

# Beyond the Cephalic Index

## Negotiating Politics to Produce UNESCO's Scientific Statements on Race

by Perrin Selcer

This paper analyzes the production and reception of UNESCO's Statements on Race from 1950, 1951, and 1964 to track the consolidation of a scientific consensus on the biological significance of race. The race statements played a key role in the establishment of the postwar liberal antiracist orthodoxy, and their history illuminates broader dynamics in the production of scientific scripts intended to influence political debates. The consensus was rooted in the synthesis of physical anthropology and population biology but depended on a parallel strengthening of antiracist social norms in the international community. As much as race, conflicts over the race statements were disputes over scientific authority—over who, if anyone, should be authorized to speak for science. Because international civil servants and activist scientists had to negotiate disciplinary, national, and international politics to achieve an acceptable consensus, a close reading of this history reveals the importance of shifting political and social meanings of equality on scientific statements of biological facts. Two central ironies that emerge are the shifting association of bell curves from representations of liberal racial tolerance to icons of enduring racism and the importance of increasing racial and national diversity in the international scientific community to discrediting biological determinism.

Historians of race routinely cite the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) 1950 and 1951 Statements on Race as the end of an era of scientific racism. During the nineteenth century, the story goes, scientists had performed increasingly elaborate measurements to show that white economic, social, and political supremacy reflected a natural racial hierarchy. After reaching its apex of technical sophistication and political influence with the eugenics movement in the years following the First World War, scientific racism lost ground during the 1930s. In part, it was a victim of its own success; the Nazi's doctrine of Aryan superiority discredited race science and provided leverage for liberal scientists' antiracist campaigns. By the start of the Second World War, the consensus among psychologists (although not yet among biologists, geneticists, and physical anthropologists) held that there was no discernible innate difference in intelligence between races—at least it did in the United States, the world's largest multiracial nation and the most enthusiastic adopter of IQ tests. The horrors of the Holocaust dealt a final blow to the respectability of racism, and the equality of all races was explicitly proclaimed in the founding documents of the United Nations (UN). Racism—and racist

scientists—certainly did not disappear. But UNESCO's Statements on Race mark a decisive transition in the scientific community from a presumption of racial inequality to a presumption of racial equality. Inequality, therefore, was determined not by nature but rather by culture (Banton 1996; Barkan 1992; Brattain 2007; Carson 2007; Jackson 1990; Kevles 1986; Marks 2008; Muller-Wille 2007; Provine 1986; Stepan 1982; Stocking 1968).

As scientific documents designed to make "race prejudice . . . a shameful sentiment that men will hesitate to avow," UNESCO's Statements on Race are indeed excellent markers of the postwar culmination of this transition (Métraux 1950b: 390). The statements responded to UNESCO's constitutional mandate to fight "the doctrine of the inequality of men and races" and a call from the UN Economic and Social Council to disseminate scientific facts disproving racial prejudice. They also represented the belated victory of antiracist intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic who had been attempting to organize declarations condemning racism since the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s. In 1950, the UN Social Sciences Department released the consensus statement of an international meeting of social scientists. The "Statement by Experts on Race Problems" rather lyrically expressed the by-then standard antiracist liberal position on the biological significance of race. It received substantial and overwhelmingly positive coverage in the international press and became a key resource for educators throughout the world. Within the scientific

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community, however, the statement provoked considerable controversy. Physical anthropologists, especially in England, resented that they had not been adequately represented on the committee of experts and questioned the scientific soundness of its conclusions. To appease this small but vocal group, UNESCO organized a second meeting of experts consisting entirely of geneticists and physical anthropologists, which produced its own "Statement on the Nature of Race and Race Differences." The second statement adopted a more matter-of-fact tone but was based on the rather esoteric argument that biological diversity must be understood through a population rather than a typological approach and more clearly hedged on the actual equality of races. Nevertheless, the second statement surprised even many of its own signatories with the strength of its antiracism, and UNESCO successfully presented it as another weapon in the fight against racial prejudice.

The Statements on Race signified a real and important change in the social and political significance of race science. The well-noted irony is that the process of drafting the statements left a rich historical record demonstrating the persistence of the supposedly defeated racist science. As Jenny Reardon has shown, the statements did not mark and were not even intended to mark an end to race as a legitimate biological category; instead, race remained a problematic and contested scientific concept (Reardon 2005).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as subjects for historical investigation—as opposed to historical markers—the great value of UNESCO's Statements on Race is the complexity of the intersecting story lines and the variety of possible themes, not the clarity of the antiracist triumph.

The danger of the Statements on Race as subjects of historical inquiry is that the hapless historian will get sucked into yet another round of the tedious and distracting argument over the biological significance of race: the difficulty of distinguishing between environment and heredity in the case of complex traits and the importance of culture in determining personality; the biases of mental tests and the invalidity of the concept of G (i.e., general intelligence); the importance of diversity within populations compared with differences between populations; the history of human mobility that undermines any claim of racial purity and the very "reality" of the race concept;<sup>2</sup> and so on. These claims and the predictable counterclaims were all made during the debates over the race statements; in fact, despite the rise of

molecular biology, it probably would be possible to reconstruct the basic arguments of any extant position on the scientific meaning of race just from the various texts—correspondence, pamphlets, editorials, reviews, articles—in UNESCO's archival files on the race statements. In the act of debunking scientific racism, the antiracist intellectual inadvertently keeps the focus on the very biological facts he insists are insignificant. It is still a necessary performance, but it often feels like merely participating in the debate keeps the show going past its rightful closing date.

The debate is sterile because it follows a well-known script (Tilly 1998). By script I mean a political debate that has crystallized into a familiar performance in which two opposing camps repeat predictable lines. The line one advocate speaks largely determines the line of his opponent, and combatants choose a part based on convictions instead of forming convictions based on the persuasiveness of the argument. This does not mean that scientific statements on race were merely incidental or unscientific. The continual repetition of argument and counterargument assured that only the most compelling claims survived; indeed, the script on the biological significance of race is so highly refined that it is extremely difficult to write new lines.

