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**ABSTRACT**

From its beginning, the United States has been a multiracial society, and from the beginning relations between and among the races have been strained by cultural, economic, social, political, and psychological conflicts. Social psychology came of age in the early 1900's as a disciplined inquiry into the psycho-social problems of the people, and central among them was the matter of race. The concept of race was intimately associated with the basic question of the nature of man. A review of the literature of Darwin, Binet, Terman, and the British Utilitarians shows that those who argued the question of social engineering for the betterment of society failed to appreciate the basic principle of the evolutionary theory, namely, that species survival was based on adaptability enhanced by variability and diversity. Race continued to be a vital concept in the foundations of social psychology as the genetic interpretation of human motivation and performance gave way to an environmental one. In more recent times, social psychology has begun to lose interest in the concept. This process can be roughly divided into 25-year cycles: (1) bio-eugenic origins and racial/cultural differences (1900-1925); (2) socio-cultural influences and socio-political action, the Negro problem (1926-1955); and (3) social integration and experimental control, diverging paths in social psychology (1955-1983). Currently the concept of race appears to be diminishing in importance as an experimental variable, a social/moral problem, and a theoretical concept. Yet social psychology has failed to present a rounded, integrated view of the complex interactions of individual and normative factors in human behavior. The development of a fully conceived, researched, and applied concept of race would make a great contribution to the maturity and significance of social psychology. (JAC)

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THE CONCEPT OF RACE IN THE HISTORY OF  
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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## The Concept of Race in the History of Social Psychology\*

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### Introduction

From its beginning, the United States has been a multiracial society. Also from the beginning, relations between and among the races have been strained by cultural, economic, social, political and psychological conflicts. Social psychology came of age in the early 1900's as a disciplined inquiry into the psycho-social problems of the citizenry of this country, and a central tenet of that inquiry was the matter of race.

In fact, so prominent was the question of race and racial differences that McDougall (1921) was moved to refer to the newly emerging IQ tests as the work of "Mental Anthropology." The concept of race was intimately associated with the basic question of the nature of man. Two strains of work in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; namely, Darwinian notions of the origins and evolution of species, and Binet and Terman's development and adaptation of IQ tests to popular and widespread uses combined to give social psychologists a mission. If survival and perpetuation of the species is determined by genetic fitness (a loose interpretation of Darwinian notions) and if the new devices for assessing intelligence (felt to have a basic genetic component) could measure genetic fitness, then social science, it was reasoned, could be the foundation of principles of social engineering that would help the development of this society toward maximum civilized advancement.

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\* This paper was presented at a symposium on the History of the Concept of Race in Psychology, sponsored by Division 26, History of Psychology, the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Anaheim, California, August 28, 1983.

As stated earlier, this society has always been a multiracial one. The fact of a multiracial population in a time of basic racist and racialist political philosophy led social scientists to make several assumptions and propose basic social plans that at the least could be described as inimical to the well being of people of color. Playing up the popularity of Darwinian ideas, but following more closely the British Utilitarians such as Spencer (1895) and Bentham (1879), this approach argues simply that the fit should be protected and encouraged to thrive, the unfit, those who are ill, handicapped, inferior racial groups defined by deviation from Nordic ideals, and so on should be restricted in their ability to reproduce, indeed to live. Chase (1979) has shown with graphic clarity how this view would truncate opportunities for disadvantaged persons. According to Chase, Thomas Malthus' plan for population control goes like this:

We should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavoring to impede, the operations of nature in producing this mortality (of the "unfit" .. Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the Plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations. But above all, we should reprobate specific remedies for ravaging diseases; and those benevolent, but much mistaken men, who have thought they were doing a service to mankind by projecting schemes for the total extirpation of particular disorders... (Malthus, , quoted in Chase, p. 6).

Because of the basic utilitarian and racist dogma, the social scientists who professed to follow Darwin in fact failed to appreciate a basic principle of his evolutionary theory; namely, that species survival was based on adaptability, AND that adaptability at the species level was enhanced by variability and diversity. Thus, what should be an argument for inclusion of diverse peoples in the society, became, rather, a program of systematic exclusion and denial.

This paper will review the concept of race within the general context of view that suggests race was a vital, albeit pejorative and to my mind unwholesome, concept in the early foundations of social psychology both in terms of its primary role in the concept of the nature of man, and its potential significance for social engineering. It continued to be a vital concept over the years as the prevalence of a genetic interpretation of human motivation and performance gave way to an environmental one. However, in recent times, social psychology has rather lost interest in the concept; in part, because it does not "appear" to have basic theoretical significance; in part, because the problems with which it has been associated "appear" to have been largely solved; in part, because such as these problems continue.

