

# Caucasian race

The term **Caucasian race** (also **Caucasoid**, **Europid**, or **Europoid**<sup>[1]</sup>) has been used to denote the general physical type of some or all of the indigenous populations of Europe, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, West Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia.<sup>[2]</sup> Historically, the term has been used to describe the entire population of these regions, without regard necessarily to skin tone. In common use, specifically in American English, the term is sometimes restricted to Europeans and other lighter-skinned populations within these areas, and may be considered equivalent to the varying definitions of white people.<sup>[3]</sup>



The 4th edition of Meyers Konversations-Lexikon (Leipzig, 1885-1890) shows the *Caucasian race* (in blue) as comprising *Aryans*, *Semites* and *Hamites*. *Aryans* are further subdivided into *European Aryans* and *Indo-Aryans* (the latter corresponding to the group now designated Indo-Iranians). Adjacent to the *Caucasians* are the *Sudan-Negroes* to the south (shown in brown), the *Dravidians* in India (shown in green) and *Asians* to the east (shown in yellow, subsuming the peoples now grouped under Uralic and Altaic (light yellow) and Sino-Tibetan (solid yellow)).

## Origin of the concept

The concept of a *Caucasian race* or *Varietas Caucasia* was developed around 1800 by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German scientist and classical anthropologist.<sup>[4]</sup> Blumenbach named it after the peoples of the Caucasus (from the Caucasus region), whom he considered to be the archetype for the grouping.<sup>[5]</sup> He based his classification of the Caucasian race primarily on craniology.<sup>[6]</sup> Blumenbach wrote:

"Caucasian variety - I have taken the name of this variety from Mount Caucasus, both because its neighborhood, and especially its southern slope, produces the most beautiful race of men, I mean the Georgian; and because all physiological reasons converge to this, that in that region, if anywhere, it seems we ought with the greatest probability to place the autochthones (birth place) of mankind."<sup>[7]</sup>

According to monogenist thought, God formed humans in their pure form. As they spread out over the globe, they degenerated in appearance. Blumenbach's and other monogenists' ideas led to the widely held conclusion that the purest and most beautiful whites were the Georgians one nation of the Caucasian region, a mountainous area on the Caspian and Black seas close to Iran, then the Persian Empire, Russia, and Turkey, then the Ottoman Empire.<sup>[8]</sup>



The Georgian skull Blumenbach discovered in 1795 to hypothesize origin of Europeans from the Caucasus.

## In physical anthropology

"Caucasoid race" is a term formerly used in physical anthropology to refer to people of a certain range of anthropometric measurements.<sup>[9]</sup> Conceived as one of the "great races", alongside Mongoloid and Negroid, it was taken to consist of a number of "subraces". The Caucasoid peoples were usually divided in three groups on linguistic grounds, termed Aryan (Indo-European), Semitic (Semitic languages) and Hamitic (Berber-Cushitic-Egyptian).

The postulated subraces vary depending on the author, including but not limited to Nordic, Mediterranean, Alpine, Dinaric, East Baltic, Arabid, Turanid, Iranid and Armenoid subraces.

19th century classifications of the peoples of India considered the Dravidians of non-Caucasoid stock as *Australoid* or a separate *Dravida* race, and assumed a gradient of miscegenation of high-caste Caucasoid *Aryans* and indigenous Dravidians.

By contrast, Carleton S. Coon in his 1939 *The Races of Europe* classified the Dravidians as Caucasoid as well, due to his assessment of what he called their "Caucasoid skull structure" and other physical traits (e.g. noses, eyes, hair). In his *The Living Races of Man*, Coon stated that "India is the easternmost outpost of the Caucasian racial region". Sarah A Tishkoff and Kenneth K Kidd state: "Despite disagreement among anthropologists, this classification remains in use by many researchers, as well as lay people."<sup>[10]</sup>

There was no universal consensus of the validity of the "Caucasian" grouping even within scientific racism. Thomas Henry Huxley in 1870 wrote that the "absurd denomination of 'Caucasian'" was in fact a conflation of his Xanthochroi and Melanochroi types.<sup>[11]</sup>

