

BRITISH EUGENICS AND ‘RACE CROSSING’: A STUDY OF AN INTERWAR INVESTIGATION

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In 1937 a polemic entitled *Half-Caste* was published, heralding ‘the richness of hybrid potentiality’. Written by a self-defined Eurasian called Cedric Dover¹ its opening pages indicated the extent of prejudice facing those of mixed race:

The ‘half-caste’ appears in a prodigal literature. It presents him ... mostly as an undersized, scheming and entirely degenerate bastard. His father is a blackguard, his mother a whore ... But more than all this, he is a potential menace to Western Civilisation, to everything that is White and Sacred ... ²

This ‘prodigal literature’ included novels and ‘a vast mass of pseudo-science’ developed by ‘eugenicists, anthropologists, sociologists and politicians’.³ In the book’s Preface, written by British scientist Lancelot Hogben, it was eugenics that was singled out for condemnation: ‘An influential current of superstition (called National Socialism in Hitler’s Germany and Eugenics in England) claims the authority of science for sentiments which are the negation of civilised society’.⁴ Yet despite the negative tone of the Preface, and the reference to ‘pseudo-science’, Dover was clearly not uninfluenced by eugenics. He cited a number of British eugenicists in his ‘Acknowledgements’,⁵ and he dedicated his book to Ursula Lubbock (Mrs Grant Duff) an active member of Britain’s Eugenics Society. He also admitted: ‘I subscribe without qualification to the prevention of undeniably dysgenic matings ... but not to the conceit that colour and economic success are indices of desirability’.⁶ His invocation of a different index of ‘desirability’ other than economic success was reminiscent of other socialists who espoused eugenics on their own terms. Eugenics was sufficiently protean to be harnessed to different ideological beliefs, ranging from the ultra conservative to the social-reformist and socialist.⁷ What was new and unique about Dover’s particular take on eugenics was the centrality of the ‘half-caste’, who ‘must be regarded ... as a portent of a new humanity - a portent to be encouraged by the stimulation of eugenical mixture ...’⁸

In contrast to his own positive eugenical reading, Dover recognised that most other exponents of eugenics in interwar Britain took a very different view of the ‘half-caste’, namely, as ‘potential menace to Western Civilisation’. Why did these eugenicists (and indeed many of the British establishment) hold such a view? What did they think were the implications of the presence of the ‘half-caste’? What or who was unsettled by the presence of mixed race

1. Cedric Dover, *Half-Caste*, London, Martin Secker and Warburg, Ltd, 1937, p290. Dover had grown up in Calcutta, had won a scholarship to Edinburgh University, had worked on the Zoological Survey of India, and then subsequently had come back to England as a natural historian. Many thanks to Patrick Wright for this biographical information.

2. Dover, op. cit., p13.

3. *Ibid.*, p16.

4. Lancelot Hogben, Preface to *Ibid.*, p8.

5. These included Reginald Ruggles Gates, Herbert Fleure, and J.C. Trevor.

6. Dover, op. cit., p267.

7. Michael Freedon, ‘Eugenics and Progressive Thought: a Study in Ideological Affinity’, *The Historical Journal*, 22, 3 (1979): 645-671.

8. Dover, op. cit., p56.

people? One way of exploring these concerns is through an analysis of a project set up by the British Eugenics Society to investigate what they called 'race crossing'. An examination of this project not only throws light on the prevailing discourses on race differences and their measurement, whiteness, and Englishness, but it also enables us to test historian Barbara Bush's claim that eugenics was 'a strong element of inter-war racism',⁹ and to get a clearer sense of the role played by British eugenics in the discussion and regulation of race.

EUGENICS AND RACIAL INTERBREEDING

At the Eugenics Society's annual general meeting in 1919, the Society's President, Major Leonard Darwin (youngest son of Charles Darwin), announced that 'what is urgently needed is a thorough scientific study of the mental and physical characteristics of mixed races'.¹⁰ Mrs Sybil Gotto, the Society's general secretary at the time, concurred, adding that 'although I am quite ready to look upon the Coloured races as our brothers, I do not want to look upon them as our brothers-in-law'.¹¹ Four years later, Major Darwin conveyed his concern to the national leaders attending the Imperial Conference (about to be held in London), warning them that 'interbreeding between widely divergent races may result in the production of types inferior to both parent stocks'.¹² From the eighteenth century into the twentieth, these 'divergent races', known as 'primary races', were thought to be between three and five in number, and were differently positioned on an evolutionary hierarchy.¹³ They were frequently colour coded, as for example in eugenicist and geologist J.W. Gregory's 1925 book *The Menace of Colour* which listed four primary races: 1) white or European (other writers usually classified this group as Caucasian), 2) yellow or Mongolian, 3) brown or non-Mongolian Asiatic, 4) black or Negro.¹⁴ Charles Darwin's claim that these primary races were fixed and unchanged for thousands of years was widely accepted amongst scientists and anthropologists, with each race identifiable by certain permanent somatic racial markers.

