later he shows no resentment, because they brought him to Islam.

Similar moralistic, patronizing remarks are easy enough to find in the writings of abolitionists, anticolonialists, and Christian missionaries. According to Lewis, "At no time did the Islamic world ever practice the kind of racial exclusivism . . . which has persisted until very recently in the United States," but he also noted that

"Even now, members of the comparatively small number of recognizably black families in the Middle East tend on the whole to marry among their own kind." He cogently warned against "the illogical assumption that the reprobation of prejudice in a society proves its absence. In fact, of course, it reveals its presence." For example, one utopian Islamic group, the Carmathians, established a community in Bahrain. Although it abolished many of the distinctions of persons and property that had arisen in Islam, all hard manual labor was performed by 30,000 black slaves.

Nor was the treatment of black African slaves necessarily better in the Islamic world. A British observer in Egypt in the 1840s estimated that a generation of slaves would die from disease and overwork every five to six years. Even allowing for exaggeration, these conditions, though by no means typical of the Islamic world, equal the worst found in the European colonies in the New World or the antebellum South. The utopian view of race relations under Islam is contradicted by the ironic and tragic fact that when the American Civil War cut off the supply of cotton to Britain, the compensating boom in Egyptian cotton provided the funds for increased purchase of black African slaves to work the Egyptian cotton fields.

Neither the nexus of race and slavery nor opposition to it was a unique construction of Western society. "It is the fashion here, as well as in our colonies, to consider the negroes as the last link in the chain of humanity, between the monkey tribe and man; but I do not believe the negro is inferior to the white man in intellect; and I do not suffer the eloquence of the slave driver to convince me that the negro is so stultified as to be unfit for freedom." So wrote an Englishman, R. R. Madden, traveling in Egypt in 1825—more than three decades before Charles Darwin wrote *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* and before any European invoked his theory to support a racial hierarchy in which whites were at the top and black Africans at the bottom.

Eschewing any attempt to "argue the relative wickedness of Muslim and Western practice," Lewis concluded that his review of the evidence served "to refute the claims of exclusive virtue and exclusive vice, and to point to certain common failings of our common humanity."

HUNTER-GATHERER SOCIETIES

In all of the civilizations noted here, their art and literature sorted peoples into races based on characteristics such as skin color, hair form, and nose shape. Each group described itself as superior to the others, which is perhaps understandable given that its level of technological complexity was higher than that of the different-looking peoples whom they encountered. If, as we have argued, race is not a construction of European colonialism, then perhaps the notion of superiority is a tendency of expanding civilizations when they encounter less complex societies. Even this attitude, however, does not seem to be the case.

Rock paintings from Africa show that the artists distinguished between the Bushmen (the people who today live in the Kalahari and are well known from the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*). At one time the Sahara was a fertile area inhabited by elephants and rhinos, rather than the desert it is today. It also apparently was home to at least two different human populations, Pygmies and Bushmen. A trail of rock art, depicting the animal life and the two races, suggests their migration from the north down to their present refuge in southern Africa.

The reaction of the Bushmen upon first seeing Asians provides not only another example but one that also comes as close as possible to a natural experiment to test whether racial sorting is a social construction or a human universal that occurs wherever and whenever there are visible differences among peoples. Further,

this example demonstrates that such sorting is done by both the dominant group that possesses the technologically complex society and by the technologically less sophisticated, subordinate group.

Henry Harpending, professor of anthropology at the University of Utah and a member of the National Academy of Sciences, has done extensive research among the Bushmen of the Kalahari desert of southern Africa. Modern DNA analysis sorts the Bushmen with the other peoples of sub-Saharan Africa. Traditional anthropology, however, did not. Their yellowish rather than black skin, high cheekbones, folded eyelids, the occurrence of "shovel-shaped" (versus flat) incisor teeth, and what was then termed "the Mongolian dark spot" that appears on the lower back of newborns led anthropologists to believe that Bushmen were more like Asians than other Africans. And so, interestingly, do the Bushmen today. They sort all mammals into three mutually exclusive groups: "!"a" (the exclamation point represents the "clicking" sound for which their language is well known) denotes edible animals such as warthogs and giraffes; "!oma" designates an inedible animal such as a jackal, a hyena, a black African, or a European white; the term "zhu" is reserved for humans, that is, the Bushmen themselves. When they first encountered Asian researchers, the Bushmen immediately classified them as "zhu," even though they had never seen members of that racial group before.

