

## Scientific (and other) Racisms

Intro: Hi, I'm Jim, I'm Erik, I'm Jo, and this is Speaking of Race. Jo: Wow, guys, this is a tumultuous time.

Erik: It sure is. We talked back in April about how the coronavirus pandemic was really revealing some of the deeper issues surrounding race in America.

Jim: For the last few months, there's been this long-delayed recognition by whites in the U.S. about the role of race and racism in America. The news media is even using that term "structural racism" that we explored in our interview of David Embrick earlier this year, though the press doesn't always seem to know what it means.

Erik: Just since the last time we recorded, we've seen a backlash by state powers. White CBP agents have been witnessed nabbing protesters off streets in San Diego and Columbus, Ohio in June, and then Portland, which really made the news. With the recent expansion of Operation Relentless Pursuit, which the Justice Department rebranded as "Operation LeGend," folks are worried that Kansas City and Detroit are going to see the same tactics.

Jo: Meanwhile Black Lives Matter protests continue from coast to coast. I feel like if there was ever a good time for some antiracist education, it would be now.

Erik: I heard an interview recently with Bryan Stevenson, the lawyer who wrote the book *Just Mercy* that was recently made into a tremendous movie with Michael B. Jordan and Jamie Foxx. Stevenson had this quote, "We need to engage everyone in a meaningful conversation about what it would take to cleanse ourselves from the legacy of slavery." And guess what he thinks the first step in that effort should be?

Jim: What?

Erik: Acc'd to Stevenson: step 1, we need to know our history. If we don't know our history, we don't know what has been done wrong, so we don't know how to seek cleansing. See, history!!

Jim: Well, good thing we've been looking at that history all along on this podcast.

Erik: Totally. Did you see Tucker Carlson—you know, the Fox TV host?--his top writer resigned last week after it came out that he'd been using a pseudonym to post this incendiary racist, sexist, and homophobic stuff for like 5 years running. And Carlson himself has been casting the BLM movement as a guerilla war attempting to destroy nuclear families, overrun the country with immigrants, and take away white rights.

Jim: Shows like Carlson's on networks like Faux News trade on the old inferiority narrative. And they draw from supposedly peer-reviewed and vetted academic studies to back it up. So, that's where we are today.

Erik: So, to get back to Bryan Stevenson's point, we want to use today's episode to highlight a specific instance of how the inferiorization narrative keeps hanging on, only now using

modernized scientific language that makes it hard for regular folks to see what's happening. It actually happened on the UA campus last academic year!

Jo: What, really? Can you give a quick rundown of what happened?

Jim: Well, the evolution group on campus at UA, of which I'm a founding member, mistakenly invited an hereditarian psychologist who pushes scientific racism about behavioral differences to speak.<sup>1</sup>

Erik: Jim and I ended up being invited to be part of a panel that gave a rebuttal to the presentation, and it went pretty well.

Jo: And you know what I haven't seen as part of these big national and international discussions about race and structural racism? Any public questioning AT ALL about whether or not race is a real, valid category. That deeper critique is still missing on a large scale—people really do seem to just assume it's biologically real.

Jim: And that's not just some tangential point in current events, either. Imagine how we might treat race differently as a population if we all understood that race is a cultural construction, not a biological reality! Mind you, we're not saying that everyone is the same or that there are no group differences—just that the patterns of biological variation that do exist in humans don't map onto our preconceived ideas of race. That kind of antiracist education is one central underpinning we need to help move beyond racism.

Jo: I totally agree. OK, so, the new bigot brigade. What kind of claims are these folks making?

Erik: Well, Alan Goodman referred to some of them in our interview a couple of episodes ago when he called out Charles Murray and Nicholas Wade as two of the folks who are trying to link race to intelligence and achievement from a white supremacist perspective (Murray, 2020; Wade, 2014).

Jim: That's right, and we discussed several more of these 21<sup>st</sup> century scientific racists in part 4 of our Race and Intelligence miniseries; people like Jim Watson and Robert Plomin (Hunt-Grubbe, 2007; Plomin, 2018).

Jo: So one of these guys ended up at Alabama? Giving a lecture in the nationally acclaimed ALLELE series (Holden, 2006, p. 771)?!

