

## THE THREE RACES OF MAN

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The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century was a period of adjusting to many changes. The industrialization was transforming the world and making the societies face new topics, issues and challenges that had never been dealt with before. There were multiple chains of changes taking place: from industrialization to urbanization, from advances in sciences to improved transportation, from ever-growing industrial strength of some countries to changes in international relationships. Intertwining and accelerating these changes created a new world. This new world was defined by the results of these changes and responses to them: urbanization, migration, imperialism, economical stratification of societies. The world was becoming more interconnected and the relationships between countries, cultures, ethnicities, classes were getting redefined.

The United States was facing all of these changes too. The population of cities was growing exponentially, a wave of “new immigrants” from Eastern and Southern Europe was coming in by millions. The country joined the imperialistic process by going into the war against Spain and gaining control of Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico. In the Gilded age of “Laissez-Faire” capitalism enormous amount of wealth was getting accumulated in the hands of a few, while workers had no protection against exploitation and no means for getting out of poverty. The society was strictly divided into the groups of “the lucky ones,” “the less lucky, but hopeful ones,” and “the really unfortunate,” with the latter group being the most numerous. This high-contrast division was happening both along class lines and ethnicity lines.

The colonialism and imperialism gave a new rise to the question of relationships between cultures and ethnicities, both on the international and the domestic stages. “The lucky ones” and “the less lucky, but hopeful” categories were overwhelmingly composed out

of people with light skin and Northern European ancestry. These people either made it to the top and got all the benefits life had to offer, or at least got an advantage at making it in life: getting a better job, enjoying civil liberties, participating in politics. People of European, especially English, German and Scandinavian descent dominated over other ethnicities economically, politically and culturally. This begged two questions: what are the reasons for this? And, is this the right way for the society to function? Naturally, a group of people that has some kind of advantage in a strictly stratified and quickly changing world will try to protect this advantage and secure it. People are inclined to believe that the benefit they have in life is deserved and justified. And what better way to rationalize and safeguard an advantage than to link it to a distinct and unchangeable biological characteristic, such as skin color?

The idea of racial superiority of the white race was extremely popular at the beginning of the twentieth century. All cultural means were used to justify the existing order. A leaflet from 1904, entitled “The three races of man and his associates during the age of evolution” (“The Three Races”), shows an attempt to use both science and philosophy to explain and rationalize why white-skinned people are better. Because the subject being proved has no support in either actual science or common morality, this piece is a great example of manipulating the reader’s opinion. It does that by falsifying the evidence, twisting the facts and using biased language in an attempt to cater to the reader’s worst instincts, inclination to believe that belonging to a certain group makes him more worthy a human being than others. “The Three Races” leaflet demonstrates how pseudoscientific facts, falsified historical data and misrepresentation of religious ideas were used to support the ranked “racial worldview” and the idea of superiority of the white race. Even though race is a cultural construct, it is based on biological differences among people, so biology and anthropology were the sciences most often used and abused to substantiate the agenda of racial hierarchy.

According to “The Three Races,”

“three distinct races have been developed from the animal creation by the act of destiny.

If one race is above another it is because God has so willed it to be--each has been colored according to their merits. The laws of nature cannot be changed, the courts of God are permanent.

The highest, cleanest and most useful class of animals are those associated with the White Race while there is also the greatest contrast in their physical propensities, and nearest mental relationship if so trained.”<sup>1</sup>

The idea of race, a notion that humanity can be divided into categories according to their physical characteristics and that these categories can be attributed with certain inherited traits was the basis for one of the most current social topics in the beginning of the twentieth century. The hierarchy of distinct races was claimed to exist biologically. Many prominent biologists and anthropologists conducted research in the area of racial science, trying to find physiological grounds for pre-existing views of superiority of the white race. New advances of psychology, statistics and biology created a wider field for these activities: IQ tests, measuring skulls, blood types, studying internal organs structure were all used to classify and rank kinds of people. These pseudoscientific studies, conducted with predetermined results in mind reinforced the idea of inferiority of the “black” and “red races” as well as Southern and Eastern European immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the ideas used to support the racial classification were based on Darwin’s theory of evolution of species and the notion of “survival of the fittest”: since the white, predominantly Anglo-Saxon race was able to take over the lands of non-whites, use their resources and labor for its own benefit, thus it “survived” better, and was, therefore, “the fittest.” The same train of thought was used to explain and validate economic differences between the poor and the rich.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Eaglin, “THE THREE RACES OF MAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES DURING THE AGE OF EVOLUTION.” *An American Time Capsule* [leaflet on-line]; available from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbpe.2400060b> (accessed 16 February 2010).

