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Transcript

RACE - THE POWER OF AN ILLUSION

Episode One: The Difference Between Us

(01:00:56)

NARRATOR: There is no question that individual human beings are different, one from the other. Our eyes confirm this day in and day out. Skin color. Body shape. Hair form. Eye shape. For several hundred years we have used these visual differences to classify people into four or five groups we call races.

PILAR OSSORIO, Legal Scholar / Microbiologist: We have a notion of race as being divisions among people that are deep, that are essential that are somehow biological or even genetic, and that are unchanging - that these are clear cut distinct categories of people.

RICHARD LEWONTIN, Evolutionary Geneticist: And the beauty of the race business is that you can identify people by just looking at them. You don't even have to look at their genes because one manifestation of their genes is there - namely skin color or eye shape or hair shape - and then that's the key to everything.

NARRATOR: The idea of race assumes that simple external differences, rooted in biology, are linked to other, more complex internal differences. Like athletic ability. Musical aptitude. Intelligence. This belief is based on the idea that race is biologically real.

OSSORIO: All of our genetics now is telling us that that's not the case. We can't find any genetic markers that are in everybody of a particular race and in nobody of some other race. We can't find any genetic markers that define race.

SCOTT BRONSON, DNA Workshop Leader: And actually, what we're going to generate are billions of copies of a little section of your, of your genetic code.

NARRATOR: These students are gathering for a DNA workshop led by Cold Spring Harbor Labs teacher, Scott Bronson. Marcus, Gorgeous, Jackie, Noah, Hannah, Jamil and their fellow students are about to explore the biology of human variation.

BRONSON: But there's another type of DNA. Does anyone know what that type of DNA is?

STUDENT (off camera): Mitochondrial?

BRONSON: Mitochondrial DNA...very good.

NARRATOR: They will compare their skin colors. They will type their blood. And they will swab cells from inside their mouths to extract a small portion of their own DNA. Once the sample is ready, they will compare some of their genetic similarities and differences. The students begin the workshop with the same assumptions most of us have.

BRONSON: As you begin to look at the data, you might want to keep in your mind, who you think you might be most similar to and who you think you might be most different to.

NOAH: I think I probably have the most similarities with, uh, Mr. Bronson or with Kiril because we are white males, both Kiril and I and both Scott Bronson and I.

JAMIL: I think I have the most differences with Kiril and the most similarities with Gorgeous. She's African American, I'm African American. I mean, like Black.

HANNAH: I think maybe me and Natalia are most alike. She's Latin American, and I'm Latin American. I figured that there would be tons of differences especially with people who looked so different.

(01:04:38)

ALAN GOODMAN, Biological Anthropologist: To understand why the idea of race is a biological myth requires a major paradigm shift, an absolute paradigm shift, a shift in perspective. And for me, it's like seeing, you know, what it must have been like to understand that the world isn't flat. And perhaps I can invite you to a mountain top and you can look out the window and at the horizon and see, "oh what I thought was flat I can see a curve in now," that the world is much more complicated. In fact, that race is not based on biology but race is rather an idea that we ascribe to biology.

NARRATOR: The idea of race as biology is ferociously persistent on America's playing fields. Gorgeous Harper and her teammates are competing at the Adidas Nationals.

GORGEOUS: I love to run track - I've been running track since I was eight years old. The people I train with, they all want to be the best - and you gotta put in the hard work.

NARRATOR: This is the top event for elite high school track and field stars. And while racial differences are not necessarily discussed openly, they are often part of the careful calculation of competitive edge.

FEMALE RUNNER: Well, I've heard, some rumors I've heard are just like Blacks have an extra muscle in their leg. But I don't think anything's true.

SECOND FEMALE RUNNER: I assume that a white girl can't beat me in the 200. In my mind I don't think she can beat me, but I won't, I won't sleep on her.

MALE RUNNER: I don't want to get too controversial here, since I really don't know exactly. But I'd say that there's maybe a little bit that - not to use as an excuse as why they beat me sometimes - but maybe, considering when you, when you look at the Olympics, you know, who, who tends to dominate the 100, the 200 and the quarter, for the most part. I'd just have to say the way it all falls out tends to point to what your race is.

JON ENTINE (in news clip) I'm really saying that different populations, whether it's West African descended Blacks, and that's what African Americans trace their ancestry to West Africa, or East Africans, or whites or Asians, they all have different body types and different physiological structures that allow them to have advantages in one sport or another. There's a genetic basis for these kinds of differences. Through, uh, culture, environment, training, athletes can't dramatically change the limits of what they can be.

JIM BROWN (in news clip): I would like to say to Jon there is no scientific definition that holds up about race. Race has changed its definition in this country to the benefit of those who wanted to define it differently. And there is no scientific place to start from, so you have no basis for your work.

NARRATOR: We can see differences among populations, but can populations be bundled into what we call races? How many races would there be? Five? Fifty-five? Who decides? And how different would they really be from one another?

(01:08:20)

JOSEPH GRAVES, Evolutionary Biologist: The measured amount of genetic variation in the human population is extremely small. And that is something that, that people need to wrap themselves around. That genetically, we really aren't very different.

NARRATOR: In fact, genetically, we are among the most similar of all species. Only one out of every thousand nucleotides that make up our genetic code is different, one individual from another. These look-alike penguins have twice the amount of genetic difference, one from the other, than humans. And these fruit flies? Ten times more difference. Any two fruit flies may be as different genetically from each other, as a human is from a chimpanzee. So the central question for us is: of the small amount of variation between us, what if any, is mapped along what we think of as racial lines?

Because we live in a racialized society, this is not an academic question. We have a long history of searching

for racial differences and attributing performance and behavior to them. For two hundred years, scientists poked and prodded, measured and mapped the human body searching for a biological basis to race. Some measured facial angle to illustrate the proximity of races to the primitive. Others calibrated skull size to identify those with superior or inferior intelligence. Measures of eye shape, hair form, even brain color were scrutinized in the hunt for the fundamental sources of racial difference.

EVELYNN HAMMONDS, Historian of Science: If we just take African Americans as an example, there's not a single body part that hasn't been subjected to this kind of analysis. You'll find articles in the medical literature about the Negro ear, and the Negro nose, and the Negro leg, and the Negro heart, and the Negro eye, and the Negro foot - and it's every single body part.

And they're constantly looking for some organ that might be so fundamentally different in size and character that you can say this is something specific to the Negro versus whites and other groups.

Scientists are part of their social context. Their ideas about what race is are not simply scientific ones, are not simply driven by the data that they are working with. That it's also informed by the societies in which they live.

(01:12:00)

NARRATOR: At the turn of the 20th century, American society was riding a wave of confidence as an emerging industrial power. And the face of its power and prosperity was white.

African Americans lived under the yoke of Jim Crow segregation. Most surviving Native Americans had been banished to reservations. And new immigrants crowded into urban ghettos. Disease was rampant. Death rates soared. Infant mortality was high. To many, this reflected a preordained natural order.

HAMMONDS: Those that looked, wanted to confirm what they saw, which is to say that the proper place of, say the Negro, or in other regions of the country, the Native American, or the Chinese, were at the bottom of the, the social and political hierarchy. And if you can say that they are fundamentally biologically different, than they should be, then it's natural for them to be at the bottom of our social hierarchy.

GOODMAN: The biology becomes an excuse for social differences. The social differences become naturalized in biology. It's not that our institutions cause differences in infant mortality, it's that there really are biological differences between the races.

NARRATOR: For Prudential Life Insurance statistician, Frederick Hoffman, those differences could lead to only one fate for African Americans. "In vital capacity," he wrote, "the tendency of the Negro race has been downward. This tendency must lead to a still greater mortality. And in the end, cause the extinction of the race."

Hoffman's *Race, Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* was published in 1896, the same year the Supreme Court legalized segregation. It was one of the most influential publications of its day.

HAMMONDS: What's interesting is that it resonated in the minds of so many other social observers of the time, the extinction thesis. It, it fit into their notions of how, uh, races become ascendant in the world. They looked at other groups of people in various stages beneath them as approaching the completely civilized stage.

NARRATOR: Hoffman presented his statistical data as unimpeachable science. He compared rates of death and disease between African Americans and whites, and, not surprisingly, found enormous disparities. But his data analysis was flawed. He ignored the insidious effects of poverty and social neglect on health.

In contrast to today's belief in Black physical superiority, Hoffman concluded that African Americans were innately infirmed. As such, attempts to improve their housing, health and education would be futile. Their extinction was inevitable, encoded in their blood.

Racial purification was one aim of the Eugenics movement. The science of eugenics rested on simple Mendelian genetics. One gene each from father and mother, it was believed, gave rise to any trait, physical, behavioral, even moral.

GRAVES: Some of these things were things like the ability to play chess, rowdiness, congenital feeble mindedness. Um, uh, virtually any cultural or behavioral trait you could imagine. Now, the mistake that they were making was assuming that complex behaviors could be reduced to simple Mendelian genes.

NARRATOR: Nonetheless, eugenicists used the science of the day to advance a social agenda widely

accepted in white America - to breed the best and the brightest, always white, and breed out society's worst and weakest of all colors.

HAMMONDS: There's a lot of concern about race mixing. You don't want a superior race, a race with great qualities of intellect and achievement and musical genius, and these kinds of things, to mix with a race on a lower stage of civilization that has fewer of these characteristics because that again would bring down the level of those characteristics and what you want to have for your civilization.

NARRATOR: What you did not want for your civilization was found in the Blue Hills of Virginia. Mongrel Virginians. Mixed race. Unclassifiable, and worse, able to pass for white, circumvent segregation laws and breed into the white race.

They were called the WIN Tribe for their white, Indian and Negro ancestry. "A combination of the worst racial traits, a badly put together people", said Charles Davenport, leader of the American Eugenics movement.

To keep America's mongrels at bay, eugenicists proposed a series of restrictive measures unthinkable today. Yet they were adopted within and outside of America. Taken to their extreme, they fueled one of the century's greatest horrors.

GRAVES: The Nazi propaganda machine pointed out that their eugenic policies were entirely consistent and in fact derived from, ideas of American race scientists.

NARRATOR: At the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Hitler's Aryan race was to have confirmed its place at the top of nature's hierarchy. But the star of the games would shatter those expectations.

(01:19:27)

As a child, Jesse Owens had been chronically ill, destined it seemed to fulfill Hoffman's extinction thesis. Until a teacher intervened. "When he first asked me to go out for the track team in fifth grade," Owens wrote in his autobiography, "it wasn't because he saw any potential champion in me; it was because he saw a potential corpse."

How could a society steeped in the science of racial inferiority reconcile itself to Owens's four gold medals? By conceding innate athletic superiority to African Americans while denying them so-called civilized capacities. In the words of American team coach Dean Cromwell, the Negro athlete excelled because he was "closer to the primitive...it was not so long ago that his ability to sprint and jump was a life and death matter to him in the jungle."

ANNOUNCER (in film clip): To Owens, star of the squad, go the laurels of the champion.

JESSE OWENS (in film clip): The competition was grand, and we're very glad to come out on top. Thank you very kindly.

A flurry of debate between racial scientists and those contesting their assumptions greeted Owens's accomplishments.

GOODMAN: With the rise of the great Negro athletes in the 1930s, it became this question that there must be a reason that they're great, and that that reason must reside in biology rather than in, in culture or history or circumstance. And Jesse Owens was picked apart.

