GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Few issues in modern history have a greater purchase on contemporary concerns and attitudes than the questions surrounding race and racism. The very words raise problems of definition even before we develop the analyses relating to the historical dynamic through which these concepts have been framed, reframed, and endlessly discussed, notably by Europeans and by their dispersed populations in the 'neo-Europes' in the Americas, Australasia and enclaves elsewhere. Even if imperialism and colonialism do not have a wholly exclusive connection with matters of race, it is certainly the case that it was through the lens of imperial relationships, both in the sphere of rule (so-called 'dependent' empire) and in the sphere of settlement by white migrants from Europe, that they were debated and modified. In being so, a whole range of disciplines were called in as providing evidence, including most notably ethnography and anthropology, as well as archaeology, geography, climatology, anatomy, anthropometry, biology, eugenics, psychology, and in modern times sociology, history and genetics. To say that these questions are broadly based and richly textured is to deliver something of an understatement.

In this book, Douglas Lorimer brings to bear knowledge and insights that stem from almost a lifetime of study in the field. He examines the striking changes that took place in debates about race in the course of the nineteenth century, and the manner in which the twentieth century saw further significant developments in the field, before modern medical understanding put paid to many of the myths that had surrounded these questions. In the course of British imperial rule, a whole succession of policies, sometimes applied, sometimes merely proposed, were developed to attempt to cope with the racial questions that faced colonial rulers and settlers at every turn. Some of these policies contrasted ideas like assimilation and separate development. Others were concerned with planning across a spectrum from the extreme notion of the predicted evolutionary disappearance of some peoples, to an acceptance by whites of the inevitability, as they saw it, of colour prejudice, and on to a desire for the necessary amelioration of 'race relations'. Such debates had a very real basis in discussions of the supposedly varied 'races' of Europe, even of the British and Hibernian Isles, as derived from historic patterns of migration and the alleged characteristics of different ethnicities. 'Race' was a concept which very much embraced different forms of 'whiteness', as well as peoples of

supposedly contrasting skin colours on a variety of continents.

These debates were expressed in many different formats and locations. Lorimer analyses scientific societies and the development of an institutionalised professional science in the later nineteenth century, as well as the many different books and popular publications through which such ideas were communicated to a wider public. Moreover, many concepts (such as social Darwinism) permeated aspects of popular culture, in exhibitions, shows, museums (where the connections with natural history could be profound), the theatre, photography and other visual representations, among others. In all of these, racial ideas were carried through a linguistic lexicon (or sets of visual tropes) which themselves underwent much expansion and modification. This language of race passed from the realm of what may be described as amateur and quasi-scientific theorists to politicians, administrators, academics, theologians and practitioners of modern scientific and medical disciplines. Moreover, racial dogmas (themselves always malleable) inevitably aroused resistance, and the forms and content of such oppositional movements also have to be understood. As Lorimer makes clear, the language of the emerging concept of 'race relations' owed much to the continuing traditions of the prominent anti-slavery movement, while much of the resistance to harder racial ideas was led by persons of colour resident in the United Kingdom. In all of this, the early twentieth century was something of a transition period, a watershed between the ideas and writings of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras and the rapid advances of the modern sciences. Throughout all of this discussion, as Lorimer cautions, we have to be wary of reading current perceptions and obsessions back into Victorian and Edwardian times.

But of course questions of race continued to be live issues, not least in discriminatory politics, right through the twentieth century, producing endless debate, political tensions and diplomatic controversy up to the period of decolonisation and after, in such places as the southern United States, apartheid South Africa, and the former colonies of settlement. Although contexts change dramatically, nevertheless questions of race are still with us. There are also many matters of mutual racial attitudes as between the peoples of the world generally. They, however, must be the subject of other studies. As it is, this work will surely take its place as a landmark study in Western attitudes to race, as was the case with Lorimer's earlier book *Colour, Class and the Victorians*.

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