

# Science and the News

## Science and Segregation: The American Anthropological Association Dips into Politics

"Any man with two eyes in his head," Carlton Putnam notes in his *Race and Reason*, "can observe the pure blooded African in his native habitat as he exists when left on his own resources, can compare this settlement with London or Paris, and can draw his own conclusions regarding the relative levels of character and intelligence." Putnam is former chairman of the board of Delta Air Lines, former president of Chicago and Southern Air Lines, and more recently a biographer of Theodore Roosevelt. He has taken time off from the preparation of his multi-volume work on TR to write *Race and Reason: A Yankee View*, which questions the Supreme Court decision on school segregation on the grounds that the decision is based on a perversion of science invented and popularized by minority group scientists. This perversion, Putnam says, denies the inferiority of the Negro race. He hopes that once the true scientific facts can be put before the public, the country will realize the mistaken basis of the court decision, and something can then be done to reverse it. As T. R. Waring, editor of the Charleston (S.C.) *News and Courier*, points out in his foreword to *Race and Reason*; "To those who recognize that the salvation of the South lies in the education of public opinion rather than in rear-guard court actions, and that our national leaders must be told the scientific as well as the political facts of race, this book will be indispensable."

The Louisiana State Board of Education quite agrees with Waring's evaluation of the book. "An eminent American anthropologist and scholar," said the Board, referring to Putnam, "has recently written a book that exposes the flagrant distortion and perversion of scientific truth by so-called social anthropologists and socialistically oriented

sociologists." In view of this, the State Board of Education made the book required reading for "selected college personnel," including "1) All deans, professors, and other instructional personnel. 2) All students enrolled in courses in Anthropology, Sociology, and Psychology. 3) All students enrolled in the required course in Americanism vs. Communism." In addition, the book will be required reading for high school students, but only those specially selected on the basis of "maturity, sincerity, and dependability."

Governor Ross Barnett, of the neighboring state of Mississippi, was so impressed by the book that he officially proclaimed 26 October 1961 Race and Reason Day throughout the state. "The people of Mississippi are fortunate indeed to have a scholar of Mr. Putnam's standing visit our state and address our people," said Barnett, suggesting that the occasion be observed by "reading and discussing *Race and Reason*, calling the book to the attention of friends and relatives in the North, and by participating in appropriate public functions."

Somewhat further east, the governor of Alabama has also taken steps to establish the scientific facts of race. In February he made a grant of \$3000 to Wesley C. George, professor of anatomy at the University of North Carolina, in order that Professor George might make an impartial study of the question. George, along with three other scientists, contributed an introduction to Putnam's book, vouching for its "inescapable scientific validity." His evaluation of race differences will be ready for Governor Patterson shortly.

### Anthropological Association

The American Anthropological Association took note of this scientific effort by passing a unanimously supported resolution at its annual meeting last month. The resolution was framed to win the support of three mildly diver-

gent views among the 192 anthropologists at the meeting: those who feel it has been scientifically established that there are no significant mental or emotional differences between the races; those who feel that the question has not been firmly settled; and those who feel there is some evidence for marginal racial differences, but not for any differences marked enough to support a view that one race is inherently inferior to another.

"The American Anthropological Association," the resolution begins, "repudiates statements now appearing in the United States that Negroes are biologically and in innate mental ability inferior to whites and reaffirms the fact that there is no scientifically established evidence to justify the exclusion of any race from the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States."

George has responded with a letter to the New York *Times* reporting that it was "amazing to me" that the Anthropological Society would attempt to decide a scientific question by submitting it to a popular vote or passing a resolution. He said that a similar vote had condemned Galileo's belief that the earth moved around the sun.

### Response

Putnam took more direct action and called a press conference to read a statement accusing the association of "deceiving the American public." He invited the association to "throw off the yoke of the hard core radicals." "The hour has passed when American scientists could afford the luxury of indulging alien ideologies in their midst."

Putnam did not want to specifically name the minority group he felt was particularly responsible for the distortion, but in answer to a direct question from a reporter he allowed that they were Jews. He said he could not understand why Jews would want to do such a thing, since they themselves are not considered inferior. "Quite the contrary," he said. The Mississippi Citizens Council, for its part, was preparing a film of Putnam's talk at a banquet held in his honor during the state's Race and Reason Day. The film will be distributed as part of the Council's "Project: Understanding."

Putnam says he does not know when he will be able to get back to his biography of Teddy Roosevelt, since his book on race, he has found, has made him a central figure in the effort to cor-

rect the perversion of scientific truth he feels has been sold to the American people. He says he does not claim to be a scientist himself, but that he sees himself as counsel for what he feels is the great number of anthropologists and geneticists who have been forced to keep silent their true views on the racial question for fear of retaliation. He naturally refuses to name any of these men, but he tells of a scientist who wanted to be assured that Putnam was not followed when he visited his home, and another who assured him that he had evidence that "his lectures were being checked on by mulattoes."

