Over the last hundred years or so it has become fashionable in some parts of the world to use race as the ultimate point of reference in analysing the relationships between peoples of differing racial backgrounds. For some people, it is not politics, not economics, but race that makes the world go round. Scanning the history of mankind, and even the Bible, through this dubious lens, they find a racial basis for the ancient forms of slavery, for the relations between the Semitic tribes in Palestine, for the Greek and Roman concept of ‘the barbarian’, for the Hindu caste system, and so on. I am going to examine here some of the patterns of race relations which exist in the contemporary world, and I shall try to assess the influence which considerations of race exert on the relations between peoples.

We all inherit a vast complex of attitudes and prejudices which inform our dealings with people of other races—our race consciousness, if you will. This complex has been created out of all the diverse historical experiences which have made our world what it is. But the largest single influence in this process has been the phenomenon of western-European expansionism. From the moment that Columbus discovered, or perhaps rediscovered, America in 1492, Europeans assumed that the resources of the world were theirs, to be exploited, used, and traded.

Moving into the new world on such journeys of discovery and exploitation, they found, for the most part, peoples less organized and less aggressive than themselves. Whole civilizations and peoples disappeared before the irresistible advance. By 1550 the Spaniards had decided that the Amerindians were ‘lazy, filthy pagans, of bestial morals, no better than dogs, and fit only for slavery, in which state alone there might be some hope of instructing and converting them to Christianity’. How can this attitude be reconciled with the description which Columbus had given a few decades previously of the same Indians as ‘a loving, uncovetous people, so docile in all things that there is no better people or better country . . . They loved their neighbours as themselves and they had the sweetest and gentlest way of speaking in the world, and always with a smile’. Had their nature changed completely overnight? Or was the new and humiliating description simply a way of justifying the atrocities that had been committed and were to continue in the name of civilization, Christianity, and a superior culture? Either way, the fate that was implicit in the clash of the two races had now been made explicit.

A different pattern of relations between races is seen in areas where indigenous populations were forced to make room for immigrants. A distinguished historian of racial encounters, Professor W. M. Macmillan, has written: ‘From the beginning, Europeans seeking to make their homes in Africa have been at one with their governments in regarding the native African population as an embarrassment’. Land was taken over from the native people and distributed to immigrants. Gradually there
was built up a structure of legislation covering ownership of land and other property, as well as social and labour relations, designed to fortify the status of the immigrants as the superiors of the natives. But even though the indigenous populations were ‘an embarrassment’, they were needed as a labour force. In 1880, Earl Grey could report that

The coloured people are generally looked upon by the white as an inferior race, whose interests ought to be systematically disregarded when they come into competition with their own, and should be governed mainly with a view of the advantage of the superior race. For this advantage two things are considered to be especially necessary: first, that facilities should be afforded to the white colonists for obtaining the possession of land theretofore occupied by the native tribes; secondly, that the Kaffir population should be made to furnish as large and as cheap a supply of labour as possible.

Assumptions like Earl Grey’s were unquestioned in the minds of policy-makers and settlers alike; unless we first appreciate how deep-rooted they were, we shall find it almost impossible to understand race relations in Kenya, Rhodesia, and South Africa.

**Expatriate Ruling Class**

There was another form of expansion in which no settlements were established and the indigenous people were not deprived of their lands. Instead, an expatriate ruling class was introduced as the instrument of authority and influence. India is an example of this. Nigeria, Ghana, the Sudan fall into the same category. In the Asian countries some recognition was given to the indigenous religions and civilizations, even though the superiority of the European was asserted and firmly buttressed. In tropical Africa the pattern of relationships was built on the foreigner’s assumption, whether he was missionary, trader, or administrator that he was dealing with ‘child’ races. Even in Muslim North Africa, an area occupied by the very Moors or Arabs who had once conquered Spain, the aggressive European managed to maintain his confidence that he was the representative and product of a superior culture, and therefore of a superior race.

In areas where several races have come to live together, relations between them take a special form. The pattern is most clearly seen in the Caribbean, where the descendants of unions between white slave-owners and black slaves occupy a place in the social hierarchy between the two racial groups. Skin colour came to be directly connected with social status; the lighter the skin the higher the wealth and social standing, tended to be the rule. But the relationships have never been simple or easy. For one thing, the dominant races have often not acknowledged the children of mixed ancestry, and their rejection by one group, coupled with their own rejection of the other, has led to inner psychological conflicts which have become a favourite subject for social psychologists. Simmering beneath the colour-shade conflict there has been an uneasy relationship between Negroes and Chinese and Indians who were brought into the Caribbean as indentured labour. In British Guiana this is now an open conflict. Happily, the evolution of most of these areas has offered opportunities in education, in politics, and, indeed, in every aspect of life to all the peoples; colour is
no longer automatically either a barrier or an advantage; it seems almost certain that as the process of social assimilation continues, it will cease to have any significance.

