SCIENTIFIC RACISM REDUX?

The Many Lives of a Troublesome Idea

Nicholas Wade, *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race and Human History*. New York: Penguin Press, 2014, 278 pages, ISBN 978-1-5942-0446-3. $27.95.

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A Troublesome Inheritance Indeed

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What, if anything, does Nicholas Wade's *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race and Human History* have to offer sociologists?

For most of us, the answer is "nothing." Because simply put, this is not scholarly work. *A Troublesome Inheritance* is not an empirically-grounded monograph that offers substantiated arguments, but rather a trade book targeting general readers who are probably not interested in the literature reviews and citations that academics expect. All kinds of claims are made without reference to any supporting evidence or analysis. As a result, the book cannot serve as a source of data or credible theory regarding race, culture, social structure, or the relationship of genes to human behaviors.

But for sociologists of knowledge and of science, *A Troublesome Inheritance* is a gold mine. These scholars will no doubt delight in discovering the echoes of eighteenth-century race science, nineteenth-century polygenetic and Romantic thought, twentieth-century eugenics and development theory, as well as enduring sexism and the occasional tirade against "Marxists." This book may also well become a classic for students of racial ideology, right up there with Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994). Both books are poignant cultural artifacts that testify to the ways in which biological science is invoked in the United States to shore up belief in races and to justify inequality between groups.

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CENTRAL ARGUMENTS

When I first picked up *A Troublesome Inheritance*, I was expecting simply a rehearsal of the argument that racial groups are grounded in patterns of genetic difference. But it turns out that is only one piece of a much larger puzzle that Wade takes on. In fact, his central endeavor is no less than to explain the rise of the West, or, "Why are some countries rich and others persistently poor?" (p. 13).

The overarching premise of Wade's book is that national differences in prosperity have their roots in genetic differences between races. As he sees it, each race has evolved in such a way as to accumulate particularly frequent genetic variants (alleles), and some of these alleles influence behaviors that in turn shape social institutions and, indeed, civilizations. Thus aggregate racial differences in behaviors and institutions—and not, say, centuries of European imperial exploitation—are an important contributor to the material gap between rich and poor nations that we observe today. Lest you think I am making this up, consider these quotations:

> …it is reasonable to assume that if traits like skin color have evolved in a population, the same may be true of its social behavior, and hence the very different kinds of society seen in the various races and in the world's great civilizations differ not just because of their received culture…but also because of variations in the social behavior of their members, carried down in their genes (p. 41).

> The explanation [for national disparities in wealth] is that there has been an evolutionary change in human social behavior that has facilitated the new, post-tribal social structure on which modern societies are based. Rich countries have non-tribal, trust-based economies and favorable institutions. Poor countries are those that have not fully escaped from tribalism and labor under extractive institutions that reflect their limited radius of trust (pp. 196–197).

> Contrary to the central belief of multiculturalists, Western culture has achieved far more than other cultures in many significant spheres and has done so because Europeans, probably for reasons of both evolution and history, have been able to create open and innovative societies, starkly different from the default human arrangements of tribalism or autocracy (p. 9).

In short, the West, home of the "Caucasian" race (p. 18), can thank its genes at least in part for its "modern," "non-tribal," and "favorable" institutions, conducive to openness, innovation, and achievement. In contrast, "the rest of the world, principally the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, [is making] the evolutionary transition to the social behaviors needed to support modern economies" (p. 197).

The ambitious sweep of *A Troublesome Inheritance* is all the more stunning because it is so thinly supported by empirical research on the relationships between genetics, race, social structure, culture, and behavior. Amazingly, Nicholas Wade is often the first to acknowledge this. Right at the start, he tells us that "the genetic underpinnings of human social behavior are for the most part still unknown," (p. 15) and, "Very little about the genes that govern the human brain is yet understood, so it need be no surprise that not much is yet known about the genetic basis of human social behavior" (p. 16). This admission leaves the reader to wonder why then Wade chose to write a book affirming that genes play an important role in behaviors and institutions, why the publisher opted to print it, and why she herself is about to read it. Somehow, Wade

seems to positively relish speculating in the absence of data, as in this assertion about European and Chinese brains:

> No one can yet say exactly what patterns in the neural circuitry predispose European populations to prefer open societies and the rule of law to autocracies, or Chinese to be drawn to a system of family obligations, political hierarchy and conformity (pp. 237–238).

