

Graves and Goodman: Racism Not Race

Jo: Hi, I'm Joe.

Erik: And I'm Erik.

Jim: And I'm Jim and this is Speaking of Race, and today we're talking to two longtime friends of ours and they've both previously been on our podcast Alan Goodman and Joe graves. They've recently published their book Racism, Not Race: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (Graves & Goodman, 2021). Which just got a very nice review from Augustine Fuentes in last week's issue of science (Fuentes, 2022). So if you don't believe what we have to say go to the magazine and read about it. Joe is an evolutionary biologist and geneticist. He's a professor of biological science at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Erik: Go aggies.

Jim: Alan is a professor of biological anthropology at Hampshire College.

Alan: Go Sters!

Jim: Yeah, go sters. Now, we could probably fill the whole episode just talking about their accomplishments but we really need to talk about the book. So what I'm going to do is just link to their Wikipedia pages in the show notes so you can see how incredibly accomplished our 2 guests are ("Alan H. Goodman," 2022; "Joseph L. Graves Jr.," 2022). Suffice it for now to say that they have both authored books that Jo and I have used to teach about race in our classes so they're experts.

Erik: Me too.

Jim: Welcome Joe and Alan to the show.

Joe: Well thanks for having us guys.

Alan: Thank you for having us for sure.

Erik: You're repeat customers too. We thought once and we'd be done. But here you are.

Alan: I'm happy to say this is my third time. At 5 you have to give me a green jacket.

Erik: That's right.

Joe: And what I was going to say is, so long as people keep believing incredibly inane stuff about race and racism, you know, we'll probably be reappearing. I'd really like, you know, to look forward to the day where we don't have to reappear.

Erik: Yeah, sad, but true.

Jim: Ah, unfortunately I think you're right?

Jo: All right? Well, let's get into it. So for those folks who haven't read the book yet racism not race answers to frequently asked questions that I feel like that title could be a little confusing isn't necessarily the word but maybe not 100% clear up front. So could you just. Start off by explaining where that title came from and how you're trying to get people to focus more on maybe the behavior around racism rather than the concept of race itself.

Joe: Oh you want me to do that all right? So Alan's pointing at me right? Even though that title really wasn't my idea but at the end of the day. the idea was we wanted to deal with this fundamental conflation

that that people have in our society and that is conflating the notion of the biological conception of race with socially defined or socially constructed race and we wanted to make the point that humans while not having biological Races. We definitely have socially defined races and that those socially defined races have consequences and one of those consequences is racism which we describe in intimate detail in the book and we wanted to make the point that it was actually racism that invented social definitions for the purposes of this you know, hierarchy and suppression of people who were racialized as opposed to an inherently natural division existing within our species. That people would see this biological race.

Alan: Here I mean I think Joe said it really well and to simply say I think the title points to the fact that a lot of what we think is due to race or violence, specifically biological differences among the races is actually due to the lived experiences that different races have historically and continue to live under and part of that is racism. So differences for example in infant mortality, health, incarceration rates, et cetera, are impacts of racism—how we treat each other versus a biological inherent biological notions of difference.

Erik: This this is an academic book and it came out through Columbia University press but one of the things I really appreciate that you both did in this book is that you gave so much of your own personal stories a lot upfront. But then I noticed throughout the book you peppered in lots of stories where you saw these concepts that you're trying to debunk come up in your own lives. for listeners who don't know you. It's true that Jim is going to put the Wikipedia entries for both of you in the show notes but would you be willing to just sort of briefly introduce. Like some salient points about how these particular issues touched on your own individual personal lives and then how your backgrounds and your positions both in your individual institutions. But then I mean Joe I know your story at least goes to the university of Michigan and your experience in. In that university and how those backgrounds sort of developed your scholarship with respect to race that was a big question tell us about yourselves would have been an easier one.

Joe: Well as I've have said to folks before I have actually finished a book called a voice in the wilderness, a pioneering biologist explains how evolution can help us solve our biggest problems. It's going to be published by basic books in the fall of 2022 and in that book I do a whole bunch of more detail than we do in racism not race, but the bottom line here is I was born. 1 year after Brown versus Board of Education. Emmett till was lynched that same year. I experienced at every step of my education and life structural and institutional racism to this very day. I am an African American in it in a racist society. So while I really wouldn't and I've said this I really didn't want to write about Race I wanted to write about proof lies and life history evolution and stuff like that. But I could I couldn't get away from it as much as I wanted to try so that's my story.

