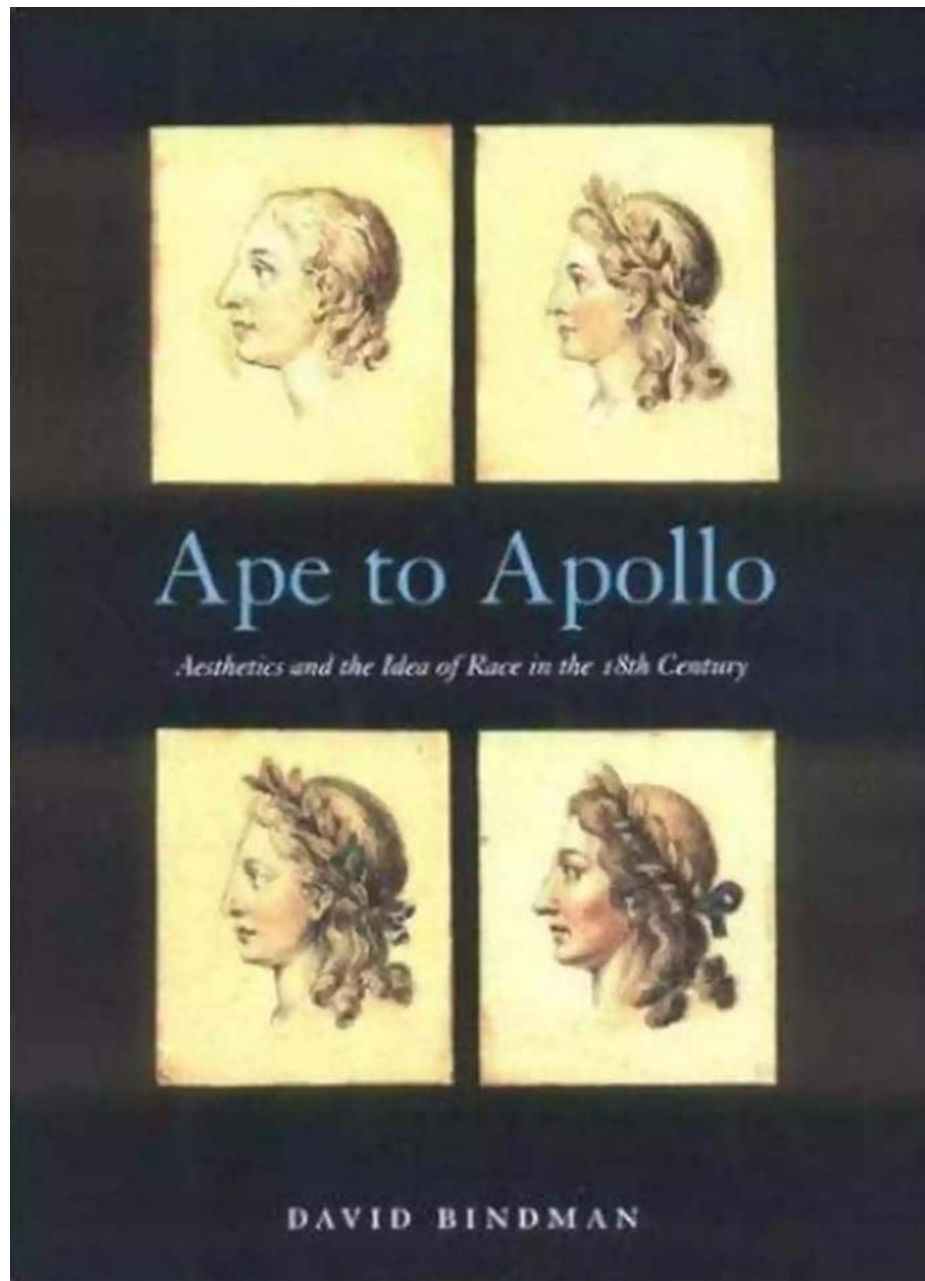


Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century:



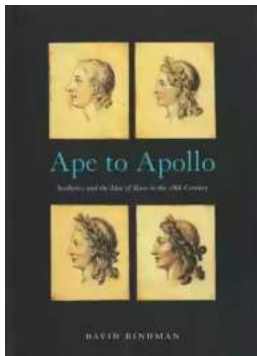
The Influence of Aesthetics on the Perception of Race

Throughout history, the concept of race has been heavily influenced by societal aesthetics. In the 18th century, during the height of the Enlightenment period,

thinkers began to explore and categorize humans based on physical features, which led to the idea of racial classifications. This article delves into the aesthetics behind these racial categorizations and their impact on society at the time.

