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**Innate racial differences**

BY FORREST E. CLEMENTS

EVERYONE sees the difference between a Negro and a Swede, a Chinaman and an Arab, an Eskimo and a Jew. Diversities in skin color, shape of the nose and hair texture strike the most casual eye and leave no doubt that these persons belong to separate stocks. In a word, men diverge in a variety of anatomical characters. It is these physical traits which form the basis for the anthropologist's classification of mankind into races.

There is a great popular confusion about races for many people do not know what the term really means. We constantly hear references to the “French race,” the “Anglo-Saxon race,” the “Semitic race” and so on. But when we speak of the “French race” we really mean the people living in the national subdivision known as France. "Anglo-Saxon" refers to English speaking peoples and is a linguistic expression. "Semitic" relates to the languages of that name or the people speaking those tongues.

In other words, we have here a muddling of political, linguistic and biological terms. These "races" are like the unicorn in that neither today nor in the past has either ever existed. They are social rather than organic groups and the term race is misapplied. One language may be spoken by people of several divergent stocks. Again, members of one race may extend over half a dozen political units and speak totally different languages in different parts of the area. Organic groups, as such, have nothing to do with political or linguistic factors and contravene such boundaries more often than not.

Race is a biological term and refers to the varieties of a species. All living men belong to one species, **homo sapiens**, but there are a number of varieties of this species. Mankind is divided into three main racial stocks and each of these into a number of sub-races as follows:

1. **Caucasoid**
   a. Nordic—around the Baltic sea
   b. Alpine—central Europe, Russia, Persia, Armenia, Turkestan
   c. Mediterranean—around Mediterranean sea in southern Europe, West Asia and North Africa
   d. Hindu—northern India
2. **Negroid**
   a. Negro proper—tropical and southern Africa and Tasmania
   b. Oceanic negroes or Melanesians—New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon and adjacent islands
   c. Negritoes or pygmy blacks—sporadically in Africa, New Guinea, Philippines and Malaya Peninsula
3. **Mongoloid**
   a. Asiatic Mongol—China, Japan and northern Asia
   b. Malay—southeast Asia and East Indies
   c. Eskimo—Greenland and Arctic North America
   d. American Indian—North and South America

This grouping includes all but about one per cent of humanity. The remaining people are the Polynesians, the Australian aborigines, the Ainu of Japan and the Indo-Australians of south India and some of the Indonesian islands. These latter groups possess features of two or more of the other stocks and may be the result of blending. The geographical range given here is that occupied by the races before the age of European exploration and colonization.

The above classification is based on inborn anatomical features and is thus founded upon organic factors alone. Physical traits are easily recognized and measured. It is another story when we come to deal with psycho-physical and psychological characters also supposedly innate. Are there differences between races in bodily function and in mentality? Is one race more emotional or more intelligent than another? Are some peoples well fitted for civilization while others can never aspire to rise from barbarism by reason of their congenital lack of brains? Questions of this sort are hard to answer unless one knows nothing of the facts and can fall back on the glib solutions of prejudice. The ignorant know everything; only the learned have doubts.

The real difficulty arises from the scarcity of trustworthy evidence as opposed to mere opinion. Nevertheless, there are a few bits of information of racial differences of this sort which may be provisionally accepted, even by the doubting learned.

It seems fairly well established that races differ in their susceptibility to color blindness. This is an inborn trait and, in its most common form, consists of an inability to distinguish between red and green. It is a sex linked character appearing commonly in males and is comparatively rare among women. About eight per cent or eight out of every hundred West European and American men are color blind but less than two per cent of American Indian males suffer from the defect. The Negro incidence is approximately four per cent. Inasmuch as most color blind persons are unaware of their deficiency, it behooves twice as many white as negro men to take their wives along when they buy a new necktie. The Indian percentage is so low that an unaided brave may purchase gaudy raiment with reasonable confidence that he is really getting the colors he thinks he sees.

Another possible racial difference that has suggested itself to investigators is diversity in innate susceptibility to various diseases but we have very little evidence...

The proportion of deaths at all ages which occur at ages from birth to the beginning of the reproductive period is very much greater among Indians than among whites, with the negro rate intermediate. Among Indians, almost half the total number of deaths that occur at all ages has already taken place by the age of twenty years. Much of the decline of the Indian population seems due to the fact that such a high proportion of deaths occurs at ages too young for individuals adequately to reproduce themselves.

The proportion of females surviving into the reproductive period is greatest among whites and least among Indians. Although the Indian survivors have a much higher birth rate, their number is too small to do more than barely maintain the population, and this only by reason of relatively great fecundity.

The greater part of the high Indian death rate under twenty years is due to tuberculosis and pneumonia. These are the main causes of death among both Indians and negroes while heart disease, kidney disease and cancer are most important among the whites.

Whites, on the average, live consider-ably longer than either negroes or Indians, the latter being the shortest lived.

These are real racial differences but with one or two exceptions and perhaps not even those, they are merely reflections of differences in sanitation, living conditions, personal hygiene and medical attention. They are due to nutriment rather than inborn organic factors.

