

Janet Rosenberg  
September 2, 1942  
Room 1350  
Psychology 1

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RACE PREJUDICE

Cheddi Jagan Research Centre

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5. Sat. Eve. Post, 214:14, June 22, 1942, The Case for the Minorities, Wendell Willkie.

SUMMARY

The psychology of race prejudice is not an instinctive antipathy caused by physical differences, but has its basis in fear. The cause of this fear may be traced to economic, social and political reasons or the fear that the "inferior" race might threaten the power and dominance of the "superior" race.

I chose this subject because I am interested in the attitude of the White man toward the Negro in the United States.

In making a study of the psychology of race prejudice, it is well to keep in mind that we are speaking of races from the anthropological point of view. There are three essential races, the Caucasian, Negroïd, and Mongoloid. It is also well to keep in mind that one of the main accusations made by the prejudiced, that of differences in intelligence, is essentially wrong. W.I. Thomas expressed this clearly when he said that there are great differences in the mental abilities of individuals but not necessarily between different races.

Some authors maintain that the prejudices between the different races, particularly the White and Black, are instinctive. They claim that the Whites dislike living side by side with the Black and they resent intermarriage. This instinct they base on physical differences. Others, with clearer analysis, believe that such physical prejudices are a social creation rather than an instinctive aversion.

My point of view, in writing this paper, favors the latter. It is my belief that one of the main causes of race prejudice can be found in fear; the fear of one race being displaced by another.

I think that one of the main reasons for the strict taboo against intermarriage between Whites and Negroes can be found in the desire of the Whites to keep the race pure, from fear I maintain, rather than from a strictly physical antipathy. This can be realized more fully if we look to South America, where we find a much lessened taboo and a gradual merging of the two racial stocks.

We can find the basis of the fear of the Negro by the White in the South. It is known that the Negro population is far greater than the

White. The Negro there is restricted in countless numbers of ways - voting, opportunities of owning property, education, etc. Certainly all this cannot be accounted for by saying that the psychological basis is an instinctive dislike of their color and physical characteristics. I think that there is the psychological basis of fear - fear that the Negro, by his populational majority might control the governing bodies, over-run the professions and displace the Whites in it and acquire the domination of wealth.

We find racial prejudice manifested in many ways. We find an emotion of solidarity in the oppressed and a feeling of inferiority or an oppression psychosis. On the dominant race this is aggression. This can readily be seen in the South, with its Jim Crow laws and frequent lynchings. This can readily be seen in the army life today, with segregation of the Negroes, restriction of the Negroes from various branches of the service and with small or no advancement permitted in the ranks. We know it is not a matter of ability, for it has been proven that the Negro is as capable as the White in learning the mechanical abilities of military life; again I say it is fear.

Then one may ask, "But what of the Yellow race, is there as great a prejudice against them by the White as by the White against the Black?" Again we have the same evidences. The laws passed against immigration of the Orientals to the United States are very stringent. The physical antipathy does not appear so great but the evidences of segregation and isolation of the Mongoloids on White territory are as great. In the

United States this can be traced to an economic reason of fear - fear that the Yellow man working for smaller wages would displace the White man. In my opinion, it was not until the Yellow race in America created an economic problem that actual manifestations of racial prejudice began. If the latter is true it again illustrates that prejudice is a social creation rather than an instinctive aversion.

When we stop to consider that the White race is only one-third the population of the world, but is the dominant race, we must realize that it has been a continuous struggle to maintain that superiority. Much of this superiority has been maintained by creating these prejudices which have subjugated the other races. Of course, now, in World War II, we are in the process of attempting to overcome the growing superiority of a branch of the Mongoloid race. And so we see, by means of propaganda, etc., an increasing hate and prejudice against this race which is threatening the dominance of a branch of the White race.

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(Janet (Rosenberg) Jagan met Cheddi Jagan in early 1943 - 1st known political writing by Janet Jagan, written while she was attending the Cook County School of Nursing)