

## WHEATON COLLEGE

### Student-Initiated Connection Proposal

**Connections Learning Outcomes:** As a result of connections students will be able to:

1. Understand how different academic disciplines analyze topics and solve problems
2. Apply methods or concepts from more than one discipline when analyzing topics or solving problems
3. Communicate using more than one different disciplinary perspective
4. Identify other disciplinary connections both in and outside the classroom

**DIRECTIONS** for structuring and submitting a Self-Initiated Connection Proposal:

The final date to submit the proposal is the "last day to drop a course without record" deadline of the semester in which you plan to take the last course of the Connection. Refer to the academic calendar on the Web for the specific date this semester.

- A proposed two-course Connection must link courses from at least two different Areas, a three-course Connection must link courses from three areas. The six areas are: History (ARHS), Creative Arts (ARCA), Humanities (ARHM), Social Sciences (ARSS), Natural Sciences (ARNS), Math/CS (ARMC).
- One single course cannot be used in two Connections.
- You cannot use English 101, Writing, or First Year Seminar, in a Self-Initiated Connection.
- When including an Independent Study in your proposal, you must also submit a statement that includes a full description of the Independent Study, plus the reading list. *It is the responsibility of the student to provide this information.*
- **Attention Seniors:** Proposals may not be submitted in your final semester.

Student Name: Anton S. Dababneh Date: 10.16.2017

Wheaton ID: W00332971 Class Year: 2018

Title of Your Proposed Connection: Disputed Origins; Now and Then

1. Attach the syllabi from all courses included in this Connection.
2. In a brief essay, identify the inter-connection you have found among these courses. Your essay should address the Connections Learning Outcomes found at the top of this page.
3. The faculty teaching each course must read your essay and approve this proposed Connection in the box below.
4. Submit this form, the accompanying essay, and the syllabi to the Committee on Educational Policy, care of the Office of the Provost, Park Hall.

Course #	Course Title	Area	Semester Taken	Faculty Approval
(Example) SOC 230	(Follow this format when filling out your proposal.) <i>Race and Ethnicity</i>	ARSS	Fall 2014	Please print your name and sign below.
SOC 230	<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>	ARSS	Fall 2016	"I have read this proposal and approve it." Print Name: Signature: <i>Kam...</i>
HIS 208	<i>American Indian Histories</i>	ARHS	Spring 2015	"I have read this proposal and approve it." Print Name: Signature: <i>see attached email</i>
ENG 235	<i>Empire, Race, and the Victorians</i>	ARHM	Fall 2017	"I have read this proposal and approve it." Print Name: <i>Winter Werner</i> Signature: <i>[Signature]</i>

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chair, Committee on Educational Policy

cc: Registrar

revised 08/2015

# Disputed Origins; Now and Then

Dear Committee Members,

This letter is to formalize my three-way Student-Initiated Connection titled: Disputed Origins; Now and Then. Lying beyond the boundaries of my Political Science Major, my connection will bring together the three divergent but overtly overlapping courses Sociology 230 *Race and Ethnicity*; English 235 *Empire, Race, and the Victorians*; and History 208 *American Indian Histories*.

It is no secret that the mystery of mankind's origins remains at the very center of our thirst for knowledge. Imbedded in such a mystery are questions such as: Where did the first humans appear?; Does all mankind share common ancestry?; Is "race" something socially constructed, or is it a biological reality? Such questions however, with their broad implications, are simply unanswerable by relying on any single field of knowledge. Rather, in attempts to expand one's perspective on the topic at hand, a range of fields is best consulted. And while every field of knowledge is capable of yielding unique insight into this great philosophical predicament, my quest for a clearer image will rely on a combination of knowledge from the fields of Humanities, History, and the Social Sciences. So how does a unified examination of the knowledge gathered from these fields shed new light on the question of our origins?

I chose to begin my senior year by venturing from the courses offered by my major. English 235 *Empire, Race, and the Victorians* was the class of my choice and it wasn't long before I realized that it was profoundly connected to classes I had taken earlier. Two weeks into the semester, our class was introduced to the works of Victorian ethnologists Robert Knox, and James Cowles Prichard. Through studying their respective works, *The Races of Men* and *The Natural History of Man*, we learned of the Victorian era's two most popular accounts of human origin. First, *Polygenism*, theorized that human races were of different origins and that variation was due to innate, immutable characteristics. Second, *Monogenism*, suggested common descent for all human races. Variation, the theory explains, is caused by differing environments. The socio-anthropological differences implied by the two theories was immense. As it turned out,

Knox, a Polygenist, who was expelled by the Anthropological Society in London in the 1860s, was later adopted by pro-slavery Confederate cause during the American Civil War. On the other hand, *Monogenism*, which interestingly aligns with biblical literalism, was advocated by Prichard, who grew up Quaker.

