

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

This fascinating study in the sociology of knowledge documents the refutation of scientific foundations for racism in Britain and the United States between the two world wars, when racial differences were no longer attributed to biology but to culture. Dr Barkan considers the social significance of this transformation, particularly its effect on race relations in the modern world. Discussing the work of the leading biologists and anthropologists who wrote about race between the wars, he argues that the impetus for the shift in ideologies of race came from the inclusion of outsiders (women, Jews, and leftists) who infused greater egalitarianism into scientific discourse. But even though the emerging view of race was constrained by a scientific language, modern theorists were as much influenced by social and political events as were their predecessors.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in
Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE RETREAT OF SCIENTIFIC RACISM

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE RETREAT OF SCIENTIFIC RACISM

*Changing concepts of race in Britain and the United States
between the world wars*

ELAZAR BARKAN



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011 4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1992

First published 1992

Reprinted 1996

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Barkan, Elazar.

The retreat of scientific racism: changing concepts of race in Britain and the United States between the world wars.

1. Race. Theories, history

1. Title

305.8001

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Barkan, Elazar.

The retreat of scientific racism: changing concepts of race in Britain and the United States between the world wars / Elazar Barkan.

p. cm.

Includes Index.

ISBN 0 521 39193 8

1. Race. 2. Physical anthropology. 3. Eugenics – Great Britain – History. 4. Eugenics – United States – History. 5. Racism – Great Britain – History. 6. Racism – United States – History. 7. Great Britain – Race relations. 8. United States – Race relations.

1. Title.

GN269.B368 1992

305.8 – dc20 90–20129 CIP

ISBN 0521 39193 8 hardback

ISBN 0 521 45875 7 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2000

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in
Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*In Memory of
Shmuel Benkler*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiv
Introduction	i
PART I: ANTHROPOLOGY	13
1. Constructing a British identity	15
Colors into races. A transition to modern British anthropology. The founding fathers. Mummies, bones and stones. The shift in British archaeology. A British glimpse at race relations.	
2. American diversity	66
Haunted sentinels. European skulls and the primitive mind. The Boasians. American physical anthropology. The politics of coexistence. Dionysia in the Pacific.	
PART II: BIOLOGY	135
3. In search of a biology of race	137
NewGenics. The statistician's fable. Race crossing in Jamaica. A Canadian in London: rigid Reginald Ruggles Gates.	
4. The limit of traditional reform	177
A racist liberal: Julian Huxley's early years. Herbert Spencer Jennings and progressive eugenics. A conservative critique: Raymond Pearl. Bridging race formalism and population genetics.	
5. Mitigating racial differences	228
Lancelot Hogben. "Africa view" – Huxley's changing perspectives. J. B. S. Haldane: a defiant aristocrat. Medicine and eugenics: expanding the environment. Eugenics reformed.	

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in
Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

PART III: POLITICS	277
6. Confronting racism: scientists as politicians	279
1933 – Early hesitations. Britain – Race and Culture Committee. <i>We Europeans</i> . The American scene. An international interlude. The Paris Congress. The population committee. Out of the closet.	
EPILOGUE	341
<i>Bibliography</i>	347
<i>Index</i>	372

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

Racism is a universal affliction, but its representation as an oppressive and dogmatic ideology captured center stage only during the years between the World Wars. Prior to that time, social differentiation based upon real or assumed racial distinctions was thought to be part of the natural order. Hence, the principal retreat of racism conveyed the recognition that racial terminology is not value free, and that social organization based on a racial hierarchy is repugnant. To describe this change, I have reconstructed the scientific discourse on race among British and American anthropologists and biologists, whom I believe to have been pivotal in this shift. The actors in the story below were scientists of a very mixed bag, personally and professionally. Yet they all shared a belief that the centrality of race for cultural and political discourse depended largely on its scientific legitimacy. For various subjective motives – that is, sociological variables – they chose to address the topic of race, which was consequently transformed from a scientific fact into a political hot potato. Racism did not disappear but racial ideologies ceased to command respectability.

Despite the long-standing ambivalence about causality in the human sciences and although exclusionary explanatory claims have gradually diminished, the belief persists that affinities, long-term structural changes, and *mentalité*, provide the motives and rationale for historical changes. Admissions of contingency, indeterminism, and open-endedness often disguise a fundamental belief in causal relationships which cannot, however, be substantiated epistemologically. Therefore, I would like to make my belief explicit: within the social, economic and political constraints, the discourse on race enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, and was shaped by the experts and intellectuals who appear in the following pages. Perhaps the prevalent conviction that racism is determined by social and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

political factors is the best proof that the retreat I speak of has become the dominating view.

