

Grade 11

The Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre is pleased to offer a series of eight (8) units covering the following Grade 11 CAPS topic:

Ideas of Race in the late 19th and 20th Centuries – What were the consequences when pseudoscientific ideas of Race became integral to government policies and legislation in the 19th and 20th centuries?

Case studies: **Australia** and the indigenous Australians; Nazi **Germany** and the Holocaust.

Unit 1

Introduction

In this unit you will be given a brief overview of the following:

- the pseudoscience of **race theory**,
- the pseudoscience of **eugenics**,

Pseudo Scientific Ideas of Race

First, we will unpack the pseudoscience of race. In order to do that, let's tackle the notion (idea) of pseudoscience.

What *is* pseudoscience? What does the word *pseudo* mean?

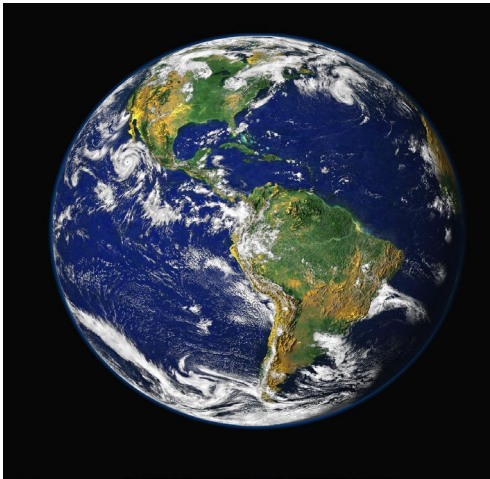
Pseudo comes from the Greek, and it means **false** or **fake** or **inaccurate**, without proof, without fact.

Today, we understand the theory of race to be pseudoscientific.

This means it is a false or mistaken science.

But when people – amongst them many scientists – believed in it, they genuinely believed it to be true. They weren't putting out this information to deliberately dupe (or trick) people or to falsify what they understood. For a long time, scientists genuinely believed in the idea of race and they thought that race 'science' was true as well. Today, of course, we know that it is not true.

And that is because science evolves. It is not static. It changes and grows – which is exciting!



Let's think about the evolution of science. Take a look at the image of Planet Earth next to this text. You have probably seen many pictures like this before (pictures of Earth taken from space).

In this one, you see the globe, and on it you can see South America and you can see the oceans around it and some clouds... And you recognise all these things as being part and parcel of our planet's landscape. You know that it is a *real image*.

But there was a time when people genuinely believed that the Earth was flat and couldn't have imagined that this image was legitimate or authentic or real. In fact, they said it was *scientifically proven* that the Earth was flat. In the 4th and 5th Centuries there were plenty of professional, well-learned cartographers (map makers) who made maps where the Earth was depicted as flat! Their 'accurate' maps showed that if you rowed your boat to the end of the world you would fall right off the edge!

Pseudoscientific Ideas of Race

Pseudoscientific Ideas of Eugenics

Where, When and Why these ideas took root?

One of the most important things when looking at any history, and if you are going to be a historian, which we hope many of you are, is the where, when and why of things. This is known as **CONTEXT**.

We have to understand when things happened, where they happened, and all of this helps us to understand why they happened.

Events generally make a lot more sense if we understand their **context**.

We will be looking at a lot of the context around these ideas throughout the units.

Pseudoscientific Ideas of Race

Pseudoscientific ideas of Eugenics

Where, When and Why these ideas took root?

The Consequences of these ideas as they became integral to government Policies in the 19th and 20th centuries

How these ideas are still affecting us to this day

When we think about the consequences of pseudoscientific ideas of race and eugenics, we can learn from them.

In these units we will be covering two case studies dealing with the consequences of prejudice, of pseudoscientific race theory, and eugenicist thinking.

The first will be the case study of **Australia**

The second case study will be **Nazi Germany**

If you have chosen to do history in Grade 11 then in all likelihood you would remember studying the rise of Nazism in Germany and what the consequences of that were, but understanding pseudoscience in terms of eugenics and race will give you a much deeper understanding of how science and politics worked together in order to create what happened in Australia in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, in Nazi Germany, and in fact in colonial and apartheid South Africa.

