

“Negroes ... naturally inferior to the whites...”

David Hume

*In the second edition of his Essays, Moral and Political (1742), David Hume added the following racist note to his essay “Of National Characters.” To the philosopher of the Enlightenment “ingenious manufactures,” “arts,” and “sciences” were the sole criteria of civilization.*

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient GERMANS, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them, in their valor, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negro slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity, tho’ low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In JAMAICA indeed they talk of one negro as a man of parts and learning; but ’tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.