Major Darwin's claim that inter-racial breeding (miscegenation) could result in inferior stock drew on the nineteenth century link between racial interbreeding and degeneracy.¹⁵ Despite the 1900 rediscovery of Mendel's work on heredity, and the subsequent rise of genetics, this link initially remained unchallenged.¹⁶ Indeed, up until the 1940s, while many British eugenicists, anthropologists, biologists and geneticists (groups not necessarily mutually exclusive) believed that breeding between races defined as 'close' in evolutionary terms might potentially be a good thing, breeding between races defined as 'distant', 'distinct' and 'widely divergent' was generally seen as disastrous, leading to degeneracy and/or 'disharmony'. (In the 1920s, there was more talk of 'disharmony', a term increasingly used by eugenicists, than 'degeneracy', but it amounted to the same thing.) Typical was a 1920 article on 'Heredity and Eugenics' in the *Eugenics Review* (the journal of the British

9. Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, London, Routledge, 1999, p281.

10. *Eugenics Review*, XI, 3 (1919): p126.

11. *Ibid.* p135.

12. Quoted in *Eugenics Review*, January 1924, p647.

13. See Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1993, chapter 4; Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race*, New York, New York University Press, 1996.

14. J.W. Gregory, *The Menace of Colour*, London, Seeley Service & Co Ltd, p19. 'Red' (Native American) was usually seen as a sub-section of 'Mongolian', while some classifiers added 'Australoid' to the primary race list.

15. See Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

16. Nancy Stepan, 'Biological Degeneration: Race and Proper Places', in J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman (eds), *Degeneration: the Dark Side of Progress*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985, p111.

17. Reginald Ruggles Gates, 'Heredity and Eugenics', part 11, *Eugenics Review* April 1920 p10, and Ruggles Gates, *Heredity and Eugenics*, p236. In his use of the term 'disharmony', Ruggles Gates was drawing explicitly on the work of prominent American eugenicist and Mendelian geneticist Charles Davenport.

18. The ports where riots occurred were London, Liverpool, Cardiff, Newport, Barry, Salford, Hull, South Shields and Glasgow. See Jacqueline Jenkinson, 'The 1919 Riots', in Panikos Panayi (ed) *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1996, pp92-111.

19. See Laura Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994; Lucy Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', in *Gender & History* 17, 1 (2005): pp29-61.

20. *Eugenics Review* 6, 3 (October 1914): 197-98. And see Richard Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina Press, 1990, chapter 7.

Eugenics Society). Written by Reginald Ruggles Gates, geneticist, professor of botany, and first husband of Marie Stopes, it discussed how 'miscegenation commonly results in disharmony of physical, mental and temperamental qualities, often leading to disharmony with the environment, and consequent unhappiness. A hybridised people will tend to be restless, dissatisfied and ineffectual'.¹⁷

While one of the reasons for Major Darwin's concern with miscegenation related to the discourse of degeneracy, another had a prosaically empirical basis, namely miscegenation's increased visibility in Britain in the interwar years, and the civil unrest it appeared to provoke. During the First World War, the urgent demands for seamen had led to the arrival in Britain of sailors from the Indian sub-continent, West and East Africa, the West Indies and China; many of these sailors entered into relationships with local white women. At the end of the war, the presence of these men of colour rapidly became controversial, resulting in 1919 in a series of race riots in nine of Britain's main ports,¹⁸ with white men's fury at inter-racial relationships reported as a key instigator. Official concern with the unrest resulted in the encouragement of voluntary repatriation.¹⁹ While colonials had been encouraged to Britain as military and economic subjects, they were not welcome as civil or familial ones. The presence of such men was seen by eugenicists as another aspect of the dysgenic consequences of the war, in which a disproportionately large number of the officer class had been killed or maimed: young 'fit' white men of middle or upper class background. As the *Eugenics Review* had expressed it early on in the war: 'the cream of the race will be taken and the skimmed milk will be left'.²⁰ The colonial men of colour were no eugenical replacement for this lost 'cream'.

Concern with miscegenation also related to the question of patriotism. Once the First World War ended in 1918, the national unity constructed during the war against the 'common enemy' began to disintegrate. Patriotism and a sense of Britishness or Englishness (the two were often used interchangeably, such was the hegemony of England) needed to be constructed yet again. After the First World War (as was to occur again post Second World War on a larger scale)²¹ the representation of black migrants to Britain as 'un-British' was part of a shoring up of national identity, in which the equation of Britishness and whiteness was consolidated, contributing to a sense of social and national cohesion. Racial 'others' facilitated a sense of who the British were: the British were white, they were *not* black or Chinese or racially 'other', and they (ideally) did not exhibit the various attributes projected onto racial 'others', such as sexual predatoriness, cunning, laziness. But the existence of 'half-castes' created an ontological problem: could mixed race offspring be seen as British? They represented a challenge to national and racial boundaries and to the neat polarity between the white British and the non-white racial 'other'. The Eugenics Society's concern to classify mixed race progeny appears to be on a par with what was occurring at the same time in certain European colonies, where, according to historian Ann Stoler, much

attention was paid to identifying who was white, who was 'native', and how to classify the progeny of inter-racial relationships.²² To the 'colonial branch' of eugenics, miscegenation was a threat to white rule and racial purity, and needed to be discouraged.²³

THE 'RACE CROSSING' PROJECT

In 1924 the Secretary of the Eugenics Society,²⁴ Mrs Cora Hodson, wrote to Herbert Fleure, Professor of Geography and Anthropology at University College, Aberystwyth, to ask whether he or his assistant, Miss Rachel Fleming, might travel up to Liverpool to help 'investigate families of mated Chinese and English (or Irish)'.²⁵ This was to be a study of what Hodson and others referred to as 'race crossing'. Presumably the Society was responding to Major Darwin's call for scientific study of mixed races, including the testing of his claim that racial interbreeding led to inferior stock.