<sup>2</sup> “Evolution, Human. Race,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica Macropedia Knowledge in Depth V.12*, ed. Jacob E. Safra (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 2007): 849.

<sup>3</sup> “Evolution, Human. Race,” 848.

“The Three Races” mentions evolution, nature and animals many times. It goes further in the classification of people; it classifies animals and links groups of animals to groups of people, using this connection as evidence for the white race superiority. The first thing that draws attention is the language used to describe the “white race associates”: “the nobility of the horse, faithfulness of the dog,... intelligence of the bear, usefulness of the cow, sheep, swine and reindeer,”<sup>4</sup> as compared to the language used to describe “the red race associates”: “elephant, the most superstitious and revengeful of all animals,... the tiger for ferocity and treachery,”<sup>5</sup> and “the black race associates”:

“rhinoceros, vicious and untamable, and like the hippopotamus, large, monstrous looking and good for nothing. The hyena is vicious, cruel and savage. The zebra is wild and untamable. The elephant has never been domesticated by this race. The monkey is peculiar for its offensive smell, imitative, and when domesticated is filthy, vulgar, and dissipated. The giraffe, though handsome, can be used for nothing and is the idiot of all animals.”<sup>6</sup>

“The Three Races” organizes almost all domesticated animals into the “white race associates” category, their “usefulness” supporting how industrious and intelligent the race that domesticated them is. This argument is another false and ungrounded evidence used by the author. According to the reference list compiled by Kris K. Hirst, cat, sheep, goat, pig, chicken, horse, bee, and most other animals were first domesticated in Asia, cattle and donkey were domesticated in Africa, the place of domestication of dog is undetermined and the only animal on the list, domesticated by the “white race”, in Germany, is goose. As for the intelligence of animals, it is commonly know today that animals capable of the most intellectual activity are apes, chimpanzee, and other primates, in other words the exact same animals characterized by the author to be smelly, filthy and stupid.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eaglin, “THE THREE RACES OF MAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES DURING THE AGE OF EVOLUTION.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Kris K. Hirst, “Animal Domestication: Table of Dates and Places,” [article on-line]; available from <http://archaeology.about.com/od/dterms/a/domestication.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 April 2010.

Other “biological evidence” used by the author as well as those used by other racial scientists at the time proves to be just as false as the “animal argument.” Genetic studies conducted at the end of the twentieth century have proven that there is no “race” in biological sense. There are no genetic identifiers of specific groups of people. Separate traits, such as skin color or facial features are inherited independently of each other and are a result of mixture of parental genes. Biological differences among people within one “racial category” are much more profound than differences among the categories themselves. The DNA evidence has shown that humans have much more in common biologically than they are different.<sup>8</sup>

These scientific findings are dated much later than the historical period discussed, but the fact that the “scientists” of the beginning of the twentieth century did not have this knowledge yet does not justify them. Not knowing something is not a crime, but falsifying evidence to fit one’s illusions and putting it forward as a proven fact is. Biological facts do not change depending on whether humanity knows them or not, so since race as a biological construct does not exist today it did not exist at the beginning of the twentieth century. And the fact that these “scientists” succeeded at proving that races do exist and can be classified and ranked, shows how biased, subjective and non-scientific their research was.

Biology was not the only science misused to justify the marginalization of non-whites, historical facts were also misrepresented and rewritten to fit cultural stereotypes. “The Three Races” claims that all art forms, sciences, religions were invented by “the red race” and then mastered by “the white race”: “Art, science and military discipline were borrowed from the children of Shem and mastered.”<sup>9</sup> While in the reality the origins of art<sup>10</sup>, religion<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Evolution, Human. Race,” 844.