Erik: Yep, this was Bo Winegard. He's an hereditarian psychologist who used to teach at Marietta College in Ohio before he was fired a couple of months ago, in part for racist tweets. He came to UA to deliver a lecture titled "The Evolution of Human Diversity," where he tried to dance around the subject of how different human groups might have evolved different psychological profiles.

Jo: Ok, so what'd he say?

Erik: A whole bunch of stuff. Let's pick it apart step by step.

Jim: Like most scientific racists, he started out by disclaiming any kind of racist beliefs, then went on to discuss the genetic basis of behavioral differences, including, according to one slide,

that “groups may vary on socially significant traits (on average) such as intelligence, agreeableness, athleticism, cooperativeness [and] criminality.”

Erik: Beyond claiming to “not be a racist,” he used a standard format used by many other scientific racists.

Jo: Such as?

Jim: He started by saying that he is not an expert in human biological variation.

Erik: In this case, he literally said that the evolution of human diversity was a side hobby of his, in pursuit of the “Darwinian Research Program.”

Jim: Then he gave several examples of human population variation in physical and biological characteristics like skin color and milk digestion and tried to sell the idea that IQ and other cognitive traits might work just the same way.

Jo: I’ve seen that before—a great example is journalist Nicolas Wade in his 2014 book *A troublesome inheritance*, when he misinterpreted cluster analyses of DNA to argue for the reality of biological races, then tried to use those *supposed* differences to account for *supposed* cultural differences in accomplishments of the races. It’s just bad science.

Erik: Of course, Winegard was more careful in his published articles, but he was pretty straightforward in his presentation at UA (Winegard, Winegard, & Anomaly, 2020).

Jim: That’s right. In his presentation, after telling us he wasn’t an expert on human biological diversity, he put up a slide showing different human faces to represent human diversity and while the slide was populating with African and Asian and Native American and European faces, like an anthropology or biology text from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he said that humans are as varied as dog breeds.

Jo: Dog breeds. I feel like those people arguing for race realism or essentialism trot that out all the time.

Erik: “Trot” – like at the Westminster Dog Show. You made a punny.

Jim: Yep, my undergrad human variation professor Vince Sarich used that same analogy in his 2005 book arguing for the biological reality of race and its effect on behavior (Sarich & Miele, 2005).

Jo: Let’s break down why that analogy doesn’t work.

Jim: There’s a couple of important aspects to the dog breed equals races syllogism. First, dog breeds have much less genetic variation within groups and much more variation between groups than the massive genetic overlap that we’ve talked about for so-called human races.

Jo: So, you can see this just by looking at, say, the differences in appearance between St. Bernards and Shi Tsus. To be clear, are you saying genetically there’s more difference between kinds of dog than there are between kinds of human?

Jim: Yes. And another important aspect is the technical specifications for dog breeds frequently include behavioral characteristics. So the reason these scientific racists use this analogy is because the average person is familiar enough with dog breeds to have you already linking physical differences, like coat color and head shape, with behavioral differences like retrieving, or spotting prey, or being great with kids.

Jo: OK, and if you buy that, then in the human analog they've already won you over to linking races with things like intelligence or personality, right?

Jim: Yep.

Erik: Though Winegard tried to be very clever about divorcing himself from race. He dove into historical classifications and said that folks like Linnaeus and Kant were classifying with racist motivations meaning based on mental and moral hierarchy. And he followed that up by saying he wasn't interested in races.

Jo: Um. Wait. Wasn't the whole lecture about races? And intelligence and stuff?

Jim: Right, even though he thinks that modern genetics validate traditional racial classifications (like Wade), he claimed that he used the term population instead of race—like that was some sort of absolution from racism. This is also really common among scientific racists. Vince Sarich used populations so that he could cut up humanity any way he wanted to: East Africans vs. West Africans or Ashkenazi Jews vs. Northern European Whites, depending upon what invidious comparison he wanted to make.

Jo: OK, so it seems like there's quite a bit of sleight of hand going into the framing here, and whether or not it was intentional, it had the effect of sort of excusing Winegard from being racist, while still allowing him to make claims that are going to be, ultimately, racist. And also scientifically inaccurate.

Jim: Right. He next turned to the long term human migrations from Africa to different environments, setting the table for natural selection to create physical—and ultimately, cognitive and behavioral differences.