Why were Fleure and Fleming selected for the 'race crossing' project? At first glance, they appeared an unlikely choice. For a start, they were out of kilter with the major eugenicist position on race and miscegenation. While Fleure insisted that everyone was mixed: 'we are all mosaics of inheritances',²⁶ Fleming was scathing about 'the 'commonly quoted' 'facile statement' that 'the coloured half-caste inherits the worst of both sides'.²⁷ In fact Fleure and Fleming unfashionably believed that mixed race offspring were not necessarily inferior to *either* parent. Yet they did share some common ground with the eugenists, indeed Fleure was a eugenicist: he was not simply a member of the Eugenics Society, but sat on its Council, his socialism sometimes at odds with the conservative politics of many on the Council.²⁸ I am unclear whether Fleming was also a Society member, but like most eugenists, when she discussed miscegenation she deployed the concept 'disharmonies'. The main reason for Hodson approaching Fleure and Fleming lay with their area of expertise. Over the period 1905 to 1916 Fleure had undertaken a huge anthropometric survey of rural Wales, measuring head shape and facial characteristics of approximately 2,500 people; he claimed that this demonstrated the migratory connection between prehistoric Wales and other parts of Europe.²⁹ Helped by his research assistant Fleming, Fleure had recently published a 'British Racial History' entitled *The Races of England and Wales*³⁰ - a reading of ancient skulls in terms of their Nordic and/or Mediterranean heritage, and the variations around the country. And Fleming herself was currently engaged in a longitudinal study measuring the heads of a large number of British children.³¹

MENTAL TESTING

If Fleure and Fleming thought they were to devise and undertake the survey on their own, they were much mistaken. From the start, Hodson had every intention of being centrally involved. She was not only Secretary of the

21. See Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963", *Journal of British Studies*, 36, April 1997: 207-238.

22. Ann Stoler, 'Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power', in Michaela di Leonardo (ed), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, p53.

23. Ibid.

24. Until 1926 the Society was known as the Eugenics Education Society; it then changed its name to the Eugenics Society. For simplicity I am referring to it throughout the 1920s and 1930s as the 'Eugenics Society'.

25. Mrs Hodson to Prof Fleure, 8 September 1924, unpublished letters, D179, Box 33, Eugenics Society Archive, Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine.

26. H.J. Fleure, 'Some Aspects of Race Study', *Eugenics Review* July 1922: 94.

27. R.M. Fleming, 'Human Hybrids: Racial Crosses in Various Parts of the World', *Eugenics Review*, January 1930: 257.

28. See Prof Fleure to Leonard Darwin, 15 April 1921, unpublished letters, A12-20, Box 1, Eugenics Society Archive, op. cit.

29. Pyrs Gruffud, 'Herbert John Fleure', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.; H.J. Fleure, *Wales and her People*, Wrexham, Hughes & Son, 1926.

30. H.J. Fleure, *The Races of England and Wales*, Benn Bros, London, 1923.

31. R.M. Fleming, 'Sex and Growth Features', *Man*, June 1922.

32. Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p114.

33. Nancy Ordovery, *American Eugenics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p11.

34. See Cyril Burt, 'The Inheritance of Mental Characters', *Eugenics Review*, 1912: 168-200, Cyril Burt, 'The Measurement of Intelligence by Binet Tests', *Eugenics Review*, 1914: 36-50, 140-152. And see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, London, Penguin Books, 1981, chapter 6.

35. Hodson to Fleming 8 May 1925, unpublished letters, D179, Box33, Eugenics Society Archive, op. cit..

36. Fleure to Hodson 12 May 1925, *ibid.*.

Eugenics Society through the 1920s, but also editor of its quarterly journal the *Eugenics Review*, as well as public speaker for the Society on a regular basis. A middle-aged widow with no children, she appears to have poured her energy into espousing the cause of eugenics. She was keen to extend the survey beyond the confines of anthropometric measurements, and in particular she wanted the two anthropologists to introduce 'mental testing'. Most eugenicists believed that 'ability', or 'talent' or 'intelligence' (the terms often used interchangeably) were discrete, measurable and inherited entities, that varied between individuals, groups and races.³² While in the USA intelligence tests were being applied to immigrants, with concomitant racist implications,³³ in Britain they were being used on British schoolchildren. For committed eugenicist Cyril Burt, official psychologist at the London County Council, had initiated tests in London schools.³⁴ Mental testing was one of the new big ideas for eugenics and it was thus not surprising that Hodson wanted it extended to the 'race crossing' survey.

