

PREFACE

Race has long been a topic of great interest to anthropologists of all types, including biological, cultural, archaeological, and linguistic anthropologists. In fact, the roots of anthropology can clearly be seen in the 19th-century fascination with racial differences and their meanings. I come to the study of race late, having spent most of my research career as a biological anthropologist working in other areas of inquiry, particularly the study of human and primate evolution. But as a result of developing and teaching a course over the past decade at Western Michigan University titled "Race, Biology, and Culture," I have become fascinated with both the history of anthropological attempts to deal with human diversity and the ways in which modern anthropology can lead to a new understanding of human variation. This book is a result of that fascination.

As a teacher on race and human diversity at the university level, I have been struck by the absence of a text that deals with anthropological notions of race and human difference from the dual perspectives of biology and culture. While many fine texts written by cultural anthropologists and sociologists provide a cultural critique of racial notions, none includes much biology. Similarly, one can find books that document at great length the biological intricacies of human diversity, but they typically devote scant attention, if any, to the cultural side of things. Of course, the gulf between anthropologists who study human biology (biological or physical anthropologists) and those who study culture (social or cultural anthropologists) is one of the central features of academic anthropology today. The few departments that retain a four-field approach seem to do it mostly through lip service, and increasing specialization in both research and teaching has become the norm for most professional anthropologists. My goal in writing this book is to attempt to bridge this gap with a textbook that critically analyzes race from both a biological and a cultural perspective.

The biocultural perspective is necessary if we as anthropologists and teachers are to be successful in explaining what I like to refer to as the "central paradox of race." The paradox refers to two claims that are often made by anthropologists: (1) that race does not exist and (2) that race is extremely important. The biocultural perspective resolves the paradox by clarifying that race fails (i.e., it doesn't exist) as a biological concept but that race as a social phenomenon can sometimes hold life-or-death significance (i.e., it is important). While some chapters of this book mostly explore biological details (e.g., chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6) and others cover primarily cultural or historical material (e.g., chapters 1, 4, and 9), my goal is to provide a synthetic, biocultural approach as often as possible. Chapters 7 (on nutrition and health) and 8 (on race and intelligence), for example, provide a cultural and historical background and context for primarily biological data on aspects of human difference. Each chapter has a list of discussion questions at the end, and most chapters include one or more boxes in which interesting related topics are set off from the main narrative. The overall message of this book is that race makes little sense as biology but needs to be understood as an aspect of culture—indeed, a very significant part of American culture.

The book follows the structure of my Race, Biology, and Culture class, but instructors may assign the chapters in almost any order that suits their teaching. The book begins with a short chapter that lays out some of the basic problems of a biological theory of race, in particular the arbitrariness of most racial classifications based on biological differences between populations. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the biological and evolutionary background to a consideration of the biology of human differences. Chapter 4 provides a historical look at the ways that anthropologists have conceptualized and studied racial differences since the first scientific racial classification was proposed by Linnaeus in 1758. Chapters 5 and 6 return to a study of the biological basis for human variation by considering how humans have adapted to life in stressful environments (e.g., hot, cold, and high-altitude environments). My approach to the study of biological differences in humans is dynamic and processual, and it is always informed by evolutionary theory. So these two chapters also discuss evolutionary scenarios that explain why and how human populations have evolved different body

shapes, sizes, cardiovascular physiology, and skin colors in different environments. Chapter 7 provides a biocultural look at human diet, nutrition, and patterns of sickness and health. Chapter 8 looks at the long and sordid history of scientific attempts to create a racial hierarchy of supposed inborn differences in human intelligence. Finally, Chapter 9 describes the historical record of race as a cultural phenomenon in the United States, including government legislation, Supreme Court decisions, citizenship, and a brief history of the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century.

My hope is that students who read this book will learn how anthropologists thought about race in the past and think about it today and will consequently be able to analyze issues of race and ethnicity more thoughtfully in their own lives and become better prepared for their roles as citizens of a multiracial 21st-century America.

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Robert L. Anemone

Kalamazoo, Michigan