Erik: This is really the driving point of his talk: that if natural selection can create physical differences, then it should also create cognitive and behavioral ones. He gave a very cursory (and somewhat primitive) overview of migrations out of Africa paying special attention to the different environments encountered between tropical Africa and Northern Eurasia. And this is where Jim really started licking his chops.

Jim: Yeah, because here he dove right into my specialty with examples of skin color, altitude adaptation and cold adaptation. I'm a very generous grader, so I would probably have given him a C+ if he was an undergrad presenting this in one of my human adaptation classes.

Erik: You seemed to be particularly unhappy with his skin color argument. You're going to have to unpack that.

Jim: There were so many layers of misunderstanding it was hard to zero in on a critique. I would have liked to have seen him use a skin color map from this millennium, instead of the map based on skin color estimates from before WW II. And it was gratuitous of him to tell us that he

is not an expert on folate that's thought to be involved in the adaptation of dark or highly pigmented skin or on Vitamin D that's thought to be involved in selection for light skin.

Jo: That's another thing I feel like I see repeatedly from these race-realist types. They throw up charts and graphs that seem to comport with the limited knowledge that non-specialists have but that aren't really backed up by present data or interpretation and then they just say, "well I'm not an expert in X, but I am an expert in Y and this chart looks good to me."

Jim: Yeah, and the same thing happened here. After the map, he put up a table of about 15 genes influencing skin color variation primarily in Europeans, but says he won't "get into the weeds on that because nobody probably cares that much." In spite of the fact that it's the mutation and selection of those genes, along with the over 50 others—almost all of which are unique to African populations—that determines modern human skin color variability, most of which occurs in African populations. He also doesn't seem to appreciate how incredibly recently some of the mutations and selection occurred and how that is the guts of the adaptive just-so argument for skin color.

Jo: But since he's trying to pull behaviors and cognition and intelligence into the same race—or "populations"—framework, it wouldn't work for him to go beyond the oversimplified version to show, actually, how genetically complex traits like skin color actually are, right?

Jim: Yep. We really need to do an episode on the skin color story because so many people have an understanding that Winegard's argument would work with. We're still learning new things about the complexity of gene-environment interaction in human skin color. But to try to extend this same argument to behavior is ridiculous.

Erik: So that must have been why he then took a weird turn into culture-gene co-evolution, starting with examples of spider webs and beaver dams.

Jo: Wait, what do spider webs and beaver dams have to do with human race?

Erik: I think he brought this up to do the same thing that the dog breed example is trying to get us to do.

Jo: You mean to make behavior genetic, right?

Jim: Exactly.

Jo: But I think he's doing another kind of sleight of hand. You said that Winegard was talking about culture-gene co-evolution but giving examples of arachnid predatory practice.

Jim: Sure.

Jo: So he's doing another sleight of hand when he calls this "culture." I can see where this is going. He's going to equate spider weaving with human culture. And then he's going to say, "Ah, if you buy that one thing is reducible to simple genes, then so is another." But that just sounds ridiculous; why does this matter?

Jim: It easier to see where this goes when he uses the lactase persistence argument. He calls this “a great example” of culture gene co-evolution. He even said, “you can relate this to the rise of farming because farming is when you domesticate animals and you get milk.”

Erik: Remember last year when I insisted on opening one of our episodes with the internet poem about milk-drinking white supremacy dudes? That was our first race and health episode. You guys thought I was nuts at the time, but look where we are now!

Jim: Unfortunately, these people who deny that they’re scientific experts yet they have no shame about the little to no understanding of the stories they try to use. Winegard put up a map on the screen of the lactase distribution. But what he didn’t note – because he didn’t know the present-day science -- is that there are different genetic mutations causing that “behavior” in different populations and the selective pressure changing the gene frequencies is extremely recent in many of those populations.

Erik: This is why I wish there were people who could just sort of walk around with white supremacists like Richard Spencer and Steven Miller and when they say something that sounds scientific, the person with actual scientific knowledge could just pipe up “no it isn’t!”

Jo: It’s like the scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* where they try to give a scientific explanation for witches.

Erik: “If she weighs the same as a duck ...”

Jo: So, again, this seems to be more reducing behavior to genes and then completely misunderstanding the biological process behind the behavior.

