



Structural and Systemic Barriers to Entry in Forensic Anthropology: Our History and Our Future

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Introduction & Objectives

Implicit and explicit barriers to building a culture of belonging persist in forensic anthropology. This lack of diversity in biological and forensic anthropology is well documented (Figures 1 & 2). There is a significant upswing in forensic anthropology programs (Passalacqua et al 2021). However, failing to address the pervasive structural barriers that continue to impede diversity

Objectives:

- To recognize that these barriers are known and have been previously discussed (Tallman et al. 2022).
- Embrace an expanding forensic canon and scholarship to include diverse perspectives that have long addressed the shortcomings of this discipline.

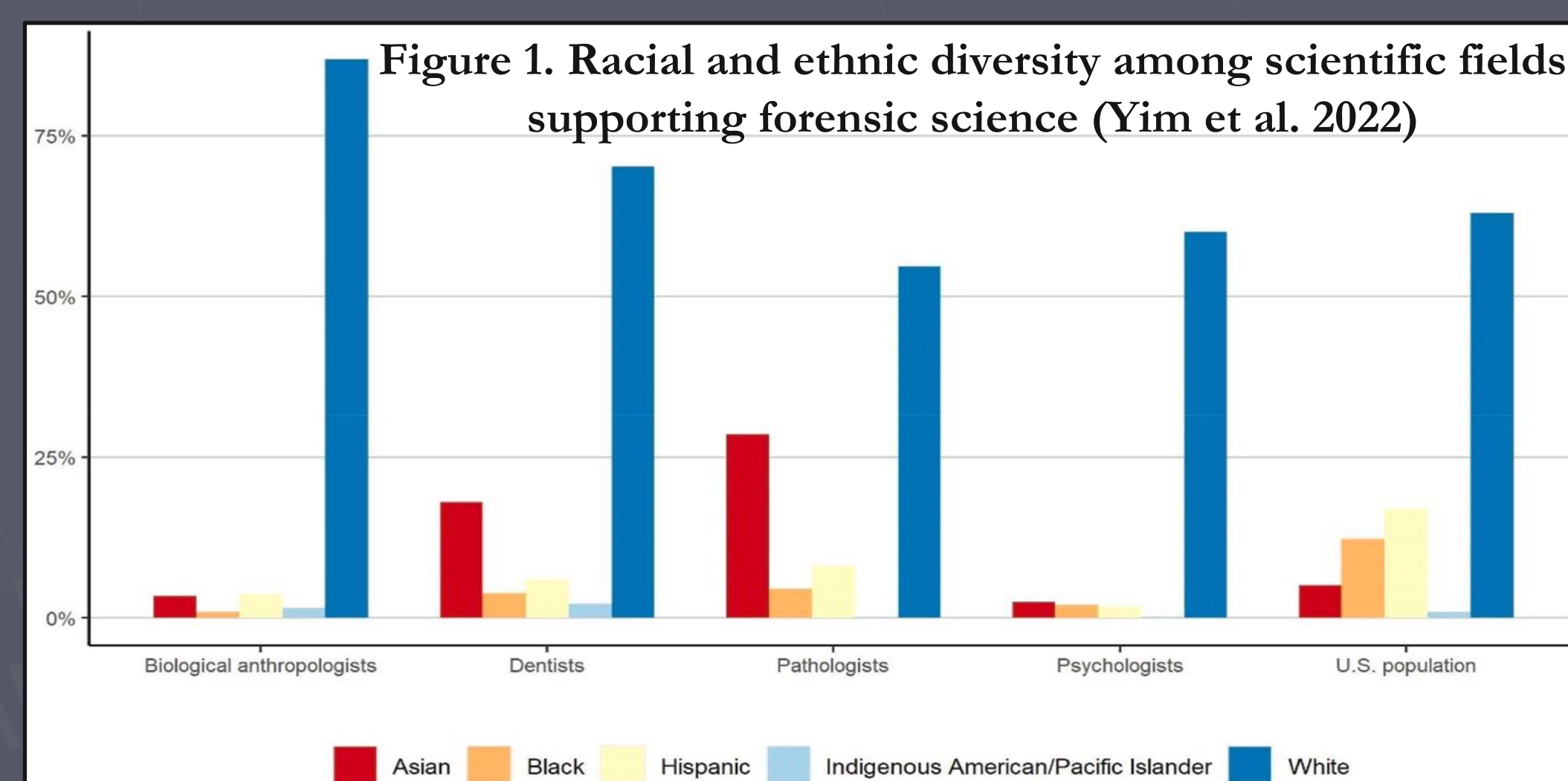
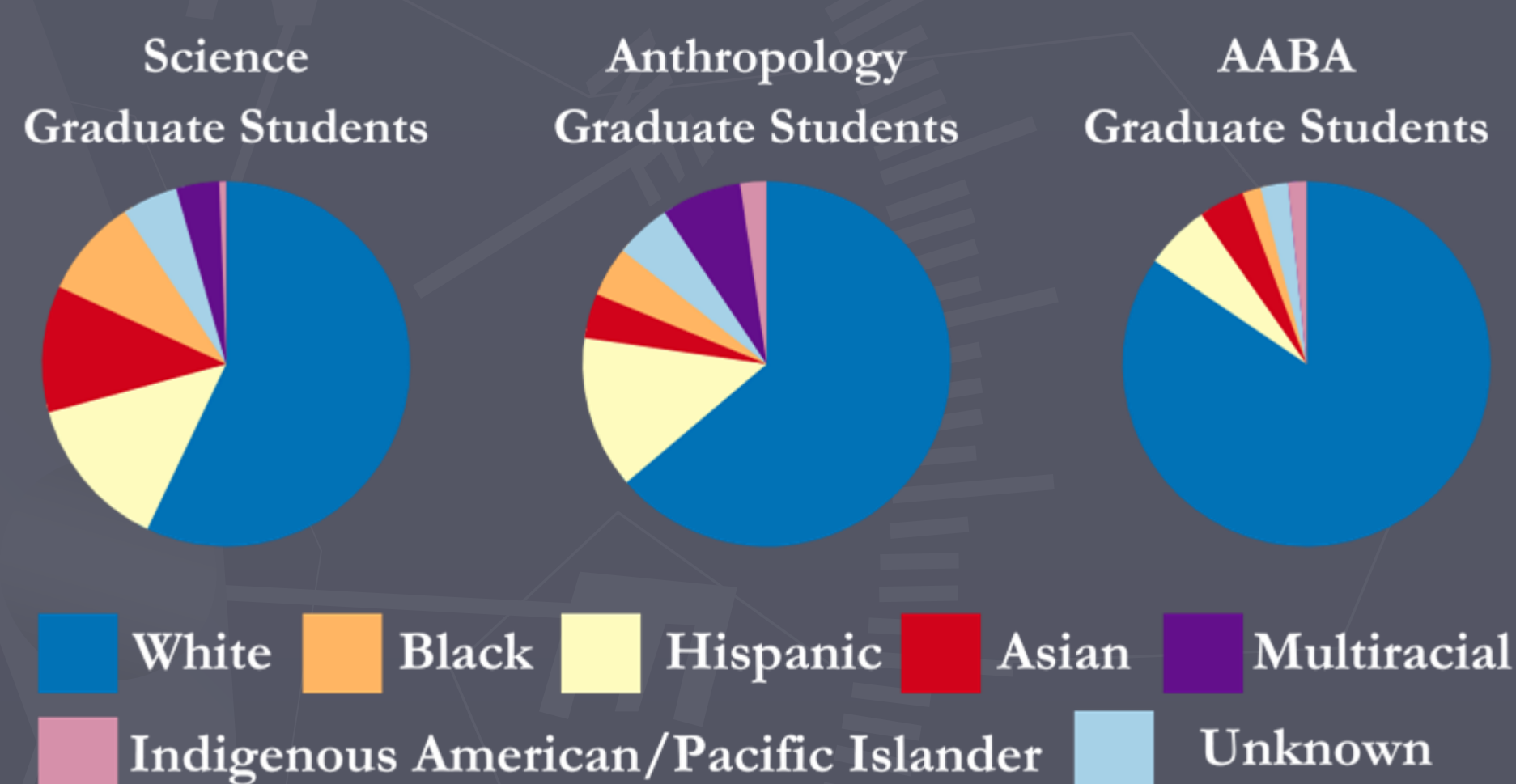
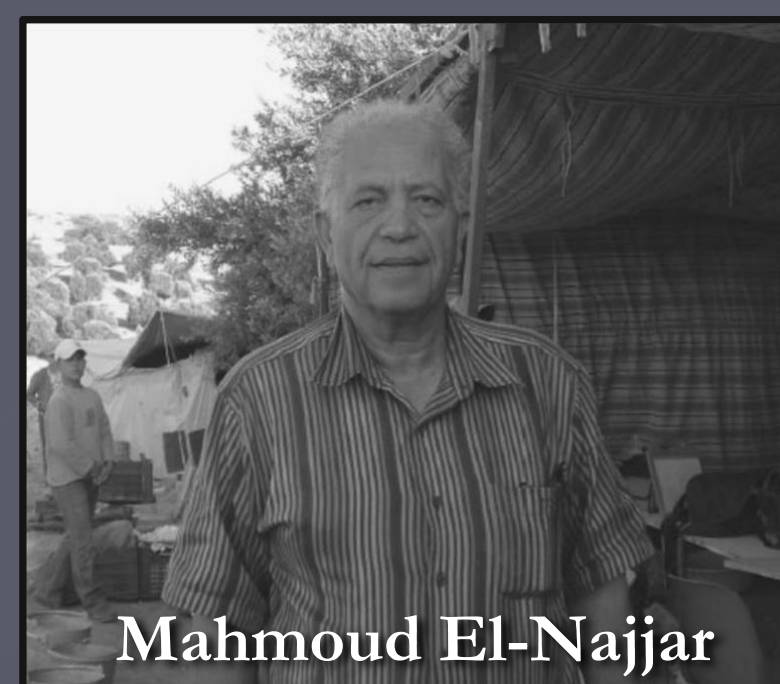


