

RACE THINKING BEFORE RACISM

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From: The Origins of Totalitarianism

Exercises by Joseph Geffen

1. If race thinking were a German invention, as it has been sometimes asserted, then "German thinking" (whatever that may be) was victorious in many parts of the spiritual world long before the Nazis started their ill-fated attempt at world conquest. Hitlerism exercised its strong international and inter-European appeal during the thirties because racism, although a state doctrine only in Germany, has been a powerful trend in public opinion everywhere. The Nazi political war machine had long been in motion when in 1939 German tanks began their march of destruction, since -- in political warfare -- racism was calculated to be a more powerful ally than any paid agent or secret organization of fifth columnists. Racism was neither a new nor a secret weapon, though never before had it been used with this thorough-going consistency.
2. The historical truth of the matter is that race thinking, with its roots deep in the eighteenth century, emerged simultaneously in all Western countries during the nineteenth century. Racism has been the powerful ideology of imperialistic policies since the turn of our century. It certainly has absorbed and revived all the old patterns of race opinions which, however, by themselves would hardly have been able to create or, for that matter, to degenerate into racism as an ideology. In the middle of the last century, race opinions were still judged by the yardstick of political reason. Not until the end of the century were dignity and importance accorded to race thinking as though it had been one of the major spiritual contributions of the Western world.
3. Until the fateful days of the 'scramble for Africa', race thinking had been one of the many free opinions which, within the general framework of liberalism, argued and fought each other to win the consent of public opinion. Only a few of them became full-fledged ideologies, that is, systems based on a single opinion that proved strong enough to attract and persuade a majority of people and broad enough to lead them through the various experiences and situations of an average modern life. For an ideology differs from a simple opinion in that it claims to possess either the key to history, or the solution for all the "riddles

of the universe", or the intimate knowledge of the hidden universal laws
35 which are supposed to rule nature and man. Few ideologies
have won enough prominence to survive the hard competitive struggle of
persuasion, and only two have come out on top and essentially defeated
all others: the ideology which interprets history as an economic
struggle of classes, and the other that interprets history as a natural
40 fight of races. The appeal of both to large masses was so strong that
they were able to enlist state support and establish themselves as
official national doctrines.

4. The tremendous power of persuasion inherent in the main ideologies
of our times is not accidental. Persuasion is not possible without ap-
45 peal to either experiences or desires. In other words, to immediate po-
litical needs. Plausibility in these matters comes neither from scien-
tific facts, as the various brand of Darwinists would like us to be-
lieve, nor from historical laws, as the historians pretend in their ef-
forts to discover the law according to which civilizations rise and
50 fall. Every full-fledged ideology has been created, continued and im-
proved as a political weapon and not as theoretical doctrine. It is true
that sometimes -- and such is the case with racism -- an ideology has
changed its original political sense, but without immediate contact with
political life none of them could be imagined. Their scientific aspect
55 is secondary and arises first from the desire to provide watertight ar-
guments, and second because their persuasive power also got hold of sci-
entists, who no longer were interested in the result of their research
but left their laboratories and hurried off to preach to the multitude
their new interpretations of life and world. We owe it to these
60 "scientific" preachers rather than to any scientific findings that today
no single science is left into whose categorical system race thinking
has not deeply penetrated. This again has made historians, some of whom
have been tempted to hold science responsible for race thinking, mistake
certain either philological or biological research results for causes
65 instead of consequences of race thinking. The opposite would have come
closer to the truth. As a matter of fact, the doctrine that Might is
Right needed several centuries (from the seventeenth to the nineteenth)
to conquer natural science and produce the "law" of the survival of the
fittest. And if, to take another instance, the theory of the Maistre and

70 Schelling about savage tribes as the decaying residues of former peoples
had suited the nineteenth century political devices as well as the the-
ory of progress, we would probably never have heard much of "primitives"
and no scientist would have wasted his time looking for the "missing
75 link" between ape and man. The blame is not to be laid on any science as
such, but rather on certain scientists who were no less hypnotized by
ideologies than their fellow citizens.