Erik: Yes.

Jim: Yeah, yeah.

Alan: Yeah, and Joe has lived race and racism in ways that somebody with white skin privilege hasn't and I think it was important to have both represented here. Though I have some so outsider perspective I grew up as a work of a kid family of 5 with a dad with an eighth grade education who became a refrigeration mechanic and part of pipe fitters. Union. And in a wonderfully Irish and Italian catholic neighborhood and but I was different I was on the outside I was one of two Jewish kids in a elementary school of about 300 so I think I had some sense of what it was like to be on the outside though. I will not say it was ethnically religiously on the outside and not really racially on the outside though there was some sense of being you know, inherently different from people. But for me a real turning point. Yeah was going to college and going to graduate school and as Jim knows because we grew up together intellectually I'm a biological a biocultural and. And that's a different place where I think Joe and I also you know, bring different intellectual to tradition traditions to what we're doing I was always interested in the way that large-scale political economic processes. Poverty inequality affect individuals under the skin. That's biocultural anthropology for me I also was interested in racism but to be honest, I did not didn't focus much on racism and one key turning point for me was the 96 meetings I didn't know Jim if you were there the American Association of Physical Anthropologists now called Biological Anthropologists and Raleigh, down the road from Jim and at that point twenty six years ago you could count the number of biological anthropologists of color on one hand. Jim and I looked around at the meetings and virtually

none of them were there and so I took an afternoon and I went over to duke to visit a good friend Lee Baker and we were talking about the whiteness of the discipline and the fact. The few people who are really talking about human variation and the non-racial aspects of human variation were the few faculty and colleagues of color and so I felt obligated I felt like this was something I wanted to get involved in. So that's what led me to have the privilege of writing a book with Joseph Graves.

Erik: I was gonna ask. Um I know I don't know if we're still recording it and we can take this out entirely but just for my own curiosity when you're at that 96 meeting did bell curve come up at all, do people discuss the book at all.

Alan: Yeah I don't really remember but my guess is probably not yeah I don't I mean there was I was part of a current anthropology kind of response to the Bell curve. But yeah I I don't yeah that.

Erik: People just avoided it.

Alan: Good point and I don't remember I mean I I only stayed at the meeting for about a day and turned around in my home kind. Yeah literally. So so we did you but where did we leave off.

Joe: Again Guys I'm telling you I'm trying to trying to get off this race thing I really am I really would like never write about race. But unfortunately the white supremacists aren't going to give me that option.

Jo: Yeah, for real. Speaking of I wanted to ask a question about the white supremacy changes I guess you could say that are happening in the world right now a lot has actually changed since so I think you began talking about the book or thinking about the book in 2019 came out very late last year twenty one and even since then or in that span of time between 2019 and the present. Ah there's been a lot that's gone on right? The killing of George Floyd the BLM protests covid the whole thing. Given everything that's going on in the world right Now. Ah, how do you look. Back on the book already even though it's brand New. Is there anything you do differently and or was there anything at the time of the writing that you felt was especially urgent given Covid and the BLM protests and everything else.

Joe: If I can start this one Alan. We started writing this book because we both saw where the nation was heading and it's not just the United States but because white supremacy was making a resurgence all over the world and other you know, fascist-type movements were beginning to show up so we know we really wanted to be able to you know, bring this book out at a time that we thought was absolutely crucial now. Columbia did a great job of this book and we're really happy that. Columbia published it. But what we originally wrote it our goal was to go to 1 of the big name presses and our literary agent showed it around to a lot of the big name presses who all kept making excuse after excuse after excuse for not you know, offering us a contract.

Erik: no.

Joe: And then George Floyd was murdered but by that time we'd already signed with Columbia and books were literally appearing like mushrooms in a field after the rain after the George Floyd murder because now all of a sudden these publishing houses were saying oh. People might actually read a book about race and racism. So our goal from the start was to ring the alarm bell about the rise of white supremacist ideology and also to call out. the myths that. Behind it and that's what we wanted to do and I think if you read the book. that we projected a lot of what happened in the fall of 2021 down to Donald Trump's attempt to you know. Maintain himself in the white house.