HAMMONDS: When the African American anthropologist and physician Montague Cobb is trying to explain why Jesse Owens was such an outstanding track star, he does so by talking about his body. He talks about his feet, he talks about his legs, his calves, his chest capacity. And he comes to the conclusion, of course, that, you know, you can't say that Negroes have some special characteristics that make them more fit as runners.

NARRATOR: Among the few who challenged racial science, Cobb wrote, "There is not one, single, physical feature, including skin color, which all our Negro champions have in common which would identify them as Negro."

But what marker would identify them as Negro, in the first place. Jackie as Asian? Noah as white? Gorgeous as Black?

GOODMAN: Think about race in its universality. Where is your measurement device? There is no way to

measure race. We sometimes do it by skin color, other people may do it by hair texture - other people may have the dividing lines different in terms of skin color. What is black in the United States is not what's black in Brazil or what's black in South Africa.

STEPHEN JAY GOULD, Paleontologist: My favorite trivia question in baseball is which Italian-American player for the Brooklyn Dodgers once hit 40 home runs in a season and no one ever gets it right, because the answer is Roy Campanella, who is as Italian as he was Black. He had an Italian father and a Black mother, he's always classified as Black. You see, American racial classification is totally cultural. Who's Tiger Woods? Who's Colin Powell? Colin Powell's as Irish as he is African. Being Black has been defined as just looking dark enough that anyone can see you are.

(01:23:47)

HAMMONDS: When I was a child, one of the things my father bought me was a set of Time-Life books on science. And a book on evolution had in it a skin color scale that went from one to thirty-six. And I would spend hours putting my arm against the scale in the book, the picture in the book, trying to figure out what number my color was. And I couldn't quite find myself on the scale.

GORGEOUS: You can be either 19 or 20.

STUDENT: Who would be this color, you or me?

GORGEOUS: Let me say me.

MARCUS: I'd say that Jon and Noah, both white by appearance, and Jackie and I both fit under the Asian classification. But I guess the thing that surprised me was with the skin color test, you know, what should you technically call the entire group.

JON: I would never know that all our, all our skin colors are so similar.

JACKIE: I bet I match you.

JON: Exactly, like we match.

MARCUS: Should you call them all white or should you call them eleven to fifteen? You know?

NOAH: I'm white.

NOAH: Would I trade my skin color?...um...I probably wouldn't trade my skin color. It's something that I've taken for granted. It's also a privilege, I guess.

NOAH: I think 13 is closer.

STUDENT: Wow, we're like all 13.

NOAH: There's no profit in denying it, that, um, that there is a certain advantage to being white.

GORGEOUS: It's not why I'm B negative, you know what I'm saying.

NARRATOR: We all have the same 35,000 or so genes, but over time mutations cause variations in our DNA. Today, some genes, like those for skin color, come in different forms.

MARY-CLAIRE KING, Geneticist: In a few genes that control the colors of melanin in our skin, different alleles, different mutations occurred that were positively selected so that many of us with very light skin lost the capacity to make dark melanin.

NARRATOR: Dark melanin blocks out some ultraviolet light and is found where sunlight is intense. Lighter melanin is found where sunlight is less intense. Scientists debate why this is.

KING: One hypothesis is that it happened because sunlight is essential to have adequate vitamin D. In northern latitudes with very little light during the winter, one needed every bit of light that one could capture in order to be able to have adequate, active vitamin D. And children in particular, would need to have, would need to be able to absorb into their skin enough light to have vitamin D present to keep them healthy.

GRAVES: The best way to understand the genetic differences that we find in human populations is that populations differ by distance, and it's a continuous change, um, from one group to another. And one way we can look at this is use the example of skin color. If we were to only look at people in the tropics and people in Norway, we'd come to the conclusion that there's a group of people who have light skin and there's a group of people who have dark skin. But if we were to walk from the tropics to Norway, what we would see is a continuous change in skin tone. And at no point along that trip would we be able to say, "Oh, this is the place in which we go from the dark race to the light race."

GOODMAN: Human biological variation is so complex. There is so many aspects of human variation. So there are many, many ways to begin to explain them.

(01:28:21)

NARRATOR: Variation in some traits. Like eye shape, hair texture, whether or not your tongue curls, involves very few genes. And even those genes haven't all been identified.

Variation in traits we regard as socially important is much more complicated. Differences in how our brains work, how we make art, how gracefully we move.

Genes may contribute to variation in these traits, but to the extent they do, there would be a cascade of genes at work, interacting with each other and the environment, in relationships so intricate and complex, that science has hardly begun to decipher them.

LEWONTIN: People are always talking about genes for things, the genes for athletic ability, the genes for making money, the genes for intelligence. And you have to be very careful. Even when there are genes that influence those things, to talk about it as genes for them is not so clear.

OSSORIO: What makes us different is both those genetic differences that we have between us and also the interaction of that genome with the environment, and the environment is a very, very complicated thing. So when I say, I sort of mean the environment writ large, everything from the environment in the womb to the environment in your school.

NARRATOR: In the urban environment of the 1930s, Jewish teams dominated American basketball. Sons of immigrants, theirs were the hoop dreams of the day.

GRAVES: And it was said that the reason that they were so good at basketball was because the, the artful dodger characteristic of the Jewish culture made them good at this sport. There are strong cultural aspects of what sports individuals choose to play that has to do with the interaction of individual genetic background of opportunity and training. History shows us, that as opportunities change in society, different groups get drawn into sporting arenas.

NARRATOR: By 1992, America's Olympic Dream team was almost completely African American. Ten years later, almost 20% of NBA starters would be foreign born. The top NBA draft pick? Chinese.

GRAVES: We can't come to any fast hard rule about how, uh, genetic ancestry is going to influence the ability of an individual to perform an athletic event. So I don't think we're ever going to be able to isolate a gene for athletic performance.

NARRATOR: Or a gene for any complex trait. If genes contribute to Marcus' musical talent, there would be dozens, interacting with environment, training, and practice. Those genes would be inherited independently of the genes for eye shape, skin color and hair form which Marcus inherited through his Korean - and Jamaican ancestors.

(01:32:21)

GOODMAN: For race to be more than skin deep, one has to have concordance. In other words, skin color needs to reflect things that are deeper in the body, under the skin. But most of human variation is non-concordant. Skin color or eye color or hair color is not correlated with height or weight. And they're definitely not correlated with more complex traits like intelligence or athletic performance.

KIRIL (off-camera): Wait, who is the person you said was going to be most similar? Jamil right?

GORGEOUS: Yeah, what's his number?

KIRIL: He's 34.

NARRATOR: The tools of modern genetics allow the students to explore the idea of race and concordance. From the beginning, they believed they would be most similar genetically to those whose racial ancestry they believed they shared.

KIRIL: Who did you say was going to be most different?

GORGEOUS: Noah, and he's...

KIRIL: 9.

GORGEOUS: 9

NARRATOR: They have now sequenced a small loop of their mitochondrial DNA.

KING: If we want a very fine scale for assessing how similar we are to each other, person by person, we can do that by sequencing that small bit of mitochondrial DNA.

NARRATOR: mtDNA is a second set of DNA, found at the cell's mitochondria. It does not code for any traits, and is inherited only from our mother.

KING: Now, what will it tell us? It will tell us a whole lot about one of our ancestors, our mother's mother's mother's mother's mother.

NARRATOR: The students' mtDNA appears as the letters A, C, T, and G, representing the four nucleotides that define our DNA. The students are sampling a small sequence, about three-hundred and fifty letters long. They find that most of it is identical, one to the other. What is not, is highlighted in yellow.

GORGEOUS: Cause I'm different. I'm, I'm really different.

NARRATOR: Jamil thought he'd have the fewest mtDNA differences with Gorgeous.

JAMIL: I was more like Kiril than I was than Gorgeous. She has like twelve differences, and like Kiril is like a white, tall, blond...from Russia, and, and, and, like, we seem completely different but it's less differences.

JON: But I think it's hard to tell because we don't...

NARRATOR: Jon thought he'd have fewest differences with Kiril and with Noah. In fact, Jon discovered that he had the same number of differences with Kiril as he had with Jackie, only three.

GORGEOUS: I don't think mine is going to show up close with anybody.

NARRATOR: If human variation were to map along racial lines, people in one so-called race would be more similar to each other than to those in another so-called race.

That's not what the students found in their mtDNA. What about other genetic differences?

LEWONTIN: The problem for evolutionists and population geneticists was always to try to actually characterize how much genetic variation there was between individuals and groups. And I spent a lot of time worrying about that, like other people in my profession.

(01:36:12)

NARRATOR: In the 1960s, Richard Lewontin decided to find out just how much genetic variation fell within, and how much between, the groups we regard as races. A new technology enabled him to do pioneering work.

LEWONTIN: And that method, which is called gel electrophoresis, a very fancy name, uh, we were able to use on any organism at all. If you could grind it up, you could do it. Uh, that included people, I mean, you don't have to grind the whole person, but you could take a little tissue, or blood.

Over the years, a lot of data were gathered by anthropologists and geneticists looking at blood group genes, and protein genes, and other kinds of genes from all over the world. I mean, anthropologists just went around taking blood out of everybody. Uh, uh, I, I must say, if I were a South American Indian, I wouldn't have let them

take my blood. But uh, but they did, and so, I thought, 'well, we've got enough of these data, let's see what it tells us about the differences between human groups.'

NARRATOR: Lewontin's findings were a milestone in the study of race and biology.

LEWONTIN: If you put it all together, and we've now got that for proteins, for blood groups, and now with DNA sequencing, we have it for DNA sequence differences, it always comes out the same. 85% of all the variation among human beings is between any two individuals within any local population. Between individuals within Sweden, or within the Chinese, or the Kikuyus, or the Icelanders.

NARRATOR: To put it another way, of the small amount of variation in our genes, there is apt to be as much difference between Gorgeous and her teammate Christine, as there is between Gorgeous and her opponent Kaylin. Any two individuals within any so-called race may be as different from each other as they are from any individual in another so-called race.

OSSORIO: Are the people who we call Black more like each other than they are like people who we call white, genetically speaking? Um, the answer is no. There's as much or more diversity and genetic difference within any racial group as there is between people of different racial groups.

NARRATOR: Still we know that some genes are found with greater frequency in some populations.

GOODMAN: And geography is the better way to explain that more than race or anything else. There can be accumulations of genes in one place in the globe and not another.

(01:39:02)

NARRATOR: Like the gene forms regulating skin color. And for some genetic diseases, like sickle cell disease. Long assumed to be a racial trait, sickle cell disease is a debilitating disorder caused by a gene form that alters the shape of red blood cells.

ERIC NISBET-BROWN, M.D.: It's one of the misconceptions that sickle cell disease is an African-American or an African disease. The sickle cell trait is not uncommon in people from the, in people from the Mediterranean region. In fact, in some parts of Greece, up to 30% of people in the population may carry sickle cell trait. Sickle cell trait persists in certain populations around the world because of the relative resistance it confers to malaria. So people who've got sickle cell trait are less likely to develop malaria and when they do develop it, they are less likely to develop severe complications and to die from it.

NARRATOR: Where malaria was common, the sickling gene was selected. In Arabia, South Asia, Central and Western - but not Southern Africa. And in the Mediterranean basin, the home of Jackie Washburn's ancestors. Thought to have originated only a few thousand years ago, sickle cell is not a racial trait. It's the result of having ancestors who lived in malarial regions.

Race does not account for patterns of genetic variation. Our recency as a species and the way we have moved and mated throughout our history, does. Our human lineage originated in Africa. About two million years ago, small groups of early hominids - not modern humans -- began a first migration out of Africa to the far reaches of the globe, breeding isolated lineages. It was long thought, and is still believed by some, that those first lineages led to genetically distinct races that are with us today.

