

The Passing of the Great Race

Madison Grant, 1923 (originally published in 1916)

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... *The Passing of the Great Race*, in its original form [published in 1916], was designed by the author to rouse his fellow Americans to the overwhelming importance of race and to the folly of the "Melting Pot" theory, even at the expense of bitter controversy. This purpose has been accomplished thoroughly, and one of the most far-reaching effects ... this volume and ... the discussions that followed ... was the decision of the Congress of the United States to adopt discriminatory and restrictive measures against the immigration of undesirable races and peoples.

Another of the results has been... [that] [t]he new definition of race and the controlling role played by race in all the manifestations of what we call civilization are now generally accepted. ... The great lesson of the science of race is the immutability of somatological or bodily characters, with which is closely associated the immutability of psychical predispositions and impulses. This continuity of inheritance has a most important bearing on the theory of democracy and still more upon that of socialism, for it naturally tends to reduce the relative importance of environment. Those engaged in social uplift and in revolutionary movements are therefore usually very intolerant of the limitations imposed by heredity.

Democratic theories of government in their modern form are based on dogmas of equality formulated some 150 years ago and rest upon the assumption that environment and not heredity is the controlling factor in human development. Philanthropy and noble purpose dictated the doctrine expressed in the Declaration of Independence, ... which today constitutes the actual basis of American institutions. The men who wrote ..., "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," were themselves the owners of slaves and despised Indians as something less than human. Equality in their minds meant merely that they were just as good Englishmen as their brothers across the sea. ...

It will be necessary for the reader to divest his mind of all preconceptions as to race, since modern anthropology, when applied to history, involves an entire change of definition. We must, first of all, realize that race pure and simple, the physical and psychical structure of man, is something entirely distinct from either nationality or language. Furthermore, race lies at the base of all the manifestation of modern society, just as it has done throughout the unrecorded eons of

the past, and the laws of nature operate with the same relentless and unchanging force in human affairs as in the phenomena of inanimate nature. ...

To admit the unchangeable differentiation of race in its modern scientific meaning is to admit inevitably the existence of superiority in one race and of inferiority in another. ...

In many countries the existing classes represent races that were once distinct. In the city of New York and elsewhere in the United States there is a native American aristocracy resting upon layer after layer of immigrants of lower races and these native Americans [have] up to this time supplied the leaders in thought and in the control of capital as well as of education and of the religious ideals and altruistic bias of the community.

... In America we have nearly succeeded in destroying the privilege of birth; that is, the intellectual and moral advantage a man of good stock brings into the world with him. We are now engaged in destroying the privilege of wealth; that is, the reward of successful intelligence and industry. [I]n some quarters there is developing a tendency to attack the privilege of intellect and to deprive a man of the advantage gained from an early and thorough classical education. ...

A true republic, the function of which is administration in the interests of the whole community – in contrast to a pure democracy, which ... is the rule of ... a majority in its own interests – should be, and often is, the medium of selection for the technical task of government of those best qualified by antecedents, character and education, in short, of experts. ...

There exists today a widespread and fatuous belief in the power of environment, as well as of education and opportunity to alter heredity, which arises from the dogma of the brotherhood of man, derived in its turn from the loose thinkers of the French Revolution and their American mimics. Such beliefs have done much damage in the past and if allowed to go uncontradicted, may do even more serious damage in the future. Thus the view that the Negro slave was an unfortunate cousin of the white man, deeply tanned by the tropic sun and denied the blessings of Christianity and civilization, played no small part with the sentimentalists of the Civil War period and it has taken us fifty years to learn that speaking English, wearing good clothes and going to school and to church do not transform a Negro into a white man. ... Americans will have a similar experience with the Polish Jew, whose dwarf stature, peculiar mentality and ruthless concentration on self-interest are being engrafted upon the stock of the nation. ...

Man continuously undergoes selection through the operation of the forces of social environment. ... The lowering of the birth rate among the most valuable classes, while the birth

rate of the lower classes remains unaffected, is a frequent phenomenon of prosperity. Such a change becomes extremely injurious to the race if unchecked... .

To attack race suicide by encouraging indiscriminate reproduction is not only futile but is dangerous if it leads to an increase in the undesirable elements. What is needed in the community most of all is an increase in the desirable classes, which are of superior type physically, intellectually and morally... .

The value and efficiency of a population are not numbered by what the newspapers call souls, but by the proportion of men of physical and intellectual vigor. The small colonial population of America was, on an average and man for man, far superior to the present inhabitants, although the latter are twenty-five times more numerous. The ideal in eugenics toward which statesmanship should be directed is, of course, improvement in quality rather than quantity. ...

Where altruism, philanthropy or sentimentalism intervene with the noblest purpose and forbid nature to penalize the unfortunate victims of reckless breeding, the multiplication of inferior types is encouraged and fostered. Indiscriminate efforts to preserve babies among the lower classes often result in serious injury to the race. ...

Mistaken regard for what are believed to be divine laws and a sentimental belief in the sanctity of human life tend to prevent both the elimination of defective infants and the sterilization of such adults as are themselves of no value to the community. The laws of nature require the obliteration of the unfit and human life is valuable only when it is of use to the community or race.

It is highly unjust that a minute minority should be called upon to supply brains for the unthinking mass of the community, but it is even worse to burden the responsible and larger but still overworked elements in the community with an ever increasing number of moral perverts, mental defectives and hereditary cripples. As the percentage of incompetents increases, the burden of their support will become ever more onerous until, at no distant date, society will in self-defense put a stop to the supply of feeble-minded and criminal children of weaklings.

... A rigid system of selection through the elimination of those who are weak or unfit – in other words, social failures – would solve the whole question in a century, as well as enable us to get rid of the undesirables who crowd our jails, hospitals and insane asylums. The individual himself can be nourished, educated and protected by the community during his lifetime, but the

state through sterilization must see to it that his line stops with him or else future generations will be cursed with an ever increasing load of victims of misguided sentimentalism.

This is a practical, merciful and inevitable solution of the whole problem and can be applied to an ever widening circle of social discards, beginning always with the criminal, the diseased and the insane and extending gradually to types which may be called weaklings rather than defectives and perhaps ultimately to worthless race types.

... Man has the choice of two methods of race improvement. He can breed from the best or he can eliminate the worst by segregation or sterilization. ... Under modern social conditions it would be extremely difficult in the first instance to determine which were the most desirable types, except in the most general way and even if a satisfactory selection were finally made, it would be in a democracy a virtual impossibility to limit by law the right to breed to a privileged and chosen few. ...

Under existing conditions the most practical and hopeful method of race improvement is through the elimination of the least desirable elements in the nation by depriving them of the power to contribute to future generations. It is well known to stock breeders that the color of a herd of cattle can be modified by continuous destruction of worthless shades and of course this is true of other characters. Black sheep, for instance, have been practically obliterated by cutting out generation after generation all animals that show this color phase, until in carefully maintained flocks a black individual only appears as a rare sport.

In mankind it would not be a matter of great difficulty to secure a general consensus of public opinion as to the least desirable, let us say, ten per cent of the community. When this unemployed and unemployable human residuum has been eliminated together with the great mass of crime, poverty, alcoholism and feeble-mindedness associated therewith it would be easy to consider the advisability of further restricting the perpetuation of the then remaining least valuable types. By this method mankind might ultimately become sufficiently intelligent to choose deliberately the most vital and intellectual strains to carry on the race.