

## Race and Genetic Diversity

I wrote an earlier post about interracial dating taboos. I have more to add to the picture.

In 1843, a Southern doctor named Josiah Nott wrote an article suggesting that biracial people were less healthy than “pure race” people. He himself claimed that he had not done enough research to truly come to a scientific conclusion, but this was ignored by a Kentucky congressman who argued successfully to add the “mulatto” category on to the census in 1850. It remained on there until the late 1930s, mostly due to the fact that an amateur Swiss biologist named Francis Galton had popularized a theory called “eugenics,” that claimed that the solution to all the world’s problems was in our genetic makeup. There were some people in the world with poor genes, and if we could make sure that everyone with strong genes mated, the people with poor genes would die out. The philosophy got very popular, resulting in an effort to control the population, including: forced sterilizations, the birth-control effort by Margaret Sanger, and, of course, Hitler. Huge eugenicist. Since the narrative of white supremacy was already one that was dominating the Western world, eugenics became not only a pseudoscience devoted to ridding the earth of the diseased, deformed, and feeble-minded, it also evolved into a narrative for protecting the superior “white” gene (I know, there is no such thing as a “white” gene. That’s why modern scientists don’t call eugenics a “science.”). Laws like the National Origins Act of 1922, which restricted immigration to America from Eastern and Southern Europe, were heavily influenced by eugenics. The mulatto category was taken off the census because it validated a sexual union that was now “scientifically” unhealthy. And yet another generation was conditioned to believe that intraracial unions were healthy and normal.

Except they’re not. At least not scientifically healthy nor historically normal. It is in fact the case that all living organisms thrive in a genetically dynamic environment, not a genetically stagnant one. Let’s look at the most obvious example: Medieval European royalty. What a shitstorm of genetic banality that was. Medieval kings and queens ruled by something called “the divine right of kings,” which literally argued that kings were kings because God willed it so. As such, kings had divine blood, and that blood could not be mixed with common blood. As so whenever some royal wanted to marry off one of their kids, instead of doing it with a commoner who might be seven or eight generations removed from any familial connection, they would send for royal cousins – from across the continent, if need be – from which they might be only one or two generations removed. The result was inevitable and sad. When you study medieval history, pay attention to the number of times you read about a grand vizier or a regent taking over for a king or queen who was chronically sick, or too grossly obese to get out of bed, or particularly subject to diseases like syphilis or pneumonia, or, yes, feeble-minded. Medieval scientists couldn’t put a finger on it back then, mostly because they’d get beheaded, but to historians these are some of the tell-tale results of selective in-breeding. Many of the great advances Western Europeans prided themselves on were made by some of the poorest specimens of humanity. Next, let’s look at dogs. As many of you know, “dogs” don’t exist. Or, rather, they are a sub-species of wolf that mankind invented through selective in-breeding. Over centuries, we domesticated and bred together wolves with the qualities we liked, and invented dogs. Strangely, though, people like pure-bred dogs as well as pure-blood humans,

so we bred many dogs with their relatives and perpetuated the idea that pure-bred dogs were more valuable than the dirty word we gave genetically diverse dogs: mutts. But as any pure-bred owner will tell you, their dogs are subject to medicines, illnesses, birth defects, and early deaths the likes of which most mutts will thankfully never know. Because mutts are healthy. Which brings us back to race.

It is in fact the case that our healthiest offspring will result from people who are as different from us as possible. But even I, a flipping race scholar, must fight the urge to think "That's unusual" when I see an interracial couple. You get it? We've even come up with a dirty word with lots of uncomfortable associations to refer to people who are actually doing what's scientifically healthy for their children. Instead of two humans who love each other, I label them: "interracial couple," and shake my head. I should be shaking my head at myself. But at least now I'm aware of how the system is poisoning my mind. It is the first step to rejecting that bullshit.