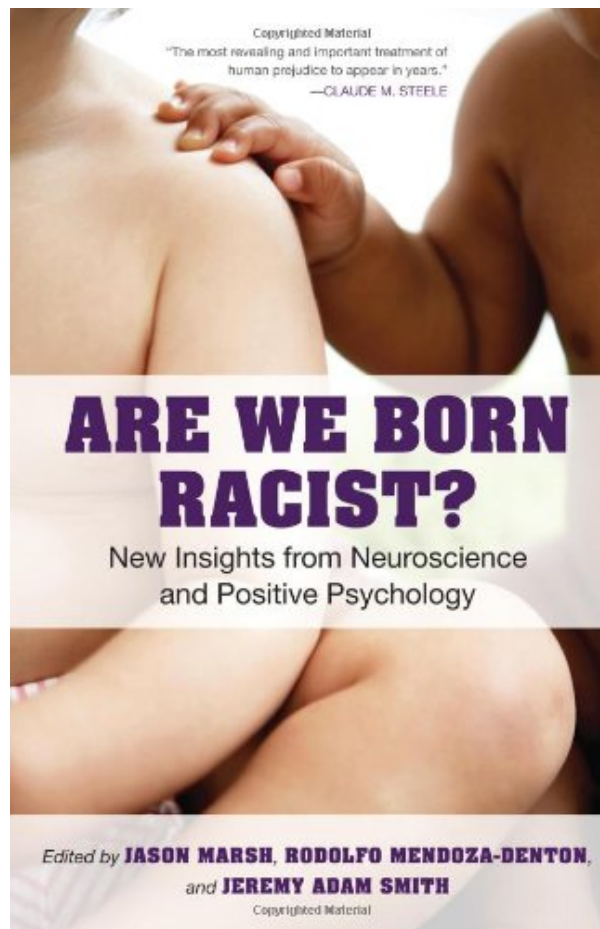
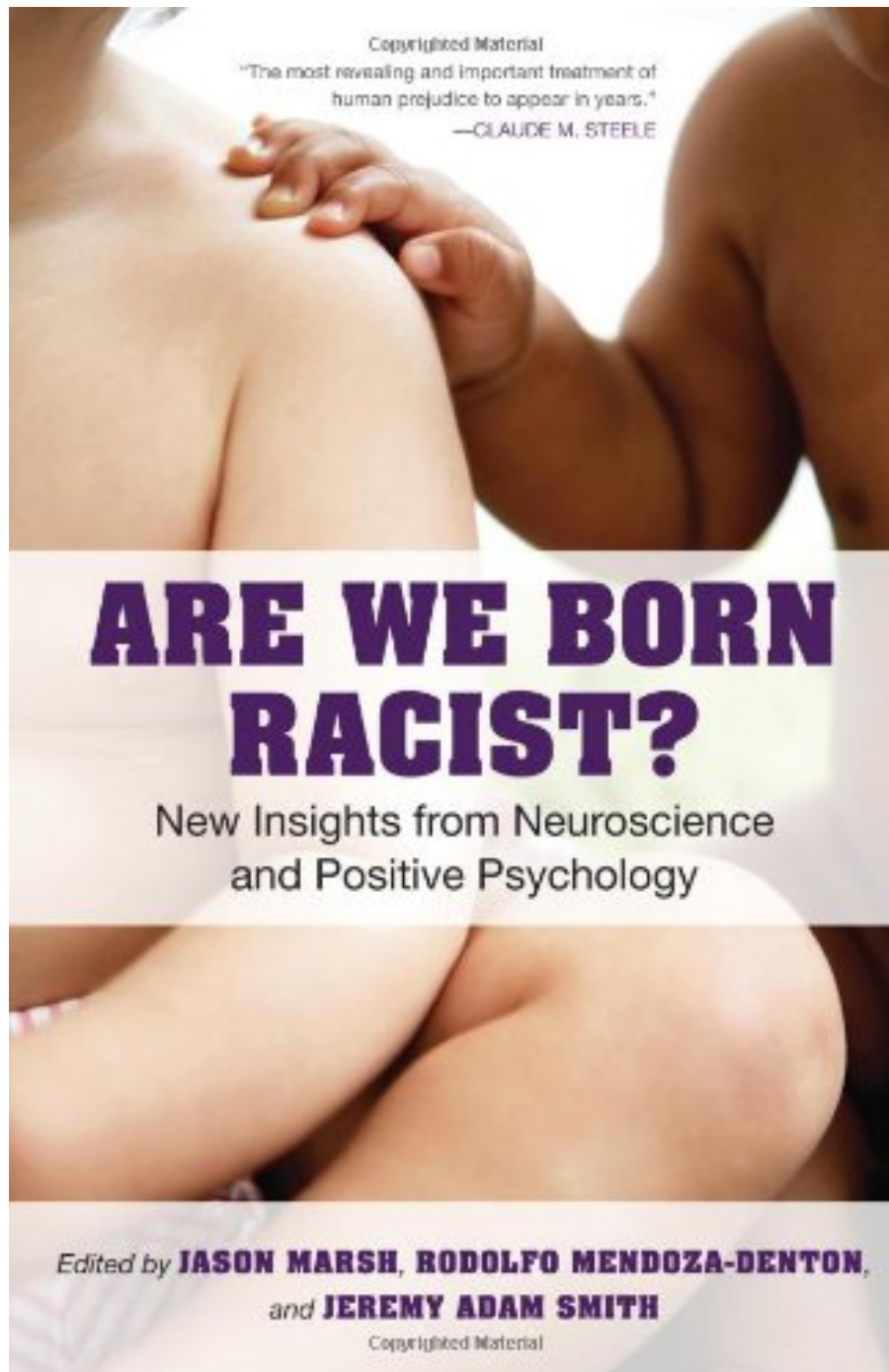


