

From the J-Vault: Sharing the World with "the Mongolian, the Negro and the Hindoo"

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On May 15, 1923, Dr. Alexander A. Goldenweiser a (presumably Jewish) professor of sociology and anthropology, gave a lengthy lecture on race and culture to the National Conference of Jewish Social Service, and took questions from the audience. The speech, and the Q&A session, were transcribed and presented in the Journal of Jewish Communal Service. In addition to discussing race generally, he discusses the racial identity of Jews in particular.

This week, from the J-Vault: *Race and Culture in the Modern World* (1923)

"Race," says Goldenweiser, "is a state of mind. It is an attitude. We are replete with it... [T]he problem of race and culture refers to all of us." The professor strikes a tone that must have been progressive at the time. But his treatment of racial origins and development are bound to strike 2011 ears with significant dissonance. Goldenweiser criticizes biased tests which found African-Americans ("Negroes") to be less intelligent than whites. These tests "measure many things, but they do not in any real sense measure intelligence," he notes. Yet he does not object to the principle of testing for inherent racial difference -- only the execution of this idea:

I do not say that there are no psychological differences between the races (and please understand me with reference to this point), I do not say that the races are all psychologically identical. I think, in fact, that it would be very strange if this proved to be the case. We saw that from the physical standpoint the races have become greatly differentiated after their dispersion over the surface of the globe, and that these differentiations were deep-rooted. To assume that no psychological changes accompanied these physical changes would be, to say the least, unreasonable. I think, therefore, that we are on the safe side when we assume that when we shall know more about racial psychology, when we shall have improved the methods of investigating brains, we shall find that in psychological dispositions of one sort or another—this is as closely as we can put it today—there are differences between the separate racial groups. But this belongs to the future. The particular racial differences in psychological disposition often assumed today, on the other hand, usually prove to be illusions, upon critical examination.

Prejudice isn't wrong in principle, he implies. Rather, we simply don't have advanced enough knowledge to be accurate in our prejudice. Meanwhile, "We might as well be prepared to share the world in the future with the Mongolian, the Negro and the

Hindoo."

From the Q&A, an answer on the nature of being Jewish:

[T]he Jew is a race but there isn't much in race, meaning by this that the Jew is no more of a pure race than other races, and that in relation to the other races—we speak, of course, here of sub-racial types in Europe—the Jew is more conspicuously mixed...

There is a great deal more in this document. Read the entire piece for an amazing glimpse into the history of American (and Jewish) thinking about race.

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