The Statements on Race are more interesting for what they can reveal about the production, reception, and evolution of scientific scripts than for insight into the fertile but well-tilled intellectual history of race science. The production of the statements was a key event in the consolidation of the postwar liberal racial orthodoxy. Because race structured so much of twentieth-century society, from international politics to playground etiquette, the script had to play well in a demanding variety of venues: the popular media and scientific journals; UN general conferences and high school classrooms; the United States, its imperial allies, and newly independent nations. The script, therefore, had to be polysynonymous—that is, carry multiple meanings so that different audiences could discover congenial interpretations. Because the script had to work for each of these audiences, each partially determined its content. Changes in the content or interpretation of the script, therefore, imply corresponding changes in the social and political significance of race.

In this paper, I am more interested in analyzing how scientists negotiated social and political pressures than in speculating about the social and political effects of the statements. Because of space considerations, I focus on debates in the British and American scientific communities. In order to capture how changes in the social and political meaning of equality affected the scientific script on race, I analyze the production of the 1950 and 1951 statements in the first section of this essay and then investigate a third statement, published in 1964, in the second section. Of the many possible themes, I pay close attention to debates over scientific authority—over who, if anyone, should be authorized to speak for science—and to the reversal of the political significance of overlapping bell curves of human population traits from a key

1. Races—often synonymous with subspecies and understood as incipient species—were a core concept of the population genetics that galvanized the midcentury evolutionary synthesis (cf. Dobzhansky 1951). For the diversity of international scientific opinion on the race question, see *The Race Concept: Results of an Inquiry*, a compilation of scientists' letters commenting on the race statement (UNESCO 1952).

2. As John P. Jackson has noted, scholars outside the history of science generally assume that because race is socially constructed, it is not a "real" or natural biological thing. But "historians of science have excelled in showing how biological categories are just such constructions" (Jackson 2002:2). DNA, the global climate, and race are all social constructions, and reality is not at issue.

component of the antiracist script to a stock argument supporting the biological inequality of races.

### Biological Individuality and Equality of Opportunity

Nearly all historical references to UNESCO's Statements on Race begin, like most contemporary accounts did, with some version of, "In the wake of the horrific mass murder of six million Jews." It would seem hard to exaggerate the transformative power of the Holocaust on the intellectual and political history of race. And yet too great an emphasis on the Holocaust can obscure other contexts that were as important in motivating the statements and more important in shaping their meaning. In metropolitan France, antiracism was predominately framed as a fight against anti-Semitism. But for UNESCO's other two most powerful member states, the race question was a problem of skin color. The Second World War transformed race relations in the United States and in the colonial world. The U.S. and British governments appealed to African American and colonial soldiers on patriotic grounds, framed the war as a struggle for freedom, and promised that victory would mean the right of all peoples to self-determination. Whatever the hypocrisy epitomized by a segregated U.S. army and Churchill's reneging on the scope of the Atlantic Charter, both African Americans and colonial subjects were determined that the bargain—service in defense of the nation or empire for the full rights of citizenship—would be upheld (Anderson 2003; Bleich 2003; Rich 1990). The Holocaust certainly provided critical moral leverage for antiracists, but in the UN, the race question was foremost about how to reconcile the ideals of a new liberal world order with the realities of European colonialism and American Jim Crow.

The Holocaust can also be a subtly misleading context in which to interpret the behavior of antiracist scientists. It can too easily imply that scientists acted out of a sense of collective responsibility for the barbarous excesses of Nazi race science. Although they loudly decried the perversion of science to destructive ends in war, the mood in the postwar scientific community was hardly one of guilt or humility. Instead, scientists tended to portray the Second World War as a warning against the dangers of irrational power politics and emotional primordial loyalties in a technologically advanced and interdependent global society. Internationalists called for the adoption of scientific rationality throughout society, from international to interpersonal relations. In an internal memo suggesting ways UNESCO might implement a 1947 General Conference resolution calling for the organization of popular discussion groups on the "social implications of science," a program officer in the Natural Sciences Department suggested the topic of human genetics. "Knowledge about genetics and human heredity," the thought piece noted, "is already sufficiently advanced to be of direct practical value . . . in the

broad field of eugenics. Human genetics has placed the equality of man on a solid scientific foundation. It has proved a powerful factor in fighting and liquidating racial antagonism on a scientific front."<sup>3</sup> Far from a renunciation of interwar eugenics, this early proposal for a scientific educational campaign against racism was framed as a logical extension of the progressive eugenics movement.

Within UNESCO's sprawling program, however, the race problem did not fall under the Natural Sciences Department's jurisdiction. Following the American organization of knowledge production, the sciences at UNESCO were divided between departments of natural and social sciences, and the Social Sciences Department (SSD) took the initiative in developing "the social implications of science" as they related to race. In January 1949, the SSD proposed an "Educational Offensive" to popularize "the results of recent developments in the social and natural sciences, indicating a) the *unimportance* of racial or biological factors in determining the behaviour of nations and b) the importance of social and historical factors in explaining such behaviour." Ironically, given the subsequent history of the race statements, the SSD noted that this "task would unite the interests and knowledge of both the natural and the social sciences." More importantly, for an organization and a department routinely accused of impractical idealism, such a campaign would "furnish [a] concrete indication that UNESCO is dealing boldly and concretely with the problem of eliminating from the minds of men those ideas which lead to misunderstanding and conflict." Yet antiracism also offered "a point of agreement among nations otherwise separated by differences in political ideologies."<sup>4</sup> Race, in other words, was a subject that could enhance intellectual cooperation between the natural and social sciences, bureaucratic cooperation between UNESCO's sciences departments, and political cooperation between the East and West, North and South.

In this sense, contemporary appeals to the Holocaust in support of antiracist activism reveal a key aspect of the dynamics of racial discourse in the international community. The great advantage of the Holocaust as a foil for antiracists was that denouncing the Nazis alienated no member states. Criticism of member states, especially the United States and Britain (the two most prestigious members and largest donors—the United States alone contributed 40% of UNESCO's budget), was another matter. While member states were happy to go on record denouncing racism, few would tolerate criticism from an international organization whose budget they provided and whose program they approved. Addressing the race question was thus a perilous prospect for any UN agency.

