There is literally a multitude of myths and dogmas which purport to explain racial differences. They range from biblical explanations to zoological classifications. As one explanation loses its novelty or its power to convince, another emerges. The persistence of race theorists is astonishing. Why do they go to such lengths to find proof for what they obviously take for granted? The concept of race resists precise definition. All the same, the layman knows perfectly well that there are certain major human groups that differ noticeably from each other—even though there are also noticeable differences between members of any one of these groups.

Racism begins with the attempt to attach values to real or imaginary differences, and the attempt plumbs the depth of absurdity when it produces statements like these: ‘Races which are hairy are inferior to and less human than those which are free from body hair; thick lips are more human than thin lips because apes have thin lips; straight, lank, or wavy hair is more simian than woolly hair’. Where does this kind of analysis take us—if it can be honoured with the name? Exactly nowhere. Simian features appear to have been distributed among the races with a fine impartiality.

What race theorists fail to establish on the basis of measurable physical differences, they try to explain in terms of inherent psychological differences. But this is tricky ground too, for people’s reactions to psychological tests are very much affected by socio-economic conditions, and by acquired habits and skills which are hard to dissociate from innate ability. For instance, it has been established that there are no completely culture-free or language-free psychological tests.

In everyday terms we speak of people as being of ‘English blood’, ‘German blood’, ‘Negro blood’. We speak of one as ‘pure-blooded’, of another we say that he is ‘half-breed’ or ‘half-caste’, or one-eighth this or one-sixteenth that. It sounds very precise to say that if one of the sixteen direct ancestors of a person—that is, a great-great-grandparent—belongs to a particular race, then he is one-sixteenth a member of that race. In Brazil there are special names for different racial mixtures—a white-African mixture is a ‘mulato’; an Indian-Portuguese mixture is a ‘caboclo’; an Indian-African mixture is a ‘cafuso’. But genetically a man cannot be described as if he were a cocktail or an omelette! Anyway, if these ‘recipes’ have any value as descriptions of people’s physical types they are useless in cases where members of the same family—brothers and sisters, even—have totally different complexions and physical characteristics, to the point where some are regarded and treated as Negroes and others pass for whites.

During the last hundred years or so the natural sciences have been dragged into discussions of racial differences in a way that runs contrary to their essence and principles. Racists have not hesitated to distort the findings of scientists or to quote
them out of context so as to give their views an air of authenticity, and this kind of pseudo-science has become more and more frequent in our time, when cheap printing and the spread of other mass media furnish ‘instant’ information on any and every topic.

Anthropologists and scientists in the biological field have played an important part, and still do, in our endeavour to understand Man and the problems of human affinities; but in my view the scientist’s most important contribution is the spirit in which he approaches his problems. As Professor J. Bronowski puts it: ‘Science confronts the work of one man with that of another, and grafts each on each, and it cannot survive without justice and honour and respect between man and man. Only by these means can science pursue its steadfast object to explore truth’. These are the very values which are needed in’ a world of peoples’. If the world were sufficiently imbued with the scientific spirit there would be no place for irrational behaviour based on false generalizations.

Race relations are rooted in accumulated experiences and memories of the past, in frustrations and grievances of the present; these are the things which determine the mood in which peoples meet, that give birth to preconceptions and attitudes which get in the way of mutual understanding. Dr Albert Schweitzer surprised us when he said: ‘My general rule is never to trust a black’. A Gold Coast statesman, Nana Sir Ofori Atta, said in the Legislative Council in 1939: ‘Whiteman is a white man; he will not leave his brother Whiteman and support you. Do you think the Government will support you, black man? ‘A former Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia is reported to have said: ‘Africans, until they are very much advanced, are all liars’.

And then there are the dogmas. A Governor of Mississippi is reported to have said: ‘The Negro is singularly tractable and amenable to control by his well-recognized superior. For this reason the Egyptian, the Roman, and the Turk paid higher prices for them than for other slaves’. Needless to say, this seemingly scholarly pronouncement has no basis in fact. But the Governor is not alone in his illusion. The late Field-Marshal Smuts, addressing an audience in New York, once remarked: ‘Apart from the donkey, the Negro is the most patient of God’s creatures’. Questioned about this, the Field-Marshals answered that he was praising the virtues of Negroes, and that his remark had not been intended to be an insult!