‘Synthetic Race of the Future’
In Latin America persons of a wide range of skin colours describe themselves as ‘morenos’ or ‘mestizos’. The successful individual is sometimes described as ‘white’, irrespective of his colour. The term ‘Negro’ is apparently not acceptable because it was a synonym for slave in former days. Some Latin-American countries are consciously developing a local culture drawn from their Indian, African, and European heritage, and together with it what they describe as ‘the real synthetic race of the future’. Mexico, Peru, and Brazil in particular appear to have accepted the ideal of a non-racial society.

Some people argue that in the Latin American pattern colour or race is only incidental, that social discrimination is of the sort which exists even in the most homogeneous societies, the only difference being that the Negro and the Indian happen by the working of history to occupy the lowest rungs on the ladder. It is an attractive analysis, but it fails, for example, to explain why, even in Brazil, where race relations seem to be basically very humane, white is still the colour at the apex of the social pyramid and black at the base. According to several observers, ‘You wouldn’t think he was a Negro’ is the highest compliment that can be paid a black Brazilian. It seems to me that there is something dubious in this selective colour-blindness. At the same time, it may be that this is a transitional stage where a certain amount of ambiguity is only to be expected.

In the Far East, neither Japan nor China ever fell under colonial rule. Japan was able to maintain her isolation up to the middle of the nineteenth century, when a treaty was practically forced on her by Commodore Perry of the United States. Under the treaty Westerners acquired extra-territorial rights. The Japanese reaction to Western gun-boat diplomacy was sharp; her rulers realized that they needed strength to maintain their national integrity, and they determined to acquire it.

Japan’s technological progress was rapid; it made the greatest impression on the West, which had apparently forgotten that the magnetic compass and gunpowder had been used in China in the twelfth century, and had come to believe that Western knowledge, techniques, and skills had some special racial origins. When Japan defeated China in 1894, and Russia in 1905, and then began to vie with the United States as a power in the Pacific, people in the West attributed her achievement to a series of lucky accidents and were convinced that time would reveal the essential mediocrity of Japanese culture.

External Influences on China
China’s experience ran parallel to that of Japan. But, plagued by internal difficulties, she was an easier prey than Japan to external influence and did not come to terms so quickly with the Western threat. When her political organization collapsed she had to grant extra-territorial rights to the Western countries, and although never formally occupied, she was helpless to prevent encroachment all round her borders.
The national humiliation of the Chinese was compounded by the behaviour of individual Europeans. Theodore White wrote: ‘No one can understand China unless he appreciates the hatred and bitterness of the intelligent Chinese for the businessman who treated him like a coolie in his own land’. The Chinese were forbidden entry to city parks and not allowed to ride first class on certain ships. That oriental master of the cool phrase, Lin Yutang, remarked: ‘When China succeeds in building her own tanks and guns and battleships there will be no need to argue about equality’.

It is sometimes claimed in the West that Asians cannot reasonably be resentful when they are subjected to race discrimination, since it exists within their own societies. The Indian caste system is cited as the prime example of home-grown Asian race discrimination. But this is disputed: some people hold that the caste system was established by the white invaders of India to preserve the purity of their race. Others think that it grew out of occupational distinctions and has no racial basis.

In Africa two patterns exist side by side, one in settler areas and the other in what were foreign administered areas. Allowing for variations, race relations in settler areas have striking similarities with the historical pattern in the United States. What they have in common is the history of subjugation of one race by another.

The experience of slavery and the repression that went with it inevitably set the pattern for the development of race relations in the United States in the period after emancipation. White supremacy there had been more than a matter of instinct or conviction; it had been a condition of life sanctioned by social custom and by law. When this sanction disappeared — and it took a war to remove it — the attitudes of mind remained. The individual citizen refused to accept the Negro as a human being fully endowed with human and civil rights; it was therefore logical to tolerate police brutality towards him.