The gaping hole in the evidentiary base for the book's central argument about genes and behavior is further exacerbated by the countless instances in which Wade makes a statement of fact without providing any citation, footnote, or other indication of the empirical data on which it is based. This is often the case when he seeks to reconstruct the past, for example, the lives of early hunter-gatherers: "there were no headmen or chiefs. Strict egalitarianism prevailed and was enforced"; "the only division of labor was between the sexes"; "the available land started to run out" (pp. 128–129). Over pages of this narrative, no citation is provided to let the reader know the factual basis for such claims: On which peer-reviewed, scientific research is this account based? Does it reflect a widely-accepted consensus among anthropologists, or the views of a minority? Is it based on the study of prehistoric societies across the globe over time, or just one site at one time point?

When Wade does draw on scientific research to support his claims, it usually involves citing the work of a single individual or team, leaving wide open the question of how representative of scientific opinion this claim is in the relevant field. For example, economic historian Gregory Clark's book *Farewell to Alms* (2009) seems to be the sole source of the startling claim that "The Industrial Revolution was caused not by events of the previous century but by changes in human economic behavior that had been slowly evolving in agrarian societies for the previous 10,000 years" (p. 161). No perspective on how this account has been evaluated by Clark's peers is provided; should we take it seriously?

A TEXTBOOK CASE IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

The laxity with which Wade treats empirical data makes it particularly ironic that he and his publisher, in a move well-known to sociologists of scientific knowledge, strain to present *A Troublesome Inheritance* as a scientific work, and indeed as an antidote to the ostensibly non-scientific forces of political ideology and careerism. Two sociological concepts are particularly relevant here to describe and understand the rhetoric that is liberally employed throughout in order to inspire confidence in the author and his book. One is Thomas Gieryn's (1999) theory of "credibility contests" and the other is Reanne Frank's (2012) notion of "forbidden knowledge" discourse.

Evidence of the former is apparent from the very start, when we read on the book's jacket flap that the author "received a BA in natural sciences from King's College, Cambridge." It is awfully unusual to read what a researcher's undergraduate degree was in, especially when the author in question is over seventy years old and earned his diploma half a century ago. But the point is not to date Mr. Wade; rather, it is to tell the reader that he has scientific training—from a prestigious university no less—and therefore is not only competent to write about genes, race, and behavior, but can also be trusted to embody and respect what we believe to be the hallmarks of real science: impartiality, accuracy, empiricism, logic, rigor.

As Gieryn (1999) explains, scientific controversies often involve "credibility contests," where "bearers of discrepant truths" not only joust over the technical accuracy

or validity of their claims, but they also deploy discourse that links their views to values such as "objectivity, efficacy, precision, reliability, authenticity, predictability, sincerity, desirability, tradition" (p. 1). Gieryn likens this process to mapmaking, where participants employ strategic rhetorical maneuvers to draw boundaries between their own ostensibly "scientific" position and the "less authoritative residual non-science" of their opponents. So even if *A Troublesome Inheritance* actually fails to provide readers with the solidly logical or data-driven arguments we might expect from scientists, we are assured of its author's scientific *bona fides* by his depiction of his adversaries as unscientific. More specifically, Wade is fond of dismissing those who disagree with him as either slaves of dogmatic "creed" and "multicultural orthodoxy" (pp. 5, 67); prone to "inertia" and "conservatism" (p. 6); or left-leaning political operators (p. 7)—in short, all inhabitants of what Gieryn called the "non-science" category.