The work of social psychologists was beginning to take on the empirical flavor of science and might indeed be considered the foundation of social science. Both the social Darwinists and IQ testers believed in social engineering, so there was implicit and often explicit advocacy for the use of social psychology for the betterment of society. Morawski (1983) has provided us with a very interesting analysis of the roles leading psychologists and social psychologists played in advancing the notion of the social utility of scientific analysis and research. Morawski's analysis of the utopian writings of men like Wallace, McDougall, Hall and Munsterberg show them to be believers in the Baconian moralism (science as an instrument of human improvement) as well as the Newtonian moralism (science as the instrument of rational pursuit of truth and understanding of human nature). However, it



predilections. This early era is overlaid with the rising tide of immigration of peoples from all over the world, particularly eastern and southern Europe and Asia. To these new groups is added the continuing presence of black Americans whose role in this society has never been without contradiction. As noted earlier, the Social Darwinists were prominent among social scientists of the day, and the concern with survival was great. While his Social Psychology text did not deal directly with the concept of race (in fact, there is not mention in the index and the only place it surfaces is in the section on morality in which the problem of the Civil War and slavery is cited as an example of the development of higher morality on the part of Americans leading them to cease the practice of slavery.

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It "appears" that the work of social psychologists has not finally proved to be effective for social engineering ends; and in part, because it "appears" to be the case that emergent scientific rigour in social psychology does not permit the race concept to play a major role in either conceptual or methodological formulations.

To review these general points, I will divide the history of social psychology into three periods corresponding roughly to 15 year cycles. Each phase has certain characteristics both in terms of the amount of attention paid to the concept of race, and to the quality or substance the concept has for our work.

### ETHNO-GENESIS ORIGINIS AND RACIAL/CULTURAL DIFFERENCES—1900-1915

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that all powerful civilizations of the past have enjoyed certain significant advantages by virtue of their genetic stock, and that their downfall has always come because that genetic stock has been diluted through intermingling with lesser peoples. McDougall spends most of the book identifying those superior attributes and show how Nordic peoples possess them in greater abundance than all others. What are these attributes? Intelligence (as measured by IQ tests of mental anthropologists which, according to McDougall, are "statistically valid"); and various aspects of character including anti-sociality; asceticism, self-assertion; will power and providence (regarding the pleasure of it). McDougall offers a eugenic 300 year plan for making the most of our scientific knowledge. If the problem is an anthropologic one; namely, that civilizations decline because the number of people of inferior genetic stock eventually exceeds those of superior stock, then the way to arrest us is to reduce the birth rate of the inferior half to equal that of the superior half at the least, and to less than the superior half if we wish to become the greatest civilization the world has ever known. So, for McDougall, it is simply a matter that tests show blacks and other races to be inferior, these inferiorities are genetic and these inferior groups are reproducing faster than the superior whites. Eugenic says, slow them down.

However, McDougall confronts race squarely in a lesser known work, Is America Safe for Democracy? (1921). As was fashionable at the time, the peoples of Europe were divided into three basic racial stocks, Nordic (Germanic, Scandinavian, British), Alpine (French, Swiss, Baltic) and

indications....

The heart of the negro question, however, is to be reached, not in the sphere of intelligence or temperament, but of sociality. The negro has not been educated socially; his drives have not been conditioned or modified by agencies of social control. The reason why the negro tends to be social is that, growing up in an environment of poverty and ignorance, where stealth and deprecation are often the accepted means of livelihood, he has had an opportunity for developing socialized traits.

We often hear the charge that the more you educate the negro, the worse he becomes. This is unfair; for the negro, though less gifted than the white man, is highly educable... The whole trouble has been that the moral side of his education was not begun soon enough. He becomes literate and learns the skilled trades; but the deeper foundations of early character training are lacking. The aim, therefore, should be not only for more education, but for earlier education. We need not so much colleges for members of the colored race as homes in which they can be properly reared. Specifically we need organized supervision of the moral influences brought to bear upon young negro children. (Allport, 1924, pp. 186-187)

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It is known that McDougall dabbled in Freud psychology, was by birth British, which suggests according to Andy Young that he might have had a constitutional predisposition toward racism. One might, therefore, tend to discount his ideas. However, let's listen to Floyd Allport, whose 1924 text is often cited with reverence for its foray into the empirical foundations of social psychology. Allport (1924) devoted two pages in the race Association manuscript are illuminating:

The vast differences in cultural adaptation between primitive and civilized races are to be ascribed as much to "social inheritance" and environmental factors as to innate differences of capacity. It is fairly well established, however, that the intelligence of the white race is of a more versatile and complex order than that of the black race. It is probably superior also to that of the red or yellow races.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This discrepancy in mental abilities is not white enough and

While McDougall attributed black inferiority to the genes, Allport attributed it to BOTH the genes and the environment. Nevertheless, the position of Allport suggests the beginning of the shift from the strictly genetic interpretation to the environmental one. From Nature to Nurture. However, the question of basic inferiority was not challenged.