GOULD: It turns out that's not true. I think there's almost genetic proof now - I wouldn't say the issue is totally resolved -- that those lineages just died out. That Neanderthals in Europe died. That homo erectus in Asia died. That there was a second migration of our modern species homo sapiens, and that all modern humans are products of the second migration, which is probably less than a hundred thousand years old, by the best current evidence.

GOODMAN: Some of those movements may follow major migrations as agricultural people came into Europe, as people crossed the Bering Strait and came into the Americas.

But, other movements are much more subtle. They're smaller groups of individuals that moved, or their genes moved from place to place, and time to time.

(01:42:43)

We've had maybe a hundred thousand years of having genes move out and mix and re-sort in countless

different ways.

NARRATOR: A hundred thousand years may seem like a long time, but in evolutionary terms, it is a blink of the eye. Human populations have not been isolated from each other long enough to evolve into separate subspecies.

GOULD: There just hasn't been time for the development of much genetic variation, except that which regulates some very superficial features like skin color and hair form. For once, the old cliché is true. Under the skin, we really are effectively the same. And we get fooled, because some of the visual differences are quite noticeable.

NARRATOR: The superficial traits we use to construct race are recent variations. By the time they arose, important and complicated traits, like speech, abstract thinking, even physical prowess, had already evolved.

KING: As geneticists, we now have the opportunity to investigate, using proper genomic analysis, complex human traits: athletic ability, musical ability, intelligence, all these wonderful traits that we wish we understood better and for which we'd very much like to know if there are genes that are involved, how they interact, how they play out. Those traits are old.

We spent most of our history, as a species, together in Africa in small populations before anyone left. There's far more of us now than those small, original populations that founded our species. Each of us carries with us some very recent variation and some common, shared variation that goes way back in human history.

NARRATOR: Variations among us in those old traits developed independent of and non-concordant with variations in the recent, superficial traits we think of as racial. Human variation does not map onto what we call race. No matter how we might measure it.

BRONSON: So now it's going to this gigantic database of DNA. And you're going to blast this database with your DNA sequence, and it's going to pull up anything that's significantly similar. And now...

NARRATOR: The final exercise of the DNA workshop, offered the students further evidence of the genetic variation within groups. They compared their mitochondrial DNA sequences with an international database.

BRONSON: One, two, three, four differences...

NARRATOR: Gorgeous's sequence was most similar to that of a Yoruban individual in Nigeria.

GORGEIOUS: That's the closest person.

BRONSON: And that's, you were saying that's the closest person that you'd match up. Now does that necessarily mean you're Yoruban?

GORGEIOUS: No.

BRONSON: No. It just means that there's somebody in this part, whoever, in this part of the world, has a very similar DNA sequence to you.

GORGEIOUS: O.K.

BRONSON: And remember, if we look at other people within this Yoruban group, I expect to see other forms of mitochondrial DNA.

NARRATOR: And they did. Her match was dramatically different from another Yoruban's, whose DNA sequence was very different from still other Yorubans. Because modern humans first evolved in Africa, there is even greater genetic diversity in Africa than elsewhere.

(01:46:38)

GRAVES: So, if there were a catastrophe which destroyed the rest of the world's population, most of the genetic variability in the world would still be present in sub-Saharan Africans.

NARRATOR: Genetic data, can subvert racial assumptions about racial ancestry.

BRONSON: We'll look and see how many differences, we see one...

NARRATOR: Jackie's data search matched her with a sequence from an individual in the Balkans.

BRONSON (off-camera): So you were expecting something maybe more Japanese?

JACKIE: Yes, definitely something more Japanese instead of Balkan. At all.

NOAH: If I actually know my maternal lineage, like I know where it should end up, doing a search like this should double-check it, right?

BRONSON (off-camera): What's your preconceived notion?

NOAH: My preconceived notion is, um, we know back from my great-great-great grandmother, and she had lived in Eastern Europe her whole life in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in a little town in the Ukraine, as far as I understand.

BRONSON (off-camera): But remember this little town in the Ukraine may have many different mitochondrial DNA sequences within it. So let's go back and we'll look at yours. And isolate from the Balkans. Not a major shock there. Uh, let's see how similar you are to that person.

NOAH: And we had always guessed that my great grandmother had been this nice little farm girl who had spent her whole life in the Ukraine. And so I was pretty sure that I should be a pretty exact match to one of those ethnic groups, and I was. 100% match.

BRONSON: So I'm going to compare you with someone in Iceland.

NOAH: Wow. Yeah, again, huh...

NOAH: We also pulled up a sequence from Iceland. And we pulled up a third sequence from somewhere in Africa, and I was also a 100% match.

BRONSON: That's a 100% match. That's very significant. Um, and...

NOAH: That's weird.

BRONSON: Well, what it's showing you is not, that you're closely related to this person, may-, possibly, mitochondrially speaking, and that we're all very closely related...

NOAH: So that somewhat shocked me, actually, that there were so many of these racial groups that shared it. I'm just a mutt so to speak. I've been crossbred and inter-bred with lots of different ethnic groups.

BRONSON: Let's see if it gets more interesting than we think.

GOODMAN: I think the way to think about things is that we're all mongrels, we've always been mixing, every single one of us is a mongrel.

NARRATOR: Today's genetic findings corroborate Richard Lewontin's genetic findings of thirty years ago. Because of our history of moving, mating, and mixing, most human variation, especially that of older complex traits, can be found within any population. Most of it from a common source: in Africa.

GOULD: We have now understood genetic variation in human beings. I'm not saying our knowledge is fixed for all time - it never is, but I think we have seen just how shallow and superficial the average differences are among human races even though in certain features like skin color and hair form the visual differences are fairly striking. They're based on almost nothing in terms of overall genetic variation.

GOODMAN: Race as biology simply doesn't work, but what is important is that race is a very salient social and historical concept, a social and historical idea. We live in racial smog.

(01:50:36)

OSSORIO: Just because race isn't something biological, that doesn't mean it's not real. There are a lot of things in our society that are real and are not biological. Race as we understand it, as a social construct, has a lot to do with where somebody will live, what schools they will go to, what jobs they will get, whether or not they will have health insurance.

NARRATOR: Black, white and brown are merely skin colors. But we attach to them meanings and assumptions, even laws, that create enduring social inequality.

NOAH: When I'm walking the streets alone at night, coming home from parties and stuff, I never get a sideways glance at people asking what I'm doing there. If a woman is stumbling with her shopping bags and I stop and say, 'would you like a hand?' I never get a sort of a glance with two meanings it's always, 'Oh nice white boy you can help.'

GRAVES: On my own campus, uh, when I walk to classes, students often come up to me and ask me if I'm the football coach or the basketball coach, and I tell them, 'No, I am a professor in the department of Life Sciences.'

HANNAH: It's easy to be white, it's very easy to be white. It's never been easy for Africans or African Americans here, never. It's been a long, long time, you know, since, the abolition of slavery, you know, African-American slavery, in, in this country. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, those ideas are still around.

NARRATOR: No matter how they view themselves, the world sees Jackie, Gorgeous and Jon as separate races. The social expectations that await them are in many ways dependent upon that racial assignment.

Would our expectation about Gorgeous be that she is a champion athlete, or valedictorian of her class? In fact, Gorgeous is both. But since the days of Jesse Owens, our society has more readily acknowledged and more avidly rewarded one of her talents over the other.

If the playing field were level, the array of opportunities open to Gorgeous and her teammates would not be limited by assumptions society makes about the nature of the genes they inherited.

KING: Lots of things are inherited that don't have anything to do with genes. Money is inherited. And money goes a long way in increasing someone's capacity to do well in one area or another.

NARRATOR: Off the track, the playing field is not level. The net worth of the average white American family is eight times that of the average African American family.

HAMMONDS: Race is a concept that was invented to categorize the perceived biological, social, and cultural differences between human groups.

(01:54:12)

LEWONTIN: And the beauty of that ideology is that it justifies what is the greatest, uh, social agony of American life, namely, it justifies the inequalities that exist in a society which is said to be based on equality.

HAMMONDS: Race 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.

NARRATOR: The racialized society we live in has been under construction for three centuries. How can we unmake race unless we first confront its enormity as a historical and social reality, and its emptiness as biology?

END

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Transcript

RACE - THE POWER OF AN ILLUSION

Episode Two: The Story We Tell

(1:01:02)

NARRATOR: "All men are created equal." "All men are created equal." It's the lofty and revolutionary ideal at America's core. Yet it was written at a time when some inhabitants were held in bondage, and others were being dispossessed of their lands. How did American society justify unequal treatment based on skin color and national origins? How did it reconcile that contradiction? America created a story, a story of race.

ROBIN D. G. KELLEY, HISTORIAN: Race was never just a matter of how you look, it's about how people assign meaning to how you look.

THEDA PERDUE, HISTORIAN: We have the idea that it's somewhere written in stone that there are these fundamental differences between human beings. We don't realize that race is an idea that evolves over time, that it has a history, that it is constructed by society to further certain political and economic goals.

NARRATOR: Created over four centuries, race has become a powerful and enduring narrative. Moments in America's past reveal how this idea took hold and became the lens through which we view our world.

Thomas Jefferson, a Virginia slaveholder, penned the revolutionary words proclaiming human equality in the Declaration of Independence. He also wrote a lesser-known influential document, Notes on the State of Virginia. Written in response to questions from France about the American colonies, the book reads as a kind of sales pitch for America. Notes on the State of Virginia was not about race, but among Jefferson's descriptions of rivers and seaports, mountains and climate, he expressed his views on the inhabitants of the new land-people from America, Europe and Africa.

ACTOR (reading from NOTES ON THE STATE OF VIRGINIA): I advance it, as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.

PAUL FINKELMAN, HISTORIAN: It is possible to make the argument that Thomas Jefferson is the first person to truly articulate a theory of race in the United States, and in effect, he has to do so. He has said in the Declaration of Independence, that we are all created equal. Well, if in fact we're all created equal, and if in fact we're entitled to our liberty, then how can he possibly own 175 slaves, and going up to about 225 slaves at the peak of his slaveholding?

NARRATOR: In Notes Jefferson's words appeared to justify slavery at a time when many slaves were admonishing the founding fathers for espousing freedom while continuing to support a system of human bondage.

(1:04:43)

KELLEY: The problem that they had to figure out is how can we promote liberty, freedom, democracy on the one hand, and a system of slavery and exploitation of peoples who are non-white on the other?

JAMES HORTON, HISTORIAN: And the way you do that is to say "Yeah, but you know, there is something different about these people. This, this whole business of inalienable rights, ah, that's fine, but it only applies to certain people."

IRA BERLIN, HISTORIAN: The moment when we become a nation is critical for our understanding of both American nationality and race. We accept the notion that all men are created equal, but then, perhaps, some of those people who are enslaved are not quite men. That is we'll keep our ideas of American nationality, but we'll write certain people out of the human family.

NARRATOR: The suspicions of black racial inferiority raised by Jefferson had evolved over time, shaped in part by an intense need for labor in the American colonies. In 1619 when the first Africans arrived in Virginia, religion and wealth, not physical appearance, defined status. Blackness and whiteness were not yet clear categories of identity.

PERDUE: They were more likely to distinguish between Christians and heathens than they were between people of color and people who were white. They regarded a person's status in life as somehow more fundamental than what color they were, or what their particular background was.