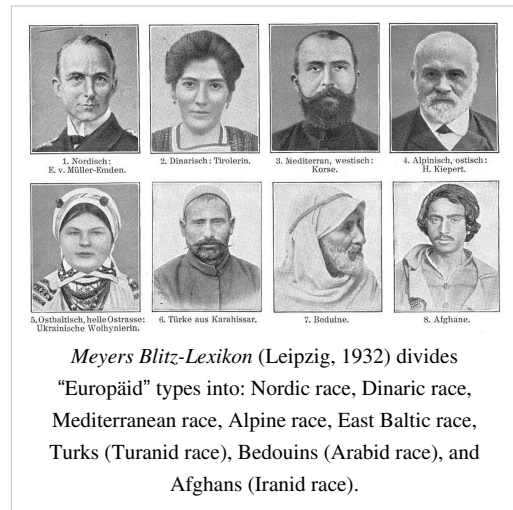
In 1920 H.G. Wells referred to the Mediterranean race as the *Iberian race*. He regarded it as a fourth subrace of the Caucasian race, along with the *Aryan*, *Semitic*, and *Hamitic* subraces. He stated that the main ethnic group that most purely represented the racial stock of the Iberian race was the Basques, and that the Basques were the descendants of the Cro-Magnons.<sup>[12]</sup>

## In the medical sciences

In the medical sciences, where response to pharmaceuticals and other treatment can vary dramatically based on ethnicity,<sup>[13]</sup> <sup>[14]</sup> there is great debate as to whether racial categorizations as broad as Caucasian are medically valid.<sup>[15]</sup> <sup>[16]</sup> Several journals (e.g. *Nature Genetics*, *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, and the *British Medical Journal*) have issued guidelines stating that researchers should carefully define their populations and avoid broad-based social constructions, because these categories are more likely to be measuring differences in socioeconomic class and access to medical treatment that disproportionately affect minority groups, rather than racial differences.<sup>[17]</sup> Nevertheless, there are journals (e.g. the *Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology* and *Kidney International*) that continue to use racial categories such as Caucasian.<sup>[13]</sup> <sup>[18]</sup>

## Usage in the United States

In the United States, the term *Caucasian* has been mainly used to describe a group commonly called *White Americans*, as defined by the government and Census Bureau.<sup>[19]</sup> Between 1917 and 1965, immigration to the US was restricted by a national origins quota. The Supreme Court in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) decided that Asian Indians and Middle Easterners – unlike Europeans – were *Caucasian*, but were not *white*, because most laypeople did not consider them to be white people. This was important for determining whether they could become



naturalized citizens, then limited to free whites. The court and government changed its opinion in 1946. In 1965 major changes were made to immigration law, lifting earlier restrictions on immigrants from Asia.<sup>[20]</sup>

The United States National Library of Medicine has used the term "Caucasian" as a race in the past, but has discontinued its usage in favor of the term "European," avoiding the now deprecated<sup>[21]</sup> term "race".<sup>[22]</sup>