ARE WE BORN RACIST?: NEW INSIGHTS FROM NEUROSCIENCE AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY FROM BEACON PRESS



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"The most revealing and important treatment of human prejudice to appear in years."

—CLAUDE M. STEELE

ARE WE BORN RACIST?

New Insights from Neuroscience
and Positive Psychology

Edited by **JASON MARSH, RODOLFO MENDOZA-DENTON,**
and **JEREMY ADAM SMITH**

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Where do our prejudices come from? Why are some people more biased than others? Is it possible for individuals, and society as a whole, to truly defeat prejudice? In these pages, leading scientists, psychologists, educators, activists, and many others offer answers, drawing from new scientific discoveries that shed light on why and how our brains form prejudices, how racism hurts our health, steps we can take to mitigate prejudiced instincts, and what a post-prejudice society might actually look like.

Bringing a diverse range of disciplines into conversation for the first time, *Are We Born Racist?* offers a straightforward overview of the new science of prejudice, and showcases the abundant practical, research-based steps that can be taken in all areas of our lives to overcome prejudice.

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Most helpful customer reviews

14 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Wonderful, quick read

By Paul in DC

As a long-time student of both neuro-science and D&I, I found this to be just the right mix of hard science and research to compliment more traditional texts on inclusion. While it in no way let us "off the hook" for prejudiced behaviors, it does remove the guilt often experienced when people first come to terms with their own primal instincts to discriminate. More importantly the authors challenge us to intentionally engage others from whom who are different (nicely referencing studies on "contact hypothesis") so that we can re-educate the neo-cortex portion of our brains and reprogram our responses. Nicely written!

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Very Practical in Changing Your View On Racism

By Matthew Tillman

I have always been interested in the conflict between the neuroscience of the brain and our behavior. One issue that often raises tension, especially being in the American South, is the discussion of race. I decided to read *Are We Born Racist? New Insights from Neuroscience and Positive Psychology* in order to explore the link between neuroscience and racism. Jason Marsh, Rudolfo Mendoza-Denton, and Jeremy Adam Smith do a good job collecting articles on the issues of racism and neuroscience. Overall, this is a great read explaining the neuroscience behind racism, and some very practical methods in how racism should be handled in today's modern society. The book is not too scientific, so the common reader is able to follow along, and it might bring to light some of your own racist tendencies you might not now see.

The book is separated into three sections. These sections contain many short essays and articles, written by neuroscientist and psychologist, centered on the theme of that section. The articles are not necessarily linked to each other, so there are many point of views expressed within the sections. The first section of the book looks into answering the question that the book actually poses in the title, Are We Born Racist? This collection of articles investigates the modern racism and the science behind them. The racism found in today's American society is different from previous generations. Rather than an out-spoken racism, the modern racism is silent, but looking at minority groups within the societal structure, one can see its affects. Looking at neurological studies, it is found that we do have a natural tendency to favor others of the same race compared to others of a different race. This is observed through activation of an area in the brain called the amygdala, which is involved in fear, when observing others of a different race. So we all have an initial prejudice instinct, but as the book explains, this instinct can be censored and controlled due to our malleable brains. The second section of the book explains how we can overcome this natural instinct of prejudice. The book convincingly explains that the color-blindness method, which attempts to avoid racism through dismissal of any differences among ethnic groups, is not the best way to overcome racism. Rather, the book says to affirm the differences among races, but also understand these differences don't make anyone better than the other. The third section of the book brings it down to a real practical level, and shows how a multiracial society can thrive without racism. The book analyzes life situations, like interracial marriages and Latino-American families, in which racism has been diminished.