SCOTT MALCOMSON, AUTHOR: The different ways in which those hierarchies of social class and social power became filled in with the content of race, so that the lowest class would be a black class, and the highest class would be some particularly pale white class, ah, that was a very gradual process.

NARRATOR: For the first fifty years in the American colonies, most of the laborers were European indentured servants, many toiling on tobacco plantations in wretched conditions. With fewer Europeans braving the treacherous journey across the Atlantic, planters facing a potential labor shortage turned to the transatlantic slave trade, and gradually replaced indentured servants with African slaves.

HORTON: They found what they considered an endless labor supply. People who could be readily identified and so when they ran away they couldn't just meld into the population like Native Americans could. People who knew how to grow tobacco, people who knew how to grow rice. From their standpoint, the ideal labor source.

NARRATOR: Colony by colony, new laws made slavery permanent and inheritable for black people. And for the first time the word "white," rather than "Christian" or "Englishman" began appearing in colonial statutes.

(1:08:11)

GEORGE M. FREDRICKSON, HISTORIAN: To what extent we could say this was actually conscious strategy, or what extent it was a result of a number of unthinking decisions that resulted in this, but it did buttress a kind of social structure.

NARRATOR: As African slavery increased, lower-class Europeans won new rights and opportunities. Some even became overseers and bounty hunters responsible for policing the growing slave population.

FREDRICKSON: The ordinary white people are not going to be complicit in this system unless they get something out of it. My belief is that payoff was in a certain status, prestige, recognition, ah, ego enhancement that ordinary white people could derive from racism. And so there was a kind of bargain struck.

KELLEY: Many of the European-descended poor whites began to identify themselves, if not directly with the rich whites, certainly with being white. And here you get the emergence of this idea of a white race as a way to distinguish themselves from those dark-skinned people who they associate with perpetual slavery.

AUDREY SMEDLEY, ANTHROPOLOGIST: Slavery became identified with Africans-blackness and slavery went together. That gave the white American the idea that Africans were a different kind of people.

MIA BAY, HISTORIAN: There's a racial divide emerging that people begin to, um, see as natural, and that's part of where the idea of race comes from. It's just in, in, in the tendency for people to see existing power relationships as having some sort of natural quality to them.

NARRATOR: By the time Jefferson sat down to write Notes on the State of Virginia in 1781, a plantation economy dependent on slavery was deeply entrenched. Slavery had become so widespread that to many whites it seemed the natural state for black people. But when Jefferson turned his attention to Indians in Notes, what appeared natural about them was their status as free people, brave warriors protecting their lands. This led Jefferson to suspect that Indians were not much different from Europeans.

ACTOR (quoting JEFFERSON): Their vivacity and activity of mind is equal to ours in the same situation. We shall probably find that they are formed in mind as well as in body, on the same module with the "Homo sapiens Europæus."

FREDRICKSON: The original view of the Indians was that they were naturally white people, and they looked slightly brown because of exposure to the sun and because of the way they treated their skin. Jefferson felt that, among many people of that time, felt that the Indians were good human material, and the problem with them was not race but culture, that the Indians were savages but they could be civilized.

NARRATOR: Jefferson and his contemporaries were also influenced by European Enlightenment thinkers who believed that education and environment could improve people. But when Jefferson wrote about the Indians he had little direct contact with them. Most Virginia tribes had been pushed west or killed off by war and European diseases.

(1:11:50)

REGINALD HORSMAN, HISTORIAN: Those in direct conflict with the Indians, those who were crossing the mountains to Kentucky or Tennessee, didn't think of the Indians in an Enlightenment view. They thought of Indians as savages who were trying to destroy peaceful settlers coming in, and thought they should be driven out or exterminated.

RICHARD ALLEN, POLICY ANALYST, CHEROKEE NATION: There was an ever-encroaching white population who wanted our land. As a people, we were hunters, as, you know, as anthropologists would describe us as hunters and gatherers. We saw ourselves as equal people. We were free people. We had always been free people.

NARRATOR: Many Indians fought to maintain their freedom and land. Within a decade of Independence, wars with frontier tribes like the Shawnee, Miami, Kickapoo and others threatened the stability of the young nation.

PERDUE: The United States decided that the cheapest, easiest way to avoid an Indian war along its entire frontier, and also to acquire Indian land, was to quote "civilize" the Indians. Civilization included Christian religion; it included an English education; and commercial agriculture. If you can convert Indians from hunters into farmers, if you could confine them to a small acreage, then you would have all this surplus land, which could be opened to white settlement.

ALLEN: The civilization policy was actually designed to assimilate us into America. It was ultimately to make us farmers, ah, to live like the colonists lived. The civilization policy was to make us brown, white men.

NARRATOR: In Notes on the State of Virginia Jefferson implied Indians could be assimilated in American society, but he did not support assimilating black people. He wrote of "deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites" and of "physical and moral differences" separating the groups.

HORSMAN: Jefferson seems to have thought about it as a Virginia plantation owner who has been brought up amongst slaves, and who at his heart of heart, I would suppose, finds it difficult to conceive of those slaves are fully his equal.

NARRATOR: It was through those eyes that the man who wrote the nation's credo "all men are created equal" put forth as a "suspicion only" that "the blacks are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."

BERLIN: This difference is not simply a product of circumstance, it's not simply a product of the environment, but Jefferson broaches this possibility, ah, that it is something, much deeper, something innate. Ah, we would say in our own language (Jefferson didn't have this language), we would say, "genetic."

SMEDLEY: But, he says, "We will not be able to know this until science gives us the answers." And so he calls on science.

(1:15:37)

FINKELMAN: He sets American science on the path of trying to figure out what it is scientifically that makes blacks inferior to whites. And of course, if that's the question the scientist asks, then that's the question the scientist will answer.

HORTON: And so from that moment on, you start to build a case that is specifically geared to tell the world that these people are different. Theories of race are used to do that.

NARRATOR: In the next century as the nation expanded, so would ideas about human difference. Science and

slavery would help focus the nation's attention on the nature of black people. Land would propel native Americans into the racial spotlight.

ACTOR (reading from THOMAS JEFFERSON'S FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS): A rising nation spread over a wide and fruitful land traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye.

NARRATOR: The hopes expressed by Jefferson in his first Inaugural Address were partially realized two years later in 1803 when the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, doubling the size of the country.

MAE NGAI, HISTORIAN: Jefferson believed that the United States had a great future because it could expand through space, that the agrarian ideal of American independence could be maintained by expanding the country westward.

HORSMAN: Obviously there are very big problems with this. The land was not empty. One did overrun Indians.

NARRATOR: At the time of the Louisiana Purchase dozens of Indian tribes populated the vast, new territory west of the Mississippi. And some Indian nations, like the Cherokee, still owned massive tracts of land in the southeast.

PERDUE: Indians in the South lived in the region in which wealth was very firmly grounded in land. Planters needed land on which to grow tobacco, to grow cotton, to grow other staple crops. Indians occupied that land. Indians owned that land. And consequently, ah, Indians were under constant pressure for that land.

NARRATOR: In response to this pressure and defeats on the battlefield, some tribes like the Cherokee embraced the government's civilization policy first begun in the 1790s. They would put to the test Jefferson's words: "We shall all be Americans. Your blood will run in our veins and will spread with us over this great continent."

PERDUE: Most people consider the Cherokees to be the great success story of the "civilization" policy. The Cherokees were able very quickly to transform, at least on a superficial level, their culture. They made many accomplishments that led their supporters to proclaim them to be "civilized" Indians.

(1:19:21)

NARRATOR: One of the largest tribes in America, the Cherokees had lived in small villages in parts of what is now Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, The Carolinas, Alabama, and Georgia. By 1819 they had signed treaties ceding over ninety percent of their land to the United States. With the civilization policy, many Cherokees had switched from being hunters to farmers, some even ran plantations and owned slaves. Their children learned Christian religion and English at mission-run schools. A Cherokee alphabet was created, and in the 1820s, the Cherokee nation began publishing a bilingual newspaper. They established a government and constitution that was patterned after the United States.

ALLEN: The "civilization" policy was looked upon as a tool for survival. We began to see that that might be the only way for the Cherokee people to - to live in peace with ah, the United States. Not so much that we wanted to become white people.

MALCOMSON: As the Cherokees became more and more prosperous along more or less classic, white southern lines, the nature of white government in America was changing. The federal government had to appeal to a much wider base of white American men than it had previously in the Revolutionary period. One of the main interests of this demographic of less well-off white American men was to get land so that they could become better-off white American men. The main result of this, ah, which was from the white point of view an expansion of democracy, and of democratic representation of, or the inclusion of more and more people in American democracy, from the Indian point of view was the gradual empowerment of exactly the population which would like to take what they had.

NARRATOR: Every year more white settlers arrived in Georgia seeking to settle on what was still Indian land. The federal government had promised to remove all Indians from the state in 1802, but 25 years later with the Cherokees appearing even more entrenched, Georgia's legislature took action asserting: "The lands in question belong to Georgia. She must and she will have them." The state held a lottery giving whites title to Cherokee property.

PERDUE: Whites invaded their land; they killed people; they stole their property; they forced them out of their houses. Cherokees were really being pressed from all sides, it seemed.

NARRATOR: The pressure on Cherokees, and all Eastern Indians, increased in 1828 when Andrew Jackson was elected president on a platform championing opportunity for the "common man." Removing all Indians east of the Mississippi was central to his agenda.

HORTON: When Jackson who speaks out in a kind a of populist way, speaking for the little guy, speaking out against privilege, his little guy, his citizen is increasingly a white, male citizen. As America is becoming more democratic for white males, it is becoming increasingly more race based.

MATTHEW P. GUTERL, HISTORIAN: It's believed that only white people can maintain the land, preserve it, ah, protect their own independence, and then using that independence, have some sort of fitness for self-government that enables them to be proper citizens.

(1:23:26)

PERDUE: Nationalism begins to be, in many respects, equated to race. People began to think that nations should be composed of people who had inherent qualities in common: they thought the same way; they believed the same things; they spoke the same language; they looked the same. And this is very contradictory to the Enlightenment notions of a united humanity.

NARRATOR: The conflict between Indian removal and America's founding ideals surfaced during bitter national debates. In a three-day speech to his fellow congressmen, New Jersey senator Frelinghuysen asked, "If we abandon these aboriginal proprietors of our soil, how shall we justify it to our country? How shall we justify this trespass to ourselves?" But Michigan Territory governor Lewis Cass provided a justification, one that used race to focus on the nature of Indians, rather than the morality of their removal.

ACTOR (quoting LEWIS CASS on Indian removal): They have resisted every effort to meliorate their situation. There must then be an inherent difficulty, arising from the institutions, character, and condition of the Indians themselves.

NARRATOR: The Indian Removal Act passed in 1830. When some tribes including the Cherokees resisted removal, President Jackson's response reflected the government's shift in racial thinking about the Indians.

ACTOR (reading ANDREW JACKSON'S FIFTH ANNUAL MESSAGE): They have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits, nor the desire of improvement which are essential to any change in their condition. Established in the midst of another and superior race, they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and ere long disappear.

ALLEN: The Cherokees felt betrayed that we were considered savages. Jackson is remembered among Cherokees, uh, uh, as someone to be vilified.

MALCOMSON: The identity of being Indian, or in this case of being Cherokee, which they had been told for decades to abandon as part of the past, as part of paganism, as, as, as a, a relic of primitive times, they were now told was inherent in them, and that they should in some way embrace it. They should not become like white people, they should preserve themselves as Indians, and not only that, they should preserve themselves as Indians a very long way away.