This book also makes use of another variant of scientific boundary-marking that is regularly invoked in debates specifically about genes and race. Dubbed "forbidden knowledge" discourse by Reanne Frank (2012), "this powerful rhetorical argument misleadingly casts geneticists' writings on race as seeking objective truths, while portraying all skeptics as motivated by unscientific fears, passions, and politics" (p. 316). This caricature of opponents' views as emotional and thus ostensibly irrational is also signaled even before readers crack open *A Troublesome Inheritance*. The publisher's accompanying press release announces that it "shatters the taboo" on the discussion of race and biology, and the blurb by E. O. Wilson trumpets it as possessing "the [virtue] of truth without fear." Nor does Wade relent in the book itself; the language of fear and courage can be found throughout. We learn that "The subject of the human race soon became too daunting for all but the most courageous and academically secure of researchers to touch" (pp. 120–121) and that "most scholars will not enter this territory [regarding genetics, intelligence, and race] from lively fear of being demonized by their fellow academics" (p. 201). After all, "[i]t takes only a few vigilantes to cow the whole campus" (p. 7) and so scholars pursuing the links between race and genes "risk being ostracized as racists" (p. 69) or may even "see their careers destroyed" (p. 7). The implication is quite sobering: that without the powerful regime of political correctness we have in place, the ivory tower would naturally be flush with the research on race, genes, intelligence, and behavior that Wade prizes. Of course, for him the alternative is unthinkable (and unmentioned): that perhaps geneticists, anthropologists, and sociologists have not thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the search for genetic determinants of race-specific behaviors and social institutions simply because they don't think there is anything there.

A WESTERN INHERITANCE

All this boundary-marking between "science" and "ideology" is all the more spectacular because *A Troublesome Inheritance* has so clearly been shaped by Western cultural beliefs about human difference that stretch back over centuries. Far from "scientific" notions forged in the bias-free contemplation of "natural" facts, these are ideas that very clearly bear the imprint of their historical, social, and political origins. The superior intelligence of Jews and Asians, admirable productivity of the English, African-American violence, "the unrelieved despotism of the East" (p. 224), the potential sexual desirability of pale skin, racial differences in sports prowess, body odor, and breast size—these are just some of the hoary old chestnuts that Wade embarrassingly resuscitates in order to argue their genetic, racial underpinnings. These are not meaningful "facts" arrived at through a process of impartial scientific deliberation, disconnected from the imperialism and racism of the societies that produced them over preceding centuries.

Instead they are longstanding Western beliefs about what marks White people from others—and Wade, a White man born and educated in England at midcentury—does not give us any reason to believe he is somehow immune to those ideological currents. Indeed, two longstanding strains of thought form the bedrock of *A Troublesome Inheritance*: racial essentialism and Eurocentrism.

Racial Essentialism

The belief that humankind is naturally divided into a few biologically-distinct races has been with us since the late seventeenth century (Hannaford 1996; Smedley and Smedley, 2012). However, it is a notion that has changed over time, from its roots in astrology, humoral medicine, theological doctrine, and sailors' tales, to successive versions emphasizing differences in races' blood, skulls, and psyches. Any of these features (and more) could be considered "essences" or inherent qualities of the various races. The racial essentialism that Nicholas Wade lays out, both in *A Troublesome Inheritance* and in much of his scientific reporting for *The New York Times*, is simply the latest incarnation of a centuries-old account of the world. In this new version, racial categories originate not in Europeans' attempts to justify the colonization, exploitation, and oppression of those they considered "Other," but rather simply in natural patterns of human genetic variation.

Throughout much of this book, Wade likes to make statements about scientific knowledge of race with a tone of finality. "[P]opulations on each continent have evolved largely independently of one another as each adapted to its own regional environment. Under these various local pressures, there developed the major races of mankind, those of Africans, East Asians and Europeans, as well as many smaller groups," he writes (p. 2). And: "Analysis of genomes around the world establishes that there is indeed a biological reality to race, despite the official statements to the contrary of leading social science organizations" (p. 4). Yet both of these ostensibly authoritative claims are highly debated in the academy today. A much more accurate assessment of the current state of scientific knowledge would be to acknowledge the lack of consensus about how best to define race. Such an assessment would also eschew the simplistic boundary-marking that Wade indulges in when he casts the debate as one between social and biological scientists. Research on contemporary academics' understandings of race has repeatedly shown that both the natural and the social sciences are internally divided on this question, and that some geneticists strongly reject an essentialist reading of race (Bliss 2012; Fujimura and Rajagopalan, 2011; Fullwiley 2007; Morning 2011).