Yet precisely because race was such a problematic issue in

3. "Memorandum on Group Discussions on the Social and International Implications of Science," undated, 5:304, Social Implications of Science, Correspondence Files, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

4. "Social Implications of Science," January 21, 1949, 5:304, Social Implications of Science, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

a liberal international world order, promoting racial liberalism was a principal function of the UN. The United States' legitimacy as the leader of the multiracial Free World was undermined by domestic racial strife. The United States responded to Soviet propaganda, which exploited the country's shameful record on race, with a propaganda campaign of its own that emphasized the democratic superpower's peaceful progress toward racial equality. In essence, this meant embracing the midcentury liberal orthodoxy most famously articulated in Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* (1944). This argument dismissed the biology of race as trivial and acknowledged the country's racist past and problematic present but emphasized the complex of positive values—the American creed—that contradicted these historical realities. The American creed promised a future in which all citizens would enjoy equality of opportunity (Dudziak 2000; Jackson 1990; Layton 2000). The cautious optimism of the American creed complemented the colonial powers' civilizing mission. The current contradictions of a liberal empire were justified by the promise of future equality; colonies would be granted independence once their people had reached the necessary standard of civilization to form modern nations (Mehta 1997). Political realities prevented UN agencies from exposing concrete manifestations of racial oppression but created the opportunity to promote the legal equality of nations and individuals.

The postwar antiracist script had to reconcile the biology of race with the ideal of a meritocratic democracy. UNESCO's second director-general, Jaime Torres Bodet, told the group of physical anthropologists and geneticists convened to draft the second statement that the “‘dogma’ of racial inequality” they were gathered to combat was “not factual inequality—like the inequalities to which history bears witness, of power, ability, or merit—but legal inequality, that is to say, inequality of worth.”<sup>5</sup> Scientific truth was not intended to reveal the actual equality of the races but the potential equality—the legal equality—of individuals and nations. The equality at stake in the first two race statements was equality of opportunity.

Equality of opportunity meant that individuals should be judged on their own merit rather than the reputation of their race. As the head of the SSD's race program, the anthropologist Alfred Métraux, wrote in an article that accompanied the publication of the first statement in UNESCO's popular magazine the *Courier*, “Ironically, the worst sufferers of racial dogma are usually the people whose intellect most forcibly demonstrates its falseness” (Métraux 1950a:8). This was essentially a middle-class sentiment that focused attention on the unequal treatment of worthy (i.e., hardworking, smart)

individuals rather than the debilitating poverty of the masses and the structural determinants of racial inequality.

This emphasis on individuals was why the distinction between typological classifications that reified the average racial characteristics of “pure races” and descriptions of dynamic groups that stressed a population's full range of variation was such an important component of the antiracist script. Thus, the second statement conceded that “it is possible, though not proved, that some types of innate capacity for intellectual and emotional responses are commoner in one human group than in another.” But the depressing implications of this possibility were effectively countered by the proved fact that “within a single group, innate capacities vary as much as, if not more than, they do between different groups.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the range of variation between groups overlapped so that “some members of the group of inferior performance surpass not merely the lowest ranking member of the superior group but also the average of its members” (Montagu 1972: 144). Differences between races, in other words, could be visualized as a set of overlapping bell curves. Although there might be differences in the curves' peaks and extremes, the substantial overlap provided a biological foundation for a nonracial liberal meritocracy. Individuals of any race could possess the talent to rise up the social hierarchy.

The cautious optimism of the race statements was intended to encourage reconciliation and reform, not to incite conflict. The first Statement on Race (which began “Scientists have reached general agreement”) was supposed to represent the scientific consensus to a popular audience, not change the consensus. By correcting the public's misguided biological determinism, it would clear the ground for the race program's series of educational pamphlets, *The Race Question in Modern Science*, which presented a more complex guide to the social implications of science.<sup>7</sup> Yet it was scientists who sparked the controversy over the statement. “If it were not for the wave of hostile criticism our Statement met with in England,” wrote Métraux, “we should never become involved in [the second Statement on the biological aspects of race].”<sup>8</sup> Like the fuzzy divisions between races that population biologists described, however, the boundaries of the British physical anthropology community were porous. Biologists and

5. “Address Delivered by the Director-General to the Meeting of Physical Anthropologists and Geneticists for a Definition of the Concept of Race,” 323.12 A 102/064(44) “51,” Statement on Race: Expert Meeting of Physical Anthropologists and Geneticists [sic]: Paris 1951, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

6. Although attention to variation within groups was often presented as a cutting-edge innovation of the new population biology, it was actually a long-standing component of scientific antiracism. Most importantly, at the beginning of the century, Boas had stressed the greater range of variation within compared with between races in his deconstruction of racial typology (Stocking 1968, 161–194).

7. For a concise review of the work of the race program, see Gastaut (2007).

8. Métraux to Dover, February 12, 1951, 323.12 A 102/064(44) “51,” Statement on Race: Expert Meeting of Physical Anthropologists and Geneticists [sic]: Paris 1951, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

American, British, and European physical anthropologists participated on both sides of the conflict.<sup>9</sup>

Even before the first statement was released, its advocates recognized its weaknesses. The problem was less the facts it presented than the style in which they were presented, which violated scientific propaganda's norm of caution. As the social psychologist and leading antiracist expert on intelligence Otto Klineberg advised the SSD, the statement would be more effective (and less open to attack) if "the tone of the Statement [was] less dogmatic than it is at present." Most importantly, instead of suggesting that there were no hereditarily determined racial differences in psychology, the statement should report that there was no proof of such inborn differences.<sup>10</sup> Despite months of arm twisting, cajoling, and pleading, the rapporteur, Rutgers University anthropologist Ashley Montagu, refused to budge, most importantly insisting on keeping the conclusion that "biological studies lend support to the ethic of universal brotherhood."<sup>11</sup>

Fears of a scientific backlash quickly proved well founded. The certainty with which the statement dismissed the importance of racial biology but affirmed "biological drives towards universal brotherhood" was exactly what William Fagg, the secretary of the Royal Anthropological Institute, claimed most anthropologists regarded "as distinctly controversial in the present state of our knowledge" in a letter to the London *Times* that initiated the controversy. Although Fagg captured UNESCO's attention by challenging the scientific authority of the statement in a popular forum, the controversy would be largely contained within the scientific community. The main battlefield was the correspondence pages of *Man*, the monthly bulletin of the Royal Anthropological Society, which Fagg edited.

