

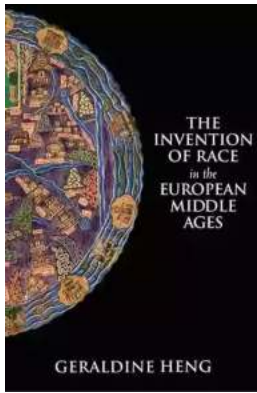
The Invention Of Race In The European Middle Ages

The concept of race, as we know it today, has a complex history that stretches back centuries. While often associated with the era of European exploration and colonialism in the 15th century, the roots of racial categorization can be traced back even further to the European Middle Ages. In this article, we will explore the invention of race in Europe during this period and unravel the ways in which it shaped the world we live in today.

The Origins of Racial Categorization

In the European Middle Ages, society was largely stratified by a feudal system. However, it was during this time that Europeans encountered people of different ethnicities and cultures through trade, exploration, and the Crusades. These encounters led to the development of early perceptions and stereotypes about other peoples, setting the foundation for the invention of race.

One influential factor that fueled the categorization of people into races was the emergence of the concept of lineage and blood purity. Nobility sought to assert their superiority by tracing their ancestry back to renowned figures of ancient civilizations such as the Romans and Greeks. This emphasis on lineage intertwined with notions of physical differences, as physical appearance became a defining characteristic in determining one's worth and social status. Europeans began to categorize people based on their physical features, such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture, creating a hierarchy based on these perceived differences.



The Invention of Race in the European Middle

Ages by Geraldine Heng(Kindle Edition)

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Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
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Race and Religion: The Role of Christianity

The Christian Church played a significant role in solidifying racial categorization during the European Middle Ages. As the dominant religious institution of the time, the Church reinforced and promoted certain ideologies that justified the subjugation and exploitation of certain people based on their race.

One such ideology was the idea of the Curse of Ham, which originated from biblical interpretations. According to this belief, the descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons, were destined to be slaves due to their supposed blackness. This notion provided a religious justification for the enslavement of African people and further entrenched the idea of racial hierarchy.

The Role of Science and Pseudo-Science

While the invention of race during the European Middle Ages was largely rooted in social and religious factors, the emerging scientific and pseudo-scientific discourses of the time also played a role in perpetuating racial categorization.

Various naturalists, philosophers, and scholars began to speculate about the origins of different peoples and their physical variations. Pseudo-scientific theories, such as phrenology and physiognomy, claimed that one's character or mental traits could be determined by their physical appearance. These theories provided alleged scientific backing to the existing racial stereotypes and further contributed to the construction of racial hierarchies.

The Ramifications of Race Invention

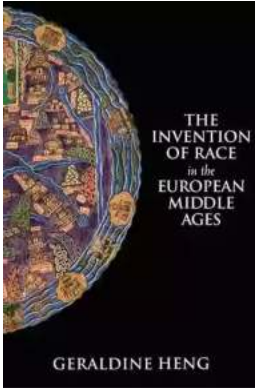
The invention of race during the European Middle Ages had far-reaching consequences that still resonate today. It laid the foundation for the later colonization and exploitation of non-European peoples, as well as the implementation of discriminatory practices such as slavery and segregation.

Furthermore, the invention of race perpetuated harmful stereotypes and contributed to the marginalization and dehumanization of certain groups. These stereotypes and prejudices persist in various forms today and continue to shape social dynamics on a global scale.

The invention of race in the European Middle Ages was a complex and multifaceted process. It was rooted in social, religious, and pseudo-scientific discourses that sought to categorize and hierarchize human populations based on physical differences. This invention laid the groundwork for centuries of racial inequality and discrimination, shaping the world as we know it today.

The legacy of this invention serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for equality and the urgent need to challenge and dismantle the systems of racial hierarchy that persist in our societies.

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In *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Geraldine Heng questions the common assumption that the concepts of race and racisms only began in the modern era. Examining Europe's encounters with Jews, Muslims, Africans, Native Americans, Mongols, and the Romani ('Gypsies'), from the 12th through 15th centuries, she shows how racial thinking, racial law, racial practices, and racial phenomena existed in medieval Europe before a recognizable vocabulary of race emerged in the West. Analysing sources in a variety of media, including stories, maps, statuary, illustrations, architectural features, history, saints' lives, religious commentary, laws, political and social institutions, and literature, she argues that religion - so much in play again today - enabled the positing of fundamental differences among humans that created strategic essentialisms to mark off human groups and populations for racialized treatment. Her ground-breaking study also shows how race figured in the emergence of *homo europaeus* and the identity of Western Europe in this time.



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