

The Origins of Racism in the West

Is it possible to speak of western racism before the eighteenth century? The term “racism” is normally only associated with theories, which first appeared in the eighteenth century, about inherent biological differences that made one group superior to another. Here, however, leading historians argue that racism can be traced back to the attitudes of the ancient Greeks to their Persian enemies and that it was adopted, adjusted and reformulated by Europeans until the dawn of the Enlightenment. From Greek teachings on environmental determinism and heredity, through medieval concepts of physiognomy, down to the crystallization of attitudes to Indians, Blacks, Jews and Gypsies in the early modern era, they analyse the various routes by which racist ideas travelled before maturing into murderous ideologies in the modern western world. In so doing this book offers a major reassessment of the place of racism in pre-modern European thought.

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