

## 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 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries – What were the consequences when pseudoscientific ideas of Race became integral to government policies and legislation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries?*

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

### Unit 2

#### The Pseudosciences of Race and Social Darwinism

In this unit you will learn about the following:

- Pseudoscientific theories of race
- Pseudoscience of Social Darwinism

### PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC RACE THEORY

**Carolus Linnaeus**

(1707-1778)



Swedish botanist and naturalist who devised the “natural system,” which became the basis for the classification of all species.

In 1735 he used it to divide humanity into four groups: Americanus, Asiaticus, Africanus, and Europeaeus.

Let’s start with Pseudoscientific (fake/false/incorrect) Race Theory, how it begins, where it begins and when it begins.

We begin with **Carolus Linnaeus**, an 18<sup>th</sup> Century botanist and naturalist who devised the “natural system,” which became the basis for the classification of all species. He realised that cats, tigers, lions and kitty cats are all part of the cat family; poodles, wolves and hyenas are all part of the dog family; and naartjies lemons and oranges are all citrus plants. That’s great science!

He did something else as well, which was **pseudoscientific**: he divided human beings into 4 groups or species. He believed there to be 4 distinct and different “races” of man: the Americanus, “native” North Americans, whose skin tone was reddish; the Asiaticus, people from East Asia, whose skin tone was yellowish; the Africanus, who came from Africa and whose skin tone was brownish; and Europeaeus, whose skin tone was pink or white.

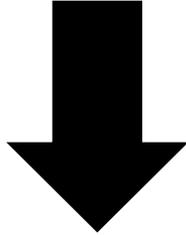
### **Dr Samuel Morton (1799-1851): “father” of scientific racism**



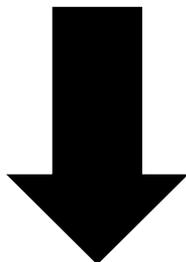
In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Dr Samuel Morton expanded on some of these ideas. He believed it was possible to prove that different ‘races’ of people have different sizes of brains and therefore it was possible to rank them in a hierarchical manner. To prove this, he took human skulls from around the world and filled them up with mustard seeds, and then he measured the volume of the mustard seeds to prove that some skulls hold more mustard seeds than other skulls. Of course he found that European skulls – ‘white’ skulls – held the most mustard seeds and so he argued that Europeans were biologically superior to all other races.

# Race Theory

**Blood**



**Purity of Blood**



**Racial Purity**

But what was the *basis* of race theory? It was **Blood**. Now, we all know that blood is blood. While we may have different blood groups, if you needed a blood transfusion, the doctors would not search for blood that comes from someone who looks like you, is the same age as you are, or comes from the same cultural or religious group as you do. The only thing that would interest them is your Blood Type, because other than that all human blood is the same.

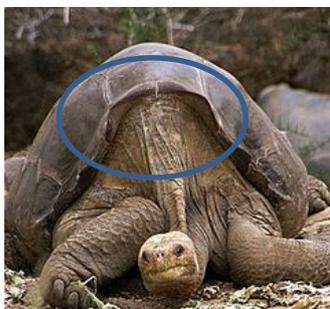
While we understand that now, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, people believed that someone's '**purity of blood**' determined their '**racial purity**'. In other words, the **lighter someone's skin, the purer their blood, the more racially pure they are, and vice versa**.

Beyond that, they said that blood contained someone's values, which often – but not always – aligned to racial purity. But it went beyond that so, for example, if a poor man has a child, his child will also be poor because it is *in their blood*. If a university professor has a child, that child will be very clever, because it is *in their blood*. This was widely believed.

## **Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882): British naturalist, geologist, biologist**

Plants and animals that are better suited to the environment will be more likely to survive

**Struggle for survival** would be **won** by those **species** most able to reproduce and **adapt (survival of the fittest)**



Also in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a British naturalist called Charles Darwin travelled to the Galapagos Islands to study animals. There, he found that some animals adapted in order to survive and thrive. He said that the animals likeliest to survive are those most able to adapt. He called this concept **survival of the fittest**.

Now look at the two tortoises on the left. The first tortoise has a domed shell and eats grass. It is an ordinary tortoise, like ones you may have seen in South Africa. The tortoise below has a different type of shell. It's domed, almost like an arc... It has *adapted*. Why? The Galapagos Islands are small, and if all tortoises are going to eat grass, there will soon be no more grass, no more food, no more tortoises. So some tortoises adapt, their shell changes over hundreds of years so that some tortoises can reach leaves up in trees and eat things that higher up.

Naturally, no tortoise is better than the other tortoise. No tortoise is more "tortoisey" than the other tortoise, they have just adapted to their environment so both can thrive.

## Social Darwinism

**Herbert Spencer  
(1820- 1903)**

- British philosopher and sociologist
- Applied Darwinist theory to human society

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a British scholar called Herbert Spencer decided he could apply that biological concept – of **survival of the fittest** – to human beings.

This became known as Social Darwinism.

**Human society is permanently in an evolutionary process in which the “fittest” are chosen to dominate.**

**There are armies of unfit, the poor, who simply could not compete.**

**And just as nature weeds out the unfit, an enlightened society ought to weed out its unfit and permit them to die off so as not to weaken the racial stock.**

On the left is an explanation of what Spencer believed. He said that human society is permanently in an evolutionary process, and we can all agree with that, because things don't stay the same over time. He said this process leads to the “fittest” being chosen to dominate. What does he mean by fittest? He is speaking about those who are most able, those who are most privileged, most advantaged. And what makes them privileged, advantaged, able? ***Their blood.*** Those who are struggling are struggling simply because their blood is inferior; they need to be dominated because they are “unfit”.