I have broken the first era at 1925 in part because Allport's book represents a new and more sophisticated approach to social psychology than earlier works, and the shift from nature to nurture has begun. Samelson (1978) also suggested in his analysis of trends in social psychology away from Racism and toward prejudice that the passage of the Immigration Restriction Law of 1924 stemmed the immigration trend and reduced for the moment, the pressure on the rapid increase of "inferior" peoples.\* By 1925, the concern becomes more how shall these people live together.

#### SOCIO CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND SOCIO POLITICAL ACTION--THE NEGRO PROBLEM--1926-1955

The next phase of social psychological work on race is characterized by the concern for how people of different races view and behave toward one another. The notions of stereotyping were raised early on by Walter Lippman (1922), and given empirical attention by Katz and Braly (1935). The Social Distance work of Bogardus (1925) helped in the development of the techniques for assessing the degree of personal bias felt toward other groups on the basis of race. The concept of attitudes became during this era the most important concept in social psychology according to Allport (1935) and the premise that it was a precursor

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\* It is commonly argued that the findings of racial differences in IQ tests for Blacks, and Europeans of Nordic, Alpine and Mediterranean origin were used in support of the restriction of immigration and other eugenic plans. The psychologists of the time have been regularly accused of playing a major role in the passage of this Act. However, writing in a recent issue of the American Psychologist (Snyderman & Herrnstein, 1983) present evidence suggesting: a) that psychologists were not fully convinced that the data supported either the racial differences were as great as they appeared or that they provided support for immigration restriction; and b) that whatever the consensus among psychologists, the Congress was not persuaded by the data, but made their decision on other grounds. The Snyderman and Herrnstein argument will surely arouse those historians of the testing movement (cf., Kamin, 1976; Gould, 1981) and the definitive answer to these issues will await their debates.

to behavior AND could be imaginatively and relatively measured contributed to its lofty status. There were three major works of this era that should be duly noted: 1) Murphy and Murphy (1931) put together the first state of the art of empirical work in social psychology (with a major contribution from Newcomb in the 1937 edition); 2) the 1935 Handbook of Social Psychology was edited by Carl Murchison and included four chapters on the cultural histories of Black, White, Red and Yellow people; and 3) most significantly, the massive work of Gunnar Myrdal and colleagues, An American Dilemma (1944) framed the moral question of the so-called Negro Problem, the basic contradiction between the principle of equality found in the American Creed, and the fact of the substantial disadvantage and denial of basic human rights of black citizens of this country.

First, Experimental Social Psychology (Murphy & Murphy, 1931) was a little different from what we now think of as experimental. The Murphy's emphasized the contextual boundedness of culture AND the important role of history.

It must be recognized that nearly all the experimental work in social psychology...has value and is definitely meaningful only in relation to the particular culture in which the investigation was carried on...Whether any of our (social psychology's) laws are really fundamental and necessary laws... can only be determined by experiment itself. Even the psychologist who has acquainted himself with but a few careful ethnological records will, we believe, have felt the massive significance of the historical approach...In this very epoch, the anthropologists have been working on their own social-psychological hypotheses, attempting to define the nature of "culture" and its transmission...In order to say anything really profound about the laws governing the transmission of culture, one would have had to understand the learning process...(and) as we do penetrate more and more into the nature of learning...we shall be able to use this anthropological material to greater and greater advantage. (pp. 7-8)

What the Murphy's are saying quite simply is that generalizations about the basic nature of human capacity are limited by the cultural/racial context, and that these limitations can be relieved by following the lead of anthropologists in learning more about cultural transmission. In the end, however, empirical and experimental work will be necessary if any lawful relationships are to be found. It is from this perspective that the Murphy's open their presentation of the experimental work of social psychology as of 1930.

There are two major themes concerning race in this volume; the first concerns the Nature-N<sup>R</sup>ture question with regard to intelligence; the second addresses inter-racial attitudes. A review of these studies is not necessary here, but suffice to say that the Murphy's take a skeptical view of the empirical support for racial differences citing the need for testing a wider range of abilities with regard to blacks, and citing inconsistent results with regard to Indians and Asians. The survey of studies of interracial attitudes was more concerned with the techniques for their assessment than with the prevalent and recurring finding that whites displayed more negative feelings as they were shown to be less educated, to live in the South or to be British! The overall emphasis on socialization of children, observation of cultural practices and the contextual and historical approaches stand out as a good beginning for the empirical assessment of matters of race. We will see that this promise has not been realized in social psychological work.

