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This book is the first full-length study of the history of intellectual and scientific racism in modern South Africa. Ranging broadly across disciplines in the social sciences, sciences and humanities, it charts the rise of scientific racism and biological determinism from the late nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth. Set against the rise of apartheid, the book illuminates the complex relationship between theories of essential racial difference and the development of white supremacist thinking. Saul Dubow draws extensively on comparable studies of intellectual racism in Europe and the United States to demonstrate the selective absorption of widely prevalent conceptions of racial difference in the particular historical context of South Africa. The issues he addresses are of relevance to both Africanist and international students of racism and race relations.

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SCIENTIFIC RACISM IN MODERN  
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SAUL DUBOW  
*University of Sussex*



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## *Preface and acknowledgements*

During the course of writing my doctoral thesis on the origins of racial segregation in South Africa, I became increasingly intrigued by the role of ideology in the creation and maintenance of white supremacy during the inter-war years. While scouring archival material and secondary literature for evidence to support or controvert theories of economic exploitation and class exploitation in the development of racial segregation, I gradually realised that my reading was too selective and too narrowly geared to the task at hand; I was overlooking aspects of the texts that were clearly of considerable importance to the authors themselves and therefore missing the wider significance of their writings. Soon, I became aware of a vast corpus of material sitting on the shelves of reference libraries that were concerned, either explicitly or implicitly, with theories of scientific racism. These included alarmist prognostications of imminent racial decline and hubristic assertions of innate white superiority, as well as prosaic investigations into the nature of racial difference – often written in the detached style of so-called scientific neutrality.

A chance meeting with the social historian Raphael Samuel on a train to London introduced me to the word ‘eugenics’. Another incidental remark by a historian colleague to the effect that ‘of course, South African history is all about race’ came as a great shock to someone schooled in the traditions of historical materialism. But it nonetheless lodged in the back of my mind. Later, I came across Nancy Stepan’s outstanding study, *The Idea of Race*, which helped to situate the body of material on scientific racism that was accumulating among my index cards. After completing my doctorate in 1986 I spent a year editing Charles Bloomberg’s remarkable history of the Afrikaner Broederbond, an experience that introduced me to some of the intricacies of Christian–nationalist theories of racial differ-

ence. It was as a result of these different but converging stimuli that I determined to explore the history of scientific racism in South Africa more thoroughly.

During my tenure as a British Academy post-doctoral fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London University from 1987–9, I was able to develop the project intensively. This period was doubly precious because it involved working in close proximity to the Institute's then director, Professor Shula Marks. I gained much from the culture of intellectual excitement that she engendered among colleagues and students, in seminars as well as in informal discussions. During a short spell as a visiting associate of the African Studies Institute, Witwatersrand University in 1989, I was able to present some preliminary ideas to South African audiences for the first time. The critical response that I encountered at seminars at Wits and at Cape Town came as something of a jolt. At a time when academic attention was closely focused on the politics of mass action, my interest in the history of social thought in South Africa may have seemed too far removed from 'the struggle'. But, rather than changing direction, I resolved to rethink my approach and extend my research in new directions.

Heavy teaching commitments following my appointment as a lecturer in history at the University of Sussex in 1989 temporarily put on hold further progress with the project. This was not necessarily a bad thing, and I benefited from a new intellectual environment in which I came into contact with colleagues with common interests in the construction of cultural identity and conceptions of racial difference. In particular, I am grateful to my then Dean, Professor Ralph Grillo, for his support and encouragement during this time.

Two productive spells of research in South Africa, in 1991 and 1993, were funded by the British Academy and the Nuffield Foundation respectively. I am most grateful for their indispensable help, as I am to the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town which generously provided me with excellent research facilities and a congenial work environment during 1993. I am particularly thankful for the efficient help and friendly welcome extended to me during my research trips by the library staff of the African Studies library, UCT, and the Cullen Library at Wits.

A number of academic colleagues and friends read sections of this manuscript. Phillip Tobias' meticulous commentary on the chapters



*Preface*

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on physical anthropology provided much reassurance and encouragement. I am indebted too to Alan Barnard, Helen Bradford, Linda Chisholm, Rob Gordon, Martin Hall, Adam Kuper, Neil Parsons, Hilary Sapire and Bryony Mortimer for their remarks on particular aspects of the manuscript. My Sussex colleague, John Burrow, read the whole manuscript with care and generosity. Two anonymous readers – Christopher Saunders and Richard Rathbone – likewise read the whole manuscript when it was being considered for publication. Their incisive comments and suggestions have been invaluable in the process of final preparation; so, too, have Mary Starkey's rigorous editorial comments. I am grateful to the following people for help in procuring, and permissions for using, photographs: Professor Noel Cameron, Professor P. V. Tobias and Dr Lee R. Berger (cover photographs); Barlow Ltd Archives and Mrs M. Fraser (photograph 2); Professor Alan Morris and Ms Leonie Twentymen-Jones (photograph 3); Witwatersrand University Archives and Mrs L. D. Arnott (photograph 4); Ms Sandra Cumming, The Royal Society, and Godfrey Argent Studio (photograph 6); Ms Mary Ann Verster (photograph 7).

Debts to family and friends are the most difficult to acknowledge, but undoubtedly the most important. In Johannesburg, Neil McCarthy and Clare Stopford offered interesting diversions when research became tedious, and tolerated my enthusiasms at other moments. My parents have been constantly supportive and have made their cottage at Zeekoevlei available to me whenever I was in Cape Town. Our newly established community of friends in Brighton has helped us to feel at home in a new environment and to make the most of our distance from South Africa. My wife and partner, Bryony Mortimer, undoubtedly deserves the greatest thanks; and without Bryony I would not be able to dedicate this book to our two daughters, Talitha and Bethany – in the unlikely hope that they may choose to read it some time in the future.

## *Abbreviations*

<i>ACVV</i>	<i>Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging</i>
ANC	African National Congress
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
FAK	Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of African History</i>
<i>JMASA</i>	<i>Journal of the Medical Association of South Africa</i>
LSE	London School of Economics
NIPR	National Institute for Personnel Research
<i>OVV</i>	<i>Oranje Vroue Vereeniging</i>
SAAAS	South African Association for the Advancement of Science
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SABRA	South African Bureau of Racial Affairs
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
<i>SAJS</i>	<i>South African Journal of Science</i>
<i>SAMJ</i>	<i>South African Medical Journal</i>
<i>SAMR</i>	<i>South African Medical Record</i>
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London)
<i>Trans. Roy. Soc. S. Afr.</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa</i>
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNISA	University of South Africa
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand