

My First Scientific Experiment

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My first scientific experiment was the product of a feral childhood. A feral child is the exact opposite of a child who has helicopter parents. In my case I didn't even think of college until my 10th grade. Helicopter parents start selecting colleges for their child in the womb. I am not here to argue the merits, except to say in a cliché that in the end we will be what we will be.

All things are in context. My context was being born and raised in the upper South during a cultural era in many ways quite different from 2017, but also in some disturbing ways very similar to the early fifties. My birth happened on Halloween 1946, and right off my parents knew I would be weird. In 1951 when I was five years old I turned to my African-American sitter and wondered why her hair was kinky, while mine was straight. The innocently curious child in me then proceeded to independently discover the awesome difference.

Why did I, unlike typical helicopter children, think of this experiment? The best explanation I have comes from the old saying, "The nail that sticks up will be hammered down." There were no zeitgeist hammers over my head, just opportunity to become my best self. I was my own compass. Scientists surely made my critically important hair discovery long before I did; so why didn't they widely broadcast what their microscopes revealed?

Stop here and ask yourself if you already know the difference. Since then I have asked dozens of people, including educated blacks and whites, and nobody has given me the answer beyond vague "genetic differences." That's about as profound as saying a cat is a cat. Such an answer says everything and nothing.

A fully correct answer to my question profoundly involves society to this day and henceforth. It is at the core of American history, and even partially determined the presidential election of 2016. When advanced cybernetic life forms possibly take over in two or three centuries, they will have the last laugh, if there are any of us killer-ape humans left by then to laugh at.

My simple experiment involved examining one of my “white” Northern European hair strands, and one strand from her African head. I used my father’s simple illuminated 80X microscope with one sliding bronze tube, perfect for this task.

Under the microscope my hair strand looked like it “should”: long and thin, smoothly cylindrical. *A cross section would have looked like a **circle**.*

In sharp contrast, the caregiver’s equally thin hair strand was also perfectly smooth. However, her equally beautiful strand looked like a perfectly formed 2X4. *A cross section would have looked like a **rectangle**,* with two wide sides, two narrow sides, and right angles.

She and I were astonished to discover that such radically different hair follicles exist. There had to be a deeper reason **why**.

Because I was a self-motivated child, and my parents were not home, nothing more was said at the time on this matter, as my simple curiosity had been satisfied. It was only decades later that I revisited my experiment and deeply pondered what I had really discovered.

Going from simple “what” to complex “why” is something I could not do at five in 1951. Over the years I have learned enough history, anthropology, systems theory, and life sciences to piece together the “why” puzzle:

All humans have emerged from a long line of early mammals, then apes, hominids, etc. Modern humans are hardly more than 200,000 years old. Most of the earliest true humans evolved through Darwinian natural selection shaped by hot African savannas.

Darwinian selection ultimately involves a contest among genes. Genes that survive pass on their characteristics to future generations. Less successful genes either die with their species, or they become recessive until maybe later needed. Over the eons millions of species have perished, only to be sequentially replaced by fortunate others in Earth’s biosphere.

Now is our turn to prosper – but we are doing all we can (with massive carbon pollution boosting global warming, stupid wars, overpopulation, and nuclear proliferation) to also become extinct sooner rather than later. We don’t require evil space alien invaders to terminate us. We are already doing that to ourselves, thank you.

The history of human racism is fascinating but fuzzy. However, when hair follicles are taken into account understanding is at hand. Everybody likes to feel superior to somebody. Nobody likes being at the vulnerable bottom. If individuals can't make it to the top, then somewhere above the bottom could be OK for enhanced well-being. You may think that racism is just a lower class phenomenon. Not true. Coded racism is a tool of the powerful:

The origin and evolution of the African slave trade by Europeans and Americans is complex and simple: When brutish and greedy European slavers bought slaves at ports in western Africa from more powerful tribes, the slavers needed to market their human cargo in the Americas as sub-human and worthy of abuse for profit. Pious Europeans of Christian faith were uncomfortable with slavery, but the profits were good from Southern cotton and tobacco plantations, as well as from Caribbean sugar cane plantations. The cynical formula to banish guilt was to portray African slaves as sub-humans who would greatly benefit from living in civilized America as Christians. A vicious moral crime thereby was dressed up as a moral virtue.

When I was at UVA I liked to read old science literature from the late 19th century. There I could see what PhDs and MDs of that era had to say about racial science. Those educated idiots *assumed* that socially superior Caucasians are categorically superior to socially inferior Africans. It was easy for them to use fake science, such as phrenology (head shapes) and misguided discussions of kinky hair, as support for their self-serving and structural-functional racist thesis.