It is not generally realized that Negro resistance to slavery never ceased. Independent and purposeful slaves on American plantations were usually ‘sold down the river’, as the expression was, to harsher and more ruthless masters. Captured runaway slaves and insurrectionists were quartered or broken on the wheel. Haiti became independent as a result of a rebellion of its slaves. Fugitives from slavery formed independent settlements in Guiana, where they became the ‘Bush Negroes’, and in Jamaica, where they were named the ‘Maroons’. Among the early settlers in Freetown, Sierra Leone, were rebellious Negroes who had been specially selected for repatriation. There is no shortage of evidence to show that the Negro worked relentlessly to emancipate himself and to regain his status as a man.
Growing Group Consciousness

Apart from resisting slavery, Negroes developed a group consciousness which provided a basis for a kind of Black Nationalism. The white man’s religion and civilization, everything white, was regarded as part of an arrangement to enslave and humiliate the black man. There have been two trends in Black Nationalism, represented by two antislavery agitators, Delany and Frederick Douglass. Douglass’s school of thought sought to secure the rights of the Negro in a multi-racial society, and it is carried on in the policy of the present-day Civil Rights movement. Delany’s attitude finds expression in the Black Zionist movement of the ‘twenties, which was led by Marcus Garvey, and in the Black Muslim movement of Elijah Muhammed and MalcolmX, whose aim is to build a Negro society in isolation.

Even in slavery days, the Negro’s feelings and determination were summed up by one of their leaders, Alexander Crummell, like this: ‘Let our posterity know that we their ancestors, uncultured and unlearned, amid all trials and temptations… were true to themselves, the age in which they lived, their abject race and the cause of man’. Such fighting words do not support the theory of Negro docility.

It has been the same in Africa. Armed resistance to European penetration ended only in 1904. In South Africa, before the creation of the Union, African chiefs, with the support of missionaries and liberals, did their utmost to secure an acceptable status for Africans. In 1912, chiefs, clergymen, teachers, lawyers, supported by white friends, founded the African National Congress to seek to protect the interests of Africans by constitutional means. From 1919 Africans and their supporters turned to strikes, protests, and demonstrations in a concerted effort to stem the tide of racism. Their protests culminated in the Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws which was organized in 1952—a unique event involving some 8,000 people determined not to be provoked to violence.

Kinship in a Heritage of Slavery

Twenty-six odd years ago the late Dr W E B Dubois, the American Negro historian, who had predicted that race would be a prominent source of conflict in the twentieth century, had this to say: As I face Africa I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes ties that I can feel better than I can explain? The real essence of this kinship is its social history of slavery, discrimination, and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa but extends throughout Yellow Asia and into the South Seas’. Sun Yat-sen’s last words to the Chinese people re-echo Dubois’s sentiments. He said: ‘We must wake up the masses of the country, unite with those countries who treat us as equals and struggle together’.

Resentment has been built up over the years, sometimes to the point of hatred. It is a negative force, and it can be a destructive one, as race riots so often show. It is usual now to speak of race riots as a new phenomenon and to assume that they are always started by minority groups. Yet in the past they were often incited by dominant groups in defence of their privileges. A Negro family moving into a white neighbourhood, a quarrel between a Negro and a white man, or an allegation that a Negro is being cheeky or forgetting his place, has been sufficient pretext.
Most racial situations today seem to involve a characteristic confrontation: on one side there is the group which until recently has been dominant, and whose members have tended to assume that their dominance was ordained by heaven and therefore immutable; on the other side is the group which feels that it has been deprived of its rights and is now in process of trying to re-establish them. This second group has usually been excluded—automatically as a group—from all positions of honour in the community and relegated to menial tasks. Its self-confidence has been systematically assailed and sometimes undermined. Its members have reacted to their situation in one of two ways: there are those who, like the West Indian poet Aimé Césaire, are ready to shout: ‘Long live those who never invented anything. Long live those who never explored anything. Long live those who never conquered anything!’, and then there are those who would join with President Leopold Senghor of Senegal in saying: ‘Tell me once again the old tales told at Negro vigils, let me be lost on forgetful roads. Mother, I am a humiliated soldier fed on coarse millet. Teach me, then, the pride of my fathers’. These two attitudes represent the dominant themes of the doctrines of the African Personality and Negritude, themes which may be described as self-assertion in the present and solace in the past.