This was particularly true in the South; but as recent events have shown, the North was by no means an oasis of enlightenment and social justice. President Johnson told a Howard University audience this year: ‘In far too many ways American Negroes have been another nation deprived of freedom, crippled by hatred, the doors of opportunity closed to hope’. He was not speaking only of the South. Happily, America’s commitment to equality for all citizens is now total in fields where legislation and governmental pressure are effective; the patterns of race relations there are surely changing; it remains to be seen what they will become now that both the law and the major forces in society have repudiated the doctrine of white supremacy.

In Rhodesia, ever since 1897, when the Matabele uprising was suppressed, a process of subjugation of a former enemy has evolved. The status of the African changed from that of an enemy to that of an adversary. Restrictions reminiscent of the days of American slavery are placed on the movements of Africans; the fear of law-enforcement authorities has been imprinted on the minds of the Africans.

Nationalist political activities have been harassed and finally suppressed. It is true that internal pressure from liberal-minded white Rhodesians, backed by world opinion, has resulted in some formal improvements in the African’s situation, but the virtual disappearance of white liberal opposition at the last general election, and recent
events, show that the white voter in Rhodesia has no intention of freely giving up any of the privileges of white supremacy.

The Rhodesian crisis brings home to us the need to re-examine ‘patterns of race relations’. Past experiences account for the apparent unpreparedness of the majority of Rhodesian citizens to exercise their political rights. The myth which sustains Rhodesian intransigence is that the white man has created new conditions of life with his bare hands out of nothing. This is obviously untrue. The supposedly exclusive achievement of the settler could not have been realized without the land and labour of the native people and the military protection of the mother country.

We have to discard false explanations of the past and accept the fact that we cannot build the future on injustice. The British Government and ‘people seem to have accepted this fact, but some Rhodesian settlers refuse to do so. But the future which the settler minority seeks to assure by arbitrary action is an illusion. Those who support the Unilateral Declaration of Independence will live to regret it. Their children will never see the stable and prosperous future which they so naturally seek to create for them. One does not need to be a prophet to foresee the course of events. When Africans take a leaf out of the settlers’ book, and decide to take unilateral action without regard to human or humane considerations, that will be the day of reckoning. Even at this late hour, we may avoid such a disaster, if we do not take sides along emotional racial lines, but act together to ensure orderly transfer of power to the people of Rhodesia.

In the Republic of South Africa 3,000,000 whites of mainly Dutch and British origin, 1,500,000 coloured, 500,000 Asians, and 10,000,000 Africans are citizens of one country, which started on the process of becoming a nation 300 years ago. In terms of institutions and practices the people of South Africa are the most westernized in Africa. Therefore one is tempted to identify the Western world with what happens in the Republic. But the West has not hesitated to disavow racism in South Africa. Even the Dutch, who are most closely related to the Boers of the Union, have voted in support of United Nations decisions against apartheid, and have contributed funds for the relief of people who are persecuted for their opposition to it.

It is easy for countries with little or no ‘economic relations with the Republic to shout moral condemnation from the side-lines at countries who seem slow to accept an economic boycott or blockade against South Africa. But if it came to a boycott, it would be the Western countries, who have the largest trade with South Africa, who would suffer the heaviest losses. If it came to paying for an economic blockade, under the present U.N. formula for contributions the West would have to bear the largest portion of the cost. The problem of South Africa should be regarded as a serious challenge to the West and one which affects vital interests.

Various influences are now impinging on the pattern of race relations in the Republic of South Africa. Repressive laws and summary action by the forces of law and order are indications of an attempt to delay or prevent change.

Uneasiness over Apartheid
It might be thought that only the most determined optimist could see grounds for hope in this situation; and yet there is the fact that the press, some trade unions, and the
universities in South Africa have been growing visibly more and more uneasy at some of the contradictions and cruelties that are the inescapable result of apartheid. The pressure of economic necessity is compelling industry to relax some of the rigid rules on distribution of occupations. The reaction of white workers has been to strike in protest against this attempt. But it seems to me that the very fact that such relaxation could be contemplated, and to a certain extent put into effect, can be looked on as a sign of hope.

All the examples I have given so far of differing patterns of relations have one thing in common: they are all situations that have grown out of the history of European expansion and of European impact upon others of the world’s peoples. It has been argued that ‘since the belief in white superiority—that is to say white nationalism—began to move over the world, no people of colour have been able to develop race prejudice independent of whites’. It is a hard view to prove or disprove; on one side of the argument would be the fact that every people is ethnocentric to some degree, tends to see its own standards in all things as final, and tends, equally, to consider all other peoples apart from itself as being something of an oddity. Every people, in its primitive state, is in its own eyes a ‘chosen’ people.

