

‘SCIENTIFIC ANTI-RACISM’ IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Disciplines, Trajectories and Politics

International Conference

Campus Condorcet (Aubervilliers)- Centre de colloques room/salle 100

11-12 December 2025

FALLACIES OF RACISM EXPOSED

UNESCO PUBLISHES
DECLARATION BY
WORLD'S SCIENTISTS

More than fifteen years ago, men and women of goodwill proposed to publish an international declaration which would expose "racial" discrimination and "racial" hatred as unscientific and false, as well as ugly and inhuman. The world at that time was running downhill toward World War II, and so-called "practical" considerations prevented publication of the statement — even if they could not prevent the war.

False myths and superstitions about race contributed directly to the war, and to the murder of peoples which became known as genocide — but victims of the war were of all colours and of all "races". Despite the universality of this agony and destruction, the myths and superstitions still survive — and still threaten the whole of mankind. The need for a sound unchallengeable statement of the facts, to counter this continuing threat, is a matter of urgency.

Accordingly, Unesco has called together a group of the world's most noted scientists, in the fields of biology, genetics, psychology, sociology and anthropology. These scientists have prepared a historic declaration of the known facts about human race.



Source: "Fallacies of racism exposed: UNESCO publishes Declaration by world's scientists", *The UNESCO Courier*, III, 6/7, 1950

Programme

11 December

9:00 – 10:00: Welcome/Introduction

Luc Berlivet (CNRS, Cermes3), **Fabrice Cahen** (Ined, UR11&UR4), **Claude-Olivier Doron** (SPHERE/Université Paris Cité)

Session 1 – Anthropology, Races and Anti-Racism in the Interwar Period

Chair: Claude-Olivier Doron

10:00 – 10:50: **Maciej Górny** (Polish Academy of Sciences): “*Rassenkampf*: East Central European Dialogue with German Racial Theories”

10:50 – 11:40: **Christine Laurière** (CNRS, Héritages): “Paul Rivet & the Temple of Man. Some Shades of Anti-Racism in 1930’s French Ethnologie”

11:40 – 11:55: Break

11:55 – 12:45: **Zacharias Zoubir** (CPGE, Le Mans): “The Society/Nature and European/Non-European Dichotomies in Franz Boas’ Critiques of Race and Racism”

12:45 – 13:00: General discussion

Lunch

Session 2 – Psychology and the Question of Races

Chair: Francesco Cassata

14:30 – 15:20: **Alexej Lochmatow** (University of Erfurt): “(De-)Racializing Intelligence in ‘Zionist Science’: A Search for Historical Agency beyond the Domains of ‘Race’ (1900–1933)”

15:20 – 16:10: **Chloé Maurel** (Institut d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine/PSL): “Otto Klineberg and Marie Jahoda: Two Humanist Psychologists at UNESCO Applying Social Psychology to Anti-Racism and the Pursuit of International Understanding”

16:10 – 16:30: Break

16:30 – 17:20: **Christelle Gomis** (University of Picardy Jules Verne): “Beyond Brown: The Clark Doll Test, Migrant Children in 1960s–70s Britain and the Limits of Psychological Anti-Racism”

17:20 – 17:45: General discussion

Conference dinner

12 December

Session 3 – Biology and Genetics against Racism

Chair: Snait Gissis

09:30 – 10:20: **Lisa Gannett** (Saint Mary's University, Halifax - CAN): *"How to Be (or Not to Be) a Scientific Anti-Racist: Lessons from Dobzhansky and Lewontin"*

10:20 – 11:10: **Cameron Brinitzer** (Harvard University): *"Genetics as Alibi: Racial Aporias amid Black Radicalism in the California Bay Area"*

11:10-11:20: Break

11:20 – 12:10: **Nayanika Ghosh** (Duke University): *"A Case to Include the Archives of Repression in the Archive of Scientific Anti-Racism"*

12:10 – 12:30: General discussion

Lunch

Session 4 – Science beyond Race? Transformations and Shortcomings of Scientific Anti-Racism

Chair: Luc Berlivet

14:00 – 14:50: **Snait Gissis** (Tel Aviv University): *"Can there be Scientific Anti-Racism when there is Racism but no "Race"? The Case of Israel"*

14:50 – 15:40: **Francesco Cassata** (University of Genova): *"In the Shadow of the 1938 'Race Manifesto': Reshaping Scientific Anti-Racism in Italy"*

15:40 – 16:30: **Claude-Olivier Doron** (Université Paris-Cité): *"Sciences against Racism in French Media. Evolving Strategies and Shifting Concepts between 1945 and the Late 1970s"*