Read out of context, it is easy to miss the nonracial components of the debate. *Man* provided a sort of clubby forum in which anthropologists matched wits and tested each other's pedantic mettle. The January 1951 issue celebrated *Man*'s 50 years of service "as a vehicle for scientific controversy." By "a series of happy coincidences," the jubilee issue included five letters feeding the fire of the UNESCO conflict and three salvos

in an ongoing battle sparked off by E. E. Evans-Pritchard's attack on the scientism of social anthropology's functionalism. "May controversy long flourish freely in *Man*" proclaimed the editor in praising the founders' refusal to provide a rigid framework or coordinated planning for the bulletin (*Man* 1951:5).

Fagg's pairing of controversy with freedom signaled that the conflict over the Statement on Race was part of a long-running debate within the British scientific community over whether science should be planned. Joseph Needham, the Natural Sciences Department's first director, and Julian Huxley, UNESCO's first director-general, were key figures in the Social Relations of Science movement, which pushed for the rational planning of science and the scientific planning of society. The Society for Freedom in Science was a right-leaning reaction to this broadly left-wing movement (Kenny 2004; McGucken 1984). There was actually significant overlap between the two camps, however, and no necessary correlation with racial positions. And although UNESCO was supposed to organize international science, it also was supposed to facilitate the "free flow of information." The question of whether UNESCO ought to be in the business of issuing official scientific statements, therefore, touched on the very purpose of the organization. It was not just the specific content of the statement scientists found objectionable but UNESCO's presumption to declare correct scientific opinion, which smacked of totalitarianism.

This reasoning opened the door to the absurd claim that UNESCO's antiracist campaign was equivalent to Nazism. Métraux was understandably shocked that German scientists—whose careers, incidentally, had not suffered under the Third Reich (Proctor 1988)—had the gall to defend nastily racist positions with this argument.<sup>12</sup> Of more long-term significance, however, the defense of intellectual freedom became a reliable theme in the reactionary script that labeled advocacy of racial equality politically correct wishful thinking. In fact, righteous antitotalitarianism provided a sort of respectable cover for racist scientists' attack on postwar antiracism.

And cover was necessary. In his letter to the *Times* undermining the original statement, Fagg declared that the Royal Anthropological Institute supported the statement's contribution "to the abatement of racial prejudice" and agreed with its "essential thesis—that racial persecution and discrimination (in the bad sense) cannot be justified on the basis of facts established by anthropology."<sup>13</sup> For Fagg, discriminating

9. In fact, prominent members of the American physical anthropology community felt that they had not fulfilled their scientific responsibility by leaving it to their British colleagues to challenge the validity of the original statement (Stewart 1951).

10. Klineberg to Angell, January 25, 1950, 323.12 A 102, Statement on Race, Part I up to December 31, 1950, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

11. Surely the UNESCO official who chided Montagu that her "only wish now is . . . that anthropologists were as co-operative among themselves as other human beings [according to your thesis]" was not alone in noting the irony. Although Métraux later attributed all the problems with the statement's tone to Montagu, it was actually Métraux who supplied the following clause: "for man is born with drives toward co-operation, and unless these drives are satisfied, men and nations alike fall ill." Angell to Montagu, April 26, 1950, 323.12 A 102, Statement on Race, Part I up to December 31, 1950, UNESCO Archives, Paris. Tead to Montagu, March 5, 1952, 323.12 A 102, Statement on Race, Part IV from January 1, 1952 to March 31, 1953, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

12. Robert Proctor (2003) has similarly argued that liberal antiracist science—labeled "the UNESCO response to Auschwitz"—has retarded scientific progress on human evolution even as he concludes that stories of human origins are moral tales. In fact, the standard strategy of antiracists (and UNESCO's race program) was to make public, often by publishing in their own journals, the writings of racist scientists. Furthermore, the best known advocate of the position Proctor favors—a bushy family tree—was also the best known antiracist (i.e., Stephen Jay Gould).

13. Fagg to the *Times*, July 24, 1950, 323.12 A 102, Statement on Race, Part I up to December 31, 1950, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

between the races was not prejudice if the distinctions were real. But this nuance was less important than the fact that in the postwar world, even scientists who believed in the biological inequality of races felt compelled to publicly support antiracism. Their arguments had to be framed within the liberal orthodoxy.

The authority and political usefulness of scientific statements, however, depended on maintaining a boundary between politics and science (Gieryn 1999). In his welcoming address to the committee gathered to author the second statement, Director-General Bodet declared that UNESCO's "weapon" against the lies and irrationality of racism must be "the truth, and nothing but the truth." "The prime merit of science," he flattered his audience, "is the example it gives of objectivity in its purest and most stable form."<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, it should not have mattered which scientists were assembled at UNESCO House in June 1951; the objectivity of science would assure that only the truth emerged. Of course, as none knew better than the scientists themselves, who was in the room mattered a great deal. The chairman of the American Museum of Natural History's anthropology department, Harry Shapiro, put it bluntly to Métraux: "The choice of delegates . . . is a matter of tactics rather than [scientific] suitability or unsuitability."<sup>15</sup>

One of the key tactical considerations was the disciplinary representation of the expert committee. The mid-twentieth century was an especially vulnerable moment for physical anthropologists. With the triumph of the evolutionary synthesis and the accompanying ascendancy of population genetics, biologists who counted the bristles on flies or measured the wingspans of birds were regarded as authorities on evolutionary processes and classifications of all kinds, including the history of human racial differentiation (Mayr and Provine 1980). Cultural anthropologists and sociologists had succeeded in claiming the social implications of race as their turf. Understandably, physical anthropologists were a defensive group.

The 1950 statement exemplified the diminished authority of physical anthropologists. After social scientists drafted the statement, Montagu and the SSD sent it for peer review to leading biologists and geneticists.<sup>16</sup> The only anthropologist who participated in revisions of the first statement was Don

Hager of the Department of Economics and Social Institutions at Princeton. Hager attributed the vitriol of British and French physical anthropologists' attacks to "a reaction against the fact that the scientific frontier has pushed beyond the cephalic index, the bigonial diameter, the bizygomatic diameter, and all the rest." The ascendancy of human genetics, he explained, had led to a shift from "taxonomic-descriptive studies to studies of function, process and diversity" (Hager 1951:54). Population biology and social science provided the tools to understand human difference, and physical anthropologists could either adapt or perish.