<sup>9</sup> Eaglin, “THE THREE RACES OF MAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES DURING THE AGE OF EVOLUTION.”

<sup>10</sup> “Art,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica V.2*, ed. William Benton (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1970): 491.

<sup>11</sup> “Religion,” in *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, ed. Barbara A. Chernow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 2300.

and sciences<sup>12</sup> go back to Paleolithic Age, about 25,000-10,000 B.C., and to geographic places attributed to “the black race”; though it is hard to speak about the existence of races at this historic period at all. Scientists say that groups of human have been migrating to the North over the last 25,000-50,000 years, where over time they have adjusted to the less sunny climate by losing melanin, which gives skin its color, in exchange for the ability of lighter skin to produce Vitamin D. They went from protecting their skin from excess of sun to making the most out of the little sunlight they were exposed to.<sup>13</sup> In other words, 25,000 years ago there was no race in any sense of the word.

As noted before, very graphic, strong and biased language is used throughout the leaflet, among other things it talks about such historical/cultural notions as slavery, cannibalism and superstition. All these ideas were once again used to underline the inferiority of “the black” and “the red races”. The author qualified slavery as a characteristic of “the black race” and claims that not only were the “children of Hem” taken away into slavery, but they also practiced slavery amongst themselves. Though not explicitly said it is alluded that people from this group are the only category of people enslaved, and it is somehow a natural state for them. In the reality the practice of one person owning another person existed in almost every culture since the development of farming 10,000 years ago. Because at that time people obviously did not have the modern ways of transportation, it is evident that each culture enslaved their own, often the debtors or criminals, or the conquered neighbors, prisoners of war.<sup>14</sup> The prevailing majority of historic slavery was not racially based and it was practiced all around the world by almost every society and ethnicity.

Another misrepresented historical issue is cannibalism, according to the leaflet: “I am the father of every known race of cannibals.”<sup>15</sup> The idea that other cultures practice can-

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<sup>12</sup> “Science” in *World Book: V.17*, ed. Paul A. Kobasa (Chicago: World Book Inc. 2010): 196.

<sup>13</sup> “Evolution, Human. Race,” 852-53.

<sup>14</sup> “Slavery” in *World Book: V.17* ed. Paul A. Kobasa (Chicago: World Book, Inc. 2010): 501.

<sup>15</sup> Eaglin, “THE THREE RACES OF MAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES DURING THE AGE OF EVOLUTION.”

nibalism was very popular in the Western society in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Every new, exotic group that Western society came into contact with was suspected of eating men. The reality was that there have been instances of survival, ritualistic, pseudoscientific or deviant cannibalism in every society. However non-white, exotic societies in which such instances occurred tended to be labeled as cannibalistic by the Western society, while it refused to characterize itself in these terms. This is not a unique feature of the Western civilization to label “others” as cannibals: in many parts of the world Europeans were assumed to be cannibals.<sup>16</sup>

The same relativity is present when analyzing another cultural key term, used in the leaflet to characterize the beliefs of “the red race” and “the black race”: superstition.<sup>17</sup> Superstition is an irrational belief, it is assumed that the person using this term has knowledge or evidence to claim the belief to be irrational. However the domains of faith and knowledge do not intertwine, it is not correct to claim that a philosophical or religious belief is irrational because it is impossible to either prove or disprove such ideas. One man’s religion is another man’s superstition: every religion and system of beliefs was deemed irrational and wrongs by people practicing another religion or not practicing any at all at different points in time.<sup>18</sup>

Religious teachings are also distorted in the “The Three Races” leaflet in a way that helps justify the marginalization of non-white, and specifically, “black race”. The author calls “white”, “red” and “black races” the children of Japheth, Shem and Ham.<sup>19</sup> This is a reference to a biblical story of Noah’s three sons. In the story Noah accidentally gets drunk and falls asleep naked in a tent. His youngest son, Ham, is the first to find him in this embarrassing situation. Ham does nothing to conceal his father’s nudity; instead he calls his two broth-

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<sup>16</sup> “Cannibalism” in *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Alan. Banard (London: Rout Ledge, 1996): 82.