Hodson wrote to Fleming with the suggestion that she 'take some anthropologist to do some mental tests of some of your children'.³⁵ Although the letter had been sent to Fleming, it was Fleure who replied: 'The Mental Tests people have not yet got hold of adequate ways of testing people who are not fully familiar with the language in which the tests are given and this is responsible for the ridiculous and rather disgraceful statements that are so widely exported from the USA'.³⁶ (Unfortunately I have no details of what these statements were.) Although Hodson responded in a grovelling tone - 'Of course I will not mention mental tests if you do not want them done'³⁷ - her determination to get mental tests applied to racial hybrids did not go away. Two years after her exchange with Fleure on the subject she wrote separate but identical letters to a Dr Linn, Professor of Physiology in Peking, and a Professor Emil, another physiologist, in Hong Kong, opening with the statement: 'Some people I know in England are beginning to make small investigations on hybrids of yellow-white parents'. (This seems an odd way to introduce herself, concealing as it does her connection to the 'people I know'.) Hodson complained that the work of the latter 'seems to be wholly anthropometric measurements and data regarding external features'; she was 'eager to see a rather more complete type of investigation', and suggested that 'psychological measurements and a few physiological tests indicative of metabolic type ... would be achieving something really definite and useful in the matter of race mixture'. She wanted to know whether Linn and Emil would be interested in 'getting such work done in China' in cases of a 'white father and yellow mother'.³⁸ She was thus trying to set up a study independent of Fleming and Fleure, with the mental testing of mixed race people at its heart.

The disagreement over methodology between the main parties involved in the project was indicative of tensions between different technologies of the racial body: the older anthropometric approach versus the newer discourse of mental testing. This could be expressed as a shift from the measuring and

hierarchizing of external somatic attributes to the measuring of the internal mind. Although anthropometry made claims to read inner attributes - mental and moral capacity - through the interpretation of head measurements, intelligence tests supposedly gave a precise numerical hierarchy, a 'mental footrule',³⁹ by which to classify its subjects, (extrapolated out to groups of subjects such as different 'races').

'WHOLLY ANTHROPOMETRIC MEASUREMENTS'

The alliance of quantification and evolution, with its obsessive measuring and ranking of racially 'other' bodies, had been central to the development of 'scientific' racism from the eighteenth century.⁴⁰ With this development, the central meaning of race had narrowed down to a differentiation of peoples based on physical difference and away from the looser usage linked to nation, language, genealogy or culture. For anthropology, anthropometry was a way of bringing scientific credibility and professionalism to what had been seen hitherto as an amateur pursuit.⁴¹ Anthropometry had grown increasingly popular in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, particularly the measuring of head shape and size, notably the 'cephalic index' (the ratio of length to breadth of the skull). Anthropometry was, in essence, a *comparative* methodology, which in the nineteenth century had involved the comparison of white people to black people, and men to women. It had contributed to various political agenda, including a justification for the ruling of non-whites in the colonies, and a justification for women's lack of political rights.⁴² It has been estimated that by 1899, the racial identity of one and half million adults and ten million children had been measured in Europe and the US.⁴³

For many eugenists, including eugenics' founder Francis Galton and mathematician Karl Pearson, anthropometry was a key methodology in their attempt to measure human heredity. Galton had set up an anthropometrical laboratory in 1884, and by the following year the laboratory had measured 9,000 people in relation to height, weight, hearing, breathing power, sight, strength etc.⁴⁴ Pearson, with one of his female research assistants, undertook an extensive anthropometric survey in the 1920s of Russian and Polish Jewish children domiciled in Britain. (The study concluded that these alien children were slightly inferior in numerous ways to their native equivalents, and in future should only be admitted to the country if demonstrably superior, mentally and physically.)⁴⁵ However, by the 1920s, Pearson's work aside, anthropometry was in decline, largely because physical anthropology was being eclipsed by social anthropology and relegated to a subsection of archaeology.⁴⁶ Hodson's dissatisfaction with the survey relying on 'wholly anthropometric measurements' was a sign of the times.

Despite this decline in anthropometry's standing, Fleure and Fleming were ardent supporters. Their previous research had involved the measuring of heads, and they do not seem to have seen any reason for changing methodology. They started the 'race crossing' project with the study of

37. Hodson to Fleure 13 May 1925, *ibid.*.

38. Hodson to Dr Linn and to Prof Emil 4 July 1927, *op. cit.* Whether there was a positive response to her request is unknown, for there is nothing from either man in the Eugenics Society file on 'race crossing', which comes to a halt in October 1927, three months after the sending of this letter.

39. C. Burt, 1921, quoted in Rose, *op. cit.*, p56.

40. Gould, *op. cit.*, p74; Schiebinger, *op. cit.*.

41. Paul Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition 1990, p101-2.

42. See Stepan, *op. cit.*; Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: the Victorian Construction of Womanhood*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1989.

43. Malik, *op. cit.*, p119.

44. Donald MacKenzie, *Statistics in Britain, 1865-1930*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1981, p64.

45. Karl Pearson and Margaret Moul, 'The Problem of Alien Immigration into Great Britain, Illustrated by an Examination of

Russian and Polish Jewish Children', *Annals of Eugenics*, 1 (1925-26), 5-127; 11 (1927), 111-244; 111 (1928), 1-70, 201-264.

46. See James Urry, *Before Social Anthropology: Essays on the History of British Anthropology*, London, Routledge, 1992.

47. Franz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 1952, London, Paladin, 1968, p10.

48. See Sara Ahmed, "'It's a Sun-tan, isn't it?': Autobiography as an Identificatory Practice", in Heidi Safia Mirza (ed) *Black British Feminism*, London, Routledge, 1997, pp153-167.

