

Edited by Ellis Cashmore & James Jennings

RACISM

Essential Readings

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RACISM: ESSENTIAL READINGS

Edited by
ELLIS CASHMORE and JAMES JENNINGS



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Introduction

Racism: Essential Readings is primarily a textbook for students and others interested in understanding how the concept and story of racism has been defined, utilized, and debated, in modern society. One goal of this anthology is to show that the concept of racism has a long and complex intellectual history as an idea but also a long track record in how powerful groups have utilized racism as an ideology to advance social, economic, or cultural interests. This collection seeks to show how racism has been utilized not only to explain racial and ethnic differences in living conditions, but also as justification for maintaining such differences. The book is organized by presenting a chronological overview of selections illustrating how racism has been approached by scholars and others to explain racial and ethnic differences in various historical periods throughout the twentieth century, as well as in the contemporary period.

The selections include historical and contemporary essays. They do not include all selections that might be considered 'classical', or the most widely read or cited, or debated. But this particular selection is essential in understanding contemporary debates, and more importantly, how the idea and story of racism has developed in different periods and within certain political and economic contexts. While a few of the articles are theoretical, the majority focus on concrete situations that students can relate to, and explore further through classroom discussion.

Although most of the selections are still relatively recent, we do include a few from much earlier periods in order to emphasize two points: first, discussions about the nature and definition of racism have a long history and tradition; secondly, the earlier articles provide a base or framework for noting how the dialogue about racism has both changed, and remained the same. Readers will discover, for instance, that a scholarly explanation for racial inequality that may be countered and dismissed in one period, arises anew in another period. This is reflected by noting that the first chapter in the anthology, written in 1905 and full of paternalistic observations and conclusions, and actions, may be the kind of problem in dealing with racism today that is identified in the last chapter of the book, published in 1995. We decided to place this article first because it summarizes some of the thinking about the nature and causes of racism at the turn of the century during the height of imperialism. This article is useful because it shows that while the concept of racism and what it is has changed over various periods, there are nevertheless enduring ideas that are continually being proposed and debated by those interested in defining, challenging, or excusing racism in the contemporary period. By presenting

the selections chronologically, and beginning with the turn of the century, students have an opportunity to discuss the antecedents of the idea and application of racism today.

Many other articles could easily have been included in this reader. Our collection is presented as one of essential readings because collectively the student can obtain an understanding of the idea of racism and how it has been applied and utilized in economic and political arenas. Since this anthology is conceived as a textbook, we are also concerned that the selections generate dialogue and further investigation. Therefore, the editors have selected essays that are both informative and provocative, and perhaps even controversial; and as suggested above, concrete in terms of actual political and economic situations.

Collectively, the selections cover the justification of racism as expounded by some writers throughout recent history, including theoretical explanations and even justifications for racism, the psychology of racism, and how racism has been molded by political interests, as well as racism as ideology. Some of the selections, for example, explain how racism has been, and continues to be utilized as a political tool by wealthy or powerful class interests, sometimes in subtle ways, but other times more openly.

The selections reflect a wide range of perspectives, including those who advocated racist views, and those who challenged them in various social and economic settings. These selections also show that some scholars have concluded that racism is no longer significant as a social, economic, or political process. Scholars in this school may believe that today class and culture are far more significant than racism in explaining social and economic differences between racial and ethnic groups. Other writers in this anthology suggest, however, that racism is an enduring idea and ideology. These particular selections provide examples of how racism may be a factor in a range of social situations in the United States, and other societies. They argue, furthermore, that while the ideology and justification of racism may have been different in the early 1900s from the 1960s, or 1990s, certain components of this ideology, particularly the social and cultural, and intellectual ranking of racial and ethnic groups, has remained constant throughout many periods. It is interesting to note, for example, selections offering 'evidence' for justifying the belief that Europeans were intellectually and genetically superior to blacks or other non-European groups at the turn of the century. These presentations can be viewed as ignorant and prejudicial today. Yet, we are still debating and responding to works like that of Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve*, where the belief in the genetic and intellectual superiority of European peoples is, again, proposed, albeit with supposedly contemporary and objective data.