<sup>17</sup> Eaglin, “THE THREE RACES OF MAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES DURING THE AGE OF EVOLUTION.”

<sup>18</sup> “Superstition” in *Encyclopedia Britannica: V. 21*, ed. William Benton, (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1970): 432.

<sup>19</sup> Eaglin, “THE THREE RACES OF MAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES DURING THE AGE OF EVOLUTION.”

ers, Japheth and Shem. The two brothers walk into the tent turning their faces away and cover their father. When Noah awakes he punishes his youngest son for treating him disrespectfully by cursing his son, Canaan to be the servant to Japheth and Shem.<sup>20</sup>

At what point in time and who has come up with the idea to reread this short and seemingly not open to much interpretation story about the importance of respect towards one's parents is unknown. However it has been the greatest justification of Black slavery for more than a thousand years. The extra detail was read into it, that when cursed, Ham and his son became black, so the enslavement of people of African ancestry was somehow preordained. There is no mention about anyone being black in this story's literal text; however everyone, especially people in the American South understood it in this way. Ham was an ancestor of the black race, God has cursed Ham and therefore the blacks were divinely doomed to be slaves. In the actual story it was Noah who did the cursing, not God, but since the reading is already arbitrary, the reader might as well make it more dramatic. This story entered Western folklore and stayed there well within the twentieth century. In fact, a study conducted in 1969 of the American Lutheran Church Sunday School lessons, primers, teachers' manuals, catechisms, etc. found that the church had interpreted Gen 9:25-27 in a way that justified Black slavery and/or segregation.<sup>21</sup>

This shows that when interpreted in a convenient way any teaching can be used to support the agenda of the person interpreting. Literal reading of the Bible is another extreme, but this particular case makes a good argument in its defense: by reading the word "black" into a biblical story white supremacists have accommodated and justified their worldview.

The story of the "Curse of Ham" is a strange one, however it is even more strange that the author is using this pseudo-Christian rhetoric, since when he talks about religions and philosophies he compares Jesus and Socrates not in favor of the former:

<sup>20</sup> *New American Standard Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 1997), Genesis 9:18-27.

<sup>21</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1.

“Instead of religion I gave to the world organized brotherhood and such moral instructors as Socrates, whose teachings were equal to the virtues taught by Jesus, though he lived 450 B.C. and did not claim himself to be of divine origin.”<sup>22</sup>

Later he mentions Christianity as one of the religions created by “the children of Shem,” and attributes this race with the label of “superstition.” These could be seen as a direct insult by a devout Christian. This duality in the author’s attitude towards religions overall, and Christianity in particular is yet another piece of evidence highlighting his hypocrisy and non-consistency not only with facts of sciences, but even with his own claims.

To be fair it is next to impossible to remain consistent when proving a fact that is not really true, namely that the society built on racial hierarchy is natural and the white race is indeed superior to others. Another example of the author’s inconsistency is in his enumeration of the ethnicities he considers “white,” and those that he concedes “red.” Especially striking is the fact that “the Ancient Irish” are named in the latter category.<sup>23</sup> This does not seem very logical to see the Irish as non-white, but if one looks at the goals behind the popularization of the idea of racial superiority, namely to justify the exclusion, segregation, and exploitation not only of African Americans and American Indians, but also of the new immigrants from Southern, Eastern Europe and Ireland, the logic becomes more clear. And if one takes a look deeper into the history of the idea of Anglo-Saxon superiority, the categorizing of Irish as non-white becomes even more understandable.

England in the times of Henry VIII was the first European country to break up with the Catholic Church and become separate from others. It was in need of a new cultural identity. English philosophers and politicians searched for this new identity in the myths of heroic past of other great civilizations. The myth of Anglo-Saxon people, distinguished from others, was created. One of the reasons behind the myth of this freedom-loving, politically advanced people was their descent from German tribes. The English scientists based their stu-