Many British physical anthropologists had not pushed beyond the frontier of precise measurements of trivial significance, however. In an editor's note, Fagg defended "classical" or "old-world" physical anthropologists from Hager's condescension and wondered "whether American physical anthropologists generally regard 'intergroup,' for example, as synonymous with 'racial,' and if so whether they do not feel that they are defining themselves out of existence" (Hager 1951:54). For the proud bearers of the classical tradition, physical anthropology was a science of race, and this was an essentially descriptive practice. For instance, in 1950 *Man* published the results of metastudies of the relative usefulness of various characteristics of living subjects (e.g., nose breadth) and skulls (e.g., orbital height) for helping "the student of race discriminate between different populations." The studies did not attempt to define race but simply compared the averages of popular measurements in the published literature; each sample series essentially represented a "race," and the greater the difference between interracial averages, the greater the significance of the characteristic (Tildesley 1950; van Bork-Feltkamp 1950). Such studies seem designed to demonstrate the vapid circularity of the race concept, but they also reveal physical anthropologists' vested professional interest in protecting the disciplinary turf of race from social scientists and population biologists. Their expertise was discriminating between races; if racial differences were of trivial social significance, so were they.

Despite Fagg's disavowal of discrimination "in the bad sense," the social value of this form of physical anthropology depended on a slippage between good scientific and bad social discrimination. In *Man*, Miriam Tildesley, the chairman of the International Committee for the Standardization of Anthropometric Technique and author of one of the studies described above, provided a hagiographic review of Sir Arthur Keith's autobiography, declaring that the aged don of British physical anthropology possessed "a hallmark of culture—tolerance" (Tildesley 1952).<sup>17</sup> Whatever his virtue as a colleague and friend, Keith is best remembered today for his theory that racial prejudice was a natural and necessary feature of evolution (and for being taken in by the Piltdown hoax, which

14. "Address Delivered by the Director-General to the Meeting of Physical Anthropologists and Geneticists for a Definition of the Concept of Race," 323.12 A 102/064(44) "51," Statement on Race: Expert Meeting of Physical Anthropologists and Geneticists [sic]: Paris 1951, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

15. Shapiro to Métraux, February 20, 1951, 323.12 A 102, Statement on Race, Part II from January 1, 1951 to August 31, 1951.

16. They were almost all American or British: biologists Julian Huxley (UNESCO's first director-general) and Edwin Conklin; biochemist (and former director of the natural sciences department) Joseph Needham; and geneticists L. C. Dunn, Theodosius Dobzhansky, Gunnar Dahlberg, Curt Stern, and H. J. Muller. American social psychologists and sociologists and Gunnar Myrdal also reviewed the statement, but these were mostly experts who happened to be hanging around UNESCO House.

17. Ironically, the review appeared just above generally positive reviews of four pamphlets in UNESCO's *The Race Question and Modern Science* series.

would so embarrass the “classical anthropology” Tidesley practiced; Stocking 1988). Desirable evolutionary progress, according to Keith, was a product of often violent racial discrimination—an idea that hardly epitomized tolerance in the twentieth century. Fagg had solicited both Tildesley’s and Keith’s opinions on the original race statement before initiating the controversy with his letter to the *Times*. Professional interests and political convictions were entangled.

Indeed, the disciplinary conflict over the race statement obscured a more basic battle over who had the authority to represent science. The content of the fifteen paragraphs of the 1950 statement is less surprising than the list of eight authors. Before the war, when Shapiro and Franz Boas had attempted to organize an antiracist statement from physical anthropologists in response to Nazism, Boas recruited Earnest Hooten as a front man. During the 1930s, it was conventional wisdom that a Jew’s authority on the race question would be undermined by a perception of bias (Barkan 1992:316). With farcical assuredness, WASPs generally ignored the corollary that the discovery of their own natural superiority might itself be suspect. (This is why sarcastic humor is generally a more effective weapon against scientific racism than earnest pleading.) WASPs, however, were noticeable by their absence in the expert panel convened to author the 1950 statement. Not only was the rapporteur Jewish, so were the representatives of France (Lévi-Strauss) and the United Kingdom (Morris Ginsberg). Even more dramatically, the committee elected the black American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier its chairman. The panel also included Ernest Beaglehole from New Zealand, Juan Comas from Mexico, L. A. Costa Pinto from Brazil, and Humayun Kabir from India. The emphasis on national/racial diversity reversed the virtually unchallenged prewar assumption that only whites really had the objectivity to answer the race question. The credibility of the 1950 statement was supposed to derive from the fact that it expressed the consensus of leading experts who represented the true diversity of the UN.

In a sense, this epistemological strategy accorded with Fagg’s celebration of freely flourishing controversy in science; truth depended on the clash of different ideas within the scientific community. But Fagg appealed to a very different notion of authority when he objected that the leading British and French physical anthropologists had not participated in drafting the statement and branded it “the Ashley Montagu Statement.” More significant than the disciplinary identity of the geneticists and physical anthropologists who authored the second statement was their nationality and race. A few Jews still made the cut, but no experts of color or scientists from outside Western Europe, Britain, and the United States did. Nevertheless, the principle of geographic and national diversity was institutionalized in the bureaucratic structure of the UN. Despite the challenge to the authority of the first statement, it signaled that the national and racial representativeness of the international scientific community was now an

issue—inclusivity, as well as exclusivity, would increasingly become a mark of credibility (Selcer 2009).