The selections in this anthology show that racism is still a pervasive social and intellectual force, and utilized to justify the social status of powerful interests and groups. The selections show that racism represents a way of thinking that emerges from particular economic and political situations and particular distribution of wealth and privilege by race and ethnicity in many societies. Some writers in this volume believe that it is difficult to recognize racism because it is so imbued within a system of white-skin privileges. The social, cultural, and political order that supports such a system becomes normalized in the world-views of some

groups, and therefore, the argument that racism is pervasive is both abhorred and challenged. Racism is abnormal, in other words, while white-skin privileges, while unacknowledged, represents the norm. The latter might be invisible, in a sense, because it represents a way of thinking, a socialization process that is not abrupt but rather constantly at play. Again, this reflects the story of racism which is not simply an event, but rather a way of thinking about racial and ethnic differences in society. Racism, this reader concludes, has been and continues to be pervasive, and is represented in fundamental social processes molding political, economic, and educational decisions in modern societies.

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The Negro Race and European Civilization

PAUL S. REINSCH

The editors included this article because it reflects the paternalistic view of some scholars in earlier periods regarding race, and "Negroes". The author portrays European civilizations as superior, and the 'negro race' as inferior, lacking in certain qualities, such as lack of social organization and social action, lack of social fellow-feeling (this explains cannibalism, according to the author), lack of originality of thought, and lack of artistic qualities, especially 'deficient on the side of the mechanical arts ...' and in general, 'show[ing] no tendency toward higher development'. These characteristics actually facilitated slavery and the slave trade according to the author. However, in quite liberal terms, Reinsch claims that the negro race will nevertheless survive due to a certain degree of race mixing and their 'buoyant, vigorous constitution and their fundamental commonsense'. The author believes that the proximity of the negro race to Europeans has allowed the former to survive. And certain kinds of race mixing have been beneficial for those groups with African blood, as he points out in his description of women in Martinique: 'the mixed races produced by Europeans and negroes exhibit some very fine qualities. The rich yet delicate beauty of the mulatto women in Martinique, their sweetness of temper and kindness of heart, so excited the admiration of visitors that they all, lay and clerical, French and British, join in the chorus of admiration and declare the women of Martinique the most charming in the world.' While readers may find this selection biased, it is interesting how some of the themes utilized by the author to explain the inferiority of blacks are repeated in various forms in contemporary scholarly dialogue and debates.

While in the past century populations and racial elements which had formerly been far distant from each other have been brought into intimate contact, the twentieth century will witness the formation of new mixed races and the attempt to adjust the

mutual relations of all the various peoples that inhabit the globe. The recent great advance in the safeness and rapidity of communication has made the whole world into a community whose solidarity of interests becomes more apparent day by day.

Closer contact with the more advanced nations of the Orient will have a profound influence upon European civilization, because these nations, though ready to adopt our industrial methods, are determined to maintain their national beliefs and customs. Though from the races that stand on a lower level of civilization no such deep-going influence upon European and American life is to be expected, their relations to the peoples of more advanced culture will nevertheless be a matter of great moment. Some of them, the weakest and lowest in organization, may indeed continue to fade away before the advance of European power; but this is not likely to be the fate of the negro race. The negroes have come in contact with the worst side of European civilization; yet their buoyant, vigorous constitution and their fundamental common-sense carry them safely through dangers which have proved fatal to other races. They are therefore destined to be a permanent element in the composite population of the future, and when we consider the extent and fertility of the regions which they hold, the necessity of their ever-increasing co-operation in the economic life of the world becomes apparent.

The negro race may be studied in four different sets of conditions: in their original state in the forests of central Africa; as a mixed race under the control of the Arab and Hamite races of the northern Sudan; living side by side with a white population in respect to which they occupy a socially inferior position, as in South Africa and North America; and in a few isolated communities which enjoy rights of self-government based upon European models, as in Hayti and in the French Antilles. A correct understanding of any part of the negro question demands a review of the situation of the negro under all these varying conditions, because only through a comparison of the aboriginal characteristics of the negro with the qualities acquired through contact with other races and civilizations can we form a just estimate of his relative capacity for progress.