NARRATOR: Cherokees vigorously fought removal against relentless pressure, but finally in 1838, the United States Army forced them to leave their homes at gunpoint. One fourth of the Cherokee Nation died in camps or on the journey west that became known as the Trail of Tears. By 1840 more than 70,000 eastern Indians had been relocated west of the Mississippi.

GUTERL: The story of the Cherokee and their ultimate removal was also about who could be civilized, and who couldn't; who could be white; who could be a citizen of this country; and who could reside within its borders. And as the country moves west, that question gets answered in the same fashion over and over again.

(1:27:40)

NARRATOR: Eight years after the Trail of Tears, America went to war with Mexico to acquire more land. Supporters of the war argued that Mexicans were an inferior, mongrel race. A popular guide for homesteaders described them as "mere Indians," barbarous "savages" who "intend to hold this delightful region against the

civilized world." When the war ended in 1848, the United States annexed one-third of Mexico's land.

NGAI: Most white Americans really believed the West was for them, and for them alone. This was part of a whole philosophy of Manifest Destiny of what impelled westward expansion, ah, throughout the middle part of the 19th century. It was this idea that the West belong to white Americans.

NARRATOR: As they continued their expansion westward, some white Americans would use science to justify their actions and support their belief in racial superiority.

BAY: During the 19th century there were lots of public lectures on the races of man. Science was, because it was new, was something people were avidly interested in. Science in the 19th century was expected to reveal all the mysteries of the universe.

HORSMAN: You even see specific references by this period where they're saying, "Race is the great issue of the age."

NARRATOR: The nation's interest in race was more than idle fascination. In the 1840s the question of whether slavery would expand to newly acquired western lands was bitterly dividing the nation and fueling attacks on slavery.

MALCOMSON: There was significant momentum towards the abolition of racial slavery. But there were also very strong countervailing trends. And in the end this created an enormous tension within white society because it was caught in this contradiction that was inescapable.

BAY: As people begin to oppose slavery, the whole question of what the difference between the races is, and what the status of black people should be becomes more debated. In the context of this debate over slavery versus anti-slavery, um, ideas about race really flesh out.

NARRATOR: In 1846, five thousand people gathered in Boston to hear, "The Plan of Creation in the Animal Kingdom," the first American lecture by renowned Swiss naturalist Louis Agassiz.

His scientific methods valued observation over speculation. Agassiz was quickly pulled into the scientific question of the day: "Are all people, no matter their physical features, members of the same or different species?"

FINKELMAN: It's a debate between people who look at the book of Genesis and see what they call a single creation, God created Adam and Eve, and scientists who say, "Well, actually these races couldn't possibly come from the same place. There must be different and separate creations.

(1:31:37)

NARRATOR: Agassiz arrived in America supporting the theory that all humans were united in a single creation. But he soon began to rethink his position, after meeting one of America's most distinguished scientists, Samuel Morton. A Philadelphia physician, Morton owned the world's largest collection of human skulls and had written two influential books documenting what he claimed were innate differences among humans. One focused on American Indians.

HORSMAN: The foundation work was a work called *Crania Americana* in which he argued that he was using purely scientific methods to investigate the question of skull size, skull capacity, which had implications for brain size which he thought was vital in how races progressed.

FINKELMAN: Lo and behold, he discovers that white American males are the smartest people on earth, followed in gradation by the English, the French, and then other Europeans, and then other races, with blacks always on the bottom. Ah, curiously, some English scholars do the same thing. They discover Englishmen are actually smarter than Americans, followed by French and other Europeans. And guess what the French discover? That the French are really smarter than both.

BAY: Somehow he managed to make sort of systematic errors in favor of what was the, you know, the sort of understood hierarchy of the races of the day.

LEE BAKER, ANTHROPOLOGIST: Samuel Morton drew wild conclusions based on very careful studying and ranking of these skulls. I don't care how many times you measure a skull, or even anything physical about an individual, or a group of people, you cannot predict their morality, their behavior, their achievements, potential

for achievement, but that was what was important about this idea of race at the time.

HORSMAN: Southerners were actually delighted at what the scientists were doing. They were hearing from, if you like, "non-special interests," that there were huge differences between the races. Now this meant that the South began to argue quite vigorously that the best scientific opinion is saying that slaves cannot exist within a free, white society and that they are inferior.

FINKELMAN: The ultimate defense of slavery is a racial defense, that blacks are inferior, and therefore they are ready-made slaves. God created them as slaves.

NARRATOR: "Why all this rant about Negro equality," asked John Campbell in his book Negro-Mania, "seeing that neither nature or nature's God ever established any such equality?" Josiah Nott, a southern doctor and disciple of Morton, firmly believed that black people were a separate species, and used science to wage a vigorous defense of slavery.

HORSMAN: Though he was a good doctor, I mean for the period, and ah well regarded as an expert on yellow fever, he immediately starts to show from his very first writings, that when he writes about race, he throws off really any scientific, ah, realism at all, and writes from his prejudices. It seems so exaggerated it looks like the publication you would get on a sort of dirty little leaflet that some fringe organization has published, and yet it's accepted scientific fact for a time.

(1:35:41)

NARRATOR: As these ideas told hold, pro-slavery advocates argued that the enslavement of black people did not violate the democratic spirit of America because Jefferson's term "all men" did not scientifically include black people.

NARRATOR: In 1850, Louis Agassiz by then Harvard's most prominent professor, told his fellow members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that "viewed zoologically, the several races of men were well marked and distinct." Josiah Nott wrote to Samuel Morton, "With Agassiz in the war the battle is ours."

BAKER: Here was the most objective, the pinnacle of the scientific man influenced by American racism, and who transformed his deeply held belief in the unity of mankind. I think that says more than anything else, that the power of the ideology of race can change peoples' minds.

NARRATOR: Three years later, Agassiz contributed a chapter to a forthcoming book co-authored by Nott. The 738-page Types of Mankind was greatly anticipated. It pre-sold its entire first edition.

BAKER: Types of Mankind was tremendously influential. It was the first time that scientists pulled together all of the research that justified the argument that African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, et cetera were different species.

ACTOR (quoting JOSIAH NOTT in TYPES OF MANKIND): Nations and races, like individuals have each an especial destiny: some are born to rule, and others to be ruled. And such has ever been the history of mankind. No two distinctly marked races can dwell together on equal terms.

NARRATOR: Types of Mankind was one of the best-selling science books of its day. Among the first to buy it were the United States departments of State, Navy, and Treasury.

HORSMAN: Science and the politicians and popular opinion weld together in a way that is extremely useful for both. The politicians and the general population are very happy to have scientific views to lean on which say that the fact that this successful republic is not destroying Indians just for, just for the love of it, they're not enslaving, ah, blacks because they are selfish, ah, they're not overrunning Mexican lands ah because they are avaricious for land, that this is part of some great inevitability of science, of really the way races are constituted; that is, the Caucasian race, and even certain branches within the Caucasian race, are superior.

EVELYNN HAMMONDS, HISTORIAN OF SCIENCE: It's about a way of sort of naturalizing a social structure which everyone understood and clearly saw that the quote, unquote the "Negro," or in other regions of the country, the Native American, or the Chinese were at the bottom of the, the social and political hierarchy. And if you can say that they are fundamentally biologically different, then they should be.

(1:39:49)

NARRATOR: In the 1857 Dred Scott case, the Supreme Court decided that people of African ancestry, enslaved or free, could never become citizens of the United States. The opinion stated that black people "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."

HORSMAN: There's been a remarkable transformation because if you are thinking say 50 or 60 years before in American history, you have got Jefferson ambiguously talking about well he thinks, possibly blacks are not quite the same capacity as whites, but he isn't sure. But they get to the 1850s, people are writing there are deep, irrevocable gulfs between the races.

NARRATOR: The conflict over slavery led the nation to war. After President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, his administration consulted Louis Agassiz on how to deal with the newly freed black population. Agassiz advised, "Beware of how we give to the blacks rights by virtue of which they may endanger the progress of whites. They are incapable of living on a footing of social equality."

HORTON: If America had just looked the world in the eye and said, "We hold these people in slavery cause we need their labor, and we've got the power to do it." Now that would have been much better because then when the power was gone, when slavery was over, it's over. But what we said was, "There is something about these people." By doing that it means, that when slavery is over, that rationalization for slavery remains.

NARRATOR: In the late 19th century as the United States expanded beyond its continental borders, ideas of racial difference would become widely accepted at home, and help define a new role for America abroad.

NARRATOR: At the turn of the century, popular culture promoted stories of race as a unifying force of national identity. Race was a common topic in the new monthly magazines.

BAKER: A whole new middle-class readership was interested in reading about it. They had people from the House of Representatives, Supreme Court Justices, expert scientists, writing in these magazines, purporting their particular visions and views on the so-called "race" question, the "Indian" question, the "Negro" question. People consumed it without even understanding the science that went behind it, that "hey, if this expert's talking about race in the North American Review, it must be correct."

GUTERL: Popular magazines contribute to an emerging sense of what is and what isn't American, who's white, who's not, who's better, who's worse.

ROBERT RYDELL, HISTORIAN: The unifying principle is a principle of, um, white supremacy, it's a principle of shared racial identity, and if you are white or if you can be made to identify with white-ness you are going to be considered to be in. And that line of whiteness cuts across class lines and provides a way to unify Americans on the basis of race.

(1:44:41)

HORTON: All through the late 19th century, there is this constant message hammered at poor white people: "You may be poor, you may have miserable lives right now, but the thing that is most important, the thing we want you to focus on is the fact that you are white."

NARRATOR: In 1898, the United States took possession of Guam, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines after defeating Spain in war. When McClure's Magazine published the poem "The White Man's Burden," Americans seized on the phrase that embodied the country's new role as a world power. Rudyard Kipling's poem was a rallying cry for empire and a racial justification to send American troops across the Pacific to put down the Filipino rebels fighting for independence from the U.S.

ACTOR (quoting RUDYARD KIPLING'S poem WHITE MAN'S BURDEN): Take up the white man's burden, send forth the best ye breed. Go, bind your sons to exile, To serve your captives' need; To wait, in heavy harness, On fluttered folk and wild- Your new-caught sullen peoples, Half devil and half child.

FREDRICKSON: Kipling wrote the poem to try to encourage the United States to annex the Philippines. And clearly it probably provided more support for the- um, those who want to take on the "white man's burden." Because some of the imperialists said, "Oh, we can bring them along, maybe not to equality, but our little brown brothers, we can advance them in civilization."

NARRATOR: Even advertising took up the phrase. Pears' Soap claimed to be "a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances." Not all Americans supported the Philippine war, but race fueled the arguments of many anti-imperialists as well. One southern senator declared, "We of the south have

borne this white man's burden of a colored race in our midst since their emancipation and before. It was a burden upon our manhood and our ideas of liberty before they were emancipated. It is still a burden."

RYDELL: If you look at the way Filipinos are represented they are represented not as Filipinos. Some Filipinos are portrayed as being akin to African Americans. Some are portrayed as being akin to Native Americans.

GUTERL: Use of the imagery of African Americans and Native Americans would have been important because these were familiar peoples. Their "faults" were familiar to the citizens of the republic.

HAMMONDS: At the end of the 19th century race is a kind of integrated totality. It embodied these sort of cultural, linguistic, psychological, moral, and biological characteristics into the concept itself. The concept is, is quite rich. It carries all these kinds of connotations. There's not a gap between what the regular person on the street understands about race and what scientists or anthropologists or social scientists think about race.