On the other side, the penetration of the European into the remotest parts of the world and the dominance of his technology and social organization have lasted for at least four centuries. This could partially explain why, for instance, in so many countries where the predominant colour of the inhabitants is dark, lightness of skin is regarded as a criterion of beauty; it could be argued that the scale of aesthetic values has been influenced by several generations of white dominance.

**Inter-Racial Suspicion in South-East Asia**

But this kind of instance does not help to answer questions about racial antipathy that pre-dates European penetration, just as it does not explain the persistence of ethnocentrism in areas where the result of European domination was to reduce all non-European peoples to the same level. We have, for example, the antipathy between Chinese and Malay which has led to the recent break-up of the Malaysian Federation. Throughout south-east Asia there is inter-racial suspicion that can, in part, be traced back over the centuries to the migrations of Indians and Chinese, who often came and settled in the area but never completely integrated themselves into the local society.

Apart from the marginal problem of Eurasians who during the days of colonial rule had a privileged position because of their quasi-assimilation to the ruling race, and now find they have no place at all, there is the much more serious question of the displaced Indians, Pakistanis, and Chinese; more serious in the sense that their numbers are much larger and therefore the political implications of their presence are much more profound. For with the coming of independence to the whole area the question of loyalties arises. Is a third-generation Pakistani in Indonesia a Pakistani or an Indonesian? Does his allegiance go to Pakistan, the land of his fathers, or does it go to Indonesia, the land of his birth? When to the resentments of yesterday are added the suspicions of today, when to group solidarity, which is a volatile enough element, is added political nationalism, we have all the makings of an explosion.
Then there are the newer incidents springing from the new meetings of peoples who have never been in contact with each other before: the racial antagonisms involving African students in India, in Eastern Europe, in China, in Russia, and involving Chinese in Russia. We have the Chinese, as far back as 1945, reluctant to let American Negro troops enter their country as part of United States military assistance. Now we have Israel, whose very existence as a nation is the culmination of a long and determined struggle to assert the oneness of Jews and to end the humiliations of the dispersion. Yet the gathering-in of the tribes of Israel is a gathering-in of what might well be called many separate nations. There are divisions of experience, of generations of contact with widely different cultures. And because colour is one of the most obvious emblems of difference between man and man, and in the last five centuries it has carried, in most places, connotations of class and caste, the Jewish state is faced with the paradox that the Jewish people now embrace whites and browns, and that traditional tensions between whites and browns do not automatically disappear even when one can invoke community of race and creed. The welding together of all these elements into one people and one nation physically and culturally is a task which faces the young state of Israel.

**Arabs and Negroes**

There is one area of race relations which is of particular interest to me, the relations between so-called ‘white’ Africa and so-called ‘black’ Africa, between Africa of the Arab and Africa of the Negro, using that term in the loosest sense. Apart from the difference in skin colour of the inhabitants, these two Africas are separated by their difference in culture and history; moreover black Africa has good reason to remember the Arab slave-raider and trader, for it is less than a century since the Arab slave enterprise in Africa came to an end.

So we have on one side some seeds of racial resentment; and on the other some seeds of racial arrogance towards the victim of dominance. No one on either side admits that this is already a problem; but the situation contains all the elements that make for racial conflict. On the other hand, the political rapprochement between black Africa and white Africa is very close and real. One unifying factor is the knowledge that separately all African states may once more become victims of foreign domination. This is one reason for the existence of the Organization of African Unity.

It is against this background that we must look at the new, apparently racial, alignments that have made their appearance in our time: in particular, what has been called Afro-Asianism. I think we find here that this is a concept of very limited validity, largely because it was born out of the negative solidarity of protest against the West. Is it really enough to have in common the quality of not being white? Already we have seen the cracks in the façade, the Indochinese conflict, the Indo-Pakistan conflict, the confrontation of African and African across the great Congo divide, and now of Arab and Arab over Arab policy towards Israel. The lesson is that what brings peoples together or keeps them apart is interest; group interest, national interest, political interest, bloc interest. So long as the interest is genuine and pressing, questions of race become irrelevant. It is not only a negative lesson; on the contrary, I feel there is a positive hope in it. It gives us a more reliable lens than race through which to view and analyse the nature of human relations.