Alan: Yeah I would at in terms of what changed over that one and a half or 2 year period more police killings George Floyd and the protest after were big public events but that. I think the point is that there were public events. They didn't change underlying ideology that ideology was always there in some sense you could say George Floyd was part of the visible tip of the iceberg of racism. And so that brought it into public consciousness and maybe opened up an opportunity to talk a little bit more deeply about racism. But that's it, it nothing. Nothing's changed. You know, racism persists.

Erik: So Joe, I know that you were a co-author on that paper that explained the 2014 national survey which was examining the perception of whether ability or athleticism or intellect and health if those things were primarily determined by race and genetics or were they primarily determined by other social factors (Outram et al., 2018). It's a paper that came out in 2018 so 2 questions about that. The first is what were the findings from your analysis of the 2014 data that convinced you that there was still a lot of work to be done to dismantle biological race. So. That's the first one and then the second one is has anything changed In the seven years since you did the analysis that came out in 2018 and now.

Joe: Well, to make a long story short. What the survey showed is that people were continuing to conflate biological and social conceptions of race that was really apparent, and there's a deeper dive on that survey that hasn't been published yet and some of the areas of the conflation and some of the misconceptions that are really sort of telling about where the American public is. One of them I discuss in a chapter that's coming out in a book on critical approaches to science and religion and it's out of Africa. The science that the human species originated in Africa is overwhelmingly solid. But the vast majority of people in this country. Don't accept it and that was one of the survey items that wasn't in the 2018 paper and so and by the way and of course it differs depending upon one socially defined race so people of African descent even though the majority of them don't accept it and that. By the way it is surprising still more of them accepted than any other group. Okay with of course whites being the highest in rejecting the idea of out of Africa so has anything changed. I don't know that there've been any other large national surveys But my guess is over the last seven years nothing has changed and one of the reasons why we went to work on this book.

Jim: That issue of not people not believing that we come from Africa that that's one of the things that makes it so much fun to teach biological anthropology isn't it. Alan.

Alan: Yes, it does.

Jo: Yeah, actually this is this is at the forefront of my mind right now, because I am teaching my retooled version of Jim's course which I picked up when I was at the University Of Alabama from Jim and we're in the sort of. Race and biology section of the course right now. It's a course for non-specialists most of them don't expect to be studying any human genetics or biology or population genetics at all in this course. It's a global studies course. So. It's like people who want to go into international studies are taking this course and one thing that they really struggle with when I do this relatively brief overview of sort of race and biology is the slippage that occurs between the concepts of population and the concept of race. and that to me is one of the hardest nuts to crack in terms of getting people up to speed with under. Standing what we mean when we say there's no biological validity to the concept of race. You sort of have to understand population as the alternative to race. so can you tell a little bit more about how you tackled that issue for a broader public in the book.

Alan: The main contrast in the book is between whether or not there is variation in the human species and whether or not that. Variation is geographically so patterned and the answer there is unambiguously yes you know, and whether or not that variation kind of neatly packets into. Large continental like groups that we have traditionally called biological races and the answer there is patently no and that's probably the biggest take home of the book if there is one big take home and I think as Jim knows and Joe can you know, tell us there's all sorts of ways to show that human variation is neither explained nor described well by the concept of race. Humans do not have races but they do vary. They may not vary as much overall as some other species because we're a relatively young species but we do vary and what explains that variation is not so different from what explains the cost of your house which is as a real estate agent would say.

Jim: Location location location.

Joe: I mean and that's the thing it's because and Alan says this really well is because humans are such a visual species. They tend to focus on variation. That's you know, varying with geography that they see. So skin color for example, but even skin color doesn't apportion groups into biological races and so everybody in the tropics has dark skin. whether they're African whether they're Indian subcontinent

whether they're Southeast Asian whether they're central American. So yeah, skin color doesn't allow you to define braces neither does hair type neither does general Anthropometric proportions of the skeleton. teeth type. We can go on and on anti-malarial adaptations, altitude adaptation but people don't tend to see those right? They tend to see and also because as we said racism made race. They've been taught to see that skin color is such an important variable of those that vary geographically with.

