

Assignment #1 Summary Notes

I. AAA Statement:

A. Key Big Ideas

1. All humans share a profound biological and psychological *unity*.
2. Race is a “social construction”, an invention, a political and economic strategy that has been used to justify social hierarchy and inequalities.
3. Culture, not biology, is decisive in shaping human temperaments and dispositions; present day inequalities between racial groups are products of social relations and circumstances.

B. Comments on the Statement

1. Invoking cultural determinism is almost as objectionable as invoking biological determinism; we should appreciate the complex relationships between geography, biology, and behavior.
2. We need to come to terms with the revelations of human genome studies; we should be open-minded to the possibility that even very small genetic differences between groups can have big effects (e.g., predispose some members of certain groups to particular kinds of diseases).
3. Admitting that geography and biology play a role in shaping human differences wouldn't change the fact that there's a fundamental unity to humankind, or undermine a moral/ethical commitment to treating all groups and people equally.

II. Gould: “The Geometer of Race”

A. Blumenbach's Major Contributions (For Better or Worse!)

1. The modern concept of five great races, roughly correlated with geography.
2. An early concept of environmental adaptation: Racial variation is the product of “degeneration” from an original Caucasian form based on differences in climate, habitat, and “mode of life”.
3. An early concept of branching through intermediary forms, albeit using the highly subjective criterion of “beauty” and in turn producing a “hierarchy of worth” (see figure at right).

B. **Blumenbach's paradox:** He was committed to the widespread Enlightenment belief in human unity, yet his framework ended up being used as a strategy for dividing, ranking, and eventually oppressing people.

C. Other Things Worth Noting

1. Gould gives the modern concept of biological race an *origin* and a *history*. People didn't always classify others by appearance, or rank them according to aesthetic, intellectual, and moral worth.

2. Gould provides insight into how even very well-intentioned ideas can have dangerous consequences. Moreover, they can “spook” subsequent generations of scholars (e.g., members of the AAA?) and thereby steer them away from certain ideas because of the historical baggage that those ideas carry.



3. Caucasian



2. American Indian



4. Malay



1. Oriental



5. African

Blumenbach's racial geometry with two lines of “degeneration” extending out through intermediary stages from a central Caucasian “ideal.” From *Anthropological Treatises*, J. F. Blumenbach, 1865.