

ANSWERS TO THE RACE LITERACY QUIZ

What differences make a difference?

The Race Literacy Quiz was developed by California Newsreel, in association with the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The myths and misconceptions it raises are explored in the documentary series *RACE - The Power of an Illusion*, available on video from California Newsreel at www.newsreel.org or 1-877-811-7495.

ANSWER KEY

1. A. None

There are no characteristics, no traits, not even one gene that distinguish all members of one so-called race from all members of another race.

2. E. None of the above

There are no traits, no characteristics, not even one gene that is present in all members of one so-called race and absent in another. The A, B, and O blood groups can be found in all the world's peoples (the percentage of Estonians and Papua New Guineans with A, B, and O blood are almost exactly identical). Skin color tends to correlate with the earth's geographic latitude not race; sub-Saharan Africans, the Dravidians and Tamils of southern Asia, and Melanesians from the Pacific all have very dark skin. Ancestry is difficult to trace; we all have two parents, four grandparents, etc. If you could trace your family back 30 generations, slightly more than 1,000 years, you'd find one billion ancestors.

3. C. The Declaration of Independence

Ironically, it was freedom, not slavery, that gave rise to modern theories of race. Until the Revolutionary period, slavery was an unquestioned "fact of life." It was only when Americans proclaimed the radical new idea that "all men are created equal" that slavery was first challenged as immoral. As historian Barbara Fields notes, the new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.

4. E. Saudi Arabians and Ethiopians

Populations that live near each other geographically tend to be genetically more alike than populations that live far apart. That's because they are more likely to have intermixed in the recent past and therefore share more genes. So even though Senegalese and Kenyans or Italians and Swedes are traditionally placed in the same "races," they live farther apart from each other and have had less contact and intermixing than Saudis and Ethiopians.

5. A. Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson was the first prominent American to speculate that black people might be innately inferior to Europeans. Until then, most Enlightenment figures believed that differences between groups were not inborn but due to environmental factors. It wasn't until Jefferson introduced the radical new ideas of liberty and equality that slavery had to be justified and prejudices against the enslaved began to crystallize into a doctrine of white supremacy. American freedom and the idea of innate racial difference were born together. Historian Barbara Fields calls them "Siamese twins."

6. D. They were deemed innately inferior

Throughout much of history, societies have enslaved people, often as a result of conquest, war or even debt. People were not enslaved because they were first deemed inferior. African slaves were well-suited to labor in North

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America: unlike the Indians, they were resistant to European diseases; they couldn't easily run away; they were not Christians (and hence unprotected by English law); and they were skilled semi-tropical farmers. Finally, in the late 17th century, African slaves became available in large numbers just as the original labor force on Virginia's tobacco plantations - English indentured servants - began to rebel and immigration from England slowed. Over time, the degradation of slavery became identified with blackness, giving white Americans the idea that Africans were a fundamentally different kind of people.

7. E. 98 percent

Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government created programs that subsidized low-cost home loans, opening up home ownership to millions of Americans for the first time. At the same time, government underwriters introduced a national appraisal system tying property value and loan eligibility to race, inventing "redlining," and effectively locking nonwhites out of home-buying just as most middle class white Americans were beginning to purchase homes.

8. B: Eight times as much

Probably no one statistic better captures the cumulative disadvantage of past discrimination than wealth. Even at the same income levels, whites still have, on average, twice as much wealth as nonwhites. Much of this difference is due to the different rates of home ownership and the different values of homes in white and Black neighborhoods. But wealth is not only the end point, it's the starting line for the next generation - helping finance your children's education, helping them through hard times, or helping with the down payment of their own home. Economists estimate 50-80% of one's lifetime wealth accumulation can be traced to this head start. As wealth gets passed down from generation to generation, the legacy of past discrimination accumulates, giving whites and nonwhites vastly different life chances.

9. A. 1964 Civil Rights Act

The Civil Rights Act made racial discrimination in public places illegal. The other programs are all examples of racial preferences - for white people. Over a 40-year period, the Homestead Act gave away, for free, 270 million acres of what had been Indian Territory, almost all of it to white people. The Naturalization Act allowed only "free white persons" to adopt citizenship, thus opening our doors to European immigrants, but barring Asians and other groups. Racial barriers to citizenship were not removed until 1952. The Federal Housing Administration made it possible for millions of average white Americans - but not others - to own a home for the first time. (see #16 above). And the Social Security Act specifically exempted two occupations from coverage: farm-workers and domestics, both largely non-white.