Their racist ideology did not just depend on kinky hair and head shapes. There was also the sick idea of sex-crazed blacks lusting for the flower of Southern white womanhood. Little was mentioned about how often seed from the flower of Southern white manhood got planted inside captive female Africans. Fear of what black males would theoretically do was magically amplified. The reality of what sex-crazed white men actually did to large numbers of black slave ladies was officially minimized. I suspect that unspoken guilt, and fear of retribution for mass rape of black women was fuel for this blacks-as-rapists fear. In other words, blame the victims.

In 1915 President Woodrow Wilson, PhD, hosted a showing of *The Birth of a Nation* at the White House. (I have seen it.) That film with pornographic KKK depictions of sex-crazed black rapists helped launch the massively resurgent KKK of the 1920s. The state with the largest number of klansmen was Indiana. A hundred years later the current KKK sings praises of another incumbent president and his racist attorney general. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

With a little honesty, and not needing a microscope, yet another of the pillars of “scientific” racism in America could be refuted, if anybody in power had cared to do this: It has been claimed that African blacks are closer to wild apes than European whites, based on the apes’ thick, dark brown body hair. Therefore, enslavement was believed to be good for these sub-human humans. Even today some extremist bigots refer to the dignified recent first lady as an “ape in heels.”

An honest cross-species comparison shows, first and foremost, that under all that ape and monkey hair is WHITE skin. White Caucasians with dark hair also have white skin, just like the apes. In contrast, black Africans have dark skin all over, with lots of melanin to protect areas of their human bodies not covered in thick hair, quite unlike apes. An honest conclusion could therefore be that whites are more like apes than blacks, which makes them by this *very weak comparison* inferior to blacks.

Here is where my childhood discovery is important: *Discovering the hair follicle difference yields a path for discovering stronger comparisons:*

Matted hair is, from an evolutionary perspective in the African tropics, superior to stringy straight hair. There is so much harsh year-around sunlight that body skin too needs to be darker and have lots of protective melanin. Both adaptations help adjust for surplus sunlight, but still allow enough radiation for skin to manufacture critical Vitamin D. This vitamin is essential for strong immune systems, and strong bones.

Africans made healthier field slaves in part due to the superior genetic protection both kinky head hair and dark skin gave them against skin cancer. Aboriginal Americans have darker skin, but also straight hair, having arrived from Siberia. This may partially explain why American Indians could not be profitably enslaved. (A greater factor with enslaved American Indians was their vulnerability to Old World diseases.) Did being genetically better protected against skin cancer make African field workers “inferior” to their plantation masters?

It has been noted that not everybody in the world with dark skin has kinky hair. Consider that the first wave out of Africa occurred as early as 130,000 years ago. Later waves settled in cooler climates with less sunlight. During that time the dominant kinky hair gene became a liability, as the temperate and northern tribes needed more sun to make enough Vitamin D. Evolution switched off this gene, though it still remains inside our genotype, occasionally making an appearance in minor ways among some whites.

Entire tribes migrated to Asian India, where all archaic Indians now have dark skin and straight hair – and then moved throughout Southeast Asia into Australia and Polynesia. Perhaps some early Polynesians made their way to the shores of South America, joining streams of people also with straight hair from Siberia.

Recent genetic science, totally unavailable in the 1950s, has proven that modern Europeans and people from the eastern Mediterranean region are genetically from one percent to four percent Neanderthal, the classical cave men. In contrast, Africans in Africa have zero Neanderthal genes. An argument could therefore be made that Northern Europeans and their white American cousins, being partially cave men, are at least partially genetically “inferior” to pure African descendants.

So now we know, in comparison to pure Africans, that *whites are in some ways more like both apes and cave men.*

Human societies are historically and culturally complex. However, there are repeating themes. All groups and individuals want to be superior to at least some others. Toward that end mythologies and magical science are introduced: There is, for example, little difference among all the black cultural racists in Nigeria, and among cultural racists in America. As for African racism, it’s not white vs. black, but cultural tribe vs. cultural tribe. Either way it’s always “in-groups vs. out-groups.”

I spent three months in Lagos, Nigeria during the summer of 1989. While there I had multiple discussions with educated West African businessmen from several countries about their region’s history of tribal competition and slavery. Typically they were OK with enslaving individuals from other tribes, but not their own.

When all the good and fake sciences and histories of this world are evaluated, the bottom line reveals how very similar are all peoples inhabiting Earth’s biosphere. All of our many cultural and phenotypical differences blend into one awesome, fragile species, when seen from the proper honest perspective. Through the eyes of a child we see a simple and elegant truth that any five-year-old child would understand, and adults *should* understand.