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METHODS OF RACIAL ANALYSIS¹

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SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TERM "RACE"

THE term "race" as applied to man is commonly employed with no accurate and well-defined meaning. One often sees references to the "white race," the "Jewish race," the "Latin race," the "Irish race." Such indiscriminate use of the word "race" implies a confusion of criteria. To speak of the "white" race is to assume that race is a matter of skin pigmentation; to refer to the "Jewish race" is to differentiate race on a basis of religion; a "Latin race" implies a linguistic criterion, and finally any reference to an "Irish race" must mean a race characterized either by geographical position or, failing that, by temperament. Such confusions of usage are usually confined to the non-anthropological writing public. All anthropologists agree that the criteria of race are physical characters. The tests of racial distinction are the morphological and metrical variations of such bodily characters as hair, skin, nose, eyes, stature—differences in shape and proportions of the head, the trunk and the limbs.

Although there exists among anthropologists this general agreement as to the physical basis of race, there is no such unanimity of opinion with respect to the further implications of a classification of mankind on the score of bodily attributes.

One school of anthropologists is disposed to deny that there are any cultural or psychological correlates of race. For these the somatological variations whereby race is determined are of little significance, except as convenient characters for classificatory purposes. They regard them principally and ultimately as effects of environment, though perhaps immediately heritable. Pigmentation may be dismissed by such as a result of climate, stature as a consequence of nutrition, head-form as a manifestation of individual variation or a by-product of separately inherited size-factors. Logically, such anthropologists refuse to recognize that language, material culture, mental capacity or social organization stand in any biological, mathematical or rational relationship to races as determined by these plastic and transitory physical characters. For them race is a congeries of environmentally determined bodily features, significant principally because it effects differences in outward appearance which arouse the prejudice of the ignorant.

¹Address of the vice-president and chairman for Section H, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Kansas City, Missouri, December, 1925.

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