So much for this type of racial difference. There remains another where feeling runs high and ethnic, national and religious prejudices beset the issue. This is the realm of psychological differences, particularly differences in temperament, emotion and mentality. There is a widespread opinion that certain races are more intelligent than others, better adapted for civilization and better fitted for cultural leadership. In this country and to some extent in Western Europe, the feeling among the uninformed is general to the effect that the white race and more particularly the Western European part of the white race, in both the Old and New Worlds, is superior to all others and is really the standard bearer of civilization. Any suggestion to the contrary will generally receive bitter opposition and in some sections of the United States is downright dangerous.

The assumption of racial superiority is highly flattering and it is not surprising that the notion of the dependence of civilization on race and particularly the white race, has reached the proportions of a cult. In the last decade or so prophets have arisen on every side to announce the doom of civilization if the white race does not hold its own. In America, the proposition has been narrowed even further. The white or Caucasian race includes Hindus, Arabs, Turks, Roumanians, Italians, Spanish and Portuguese to name only a few. Surely these fellows are inferior to the Swedes, Danish, English, and Americans of like ancestry. Therefore, not all the white races are to be entrusted with the torch of cultural progress but only those who are tall, blonde, blue-eyed and delicately chauvinic; in other words, the Nordics.

It is claimed that the majority of our population is of Nordic ancestry, that the Nordics are the only ones capable of supporting civilization and that therefore the decline of the Nordic element among us presages the collapse of culture. We have such books as Madison Grant's "Passing of the Great Race" and Lothrop Stoddard's "Rising Tide of Color." To quote Mr. Stoddard, "If this great race (Nordic) with its capacity for leadership and fighting, should ultimately pass, with it would pass that which we call civilization."

Mr. Grant has glimpsed the same dark future and deplors the immigration of other stocks into this country, lugubriously announcing the downfall of the nation unless it is arrested. From his point of view the Nordic race is regarded as a sick flower that the least dash of another type pollutes and defiles its noble purity; blasts from its germ plasm the God-given impulse to progress.

West Europeans are no less naive than Americans. Does any right thinking Frenchman believe the Taurag is innately the intellectual equal of a west European? Do the Belgians think the potential cultural capacities of the Congo natives are as great as their own? Hardly. The English attitude is well reflected in Kipling's poem which contains the lines:—

"Take up the white man's burden,
Send forth the best of your breed."

The white man's burden is civilization and it is his obvious duty to carry this precious charge to those "lesser breeds without the Law" in order that they may share in its benefits to the extent of their limited capabilities—even at the point of a bayonet or the muzzle of a machine gun.

There is no lack of quasi-scientific evidence to support these contentions. The mental testers have been busy giving various intelligence tests to little Indians and negroes who invariably do much worse than white and particularly "Nordic" children. These results are taken at their face value by the uncritical and by the adherents of the white superiority dogma, yet it is perfectly plain why the white children perform better, irrespective of any real differences in intelligence. These tests have nearly all been constructed on the basis of the social background common to the whites. Naturally, a person reared in another kind of cultural environment will do poorly on such tests. The inferior showing of Indians and negroes is only a reflection of the social or nutrural differences between the three groups. The Japanese, who have taken over so much of western civilization, have also adopted the notion of intelligence testing. They, however, have constructed their own tests based on their own social environment. These work very well with Japanese reared in the national culture but white persons make low scores. Evidently it makes a great deal of difference who is conducting the examination.

Tests of temperament and emotion, esthetic appreciation, and the like are less well developed than intelligence tests but these too show no difference between races which are not best explained as differences in nurture.

In short, it is safe to say that impartial anthropologists and psychologists, who should know more about the subject than anyone else, are agreed that there is no conclusive evidence in support of innate racial differences in intelligence or any other mental capacity. Such differences may exist but they have never been satisfactorily demonstrated and the historical evidence is almost wholly against their reality. The touting of test results show-

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The historical evidence bearing on the question of racial differences in capacity for civilization is enormous but only a few items can be submitted here.3

Let us first take the question of housing, for shelter is an important phase of culture. The Hopi Indians of Arizona live in villages built on the tops of mesas. Formerly, the comparative inaccessibility of the mesa tops served as a protection against marauding bands. However, this danger has ceased to exist. Yet the Hopi cling tenaciously to their tablelands although every drop of water and every particle of food and other supplies has to be painfully carried up the steep height while the men have to walk several miles to their fields located down on the plain. Even new villages built in the last few years are perched on the tops of these precipitous cliffs. Why do the Hopi persist in such an inconvenient way of life? Why not build their villages close to the fields? Their silly roosting on mesas surely argues a stupidity of which Nordics would not be guilty.