16:30 – 16:45: General Discussion

16:45-17:00: Break

A Personal Perspective on Scientific Anti-Racism in France

Introduction: Fabrice Cahen

17:00-18:00: **André Langaney** (Emeritus Professor at the Musée de l'Homme and the University of Geneva)

Abstracts

Cameron Brintzer, *Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies (CES), Harvard University*
Genetics as Alibi: Racial Aporias amid Black Radicalism in the California Bay Area

In October 1970, two Stanford geneticists, Walter F. Bodmer and Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, published an article titled “Intelligence and Race” in *The Scientific American*. The aim of their article was to review, from a technical and scientific perspective, claims that two scientific racists at Stanford’s Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS), Arthur Jensen and William Shockley, had popularized about the genetics of race and IQ. “Intelligence and Race” was the result of several years of deliberations and deferrals in both the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) and Stanford’s Department of Genetics. When Bodmer and Cavalli-Sforza finally delivered the geneticists’ public reproach, their conclusion was cautious: Jensen and Shockley’s eugenic arguments were unwarranted, because genetic science and statistical techniques were not yet capable of definitively answering the questions Jensen and Shockley posed. As Arno Motulsky, the head of the ASHG’s Social Issues Committee, had written in a letter to Bodmer while planning *The Scientific American* article: “an outright rejection of such suggestions is also not scientific even if such claims make us uncomfortable emotionally.”

The geneticists’ sedate and ponderous scientific antiracism stands in stark contrast to the context of its articulation. In 1970, Stanford was not infrequently on fire. In April, the CASBS was the target of an arson attack and ten of its offices were burned completely. Students protesting Stanford’s complicity in the Vietnam War clashed with tactical police forces on campus over a dozen times during the last month of spring classes. The personal residences of Stanford’s Provost and President were attacked with explosives in May. That summer, student protests continued with marches on labs and departments involved in weapons development and classified research. At the same time, across the San Francisco Bay in Oakland, the Black Panther Party reached its peak membership and achieved international recognition, while being labeled the “greatest threat to the internal security of the country” by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. In August, the California Bay Area made national headlines yet again when Jonathan Jackson—the younger brother of the political prisoner and Black Panther Party Field Marshal, George Jackson—entered the Marin County courthouse armed with firearms and took the judge as well as clerks hostage in an attempt to negotiate freedom for the “Soledad Brothers.” Although Bodmer and Cavalli-Sforza’s “Intelligence and Race” was celebrated in some quarters as an achievement of scientific antiracism, its impact on public and scientific debates appears negligible. In this paper, I explore the limits of this liberal scientific antiracism by considering it in the context of alternative tactics and techniques of antiracist activity that were both contemporaneous and close by. While Motulsky was writing to Bodmer about appropriately tempering their critique, George Jackson was moved to San Quentin Prison, where he wrote in a letter to his lawyer that: “An intellectual argument to an attacker against the logic of his violence...borders on, no, it overleaps the absurd.”

Francesco Cassata, *CENTRA, University of Genova*

In the Shadow of the 1938 “Race Manifesto”: Reshaping Scientific Antiracism in Italy

This paper focuses on two key moments in the recent history of Italian scientific antiracism: first, the 2008 San Rossore “Manifesto of Anti-Racist Scientists”; and second, the campaign to remove the word “race” from the Constitution of the Italian Republic, which unfolded between 2014 and 2018. These examples illustrate how the memory of the 1938 “Manifesto of Racial Scientists” — the ideological decalogue published in July 1938 that laid the foundations for the Fascist regime’s racial policies — continues to cast a shadow over contemporary Italian antiracism, constraining its discourse to anachronistic condemnations.

The paper argues that this political and ideological configuration entails two main shortcomings: on the one hand, it contributes to the dehistoricization of the role of science in Fascist racism and antisemitism; on the other, it fosters the parallel dehistoricization of scientific antiracism itself. In conclusion, the paper reflects on possible ways to reshape antiracism in Italy — freeing it from its mimetic relationship with 1930s racism and antisemitism, and adapting it to the challenges of the post-genomic era.

