

### 3.3 What is Race?

Racism, prejudice and discrimination based on the supposed innate characteristic of specific population groups, has been used to justify imperialism and genocide. While the racial differences that are used to justify racism are supposed to be genetic, the DNA of two humans chosen at random varies by less than 0.1%. Read the passages below that discuss the “science” of race and answer questions 1-5.

#### Questions

1. What did Strickland claim about the Irish?
2. How could this claim be used to justify prejudice and discrimination?
3. What is the “scientific” definition of race?
4. What does it mean to say that “race” is a “social construct”?
5. In your opinion, given the long history of racism and its uses, should scientists and social scientists abandon the concept of race? Explain.



Illustrations in *Ireland from One or Two Neglected Points of View* by H. Strickland Constable were used to justify British colonial policy in Ireland. The Anglo-Teutonic image is supposed to represent the British. Negro refers to sub-Saharan Africans. Strickland claimed the illustrations proved the Irish were descended from “Iberians” or Spaniards who were “originally an African race” that mixed with the natives of the South and West. These people were also “supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages of the Stone Age, who, in consequence of isolation from the rest of the world, had never been out-competed in the healthy struggle of life, and thus made way, according to the laws of nature, for superior races.” (Image Source: Wikipedia)

<b>Race is a useful biological category.</b>	<b>Race is a social construct that contributes to racism.</b>
<p>Race is a geographically isolated breeding population that shares certain characteristics in higher frequencies than other populations of that species, but has not become reproductively isolated from other populations of the same species. A population is a group of organisms that inhabit the same region and interbreed. Human racial groups compose a number of breeding units that in the past remained geographically and perhaps temporally isolated, yet could interbreed and produce viable offspring within the species <i>Homo sapiens sapiens</i>.                      Paleoanthropological evidence suggests that these units have been interbreeding between populations for at least the last two hundred thousand years or longer in what may once have been considered racial groups.  <a href="http://www.biologyreference.com">http://www.biologyreference.com</a></p>	<p>“Race has been called man’s most dangerous myth., a superstition, and more recently a social construction. Race concepts are rooted in the belief that the people of the world can be organized into biologically distinct groups, each with their own discrete physical, social, and intellectual characteristics . . . As much as scientists once thought that race was a reflection of physical or biological differences, today social scientists, with help from colleagues in the natural sciences, have shown that the once seemingly objective race concept is in fact historically contingent . . . Race is a historical and cultural phenomenon – an analysis of human biological difference mediated by the politics, culture, and economics of a given historical moment.” - Michael Yudell, <i>Race Unmasked</i></p>