Not surprisingly, given his lopsided summary of the state of scholarly thinking, the claims about race that Wade puts forth in *A Troublesome Inheritance* are not borne out by evidence, genetic or otherwise. First, his pronouncements about the very existence of "major races" go unsupported by scientific citations, as usual, and the fact that these inexplicably fluctuate in number over the course of the book—between the three "principal races" (pp. 4, 93, 178) and the "five continental based races" (p. 121, see also p. 100)—hardly lends confidence in their "biological reality." In another puzzling auto-goal, Wade acknowledges that "many more subpopulations could be declared races, so to keep things simple, the five-race, continent-based scheme seems the most practical for most purposes" (p. 100). In other words, his hallowed five- (or was it three-?) race taxonomy is an arbitrary one, selected not for its accuracy but for its (unexplained) practicality.

The empirically shaky foundation for such a breakdown of humankind is further suggested by the improbably monolithic processes of evolution that Wade ascribes to each race. Think for a moment about the sheer size of the "major

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races"—African, East Asian, and European—that Wade believes resulted from "local pressures" leading each to adapt to its "own regional environment" (p. 2). These are populations of millions if not billions of people, spread across huge land masses that contain well more than one kind of environment. With the Americas covering both the Arctic Circle and the Equator, Africa including deserts and tropical forests, and Asia reaching from Indonesia to Mongolia, continents span wildly varied environments, making talk of uniform "racial" adaptations ludicrous. What single physical adaptation would be useful to all members of a race that is so far-flung? In fact, not surprisingly, the examples that Wade offers of regional adaptation are, overwhelmingly, instances of much more circumscribed, local evolution, affecting populations much smaller than his "principal races," such as: Tibetans (p. 2); Québécois (p. 3); Andeans and West Africans (p. 8); Finns (p. 57); Ashkenazi Jews, Bedouin, pygmies, Taiwanese, Russians, and Mexicans (p. 56); Dutch and Swedish people; and "pastoral peoples of eastern Africa" (p. 61).

Even what Wade considers his empirical *coup de grâce*—namely, that genomic research has established the "biological reality" of race—is simply untrue. A few geneticists, like Neil Risch, have loudly proclaimed that races are anchored in genetic variation (Burchard et al., 2003; Risch et al., 2002). Others just as emphatically contest this. Wilson and colleagues (2001) contend that "commonly used ethnic labels (such as Black, Caucasian, and Asian) are insufficient and inaccurate descriptions of human genetic structure," and Serre and Pääbo (2004) argue there is "no reason to assume that major genetic discontinuities exist between different continents or 'races'" (p. 1679). Similarly, some of the most publicly prominent geneticists in recent years—like Richard Lewontin, Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Francis Collins, and Craig Venter (see also Barbujani 2006; Bliss 2008; Graves 2001)—have publicly dismissed the idea that race is anchored in DNA. Perhaps the majority of geneticists writing about population structure, however, simply do not mention race or ethnicity in their work, making it difficult to say what connection if any they might see between genes and race.

Not only does this brief overview of the heterogeneity of opinion in the genetics community contradict Wade's assertion of proof of biological races, but recent research makes clear that the estimated genetic clusters that he and others equate with races are far from impartial measurements of some underlying biological, let alone racial, reality (Bolnick 2008; Fujimura and Rajagopalan, 2011; Fullwiley 2008; Montoya 2011; Morning 2014). Prior assumptions about racial boundaries can easily filter into statistical analyses that then corroborate them. For example, the ancestry-informative-markers (AIMS) approach that Wade describes is based on researchers arbitrarily deciding beforehand which races they believe exist, then mining genetic data from each corresponding group of people for the markers they believe are most characteristic of each. And the STRUCTURE program, which aims to estimate the number of genetic clusters within a dataset (rather than let the analyst set the number arbitrarily), is nonetheless sensitive to many data and method choices made by researchers. The geographic sources of the individuals sampled and the amount and type of genetic data collected are just some of the ways in which researchers' assumptions about which people constitute populations and which data should be analyzed shape the final output of what Wade interprets as biological races. Again, the counterintuitive surprise here is that Wade acknowledges that the more genetic markers used in an analysis, the more clusters are identified (p. 99), directly contradicting his claim that "clusters always correspond to the five continental races in the first instance" (p. 96), which other researchers have shown simply not to be true. To take just one example, Wilson and colleagues (2001) discerned four clusters among human beings using one type of

genetic marker, and three with a second. Nor do estimated clusters always correspond to "continental races," as the repeated appearance of the Kalash of Pakistan as one of a handful of clusters demonstrates (e.g., Li et al., 2008; Rosenberg et al., 2006). In short, as the designers of statistical methods to identify human genetic clusters are the first to admit (Pritchard et al., 2000), human judgments go into the production of such taxonomies. And those judgments are not made in a historical or cultural vacuum.