Another promising approach is contained in the first Handbook of Social Psychology (Murchison, 1935). Of note is the attention paid to culture as presented by the Chapters on the Social Histories of Negroes (Herskovits);

Red Man (Wissler); White Man (Wallis) and Yellow Man (Harvey). All chapters were written by anthropologists, and all provided comprehensive histories of major racial groups in the world. The notions advanced by the Murphy's were continued by Murchison; namely, that anthropological data would be important to our understanding of the interaction and reactions of peoples of different racial/cultural origins. That social psychological generalization must take anthropological reality into account was taken for granted in the 1930's, but has since become an almost incidental concept in social psychology.\*

Perhaps the cornerstone of the concept of race in social psychology is the massive and comprehensive volume of Dr. Gunnar Myrdal's, An American Dilemma (1944). The research for this volume enlisted the efforts of many social scientists concerned with the race question including Black social scientists such as Kenneth Clark, Charles and Guy Johnson, Allison Davis, St. Clair Drake, Ralph Bunche, and Sterling Brown and E. Franklin Frazier. In addition to these men, noted white social scientists such as Arnold Rose, Eugene Horowitz, Otto Klineberg, Samuel Stouffer, Melville Herskovits and Ashley Montague among others participated in this massive effort.

Stated simply, Myrdal's massive analysis reinforced a fundamental issue stated at the outset: "There is a Negro problem in the United States...(It) has distinctly negative connotations...(It) suggests something difficult to settle and difficult to leave alone...(It) makes for moral uneasiness. The

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\*There are many notable exceptions but almost all of them fall in the category of critiques of social psychology calling at once for cultural contextual and historical concepts and decrying the experimental method as the culprit responsible for social psychology's crisis. I share some of these concerns and have made many of the same criticisms, but it is not my purpose here to dwell on this (cf. Pepitone, 1975; Gergen, 1973; Jones, 1983 for reviews of some of these positions).

very presence of the Negro in America...represents...an anomaly in the structure of American society..."The American Negro problem is a problem in the heart of the American (p. lxix, lxxi). This fact of social, economic, political psychological oppression of Black Americans contradicts in every detail the promise of the American Creed (freedom, justice and equality for all) and creates An American Moral Dilemma. The data contained in this volume document the degree of disadvantage of Blacks as well as the ignorance, apathy and basic racism of white Americans. The Negro problem is a moral issue and social science has charted for itself an action course designed to ameliorate this problem. Having gone outside the United States to obtain an impartial observer, and reinforced by the prestige and financial clout of the Carnegie Corporation, An American Dilemma set the stage for a mandate for change, and gave social scientists, particularly social psychologists, the "authority" to speak definitively on the subject.

We have now come full circle round. If McDougall's eugenics plan can be said to fairly represent the first era, then we have by now come to view the social engineering requirement as a modification of the attitudes, values and behavioral and environmental (not genetic) realities of Black and white citizens. The general view has moved from one that views each and every group as fundamentally racial and seeks a genetic solution to both the economic and political growth and possible decline of this nation, to the view that race is basically a social phenomenon and seeks a social psychological solution to what is conceived as a basic moral deficiency that threatens the strength of this nation. It is this latter view that perhaps reached its most far reaching expression in the 1954 Supreme Court case, Brown vs. Topeka. The social



science statement led to famous Footnote 11 in which the court cited social science research as the "Modern Authority" overturning Plessy vs. Ferguson's prescription for racial segregation, and substituting a compelling need for racial integration.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND EXPERIMENTAL CONTROL--DIVERGING PATHS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY--  
1955-1983

The third social psychological era is one characterized by diverging trends. The essence of my analysis of this period is contained in my recent chapter in the Review of Personality and Social Psychology (Jones, 1983). The Negro problem/Moral Dilemma approach to race set two basic parameters for our analysis of race, both of which created some problems for us. The first, is the issue of the "Negro Problem." The domination of the problem view set as priorities, understanding the negative heart of whites (i.e., prejudice an individualistic analysis of bias in social relations) and correspondingly the social pathology of blacks. These perspectives demanded a basically negative and ignoble view of both black and white Americans. The second aspect of the approach led, perhaps, to an uncritical moral chauvinism among social psychologists, such that the moral superiority of the goal took precedence over the basic objectivity of social scientific analysis. A recent paper by Gerard (1983) in the American Psychologist seems to imply as much.

The major works of social psychology during this era concerned either the characteristics of whites leading them toward negative bias such as the Harding, Kutner, Proshansky and Chein (1954) chapter in the 1954, Handbook of Social Psychology (Lindzey, 1954), or the tremendously influential Nature of Prejudice of Gordon Allport (1954). The Allport volume set the analytic tone for much of the research of this era in delineating the conditions of social integration that lead to positive attitudinal and behavioral consequences. The Contact Hypothesis, elucidated by Allport has been the driving force behind