The Social Construction of Race

During the 18th century, a growing fascination with scientific reasoning and the categorization of knowledge led to the examination of physical traits as a means to classify humans into distinct racial groups. This newfound focus on aesthetics played a significant role in shaping the perception of race.



Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the Eighteenth Century by David Bindman(Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 4208 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Print length : 264 pages



European philosophers and scientists, such as Carl Linnaeus and Immanuel Kant, developed elaborate systems of racial classification based on physical attributes. These classifications were influenced by biased cultural perspectives and societal norms, leading to the formation of racial hierarchies.

However, it is essential to recognize that race, as a concept, is not based on inherent biological differences but is instead a social construct. The aesthetic

qualities associated with each racial group were largely subjective and influenced by prevailing cultural beliefs.

The Eurocentric Aesthetic Ideal

In the 18th century, European societies, influenced by the Age of Enlightenment, held a Eurocentric aesthetic ideal. This ideal positioned people of European descent as the pinnacle of beauty, intelligence, and cultural superiority. Non-European racial groups were often considered inferior due to their physical attributes, including skin color, facial features, and hair texture.

These Eurocentric beauty standards were perpetuated through various means, such as art, literature, and scientific discourse. European art often depicted non-European individuals as exotic or savage, reinforcing the idea of their inferiority and distinguishing them from the European aesthetic ideal.

The Impact of Aesthetics on Social Hierarchies

The racial classifications based on aesthetics in the 18th century had a significant impact on social hierarchies and the perpetuation of discrimination. The Eurocentric aesthetic ideal created a division between European and non-European populations, leading to the justification of colonization, slavery, and the subjugation of non-European cultures.

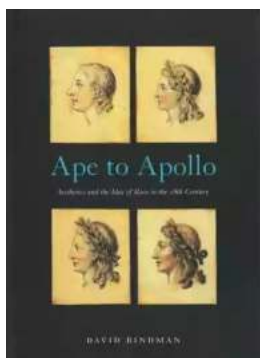
By associating physical attributes with superiority or inferiority, societies justified the mistreatment and exploitation of racial minorities. Racial categorization based on aesthetics reinforced prejudices and stereotypes, deepening divisions between racial groups and perpetuating inequality.

Rethinking Aesthetics and Race

While the 18th-century aesthetics heavily influenced the perception of race, it is crucial to recognize the flaws in these categorizations. Aesthetics alone cannot determine an individual's abilities, intelligence, or worth. The diversity of human experiences and contributions throughout history highlights the limitations of relying solely on aesthetics to define race.

As societies progress and become more inclusive, it is important to challenge and question the aesthetic ideals associated with race. Embracing diversity and acknowledging the complexities of human experiences can dismantle the racial hierarchies established in the past.

The 18th century witnessed a significant influence of aesthetics on the idea of race. European societies' Eurocentric aesthetic ideal led to the creation of racial hierarchies, perpetuated discrimination, and justified inequalities. However, it is essential to recognize the flaws in these categorizations and move forward towards a more inclusive understanding of human diversity.



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'Race' was essentially a construction of the 18th century, a means by which the Enlightenment could impose rational order on human variety. In this book, the art historian David Bindman argues that ideas of beauty were from the beginning inseparable from race, as Europeans judged the civility and aesthetic capacity of other races by their appearance. These judgements were combined with a conflict between those who wished to order humanity into separate races, and those who believed in a common humanity whose differences were due to climatic and geographical variations. Central to this debate was the work of Linnaeus and Buffon, but it was also driven by the writings of the German art historian J. J. Winckelmann, who argued for the supremacy of the ancient Greeks, the Swiss physiognomist J. C. Lavater, who believed that moral character could be deduced from the study of a person's face, and by two scientists - the father and son Reinhold and Georg Forster - who had been on Captain Cook's second voyage to the South Seas in 1772-5.

During this time the philosopher Immanuel Kant attempted the first modern definition of race, a definition which was challenged by Georg Forster and the philosopher J. G. von Herder, sparking a lively but astonishingly little-known controversy that went on through the next decade and beyond. The 1770s also saw the beginnings of a more scientific yet also profoundly aesthetic approach to race in the work of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and Pieter Camper, whose notorious classification of skulls was, despite their own liberalism, to become the basis of 19th-century 'racial science'.

Ape to Apollo provides a refreshing and original view of a highly contentious subject. It will be essential reading for anyone seeking the origins of today's controversies over race and ideas of beauty.



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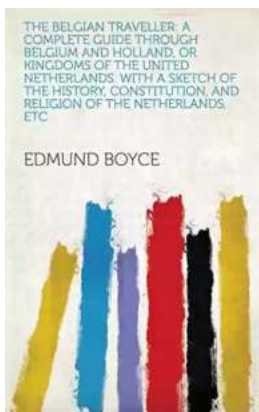
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