

# Pattern, process, and the anthropological critique of race.

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Human variation is better thought of as process than pattern. Variation at any point in time is a ephemeral manifestation of complex and historically contingent interactions among evolutionary processes. I argue two points to show that the embrace of this complexity has important implications for how we understand human evolution and the ways in which biological anthropology can and should contribute to countering racist hereditarian ideologies. Firstly, using a mixed genomic and morphological approach informed by evolutionary quantitative genetics, I show that recent human morphological evolution was driven by a mixture of natural selection and random genetic drift. This complex blend of processes renders untenable the traditional synecdochical relationship between human adaptation and human evolution. Secondly, the evolutionary genetic models appealed to in the critique of race emanating from biological anthropology and allied fields entail theoretical commitments that are inimical to the development of an effective counter to racist hereditarian ideologies. The use of equilibrium models to explain human variation as it was half a millennium ago is at odds with the empirical results of rigorous population genetic investigations of human variation and serves to elide racism from the anthropological discourse on race. Biological anthropologists need to draw from critical perspectives on race and racism if we wish to contribute to an effective counter to racist hereditarian ideologies.

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