Eurocentrism

Although Wade insists that *A Troublesome Inheritance* is free of racism and any claim about European superiority, the content of the book repeatedly belies this claim. Consider statements like "Western culture has achieved far more than other cultures in many significant spheres," (p. 9) and "European social organizations and especially its institutions have by several significant yardsticks proved more productive and innovative than those of other races" (p. 221). Even "Western music, art and film are generally more creative than the tradition-bound artistic cultures of the East" (p. 221). It is hard not to discern hierarchical thinking here, and the author's attempts to disavow any racism ring hollow:

> People being so similar, no one has the right or reason to assert superiority over a person of a different race. But some societies have achieved much more than others… (p. 9).
>
> That European societies have turned out to be more innovative and productive than others…does not of course mean that Europeans are superior to others… Europeans are much like everyone else except for minor differences in their social behavior. But these minor differences…have major consequences at the level of a society. European institutions, a blend of both culture and European adaptive social behavior, are the reason that Europeans have constructed innovative, open and productive societies. The rise of the West is an event not just in history but also in human evolution (p. 238).

As these passages suggest, the transparent air of supremacy and triumphalism that animates this book is not conveyed solely through explicit claims about the peoples of the West "achieving more" (whatever that means) than others. There are also the partisan assessments (Europeans are more artistically creative than others? Really?) and the selection of particular yardsticks for measurement like the (European-established and -awarded) Nobel Prize. More subtly, there is the deeply Eurocentric structure of the book, which places "the rise of the West" at the center of human history and even evolution. This is not a book that draws on genetics to explain the rise of the Islamic empire that spanned three continents, for example; that does not seem to rate as "an event in human evolution." Brief excursions to other continents, notably Asia, serve only to explain why non-Europeans did not develop the same societies as Europeans. It is hard to imagine a more literal rendering of Eurocentrism.

An especially powerful rhetorical device for underscoring the superiority of the West is not only to locate it at the center, but also to position it as "ahead" of all others along some cosmic timeline. This is what Preiswerk (1980) called "linear evolutionism" in his analysis of "ethnoracial distortions" in history textbooks. This ubiquitous theme in *A Troublesome Inheritance* blends nineteenth- and twentieth-century polygenetic thought with the development theories of the mid-twentieth century (Hill 1986). According to the former, different races were born as distinct human populations, rather

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than being members of a single creation of the human family. This belief was fed by Biblical stories such as the tale of Noah and his sons, and was used to justify North American slavery (Fredrickson 2002; Nobles 2000). In its twentieth-century "scientific" incarnation, polygenetic theory (represented today by the "multiregional hypothesis") stressed the chronological distinctiveness of races; each one had evolved independently into groups of *Homo sapiens sapiens* at different times in history, with Europeans unsurprisingly having a long past as human beings behind them and Africans having made the transition to human status only relatively recently (see Coon 1962). *A Troublesome Inheritance* revives this understanding of Europeans as "ahead" and others "behind," particularly as it was incorporated in twentieth-century Western programs for economic development. Behind such postcolonial projects lay the fundamental presumption that non-Western countries should emulate and "catch up" to European institutions.