(1:45:03)

NARRATOR: America crushed the Filipino independence movement, and the Philippines became a U.S. territory. The United States gained a strategic port in the Pacific, and began a campaign to civilize another set of natives. The United States entered the twentieth century as the world's most prosperous nation, and newest empire. In 1904, St. Louis, Missouri staged a world's fair to showcase America's achievements, and celebrate the 100th anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase.

BAKER: The 1904 World's Fair was America's triumph of civilization, imperialism, and a new century. It was filled with hope and optimism. The organizers wanted to show America's unbridled progress.

RYDELL: People go to have fun, to be sure, but world's fairs are not about entertainment, they're billed as the world's universities.

NARRATOR: In neo-classic palaces of progress, fairgoers wandered through technological and cultural exhibits. But on the other side of the fair grounds, they were captivated by human exhibits-people on display in their so-called "natural" habitats.

BAKER: They would have these exhibits of little brown people to show, "Oh, that's a savage. Hmm. Look at the way they carve that wood." And the barbarians, as you moved up the evolutionary tree, "Oh, isn't that interesting, I see it's different than the savages."

RYDELL: Fairgoers see an enormous number of people who perhaps they have only read about, maybe never even heard about. But here they are living flesh and blood, there to be seen. World's Fairs are very adept at organizing categories of human beings on this continuum from savagery to civilization.

NARRATOR: One fair organizer described it as "a practical illustration of the best way of bearing the white man's burden." On display for all to see were the subjugated people of America's recent past. An exhibit titled "Old Plantation" served up a bucolic view of slave life, and Geronimo, the legendary and recently defeated Apache warrior, signed autographs for a fee.

RYDELL: Here you have not only American Indians put on display as a kind of vanquished people, but you also have at the fair a direct link made between Manifest Destiny on the home front, and America's burgeoning drive to expand overseas.

NARRATOR: The Philippine Exposition, was one of the largest and most popular exhibits. Created to demonstrate the benefits of America's civilizing presence, the exhibit gave Americans a chance to see the people they had recently conquered.

BAKER: Part of the world's fair was also about showing where you were as a white citizen. And a lot of people took pictures next to the so-called "savages," and having a white body next to a dark body demonstrated how "civilized" they were.

NARRATOR: Nearly 20 million visitors to the fair received an object lesson that connected an understanding of race to a vision of America's future.

(1:53:26)

RYDELL: One of the metaphors that's constantly used over and over again at the Fair is the metaphor of the

highway of human progress: "Who's in the fast lane?" "Are you part of this advancing order of Caucasians, or are you somebody else, somebody other?"

MALCOMSON: White people saw their advance as being historical, and this gave them an enormous motivation to see the lives of people who were not white as being outside of history and not part of this progressive advance.

GUTERL: Most Americans believed that race was one of the most important parts of national life; that race mattered because it guaranteed this country a future in the history of the world. The United States would rise towards glory, towards history, towards its destiny.

NARRATOR: After six months the St. Louis World's Fair closed on December 1, 1904. Its grand exhibit halls demolished soon after. But race, a story first told to rationalize deep social divisions in a society that proclaimed its belief in equality, would be carried forward into the 20th century and beyond.

HORTON: We are a society based on principles literally to die for. Principles that are so wonderful it brings tears to your eyes. But we are a society that so often allows itself to ignore those principles. We live in a kind of heightened state of anxiety because we know we aren't what we could be or what we say we are.

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Transcript

RACE - THE POWER OF AN ILLUSION

Episode Three: The House We Live In

(1:00:51)

NARRATOR: It is all around us. It is an illusion and yet profoundly real. What we perceive as race is one of the first things we notice about each other. Skin: darker or lighter. Eyes: round or almond, blue, black, brown. Hair: curly, straight, blond, or dark. And attached to these characteristics is a mosaic of values, assumptions and historical meanings. Even those of us who claim we don't believe the stereotypes can easily recite them.

JOSEPH GRAVES, Geneticist: The average person on the street thinks that race consists of differences in physical appearance. They also think that from looking at a person's physical appearance, that they can find out or know more subtle things about them. Race is not a level of biological division that we find in anatomically modern humans. There are no subspecies in the human beings that live today.

ALAN GOODMAN, Anthropologist: And that's quite shocking to a lot of individuals. When you look and you think you see race, to be told that no, you don't see race, you just think you see race. That-it's based on your cultural lens, that's extremely challenging.

NARRATOR: Just because race isn't a biological reality doesn't mean it isn't real. Being classified as Asian, or Black or Latino has never carried the same advantages in our society as being white.

MELVIN OLIVER, Sociologist: Race in itself means nothing--the markers of race, skin color, hair texture, the things that we identify as the racial markers, mean nothing unless they are given social meaning and unless there's public policy and private actions that act upon those kinds of characteristics. That creates race.

NARRATOR: Physical differences don't make race. What makes race are the laws and practices that affect life chances and opportunities based on those differences. If we look carefully, we can see how our institutions and policies have assigned racial identities and reinforced racial inequality throughout the 20th century.

MAE NGAI, Historian: And this is something I think that all immigrant groups experience in one way or another when they come to America, no matter what point in time it is. Because they come to a country that has historically always been highly racialized. It's a country where race has its origins in, uh, slavery, um, as well as in the conquest of Native American Indians. So anybody coming from the outside after that point has to fit into this racialized society in some way, and it's not always clear how people are going to fit in right away.

NARRATOR: At the start of the 20th century, as millions of immigrants arrived from all over the world, lawmakers and social scientists debated how all of them-including the new European arrivals-would fit into the hierarchy of races already here.

They came seeking economic opportunity, freedom, and a future for their families. Of the 23 million newcomers between 1880 and 1920, the vast majority were from Eastern and Southern Europe. Immigrants often worked the hardest, poorest paying and most dangerous jobs, along with the so-called inferior races already here: Blacks, Mexicans and Chinese.

(1:05:44)

MATTHEW JACOBSON, Historian: Cities with enormous slums developed, as the ugly side of industrialization. Ugly both in terms of the aesthetic of American cities but also ugly in terms of the - the solidifying of class differences and class tension. As all of those things became apparent, uh, the immigrant became the symbol for

- for what America might be becoming.

NARRATOR: By 1910, 58% of American mining and factory workers were immigrants. Like Mexicans and African Americans, Italians, Slavs and Jews were often desired as laborers - but also feared, seen as promiscuous, lazy, or stupid. Some saw it as a racial invasion. Charles Davenport, a famous biologist, expressed those fears in 1911.

NARRATOR: The population of the United States, wrote Davenport, will, on account of the great influx of blood from Southeastern Europe, rapidly become darker in pigment, smaller in stature, more given to crimes of larceny, kidnapping, assault, murder, rape and sexual immorality. And the ratio of insanity in the population will rapidly increase.

NGAI: And this was also a time when scientific race theory began to take off and people began to, uh, look at society and look at, at groups of people in more racialized terms. So, people were perceived as, as being separate races. So you had kind of a higher order of white races, you know, which were seen as the Nordics, as opposed to what many of the nativists called the lower races of Europe.

JACOBSON: There are various groups, like the American Breeders Association, the Eugenics Research Association, who not only are doing research on various racial types, in this case Hebrews, Slavs, Mediterraneans, what we would call now the Caucasian race, uh, would break it down to thirty-five, or thirty-seven, or forty-five races for study. And, uh, a lot of the language was beginning to get at the idea that those differences were actually, uh, rooted in, in reproduction, they were rooted in, inheritable traits. They were heritable, they were biological, they were immutable.

NARRATOR: The more the newcomers were forced into low paying jobs and diseased tenements, the more these conditions were explained as natural consequences of their innate racial character. Biology was destiny. Which side of the racial divide you found yourself on could be a matter of life or death. Between 1890 and 1920, 2500 African Americans were lynched in the South. In 1915, Leo Frank, a Jew living in Atlanta, was also pulled from a jail and hanged by a mob for allegedly killing a white girl. Writing about the lynching, a Black journalist wondered, "Is the Jew a White Man?"

NGAI: Some historians have suggested that these new immigrant groups from Europe, uh, were "in-between peoples," they were in transitional stage. When compared to, uh, Anglo Saxon Protestants, groups such as Italians, um, or Jews were seen as not being fully white perhaps, but when compared to African Americans, or when compared to Asians, um, their whiteness became more salient, became more visible.

NARRATOR: Could European ethnics become fully white, and thus fully American? By 1910, a new term was entering popular culture to describe the transformation of Europeans. The phrase came from the title of a Broadway play by Israel Zangwill. God, said Zangwill, would melt down the races of Europe into a single pure essence, out of which He would mold Americans.

(1:10:44)

EDUARDO BONILLA-SILVA, Sociologist: So when the Irish, when Germans, when Italians were coming, and they didn't speak the language and they didn't know the culture, the idea was they will assimilate into Americanhood; they will become American, which in the American tradition has meant white American.

BONILLA-SILVA: But that melting pot never included people of color. Blacks, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, etcetera, could not melt into the pot. They could be used as wood to produce the fire for the pot, but they could not be used as material to be melted into the pot.

NARRATOR: Whiteness was key to citizenship. In 1790 Congress had passed an act declaring that only "free white" immigrants could become naturalized citizens. After the Civil War, naturalization was extended to "persons of African descent" as well. But it was the white citizen who had clear access to the vote, sat on juries, was elected to public office and had better jobs. Whiteness was not simply a matter of skin color. To be white was to gain the full rewards of American citizenship.

PILAR OSSORIO, Legal Scholar: In order to be a naturalized citizen in this country, you had to be categorized as white or Black. And almost everybody who tried to naturalize-- all but, I think, one case that went to the Supreme Court-- all of them were people trying to be categorized as white. So the court had to make decisions about who was white and who was not.

NARRATOR: Courts and legislators had long been in the business of conferring racial identities. In the South, to enforce Jim Crow segregation and laws against mixed marriages, courts had to first determine who was Black under law.

JAMES HORTON, Historian: And here's where it really gets interesting. You got some places, for example Virginia, Virginia law defined a Black person as a person with one-sixteenth African ancestry. Now Florida defined a Black person as a person with one-eighth African ancestry. Alabama said, "You're Black if you got any Black ancestry, any African ancestry at all." But you know what this means? You can walk across a state line and literally, legally change race.

Now what does race mean under those circumstances? You give me the power, I can make you any race I want you to be, because it is a social, political construction.

NARRATOR: In 1909, American courts had that power. That year the U.S. Court of Appeals in Massachusetts ruled that Armenians, often classified as Asiatic Turks, were legally white. If Armenians could be designated white, what of the other so-called Asiatic races? Filipinos? Syrians? The Japanese? Could they also petition successfully to be designated white by the courts, and thus become Americans? In 1922, when Japanese businessman Takao Ozawa petitioned the Supreme Court for naturalization, many in the Japanese community believed his was the perfect test case.

NGAI: Takao Ozawa came from Japan, went to the University of California at Berkeley, uh, for a few years, then moved to Hawaii, where he had, um, a family. And he applied to become a naturalized citizen in 1915.

EDITH TAKEYA, daughter of Ozawa: My father wrote his own brief and everything. And he was really, uh, devoted. He wanted to become an American citizen and nothing would stop him. He was determined.