49. R.M. Fleming, 'Anthropological Studies of Children', *Eugenics Review*, January 1927: 299.

Chinese-white mixed race children in Liverpool, extended to mixed race children with black fathers, and expanded geographically to Cardiff and East London. The two anthropologists took typical anthropometric measurements involving the proportions of the skull and the shape of the head (craniometry), the shape of the nose, ear and eye, and the fold of the upper eyelid. They also made observations as to skin colour, eye colour, colour and texture of hair (whether curly, wiry, straight etc.). They operated with certain assumptions as to specific racial markers, such as the 'Negroid nose' or the 'Mongolian eye'. In the first write-up of the research in an article by Fleming in the *Eugenics Review* in 1927 ('an interim report'), the measurements and observations were said to show that for both groups studied - those children with Chinese fathers, those with black - characteristics from the father's side were more markedly inherited than those from the mother's. In relation to those with black fathers for example (and numbers were small at this stage, though not specified - more research being undertaken in the 1930s) 92 per cent 'showed some degree of Negro colouring'. Forty-three per cent of the children 'immediately gave the impression of being distinctly negroid', 5 per cent 'might have passed as English children', while 'the remainder were half-caste in appearance'. I want to examine each of these readings one by one, showing how they reveal the implicit, unspoken assumptions drawn upon in this eugenical report - assumptions that operated widely in relation to discourses of whiteness, racial differentiation, and Englishness.

Fleming's claim that 92 per cent of the children 'showed some degree of Negro colouring' is obviously a reading of the skin (what Franz Fanon referred to as 'epidermalization')⁴⁷ but skin colour is not self-evidently a racial marker. The reading is contingent and depends on the context; here the context was one in which there was knowledge of parenthood and hence suppositions made about inheritance. In other contexts however, a brown skin could be a marker of the tanning of 'white' skin, or the application of make-up, especially where other factors such as class, location or dress might militate against a reading of the body as non-white.⁴⁸ Fleming's assertion that 43 per cent of the children 'immediately gave the impression of being distinctly negroid' conveys the sense of certainty as to clear-cut bodily racial definers. She listed some of these: 'the peculiarly velvety deep bluish brown Negro eye', 'wide averted lips', 'the broad flat Negro nose'. She did not make it explicit, but presumably it is the *combination* of these features in any one individual, along with 'some degree of Negro colouring', that gave the racial reading. That she was able to claim that the majority (52 per cent) 'were half-caste in appearance' suggests that these children had certain *select* features that were read as 'negro'. For example, she noted that 70 per cent of the children 'had the broad flat negro nose', and 70 per cent (unclear if the same 70 per cent) 'showed negroid features in the slimmness of bone'.⁴⁹ Again it is the confidence of the claim that is interesting to a reader today: the assumption (presumably common at the time) that her ocular reading is scientific fact, the 'truth' of the body, as opposed to an historically specific, and ideologically loaded,

'way of seeing'. Paul Gilroy, following others, insists that: 'There is no raw, untrained perception dwelling in the body. The human sensorium has had to be educated to the appreciation of racial differences'.⁵⁰

Fleming's claim that 5 per cent of the children 'might have passed as English' demonstrates cogently the implicit assumption that 'Englishness', like 'negritude', was a recognisable ethnicity. By 'English' did she mean 'white'? If 92 per cent 'showed some degree of Negro colouring' and 5 per cent 'might have passed as English', then there were a remaining 3 per cent who though presumably 'white' in skin tone (or rather, *not* showing 'some degree of Negro colouring') could not pass as English, and must therefore have had other racial markers. In fact this 3 per cent were unlikely to have been read as white either, for whiteness was not (and still is not) simply a matter of flesh tone; there is also the shape of the nose, eyes, lips, type of hair.⁵¹ Fleming indeed referred to 'English eyes', 'hair English in type and colour', 'lips like the average English child'⁵² but with no clarification as to what these entailed; they are presented as self-evident.

Fleming's use of the term 'passing' is also worthy of comment. Not only does it have the connotation of deceit and disguise, but it also implies that the offspring of mixed heritage could never be truly English, despite their birth in England and their English mothers. To cross racial boundaries ('race crossing') had two meanings: crossing the 'colour line' in terms of sexual relationships, and crossing races in the sense of being of mixed race. The white women who crossed the colour line and gave birth to mixed race children were not aliens as such, but liminally placed by virtue of their 'unBritish', 'unpatriotic' behaviour. Where the mothers were Irish, as some were (as Hodson noted) the mixed race children were even less likely to have been permitted the mantle of Englishness, for the Irish were not only 'not English', but frequently seen as 'not white' either.⁵³ There was (and is) a hierarchy of whiteness, in which some people were/are white only some of the time, such as Irish, Latinos, and Jews.⁵⁴ Fleming's assumption that mixed race children were not, and implicitly could not, be English, sounds not dissimilar from the 'one drop of black blood' rule that was operating at this time in US Deep South. This 'rule' proclaimed that even a single black person in ones ancestry deemed one black. The system was a means of policing entry to the privileged category 'white'.⁵⁵ In the context of Britain in the interwar, the Eugenics Society was concerned with classifying and codifying those of mixed race in an attempt to reduce the threat to racial and national boundaries represented by their presence.