Nicholas Wade makes no bones about this Eurocentric timeline and yardstick being central to his argument. In his view, the world is inhabited by "modern" versus "tribal" societies, which represent the historic starting point for human beings. Notice the linear model at work: "The countries that have not *completed the transition* to *modern* states *retain the default* state of human political systems, namely that of tribalism…Africa and much of the Middle East *remain* largely tribal societies" (p. 173, emphasis added). In this view, some regions are behind, because they have not "completed the transition" that is apparently universal or at least uniformly desirable; they "retain the default state"; they are not "modern"; they "remain" unchanged. Similarly, Australian Aboriginal people "[serve] as a kind of baseline" in the "vast natural experiment [that] was set in motion when modern humans dispersed across the globe" (p. 225). Apparently, over their 46,000 years on the Australian continent, "their way of life had changed little. Australian aborigines still lived in tribal societies without towns or cities….During the 46,000 years of their isolation, they had invented neither the wheel nor the bow and arrow… Their most conspicuous cultural achievement was an intense religion…" (p. 225) Needless to say, once again, Wade fails to cite any evidence of no societal change taking place on the continent for nearly fifty millennia. But his appallingly dismissive language speaks volumes. Not having the material culture—towns and cities, wheels, bows and arrows—that Westerners recognize as signs of progress, or valuing institutions they don't, like "an intense religion," is cause for deriding Australian people as "still" living in primitive "tribal societies." Furthermore, the entire arc of Wade's exploration of "Nature's experiment, with at least five versions running in parallel" (p. 125) is structured around a clear hierarchy. After the benighted Aborigines, Wade proceeds in order to consider the next step up the racial ladder: Africa (where "agriculture was quickly adopted and settled societies developed," but "state and empire building…only just begun," (p. 226), and then the indigenous Americas, where "[s]ignificant empires arose" but "made only a late and uncertain start toward modern states" (p. 226). Again, Europe remains the implicit goalpost against which the "lateness" and modernity of states are judged, and indeed Europe is the final stop on this tour. Although the reader might think at first that Asia would share top billing, since Wade concludes that "Only in Eurasia did substantial states and empires emerge" (p. 226), the finale of his coverage of "Nature's experiment" is devoted to detailing what made Asia and the Middle East diverge from Europe. Surveying the history of science, Wade concludes that modern science, to which Europe was uniquely receptive (in contrast, both China and the Islamic world had an antipathy to it (p. 230)), provided "the concepts of law and reason" (p. 232) that served "as the basis for an open society," leading Europe alone to the "magic formula" that became "the basis for Europe's ascent in the world" (p. 235).

In the midst of this heady account that puts Europe at the center and the top, however, is a huge and puzzling gap. In the press to explain its relative prosperity as flowing from genetically rooted proclivities for laudable behaviors, somehow Wade overlooks a crucial factor that we know to have enriched the West while impoverishing much of "the rest": imperialism. How is it possible that when pondering why "a part of the world has grown steadily and vastly richer over the past 300 years," Wade concludes that "a reasonable explanation is available in terms of human evolution" (p. 196)? Somehow the extraction of material resources and the exploitation of non-European labor on a mind-boggling scale, coupled with the destruction of indigenous cultures, societies, economies, and political systems seem not to have played any role in contemporary inequalities. This absence is all the more puzzling because Wade himself notes that "Europe occupies 7% of the earth's land mass but came to rule 35% of it by 1800 and 84% by 1914" (p. 234), after "brush[ing] aside tribal societies almost at will" (p. 233). With that kind of planetary stranglehold in our recent past, why do genes seem, to Wade, a better explanation than imperialism for contemporary inequalities?

The answer is that Wade seems to believe, astonishingly enough, that the impact of European colonialism was short-lived and innocuous. "Though it was justifiable at first to blame the evils of colonialism," he writes, "two generations or more have now passed since most foreign powers withdrew from Africa and the Middle East, and the strength of this explanation has to some extent faded" (p. 177). Could Wade truly be so naïve as to think that after centuries of imperial rule, from the Americas to Asia to Africa, two generations would suffice to restore what had been transformed if not eradicated? One has only to visit Mexico City or New Delhi or Nairobi to understand that European colonialism was a totalizing force. Is he surprised that Mexicans still speak the Spanish of their former European rulers, just as English is still spoken in India and Kenya, two or more generations after decolonization? Equally astonishing is Wade's recasting of imperial rule as beneficial:

> Western civilization was certainly expansionary, but after a comparatively brief colonial phase it has refocused on the trade and productive investment that drove its expansion in the first place. It seems a fortunate outcome that the world's dominant military power has turned out to be the West, with a system of international trade and law that offers benefits to all participants, and not a purely predatory and militaristic state like that of the Mongols or Ottomans,…or even a civilized but autocratic one like that of China (p. 247).