### “Not Just Equality as a Right and a Theory but Equality as a Fact”

When the General Conference resolved that UNESCO should produce a new Statement on Race in 1962, the politics of race in the international community had changed dramatically. This decade experienced a shift away from the human rights of individuals to the collective rights of “minorities”—from a focus on weakening primordial affiliations to the empowerment of oppressed groups (Burke 2008). This change was both a cause and an effect of decolonization. In order to speed the process of decolonization and leverage their position in the Cold War, colonial peoples joined together in the non-aligned movement. The Third World was defined in relation to the poles of the Cold War, but the solidarity of new nations was based on shared colonial histories and often expressed in racial terms. 1960 was a watershed; that year 17 newly independent African nations joined the UN system, accounting for nearly 20% of the votes in UNESCO’s General Conference. A corresponding shift reverberated in the United States. By the mid-1960s, the civil rights movement transformed into what has been called a “minority rights revolution” (Skrentny 2002). In 1965, President Johnson issued Executive Order 11246 mandating affirmative action “to correct the effects of past and present discrimination” and announced at Howard University that Americans “seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.”<sup>18</sup> Equality of outcomes, not just opportunities, was now at stake.

Sol Tax, the inimitable editor of *Current Anthropology*, made the change in stakes clear in a letter copied to the SSD in preparation for the third Statement on Race. After rehearsing a favorite argument of liberal social scientists—that proving innate mental inequalities would require establishing true equality of opportunity—Tax added a new addendum. In the highly unlikely circumstances that substantial differences still persisted after multiple generations, “Negroes would have to be given greater educational opportunities to make up for whatever weaknesses have been demonstrated.”<sup>19</sup> A simpler solution would have been to better norm tests of talent to the value of racial equality, but the point was much the same.

UNESCO’s race program struggled to adapt to the evolving politics of race, but the executive board and NGOs continued to push for action in the fight against racial prejudice. The impetus for continued action received a strong push by per-

18. Lyndon B. Johnson, “To Fulfill These Rights,” commencement address at Howard University, June 4, 1965. <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650604.asp>.

19. Tax to Booker, February 12, 1962, 323.1:574 A 064 (470) “64,” Expert Meeting on the Biological Aspects of Race: 1964: Moscou, Part I up to December 31, 1963, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

ceived recrudescence of racism in Europe and the United States as well as the antiracist convictions of the new member states. Race riots in Notting Dale and Nottingham in 1958, which targeted West Indian immigrants, showed that colonial racial tensions were now a domestic British problem. In 1959 the desecration of a synagogue in Cologne inspired a wave of anti-Semitic acts in West Germany that spread into France (Bleich 2003; Rich 1990; UNESCO 1960).<sup>20</sup> In the United States, the success of the civil rights movement sparked a campaign of massive resistance throughout the South (Klarman 1994). One component of the push back against desegregation was a new wave of race science, exemplified by the founding of the journal *Mankind Quarterly* in 1960, which sought to demonstrate the biological basis of racial inequality. Most disturbingly for liberal anthropologists, the new generation of racist “pseudoscience” threatened to return to mainstream respectability in 1962 with the publication of Carleton Coon’s *The Origin of Races* (Coon 1962). In this context, shoring up the scientific foundations of the antiracist script took on renewed urgency (Jackson 2005). And updating the race statement was also a mission with which Western governments—and crucially the United States—could find common ground with Third World nations.

Métraux’s replacement at the race program, Francisco Benet, a young Spanish anthropologist with a degree from Columbia University, planned the drafting of the third statement. Benet essentially took two documents as the basis for discussion: UNESCO’s 1951 statement and Coon’s *The Origin of Races* (Coon 1962). He initially envisioned a single comprehensive statement addressing both the biological (which he termed anthropological) and sociological dimensions of race. He proposed that a sociological commission debate issues such as “the misuse of the term ‘race’” and racial relations in “a context of cultural diversity” while an anthropological commission surveyed “the present state of our knowledge regarding the social life of early man” and tackled “one of the most important problems of the conference”: the polytypic origins of *Homo sapiens* from different racial stocks of *Homo erectus*, which “in the hands of C.S. Coon, [had become again] a plausible scientific hypothesis.”<sup>21</sup> With the notable exception of Julian Huxley, however, the experts Benet consulted (mostly anthropologists from the United States and Great Britain) warned against lending further credence to Coon’s profoundly flawed work. In the end, the SSD chose to produce two documents, the first focusing solely on “the

biological aspects of race” and clearing the ground for a second statement taking on the social determinants of racism. Yet again, physical anthropologists were called on to declare their own irrelevance.

SSD director T. H. Marshall pointed out another fundamental problem with Benet’s initial agenda: was the new statement’s aim “to make a scientific review of current knowledge, or to prepare a statement that will influence the attitude of the public at large?”<sup>22</sup> In fact, the proposed agenda’s focus on recent and controversial findings implied that it was intended to influence the judgment of scientists. Although this distinction was never clearly articulated, the 1964 statement ended by asserting that “anthropologists should endeavour to prevent the results of their researches from being used in such a biased way that they would serve non-scientific ends.” It is hard not to read this conclusion as a reprimand of Coon, who was a member of the expert committee that negotiated the statement, because the standard complaint against *The Origin of Races* was that it was easy fodder for racist propaganda (Dobzhansky 1963). Indeed, although the first statements had been intended to demonstrate the social implications of science to the public, they turned out to be key instruments for establishing and policing the norm against racism within the scientific community.<sup>23</sup> One of the ironies of propaganda is that often those who produce it are the ones who find themselves obliged to behave as if it were true.

Some of the participants in the first round of race statements welcomed the opportunity to correct what they perceived as flaws caused by political exigencies and the process of negotiation. Huxley, for example, wrote that he had “only signed the earlier [statement] with reluctance” and recommended Coon’s book. He urged that UNESCO “must hold the fort between the two extreme positions, both untenable—that biological races are clear cut genetic entities . . . and the political extension of this view that some races are superior and some inferior; and the view that there is no scientific or genetic basis at all for the idea of genetically distinguishable ethnic groups, with mean differences in various genetic properties.”<sup>24</sup> Huxley was not alone in hoping that the new statement would reassert the importance of biology. But the 1964 statement, titled “Proposals on the Biological Aspects of Race,” turned out to be an even stronger declaration of biological equality and cultural determinacy. It stressed, for example, that racial classifications were never made on the basis of traits having “a universal biological value for the survival

20. Mara to Métraux, July 19, 1960; Métraux to Mara, August 10, 1960, 323.12:342.7, Race Discrimination and Human Rights: General, Part II from January 1, 1959 up to April 30, 1961, UNESCO Archives, Paris; Métraux to ODG, “14th session of Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities,” December 21, 1961, 323.12:342.7, Race Discrimination and Human Rights: General, Part III from May 1, 1961 up to August 31, 1962, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

21. “International Meeting on Race, 1964,” 323.1:574 A 064 (470) “64,” Expert Meeting on the Biological Aspects of Race: 1964: Moscou, Part I up to December 31, 1963, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

22. T. H. Marshall, “Some Comments on the Plan,” 323.1:574 A 064 (470) “64,” Expert Meeting on the Biological Aspects of Race: 1964: Moscou, Part I up to December 31, 1963, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

23. For example, Juan Comas called out the racists behind the *Mankind Quarterly* by referring to the scientific consensus approved by the 1951 statement, and *Current Anthropology* reprinted the entire statement along with a new collection of letters on the subject (Comas 1961).