Well, when the change from rural to town life took place in western Europe in the Middle Ages did the people quickly adapt themselves to the changed conditions? Hardly. When hundreds of wooden houses were crowded together it should have been obvious that there was great danger of fire, especially in view of the use of thatch as roofing material. Natural urination also followed up in one another but even then what should have been patent at first was no more so. In Scandinavia, the very stronghold of the Nordic race, thirty-six towns were burned in sixty years, some of them more than once. Royal decrees against thatch were issued by the score in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and England but to no purpose for the people merely rebuilt their houses of wood and roofed them with straw only to see the towns again reduced to ashes. It took three hundred and fifty years and six hundred years to solve a practical problem consequent upon dwelling in towns. They had the splendid example of Rome before them and there can be little excuse for their slovenliness save the natural ineptitude of the human species.

In parts of Africa, women pierce their lips and stick ornamental plugs in the holes. The apertures are gradually enlarged until the lips are so distended that discs the size of dinner plates can be inserted in the openings and the lower lip actually hangs down on the chest. Is this hideous? African men find it bewitching and a dusky maiden whose lips have been allowed to retain their natural contour feels herself hopelessly out of fashion. Not very long ago all Chinese girls of social pretension had their feet bound from infancy. The practice turned them into incurable cripples but small feet for women were fashionable and movements to abolish the custom met a hostile reception, even from the women themselves. Brazilian Indians put tight ligatures around the fleshy parts of their calves and upper arms. Circulatory disturbances and distortion of the limbs result but the ligatures remain. Who wants to be out of style?

In Eighteenth century western Europe, ladies wore headdresses two and three feet high. They were extremely elaborately affairs composed of hair, feathers, gauze and flowers, all heavily powdered. Once constructed, they were worn for some time and naturally came to swarm with lice. The consequent itching was intensely uncomfortable but the fashion was so absurd that no one objected. The term of Homo sapiens bent itself to the problem and invented a head scratcher in the form of a carved ivory or wooden hand mounted at the end of a wand. It became a form for fashionable ladies to carry these odd swagger sticks and delicately scratch their itching scalps as a nonchalant gesture in social intercourse. Forty years ago American ladies cinched their waists so tightly that normal abdominal function were seriously affected. The medical faculty issued thunderous denunciations of the practice. The clergy rallied against the new mode. All this had its usual effect and the fashion continued unabated. After a few years it disappeared as suddenly as it arose. Apparently no one race has a monopoly of stupidity.4

Nor is the blushing virtue of modesty the exclusive attribute of the whites. It is true that many of the less civilized races wear few clothes. The first duty of the newly arrived missionary in the South Seas is to put troussers on the men and mother-hubbards on the girls, thereby introducing a more sophisticated titillation to enhance the arts of native coquetry and courtship. California Indians used to go around stark naked with other benefits of both sexes for at that time mixed bathing was popular among Nordics. Modern women nonchalantly appear in the most abbreviated beach costumes. Yet the same girl who parades all day on the strand would blush to be seen publicly in her chemise which actually covers more of her body than her bathing suit. Evidently modesty is a matter of time and place rather than innate racial factors.

One more group of illustrations must suffice and these we will take from the almost sacrosanct field of medicine and science. When a Siberian native falls ill he sends for a medicine man. In this part of the world disease is held to be the result of having one's soul stolen by ghosts. Hence, the efforts of the doctor are directed toward the restoration of his patient's kidnapped spirit. American Indians believe sickness is due to the absence of a magical disease object, placed in their bodies by hostile supernatural power. Native therapeutics acts on this theory and the physician's treatment consists in abstracting the disease object, usually by sucking on the afflicted part, and then proudly exhibiting a bit of bone or a pebble to the gaze of the sufferer who very often proceeds to get well. If the sick man dies, then the supernatural power was too strong for the power of the prim-

3 For most of the case illustrations and facts of the preceding section I am indebted to R. H. Lowie's eminently readable and scholarly work, Are We Civilized, Harcourt Brace Company, 1929.
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about what is innate and what acquired, to formulate an intelligent eugenic program. If we did possess the knowledge we have no one to whom it could safely be intrusted. Shameless propagandizing and the glossing of inconvenient facts and lack of knowledge is purely the result of ethnic and class prejudices however it may masquerade in the guise of science.

As Professor Stanley Hall once said, “Man has not yet demonstrated that he can remain permanently civilized.” The statement might be amended to read that man has never become truly civilized in the higher sense of the term. He has accumulated a stupendous array of facts and beliefs, his conquest of portions of the physical environment has proceeded apace and he has contrived an amazing number of mechanical wonders. But real civilization is a more subtle thing than motor cars, radios, and notions of space-time. We have vastly increased the material complexity of our lives; psychologically, it is doubtful whether we have changed one whit since the reindeer and the mammoth roved over western Europe and Cro-Magnon man sketched his paintings on the walls of Palaeolithic caves.

It may be that innate racial differences in mentality and emotion really exist but the truly impartial scientist will admit that he does not know one way or the other. However, there is fair certainty on one point. Some races may or may not be superior to others but they all share in the common heritage of mankind bequeathed to us by our apelike fore-bears; a dull stupidity in which flares, at rare intervals, a spark of reason. In another 20,000 years it may emit a stronger light.

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