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<sup>22</sup> Eaglin, “THE THREE RACES OF MAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES DURING THE AGE OF EVOLUTION.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

dies of German tribes on the works of Tacitus, a Roman historian, who lived in the first century AD. Tacitus, in an attempt to shame his fellow-citizen and teach them a moral lesson, motivate them to fight the corruption and moral decay of Roman Empire, contrasted Roman culture with that of German tribes, the “first noble savages” who lead simple, unadulterated tribal life. These works were used to add historical credibility to the idea of racial supremacy and unique inherited virtues of Northern Europeans.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of seeing themselves as different and separate and treating everyone else as inferior others runs deep in English history. In the seventeenth century, as a result of their practices in Ireland, the English have started to see the Irish as “savages” who could not be civilized. It was proposed to conquer the Irish, take their lands, and use them as forced labor. However this idea failed because of Irish resistance. After that the eyes of many turned towards the New World. The attitudes toward the Irish set precedents for how the Anglo-Saxons would treat the New World Indians and Africans.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore the idea of racial superiority and justification of exploitation of other ethnicities was in no way new at the beginning of the twentieth century. The new were the means for justification, namely the advances in sciences and new ways of exploitation, through sharecropping, uncontrolled, unregulated manufacturing. There were also new groups of people who would undergo exploitation, those who came to the cities in great numbers as a result of urbanization and immigration and found themselves in a challenging position of trying to make ends meet in a highly competitive and hostile world.

“The Three Races” reveals how scientific facts and philosophic ideas are twisted and misrepresented to justify the hierarchical worldview and the idea of superiority of the white race. The extent to which this search for “proofs” is taken shows how important the topic of racial relations was at the beginning of the twentieth century and how strong was the

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<sup>24</sup> “Evolution, Human. Race,” 850.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 845.

need to justify and secure the existing domination of “the white race” over the other people both within the country and abroad. There were a lot of changes in the relationships between countries, cultures, ethnicities as well as in the lifestyle, economy and politics in this historic period. Such dramatic changes that have no precedent in the past inevitably bring disorder and anxiety into the minds of people and the desire to make sense of the new world. Classifying and ranking, labeling and stereotyping are all defense strategies against unknown and misunderstood, against terrifying and confusing mental entropy.

Today, one hundred years later the process of trying to make sense of diverse, multicultural, multi-religious, multicolored world continues. Though proven scientifically wrong, the ideas of racial hierarchy still exist in the society today. Now, unlike at the beginning of the twentieth century, holding such beliefs is a sign of ignorance and immorality. Natural and social sciences have disproved all claims of racial superiority; it is no longer considered normal or justified to hold such beliefs. These are important and valuable signs of progress in all areas mentioned above and something we should all be grateful for.

However examples from the recent history, such as the incarceration of Japanese Americans during the Second World War, the hostility towards Arab Americans after the events of 9/11, or, even the most recent news about Arizona anti-immigration laws show that racial profiling, ranking and labeling are still current issues. The scale of the problem is smaller, but nevertheless there is room for improvement. The shift that happened in the mentality of the majority of people over one hundred years is reassuring. The ideas that people can be divided into groups based on arbitrary qualities such as skin color of facial features, that these groups are the carriers of specific talents, traits, qualities, and, finally, the idea that some people are more worthwhile human beings than others have been steadily losing their popularity over this century. One can be hopeful that this tendency signifies that they will become extinct as the society continues to evolve.

Learning from these lessons of history is everyone's personal responsibility. The first and the most important step in moving away from close-minded, biased mindset is also the hardest: recognizing one's own prejudice and trying to understand the other side. It is easy to fall into either extreme: to justify or to judge, it is hard to stay objective. For example it is hard to restrain oneself today from judging the defenders of the idea of racial superiority at the beginning of the twentieth century. But one can try and imagine what life was like at this time: the world was rapidly changing and there was no tradition to turn to in order to make sense of it. The new social order was also drawing distinct lines among people, dividing them into those who have everything and those who have nothing. This was the time of big contrasts and big fears and any resemblance of order one would come upon he would find comfort in; any advantage one can get over others he would use and protect. In "Jungle"-like society, where you will either eat others or get eaten, everyone who had a chance to belong to the first category would hold on to it by all means, no matter how irrational. In times of turbulence people look for order, comfort and security. As the uniraical singer, Michael Jackson, sang in one of his songs: "If they say, why, why? Tell 'em that is human nature..."