## Notes

- [1] For a contrast with the "Mongolic" or Mongoloid race, see footnote #4 of page 58-59 in Beckwith, Christopher. (2009). *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. ISBN 9780691135892.
- [2] The Races of Europe (<http://carnby.altervista.org/troe/11-01.htm>) by Carlton Stevens Coon. From Chapter XI: The Mediterranean World - Introduction: "This third racial zone stretches from Spain across the Straits of Gibraltar to Morocco, and thence along the southern Mediterranean shores into Arabia, East Africa, Mesopotamia, and the Persian highlands; and across Afghanistan into India."
- [3] The Oxford English Dictionary defines *Caucasoid* ([http://www.askoxford.com/concise\\_oed/caucasian?view=uk](http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/caucasian?view=uk)) as a noun or adjective meaning *Of, pertaining to, or resembling the Caucasian race*. It defines *Caucasian* as "relating to one of the traditional divisions of humankind, covering a broad group of peoples from Europe, western Asia, and parts of India and North Africa" or "white-skinned; of European origin".
- [4] University of Pennsylvania Blumenbach (<http://www.english.upenn.edu/Projects/knarf/People/blumen.html>)
- [5] Oxford English Dictionary: "a name given by Blumenbach (a1800) to the 'white' race of mankind, which he derived from the region of the Caucasus."
- [6] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *The anthropological treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach* (<http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/bindon/ant275/reader/blumenbach.PDF>), translated by Thomas Bendyshe. 1865. November 2, 2006.
- [7] Blumenbach, *De generis humani varietate nativa* (3rd ed. 1795), trans. Bendyshe (1865). Quoted e.g. in Arthur Keith, *Blumenbach's Centenary, Man*, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (1940).
- [8] Frost, Linda. *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850-1877*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005.
- [9] Reinhard, K.J., & Hastings, D. (Annual 2003) "Learning from the ancestors: the value of skeletal study".(study of ancestors of Omaha Tribe of Nebraska), *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, p. 177(1)
- [10] Tishkoff SA, Kidd KK (November 2004). "Implications of biogeography of human populations for 'race' and medicine" (<http://www.nature.com/ng/journal/v36/n11s/full/ng1438.html>). *Nat. Genet.* **36** (11 Suppl): S21–7. doi:10.1038/ng1438. PMID 15507999. .
- [11] T. H. Huxley, *On the Geographical Distribution of the Chief Modifications of Mankind*, *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* (1870).
- [12] Wells, H.G. *The Outline of History* New York:1920 Doubleday & Co. Volume I Chapter XI "The Races of Mankind" Pages 131-144 See Pages 98, 137, and 139
- [13] York P C Pei, Celia M T Greenwood, Anne L Chery and George G Wu, "Racial differences in survival of patients on dialysis" (<http://www.nature.com/ki/journal/v58/n3/full/4495489a.html>), *Nature*
- [14] "Study Shows Drug Resistance Varies by Race" (<http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=study-shows-drug-resistan>), Kate Wong, *Scientific American*
- [15] Categorization of humans in biomedical research: genes, race and disease (<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=139378>), Neil Risch, Esteban Burchard, Elad Ziv, and Hua Tang
- [16] Genetic variation, classification and 'race' (<http://www.nature.com/ng/journal/v36/n11s/full/ng1435.html>), Lynn B Jorde & Stephen P Wooding
- [17] The Race, Ethnicity, and Genetics Working Group of the National Human Genome Research Institute (2005). "The Use of Racial, Ethnic, and Ancestral Categories in Human Genetics Research" (<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?tool=pmcentrez&artid=1275602>). *American Journal of Human Genetics* **77** (4): 519–532. PMID 16175499. PMC 1275602.
- [18] "Ethnic and cultural determinants influence risk assessment for hepatitis C acquisition" (<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bsc/jgh/2004/00000019/00000007/art00012>), Anouk Dev, Vijaya Sundararajan, William Sievert
- [19] Painter, p.
- [20] "Not All Caucasians Are White: The Supreme Court Rejects Citizenship for Asian Indians" (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5076/>), *History Matters*
- [21] Leonard Lieberman, Rodney C. Kirk, and Alice Littlefield, "Perishing Paradigm: Race—1931-99," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 1 (2003): 110-13
- [22] "Other Notable MeSH Changes and Related Impact on Searching: Ethnic Groups and Geographic Origins" ([http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/techbull/nd03/nd03\\_med\\_data\\_changes.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/techbull/nd03/nd03_med_data_changes.html)). *NLM Technical Bulletin* **335** (Nov-Dec). 2003. . "The MeSH term Racial Stocks and its four children (Australoid Race, Caucasoid Race, Mongoloid Race, and Negroid Race) have been deleted from MeSH in 2004. A new heading, Continental Population Groups, has been created with new identification that emphasize geography.".

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