Again, colonialism is only "a brief phrase" in an expansion which is more properly characterized as devoted to "productive investment" and (ostensibly un-coerced) "trade," in a world system "that offers benefits to all participants." As he observes benignly, "Trade and exploration…became central forces in Europe's expansion" (p. 232)—as opposed to pillage, coerced labor, and genocide.

An important tool in this sanitization of Western imperialism is boundary-marking; it is through repeated comparison to other empires that we learn that European colonialism was "brief" and decidedly *not* "predatory." The Byzantine, Arab, and Ottoman empires were not "overly concerned with the welfare of [their] citizens" (p. 174); the Ottoman empire in particular "was a pure plunder machine" (p. 175); and the "Mongol imperium" was "a rapacious and highly destructive society" (p. 247). This reveals a willful blindness to the nature of European imperialism; the Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, Dutch, and Belgian empires were nothing if not rapacious "plunder machines" that wrought destruction on an unprecedented scale. But Wade

would have us believe they were nothing more than visiting Boy Scout troops. Similarly, he chalks up to African "tribalism" the economic organization that is actually a legacy of European colonial governments:

> Throughout much of Africa, the standard mode of government is kleptocracy; whoever gains power uses it to enrich his family and tribe, which is the way that power has always been used in tribal systems. Extractive institutions…are prevalent in Africa, particularly in countries rich in natural resources (p. 175).

Again, it is hard to believe that Wade attributes kleptocracy to African states (let alone to African genes), when purely extractive kleptocracies are precisely what their colonial predecessors were. But it is of a piece with the Manichean boundary-marking that is the soul of *A Troublesome Inheritance*. Europeans are "modern" and their empires are based on "trade and exploration"; other people are "tribal" and their empires "predatory." Europeans created "inclusive" institutions—that is, if you don't consider whether their institutions were inclusive of the millions of people who fell under their colonial yoke. Other countries have "extractive institutions," which is why they are poor:

> The bad, extractive institutions are those in which a small elite extorts the most it can from a society's productive resources and keeps almost everything for itself… Through its own greed, the elite impoverishes everyone else and prevents progress (p. 194).

Here Wade means this to tell us something about the poorest nations of today, but apparently unwittingly, he is describing European colonialism to a "T."

The sanitization and erasure of European imperialism do more for Wade's arguments than simply clear a path for genes to make their way to the front of the historical stage. They are also important ingredients for the "glorified self-presentation" that Preiswerk (1980) identified as central to Eurocentric thought. To really believe that Europeans alone are possessed of genetic characteristics that favor "open" and "inclusive" societies, it is necessary to sweep under the rug the decidedly "exclusive" and "extractive" characteristics of the societies they fostered around the globe.

This hagiography of Europe means a complete misunderstanding of what the European colonial powers were really about, and therefore a complete misunderstanding of how the West achieved the dominance it still enjoys today. When Wade approvingly paraphrases Niall Ferguson as claiming "the Western model of industrial production and mass consumption left all alternative models of economic organization floundering in its wake" (p. 224), he seems to think that the history of the last 500 years has been simply one of a marketplace of ideas, where European institutions won out because of their intrinsic superiority or appeal. It's a global version of what Lawrence Bobo, James R. Kluegel, and Ryan A. Smith (1997) call "laissez-faire racism," where racial inequalities are chalked up to the impartial workings of neutral market forces. But instead of being just one set of wares jostling alongside others in a buyer's market, European ideas and practices were spread at the tip of sword and gun, discrediting the idea that they were naturally embraced by non-Europeans as superior models. Language diffusion again provides an apt illustration. Do people in Kenya speak English and people in Senegal speak French because native Kikuyu or Wolof speakers decided that European languages were preferable to their own? For that matter, how did Christianity spread among indigenous people of the Americas—through peaceful invitations to sit in on Sunday services and then choose for themselves? Funnily enough, Wade hints at the answer when he writes that "Western societies are well adapted to present economic conditions, which they have in large measure

created" (p. 248). In other words, Westerners imposed their own forms of social organization and cultural practice on millions of other people around the world, and have benefited most from the resultant organization of the world economy. Suddenly the burning question posed by *A Troublesome Inheritance*—namely, "What…explains the rise and continued success of the West?" (p. 221)—doesn't seem so puzzling anymore, genes or no genes.