An Illiberal Concept
At one time it was believed that non-Europeans under colonial rule should be educated, ‘enlightened’, and gradually assimilated—a belief that was based on a notion of ‘potential’ equality. Taken at its face value, this may well appear to be a liberal concept. I suggest that it is, rather, an insulting and illiberal one. Humanism values man for what he is, not for what he may become under a set of arbitrarily chosen stimuli. If the fact of being the creation of God does not confer equality, how can being the creation of man do so? On the other hand, the humanist must reject with equal vehemence any attempt to ‘preserve,’ the non-European or to keep him ‘unspoilt’, or perpetually confined to his traditional institutions. Real equality demands that people be totally free to decide what parts of their own culture they wish to preserve and what elements of other cultures they desire to assimilate.

The search for identity is closely connected with a feeling of rejection and isolation, and this feeling, I believe, especially now, is driving non-European intellectuals back on to themselves. As the American novelist Richard Wright puts it: ‘They are like lonely outsiders who exist precariously on the cliff-like margins of many cultures’. They are not quite at home in the indigenous cultures they have outgrown and do not feel welcome in the white man’s world.

There are signs, though, that this phase in race relations will soon disappear. Negro-Americans, in the tradition of Frederick Douglass, increasingly stress their American-ness; like Louis Lomax who wrote: ‘Whatever else the Negro is, he is American. Whatever he is to become—integrated, unintegrated, or disintegrated, he will become it in America’. In the same way it will be difficult to try to contain urbanized South Africans in a tribal structure. More and more the leaders and technicians of the newly independent states are doing business with their opposite numbers in different parts of the world. Statesmen of all races are discussing world problems on an equal footing. A world society is emerging, in which it will be culture rather than race that provides community of interests.
One of the enigmas of race relations is the apparently unbridgeable gap that can exist between races who have lived together for long periods. Time, one would think, should enable people to come together, to become adjusted to the strangenesses of other cultures and to accommodate themselves to social and psychological conditions that new contacts create. Yet when one looks at the situation in the Republic of South Africa or in many parts of the United States of America, one finds that members of the same community are in fact separated by an invisible, but real and palpable, barrier. What can this be but a question of mood, a mood that has its origins in the preconceptions I have spoken of, a mood that altogether excludes the desire to coexist? And this being so, it becomes impossible sometimes for the races actually to see one another as they really are. This social astigmatism has perhaps reached its acme in South Africa.

Yet one need not totally despair. It is recorded of Patrick Duncan, the celebrated white South African opponent of apartheid, that ‘after his twenty-ninth birthday he suddenly realized that the racial feelings of white South Africans were a gigantic illusion. This discovery made him feel like someone cured of a disease or as if for the first time he could see clearly’. Unfortunately, because of the influence of prevailing racial moods, there are not many to whom this sort of revelation can come.

I have had occasion in these talks to refer to fear, and I would like now to look at some of the specific forms it can take, and to suggest the kind of therapy that each seems to call for. First there is the fear of our neighbours. In the Republic of South Africa the fear of seeming disloyal to the idea of Afrikaner solidarity has successfully silenced men who know in their hearts that apartheid is unworkable and wrong. In the Southern States of America the same kind of fear makes decent Southerners accomplices in intimidation and crimes of violence. In black nationalist circles anyone who tries to look objectively at the racial situation is accused of ‘mulatto thinking’. In inter-racial meetings those who speak up frankly are accused of ‘going against the race’. There is a risk of total breakdown in communications between races; mutual fear and distrust are accentuated. But what is there to hide between the races? The only secret I can guess at is fear—the fear that the other party will see through our pretences, our weaknesses, our lack of self-confidence.

Then there is the fear of injustice. In a community where crime, even murder, may go unpunished because people refuse to give evidence against members of their own race and juries refuse to convict them, there can be no sense of security. Lack of confidence in the law often pushes desperate men into riots and violence. A society which permits its police force to use brutality systematically against minorities is playing with fire; it is a short step from selective to indiscriminate brutality.

There is the fear of those who feel that power is being taken out of their hands. This can lead to desperate acts. People who have dug up their roots and settled in other parts of the world feel that they have everything to lose if they are compelled to abandon their new-found homes. Their very fear prevents them from realizing that they are usually not being asked to do any such thing.