The global significance of developments in Victorian Britain cannot be understated. The Empire's brutal influence was far reaching and the legacy it created continues to affect the lives of billions to this day. Evidence strongly suggests that emerging Polygenist based theories played a vital part in aiding Western societies' justification their inhumane treatment of select groups, through systems of slavery and colonialism. As I learned from Eng. 235, the story of the evolution of these topical power projecting theories is well etched into the literature of the time. For instance, Wilkie Collins' novel *The Moonstone* (1868), opens with the explicit scene of British troops storming a Hindu temple in India. Later works such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) show signs of reconciliation with Monogenist based theories. Among such works was Charles Darwin's *The Decent of Man* (1871), which provided a well-evidenced account of mankind's common decent from 'some lower form.' Consequently, the innovative plots of Stevenson and Stoker's novels explored public anxieties surrounding man's wild and violent origins. Such a connection is clear when examining the striking characters of both Count Dracula and Mr. Hyde, who closely resemble man's imagination-grabbing hybrid ancestors, and who were described by the period's contemporary scientific works. Examining the developing trajectory of theories of mankind's origin in Victorian society through understanding the periods' popular literature, demonstrated that the era's scientific ideas about race heavily influenced the Victorian's fascinating culture and domineering politics. Nevertheless, a parallel look at a Polygenist theory from another field offers an entirely different mode of interpretation.

During the second semester of my freshman year, I enrolled in a History course which reshaped my understanding of history. Among the various topics addressed by my *American Indian Histories* course, was the question of North America's earliest settlement. I quickly learned that this was a topic of great controversy. The dispute pitted Native American creation stories and oral traditions against the widest held theory of mankind's global migration. Most non-native historians believe that Native American peoples migrated from Asia to America via

the Bering Strait, when the Ice Age of c. 75,000-8000 B.C. exposed a land bridge connecting Siberia and Alaska. Archaeologists go on to cite dental, genetic, and linguistic evidence, to link Native Americans to the peoples of East Asia. Native traditions on the other hand, affirm that their ancestors have always inhabited the land the Navajo knew as Dinétah, or that the Abenaki knew as Ndaakinn. The celebrated Lakota, theologian, and historian, Vine Deloria, Jr., who adamantly denied that Native American origin can be explained using the Bering Strait migration theory, gave voice to the matter's delicate nature. Deloria insisted that the theory assumed by the scientific community only found prominence due to its "immense political implications." According to Deloria, framing Native Americans as "latecomers who had barely unpacked before Columbus came knocking," justified Europeans' negation of Native claims to autochthonous occupancy of North America.

Only in retrospect, did I notice that as a freshman I had unknowingly stumbled upon a debate which identically parallels that which drives Monogenism and Polygenism apart. Deloria's beliefs that Native Americans had always been there makes him a Polygenist, as his stance suggests that the Native American populations were not linked to the peoples who originated in Africa before migrating into Asia. On the other hand, those who hold the Bering Strait migration theory to be true could be considered Monogenists. With the parallel drawn, and the connection here made, I found it most interesting that although many of us take a Monogenic approach as a given, Polygenic theories have been invoked by both colonizer and colonized, which raises interesting questions. While the Monogenic account of human origin unites the scientific community and followers of the three Abrahamic religions, the Polygenic approach has been lobbied for by both the perpetrators and victims of imperialism. The irony of this alone begs for a closer look to be taken.

Such a connection could not have been possible, or appreciated without an in depth understanding of the past and present sociological implications of the two accounts of human origin. During my junior year I took *Race and Ethnicity*, a critical sociology course, which contextualized much of the racial and ethnic injustice evident in countless modern societies. Not only did this course offer me a clear framework of definitions and theories through which I could understand the significance of the aforementioned connection, but it also paved the way for the developing of my own opinion on the question. As I quickly learned, the classes of race and

ethnicity, two terms I had long considered interchangeable, each had mutually exclusive elements to them. I learned that an ethnic group was a group within larger society, with real or putative ancestry. Moreover, ethnicity is defined by the group itself. Race, in contrast, is a human group defined by others as distinct based on perception of common physical characteristics. Since race typically originates in assignment by others however, it implies inherent differences, thereby reflecting power relations. We also considered alternative definitions such as “Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi & Winant.) Perhaps most importantly, we learned of the far-reaching effects of past injustices on the ancestors of victims of racial discrimination.

By introducing this sociological lens, the Monogenic and Polygenic theories held by different groups of people ceased to be notions in the abstract. For one of my assignments, I was asked to analyze data presented by The Counted, a project being undertaken by the Guardian news agency which works “*to count the number of people killed by police and other law enforcement agencies in the United States throughout 2015 and 2016, to monitor their demographics and to tell the stories of how they died.*” (The Counted Official Webpage) I could now attribute names and stories to the present-day victims of racial discrimination, a violence rooted in the same socially constructed classifications that appear in Knox’s *Races of Men*.

In conclusion, studying *Empire, Race, and the Victorians*, *American Indian Histories*, and *Race and Ethnicity* in concert inspired helped me gain an acute understanding of the questions and controversies that surround differing accounts of mankind’s origin as well as the significance of the opposing answers. I am confident that I will carry this unique three-dimensional perspective with me for the rest of my life.

Thank you for your time,

Anton S. Dababneh.

Works Cited:

Calloway, Colin G. *First Peoples; A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* .  
Dartmouth College, 2012.

Darwin, Charles *The Decent of Man*, W.W. Norton and Company, London, 1871

Werner, Winter Presentation on James Cowles Prichard & Robert Knox. Wheaton College, 2017.

McCormack, Karen Presentations on Theories & Definitions. Wheaton College, 2016.