Claude-Olivier Doron, *Université Paris-Cité, SPHERE*

Sciences against Racism in French Media. Evolving Strategies and Shifting Concepts between 1945 and the Late 1970s

This communication is based on a study of the main French radio and television programs that addressed the issue of fighting racism between 1945 and 1980. It examines how the concept of “racism” and anti-racist strategies evolved in parallel during this period, what types of scientific knowledge were convoked to address this issue at different moments, and what roles scientists, in the broad sense, played in these programs. We will see how, initially, from 1945 to the late 1950s, the dominant conception of “racism” was that of an ideology, based on the assertion of the biological existence of different human races deemed to be unequal, which led to specific policies. In this context, the sciences mobilized in the anti-racist struggle was primarily genetics, physical anthropology, and ethnology. Scientists were seen as undisputed experts who provided scientific truth to refute an ideology. Racism, understood in this narrow sense, was generally presented as something that belonged to the recent past or was confined to certain countries such as the United States and South Africa, and to a much lesser extent the French Empire. The late 1950s and early 1960s marked a clear turning point. Racism is described much more as a set of situations and psychosocial phenomena linked to prejudice, discrimination, etc. It is now presented as concerning metropolitan France itself and, more broadly, as a general tendency in all humanity that must be tracked down and eradicated in each of us. In this context, the knowledge mobilized and presented came from psycho-sociology, psychoanalysis and, more broadly, from the experiences of people suffering from racism. The voice of the scientific expert, particularly the biologist or anthropologist, was marginalized. The 1970s finally saw the development of a much more political and sociological conception of racism, linked to social structures and, in particular, to the issue of immigration and the economic crisis in France. The sciences mobilized appear to be much more diverse. Nevertheless, there was a resurgence of genetic expertise in connection with discussions on sociobiology and the controversy over the genetic determinants of IQ, arguments mobilized in the second half of the 1970s by a rapidly developing “New Right.”

Lisa Gannet, *Saint Mary's University* (Halifax, Canada)

How To Be (or Not To Be) a Scientific Anti-Racist: Lessons from Dobzhansky and Lewontin

The U.S. has been at the fore of scientific research internationally since at least WWII, with its universities, journals, and conferences attracting scientific talent throughout the globe. Given its history of colonization, slavery, and segregation, the U.S. has also been a leading site for grappling with scientific racism (and scientific anti-racism), past and present. Theodosius Dobzhansky and Richard C. Lewontin are examples of prominent American geneticists who took scientific anti-racist stands throughout much of their careers. Both Dobzhansky and Lewontin engaged in scientific debates with their contemporaries and embraced roles as public intellectuals. Comparing their contributions provides possible lessons about how to be (or not to be) a scientific anti-racist, which may help assess efforts by scientific leadership at the NIH and NHGRI to combat the risks of scientific racism as an outcome of human genome diversity research. However, the value of such lessons is being stretched by contemporary changes in intellectual currents, institutional priorities, and domestic and global politics that find the scientific establishment in the U.S. struggling to survive the anti-intellectual, illiberal, and White supremacist Trumpian political order.

Nayanika Ghosh, *Duke University*

A Case to Include the Archives of Repression in the Archive of Scientific Anti-Racism

As early as 1982, Nancy Leys Stepan argued in the *Idea of Race in Science* that populational thinking did not spell the end of biological determinism. Emerging biological and psychological studies, that indicated “biological roots” of human behavior, Stepan concluded, in fact, replicated racial typology. More than two decades later, Jenny Reardon maintained that conventional biomedical studies had not allowed us to move beyond race. If anything, they reaffirmed the centrality of racial categories in the human sciences. Recent studies have similarly suggested that statistical populations have neither replaced racial typologies nor have technical changes in the definition of “race” actually fixed the problem of scientific racism. The “remnants of race science,” Sebastian Gil-Riano’s work shows, have not only survived in biology and medicine but also in the social sciences. Studies across the last forty years in fact suggest that the history of scientific antiracism is a history of the ineffectiveness of liberal expertise. My paper will expand this history by including the archives of the “second wave” of “radical science” and its failures. The shortcomings of radical science – and radical antiracism – are of emerging significance. Recent scholarship attributes its demise in the U.S. in 1989 to sexism and a lackluster approach to racial justice. I do not contest that radical science suffered from these problems, that afflicted the New Left more generally. But my analysis of newly-accessible archives suggests that an explanation of the radical science movement’s failures necessitates the difficult task of bringing the histories of biology and scientific racism in conversation with the history of the Cold War. Bridging these histories permits the exploration of a new thesis, namely that radical science and scientific antiracism in the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s suffered from the repressive effects of the national security state and the military-industrial complex. My paper will ultimately argue that we need to consider that scientific antiracism was neither a unanimous goal in American science during the late twentieth century, and that radical scientific antiracism in the same time period was up against serious odds.