We need not here enter into the controversy between polygenists and unigenists, since it has a purely ethnological interest, whereas we intend to approach the question from the point of view of the political activities of the present. No matter what may be the origin of the diversity which the human races at present exhibit—whether the result of the amalgamation of an almost infinite number of disparate groups, or the consequence of continued diversification of an original type—the negro race today exhibits such characteristic features and such distinct traits as to induce many observers to consider it as entirely incommensurate with the white race; yet, on the other hand, it is physiologically connected with the Aryans through a long series of mixed races. As we pass from Morocco or from Cairo toward the center of the Sudan, the color of the population gradually grows darker, and their

features, from the regular and often beautiful type of the Hamite, merge off into the coarser characteristics of the negro race. From the pure white skin of the Berber to the yellow of the Tuareg, the copper tint of the Somali or the Fulbe, the chocolate of the Mombutu, and the ebony of the Jolof, the color gradations are imperceptible; and no conception is more utterly mistaken than that which would people all of central Africa with a black-skinned race.

The physiological aspects of race-mixture have lately attracted much attention. Mr. James Bryce, in his recent lecture on "The Relations of the Advanced and Backward Races," carefully reviews the experience of mankind in this matter, and adds his support to the current assumption that mixed breeds are morally and physically weak when the parents belong to widely disparate races and civilizations. However, it would seem that this assumption is true only in cases where the two societies to which the parents respectively belong maintain a repugnant attitude to each other, so that the mestizos form an outcast class and suffer a total loss of *morale*. Where friendly relations exist, the mixed races produced by Europeans and negroes exhibit some very fine qualities. The rich yet delicate beauty of the mulatto women in Martinique, their sweetness of temper and kindness of heart, so excited the admiration of visitors that they all, lay and clerical, French and British, join in the chorus of admiration and declare the women of Martinique the most charming in the world. Intellectually, the mulatto race has produced a number of remarkable men, and the liberality of mind among the leaders of this class in Martinique is certainly most noteworthy. Still it is generally true that the men of a mixed race will exhibit fewer pleasing qualities of character than the women: they must make themselves useful often by activities not conducive to sweetness of temper or honesty of mind; while the women naturally develop more gentle and attractive characteristics.

The question of race-mixture between Europeans and negroes is, however, at present of little practical importance. In the regions where large numbers of Europeans and negroes live side by side the social laws more and more stringently forbid a mixture of the two elements; moreover, the number of Europeans who settle in central Africa will probably always be exceedingly small. But there is another racial element which will in the future have a very prominent part in the physiological modification of the African race. All along the east coast of Africa immigration from India is taking place. Both coast and inland regions are very well adapted to settlement by the Hindus, and no race-antipathy exists between them and the negroes. We may in the near future look for a great inpouring of Indian coolies, tradesmen, and settlers, who, together with the Arab and Hamite elements coming from the north, will leaven the mass of the African population.

While physiologically the transition from the negro to the white race is a gradual one, the distinctive type of negro civilization is yet very different from that which we call European. The last few years have witnessed a great change of mind in matters of humanitarianism; the absolute unity of human life in all parts of the globe, as well as the idea of the practical equality of human individuals wherever they may be found, has been quite generally abandoned. Without going into the question of origins, it is clear that conditions of environment and historical forces have combined in producing certain great types of humanity which are essentially different in their characteristics. To treat these as if they were all alike, to subject them to the same methods of government, to force them into the same institutions, was a mistake of the nineteenth century which has not been carried over into our own. But, after all, it is difficult to say which is the more surprising—whether the remarkable recurrence of similar customs and ideas, similar ways of looking at things, in the remotest parts of the world, and in most distant epochs,¹ or whether it is the existence of clearly marked, almost unchangeable psychological types differing radically from each other. Thus when we study the negro race we encounter many characteristics and customs which bear witness to the common unity of mankind, and which can be accounted for only by assuming the same fundamental instincts, or the transmission of ideas and institutions through tradition; on the other hand, we find many psychological characteristics which distinguish the negro race sharply and clearly from the European, the Hamite, or the oriental world. Whether these differences are irreducible is a question which further development alone can solve.

