

Study Questions on *Race: The Power of an Illusion: The Story We Tell*
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HUM 376
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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

—Theda Perdue, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*

1. Pay attention to the ways the documentary discusses the history of the concept of race. Moreover, pay attention to how what we call race (in the U.S.) today is a peculiarly modern (i.e. 18th/19th century) construct.
2. How, according to the documentary, are our modern notions of race bound up with something we consider to be “natural”?
3. Pay attention to how the documentary discusses “whiteness.”
4. Pay attention to the history of the “civilization policy” and Cherokee peoples, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and the Trail of Tears.
5. Pay attention to how our inherited concepts of race were an invention of modern (i.e. 19th century) science.
6. How is the concept of race bound up with the act of “looking”? How is it a way of “seeing” in addition to a way of speaking?
7. Pay close attention to the discussion of the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, particularly around modernism, civilization, progress, and race. How were these displays of human beings creating ways of “seeing” race? And what were those “looking” at these “human exhibits” experiencing? In other words, do you think they were “experiencing” whiteness and what do you think was bound up with that “experience”?
8. How does the information in this documentary deepen your thinking about Ishi’s story?
9. How are we still dealing with the legacy of the uniquely modern construct of race, today?