Snait Gissis, *Cohn Institute, Tel Aviv University*

Can there be Scientific anti-racism when there is racism but no “race”? The case of Israel

I will leave it to others to explicate the concept of race and its substitutes in recent decades ; I assume that there is a plurality of racisms, which are constantly mutating in ideology, rhetoric, practices, emotions. My discussion is guided by the question whether one needs an explicit ‘biological race’ assumption and /or reflection on it in order to produce scientific anti-racism

I divide the issues to be dealt with concerning the case of Israel into two periods: 1946-1980s, late 1980s-up to the present. I discuss the presence or absence of ‘race’, possible substitutes, and racism, when dealing with Jews, and when dealing with Palestinians and other non-Jews in genetics/ genomics, medicine, epidemiology, anthropology, and sociology, briefly contextualizing both periods. I try to analyze conceptual and practical uses. I then look into the possibility of scientific anti-racism in these diverse fields during these periods. At the very end I will try to provide a tentative explanatory answer to the guiding question.

Christelle Gomis, *University of Picardy Jules Verne*

Beyond Brown: The Clark Doll Test, Migrant Children in 1960s–70s Britain, and the Limits of Psychological Anti-Racism

This paper follows the journey of Kenneth and Mamie Clark’s “doll test” used as pivotal evidence in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) as it travelled through the Black diaspora and influenced debates in 1960s–70s Britain regarding the schooling of Caribbean migrant children. While traditionally celebrated within the U.S. civil rights narrative, the test’s migration into British educational psychology provides a critical case study of how “scientific anti-racism” was not only shaped by white experts but also reappropriated by Black actors working under distinct historical constraints. The central tension lies not only in the psychological harm to individual children, but in how the doll test’s methodology, i.e. the suggested/forced choice between a Black doll and a white doll, facilitated a form of evidence that prioritized psychological self-esteem over structural context. What happens when such frames are transposed onto migrant children navigating postcolonial education systems in Britain? Looking at how white and non-white psychologists, educators, and community groups adopted, adapted, or resisted these categories, this paper highlights their intellectual agency and the interpretive limits they faced. Through archival sources, including U.K. educational psychology journals, education reports, and migrant community testimonies, this study situates the doll test within the broader 1950s–70s chronology of scientific anti-racism, tracing developments from postwar prejudice research and discrimination psychology to later controversies surrounding population genetics, sociobiology, and IQ. It reveals how psychological tools migrated, acquired new meanings, and were reworked in different national and diasporic contexts. Ultimately, it underscores the methodological challenges and institutional blind spots that shaped the pursuit of anti-racist science in the twentieth century.

Maciej Górny, *Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History; Polish Academy of Sciences*
"*Rassenkampf*": East Central European dialogue with German racial theories

This paper uses a set of case studies to discuss the trajectories of East Central European scholars active within German-language academia in the early 1900s, focusing on their criticism of the racist theories that were popular during and after the First World War. The specialists (and amateurs) in question were involved in racial anthropology, anthropogeography and psychiatry; Mateusz Mieses, Erwin Hanslik and Arthur Kronfeld reacted to discourses that occupied the mainstream of their respective disciplines in the belligerent atmosphere of the time. Complex, ambivalent and ironic, their stance towards German-speaking academic race discourse was proactive, aiming to reverse what they perceived as aberrations of racial theories. The paper contextualises their contributions, paying particular attention to the complicated relationship of these scholars with the German-speaking academic milieu. Their ethnic and/or cultural minority status reduced their academic 'credibility', and they were not entirely immune to the influence of racial theories. It is therefore unsurprising that none of the three were able to conclude their academic careers in interwar German-speaking academia.

Christine Laurière, *CNRS, Héritages : Culture/s, Patrimoine/s, Création/s*
Paul Rivet & the temple of Man. Some shades of antiracism in 1930's French Ethnologie