This observation may come as a surprise to some people; therefore I would like to cite a few statements to support it. Chief Luthuli of South Africa says Africans stand for ‘non-racial democracy where colour is irrelevant’. The Rev Ndabaningi Sithole of
Rhodesia reaffirms this view when he says that ‘on a purely human basis the African accepts the white man. In the majority of cases it is the white man who does not accept the African’. President N’Krumah declares; ‘We welcome into our midst people of all races, other nations, other communities, who desire to live among us in peace and equality’. A white South African testifies that African nationalists generally do not pursue a ‘white-man-get-out’ policy. In spite of the atrocities committed by the Italians in Ethiopia, on his return to Addis Ababa the Emperor Haile Selassie made an appeal to his people not to take revenge on the Italians who were still living in Ethiopia. Today there are many Italians happily settled in Ethiopia who arrived there during the period of Italian occupation.

The transition from a settler-dominated to a multi-racial society cannot be easy. Yet in relations between races, as in individual man-to-man confrontations, at the back of all the bluff and pretence there is often a genuine desire to know what the other side is thinking. But if this curiosity is to lead to useful results, it must break through the wall of what has been called the ‘entrenched and impenetrable inability to communicate’. Getting the right answer to the simple question ‘what does the other man want?’ can be crucially important: it can indicate the minimum conditions necessary for interracial negotiation.

In his study of the race question, *An American Dilemma*, the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal established what he termed a ‘rank order of discrimination’. This is a set of topics about which upholders and victims of racial discrimination feel most strongly. Myrdal lists them from the point of view of white Americans in descending order of intensity. Marriage and sexual relations rank the highest, followed by conventions intended to deny social equality; then there is segregation in the use of public facilities; next comes political disenfranchisement; then comes discrimination in law courts and by law-enforcement officers; and at the bottom of the list are restrictions on the ability to purchase land, secure credit, and obtain employment.

Myrdal notes that ‘the Negro’s rank order is just about parallel, but inverse, to that of the white man’. In other words, the complaints which were at the bottom of the white man’s list—jobs, education, housing, political rights and just treatment by the courts and law-enforcing authorities—are at the top of the Negro’s list. The same pattern appeared in what were called ‘the African Claims’ which were adopted in 1945 by the National Congress of South Africa, some of whose activities I have mentioned. In short, the most pressing disabilities are economic. Poverty, social debasement, and lack of political influence expose the deprived sections of a community to abuse, exploitation, and injustice. An improvement in economic status could lead to fuller public acceptance and to equality before the law; but the lack of these social rights makes economic improvement impossible.

To return to my categories of fear: the intensity of feeling about inter-marriage, which came first on the white man’s list, is closely linked with the fear of miscegenation. It is an aspect of most caste and class systems. The rule has been for the male members of the dominant races to take women of the subject or conquered peoples, and where there has been ethnic domination most persons of mixed ancestry have for their fathers or grandfathers members not of the subject group but of the ruling group. The contemporary male member of what used to be the ruling races has inherited a sense of guilt which grossly exaggerates his fear of the reverse process—of the formerly
subordinate group becoming sexually dominant. And unscrupulous politicians and racial psychopaths exploit this fear.

Richard Wright once made the defenders of ‘racial purity’ an offer: he suggested that an inter-racial covenant should be signed which would guarantee that: ‘The white man’s eyes shall remain forever blue, his skin forever white, and his hair forever blond, provided that he does not continue to presume that the natural resources of the world belong to him and that all other peoples are means placed at his disposal merely because his eyes are blue’.

The peoples of the world are trapped in a vicious circle composed of notions of superiority and inferiority, of suspicion, misconceptions, preconceptions, frustrations, and insecurity. Above all there is fear. It is fear that sets the racial moods, and if we are to break the vicious circle we must concentrate our assault upon these racial fears in all their forms. Hatred and intolerance are not innate in peoples; they are the children of fear, as fear is the child of ignorance.

Ultimately, what racial minorities seek is not anybody’s to give. The dominant races will not be any poorer by recognizing the rights that are now denied to much of the world. When this fact is appreciated in all its significance, our moods will change. And change they must, because the solution to our problem is to be found in a society of free men. There is all the difference in the world between ‘free’ and ‘freed’ men. Nobody is being required to free anybody. A world of peoples will consist of societies in which men are free.

No one can give equality; all that can be shared is respect.