(1:15:12)

NARRATOR: Japanese growers in California watched Ozawa's case closely. By 1920, a series of alien land acts prohibited many non-citizens from owning or leasing land. Without a legal designation of whiteness to make them citizens, Japanese immigrants could not have the full protection of American law, no matter how long they lived in the country. In his brief, Ozawa argued that his skin was as white as any so-called Caucasian, if not whiter. But he made a much more important, second argument.

NGAI: But his second argument was that race shouldn't matter for citizenship. What really mattered was a person's beliefs.

NARRATOR (quoting Ozawa): My honesty and industriousness are well known among my Japanese and American friends. In name Benedict Arnold was an American, but at heart he was a traitor. In name I am not an American, but at heart I am a true American.

TAKEYA: The articles would come out in the paper. I thought, "Ooh. What did he do?" You know, I thought only bad things came out in the paper and I was kind of ashamed, you know? And I was a child. And it was just the way we were brought up. I didn't have any Oriental friends. My neighbors were all Caucasian. And, so he was so determined to get us, well, when the time came, to be American citizens.

NGAI: The Supreme Court ruled that Ozawa could not be a citizen. Uh, they said he was not white within the meaning of the statute, and therefore not eligible to citizenship. And the court said, well, he's not white, because he's not Caucasian, and Caucasians are whites.

NGAI: He did everything right. He learned English, he had a lifestyle that was American, he went to Christian church on Sunday, he dressed as a Westerner, he brought up his children, um, as Americans. He did everything he was supposed to do, and, and yet he's told that he can't be a citizen, because he's not white.

NARRATOR: The Court ruled that according to the best known science Ozawa was not Caucasian, but of the Mongolian race. But the Court would not be bound by science in policing the boundaries of whiteness.

Only three months after Ozawa, the Court took up the case of Bhagat Singh Thind, a South Asian immigrant and U.S. Army veteran, who petitioned for citizenship on the grounds that Indians were of the Aryan or Caucasian race, and therefore white.

JACOBSON: And he makes the scientific argument, uh, having learned something, actually, from the Ozawa case, that he is Caucasian. He gets scientific authority to speak on his behalf, that in fact South Asians are included in the Caucasian race.

NGAI: So here the court was in a bind, because they were presented with, so-called scientific evidence that Indians were Caucasian. And the court solved this problem by saying that it didn't matter what science said, so-called science. They actually said white is not something that can be scientifically determined, but white is something that is subjectively understood by who they called the common person, the common man.

(1:19:15)

NARRATOR (quoting Supreme Court opinion): It may be true, reasoned the court, that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them today.

NARRATOR: The same court that used science to determine whiteness in Ozawa three months before, now refuted its own reasoning in *Thind*. *Thind* might well be Caucasian, the high court said, but he was not white. The justices never said what whiteness was, only what it wasn't. Their implied logic was a circular one: Whiteness was what the common white man said it was.

OSSORIO: The court often decided who was white and who wasn't based on whether they just felt that the person would politically fit well into the kind of society that we were trying to build. And sometimes it was pretty explicit that this was what the court was doing.

NGAI: There was widespread racial views that Asians were undesirable, that they threatened to contaminate the American society. Basically that Asians are too different. That they can't ever really become like the rest of us.

NARRATOR: The consequences of the unanimous verdict in *U.S. vs. Thind* were catastrophic for the Indian community. South Asians who had naturalized before the verdict were stripped of their citizenship and property. Vaishno das Bagai was a successful merchant, who fled British tyranny in India to raise his family in a free country. After his American citizenship was revoked, he took his own life. He left a suicide note for his family--and another for the public:

QUOTE: But now they come and say to me I am no longer an American citizen. What have I made of myself and my children? We cannot exercise our rights, we cannot leave this country. Humility and insults...blockades this way, and bridges burned behind.

NARRATOR: For the Japanese community, the verdicts in the *Ozawa* and *Thind* cases were equally devastating. Now, as "aliens ineligible for citizenship," many growers were unable to purchase or even lease land to stay in business. Thousands of acres were seized from Japanese immigrants and sold to white farmers. By the time the racial requirement for naturalization was finally removed in 1952, Takao Ozawa was long dead.

NGAI: The notion that Asians are racially unassimilable, and that they're ineligible to citizenship, uh, because of their race is something that I think has had, uh, a real enduring, uh, effect. The fact that they were seen as non American, enabled many Americans to see them as, uh, as the enemy, and to strip them totally of their civil liberties and to put them in, in internment camps during World War II. The legacy of this idea is that, um, even those who are third or fourth generation Asian Americans are still perceived as foreigners.

NARRATOR: In 1924, Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, which effectively banned Asian immigration until 1965. Johnson-Reed also cut immigration from eastern and southern Europe to a trickle.

(1:23: 49)

FRANK SINATRA (film clip): Your bloods the same as mine. Mine's the same as his. Do you know what this wonderful country is made of? It's made up of a hundred different kinds of people...

NARRATOR: World War II found the U.S. at war with Nazi Germany and Japan. Films like the 1945 Oscar-winning short "The House I Live In" called for national unity and ethnic tolerance.

SINATRA (singing): What is America to me? A name, a flag...

JACOBSON: And these other distinctions which had carried so much power in an earlier period--Celt, Slav, Anglo-Saxon--uh, started to fade away. They had no purchase because those distinctions didn't seem to hold the key to any social questions that were worth answering any more. The more important and more pressing political, social questions seemed to hinge on, on, uh, black and white.

SINATRA (singing): All races and religions. That's America to me....

NARRATOR: Sinatra's song was one of tolerance, but the line that sang of "my neighbors Black and white" was cut from the film.

SINATRA: So long, men.

NARRATOR: European immigrants were learning that whiteness was more than skin color. It was the privilege of opportunity. And above all, exclusive.

JACOBSON: There's this whole very standard narrative of the European mobility model. We came here with nothing. We worked hard. We, we pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps. And it's offered up as proof of the openness of the American economic order.

NARRATOR: Left out of the bootstrap myth of European ethnics, was access to opportunities closed to non-whites. Roosevelt's New Deal reforms offered many Americans a path out of poverty.

FILM CLIP: This social security measure gives at least some protection to 30 millions of our citizens...

NARRATOR: But the original social security program excluded farm workers and domestics, most of whom were non-white. And many unions locked Blacks and Mexicans into low paying jobs, or kept them out all together. Perhaps the best example of how European ethnics would finally gain the full benefits of whiteness, to the exclusion of others, would come with an innovation in housing at the end of World War II.

NARRATOR: It was a time when hundreds of thousands of GIs came home ready to start families, but had no place to live.

JOHN JULIANO, Realtor: Living space was at a premium. In the Bronx, they tried building Quonset huts and they turned to, to slums. All the Quonset huts just disintegrated. There were two families sharing a hut; one family at one end, one family at the other; and before you know it, they were, they were awful.

(1:27:05)

FILM CLIP: FHA came to the rescue by insuring long term, low monthly payment mortgage loans. Home ownership was made possible for additional millions of families and stimulated a tremendous volume of construction.

NARRATOR: Veterans needed homes for families. They turned to a revolutionary New Deal housing program. It would racialize housing, wealth, and opportunity for decades, in ways few could have imagined.

OLIVER: In the 1930's the federal government created the Federal Housing Administration, whose job it was to, uh, provide loans or the backing for loans to average Americans so they could purchase a home.

FILM CLIP: Due to the stimulation of the national housing act, from every section of the country come reports of vastly...

OLIVER: In order to purchase a house in America prior to 1930s, you had to pay 50 percent of the sales price up front. The new terms of purchasing a home was that you put 10 percent or 20 percent down, and the bank financed 80% of it--not over five years but over 30 years at relatively, uh, low rates. This opened up the opportunities for Americans to own homes like ever before. The average person could own that home.

NARRATOR: If these terms sound familiar, they should. Because this is essentially the same financing scheme that allows most Americans to own their homes today. Federal programs and banks sank millions into the home construction industry. Their message to veterans: you can afford a new home--buy a new home now. On the outskirts of Baltimore, Memphis, Chicago, Los Angeles, Denver, and other cities, brand new communities sprang up. One of the most famous was a Long Island potato field, transformed into 17,000 new homes. It was called Levittown. Tax dollars helped make the single family home a mass-produced consumer item. The American dream had a new name: Suburbia.

HERB KALISMAN, Levittown Resident: You have to remember the people who came here in 1947, 1948 were young ex-GIs whose upper most concern was taking advantage of the GI bill and making things better for themselves.

NARRATOR: Before moving to Levittown , Herb Kalisman and his wife Doris lived in a cramped attic apartment in New York City.

DORIS KALISMAN: And when we began to look for an apartment, we found that the apartments were a hundred, a hundred and twenty five, hundred and fifty dollars a month. I know that's unbelievable today but it was too expensive for us. And, out here in Levittown the mortgage payments were 65 dollars a month.

WOMAN (singing in film clip): A brand new sink, a built-in oven, a new refrigerator, and a phone, a kitchen phone...

JULIANO: If you were buying a Levitt home in 1947, '48, '49, '50 and '51, you would get, this would be your kitchen: You would get a G.E. stove, G.E. refrigerator, and a Bendix wash machine, it would be part of the real estate.

(1:30:55)

EUGENE BURNETT, Long Island Resident: We came to Levittown and we found the model house. And we walked in, and we looked around, and, uh, of course, in the eyes of a, uh, young man who was raised in the ghetto, so-to-speak, it was an interesting experience - interesting lifestyle, seeing all the new modern conveniences. Very fascinating.

NARRATOR: Eugene Burnett came home with almost a million other Black GIs. They had fought for the country in segregated ranks. They returned hoping for equality and the American dream. For many, that dream was a new home for little money down and some of the easiest credit terms in history.

MR. BURNETT: I went up to the salesman, "We're interested in your home, we're interested in buying one, and, uh, what is the procedure? Is there an application to be filled out?" So forth. So he looked at me. Looked around and he said to me. He says, "Listen, it's not me, but the owners of this development have not as yet decided to sell these homes to Negroes."

MRS. BURNETT: It was as though it wasn't real. You can't imagine - but for someone to come out and actually tell you that they can't sell to you - you know, I, I was really on a - oh, man look at this house! Can you imagine having this? And then for them to tell me because of the color of my skin I can't be a part of it?

NARRATOR: The FHA underwriters warned that the presence of even one or two non-white families could undermine real estate values in the new suburbs. These government guidelines were widely adopted by private industry. Race had long played a role in local real estate practices. Starting in the 1930's, government officials institutionalized a national appraisal system, where race was as much a factor in real estate assessment as the condition of the property. Using this scheme, federal investigators evaluated 239 cities across the country for financial risk.

OLIVER: So that those communities that were all white, suburban and far away from minority areas, uh, they received the highest rating. And that was the color green. Those communities that were all minority or in the process of changing, they got the lowest rating and the color red. They were "redlined." As a consequence, most of the mortgages went to suburbanizing America, and it suburbanized it racially.

JACOBSON: The racial logic adopts the principle that an integrated neighborhood is a bad risk, is a financial risk. That an integrated neighborhood is likely to be an unstable neighborhood. Uh, unstable socially, but therefore also unstable economically.

NARRATOR: When the white residents of Eight Mile Road in Detroit were told they were too close to a Black neighborhood to qualify for a positive FHA rating, they built this six foot wall between themselves and their Black neighbors. Once the wall went up, mortgages on the white properties were approved. Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government underwrote 120 billion dollars in new housing. Less than 2% went to non-whites.

MRS. BURNETT: I can understand an individual -- depending on his environment, or his family, or whatever, uh, being racist, but for your country to, um, sanction it, give him tools to do that, there's something definitely wrong there.