Inaugurated in June 1938, the Musée de l'Homme, founded and directed by Paul Rivet, openly presented itself as an anti-racist museum, a herald of scientific humanism opposed to racial hierarchization. This is how it was described by the various ethnologists who contributed to the triple issue of the journal *Races et racisme* in December 1939, devoted to "the science of races at the Musée de l'Homme." This stance—both ideological and scientific—was fiercely attacked by the collaborationist and antisemitic newspaper *Le Pili* in November 1941, which lamented that "Rivet's experiment has almost made anthropological science forgotten, the scholar preferring ethnography [...], a more spectacular science that offers the immense advantage of not dealing with 'races.'" Rivet and the Musée de l'Homme were here conflated, since Rivet himself, particularly from 1934 onward, had taken a public and scientific stand on this issue. This engagement had repercussions both on the scope and definition of anthropology and on its educational mission toward the museum's visitors. The struggle against racism unfolded within a scientific and historical context marked by several intertwined factors: the height of colonial imperialism, the fashion for so-called "primitive art", the institutionalization of ethnology as an academic discipline, economic crisis and growing industrialization, as well as the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe, among them fascism and Nazism—the latter making devastating ideological misuse of the notion of "race." In 1930s France, fighting racism did not necessarily mean opposing all forms of racism, nor did it imply the theoretical abolition of the concept of race, since the racist paradigm remained integral to the prevailing framework for interpreting human diversity. So then, what kind of anti-racism are we talking about? This paper aims to provide some points of reference to better understand the ambiguous position of Paul Rivet and the Musée de l'Homme.

Alexej Lochmatow, *University of Erfurt*

(De-)Racializing Intelligence in 'Zionist science': A search for historical agency beyond the domains of 'race'

The discourse of 'intelligence' became a core topic in physiological, anthropological, and sociological debates on race and heredity in early 20th century. The level and degree of 'intelligence' became not only a basis of measuring individuals but also a central criterion in defining the historical agency of a 'race' and its situating on the landscape of 'civilization.' My paper will focus on debates around the works of the physician and anthropologist Ignaz Zollschan (1877–1948) who was a prominent Antiracist activist and, at the same time, an ardent proponent of Zionism. Without abandoning the concept of race, Zollschan controversially argued that the development of scientific research on racial traits can help to fight racism both in science and politics. Based on Zollschan's works as well as critical responses to them from the German and Polish (anti-)Zionist contexts, I will argue that the attempts to scientifically catch 'intelligence' played a significant role not only in supporting the racist discourses but also in radical narrowing the domain of racial analysis and promoting the antiracist political agenda.

Chloé Maurel, *Institut d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine (PSL)*

Otto Klineberg and Marie Jahoda: Two Humanist Psychologists at UNESCO Applying Social Psychology to Anti-Racism and the Pursuit of International Understanding

The Canadian psychologist Otto Klineberg dedicated his entire life to peace and international understanding through his research, publications, teaching, and lectures. Similarly, the British psychologist Marie Jahoda worked to promote mental health and combat racism. During the 1950s and 1960s, both actively collaborated with UNESCO as part of its program on "the race question." Through the writing of original and pioneering studies, they established links between mental health and anti-racism, and between psychology and international understanding. They applied social psychology to humanistic goals: seeking to dismantle the persistent racist prejudices in the post-war world and to ease tensions—arising from biases and stereotypes—between human groups, peoples, and nations. They drew on their personal backgrounds—both came from Central European Jewish families who had survived the death camps and Nazi barbarity—and on their discipline, psychology, to serve the cause of peace and human brotherhood. In doing so, they succeeded in bridging theory and practice, combining academic research with a strong commitment to pacifism and anti-racism. This presentation is based on their intellectual trajectories, on their articles, books, and reports produced within the framework of UNESCO, as well as on the institution's archives and correspondence files.

Zacharias Zoubir, *CPGE Le Mans*

The society/nature and European/non-European dichotomies in Franz Boas' critiques of race and racism

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is both to present and to critically examine the American pioneer of cultural anthropology Franz Boas' relationship to scientific anti-racism. Its aim is more precisely to shed light on the history of the very concept of 'racism' by tracing the intellectual path that led Boas from his early critiques of the misuses of the concept of 'race' to his late critique of 'racism' whose

main stake was to limit the concept of 'race' to the fields of genetics and biology. The main hypothesis of the paper can be summarized as follows. Because he dichotomized between supposedly real natural differences between human races, on the one hand, and the social causes of racial conflict, on the other, there is a double standard in Boas' critique of the pseudo-scientific uses of race. Indeed, in his late writings on the subject, he relates the racial distinction between European peoples to 'racism', thus making it the object of his scientific critique of racial theories. However, Boas considered the difference between 'Caucasians' and other races a natural fact and race prejudice its social correlate. On this view, in order to act upon the causes of race prejudice, one had to act upon the visible physical differences themselves. In Boas' anti-racist horizon, the only way to put an end to race prejudice was hence through miscegenation and its expected result: the phenotypical assimilation of racial, and notably black, minorities into the white social body. Some of the epistemic, strategic and political implications of this ambivalent Boasian critique of race and racism become clear in the scientific anti-racist discourse developed by two of his students, Ruth Benedict and Ashley Montagu.

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