Opinions

Neurological analysis:

The book highlights a few studies on the neuroscience of racism, but I personally believe that the analysis given is fairly weak. I have recently been studying this topic in the academic literature, and have found many more additional findings compared to those that were presented in this book. For example, the main biological components discussed in the book are the activation of the amygdala and its control by the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC). However, there is a more research on how the brain interprets other ethnic group faces, as well as the effects that seeing other races have on memory. Though there is not a huge emphasis on the neurological aspects of racism, there is a bigger emphasis on the psychological principles behind racism. This is acceptable because this book is likely intended more for the common individual, rather than the academic world. But do realize that the title might mislead you into thinking it is more neurologically based.

Diverse Articles:

One complement to the book is that it contains such a vast variety of very interesting articles. This variety does limit the book to have a consistent flow, as the articles jump from different topics, but they all stay within the section theme. Some interesting articles include how racism can actually make us physically unhealthy. Other articles look into the interesting and sometimes hilarious world of kids and racism. This diverse group of articles makes this book a very interesting read.

Practical Solutions to Racism:

I do greatly commend the book for explaining very clearly, with backing evidence, how to best eliminate racism in our own lives. The book does a good job describing that trying to ignore differences among races (color-blindness methods) is not the best way to end racism. In fact, when we adhere to color-blindness methods, we often appear to be more racist than we actually are. The first step towards racial equality is acknowledging differences but respecting differences. The next step towards suppressing prejudices is to actually spend time with people from other races. I believe this is huge insight into the psychology behind how we can suppress racism, and would thus encourage you to read this book, due to its convicting treatment on our racist tendencies of color-blindness.

Here are some interesting quotes from the book.

Dottie Blais explains her own racism as a teacher to a multiracial class. "My color blindness signaled to them that they were invisible, somehow unworthy of my attention and my curriculum; my efforts were perceived as an attempt to "whiten" them." (p.74)

Eric Holder's speech on American race relations. "In things racial we have always been and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards... We work with one another, lunch together and, when the event is at the workplace during work hours or shortly thereafter, we socialize with one another fairly well, irrespective of race. And yet even this interaction operates within certain limitations. We know, by "American instinct" and by learned behavior, that certain subjects are off limits and that to explore them risks, at best embarrassment, and at worst, the questioning of one's character. " (p.88)

Overall, the book has some very interesting insights in how we can overcome our racist tendencies. I wouldn't recommend this book if you are looking for a hard-nose neuroscience book, but it is a very practical and applicable. It may challenge you on your own racial relations as it did for me.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

A fascinating look at our physiological reaction to "others"

By KingGeorge24

My review will be brief, as I have already written a rather lengthy review of the text as a comment under the 1-star review by The Wolf.

Buy this book if you are curious how we process those who are different than us, notably by race. Essay by essay, the authors argue persuasively that humans have no control over whether or not they notice race. Our bodies - from our brains, down our spine and into our nervous systems, through our bloodstream and to our hearts - respond differently to people who differ visibly from us. This has been shown by fMRI and EEG readings of amygdala activity (the part of the brain related to stress and fear, among other things), as well as hormone release (cortisol, a fright or flight hormone, is released both when prejudiced people are forced to interact with people of another race, and to people of another race when they are being antagonized). We have this amygdala activity and hormone release to protect us. For hundreds of thousands of years, we needed to be very defensive and alert. This programme was essential to survival. But today, in structured societies of humans whom science has declared all equal, this programme is obsolete. Much like our irrational fear of spiders and Mad Cow disease (you are much more likely to die in a car, but cars weren't around 150,000 years ago and food pandemics and deadly insects were), our inclination to "other" people unlike us is an unfortunate part of our design feature that is here to stay.

The good news: people who are less prejudiced (due to multicultural studies, growing up with people of different races, learning in science and civics that all people are the equal, etc) have smaller amygdala and cortisol responses, and thus it appears possible to regulate and reduce this natural tendency to negatively judge others. But in order to beat it, we have to recognize that we do it. And we objectively do it, as the science shows. What sociology, law, political science, ethnic studies, and logic show is that our inborn inclination to "other" has created a society of others, marginalized based on our irrational fears. A "colorblind" approach keeps the marginalized where they are. A multicultural approach, in which we actively recognize our color differences and their consequences, is the only path to an equal society.

Note: The editors' introduction to Part III reads: "the Roman emperor Augustus converted to Christianity" (pg 100). This obviously never happened. Augustus died in AD 14. The first Christian emperor of Rome was Constantine, 300 years later, and Christianity eventually became the state religion of Rome in 391 AD, under Theodosius I. There's absolutely no excuse for publishing such absurdity in a book - it would be

unacceptable even on a blog - but this book is so rich in empirical data that the emperor data can be let slide.

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