Low social organization, and consequent lack of efficient social action, form the most striking characteristic of the negro race. Among the Africans of the western Sudan the matriarchal organization of the family, combined with the practice of polygamy, makes the mother the real center of the family-group and renders impossible the upbuilding of strong families through the inheritance of power and property combined from father to son. The father's property goes, not to his children, but to those of his eldest sister. He can, therefore, not supplement, by his accumulated wealth, the physical and mental endowment bestowed upon his son. The redeeming social trait of the African race is the love of sons for their mothers, which is often very deep and touching. But no great families, and therefore no truly great men or leaders to the manor born, exist among Africans.

Among most of the tribes, although there are notable exceptions, the duties of the marriage relation are strictly observed. This is due primarily to the fact that the husband has paid a respectable sum to acquire his spouse, and his strongly developed sense of private property would brook no interference. Her person, her labor, her attentions, belong exclusively to him. In fact, there is but a difference in degree between the position of the wife and that of the slave. The reasons for entering into marriage are almost always prudential: among the poorer people, the working power of the wife; among the wealthier, the influence of her relatives, form the main consideration. The African bush traders have a wife in every important village on their route, not only on account of the business advantage accruing from her connections, but also for the reason that traders are in constant danger of having their food poisoned unless the kitchen is managed by a friendly spirit.

Slavery among the African negroes is an institution which does not at all correspond to what we understand by that term. No special social disgrace attaches to it, nor is a slave a mere chattel; on the contrary, his property rights are scrupulously respected. He is merely a more dependent member of the community. Thus a "trade boy" slave on the west coast is obliged only to pay a fixed amount to his master, and he may in prosperous times acquire a good deal of wealth for himself. He may then purchase other slaves, and when he has become powerful even free men will place themselves under his protection, and he will thus become a "king." Even during the last decade, of the three most powerful chieftains in the Oil River region, two were slaves. The fact that a man may be "king" and slave at the same time is certainly unprecedented in any other civilization, which of itself shows that the African institution of slavery can in no way be classed with that of Rome or of the southern states. We shall revert to this matter later on in our discussion of the slave-trade—the dark and terrible side of the institution in Africa.

A lack of social fellow-feeling, an absence of every vestige of patriotism, is shown by the readiness with which negroes allow themselves to be used to fight against their neighbors. The Arab slave-raiders never lack men to fight their battles; for, though their Hamite troops may refuse to attack the bands of another trader, the negroes are always ready for a savage onset, even upon men of very nearly their own flesh and blood. The terrible custom of cannibalism, too, can be explained only by taking into account this absence of a feeling of common humanity. Cannibalistic feasts are usually accompanied by religious frenzy or the fury of war; but this is not always the case. There are thrifty tribes which, in the words of De Cardi, "tap their older people on the head, smoke-dry them, then break them up into small bits, which are rolled into

¹ E.g., the almost universal recurrence among the aboriginal peoples of the ordeal, animistic beliefs, marriage by purchase, etc.

balls and laid away for future use in the family stew." It is remarkable that some tribes, like the Mombuttu, which are distinctly advanced in industrial civilization, are the most voracious among the cannibals; thus the greediness of the Sandeh has earned them, among their neighbors, the suggestive nickname of Niam-niam. In the presence of whites these cannibals are, however, generally anxious to conceal their peculiar practice, and when Schweinfurth visited the realm of King Munza, the monarch had forbidden all open cannibalism in order to keep offense from the eyes of his guest.

