

SOU 2013-14 Campus Theme Proposal:

RACE

Geneticist Richard Lewentin states: ““Race” is a term of uncertain etymology and many meanings. It may refer to a whole species (the “human race”), a collection of loosely related individuals with a common appearance (the “white race”), a nation (the “race of Englishmen”), or a single family (“he was the last of his race”).”

Race is a powerful word. Race shapes how one sees and is seen by others. Yet, people poorly understand what race is and isn't. To help promote a broad understanding of race and human variation, we propose RACE as our campus theme for the 2013-14 academic year.

According to scholar Michael James of Bucknell University, “the concept of race has historically signified the division of humanity into a small number of groups” based on several criteria, including the following:

- (1) Races reflect some type of biological foundation, be it Aristotelian essences or modern genes;
- (2) This biological foundation generates discrete racial groupings . . .
- (3) This biological foundation is inherited from generation to generation, allowing observers to identify an individual’s race through her ancestry or genealogy; and
- (4) Genealogical investigation should identify each race’s geographic origin, typically in Africa, Europe, Asia, or North and South America” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

We would like the campus to explore questions such as:

- Is race a human invention?
- Is race about culture, not biology?
- How do we approach and understand race when it is embedded in institutions and everyday life?

As with our previous campus themes, we will explore Race from a variety of perspectives. Towards this end, the different school areas will be invited to take the lead in helping us in our explorations. We will begin with natural sciences, followed by the social sciences in winter, and conclude with the arts and humanities in the spring.

The goal is for the campus and our larger community to engage in rigorous intellectual conversations about this important subject, informed by the latest research, scholarship, and insights from a wide variety of perspectives.

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