Just as nineteenth century anthropometry had been comparative, so too in effect was Fleming's study - not between white and non-whites this time, but between different categories of mixed race, resulting in a hierarchy of 'race crossings'. Although Fleure and Fleming had refused to undertake mental measurements, Fleming nevertheless brought the question of mental ability into her 1927 article through claiming that some of the half Chinese children were exceptionally talented. She appears to have made such comments not

50. Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, London, Penguin Books, 2000, p42.

51. See Richard Dyer, *White*, London, Routledge, 1997, p42.

52. R.M. Fleming, 'Anthropological Studies of Children', *Eugenics Review*, January 1927: 299.

53. See Liz Curtis, *Nothing but the Same Old Story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism*, London, Information on Ireland, 1984.

54. Dyer, *op. cit.*, p51, Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, London, Routledge, 1991.

55. See Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire*, London, Routledge, 1995, chapter 6; Dyer, *ibid.*, p25.

on the basis of anthropometric measurements, or mental testing, but with reference to social/sociological observation. Comparing the two categories of mixed race, Fleming argued that the children with white mothers and black fathers were more disadvantaged than those termed the 'yellow/white hybrids', although she did not explain how she was measuring 'disadvantage'. (Did 'disadvantage', for Fleming, cover social, economic, even physiological factors?) She reported that social workers' belief that 'the Chinese were good husbands, and especially good fathers', had been borne out from her own visits.⁵⁶ She ended her article by drawing attention to what she called 'the great difficulty of the half-caste girl', namely 'lack of employment during adolescence, which throws her into the dangers of the streets, and, as in the case of the English mentally deficient girl, increases the number of illegitimate children with poor heredity and bad environment'.⁵⁷ Although Fleming referred here generally to the 'half-caste girl', from earlier statements it is clear that it was the girl with a black father that she was referring to.

56. Fleming, 'Anthropological Studies of Children', *op. cit.*, p298.

57. *Ibid.*, p301.

THE HANDICAP OF HYBRIDITY

Before publication of her 1927 article, Fleming gave her paper as a public talk. The Liverpool University Settlement's response to Fleming's talk, or rather to the social commentary given at the end of the talk, was to set up almost immediately the 'Liverpool Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children'. Its report of 1930 by social worker Muriel Fletcher echoed Fleming in finding 'no serious problem ... presented by the Anglo-Chinese community',⁵⁸ in fact the Anglo-Chinese child was thought mentally equal, if not superior, to the white. However, once the Fletcher report turned to families with black fathers (blacks seen as a homogeneous category), the tone changed. Like Fleming, Fletcher saw the greatest problem lying with the mixed race *girls*:

58. Introduction by Percy Roxby to Muriel Fletcher, *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and other Ports*, Liverpool Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children, 1930, p1.

All the circumstances of their lives tend to give undue prominence to sex; owing to the nature of the houses in which they live, their moral standards are extraordinary low ... From her mother the half-caste girl is liable to inherit a certain slackness, and from her father, a happy-go-lucky attitude towards life. She has not therefore much incentive to work.⁵⁹

59. Fletcher, *ibid.*, pp32-4.

Fletcher approvingly mentioned that 'those mothers of a better type regretted the fact that they had brought these children into the world handicapped by their colour'.⁶⁰ In Cardiff, the Juvenile Employment Bureau reported to Fletcher that 'half-caste' children 'are faced with such overwhelming handicaps ... that no opportunity [should] be lost of supporting any measure which aims at reducing the number of unions between coloured men and white women'.⁶¹ In an article published the same year as the Fletcher report, Fleming's account of her recent visit to Cape Town deployed a language similar to Fletcher and the Cardiff Juvenile Employment Bureau: 'it seems

60. *Ibid.*, p32.

61. *Ibid.*, p55.

a bad policy of citizenship to penalise half-castes for a fault of birth for which they are in no way responsible'.⁶² When in 1938 the official history of the Liverpool University Settlement declared that 'mixed parentage' was 'a handicap comparable to physical deformity', they were reiterating what had become a commonsense understanding.⁶³

Although all those of mixed race were defined as handicapped, some were thought more handicapped than others. This hierarchy of handicap was predicated on relative distance from the (constructed and idealised) norm of English/Nordic physical appearance. In its coverage of Fletcher's report, *The Times* made this explicit: 'since the colouring and features [of the Anglo-Chinese children] are far less distinctive than those of the Anglo-Negroids they are not such a handicap'.⁶⁴ That 'the colouring and features are far less distinctive' implies their lesser obtrusiveness on the (English) eye: their *difference* is less apparent, and thereby less threatening. Yet, if in interwar Britain those of Chinese descent had a relative advantage over those of 'Negro' descent, in another context, where the comparison was not with another racial 'other', but with non-othered Caucasians, the stereotyped physical features of the Chinese - 'flat nose', 'small, slanty eyes' - worked against them. They were characterised as the 'yellow peril', sly and inscrutable, luring young white women into opium and gambling.⁶⁵ And their inter-racial relationships were disparaged. For instance, eugenicist E.J. Lidbetter asserted: 'I think no one who is conversant with East London at the present time can doubt the real danger in which we stand of vitiating the British stock thorough marriage alliances with Asiatics who make a very undesirable blend with our own people'.⁶⁶

It would be wrong to assume that there were no alternative public voices speaking out on the issue of mixed race children, including those of a few eugenicists. While the Liverpool University Settlement might have been 'in no doubt that the presence of increasing numbers of half-caste children inheriting disharmonious mental and physical traits, depresses very considerably the life of the Dockland population of Liverpool',⁶⁷ a reporter for the League of Coloured Peoples' journal *The Keys* was adamant that 'the general testimony of teachers and people who have had contact with coloured children is that they are as bright and intelligent as any'.⁶⁸ To the League, the answer to the poor conditions and racial discrimination facing mixed race children, was education of 'the British people in the matter of race'.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, few in positions of national power and influence heard or listened to this good advice.

