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Book Review
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EVERYONE IS
AFRICAN

HOW SCIENCE EXPLODES
THE MYTH OF RACE

DANIEL J. FAIRBANKS
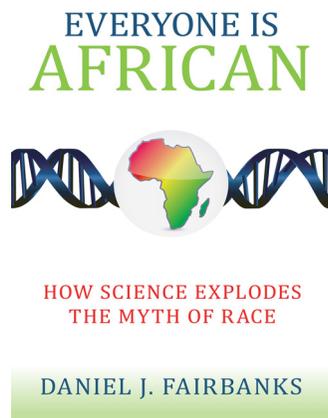
When it comes to race, science is called to duty. In the aftermath of the Second World War, scientists were rallied to affirm that ideologies of racial hierarchy found little or no support in biology. A scientific underpinning has been considered essential for the case against racism ever since.

At first, scientists were relaxed about the notion of race itself. 'The physical anthropologists and the man in the street both know that races exist', the geneticist L.C. Dunn remarked in his introduction to UNESCO's 1951 statement on race, 'the latter from the immediate evidence of his senses' [1]. As time went on, though, statements against racism dwelt increasingly upon the weaknesses of race as a taxonomic category. Interwoven with references to atrocities and injustices perpetrated under racial regimes, most prominently those of the segregated American South and Germany's Third Reich, they affirmed harmony between values and facts. Biological notions of race were socially dangerous and scientifically dubious.

The formula was already familiar more than 20 years ago, when Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray published *The Bell Curve*, a muscular exposition of hereditarian arguments about intelligence quotient (IQ) that thrust claims about innate group differences in intelligence into public debate [2]. They were furiously and repeatedly rebutted. And yet duty still calls. Race continues to stake scientific claims, and the moral-scientific textbooks need ongoing revision. Everyone is African accordingly recapitulates the burden of the argument and updates the references.

The genre it belongs to is syncretic: chimeras of facts and values, scientific exposition, and moral rhetoric. For some readers, the moral may be more imperative than the scientific. Daniel J. Fairbanks, himself a geneticist, feels obliged to pre-empt possible criticism for 'failing to sufficiently recount' the atrocities of racism. Yet he begins his story with the case of the Lovings, a married couple whom the Virginia police put asunder in the late 1950s on the grounds that they were of different races, and reminds his readers of a series of injustices, from Lord Jeffery Amherst's suggestion in 1763 that smallpox-exposed blankets be used to extirpate an 'Execrable Race' of native Americans, to the 'stolen generations' of Aboriginal children taken from their parents by Australian officials.

History does need retelling, especially to the students who presumably are the main intended audience for this book. So do the classic textbook examples, such as sickle cell trait and similar conditions apparently resulting from selection for malaria resistance: Fairbanks outlines these lucidly. But the measure of a scientific perspective on race is its response to the continuing flux of findings, trends, and claims.

The question at the heart of all the controversies is the gap between the average IQ scores of black and white Americans. Fairbanks reports that DNA studies, like earlier indirect methods, indicate that IQ test performance is substantially heritable, but provide no evidence to support claims that differences in scores between ethnic groups have a genetic component. He notes mixed findings about whether or how socioeconomic status affects heritability, and gives due weight to the undeniably environmental phenomenon of large test score gains from one generation to another, known after its discoverer as the Flynn effect.

Everyone is African is not so responsive to other developments, however. It does not address a strand of arguments that has emerged to propose that natural selection can have rapid local or regional effects on mental traits in different populations, such as the 2006 paper claiming that social conditions in medieval Europe selected for intelligence among Ashkenazi Jews, or former New York Times science reporter Nicholas Wade's book *A Troublesome Inheritance*, published last year, which argues that recent genetic variegation may underlie differences in how different societies behave [3,4]. Another chapter would have covered the issue and still left the main text less than 200 pages long.

The title harks back to an earlier period, too, when the simple story that all living humans are descended from a single African population was used to evoke a sense of humankind's fundamental unity. Now, with the revelation that anatomically modern humans interbred with Neanderthals outside Africa, the picture has come to look more complicated and obscure. Although Fairbanks rejects race as a category fit for humans, he is surprisingly casual about describing extinct hominins as separate species, 'humanlike' rather than human, despite what the 1950s Virginia police would have called their miscegenation with the more recent arrivals from Africa. They are not around to protest, but

when it comes to race, the devil is in details like that.

Everyone is African: How Science Explodes the Myth of Race by Daniel J. Fairbanks, Prometheus Books, 2015. $18, pbk (191 pp.) ISBN 978-1-63388-018-4.

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