

EDI Reading Newsletter, 3 August 2020

As part of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team here at the IfA, we're introducing a newsletter to share readings that we've found inspirational and informative. Our hope (and expectation!) is that everyone takes a few minutes to engage with the shared writing. Agree or disagree with what's written, it is valuable to increase our literacy for informed discussions and decisions. We're not demanding a significant amount of time, and we've given several levels at which to engage.

Writer: Mike Petersen

What we're reading this fortnight: 'Superior' by Angela Saini, Chapters 1 (Deep Time: Are we one human species, or aren't we?) and 2 (It's a Small World: How did scientists enter the story of race?).

Angela Saini is a science presenter for the BBC who takes the reader "from the Enlightenment through 19th-century imperialism and 20th-century eugenics to the stealthy revival of race science in the 21st-century..." (Financial Times). Reni Eddo-Lodge offers a synopsis: "Roundly debunks racism's core lie – that inequality is to do with genetics, rather than political power."

Pick up a copy at the local bookstore, read the guardian review ([here](#)), or watch one of her many interviews on the book!

Why we're reading it: The first two chapters introduce the main idea: that the scientific process has been abused to offer support for racial biases. And – we can't pretend like this doesn't still happen: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/28/leading-voice-welfare-reform-accused-racism>

What you should read: (In 20 minutes): pages 15-16 and 55-58; (in 2 hours) the full chapters.

Discussion question: Have you witnessed intellectual racism in science? How can we combat intellectual racism?

Please feel free to discuss in the EDI Teams channel, and we will organise a coffee next week (week of 10 August) to chat further.

Sophie brought up a great point about not always giving scientists a pass, still need to think critically. Is this our best defence to combat intellectual racism?

Our best action might be de-platforming people who have these awful fields of research.

We can't really stop racists from saying racist things. It's not about what can we implement to avoid racists being racist...but it's more about how do we educate people who might be exposed.

Theory: just get it all out there, and try to let the light of day show how racism is wrong. If we just get more data, we can show that everyone is the same!

Classification system from 1795 in the prologue, generally the desire of scientists to classify, find differences

What makes humans modern? Capacity to think symbolically, talk in past and future tenses, produce art (hence the art debates in science).

The basis for the intellectual debate on races: Out of Africa (all modern humans left Africa relatively recently) vs. humans evolving distinctly from proto-humans, leading to some intellectual support of different races.

Darwin helps refute that (humans can only have evolved from shared origins), but even he wasn't ready to be progressive in how he thought about race. 'Ambivalent on the question of whether black Africans and Australians were strictly equal to white Europeans on the evolutionary scale.' E.g. perhaps populations evolved differently over time.

Chapter ('Black pills') discussing medical research and divisions by race. Essentially, 'race' as a superficial way to classify people, is a horrible way to gain scientific insight.

Chapter ('The Illusionists') describing modern research, and how one needs to be careful still (genetics being a primary concern!)

Sarah shared an article about old racist tropes that were in a recent article: trying to find correlations between culture and ethnicity.

Learning how culpable scientists are in the race science. Scientists are still just people and products of their environment. Still need to critically think about ideas that people have!

Teresita brought up 'weapons of math destruction', machine learning and biases that get baked into machine learning. Correlation doesn't mean causation. **Look up the book and think about making this as a future recommendation.**