(1:35:27)

MR. KALISMAN: I think we had the golden chance after World War II and we, and we flubbed it. Because, uh, here, here we had a GI Bill, that was, uh, uh, supposed to, you know--- that was available to everybody; but in a

way they didn't make it available to everybody and, uh, and that was a golden opportunity in this country, and we missed it. We really missed it.

MAN (film clip): But you can always tell can't you. A town with good real estate people is a more substantial community, because more people own their own homes.

SECOND MAN (film clip): That's right.

john a. powell, Legal Scholar: Now it's sort of hard to believe that the federal government nationalized and introduced redlining. In a funny way, it wasn't just giving something to whites it was constructing whiteness. Whiteness meant, as, as in the past white has meant being a citizen and being a Christian; it now meant living in the suburbs.

NARRATOR: Only 50 years before, European ethnics were believed to be distinct races. Now in these new segregated neighborhoods they blended together as white Americans.

MRS. KALISMAN: We did have different religious groups. We were mixed up there, but, uh, we, we were an all white community, and I think it's an unrealistic world. I think there's something sterile about everyone being on the same economic level and everyone being the same color.

BILL GRIFFITH, Cartoonist: It certainly doesn't, um, promote, um, a feeling of a wider world--wider not whiter--um, to live in place where there are only people that look like you.

NARRATOR: Cartoonist Bill Griffith remembers moving from Brooklyn to Levittown as a kid.

GRIFFITH: It's an untenable, artificial world. You're creating a weird utopia in a way: a, a utopia of, of, you know, middle class white people who are trying to deny that they were living in a multi-racial world and how long can you keep that up? You can't keep that up forever.

GRIFFITH: Whether there were going to be, Black people in Levittown was just--it would be almost the equivalent of saying, "Are there going to be Martians in Levittown?"

powell: Basically the idea of whiteness is who's included, who's part of the family and it has material consequences.

powell: Blacks weren't completely left out of the housing market. The housing market that they were exposed to was largely public housing. And public housing, first of all was built almost exclusively with some - uh, with a few exceptions - in the central city. And after World War II, we started building larger and larger public housing projects, which were called "vertical ghettos." All of a sudden you're concentrating large numbers of poor people of color in one place.

NARRATOR: Another federal program, urban renewal, was supposed to make cities more livable. 90% of all housing destroyed by urban renewal was not replaced. Two thirds of those displaced were Black or Latino.

(1:39:20)

PRESIDENT JOHNSON (in film clip): Fair housing for all, all human beings who live in this country, is now a part of the American way of life.

NARRATOR: In 1968, President Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act. For the first time, racial language was removed from federal housing policy. Non-white families began moving into traditionally white communities in numbers.

BUNNY FRISBY, Roosevelt Resident: We lived in an apartment, a two, uh, two-family house in Queens. And when we came here, it was the first time we had bought a house, and I was looking for everything in the storybooks.

NARRATOR: In 1966, the Frisbys moved from Queens to suburban Roosevelt, only a few miles from Levittown. Like the Frisbys, many non-white families would discover the economic value of race in the real estate market. They watched as their homes and neighborhoods in suburbia declined precisely because they had moved into them.

FRISBY: When I moved into a neighborhood, I thought it would stay intact the way it was. On the street that I

moved on when I moved there, it was predominantly white. Within two years, it was predominantly Black.

NARRATOR: It was called "block-busting." Real estate agents preyed on the racial fears of white homeowners to get them to sell their homes quickly, for less than market value. The homes were resold to non-whites at inflated prices.

RUTH GREFE, Roosevelt Resident: Well, they would say, you know, we're having Black people move in now. I will give you cash if you want to sell me your house. Do you want to stay with Black people next door to you? And that's the way it went on. And, uh, as Bunny said, a lot of the people just said, "Yes, I'll take the money, and run." And, uh, that's the start of the white people leaving.

NARRATOR: As more Black and Latino families moved to Roosevelt, real estate became more and more depressed, just as the FHA had predicted. But why?

CHARLIE WINTER, Roosevelt Resident: I have an idea my house is probably worth around 120 in this town. But what it would be worth in Wantagh, uh, or Garden City, or some other place, probably around \$200,000 or better. Now you're talking about \$80,000. ---You, uh, said to me one time about-- why do people dislike the Blacks? Well, money-wise, there's a reason. Not that you dislike the Blacks so much, but you dislike what happens when a community turns from white to Black.

NARRATOR: It wasn't African Americans moving in that caused housing values to go down in Roosevelt and other neighborhoods, it was whites leaving.

DALTON CONLEY, Sociologist: When a neighborhood, a previously white neighborhood starts to integrate, even if individual whites don't have personal or psychological animosity or racial hatred, they still have an economic incentive to leave. Because they recognize that others might make the same calculation and leave first. So you get a vicious circle where whites calculate that other whites are going to sell when a neighborhood integrates, therefore they want to sell first to avoid losses. And, they actually make it happen. They make white flight happen.

(1:43:29)

OLIVER: And if you think about African Americans, if African Americans are 20% of that market, it means that 80% of the people are not looking in those places for homes. So the price of those homes declines or stays stable. And banks contribute to this by continually making loans in regions that are, um, on the rise, white communities, and making it difficult to get loans in Black communities.

powell: So there's a difference. There's a lack of symmetry that's important to keep, keep in mind. That, that, uh, so it's not the same when, when whites are all by themselves. Cause when they're all by themselves, they're taking all the resources with them, they're taking all the amenities with them. But when Blacks are by themselves, they can't get, they can't get loans. Uh, they don't have a decent tax base, there no jobs. And then that, that becomes associated with Black space.

NARRATOR: In the end, what happened to Roosevelt happens in many neighborhoods when white families and businesses flee: the tax base eroded, schools and services declined. The town was seen by county officials as a legitimate dumping ground for welfare families.

powell: At one point we had explicit laws that says whites are on top, and Blacks are on the bottom. Today, we have many of the same practices without the explicit language, and those practices are largely inscribed in geography. Uh, and so, geography does the work of Jim Crow laws, so many people are confused as to why after 50 years of civil rights, are our schools still segregated? Why our housing market still segregated? Why are our jobs still segregated? Uh, and again, a lot of this is a function of how we've reinscribed the racial geographic space in the United States. That structure is still what we're living with today.

NARRATOR: As homes in white communities appreciated in value, the net worth of these white families grew. For most non-white families who stayed in urban neighborhoods, the housing market open to them in the 50's and 60's was largely a rental market. You don't gain equity by paying rent.

CONLEY: Where one's family lives in America is not just a matter of, of taste and preference. You have the issue of housing and wealth. The majority of Americans hold most of their wealth in the form of home equity. So that's their nest egg. That's how they can finance the education of their offspring. That's how they can, um, sort of save up for retirement. Um, it's their savings bank, right. They're living in their savings bank.

powell: My family, like a lot of families, was in Detroit struggling to buy a house. You had a dual housing market -- one white, one Black -- a housing market with one, with a lot of demand; another housing market with very little demand. My father lives in the house that I grew up in. The house today -- a five bedroom house -- is worth about \$20,000. That same house bought in the suburbs would be worth today about \$320,000. So whites moving to the suburbs were being subsidized in the accumulation of wealth, while Blacks were being divested.

OLIVER: And these, uh, were public policy decisions in which, on one hand, people were given access to property, given title and subsequently wealth. And on another hand, where people were not given access to property, did not generate wealth and did not generate the kind of opportunity for the next generation.

(1:47:35)

BEVERLY TATUM, Psychologist: So if you can get a government loan with your GI Bill, your newly earned college degree and buy a house in an all-white area, that then appreciates in value, that then you can pass on to your children, then you're passing on wealth. That has all been made more available to you as consequence of racist policies and practices. To the child of that parent, it looks like my father worked hard, bought a house, passed his wealth on to me, made it possible for me to go to school, mortgaged that house so I could have, you know, relatively debt-free college experience, and has financed my college education. How come your father didn't do that? You know, well, there are some good reasons why maybe your father had a harder time doing it if you're African-American, or Latino, or Native American.

powell: And the thing that's really, uh, slick about whiteness, if you will, is that most of the benefits can be obtained without ever doing anything personally. For whites, they are getting the spoils of a racist system, even if they are not personally racist.

NARRATOR: To glimpse one of the far-reaching consequences of racial inequality, you need only consider one statistic: comparative net worth or wealth. If you add up everything you own and subtract all your debts, what's left is your net worth.

CONLEY: Today, the average Black family has only one-eighth the net worth or assets of the average white family. That difference has seemingly grown since the 1960's, since the Civil Rights triumphs. And is not explained by other factors, like education, earnings rates, savings rates. It is really the legacy of racial inequality from generations past. No other measure captures the legacy, the sort of cumulative disadvantage of race, or cumulative advantage of race for whites, than net worth or wealth.

NARRATOR: Even with the same income, white families have on average twice the wealth of Black families. Much of that difference lies in the value of their homes. But what happens when we compare families along the colorline who have similar wealth?

CONLEY: When you make the right comparison when you compare a Black kid from a family with the same income and wealth level as the white kid, um, from the similar economic situation, rates of college graduation are the same; rates of employment and work hours are the same; rates of welfare usage are the same. So when we're talking about race in terms of a cultural accounting of these differences or a genetic accounting of these differences, we're really missing the picture, because we're making the wrong comparison.

NARRATOR: We want to be a colorblind society that values the content of character over the color of skin. The hope of the thousands of newcomers who arrive each year is that we already are. "I don't see color, I see people," the saying goes. But in post-Civil Rights America, is colorblindness the same as equality?

BONILLA-SILVA: The notion of colorblindness came to us from that famous "I Have A Dream" speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, where he said that the people should be judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin. And what has happened in the post civil rights era is that whites have assumed that we are already there, that we're in a society where color does not matter.

(1:52:17)

CONLEY: On the one hand, the civil rights era officially ended inequality of opportunity, officially ended de jure legal inequality. At the same time, those civil rights triumphs did nothing to address the underlying economic and social inequalities that had already been in place. It doesn't recognize the fact that the rewards, the house, the Lexus, the, you know, the big bank account, those are not only the rewards, you know, the pot of gold at the end of the game, they're also the starting position for the next generation.

NARRATOR: The wealth gap grows, the advantages of being white accumulate from one generation to the

next.

TATUM: What are the benefits or the advantages to being white in a society that has historically given benefits and advantages to members of the dominant group? And if you are a person who has that privilege, you don't necessarily notice it.

CONLEY: So until we recognize that there is really no way to talk about equality of opportunity without talking about equality of condition then we are stuck with this of paradoxical idea of a colorblind society in a society that is totally unequal by color.

NARRATOR: Claiming we don't see race won't end racial inequality. As Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun said, "To get beyond racism we must first take account of race. There is no other way."

TATUM: And just as we're born into this system, we don't ask to be loaded up with stereotypes or omissions, or distortions when we come into the world. We don't ask to be in a structure which is unfair, but that's what we have inherited. Whether you identify as a person of color, whether you identify as a white person, it doesn't matter.

powell: I think we have to be uncomfortable with the present racial arrangement. Uh, in a sense, I think we have to be willing to be uncomfortable, willing to demand more of ourselves and more of our country, and willing to make the invisible visible.

TATUM: I think we all have to think about what can I influence? I don't influence everything, but the things I do influence, I can think about how am I making this a more equitable environment?
I can ask myself who's included in this picture and who isn't, who's had opportunities in my environment and who hasn't? What can I do about that?

END

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