RACE IS AS OLD AS HISTORY OR EVEN PREHISTORY

The surveys presented here of the art and literature of non-European civilizations and the art and oral record of the Bushmen lend no support to the view that the race concept was "constructed" by Europeans. What is novel was that Western European

civilization was the first to describe race and race differences using the grammar and lexicon of science rather than of religion or philosophy or protoscience. But not until the European Age of Exploration did the tradition that led to modern science begin. In the next chapter, we trace the development of anthropology as the science of race. It too was subject to all the prejudices and stereotyping of the nonscientific approaches to understanding human diversity. The unique feature about science, however, is that it is a self-correcting process.

The use of the DNAPrint methodology in identifying the Baton Rouge serial killer is described in Dana Hawkins Simons, "Getting DNA to Bear Witness: Genetic Tests Can Reveal Ancestry, Giving Police a New Source Of Clues," *Silicon Investor*, Science and Technology section, 6/23/03 (<http://www.siliconinvestor.com/stocktalk/msg.gsp?msgid=19042492>); Josh Noel, "Florida Lab Pointed to Race—Serial Killer Search Changed Course" (<http://www.2theadvocate.com/cgi-bin/printme.pl>); ABC News, "Racial Profiling—Will a New DNA Test Shatter Serial Killer Profile?" (http://abcnews.go.com/sections/GMA/Primetype/forensics_serialkiller030613.html); Nancy Touchette, "Genome Test Nets Suspected Serial Killer," *Genome News Network* (http://www.genomenewsnetwork.org/articles/06_03/serial.shtml); "Law Enforcement Independently Validate DNAPrint's Forensics Tests," *Forensic Nurse* (<http://www.forensicnursemag.com/hotnews/31h2272358.html>). The underlying methodology of DNAPrint is described in *DNA Witness 2.0 Validation Studies* (Sarasota, FL: DNAPrint Genomics in conjunction with National Center for Forensic Science and San Diego Police Department Crime Lab, no date). Descriptions of the methodology that have appeared in peer-reviewed scientific journals include Michael Bamshad et al., "Human Population Genetic Structure and Inference of Group Membership," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 72 (2003):578–589; and M. D. Shriver et al., "Skin Pigmentation, Biogeographical Ancestry, and Admixture Mapping," *Human Genetics* 112, 4 (2003):387–399.

The research on how children develop the concept of race without being taught can be found in Lawrence A. Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making: Cognition, Culture, and the Child's Construction of Human Kinds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 97, xi.

CHAPTER 2: RACE AND HISTORY

The view of early anthropologists on Egyptian art is from Alfred C. Haddon, *History of Anthropology* (London: Watts, 1934). Information on the concept of race as shown in the art and literature of ancient

Egypt, Greece, and Rome (including Table 2.1 comparing the African traits in *The Moretum* with those identified by contemporary anthropologists) can be found in Frank Snowden Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); and Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934).

The sources for ancient India are R. Craven, *Indian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 9; L. Torday, *The Mounted Archers: The Beginnings of Central Asian History* (Edinburgh: Durham Academic Press, 1997), p. 39; and R. Goring, ed., *Larousse Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions* (New York: Larousse, 1994), p. 64. For the Islamic period, a wealth of information, including plates of art pieces showing different races, can be found in B. Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). For ancient China, see E. Barber, *The Mummies of Ürümchi* (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 18.

CHAPTER 3:

ANTHROPOLOGY AS THE SCIENCE OF RACE

This chapter is adapted largely from Frank Miele (the junior author), "The Shadow of Caliban: An Introduction to the Tempestuous History of Anthropology," *Skeptic* 9:1 (2001):22-35. Our source for *Federalist* Number 10 is Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 78.

For more information on the early history of anthropology, see Haddon, *History of Anthropology*.

The definitive work on the American School of Anthropology is W. Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). John S. Haller Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), also supplies useful information.

For Franz Boas and the Boasian school of anthropology, see Marshall Hyatt, *Franz Boas, Social Activist* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); and Regna Darnell, *And Along Came Boas: Continuity and Revolution in*