



A178 Ancestry Estimation, Race Science, and Scientific Racism in Forensic Anthropology

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how forensic anthropological research influences the production of race science and is used in the perpetuation of racist ideologies. Additionally, results from an online survey are presented regarding the views of biological anthropologists on race and ancestry, and professional obligations in response to race science and scientific racism.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing information on the implications of forensic anthropological research and practice in race science and the enforcement of racial hierarchies. Such knowledge, in conjunction with current views in biological anthropology concerning race and ancestry as well as ethical practice, may be used to establish a series of best practices regarding language use, research design, and public engagement.

In forensic anthropology, practitioners differentiate the concepts of biological ancestry and social race to argue that typological views are no longer a valid perspective in the discipline. However, despite these efforts, individuals in a variety of fields continue to assert the existence of biological racial differences with a resulting natural hierarchy. Importantly, for the anthropological community, the research is misused to promote these racist views. To understand this misappropriation, this project examines the literature for instances in which proponents of race science and White supremacists/nationalists utilize forensic anthropological research to justify the existence of biological races. Articles in multiple journals were reviewed, including *Mankind Quarterly*; *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*; *American Renaissance*; and *The Occidental Quarterly*.

Two primary ways of misusing research on skeletal human variation were identified. The first is the use of forensic ancestry estimation as evidence for the existence of biological races with clearly delineated differences. The second is the use of phenotypic traits as correlates for racial differences in relation to personality, behavior, and intelligence. Indirectly, research in age and sex estimation, including studies of dental and skeletal development, were used to support various claims of racial differences in intelligence and temperament.

To supplement this review of the literature on race science, results from a recent online survey approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Nevada, Reno ($n=257$) are discussed. In this survey of biological anthropologists, there is a consensus regarding the social versus biological dichotomy of race and ancestry. However, there is disagreement as to whether ancestry itself is also a social construct (28.05% agree vs. 49.32% disagree). There is a lack of agreement as to whether the use of categories like African American and European involves the identification of a biological race (21.83% agree) and if forensic anthropology reinforces racial typology (27.95% agree). In fact, scholars are almost evenly split as to whether using categories like African American or White are justified when studying phenotypic variation, with 32.54% agreeing and 35.32% disagreeing.

Questions regarding terminology show some disagreement between respondents. Biological anthropologists suggest geographically based terminology (e.g., European) is preferred over socially based terms (e.g., White) (54.63% vs. 9.73%). There is slightly more disagreement regarding social/nationality-based terms like European American (24.55% agree vs. 42.41% disagree). There is also some debate regarding the use of Hispanic/Latino as an ancestry category with approximately 26% arguing it is a valid category and about 43% arguing it is not.

Nearly half of respondents argued that political correctness is a problem in biological anthropology (46.12%) and about one-quarter of respondents agreed that concerns over the moral and ethical implications of research (e.g., photos, ancestry, terminology) result in the silencing of research. Most anthropologists argue that if misappropriation of research occurs, there is an ethical obligation to intervene (94.87%). Finally, despite these concerns, 71.6% of respondents argued ancestry estimation should remain a component of forensic practice.

The review presented here provides important evidence of continued weaponization of forensic anthropological research to push extremist and harmful ideologies of racial typology. Based on this study, it is critical that forensic anthropologists clearly evaluate what is meant by ancestry and its relation to race. Further, they should be mindful of the terminology used, reference sample construction, and method design. Research should be transparent and forensic anthropologists should engage with the public in discussions of race and biology as well as work to combat the misappropriation of their research.

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