ANTHROPOMETRY'S SWAN-SONG

After her 1927 article, as far as I can establish, Fleming published nothing more on the 'race crossing' project for the next twelve years. Then in 1939 Fleming's final report of her survey appeared in the *Annals of Eugenics*. It is a strange document: a huge quantity of measurements, but no conclusion and virtually no commentary; 119 children with Chinese fathers and white mothers

62. Rachel M Fleming, 'Human Hybrids: Racial Crosses in Various Parts of the World', *Eugenics Review*, 21, 4 (1930): 260.

63. Constance King and Harold King, *Two Nations: the Life and Work of the Liverpool University Settlement*, London, University Press of Liverpool, 1938, p132.

64. *The Times* 16/06/1930, p7.

65. See numerous articles in the popular press through the 1920s. On representation of London's Chinatown, see Anne Witchard, 'Aspects of Literary Limehouse: Thomas Burke and the "Glamorous Shame of Chinatown"', *Literary London Review*, 2, 2 (2005).

66. E.J. Lidbetter, *Eugenics Review*, XI, 3 (1919): 132.

67. King and King, *op. cit.*, p129.

68. Nancie Hare, 'The Prospects for Coloured Children in England', *Keys*, V, 1 (July-Sept 1937): 25.

69. P. Cecil Lewis, 'Cardiff Report', *Keys*, 3, 2 (Oct-Dec 1935): 61.

70. R.M. Fleming, 'Physical Heredity in Human Hybrids', *Annals of Eugenics*, IX (1939): 60.

71. *Ibid.*, p64, p67.

72. *Ibid.*, p70.

73. These included Filipinos, Malay, Somalis, Egyptians and Arabs.

74. Fleming, 'Physical Heredity in Human Hybrids', *op. cit.*, p71.

75. R.M. Fleming, 'Human Hybrids', *Eugenics Review*, January 1930: 259.

76. Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p126.

77. See Donald Mackenzie, 'Sociobiologists in Competition: the Biometrician-Mendelian Debate', in Charles Webster (ed), *Biology, Medicine and Society, 1840-1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

78. Elazar Barkin, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp279-80.

79. 'Notes of the Quarter', *Eugenics Review*, January 1934: 77, reprinted in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds), *Sexology Uncensored: the Documents of Sexual Science*, Oxford, Polity Press, p184.

had been measured, only four of which 'might have passed as completely English';⁷⁰ 110 cases of Negro/white crosses had also been measured, of which 10 per cent displayed 'marked disharmony of the jaws'.⁷¹ Forty-nine cases of what were termed 'back-crosses' had been measured too: 'Anglo-Negroid' mothers and Negro fathers. Of these, none 'could have passed as English'.⁷² Various other racial combinations were also examined.⁷³ When a case of incest was mentioned ('another back-cross ... of an Anglo-negro girl to her own father, a West Indian negro'⁷⁴) Fleming made no comment. The twenty-six page article ends abruptly. As to why she gave no conclusion or social commentary, we can only speculate.

Fleming's 1939 report, published just before the outbreak of the Second World War, was part of the swan-song of anthropometry and thus the ending of one long episode in the history of racial science. It is probably wishful thinking to assume that in the inconclusiveness of this report lay a realisation of the barrenness of bodily measurements. The inconclusiveness may have had something to do with Fleming subscribing to Mendelianism. In a review essay written in the period between her two reports, she suggested that her observation that characteristics from the father's side were more markedly inherited than those from the mother's supported a Mendelian theory of human heredity.⁷⁵ Mendelians were not interested in observational data but in unseen (to the naked eye) genetic structures.⁷⁶ It is interesting to speculate whether Fleming's increased attraction to Mendelianism led her to question the value of her anthropological findings. Her report was published just three years after the death of Karl Pearson, who continued strongly to oppose Mendel in favour of his own version of 'measured' biology, biometrics.⁷⁷

There were of course other possible reasons for Fleming's lack of commentary and conclusion: the growth of one anthropology (social) at the expense of another (physical), the rise of mental as opposed to bodily measuring, and the scientific community's (belated) recognition of the full implications of Nazism.⁷⁸ Surprisingly, from the start the Eugenics Society was strongly opposed to Hitler's sterilisation of Jews, declaring Jews superior to the majority of Germans, although it initially welcomed sterilisation of the physically and mentally dysgenic.⁷⁹ But its opposition to anti-Semitism did not prevent the journal from reflecting: 'There may be something to be said for not encouraging such risky racial experiments as colour-hybrids'.⁸⁰ As journalist Kenan Malik points out, whatever the formal opposition to fascism by the scientific community (in which we can include the Eugenics Society) and the discrediting of biological arguments for racial superiority, the basic assumptions of racial/racist thinking remained, including the dividing of humankind into immutable discrete groups.⁸¹

The 'race crossing' project occurred at the very moment when the older technique of comparative anatomy was already being superseded by the new

