

# THE RACIAL QUESTION IS ALSO THE CONCERN OF SPORT

## THE COLOUR OF PEOPLE'S SKIN

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The question of race is based on a confusion of ideas, for, to believe that race can determine an individual, that it can explain differences of intellectual aptitudes, of culture, etc., is to confuse two very different sets of values. Naturally psychological differences between men and between peoples do exist as they are not all at the same level. But it is a mistake too to believe that the notion of race, which, in any case, is a very vague conception, can be taken as an explanation of these differences. It is also a mistake to believe that membership to an ethnological group or that certain morphological characteristics, etc., can account for the differentiation between persons and between groups of persons. One person's *superiority* over another may be the result of a biological phenomena or of his own personal ascendancy (although our knowledge on this particular point is very vague and uncertain). It may be due, as is usually the case, to the person's background; his education, his religious or cultural formation, etc... But at no time

can one maintain that from an ethnological point of view, a particular race is more *intelligent*, more *moral*, or more *gifted* than any other. The work of anthropologists and psychologists has shown us throughout the last century that *the racial factor plays a far from dominant part in the formation of individual personality*. On the 'contrary, the essential factors is culture, and this embodies the whole inheritance of belief, of knowledge, of regional practice which is acquired by man from the environment in which he lives. There are certain civilizations which, from the technical point of view at least, are more advanced than others; for, the man who has already a steam engine or an electrical machine at his disposal is in a position of mechanical superiority over the man who is born into an archaic civilization. But a race is not necessarily attached to a single type of culture for there is a constant processus of decadence and progress. When Julius Caesar landed in England, the Britons seemed to the Romans

to be an inferior race 'since they are dull and incapable of learning'. Several centuries later, the British civilization was to be one of the most brilliant in History. Furthermore there have been great African negro civilizations such as the empire of Ghana and the Benin which were distinguished by a high level of attainment in the arts, in their cities and in various technical attainments. It is never the colour of a people's skin, their anatomical structure, or their racial characteristics which provide the explanation of their greater or lesser good fortune, their historical rise or fall, or their creative intelligence.

As Michel Leiris has written: 'As soon as one comes away from pure biological considerations, the word race loses all practical meaning'. The existence of great

writers, brilliant doctors, famous artists, and great thinkers amongst the coloured races is a telling argument nowadays against racial prejudice. I wish only to remind you of the great negro musicians for it is commonly said that if the coloured peoples are inferior in all other respects, then at least they have a great sense of rhythm and are gifted in music. But the great poet Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Richard Wright, the famous American novelist, Dr. Du Bois, and a host of architects, philosophers and doctors, both negro-African and negro-American, prove the falsity of racial prejudice and confirm the truth of that ancient Confucian proverb: *The nature of all men is identical ; it is their customs which keep them apart.*