Erik: So Joe that was a great response I think especially for the sort of common sense notion that of course skin color isn't a real determinant of anything at least when it comes to actual scientific categorization. So Nicholas Wade as you I'm sure know wrote that book a few years ago even though he's a journalist saying. Well yeah, okay, we can get rid of the skin concept of race but genes. It's definitely true that genes show that there are things like human races and then I noted that a theoretical physicist named Ron Unz wrote this article in 2020 (Unz, 2020), in fact, just right before all the stuff with Ahmaud Arbery started to come out in the news and he says oh yeah, Nicholas Wade is correct because doubting that genes show that there is race is like doubting that there are Higgs bosons in physics. These are just things that scientists have told us and therefore you can't doubt them and she actually calls out. Augustin Fuentes and some other people for you know, trying to say that no there is no biological race concept. So when somebody like a theoretical physicist, not just, you know, Nicholas Wade, a journalist, says, oh yeah, but the genetics says that there are definite races. What's the punch back? What line do you take?

Joe: Well the punch back is number 1 they didn't call me out. Okay, so that's first and because the question of whether genetic variation within the species can be apportioned into biological races is really an evolutionary question and I respect folks in biological anthropology many of them know the theory behind this just as well as evolutionary geneticists do but at the end of the day I know how these folks always never seemed to call me out because that would be like you know, basically deciding to call Ali into the ring and trying to start some mess so because what's his name Wade did do that once and you know. And basically I sent him to heaven within the first round it was it was definitely it. It wasn't even a tko he was straight on the canvas after one blow. So yeah I mean these people say this don't know the theory behind. how we even define biological races and typically when you look at their stuff and they say of course biological races exist. Well okay, well then what's the definition of what a biological race is and when we examine modern evolutionary genetic definitions such as. Amount of genetic variation within and between groups and whether a group can be identified as a unique phylogenetic lineage is really clear that neither of those things are true in our species and you can deploy algorithms like structure to show that there is some structure to human genetic variation. But structure isn't race so that was the mistake that Wade made in his 2002 piece in the New York Times and then later on in his book. so bottom line is people who act like they know but don't know should stay quiet.

Alan: The rhetorical flourishes here are really interesting and I'll just use continue with Nicholas Wade. But also this theoretical physicist stay in your lane. Yeah, and Nicholas Wade is right at the very beginning he talks about this being the social science cabal denying human variation. He doesn't even talk about the biological anthropologist and definitely not the evolutionary biologists who have led the way in understanding that race is not a biological concept that humans do not have race. It's one thing. The second thing is that when will we quit looking for race under every stone there is. But every little scraping under your fingertips or whatever in the human body and I have the we're not, we're on audio not on but this is William C. Boyd and all of a sudden all of the physical anthropologists who have been looking for race in skin and bones and things of that so he gets on his high horse and says aha Now we're going to find it in the genes and well. I write this book called the genetics and human races and so now we've been looking in the genes for 72 years with success. Not at all and so when will finally they give up and shame on Nicholas Wade that after so many years of covering human evolution could not get it through his skull the difference between human variation the reality of human variation in the idea of race.

Joe: So let me tell you guys a quick wave story back in 2002 I was on a panel that was convened by the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on the concept of race and Wade was the moderator and so he's reading the bios of the members of the panel and right next to me is a guy that was in my department. Okay, and so he properly identifies this person as an evolutionary biologist and then he gets to me and doesn't read my biography at all and describes me as a philosopher who had

written who has written about race I mean he literally said that at this panel even though I wasn't the same department as the guy next to me on the panel department of ecology and evolutionary biology.

Jim: Oh my god, well that takes a different kind of concept of race to do something that ignorant.

Jo: Whoa.

Joe: Yeah, but that's what we're dealing with here which is also why these folks never call me up because quite frankly, they know they're not only are they not going to win but they're going to look really bad in attempting to win.

Jim: Oh.