Erik: “... and therefore ... A WITCH! BURN HER!!!”

Jim: Did either of you notice anything missing in Winegard’s list of adaptations?

Jo: Well, so far he didn’t bring up sickle cell, which is one of my favorite examples of a culturally-shaped adaptation. (We also talked about that in our race and health miniseries.)

Jim: That’s right, he avoided any mention of the best documented example of natural selection in humans. I have to think that was deliberate. I don’t know if it’s because of its racial connotations and he was trying to shy away from race or because it’s getting so well known that sickle cell is distributed through African, European, and Asian populations living with malaria so it counters his population-race ideas. I’d have to guess the former, though, since his understanding of these things is so rudimentary.

Jo: Ok, so he clearly didn’t get the biology very well. Let’s go back to the behavior stuff—the big question (it’s really not a question, but some people think it is) about whether there are genetically-coded differences in behavior between racial groups.

Erik: What he did next was pretty important, in my opinion. After using several examples of differences in physiological traits in various groups, then he began to talk about human culture being genetically controlled and different in human “populations” on a slide labeled “human psychological diversity.”

Jim: Then, after an extended example about changes in physiology and behavior of Italian lizards, he dredged up the 19<sup>th</sup> century racist notion of the causes of the difference in cognitive achievement between Africans and Eurasians. I'm not sure he's aware of the history of this idea, but what his slide said was, "imagine in colder climates hunting is more important for calories. Hunting requires more cooperation than other food gathering processes. Therefore, groups that spread from Africa into colder climates would have needed to cooperate more. Over time, this would have selected for the propensity to cooperate" [in non-African populations]! From there, he went to his major example of the evolution of cognitive differences: interdependence or collectivism in North Asians versus independence in Europeans.

Jo: Hooooooboy. This is a big debate in cultural studies too; I come across it all the time in my work in India. It's the idea that some societies are more inclined to think collectively—like, to ground their personal identities in, say, family or community. And others are more inclined to think individually, with the US and our 'rugged individualism' as the paradigmatic example. So collectively-oriented people are less likely to focus on personal achievement and self-image, while individualistically oriented people tend to be achievement-focused, competitive, and more concerned with self-image. But the debate in the cultural studies side isn't at all about biology though—we assume this is all culturally conditioned from the start. The debate in my corner of the world is about whether or not that dichotomy is a fair distinction in the first place, or whether it is ridiculously oversimplified (spoiler: it is).

Jim: Well, Winegard went all biological on it. He presented a genetic explanation for cooperation and collectivism that he then acknowledged wasn't replicable, but he thought the logic was good that there WERE genes selected for North Asian collectivism.

Erik: So the fact that one gene didn't work out suggests to him that it must be some other genes?

Jim: Pretty much. Then he claimed that rice cultivation requires more cooperation so people in rice growing areas of China show higher interdependence scores than those in wheat growing areas. Of course, the difference must be genetic and he assumes, without any evidence that this is the same kind of adaptation by natural selection that he discussed for skin color or lactase persistence.

Jo: This is ALSO a thing in India! There were some scholars in the 1970s who claimed that major cultural differences between North and South India (especially things like who's more "advanced" and which group has more "liberated" women) are related to the fact that South Indians are rice growers and therefore have to cooperate more (Agnihotri, 1997; Bardhan, 1974). And of course there's a serious racial-ethnic-caste rift between North and South India, like we have talked about in our episodes on race in India. But that stuff is really old at this point, and largely discredited.

Erik: But measuring skin color or detecting mutations in the lactase gene are a bit more straightforward than measuring collectivism, aren't they?

Jo: Well sure, yes, behaviors are always harder to measure than biological traits because they're hard to define—especially complex behaviors like collectivism or intelligence.

Jim: But the difference goes way beyond measurement. For things like lactase and the even better example of sickle cell and malaria, we have physiological measurements, we have specific DNA mutations, we have clinical evidence, we have demographic records to show

selection operating, and we have archaeological and cultural data to gauge the appropriateness and utility of the just-so story that we're telling. By trying to draw an equivalency between the biological adaptations and the psychological ones, he's also trying to convince us that it has the same level of data and research backing it up. That's simply not true for any behavioral characteristic we have ever measured.