'psychological complex'⁸² on the one hand, and the growth of *social*, as opposed to *physical*, anthropology on the other. Kenneth Little was an ethnographer who successfully made the transition between the two anthropologies; the narrative of his journey is illustrative of the direction taken by work, including eugenical work, on race. Following in the footsteps of Fleure and Fleming, Little travelled to Cardiff in 1940 to measure ninety 'Anglo-negroid cross' children and compare them with forty 'white' children, but as his biographer in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography expresses it (without explanation): 'It was the kind of research that led into a dead end'.⁸³ Little published a paper on this research in the *Eugenics Review*,⁸⁴ but subsequently shifted his focus to racial discrimination, moving away from a consideration of biological differences in relation to race and turning instead, like many other anthropologists, to *cultural* differences.⁸⁵ Anthropologists were not alone in this shift. In 1936 biologist Julian Huxley, in his annual Galton lecture to the Eugenics Society, of which he was a member, had announced that 'the alleged inferiority of half-castes ... is much more likely to be due to the unfavourable social conditions in which they grew up than to any effect ... of their mixed heredity' - a confusion of genetic factors with cultural ones.⁸⁶

Although the focus of the new 'race relations' of the 1950s and 1960s was on race as cultural difference, the racial(ised) body remained, and still remains, very much alive in the form of popular representation. Siobhan Somerville, in her illuminating discussion of sexology and its use of the tools of scientific racism, notes that despite the move by interwar sexologists from methodologies of comparative anatomy to psychoanalytic models, 'notions of biological difference continued to shape cultural understandings of sexuality, particularly in popular representations of lesbians and gay men'.⁸⁷ The same is true of cultural understandings of race, and by extension, racial hybridity. The visual body of the mixed race person, if 'read' as mixed race, still tends to be read through 'common-sense' popular assumptions that takes the person's *non-white* heritage as over-determining of character, disposition, inclination, culture, and intelligence. And it is assumptions about *bodily* difference that are seen as central to racial difference: the idea that the body yields up the 'truth'. In Britain and the USA, and possibly elsewhere, in relation to boys or men with black heritage, it is their 'inherent' rhythm (the 'beat in the black body') and their potential sporting prowess that are key racial definers.⁸⁸ (Musical and sporting ability in black males is also read as indicative of lack of intellect.) The female equivalent is the designation of hypersexuality - in terms of excessive lasciviousness and excessive childbearing.⁸⁹

In Britain in the aftermath of the Great War (and indeed later, after the Second World War)⁹⁰ miscegenation stood as one boundary marker; when the defining of Englishness and the need to rebuild the nation became a particular concern.⁹¹ In building nationalism, not only are certain groups deemed outside the nation, but so too are certain 'undesirable' sexual practices, which are projected beyond national borders. Interracial sex and its consequences were deemed by many a form of sexual perversion: a non-English activity

80. Ibid.

81. Malik, op. cit., pp123-127.

82. The term is that of Nikolas Rose, 'The Psychological Complex: mental measurement and social administration', *Ideology & Consciousness*, 5 (Spring 1979).

83. Michael Banton, 'Little, Kenneth Lindsay (1908-1991)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49231>.

84. K.L. Little, 'Racial Mixture in Great Britain: some Anthropological Characteristics of the Anglo-Negroid Cross', *Eugenics Review*, 33 (Jan 1942).

85. Chris Waters, op. cit.; K.L. Little, *Negroes in Britain: a Study of Racial Relations in English Society*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd, 1947. Note 'English' in the title, despite the ethnography having been carried out in Cardiff, Wales.

86. Julian Huxley, 'Eugenics and Society', *Eugenics Review*, 28, 1 (April 1936): 18.

87. Siobhan B. Somerville, 'Scientific Racism and the Homosexual Body', in Lucy Land and Laura Doan (eds), *Sexology in Culture*, Oxford,

Polity Press, 1998, p71.

88. See Ben Carrington, 'Fear of the Black Athlete: Masculinity, Politics and the Body', *new formations*, 45 (Winter 2001-2002): 91-110.

89. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, London, Routledge, 1991; bell hooks, *Black Looks*, Boston, South End Press, 1992.

90. See Sonja O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003; Waters, *op. cit.*

91. See George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

92. Dyer, *op. cit.*, p23.

93. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, *Mixed Race' Studies: a Reader*, London, Routledge, 2004, p18.

resulting in non-English progeny. The Eugenics Society's concern with national fitness and the reduction or exclusion from the nation of the 'unfit', informed its desire to investigate these new, non-English progeny. In seeking 'to know, fix and place the non-white',⁹² it attempted to reduce the threat to racial and national boundaries represented by their presence. That the investigating anthropologist was unable to offer much of a placing or fixing left unresolved the problem of the 'half-caste' and its 'potential menace'. Although neither racism nor the debates over Englishness have gone away of course, today the phenomenon of 'mixed race' is studied and celebrated, and 'mixed race' studies is 'one of the fastest growing ... areas in the field of 'race' and ethnic studies'.⁹³ One wonders whether any of the interwar eugenis, anthropologists, or biologists, Cedric Dover excepted, could have foreseen that in the twenty-first century to be both 'English' and 'mixed race' is *not* a contradiction in terms. And 'passing' has nothing to do with it.

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