Figure 2: NSF Estimates of Graduate Students Demographics

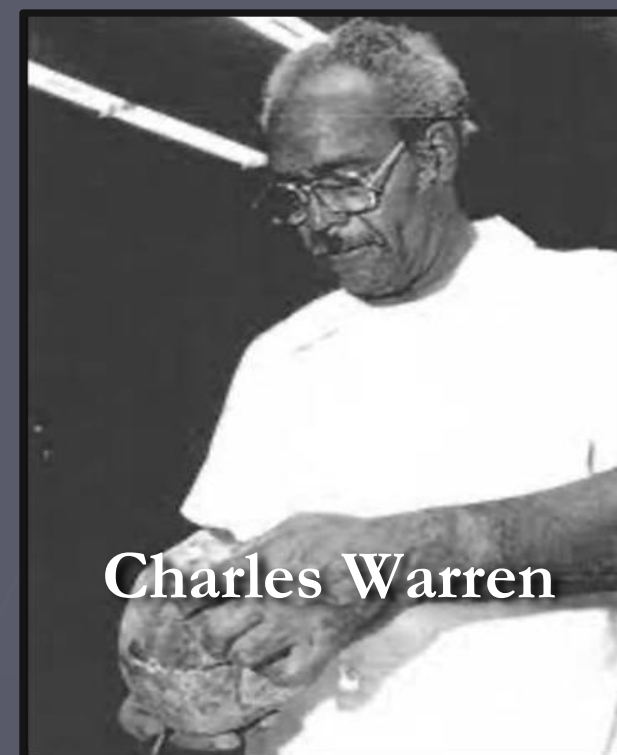


Barriers to Entry

- Lack of peers of similar identity
- Lack of access to role models (historical and current)
- Racial and cis-gender biased methodologies
- Top-down hierarchical power structure in academia
- Illusions of objectivity and impartiality
- Relevance of this to curriculum and training structure
- Lack of a sense of inclusion/belonging