24. Huxley to Benet, June 20, 1963, 323.1:574 A 064 (470) “64,” Expert Meeting on the Biological Aspects of Race: 1964: Moscou, Part I up to December 31, 1963, UNESCO Archives, Paris.



of the human species,” and therefore it was impossible “to speak in any way whatsoever of a general inferiority or superiority of this or that race,” and it asserted that “differences in the achievements of different peoples must be attributed solely to their cultural history” (Montagu 1972:150–151).

More than a liberal drift in elite scientific opinion, the institutionalization of the norm of diversity assured this strong antiracist position. Although the SSD again consulted mostly American and British experts in planning the meeting, the logic of the UN required that the expert committee represent the diversity of the community of nations. The UN’s increased membership meant that an even more diverse group of experts participated in drafting the third statement than had the first. Among the 22 signatories were representatives of Nigeria, Senegal, Japan, India, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, France, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Norway, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Most significantly, the Soviet Union had joined UNESCO in 1954, and three Russians, a Pole, and a Czech represented the Eastern Bloc. By coincidence, the seventh congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnographic Sciences met in Moscow in 1964, and the SSD decided to save money and assure prestigious participants by linking its meeting of experts with the congress. This decision had the effect of focusing Soviet attention on the statement.<sup>25</sup> The third statement, therefore, had to make sense from a truly global diversity of perspectives.

That the meeting actually succeeded in producing a consensus demonstrates the hegemony of the antiracist script. Even scientists who did not necessarily believe the script lent their signatures to the third statement. After the meeting, the great German zoologist Bernard Rensch reported to the SSD that he did not actually agree with the statement’s strong skepticism regarding genetically determined psychological differences between ethnic groups and thought “that in this case political convictions were stronger than scientific considerations”—the Russians, in particular, had been obstinate. But Rensch signed on to the statement because he believed the “practical target” of a unanimous antiracist declaration was more important than “little differences in formulation.”<sup>26</sup>

Within the scientific community, the 1964 statement was relatively uncontroversial. The changed context was illuminated by the University of Chicago physiologist Dwight J. Ingle’s attempt to provoke a sort of revival of the controversy over the 1950 statement in *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, which he edited. *Perspectives* is a free-ranging journal dedicated to the interdisciplinary exploration of philosophical and theoretical questions at the frontier of the life sciences.

Like *Man*, *Perspectives* celebrated its role as “a forum for free and honest criticism, not carping but searching, and . . . not beholden to the renowned figure or figurehead or fearful of uncovering error or flabby thinking.” In this early essay, a member of the editorial board invoked Thomas Jefferson: “For here we are not afraid to follow truth, wherever it may lead” (Bean 1958:225).

On the race question, Ingle believed scientific truth had been distorted by political pressure, and he made *Perspectives* a forum for interrogating the errors of “equalitarianism.” In 1963, he “opened the pages of *Perspectives* to debate on the issue of race and intelligence,” noting that he had “personally opposed the dogma of both equalitarians and racists because both groups rationalize value judgments behind a façade of flimsy evidence” (Ingle 1963:539). To provoke debate, he published UNESCO’s 1964 statement, “Proposals on the Biological Aspects of Race,” inserting his own point-by-point critique in an effort to reveal it as the epitome of equalitarian dissimulation (Ingle 1965).

By 1967, however, Ingle (1967) complained that “no one [had] accepted the invitation” to debate the race question in *Perspectives* (499). For many scientists, the visionary sociobiological race science of *Perspectives* appeared to look backward. Ingle not only published but promoted articles by the geneticist H. J. Muller and Julian Huxley (who served on the journal’s advisory board) promoting eugenics, including elaborate artificial insemination schemes so that the genetically disadvantaged could have children (Huxley 1963; Muller 1959). Huxley’s paper, originally delivered as the Galton Lecture to the Eugenics Society, explained that such a eugenic program would not be racist because of the greater intra-rather than interracial variation (although he was also busy advocating the notion that exceptionally high intelligence was more frequent in some races). Ingle used this same logic to describe himself as a champion of civil liberties and a righteous opponent of racial prejudice: he did not adhere to the typological concept of pure races; ipso facto, he was not racist. He could have signed UNESCO’s second race statement in good faith.

But Ingle emphasized a crucial point that proponents of the postwar racial orthodoxy had elided: “the question of average genetic differences among the ‘races’ is important in the struggle for social and biological values” (1964:1528).<sup>27</sup> In 1967, after several summers of race riots in U.S. cities, Ingle explained the danger of ignoring innate average differences in aptitudes. Not only did equalitarianism mandate mediocrity, but also it would raise expectations: “When all Negroes are told that their problems are caused solely by racial discrimination and that none are inherent within themselves,

25. Hochfeld to Elmendjra, July 27, 1964, “Participation soviétique à la reunion d’experts sur les aspects biologiques de la question raciale,” 323.1:574 A 064 (470) “64,” Expert Meeting on the Biological Aspects of Race: 1964: Moscou, “Part III from July 1, 1964 up to,” UNESCO Archives, Paris.

26. Rensch to Bertrand, September 12, 1964, 323.1:574 A 064 (470) “64,” Expert Meeting on the Biological Aspects of Race: 1964: Moscou, “Part III from July 1, 1964 up to,” UNESCO Archives, Paris.

