

Letters

Caucasian Genes in American Negroes

T. Edward Reed ("Caucasian genes in American Negroes," 22 Aug., p. 762), has provided interesting evidence on the amount of non-African ancestry in the American Negro. Unfortunately, he never defines the population or populations included in the term. This is a serious omission, tending to prejudice the results of his work. In southern Louisiana, at least, many persons are called "white" who might very well be called "black" in the North. This would be a factor in making Southern Negroes seem less "mixed" than Northern ones. There is also the question of "passing" and related devices whereby African genes scatter through the "white" population. According to one estimate (1), most Americans with African ancestry are "white," though, of course, their percentage of African ancestry must be small. We are dealing here with a sociological or "folk-scientific" classification. What is Reed's particular version of it? How did he arrive at his sample of Negroes? What possible statistical biases would be introduced by his procedures in defining and in sampling?

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References

1. R. P. Stuckert in *Physical Anthropology and Archaeology: Selected Readings*, P. Hammond, Ed. (Macmillan, New York, 1964), pp. 192-197.

Anderson's two main points require comment. A precise objective definition of "Negro" was not given because none was, or is, available. As implied in my first paragraph, the definition used in the various studies is generally the conventional one used by most persons in the particular area in question. I believe that this is the case for the five studies of Table 4, for example, but I can speak in detail only for the large Oakland, California, study. For this popula-

tion, individuals (all married, age 17 years or over) were classified as Caucasian, Negro, or other race on the basis of the wife's statement (obtained by interview) about her own and her husband's ethnic background. If this background was said to be "mixed," the person was placed in a separate category (2 percent of the total) and was not used in my study. This classification as "Negro" or "Caucasian" did not differ in any obvious way from the conventional ethnic classification, used between persons, in this area.

Relative to the other biases I discussed, I think that the lack of a precise definition of "Negro" is a minor deficiency. I do not believe that this deficiency seriously affects the conclusions of my article. In particular, after discussions with colleagues who have lived in both the South and the North, I believe that the proportion of persons (relative to the total "Negro" population) who may be called "white" in one area of the United States but "black" in another area is not over a few percent. I would welcome objective information on this point.

The second point, African Negro genes in American "whites," does not bear importantly on my article but it does merit comment on its own. There is no doubt that the African genes introduced by "passing" have spread widely through the American "white" population. In several more generations it is likely that a majority of "whites" will have at least one gene of African origin. To a lesser extent, of course, genes from other non-Caucasian peoples will also be widely distributed. It is of interest to note, however, that in the California Caucasians I studied (who are representative of U.S. Caucasians), the proportion of genes which are of African origin is probably less than 1 percent. The genetic argument leading to this conclusion is the following: The R^0 allele (of the Rh blood group system) has a West African frequency of 0.55 to 0.60, a California Caucasian frequency

(q_e , West European ancestry) of 0.0228 ± 0.0023 , and an English frequency (q_e) of 0.0257 [with S.E. about 0.0037; $N=2000$; from R. R. Race and R. Sanger, *Blood Groups of Man* (Blackwell, Oxford, ed. 5, 1968), p. 178]. The 95 percent confidence interval for $q_e - q_e$ is -0.0119 to $+0.0061$. If q_e is actually greater than q_e because of the contribution of African R^0 genes (and for no other reason), then it is about 95 percent probable that the proportion of "African" genes in the California Caucasians studied is less than $0.0061 / (.55 - .0257) = 0.012$. At the present time "passing" may be important socially but it is unlikely that it is very important biologically.

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Social Work—Dr. Wiesner!

In the report by Bryce Nelson entitled "Psychologists: Searching for social relevance at APA meeting" (12 Sept., p. 1101), Jerome B. Wiesner "called for the establishment of a new profession of social engineering to apply the findings of the social sciences to pressing social problems." Wiesner, like many others, needs to be informed that such a profession does exist, that being social work. The profession of social work has historically both interpreted and applied social science knowledge, and has focused its concern on the "pressing social problems" confronting modern society. The point may be made that social work's present impact is not what it could be or ought to be, and this would be a point well taken. But then, it would seem that none of the professions are making dramatic impact today or even coming close to the fullness of their professional goals. In any case, a professional structure (National Association of Social Workers) and an educational structure (over 70 graduate schools of social work) do exist through which knowledge from social and behavioral sciences is increasingly being brought to bear for the betterment of man. I doubt that we need a new or another profession. Why not use the one that exists and make it more effective and increasingly socially relevant?

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