CONCLUSION

It is an odd moment to celebrate the triumphs of the West, when our planet appears to be on the brink of massive, irreversible, and deeply destructive environmental change wrought precisely by the Industrial Revolution and Western market organization that Nicholas Wade so reveres. And in the shadow of Ferguson, Missouri, it is also a painful moment in which to maintain, as he does, that racism is a thing of the past. As he puts it, "opposition to racism is now well entrenched, at least in the Western world," (of course) and "a resurgence of racism…seems most unlikely" (p. 7). The irony of *A Troublesome Inheritance* is that it epitomizes the essentialism, racism, and Eurocentrism that it claims no longer exist, "at least in the West."

A Troublesome Inheritance is a retrograde musing of no use to contemporary social science. Yet it will continue to be reviewed countless times, including by social scientists. This raises a final reflection on the sociology of scientific knowledge: Why is it that social scientists feel compelled to spend time and effort dismantling nineteenth-century arguments reprised in non-scholarly publications? Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's (1994) *The Bell Curve* is another prominent example of social scientists launching serious efforts to take down a half-baked, racist screed. I could be wrong, but I don't think that essentialist thinkers are similarly galvanized to critique constructivist sociological writings. When Mary Waters wrote in *Ethnic Options* (1990) that people's ethnic identity was shaped by their social context, or Michael Omi and Howard Winant first published *Racial Formation* (1986), did essentialists flood journals and newspapers with denunciatory reviews? I don't think so. Some might say it's simply because *The Bell Curve* and *A Troublesome Inheritance* are bad books that invite criticism, whereas *Ethnic Options* and *Racial Formation* are good books that were widely acclaimed. Alas, sociologists of science know that such judgments have much more to do with sociohistorical context than with intrinsic qualities of knowledge claims.

Instead, our rush to publicly take apart books like *A Troublesome Inheritance* is motivated by our fears about their likely reception from the public. We worry that everyday Americans will be—or already are—easily persuaded that different races have different genes that make some more hard-working, innovative, or peace-loving. Why not? We've already been primed for years by the ideas that some races are more intelligent, more athletic, or more violent than others. In contrast, how much do Charles Murray or Nicholas Wade have to worry that social constructivists will find fertile soil for their ideas in American culture? How many schoolchildren learn from their teachers that races are invented groupings, compared to the number who hear from their coaches that Blacks have extra leg muscles? Although we are far from having nationwide empirical data on how Americans conceptualize race, available research suggests that essentialist beliefs about fixed, inherited biological racial differences far outstrip any perception of races as being social constructs (Morning 2011).

People like Nicholas Wade may have little to fear, moreover, from constructivist scholars whose work is published by academic presses as opposed to commercial houses like Penguin. Where are the trade versions of books like Agustín Fuentes' (2011) *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths about Human Nature* (University of California Press)? Having said that, anthropologist Ashley Montagu published

Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race (1942) with the Columbia University Press, and it went on to have a real impact on national and even international discourse about race. Perhaps the lesson then is simply that the historical moment has a great deal to do with which ideas can break out of the ivory tower, and which remain trapped inside. The post-World War II era no doubt had an appetite for anti-racist thinking that the supposedly "postracial" one apparently does not. But that should not deter us from thinking very seriously about how to spread the understanding that races are groupings that we invent. And as Montagu realized, more than proselytization of the adult, book-reading public is needed. If we want to spare future generations of sociologists from having to review every sensationalist tract about genes and race that mainstream publishers see fit to print, we have to target the education of young people. The challenge is to gradually change fundamental beliefs about "genes, race, and human history," as Wade's subtitle aptly puts it, rather than shore up centuries-old commonplaces.

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The Politics of Race and Science: Conservative Colorblindness and the Limits of Liberal Critique

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When the Human Genome Project was completed in 2003 it confirmed the apparent consensus among scientists that race is not a natural subdivision of human beings. The map of the human genome, like prior genomic studies, showed both high levels