Jim: Yeah. Yeah, it's not hard to eat their lunch scientifically. Unfortunately they have such a big internet platform that they just keep going and going and going and misinterpreting the science like Wade was misinterpreting. The 2002 article on the structure of the human population genetics. We all use the same principles that you use in the book to teach the lack of biological validity to race that is looking at the apportionment of genetic variation within populations, between populations, and between races. And this goes back to Richard Lewontin's 1972 study where he correctly found that race accounted for a very small percentage of the genetic variation that was visible at that point in time (Lewontin, 1972). That conclusion has been nothing but amplified as we've gotten more and better genetic data. But even after the first draft of the human genome project Anthony Edwards comes out in 2003 arguing that there's a logical fallacy in the way that Lewontin was dealing with his apportionment of genetic variation and one of the things that Edwards says is that you can statistically identify these groupings within human genes (Edwards, 2003). And certainly you can like we've talked about you can use us the structure program that Joe has mentioned many times or any other genetic clustering program to group populations together according to their genes that doesn't have anything to do with race. But the thing is this has been carried over and it's now become a part of the scientific misinformation that is bandied about as part of the white supremacist Twitterverse (Carlson & Harris, 2021). Where they're trying to make the case for biological race. So when you say Lewington and apportionment of variation. The response by these folks is well that was a fallacy and we have the publication, you know, the scientifically refereed publication by Edwards in 2003 to prove it and it's just it's really blown up. When you see Lewontin in the Twitterverse one of the most frequent pairs of words with it is fallacy. It's just insane because it is. It's become this white supremacist meme for lack of something better. So again, if you guys have a way to combat this I'm getting old I need to do this fast. So if you guys have any tricks that we can use.

Joe: Ah, but we don't do tricks we do science.

Jim: Ah so yeah, but the science isn't working with these morons I know.

Joe: Well, but again we didn't write this book for white supremacists. We wrote this book for the people who want to take issue with white supremacy.

Jim: So Alan help me here.

Alan: Well I know I think you said it really well and the way I would just kind of highlight it a little bit more is to say that Edwards and Lewontin had vastly different goals in mind and all Edwards was doing is he was showing that you can. With enough genes and ancestry informative markers that are weakly correlated. You can trace ancestry in the same way that 23 and me is doing it all that stuff and Lewontin wasn't interested in that he was interested in gene by gene on average how much variation is there within versus among race. It's 2 entirely different questions and for Edwards to title his article Lewontin's fallacy was just you know, egregiously awful and so I asked Lewontin about this when he was alive. He was living in Marlborough Massachusetts not far away from me and so I had the pleasure of visiting him a number of times and talking to him and he simply wasn't he just nodded his head but he was not going to bow the get into the gutter. And respond I sort of wish he would have because as you say you know, almost

twenty years after Edward's piece the notion that if you google Lewontin's fallacy you come up with all sorts of stuff just not true. You know, just not true.

Joe: Yeah, one thing, if you don't know, Edwards was a student of Fisher who was a eugenicist so no big surprise there.

Erik: Oh I didn't know that. Okay, yeah, yeah, oh I had no idea. Okay, well that explains a lot.

Alan: Yeah, and there was there was definitely that political undertone to this argument. Yeah.

Jim: Totally yeah.

Jo: And we will link in our show notes to Joe's paper about this so those listeners who would like to know more about exactly why Lewontin's fallacy isn't a fallacy (Graves, 2006).

Erik: Well, let's wrap up with one question that does get addressed in your book *Racism not Race*. So you give several suggestions that people could sort of take up and actually be anti-racist actually try to kneecap white supremacy. Could you grab onto a couple that you'd like to share with our listeners that you think that people could push forward on their own.

Joe: Yeah I mean the bottom line is that what we wrote this book for was to be a tool for people who have questions about what race is what it isn't and how racism operates and so what we really hope is that we've created. easily accessible. questions and given direct answers to them and that people will begin to engage in these difficult conversations and 1 of the reasons why the conversations are difficult for some folks is because they simply don't know what to say and what we've done is we've given them the answer to all of the most common misconceptions. that people present but at the end of the day nothing we've done will be effective unless people are willing to engage their friends their neighbors their relatives who hold these white supremacist misinformed racist ideas.

Jo: I think Joe gave us our future tee-shirt slogan which is: We don't do tricks we do science. Well awesome.

Erik: It's good. It's really good. Yeah, there are a couple of good one liners in there that everybody had.

Jim: I'm Jim the biological anthropologist.

Erik: I'm Erik the historian of science.

Jo: And I'm Jo the cultural anthropologist and you have been listening to speaking of race you can find us on Facebook at S O R Podcast on Twitter and Instagram at speaking of race and wherever you get your podcasts.

Erik: Thanks so much for listening.

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