27. This quotation is from Ingle’s response to a flurry of outraged letters attacking his article in *Science* calling for further investigation into the determinants of differential racial intelligence and behavior and for eugenic interventions—importantly, he proposed subsidized sterilization for carriers of “substandard culture” as well as genes.

the ensuing hatred, frustration behavior—largely negative and destructive—and reverse racism become forms of social malignancy” (Ingle 1967:498). Equality was a legitimate social value, but it had pathological effects on a liberal society when wishful thinkers denied the fact of biological inequality.

A key biological argument of the antiracist script at the beginning of the 1950s—that innate capacities varied more within populations than between them—was now central to the script justifying racial inequality. Indeed, Ingle deployed the history of the argument as a shield against attacks that he was racist. And he allied with key actors in the production of the first Statements on Race. In addition to Huxley, Ingle published the population geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky’s “On Genetics, Sociology, and Politics” (Dobzhansky 1968). Perhaps the most respected postwar authority on the question of biological diversity, Dobzhansky was a renowned antiracist who had served as a sort of final judge of the biological correctness of the first UNESCO statements. “On Genetics, Sociology, and Politics,” originally prepared for a 1964 Wenner-Gren symposium, argued for equality of opportunity but warned against expecting it to result in equality of “types” (Dobzhansky 1968:554). Indeed, in a series of popular lectures published in 1964, he appeared more worried about cultural than biological determinists and assumed a similar position on the race question as Ingle: “The sentimentalism of the equalitarians and the selfishness of the racists are equally purblind in light of biology” (111). In a section titled “In Praise of Diversity,” Dobzhansky asserted that with equality of opportunity, members of all races would fall short of their ambitions.

This involves pain and disappointment. It is debatable whether the pain and disappointment are easier to accept if they are felt to be owing to one’s own shortcomings than to an injustice inflicted by others. The former is preferable to the society. It is surely intolerable to be told that one is not entitled even to try to climb a height because of the color of one’s skin or a lack of social status in one’s ancestors. (1964:111–112)

In a just meritocracy, everyone would have the chance to achieve excellence. But the biology of overlapping bell curves might, indeed probably would, still determine that each race was equal in its own way—some races, on average, might be better analytical thinkers, others more musically gifted.

Despite the name, population biology focused attention on minute differences between individuals. This focus was congenial to the movement for legal equality. But when social equality—equality of outcome—was at stake, it could slip into a rationalization of inequality. Tellingly, the bell curve became the *de facto* title of the new generation’s racist script (Hernstein and Murray 1994; Jacoby and Glauber 1995). The point is not exactly that the postwar liberal orthodoxy had always possessed the potential to rationalize racial inequality. Rather, it is that it had succeeded in winning the imprimatur of the scientific community and the blessings of UNESCO’s

member states precisely for this reason. Scripts are constructed and interpreted to match the political opportunities of particular historical moments. Even when they aspire to timeless truth, they must be assessed as conjunctural achievements.

## Conclusion

UNESCO’s Statements on Race were a product of both international and disciplinary politics. Although the statements were originally intended to demonstrate the social implications of race science to a popular audience, it is easier to read in their history the scientific implications of racial politics. Race had provided the organizing principle of physical anthropology; sorting their collections into racial categories was what physical anthropologists did. This scientific practice was meaningful because society was organized according to a racial hierarchy. Race was both a scientific and a commonsense classification system. The delegitimation of race as a social category, therefore, plunged physical anthropology into an existential crisis. The identity of physical anthropology was at stake in the production of scientific Statements on Race for a popular audience.

Like the lay citizens they attempted to educate, scientists’ judgment of the social significance of race was determined by their life experiences. When Métraux was disturbed by the geneticist Alfred Sturtevant’s racism, Dobzhansky wrote him that, considering Sturtevant had grown up in Alabama, “his views on the race problem must be considered remarkably liberal and reasonable.”<sup>28</sup> *Drosophila* genetics were irrelevant. In accepting an invitation to participate in drafting the 1964 statement, Rensch (an ornithologist by trade) wrote, “Based on my personal experience with educated people and more primitively living tribes in India and Indonesia, I am convinced that the mental background of all races is rather similar. . . . But we cannot pretend that there are no important inherited differences of psychical capabilities.”<sup>29</sup> When the taxonomist, leading architect of the evolutionary synthesis, and historian of biology Ernst Mayr explained the relationship between “the biology of race and the concept of equality” in an article written in 2002 (but which could as easily have been published in 1952), he asserted, “The rule that no individuals are the same was as true for the Stone Age natives of New Guinea as it is for a group of my Harvard colleagues”; he knew because his ornithological research had led him to be “one of the first outsiders to visit a native village in the interior of New Guinea” (Mayr 2002:93). The ultimate appeal to personal experience was not confined to scientists who studied flies or birds. In reply to Montagu’s damning review of *The Origin of Races*, Coon dismissed Montagu’s claim that

28. Dobzhansky to Métraux, April 29, 1952, 323.12 A 102, Statement on Race, Part IV from January 1, 1952 to March 31, 1953, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

29. Rensch to Benet, August 19, 1963, 323.1:574 A 064 (470) “64,” Expert Meeting on the Biological Aspects of Race: 1964: Moscou, Part I up to December 31, 1963, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

"the more one gets to know people of different races the more fundamentally alike they appear to be" (Montagu 1963:362). "His impression is of no validity and less interest," Coon scoffed, "because he has done no field work. Having worked with people of all races but the Capoid on every inhabited continent, I know whereof I speak" (Coon 1963:363). Coon's appeal to the experience of fieldwork—not the standardized data of mental tests, for example—was a claim to privileged personal experience. The more he got to know people of different races, the more fundamentally different he found them. Examples could be multiplied, but I do not think the point is controversial. On the race question, scientists interpreted data in light of common sense. Perhaps because history was on their side, antiracist scientists were more honest about acknowledging that the answer to the race question depended on who possessed the power to measure merit.

The controversies over the Statements on Race were fundamentally about who was authorized to speak in the name of science—about whose common sense the scientific community would legitimate. As the anthropologist Alan Beals noted in a satirical response to Ingle's eugenic proposals, "Big-ots" performed well "only on intelligence tests of their own devising" (Beals 1964). This common suspicion was why the political imperatives that assured the postwar institutionalization of the norm of diversity in the international scientific community were critical to the production of credible Statements on Race.

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