Often politicians and governments used – and in some cases continue to use – ‘science’ to underpin and give legitimacy to their violent (physically and socially) policies.

So are these ideas of race and eugenics still affecting us today, if they are, **how** are they affecting us today? These are all important questions. Another important question is: “What does this have to do with me, a Grade 11 learner in South Africa in the 21st Century?”

You may be asking yourself: **how** does this affect **me**, **why** does this affect **me** and **why should I bother to learn about this?** These are reasonable questions to be asking. You are well within your rights to ask why you are learning about scientists from the 18th and 19th Centuries, about Australia in the early 1900s, and about Europe in the 1930s. It’s understandable that you are asking yourself: **does this have anything to do with modern day South Africa?**

WHAT DID 46 YEARS OF LEGALISED APARTHEID DO TO YOU, TO ME AND TO THOSE AROUND US?



- Made us see one another as different
- Made us believe in the idea of superior/inferior
- Made us believe in differences that are only skin deep
- Made race seem real

RACE IS NOT REAL

SCIENCE HAS PROVEN THAT ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE 99.9% THE SAME IN OUR DNA

We're going to ask you a question now:

“What did 46 years of legalised apartheid do to the people in this country?”

Think about that for a minute, and if you are sitting with someone in the room where you are reading this, say a family member, ask them that question.

You will see that the answers are as follows:

- 1) It made us see one another as different;
- 2) It made us believe in the notion, in the idea, of superior humans and inferior humans;
- 3) It made us believe in differences that really are only skin deep. It made us believe that when someone has a different ethnicity, a different religion, a different language, a different culture or nationality – we judge those people and we believe that they are inherently, *biologically* different from us. But this is, of course, not true!
- 4) And, of course, **legalised apartheid made race seem *real*.**

But race is not real. We don't have another word to use to communicate when someone looks different from us. Race has become the word we use to denote physical differences. Still, the word 'race' is full of so many things, things that are negative and have all sorts of historical connotations attached, that it becomes important to remember that *biologically* race is not real.

Science has proven repeatedly (and this is provable, factual science, not pseudoscience) that race doesn't exist. The Human Genome Project and many other initiatives demonstrated that if we check your DNA against someone else's DNA, even if that person looks nothing like you, you will find that the DNA coding will be 99.9% the same. **So Race is not real!**

But, here's another truth: while race is not real, **RACISM IS REAL.**

Why? Because **people** are **racist**. And **why** is that? Because **people create categories for other people**. These categories can be based on how other people look, how they pray, how their cultural practices differ from their own, and many other criteria. People get frightened about difference and change, and create categories. These categories – 'races' – are a **social construct**.

Race is not real. Racism absolutely is.

How did this pervasive idea of race begin? How did it all start? This is the question that we are going to ask next, because it is very important that you understand how these theories began. **Race and racism didn't begin with Apartheid, or with Nazi Germany, or with Australia. There is a long history of racial pseudoscience that we need to understand in order to understand many 20th Century atrocities.**

QUESTIONS

1. a) What does the word 'pseudoscience' mean?
b) From your own knowledge, give an example of a pseudoscientific idea that has been **disproven**
2. Define 'context' in your own words
3. Why is race scientifically 'not real'?
4. Define the term 'social construct' in your own words
5. Using this unit and your own knowledge, reflect on if or why you think it is important for South Africans to study the pseudoscience of race theory and eugenics

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre: <http://ctholocaust.co.za/>

Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwVBUs5VqvsumuwDdzYIAaQ>

There's No Scientific Basis for Race—It's a Made-Up Label:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/04/race-genetics-science-africa/>

These Twins Will Make You Rethink Race:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/04/race-twins-black-white-biggs/>

How Science and Genetics are Reshaping the Race Debate of the 21st Century:
<http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2017/science-genetics-reshaping-race-debate-21st-century/>