“Making a difference” is the subject of this book. The repudiation of racism by scientists was a crucial step in the growth of global egalitarianism. Disparities between the West and the rest – as well as within Western democracies, together with the ever present ethnic and racial animosities – may provide a sound basis for skepticism regarding the retreat of racism. Yet, the shift has occurred. Racial differences are viewed in cultural terms, not biological, xenophobia has become more egalitarian, and the strife is no longer waged in the name of superiority. This transformation has been the retreat of racism.

I have incurred many debts of genuine gratitude on the road towards the final version of this book. My understanding of the intellectual and political milieu of the period studied was enriched by the personal memories and vignettes provided by Sir Raymond Firth, Otto Klineberg, Robert K. Merton, Harry Shapiro, Dirk Struik, and Lord Zuckerman, for whose time and generosity I am grateful.

My intellectual apprenticeship owes much to Shulamit Volkov, Saul Friedländer, and Yehuda Elkana, who introduced me to important issues in cultural history during my early studies at Tel Aviv University. Rudi Binion, Eugene Black, Sam Schweber and Everett Mendelsohn provided guidance and encouragement through the steps towards my dissertation at Brandeis University. I am particularly indebted to I. Bernard Cohen, Daniel Kevles, and George W. Stocking Jr. for their constructive comments on the manuscript.

While writing this book I have been affiliated with Brandeis University; the History of Science Department, the Center for European Studies, and the Social Studies Program at Harvard University; and the California Institute of Technology. Many colleagues have provided advice, support and friendship. Among them I am especially grateful to Garland Allen, Peter Baldwin, Allan Brandt, Nathan Glazer, Leigh Hafrey, Gerald Holton, the late Nathan Huggins, Andy Markovits, Diane Paul, Barbara Gutmann-Rosenkrantz, and Bernard Wasserstein, who have willingly read and commented on my work at various stages. I would like to thank Mary Lee and William Bossert, the Masters of Lowell House at Harvard University, for their kindness and unmatched hospitality.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xiii

I am happy to acknowledge financial support for research from the Sachar International Fellowship, the Tauber Institute, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the Rockefeller Foundation. For assistance and permission to quote from unpublished archival sources I would like to thank Rear-Admiral J. A. L. Myres (J. L. Myres), Naomi Mitchison (J. B. S. Haldane), and the librarians of the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the Eugenics Society Records, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London; King's College, London; London School of Economics; University College, London; the University Library, Manuscript Division, Cambridge; the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia; the National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institute, Washington; the American Jewish Committee Archives, New York; the Library of Congress, Washington; the Woodson Research Center, Rice University, Houston; and in particular the Tozzer and Widener Libraries at Harvard University.

I am highly indebted to my editors, Jessica Kuper and Con Coroneos, for their patient and skillful suggestions which have greatly improved the quality of the manuscript.

My wife, Diana Barkan, has helped and encouraged me throughout. Many thanks.

Pasadena, 1990.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-45875-7 - The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars

Elazar Barkan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Abbreviations for manuscript collections*

ACHP	A. C. Haddon, Cambridge, England
AES	American Eugenics Society Papers at the American Philosophical Society
AHP	A. Hrdlicka, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institute
AJC	American Jewish Committee Archives, New York
BMP	Bronislaw Malinowski, London School of Economics
CBDP	C. B. Davenport, American Philosophical Society
CPB	C. P. Blacker, in EUG/SA
CSP	C. S. Seligman, London School of Economics
EAHP	E. A. Hooton, Peabody Museum, Harvard University
EUG/SA	Eugenics Society Records, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London
FBP	Franz Boas, American Philosophical Society
FSP	Frederick Osborn, American Philosophical Society
HSJP	H. S. Jennings, American Philosophical Society
JBSHP	J. B. S. Haldane, University College, London
JCM	J. C. Merriam, Library of Congress
JLMP	John Linton Myres, Bodleian Library, Oxford
JMCP	J. M. Cattell Papers, Library of Congress
JSHP	J. S. Huxley, Rice University, Houston
KPP	Karl Pearson, University College, London
LLP	Lionel Penrose, University College, London
RPP	Raymond Pearl, American Philosophical Society
RRGP	R. R. Gates, King's College, London