

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONSTATEMENT ON RACE1951

1. Scientists are generally agreed that all men belong to a single species, Homo sapiens, and are derived from a common stock, even though there is some dispute as to when and how different human groups diverge from this common stock.

The concept of race is unanimously regarded by anthropologists as a classificatory device providing a zoological framework within which the various groups of mankind may be arranged. Anthropologically, "race" should be reserved only for groups of mankind possessing well-developed and primarily heritable physical differences from other groups. While such groups exist, it is also clear that, because of the complexity of human history, there are many populations which cannot easily be fitted into a racial classification.

2. Some of the physical differences between human groups are due to differences in hereditary constitution and some to differences in the environments in which they have been brought up. In many cases, both influences have been at work. The science of genetics suggests that the hereditary differences are the results of the action of two sets of processes. On the one hand, isolated populations are constantly being altered by natural selection and by occasional changes (mutations) in the material particles (genes) which control heredity. Populations are also affected by fortuitous changes in gene frequency and by marriage customs and breeding structure. On the other hand, crossing is constantly breaking down the differentiations so set up. The new mixed populations, in so far as they, in turn, become isolated, are subject to the same processes, and these may lead to further changes. Existing races are merely the result, considered at a particular moment in time, of the total effect of all these processes on the human species. The hereditary characters to be used in classification, the limits of variations permissible within the groups, and hence the size of the sub-divisions to

be adopted for purposes of classification, may legitimately differ according to the scientific purpose in view.

3. National, religious, geographical, linguistic and cultural groups do not necessarily coincide with racial groups: and the cultural traits of such groups have no demonstrated connexion with racial traits. Americans are not a race, nor are Englishmen, nor Frenchmen, nor any other national group. Moslems and Jews are no more races than are Catholics and Protestants; nor are people who live in Iceland or Britain or India or who speak English or any other language, or who are culturally Turkish or Chinese and the like thereby describable as races. Serious errors of this kind are habitually committed when the term "race" is used in popular parlance: the term should never be used when speaking of such human groups.

4. Human races can be, and have been, classified by different anthropologists in different ways. Most agree in classifying the greater part of existing mankind into at least three large units, which may be called major groups (in French, grand races). Such a classification does not depend on any single physical character, nor does, for example, skin colour by itself necessarily distinguish one major group from another. From the morphological point of view, moreover, it is impossible to regard one particular race as superior or inferior to another.

Broadly speaking, individuals belonging to different major groups of mankind are distinguishable by virtue of their physical characters, but individual members, or small groups, belonging to different races within the same major group are usually not so distinguishable. Even the major groups grade into each other, and the physical traits by which they and the races within them are characterized overlap considerably. With respect to most, if not all, measurable characters, the differences among individuals belonging to the same race are greater than the differences that occur between the observed averages for two or more races within the same major group.

5. Most anthropologists no longer try to include mental characteristics in their classification of human races. Studies within a single race have shown that both innate capacity and environmental opportunity determine the results of tests of intelligence and temperament, though their relative importance is disputed.

When intelligence tests, even non-verbal, are made on a group of non-literate people, their scores are usually lower than those of more civilized people. It has also been recorded that even different groups of the same race occupying similarly high levels of civilization may yield considerable differences in intelligence tests. When, however, the two groups have been brought up from childhood in similar environments, the differences are usually very slight. Moreover, there is good evidence that, given similar opportunities, the median performance (that is to say, the performance of the individual who is representative because he is surpassed by as many as he surpasses), and the variation around it, do not differ appreciably from one race to another.

Even those psychologists who claim to have sometimes found the greatest differences in intelligence between groups of different racial origin, and have contended that they are hereditary, always report that many members of the group of inferior performance not merely surpass the lowest ranking member of the superior group, but most of its members. In any case, it has never been possible to separate members of two groups on the basis of mental capacity, as they can often be separated on a basis of religion or skin colour, hair form or language. It is possible, though not proved, that some types of innate capacity for intellectual and emotional responses are commoner in one people than in another, but it is certain that, within a people, innate capacities vary as much as, if not more than, they do between peoples.

The study of the heredity of psychological characteristics is beset with difficulties. We know that certain mental diseases and defects are transmitted from one generation to the next, but we are less familiar with the part played by heredity in the mental life of normal individuals. The normal individual, irrespective of race, is essentially educable. It follows that his intellectual and moral life is largely conditioned by his training and by his physical and social environment.

It often happens that a national group may appear to be characterized by particular psychological attributes. The superficial view would be that this is due to race. Scientifically, however, we realize that any common psychological attribute is more likely to be due to a common historical and social background, and that such attributes may obscure the fact that, within different populations consisting of

many human types, one will find the same range of temperament and intelligence.

6. The scientific material available to us at present does not justify the conclusion that inherited genetic differences are a major factor in producing the differences between the cultures and cultural achievements of different peoples or groups. It does indicate, on the contrary, that the major factor in explaining such differences is the history of the cultural experience which each group has undergone.

7. There is no evidence for the existence of so-called "pure" races. We know the earlier races chiefly from skeletal remains and our knowledge is therefore limited. In regard to race mixture, the evidence points to the fact that human hybridization has been going on for an indefinite but considerable time. Indeed, one of the processes of race formation and race extinction or absorption is by means of hybridization between races. As there is no reliable evidence that disadvantageous effects are produced thereby, no biological justification exists for prohibiting inter-marriage between persons of different races.

8. We now have to consider the bearing of these statements on the problem of human equality. We wish to emphasize that equality of opportunity and equality in law in no way depend, as ethical principles, upon the assertion that human beings are in fact equal in endowment.

We have thought it worth while to set out in a formal manner what is at present scientifically established concerning individual and group differences.

(1) In matters of race, the only characteristics which anthropologists can effectively use as a basis for classification are physical (anatomical and physiological).

(2) Available scientific knowledge provides no basis for believing that the groups of mankind differ in their innate capacity for intellectual and emotional development.

(3) The biological differences between human beings within single races may be as great as the biological differences between races.

(4) Vast social changes have occurred which were not in any way connected with changes in racial type. Historical and sociological

studies thus support the view that genetic differences are of little significance in determining the social and cultural differences between different groups of men.

(5) There is no evidence that race mixture as such produces disadvantageous results from a biological point of view. The social results of race mixture, whether for good or ill, can generally be traced to social factors.

(Text drafted, at Unesco House, Paris, on 8 June 1951, by: Professor R.A.M. Bergman, Professor of Anthropology, Netherlands Anthropological Society, Amsterdam; Professor Gunnar Dahlberg, Director, State Institute for Human Genetics and Race Biology, University of Uppsala; Professor L.C. Dunn, Department of Zoology, Columbia University, New York; Professor J.B.S. Haldane, Department of Biometry, University College, London; Professor M.F. Ashley Montagu, Department of Anthropology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.; Dr. A.E. Mourant, Director, Blood Group Reference Laboratory, Lister Institute, London; Professor Hans Nachtsheim, Institut für Genetik, Freie Universität, Berlin; Dr. Eugène Schreider, Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Physique, Institut de Paléontologie humaine, Paris; Professor Harry L. Shapiro, Chairman, Department of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, New York; Dr. J.C. Trevor, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge (United Kingdom); Dr. Henri V. Vallois, Professeur au Museum d'Histoire naturelle, Directeur du Musée de l'Homme, Paris; Professor S. Zuckerman, Department of Anatomy, Medical School, University of Birmingham. Professor Th. Dobzhansky (Department of Zoology, Columbia University, New York), and Dr. Julian Huxley contributed to the final wording.