Jo: So it sounds like bad science, alright. How does Winegard make it into scientific racism?.

Jim: You need to know a little more about his agenda, and obligingly he makes it clear in his paper "Dodging Darwin: Race, evolution, and the hereditarian hypothesis," (Winegard et al., 2020). In it, he goes right to the heart of scientific racism, taking us back to Jensen and the claim that the IQ gap between Blacks and whites is largely genetic and is based on past natural selection. Erik, can you give us a sample of his prose?

Erik: The article says, "The claim that Blacks face ubiquitous prejudice and discrimination in the contemporary United States is more often repeated than experimentally demonstrated. Blacks certainly might face some discrimination, but we are skeptical that it is as pervasive as is often claimed."

And also

"Nevertheless, even if discrimination against Blacks in some countries is widespread, this would not explain IQ and achievement gaps between ethnically homogenous countries, such as Iceland and Haiti, or between different demographic groups within multi-ethnic countries in which racial discrimination is not widespread, such as the UK, France, or Sweden. Moreover, the claim that discrimination depresses intelligence must specify some causal mechanism that also affects other ethnic groups which suffer discrimination."

Jo: Wow—he needs to listen to our 4 part series on race and intelligence, then our episode on structural racism, among others. I hope we don't need to go over all of the problems with both of those statements here! Also, by the way, those are really bad examples of places that supposedly lack widespread discrimination.

Jim: There's one more aspect to the scientific racism agenda that we haven't covered yet, and it cropped up in both his presentation at UA and in his paper.

Jo: What's that?

Jim: The culture of victimhood cultivated by the new bigot brigade—I mean the racial realists. That's what they like to call themselves. They are always coming up with this "Woe is me, I'm so marginalized by those liberal PC academics, even though I'm right" stuff.

Erik: Like, remember, Jo, when we did the flash episode on Sam Harris? He had just interviewed Charles Murray. They were BOTH making that claim.

Jo: Yep, totally.

Jim: That's right. He claims that there is a concerted effort by mainstream science to silence hereditarians like him because his conclusions about group differences (or as he says explicitly in his paper, race differences) in behavior or IQ are unpopular.

Jo: But the point we're trying to make here isn't just that they're unpopular. It's that they are blatantly unscientific.

Jim: Well, YES! It's worth reemphasizing that from a social justice perspective, ideas from people like Winegard are repellant because they attempt to justify inequality. That's true, and that's a damn good reason to oppose them. But we wouldn't fight against them like we do if they were actually correct. We oppose them because they're unjust BUT ALSO because they twist the best scientific evidence we have.

Erik: And when people are willing to ignore the facts, you have to assume that they're doing so either out of ignorance—which, in Winegard's position as a professor giving a public lecture SHOULD NOT be the case—or to promote some other kind political, or maybe personal, agenda.

Jim: As Jonathan Kaplan points out in his paper "Ignorance, lies, and ways of being racist," "current hereditarians are... properly regarded as racist not because they support a politically unpopular scientific hypothesis, nor even (just) because they are guilty of culpable ignorance, but rather because their work reveals a deliberate and systematic attempt to minimize and ignore both the continued existence of racism, and the contemporary and historical effects of racism" (Kaplan, 2014, pp. 160-161).

Erik: There's a lot more that could be said about combatting scientific racism, but I think we need to get this one in the can. -->They use "diversity" a lot now.

Jo: But I do think this was a great example of the kind of public misinterpretation of science that goes on, even now, as a way to justify race and racism. Which brings us back to where we began, with the Tucker Carlson show and other examples of media that are promoting the idea that Black people are naturally prone to violence, less intelligent, more athletic, less capable of political leadership, or any of the other bajillion negative stereotypes that implicitly link behavior with this phony idea of racial biology. That stuff is circulating really widely right now as part of the backlash against the global BLM movement and the protests still raging in cities across America. So it's important to pick it apart, and I think you did a great job of that, Jim and Erik.

Outro:

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<sup>1</sup> Low quality (especially the audio) videos of this panel is available here: Jim's presentation: <https://www.facebook.com/ALLELEseries/videos/1011372252533221/> and Erik's presentation: <https://www.facebook.com/ALLELEseries/videos/955242114852838/>.

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