

CASE STUDY

Prejudice against Eskimos

European ethnographers of the nineteenth century exhibited their own bias and prejudices in their studies of Eskimos. Their accounts mocked the Eskimos as their language had six or seven terms for various types, aspects or uses of snow, but no term to denote snow in general. From this the ethnographers deduced that the Eskimos had an underdeveloped capacity for conceptual abstraction. However, they failed to take account of the fact that, because snow in some or other form was a central element in the Eskimos' everyday lives, a general term would have been useless to them because it was overly broad in meaning. It would be as if ethnographers from some tropical country mocked the Europeans for not having a general term (and presumably not even a concept) which embraced such diverse phenomena as snow, ice, frost, hail, and so on.