

# Why race in america is a social construct, not reality essay samples

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Few would argue that Race in America has been one of the biggest social issues since the founding of our country. Race defines politics, socio-economic status, educational and employment opportunities. George Henderson writes in his essay “ Race in America” writes, “ At some time in their history, all ethnic groups in the United States have been the underclass.” He qualifies this by saying that “ Also, at different times, all ethnic groups have been both the oppressed and the oppressors.” (Henderson, 1). That is to say, America is a country where race issues and discrimination about race has always been present. Unfortunately, this was a completely avoidable state of affairs. Race is a social construct. As Zora Neale Hurston reveals in her memoir about being colored in America, “ How It Feels To Be colored Me” race is something that she was taught to feel, not something that she innately felt. Both essays support the thesis that all of the racism problems in America could have been avoided had people not carried around misconceived mentalities with them surrounding what it means to be a different color.

The word unconscious bias implies that someone is unaware of the bias they possess. Unconscious biases are handed down through generations. Just as children pickup on the slang of their parents, they also pick up on their unconscious biases. This is likely a deeply seeded part of human nature that developed because it had an evolutionary advantage. Back in the early days of human existence, it was important to be wary of outsiders. But a human being is a human being regardless of the color of their skin. This is the reality of the situation. There are no differences in human-hood across different skin colors. As humans are capable of believing a variety of illogical things,

racism is a product of an irrational train of thought. Henderson writes, “ It is the erroneous belief that people who come to America can be placed in categories based on their unique gene pools that has resulted in the most blatant instances of discrimination” (Henderson, 1). Zora Neale Hurston writes, “ I remember the very day that I became colored” (Hurston, 2). She writes that this event occurred on her thirteenth birthday. Obviously skin color is something that a person is born with, so what could she mean by that.

What she meant was that distinguishing between white and black did not exist for her until that age. People were just people. Their skin color varied like their hair, and eye color varied. But at thirteen she realized the differences that society attached to skin color and, as a result, came to see people and herself in a much different light. Hurston’s background puts her perspective on the race issue in a unique light. She lived in a mostly black town growing up, where whites were the outsiders, and blacks were the rule. She writes, “ During this period, white people differed from colored to me only in that they rode through town and never lived [they] gave me generously of their small silver for doing these things, which seemed strange to me” (Hurston, 2). Even after her childhood Hurston had difficult coming to terms with being colored. She writes that sometimes she doesn’t feel colored. And why should she? Should a white person feel like a white person? Should a black person feel like a black person? Or should people just feel like people? Henderson believes that this is the state of affairs in the world but that it is an unnecessary state of affairs. It is not fact, but merely perception. He writes, “ A much more practical dictum, and one that has often been

ignored throughout American history is that all people belong to the same species” (Henderson, 2). He laments that too few people believe “ the only race of any significance is the human race” (Henderson, 2).

Racism is unjust because, for those who hold biases against races, it prevents them from being themselves. A black woman like Hurston is unable to let people judge her on her own merits and behavior because preconceived notions are how she is evaluated. This is why she writes the analogy that “ I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against the wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow.” Hurston then lists the miscellaneous things inside there. Her point in this analogy is that the contents of a person’s bag tell more about who they are than an outward appearance. For a handbag, brown is a very dull color. A red, yellow or white handbag will be more noticeable and perhaps desirable than a brown one. But the exterior is no guarantee about what one will find inside. People need not judge a book, or a handbag, or a person, by the exterior. The point is as Henderson demonstrates in his essay; they do. Even despite the advances that people tout since the Civil Rights Movement, America still lags hopelessly behind in a racial liberty. He says that “ Despite numerous and impressive gains during the past century, a disproportionate number of peoples of color are still treated like pariahs” Henderson, 3).

Hurston is unable to get angry at being discriminated against. For her, it is a surreal experience. She has such a strong and independent identity regarding who she is that she clearly does not take her race into her evaluation of her self. Others around her do. It is frustrating for her to need to make allowances for how others perceive her instead of being able to

make them understand that her race does not define her. She says that “ Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me” (Hurston, 3). Here Hurston displays humor and confidence. She wants to be able to go out and meet people and interact with them on their level, but she cannot do that if the white people she meets are governed by biases that force them to see her in a preconceived sort of way. While it is possible to say that these perceptions are excess baggage that is unnecessary, it is impossible to deny that necessary or not, race does govern politics and culture in the country. Lots of progress has been made since Hurston wrote her essay in 1928. Henderson writes nearly a decade after her, but he points to the crossroads that our culture is at. He writes, “ There is little doubt that our nation is at a crossroads in its race relations. Where we go from here is up to all of us. We can try segregation again, continuance of the status quo, silence in the face of prejudice and discriminatory practices, or activism. The choice is ours” (Henderson, 15). The important word in Henderson’s outlook on the future is choice. Hurston believes that seeing race and attaching meanings to different races is a choice. It is not a choice that she has made; it is a choice that the culture she lives in has made. Unconscious bias cannot be preventing from forming, but people should be open to acknowledging that it exists, and studies have shown that to some degree or other, most people have biases against other races. Some, because of the messages reinforced in media, even have biases against their races. Both Henderson and Hurston are hopeful that the future will be places where people make a choice not to see a race. While

progress is slow, progress has been made, in a relatively short period. Only 150 years ago, people believed that it was okay to own human beings. This type of opinion is unacceptable by today's standards. Hopefully, the path towards seeing people by who they are inside, and not what the "color of their bag is" is one that our culture will continue to follow. Because as both writers argue, and the science has shown, all prejudices founded on the bases of race are irrational biases. So if the human race is ever to truly enter the "age of reason," such illogical perspectives will have to be stricken from the cultural consciousness.