5. The fact that racism is the main ideological weapon of imperialis-
tic politics is so obvious that it seems as though many students prefer
to avoid the beaten track of truism. Instead, an old misconception of
80 racism as a kind of exaggerated nationalism is still given currency.
Valuable works of students, especially in France, who have proved that
racism is not only a quite different phenomenon but tends to destroy the
body politic of the nation, are generally overlooked. Witnessing the gi-
gantic competition between race thinking and class thinking for dominion
85 over the minds of modern men, some have been inclined to see in the one
the expression of national and in the other the expression of interna-
tional trends, to believe the one to be the mental preparation for na-
tional wars and the other to be the ideology for civil wars. This has
been possible because of the first World War's curious mixture of old
90 national and new imperialistic conflicts, a mixture in which old na-
tional slogans proved still to possess a far greater appeal to the
masses of all countries involved than any imperialistic aims. The last
war, however, with its Quislings and collaborationists everywhere,
should have proved that racism can stir up civil conflicts in every
95 country, and is one of the most ingenious devices ever invented for
preparing civil war.

6. For the truth is that race thinking entered the scene of active
politics the moment the European peoples had prepared, and to a certain
extent realized, the new body politic of the nation. From the very be-
100 ginning, racism deliberately cut across all national boundaries, whether
defined by geographical, linguistic, traditional, or any other stan-
dards, and denied national-political existence as such. Race thinking,
rather than class thinking, was the ever-present shadow accompanying the
development of the comity of European nations, until it finally grew to
105 be the powerful weapon for the destruction of those nations. Histori-

110 cally speaking, racists have a worse record of patriotism than the representatives of all other international ideologies together, and they were the only ones who consistently denied the great principle upon which national organizations of peoples are built. The principles of equality and solidarity of all peoples guaranteed by the idea of mankind.

Answer the question below

1. How does the author feel about the view that race thinking is a German invention?

Answer: _____

Complete the sentence below

2. The author suggests that race thinking, paragraph 1, became rather widespread _____

Answer the question below

3. How does the author, paragraph 1, account for the success of Nazi propaganda?

Answer: _____

Choose the best answer

4. One of the differences between the Nazis and the other racists that had preceded them, paragraph 1, was that
- a. the former had been less effective.
 - b. the latter had used racism more methodically.
 - c. the former had applied racism more ruthlessly.
 - d. the earlier racists had applied their ideology more consistently.

Complete the sentence below

5. The origins of racism can be traced all the way back to its beginning _____

Choose the best answer

6. An historical study of racism, paragraph 2, will further demonstrate that
- a. race thinking was by no means the monopoly of any single Western country.
 - b. some Western countries deserve credit for being pioneers in the propagation of racism.
 - c. race thinking has always had the features of an ideology.

d. modern racism owes nothing to its precursors.

Answer the question below

7. It is suggested in paragraph 2 that certain political forces -- not necessarily German -- have made good use of racist views; which ones?

Answer: _____

Choose the best answer

8. The expression "race opinions were still judged by the yardstick of political reason", paragraph 2, implies that racism was, at that time,
- a. a full fledged ideology.
 - b. made use of when expedient for reasons of state.
 - c. considered a logical doctrine.
 - d. adhered to because it was consistent with reason.
9. Towards the end of the 19th century, paragraph 2, dignity and importance were accorded to race thinking
- a. although it no longer served political ends.
 - b. although it was still judged by the yardstick of political reason.
 - c. because it was a major spiritual contribution.
 - d. because its claims had been borne out by scientific research.
 - e. quite undeservedly.