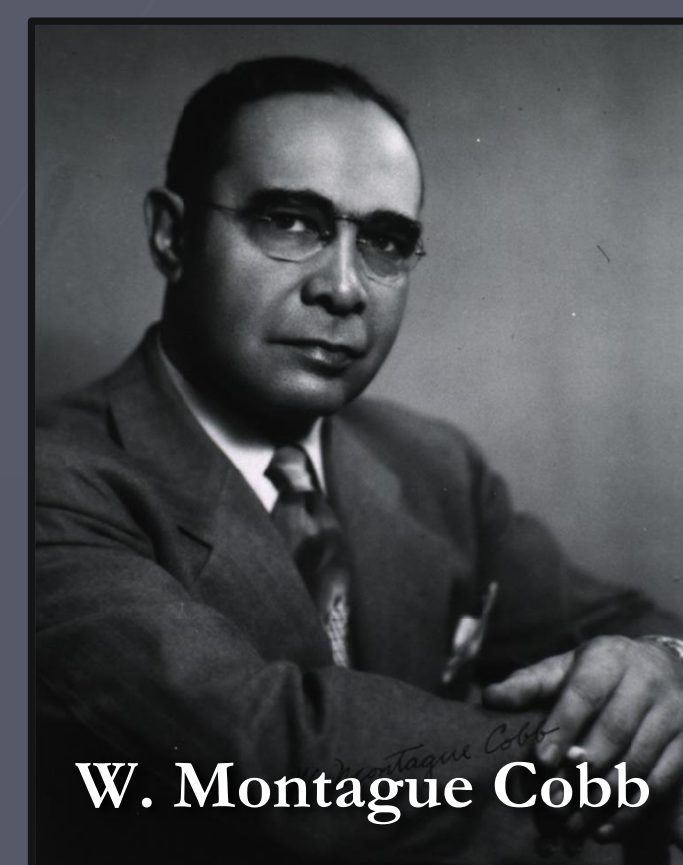
Mahmoud El-Najjar



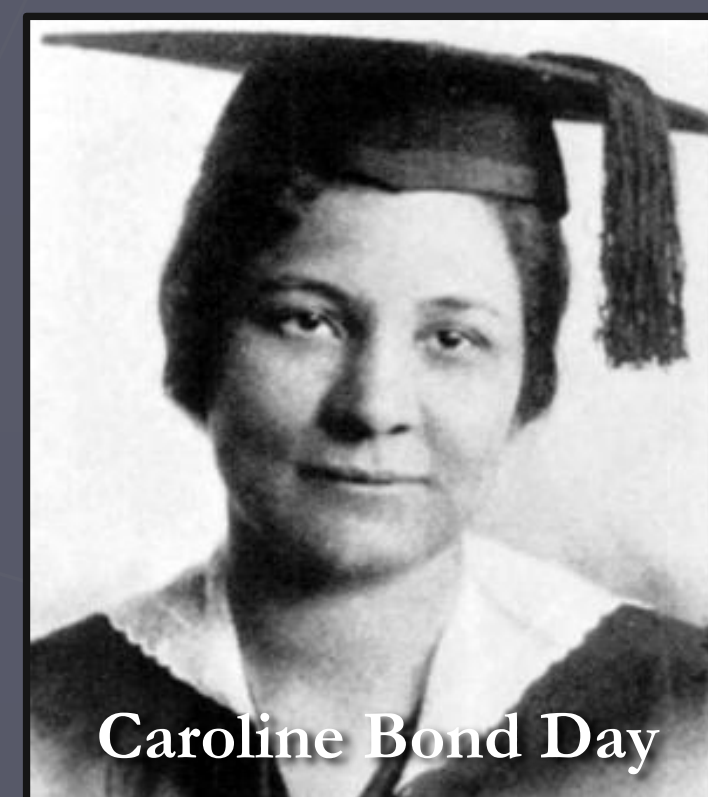
Charles Warren



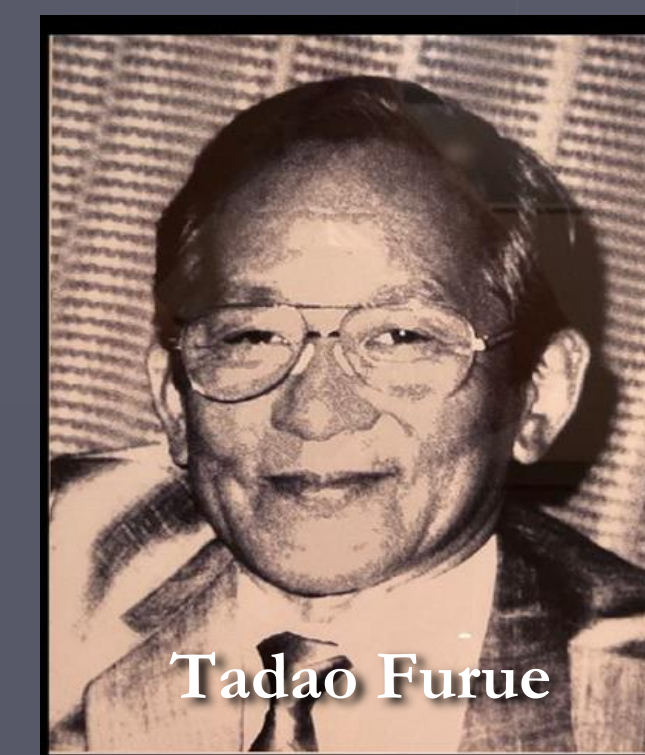
Kazuro Hanihara



W. Montague Cobb



Caroline Bond Day



Tadao Furue



Kenneth and Mamie Clark

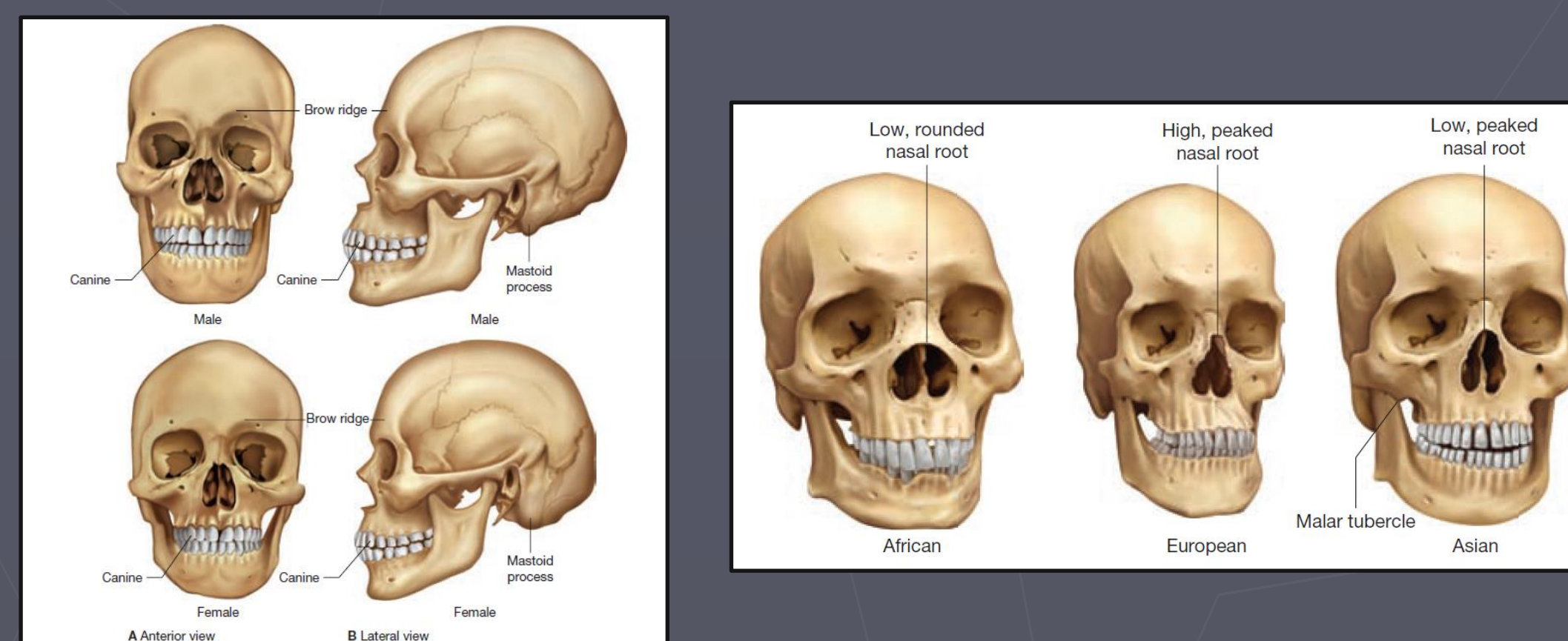


Figure 3. Estimating sex and ancestry exemplars (Soluri and Agarwal 2019)

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Figure 4. Embracing DEI in the Scientific Community (Garelnabi et al. 2022)

Best Practices for the Future

- Break down top-down hierarchical learning through peer engagement and active mentorship.
- Legitimizing alternative perspectives, validating experiential evidence and learning, and encouraging research that challenges traditional methods/practices in curriculum and training structures.
- True mentorship with education and advocacy for mentor and mentee through encouragement and modeling examples of professionalism.
- Avenues of mentorship that place less of a burden on students/ people in lesser positions of power, etc.
- Engage open discussions and explicitly teach about structural vulnerability and its cultural and biological implications - including external and internal vulnerabilities, methods that erase variation in vulnerable populations but also structural vulnerabilities created by how we teach forensic anthropology.
- Engage and encourage advocacy in ethical treatment of human remains, decedents, and descendants, including uplifting the voices of Black and Indigenous scholarship.
- Pedagogy and professional practices in forensic anthropology can be modernized and restructured to promote learning environments that foster belonging and engagement.