### Resolution

The Anthropological Association's response to this renewed effort to claim a scientific basis for segregation was the resolution quoted earlier, which was, in itself, a restatement of a formal position it had taken several years ago in response to an earlier group of statements on racial inferiority. The affair, as it could not help doing, put the association in an awkward position. The resolution it passed was a political rather than a scientific statement: it was mildly but deliberately ambiguous. The first clause "repudiates" the view that Negroes are inferior. The second clause, though, does not affirm the opposite of what the first clause repudiates: it does not say that Negroes are not inferior, but that there is no scientific basis for denying them any share of the constitutional rights available to other citizens. Translated into blunter language, the statement might have said that while the anthropologists differ among themselves about the extent, if any, of congenital racial differences, they agree that there is no proof to give a policy of enforced segregation a scientific basis, and that while there may be evidence of racial differences, the suggested differences are not so firmly established or so uniformly favorable to any one race that they can support a flat assertion of the inferiority of another race.

The difficulty the anthropologists faced was the political problem that any recognition that there might be racial differences would be used by racists to support their own side, as is done, for instance, by Putnam, with quotations from authors who think the racist view is preposterous but agree that racial differences probably exist. From the other side, the association, in

order to get unanimous support for its resolution, had to meet the objection of the minority at the meeting who felt that there was affirmative scientific proof that no racial differences exist. The result was the negative clause repudiating the claim of the white supremacists that racial superiority had been proved, and the affirmative clause, making the more general assertion that there is no scientific basis for treating Negroes as second-class citizens.

The problem the association faced in wording its resolution is one faced continually by scientists working in the field, where Putnam is undoubtedly correct in saying that scientists are wary of speaking frankly on racial matters. This does not mean that Putnam is correct in claiming that many scientists would support his view if they felt free to speak. An indication of this is that even in the South, where a scientist would presumably feel free to speak out without much fear of being ostracized, or of losing his chances for promotion, there are very few men of any prominence who have supported the racist view. There are, however, a large number of scientists who feel there probably are racial differences, who feel, indeed, that it would be most surprising that groups living apart for so long that they have developed obvious physical differences had no differences at all beyond the physical differences, and yet who feel constrained to be very careful about what they say publicly, for it is almost impossible to say anything without on the one hand being suspected of being a racist, and on the other hand, of having whatever is said quoted out of context to support the racist view. It is very difficult to talk of possible racial *differences* beyond the most obvious physical ones without having the racists, and often the strong egalitarians as well, assume you are endorsing the idea of racial *inferiority*.

### Dilemma

There is no easy way out of this dilemma. Being a scientist rather than a politician does not make a man unaware of, or unconcerned about, the practical effects of what he says. Yet the scientist who is cautious about what he says in public about race faces the charge that he is letting political considerations interfere with his scientific objectivity. He also leads men like Putnam and the few scientists for whom he

speaks to feel that there is a conspiracy afoot.

The scientist speaking on a subject with unavoidable political implications has no comfortable way out unless he happens to hold an extreme (although not necessarily unsound) view. In this racial matter, those who have no difficulty deciding what to say are the men who hold that there cannot possibly be any racial differences not attributable to environment, or, on the other side, those who feel that there are, as George and his colleagues claim, "vast differences" which justify a policy of legally enforced segregation to prevent the degeneration of American civilization. The men in the middle cannot say much of anything without being attacked from one side and having their statements misused by the other.

There is, of course, the possibility of saying nothing, or at least nothing written in nontechnical language for the general public. The problem here, in the view of the Anthropological Association, is that George and the three co-signers of the introduction to Putnam's *Race and Reason* had issued, in effect, a public manifesto asserting they, as scientists, vouched for the scientific validity of Putnam's views. As the scientific body most directly concerned, the anthropologists felt they had a public responsibility to issue a statement making very clear that the great majority of men in this field regard George's views as hokum. To George's complaint about the impropriety of deciding a scientific question by passing a resolution, a spokesman for the association replies that George and his colleagues have done much the same thing in writing their introduction, and that they have nothing to complain of if a much larger body of scientists releases a similar public statement repudiating the racist view.

The association will try to put together a more precise statement of the question of racial differences, but a measure of the difficulty it foresees in working out something suitably "objective" and "scientific" is that the statement, if it is expected, will probably take about a year to prepare. It will not be terribly surprising if it never appears at all, for it is a good deal easier to agree to make a statement of the objective facts of a political issue available to the public, than to get agreement on just what an objective statement of facts ought to contain.—H.M.