The Meanings of "Racism": Towards a History of the Term and the Concept
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This presentation is a sketch of my current research project about the history of the term and concept "racism," as well as earlier terms and concepts that pre-dated "racism," like "race prejudice." This project is not interested in the thing "racism" but rather, I'm interested in the language people have used historically to talk about racial oppression, inequality, and discrimination.

In the presentation, I begin by discussing terms and concepts that pre-dated the term. Since the term "racism" didn't become widely used in English until the 1930 and 40s, my project examines the terms people used before the word "racism" existed to talk about what we would today describe as "racism." Here I talk about the uses of terms like "race prejudice" and various quasi-medical language, like "colorphobia," that were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

I next consider early uses of "racialism" and "racism" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These terms often had different meanings to the ones in the present. In particular, members of the French far right used the term "*racisme*" to describe their own racial views.

The term's meaning begins to coalesce in the 1930s and 40s, when it was used to describe and condemn Nazi racial ideology. In the postwar world, the term's usage continued to increase, as did its meanings. In particular, the concept of "institutional racism" emerges in the 1960s. Here, "racism" was not just an individual phenomenon, but applied to social structures and institutions that produced racial inequality.

I also introduce the idea of "racism" as a "thick" concept that has normative power. I speculate the use of the term actually plays a role in shaping social change. I conclude by reflecting on some of the political implications for present-day debates by studying the history of the term and concept.