

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

REPORT ON MEETING OF
PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND GENETICISTS
FOR A DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT OF RACE

held at

Unesco House, from 4 to 8 June 1951

by ^{edited} L. C. DUNN, Rapporteur

PURPOSE OF MEETING

The reasons for convening a second meeting of experts to discuss the concept of race were chiefly these:

Race is a question of interest to many different kinds of people, not only to the public at large, but to sociologists, anthropologists and biologists, especially those dealing with problems of genetics. At the first discussion on the problem of race, it was chiefly sociologists who gave their opinions and framed the STATEMENT ON RACE. That Statement had a good effect, but it did not carry the authority of just those groups within whose special province fall the biological problems of race, namely the physical anthropologists and geneticists. Secondly, the first Statement did not, in all its details, carry conviction of these groups and, because of this, it was not supported by many authorities in these two fields.

MEMBERSHIP

In convening a new conference, a special effort was made to have better representation from these latter fields than had been possible before. The members of the new conference were all biologists, in the wider sense of the word, that is, that it included physical anthropologists (Professors Ashley Montagu, Bergman, Trevor, Schreider, Shapiro, Vallois, Zuckerman), geneticists (Dahlberg, Dunn, Haldane, Nachtsheim) and one serological anthropologist, specialist in the distribution of human blood groups (Mourant).

The discussions were marked by a very evident desire, on the part of all, to reach common ground. In this, there is no question but that success was attained.

CONCLUSIONS OF MEETING

In general, the chief conclusions of the first Statement were sustained, but with differences in emphasis and with some important deletions.

There was no delay or hesitation or lack of unanimity in reaching the primary conclusion that there were no scientific grounds whatever for the racist position regarding purity of race and the hierarchy of inferior and superior races to which this leads.

We agreed that all races were mixed and that intra-racial variability in most biological characters was as great as, if not greater than, inter-racial variability.

We agreed that races had reached their present states by the operation of evolutionary factors by which different proportions of similar hereditary elements (genes) had become characteristic of different partially separated groups. The source of these elements seemed to all of us to be the variability which arises by random mutation, and the isolating factors bringing about racial differentiation by preventing intermingling of groups with different mutations, chiefly geographical for the main groups such as African, European and Asiatic.

Man, we recognized, is distinguished as much by his culture as by his biology, and it was clear to all of us that many of the factors leading to the formation of minor races of men have been cultural. Anything that tends to prevent free exchange of genes amongst groups is a potential race-making factor and these partial barriers may be religious, social and linguistic, as well as geographical.

We were careful to avoid dogmatic definitions of race, since, as a product of evolutionary factors, it is a dynamic rather than a static concept. We were equally careful to avoid saying that, because races were all variable and many of them graded into each other, therefore races did not exist. The physical anthropologists and the man in the street both know that races exist; the former, from the scientifically recognizable and measurable congeries of traits which he uses in classifying the varieties of man; the latter from the immediate evidence of his senses when he sees an African, a European, an Asiatic and an American Indian together.

We had no difficulty in agreeing that no evidence of differences in innate mental ability between different racial groups has been adduced, but that here too intra-racial variability is at least as great as inter-racial variability. We agreed that psychological traits could not be used in classifying races, nor could they serve as parts of racial descriptions.

We were fortunate in having as members of our conference several

scientists who had made special studies of the results of inter-marriage between members of different races. This meant that our conclusion that race mixture in general did not lead to disadvantageous results was based on actual experience as well as upon study of the literature. Many of our members thought it quite likely that hybridization of different races could lead to biologically advantageous results, although there was insufficient evidence to support any conclusion.

Since race, as a word, has become coloured by its misuse in connexion with national, linguistic and religious differences, and by its deliberate abuse by racialists, we tried to find a new word to express the same meaning of a biologically differentiated group. On this we did not succeed, but agreed to reserve race as the word to be used for anthropological classification of groups showing definite combinations of physical (including physiological traits) in characteristic proportions.

We also tried hard, but again we failed, to reach some general statement about the inborn nature of man with respect to his behaviour toward his fellows. It is obvious that members of a group show co-operative or associative behaviour towards each other, while members of different groups may show aggressive behaviour towards each other - and both of these attitudes may occur within the same individual. We recognized that the understanding of the psychological origin of race prejudice was an important problem which called for further study.

Nevertheless, having regard to the limitations of our present knowledge, all of us believed that the biological differences found amongst human racial groups can in no case justify the views of racial inequality which have been based on ignorance and prejudice, and that all of the differences which we know can well be disregarded for all ethical human purposes.

Distribution: limited

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PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting by the Director-General.
2. Election of Chairman and of Rapporteur.
3. Terms of reference.
4. Adoption of Agenda.
5. Examination of Unesco STATEMENT ON RACE and suggestions for modifications or additions.
6. Definition of race in the light of recent trends in physical anthropology and genetics.
7. The present state of our knowledge with regard to race formation; the import of environmental factors and selective mechanisms involved.
8. "Racial aptitudes" and cultural differences.
9. Biological effects of race mixture.
10. Recommendations and suggestions as to the contribution that physical anthropology and genetics can make to Unesco campaign against racialism.
11. Other business.

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List of Participants

Participants:

Professor Gunnar DAHLBERG	Director, State Institute for Human Genetics and Race Biology, University of Uppsala (Sweden).
Professor L. C. DUNN	Department of Zoology, Columbia University, New York (U. S. A.)
Professor Th. DOBZHANSKY	Department of Zoology, Columbia University, New York (U. S. A.)
Professor J. B. S. HALDANE	Department of Biometry, University College, London (U. K.)
Professor M. F. ASHLEY MONTAGU	Department of Anthropology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N. J. (U. S. A.)
Dr. A. E. MOURANT	Director, Blood Group Reference Laboratory, Lister Institute, London (U. K.)
Professor Hans NACHTSHEIM	Institut für Genetik, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)
Dr. Eugène SCHREIDER	Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Physique, Institut de Paléontologie humaine, Paris (France)
Professor Harry L. SHAPIRO	Chairman, Department of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, New York (U. S. A.)
Dr. J. C. TREVOR	University Lecturer in Anthropology, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge (U. K.)
Dr. Henri v. VALLOIS	Professeur au Museum d'Histoire naturelle, Directeur du Musée de l'Homme, Paris (France)
Professor S. ZUCKERMAN	Department of Anatomy, Medical School, University of Birmingham (U. K.)

Observers:

United Nations

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique - Mr. Grapin
(Paris)

Royal Anthropological Institute (London) - Mr. Fagg