



Genetic Differences Between Races for Desirable Traits

A Review of

A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race, and Human History

by Nicolas Wade

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Reviewed by

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Every psychologist should read *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race, and Human History*, particularly those who dismiss hypotheses about whether genetic differences between races or ethnic groups are correlated with trait differences. Wade argues that traits like aggression and deferred gratification (impetuosity) are very likely to differ thanks to the evolutionary history of various groups. He is convinced that Jews have been selected for intelligence vis-à-vis gentiles. He awaits more evidence about intelligence differences between East Asians, Whites, and Blacks, but argues that even if IQ test differences have a genetic component, there is no cause for alarm. He does not dismiss the potency of environmental factors. And he, of course, rejects the crude contentions of the vulgar racist (e.g., all Blacks are less intelligent, more impetuous, etc., than all Whites) and those who promote compulsory sterilization to eliminate unwanted genes.

If the relevant genetic differences exist, they would be statistically with say only the top 25% of one group overlapping with the top 50% of another and thus individuals would be what they are, group membership aside. Arthur Jensen believed that Black/White intelligence differences in America were partially genetic in origin, but he always stressed that the brightest man in America might be a Black male. Ideally we would judge every person as an individual, which would nullify the significance of group differences in practice. However, as we shall see, there are reasons why this ideal will never be realized.

If significant genetic differences exist, they would be the result of natural selection: Those higher on the trait hierarchy would have had more offspring than those lower. Wade uses Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011) to argue that as human groups enlarged over historical times, those who showed pacific behavior (within the group) survived, and duplicated their genes, more often than those who showed aggressive behavior (criminals). We have domesticated ourselves just as we have domesticated dogs: The latter were bred to obey and not threaten their masters but to save aggression for those the master designated as dangerous.

I have emphasized differential reproduction as the mechanism of altering our genes because, as Wade notes, the study of genes themselves is in its infancy. We can put forward hypotheses that are probable but still to be tested. Until recently, peoples in Africa and the Middle East did not have to curb aggression except within the tribe or extended family, and may have weeded out fewer "aggressive" genes than Europeans and Chinese who have lived in large nation states where civility and the rule of law prevail. However, how discriminating would the social structure be in terms of affecting genes? I accept that those in pre-state societies might tend more toward aggression and that this proclivity might be retained if they migrated to a more "advanced" society. However, would it be encoded that the infant Iraqi (if raised in America) must direct his aggression at fellow citizens who are not kin, rather than at foreign nations? I suspect that the *target* of his greater aggressiveness would be determined by nurture.

On the other hand, impetuosity (failure to defer gratification) might be encoded in the genes and discourage traits that require self-control: educating oneself, doing boring work, not stealing, which all assume delayed gratification. I say "might" because we must await direct genetic evidence. It is possible that in a tribal society unwritten law, back-breaking work, and learning survival skills are as onerous as anything other societies impose.

When discussing why he believes that Jews have been bred for higher intelligence, he strays from describing what natural selection entails. Jews may well have pursued cognitively demanding professions like money lending and banking for centuries but this would not select their genes for intelligence. For the latter to occur, certain reproductive patterns within the group would have to prevail: Jewish bankers and intellectuals would have to have out-reproduced Jewish non-bankers and non-intellectuals, thus weeding out unintelligent genes, during a period when no similar pattern was manifest among non-Jews. This may have happened of course.

This dynamic is crucial concerning between-race genes for intelligence. After the industrial revolution, Europeans developed cognitive traits that promote academic success, such as taking the hypothetical seriously and using logic to generalize about abstractions, and academic success established a hierarchy with cognitively demanding professions at the top. But as IQ gains over time and census data show, this became dominant only in the 20th century during which reproduction by the upper classes became less efficient than among the lower (Flynn, 2013). So actually good genes for intelligence would be weeded out; and a society prior to the industrial revolution, where no such negative selection occurred, could have a better gene pool (this tentative hypothesis is mine, not Wade's).

I have three major criticisms of Wade's book. First, there are the passages in which he tries to disarm those concerned about what group differences may show. He keeps saying that neither evolution nor anything else could show that one race is superior to another. That may be true of God who values all of his children equally. But people in general will not be so forbearing when confronted with a race whose genes give them collectively a greater inclination toward impetuosity; and therefore, a tendency away from valuing education, hard work, and respect for law. The perception of such difference is very likely to influence their attitudes toward immigration.

American Blacks are already in America. Assume a worst-case scenario: They have genes that make them on average less law-abiding, more aggressive, more inclined to "immediate-gratification" behavior than Whites (such as theft and drugs). This would at

least partially account for the facts that give them an unfavorable racial stereotype: for example, higher crime statistics (one third of Black males are convicted felons) and higher unemployment. What has this to do with any given individual? Absolutely nothing—but due to the cost of getting information about individuals, people will use racial stereotypes because the latter are free. For example, imagine the case of a landlady who has a room to rent: She must choose between a Korean American female and a young Black male. She will not hire a private detective to check them out as individuals but fall back on the stereotype and play the odds: Why take one chance in three of an unwelcome tenant? As evidence that market incentives rather than simple racism are operative, Black landlords also prefer White tenants (Flynn, 2008).

Second, Wade does not face the case of eugenicists like Richard Lynn who have shed the excesses of the past. If those with less education are reproducing more efficiently than those with more, the gene pool is becoming less favorable to intelligence, deferred gratification, and hard work (Lynn, 1996, 2001).

Finally, Wade accepts the Ice Ages hypothesis: that human beings north of the Himalayas during the last ice age confronted more rigorous conditions that selected their genes for intelligence. This has been falsified: Only Northern Chinese were in that area; the Southern Chinese travelled out of Africa by a coastal route through India and Southeast Asia and never suffered extreme cold; yet the IQs of the two groups are identical (Flynn, 2012).

This book treats genes, race, and history as evidential issues. That alone is sufficient to recommend it to social scientists, who should face the fact that what science tells us to be true cannot be dictated in advance.

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