Social Darwinists then argue that just as nature *weeds out* the unfit (in nature those who cannot survive, die) so an enlightened, advanced, educated society ought to *weed out* its unfit and permit them to die off so as not to *weaken* the racial stock. Remember these terms because they will come up again in Unit 3: Eugenics.

### Social Darwinism

Survival of the Fittest

Right to dominate

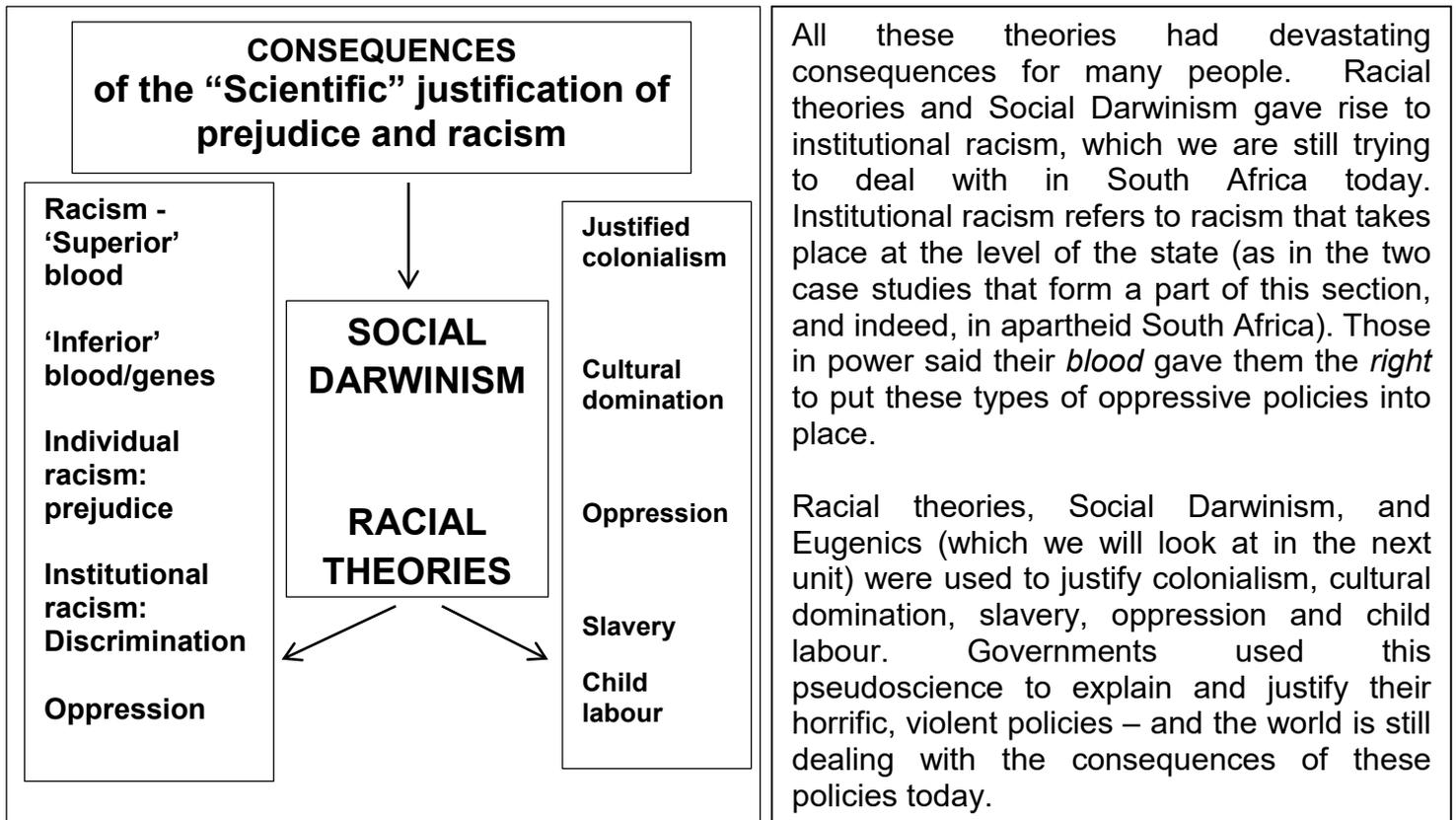


Unfit



So according to Social Darwinists, **survival of the fittest** gives the privileged the right to **dominate** over the unfit.

This is a complete, or misrepresentation, of Darwin's original concept of survival of the fittest (which referred to adaptation of species to their environment over hundreds of years).



### QUESTIONS

1. What has Carolus Linnaeus’s contribution to contemporary science been?
2. Briefly describe Dr Samuel Morton’s experiment and explain, in your own words, why you think these experiments were flawed
3. What was the *basis* of race theories?
4. Compare and contrast Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer’s concepts of ‘survival of the fittest’
5. In the last slide, we listed some of the consequences of racial theories and Social Darwinism. Using these Units and your own knowledge, give a specific example of a policy enacted and justified because of these theories.

### 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/>