The greatest deficiency of the negro race lies on the side of the mechanical arts. While they practice the smelting and forging of iron, and while some of the tribes have advanced considerably in the art of weaving, the negroes nevertheless show little originality, and have acquired most of these arts from the Hamites. They are far more ready to engage in trade; in fact, the trend of the African negro mind is primarily commercial. Living in a country endowed with abundant natural resources, the negro tribes have found it far easier to procure the few things they need, in addition to what nature furnishes them, by trading with Arabs and later with the Europeans, than by developing industries among themselves. This is, of course, especially true of the coast tribes, and in general it may be observed that industrial civilization is higher in the interior regions of Africa than on the coast, the negro race reversing in this particular the historical experience of Europe and America. No shrewder merchants can be imagined than the bush traders of the forest belt and the "trade boys" of the coast. The subtlest tricks for practicing deception are known to these simple-minded forest-dwellers. Women who have learned the art of mixing with the rubber balls sold to merchants the largest amount of dirt that can escape detection, are said to be especially sought after in the marriage-market.

When we pass on to the specific psychological traits of the African race, we enter a field of darkness and uncertainty. "Race psychology" has of late become a fashionable term; but with most writers it stands merely for a more or less interesting description of racial characteristics, without that close study of origins and causal relations which constitute the science of psychology. Even when employed with great care and scientific precision, as in the works of Herbert Spencer, the psychological method does not always produce convincing results; and often the material it deals with becomes so unmanageable as to furnish no clear generalization, as in the painstaking and ponderous *Afrikanische Jurisprudenz* of Post. Yet, from the point of view of political activities and social reform, the psychic phenomena of primitive races are a matter of the greatest importance, deserving the most careful attention of the colonial administrator.

The art-sense of the negro is rudimentary. Unlike the Bushman, he has no pictorial or plastic art. His

chief pleasure is the dance and the entrancing sound of the tom-tom. Of the marvelous sense for melody that the negro has developed in the Antilles and the plantation states of America hardly a trace is found in the African. But the sense of rhythm exists, and the rhythmic drumming on the tom-tom has an almost hypnotic effect upon the blacks. They sit as in a trance, listening to the marvelous sound for hours; or, should the tom-tom player move about the village, they will follow him in utter abstraction, so that they will often tumble headlong into ditches. On the occasion of great military displays, given in the honor of European commissioners, the various chieftains will each bring forward a band of musicians, who at the height of the festivities all play their instruments with the greatest vigor and totally regardless of their fellow-artists. The tremendous discord and strident volley of sound thus produced give rise to the greatest popular satisfaction. Toutée, however, reports that if a simple tune, like "Casquette du père Bugeaud," is played to the negroes, they will listen to it with rapt attention, and will gladly abandon for a time their accustomed instruments.

The art of oratory is much cultivated in Africa. As most of the tribes have no written language, their rich folk-lore is handed down by word of mouth, and whenever men come together they listen to the expert story-teller and orator. The capacity of the American negro for oratory, which has again and again placed young negroes and mulattoes in the position of class orators at leading universities, is therefore an inheritance from customs practised in the primitive villages of Africa. The great occasion for the display of oratorical talent is the palaver—a meeting for the discussion of questions of public interest among prominent persons, or for the trial of cases at law. The African negro shows great ability in the development of systems of law and in the enforcement of rights; this is especially true of the rules of private property, which are strictly defined and scrupulously observed. Palaver, however, is costly, so that persons who cause much litigation are looked upon as undesirable citizens. Thus, Miss Kingsley saw on a stake before a village the head of a woman whose offense had been that she had "caused too much palaver." In order to prevent the stringing-out of actions, each party has to present the judge with a calabash of palm wine for every day of the sessions.

The intellectual life of the African negro is taken up chiefly with fetishism; that is, with the construction of a spirit-world by which he feels himself surrounded and which he believes is influencing his every act. Fetishism is not unlike the animism of the Brahmin, but it is without the latter's belief in the duality of spirit and matter, and looks upon visible existence as only a grosser form of spirit. According to the belief of the negro, the world was created by potent divinities, who now hold aloof and allow the