Answer the questions below

10. How would you describe the standing of race thinking, paragraph 3, during most of the 19th century?

Answer: _____

11. What happened to the various opinions, paragraph 4, current within the framework of liberalism?

Answer: _____

12. How do ideologies, paragraph 3, differ from ordinary opinions?

Answer: _____

Choose the best answer

13. The hidden universal laws which are supposed to rule nature and man, paragraph 3,
- a. are explained in essentially the same way by all ideologies.
 - b. do not concern ideologies.
 - c. seem to present no difficulty to ideologies.
 - d. are in fact known to ideologies.

Answer the questions below

14. Why do ideologies, paragraph 4, prove so persuasive to large groups of people?

Answer: _____

15. What contribution did the scientists who became keenly interested in ideologies, paragraph 4, make to their advancement?

Answer: _____

Choose the best answer

16. The fact that every single sentence shows the effect of race thinking, paragraph 4, is to be attributed to
- a. the inherent strength of racism.
 - b. the efforts of scientists who had succumbed to its temptations.
 - c. the fact that race thinking can be scientifically justified.
 - d. the fact that race thinking originated as a scientific theory.

Complete the sentence below

17. The so-called scientific findings, paragraph 4, with which ideologies are so liberally interspersed should in the case of racism not be considered causes but rather consequences of racism, because in essence they _____

Answer the questions below

18. What example, paragraph 4, does the writer provide to illustrate the influence of social ideas upon the birth of scientific theories?

Answer: _____

19. Why did the scientists of the 19th century, paragraph 4, go on searching for the missing link between ape and man?

Answer: _____

20. A failure to admit the fact that racism serves imperialistic policies, paragraph 5, implies a refusal to
- a. face the self-evident.
 - b. be swayed by emotional considerations.
 - c. deal in politics.
 - d. condone imperialism.

21. Some studies of French scholars on the subject of racism, paragraph 5, have tended to prove that racism
- a. is a pernicious form of nationalism.
 - b. follows quite naturally from chauvinism.
 - c. is in fact less dangerous than extreme chauvinism.
 - d. must not be confused with nationalism.

Answer the question below

22. How has the experience of the last World War, paragraph 5, forced people to reconsider their conception of racism?

Answer: _____

Racism/9

A. Note the following expressions. B. Fill in the blank spaces in the passage that follows with one of these expressions. Be sure to use each expression only once. There are more expressions than you actually need.

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. ill-fated attempt | b. thorough-going consistency |
| c. had won enough prominence | d. state support |
| e. judged by the yardstick | f. solving the riddles of the universe |
| g. a major spiritual contribution | h. to win the consent of public opinion |
| i. mistaking causes for consequences | j. is still given currency |
| k. ingenious device | l. ideological weapon |
| m. had cut across national boundaries | n. survival of the fittest |
| o. dignity and importance were accorded | p. its original political sense |

The misconception that racism is a German discovery _____ . But a serious study of history should prove that race thinking, although not an ideology enjoying _____ , had been in existence long before twentieth century Germany began its _____ to dominate the world. In fact, throughout most of the 19th century, racism was one of the opinions struggling _____ , and it was not till the beginning of our century that it _____ to be considered _____. But the race opinions that were so often preached during the 19th century were still _____ of political expediency, that is to say, to be applied or ignored as the need arose. And obviously in an era that witnessed the unprecedented expansion of colonial empires, racism could, and often did, serve as a powerful _____. But the 20th century racists, who had already adopted racism as an ideology capable of _____ , were not tacticians, in fact they applied their doctrine with a _____ and ruthlessness unprecedented in the annals of mankind. As for the thesis that racism is but an extreme form of nationalism, the author claims that, right from the beginning,

it _____ and is in fact an extremely _____ capable of undermining the structure of national communities.

The writer sums up the passage saying that one must not be misled by the pseudo-scientific arguments that are so often used in support of racism. Nor is science as such to be held accountable for this pernicious theory. In fact, condemning science for the misdeeds of individual scientists, would be a clear case of _____. In every case, this is the responsibility of the individual scientist who has allowed his racial prejudice to colour his scientific work.