

Creoles who have made themselves independent of Spain; the native Indians were incapable of doing so. In Paraguay, they were just like small children and were even treated as such by the Jesuits. The natives of America are, therefore, clearly not in a position to maintain themselves in face of the Europeans. The latter will begin a new culture over there on the soil they have conquered from the natives.

## Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*

*Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) is remembered both for his literary works and his racist philosophy of history. The latter is most clearly expounded in his Essay on the Inequality of Human Races. Although Gobineau placed race at the very center of history, he never offered a clear definition of what he meant by race. Indeed, his division of the races into White (Caucasians, Semitic, or Japhetic), Black, and Yellow (Altaic, Mongol, Finnish, and Tartar) was somewhat crude for its time. The first two books of Gobineau's Essay were published in 1853. By 1856, Josiah Nott of Mobile, Alabama, prepared an English version with the help of Henry Hotz. The result was a seriously doctored text. Nott added an Appendix of his own, and Hotz supplied numerous notes. From the chapter printed here, Nott and Hotz omitted the laws of repulsion and attraction, which were at the heart of Gobineau's account of the role of race-mixing in the rise and fall of civilizations.*

The word *degenerate*, when applied to a people, means (as it ought to mean) that the people has no longer the same intrinsic value as it had before, because it has no longer the same blood in its veins, continual adulterations having gradually affected the quality of that blood. In other words, though the nation bears the name given by its founders, the name no longer connotes the same race; in fact, the man of a decadent time, the *degenerate* man properly so called, is a different being, from the racial point of view, from the heroes of the great ages. I agree that he still keeps something of their essence; but the more he degenerates the more attenuated does this "something" become. The heterogeneous elements that henceforth prevail in him give him quite a different nationality—a very original one, no doubt, but such originality is not to be envied. He is only a very distant kinsman of those he still calls his ancestors. He, and his civilization with him, will certainly die on the day when the primordial race-unit is so broken up and swamped by the influx of foreign elements, that its effective qualities have no longer a sufficient freedom of action. It will not, of course, absolutely disappear, but it will in practice be so beaten

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down and enfeebled, that its power will be felt less and less as time goes on. It is at this point that all the results of degeneration will appear, and the process may be considered complete.

If I manage to prove this proposition, I shall have given a meaning to the word "degeneration." By showing how the essential quality of a nation gradually alters, I shift the responsibility for its decadence, which thus becomes, in a way, less shameful, for it weighs no longer on the sons, but on the nephews, then on the cousins, then on collaterals more or less removed. And when I have shown by examples that great peoples, at the moment of their death, have only a very small and insignificant share in the blood of the founders, into whose inheritance they come, I shall thereby have explained clearly enough how it is possible for civilizations to fall—the reason being that they are no longer in the same hands. At the same time I shall be touching on a problem which is much more dangerous than that which I have tried to solve in the preceding chapters. This problem is: "Are there serious and ultimate differences of value between human races; and can these differences be estimated?"

I will begin at once to develop the series of arguments that touch the first point; they will indirectly settle the second also.

To put my ideas into a clearer and more easily intelligible form I may compare a nation to a human body, which, according to the physiologists, is constantly renewing all its parts; the work of transformation that goes on is incessant, and after a certain number of years the body retains hardly any of its former elements. Thus, in the old man, there are no traces of the man of middle age, in the adult no traces of the youth, nor in the youth of the child; the personal identity in all these stages is kept purely by the succession of inner and outer forms, each an imperfect copy of the last. Yet I will admit one difference between a nation and a human body; in the former there is no question of the "forms" being preserved, for these are destroyed and disappear with enormous rapidity. I will take a people, or better, a tribe, at the moment when, yielding to a definite vital instinct, it provides itself with laws and begins to play a part in the world. By the mere fact of its wants and powers increasing, it inevitably finds itself in contact with other similar associations, and by war or peaceful measures succeeds in incorporating them with itself.

Not all human families can reach this first step; but it is a step that every tribe must take if it is to rank one day as a nation. Even if a certain number of races, themselves perhaps not very far advanced on the ladder of civilization, have passed through this stage, we cannot properly regard this as a general rule.

Indeed, the human species seems to have a very great difficulty in raising itself above a rudimentary type of organization; the transition to a

more complex state is made only by those groups of tribes, that are eminently gifted. I may cite, in support of this, the actual condition of a large number of communities spread throughout the world. These backward tribes, especially the Polynesian negroes, the Samoyedes and others in the far north, and the majority of the African races, have never been able to shake themselves free from their impotence; they live side by side in complete independence of each other. The stronger massacre the weaker, the weaker try to move as far away as possible from the stronger. This sums up the political ideas of these embryo societies, which have lived on in their imperfect state, without possibility of improvement, as long as the human race itself. It may be said that these miserable savages are a very small part of the earth's population. Granted; but we must take account of all the similar peoples who have lived and disappeared. Their number is incalculable, and certainly includes the vast majority of the pure-blooded yellow and black races.

If then we are driven to admit that for a very large number of human beings it has been, and always will be, impossible to take even the first step towards civilization; if, again, we consider that these peoples are scattered over the whole face of the earth under the most varying conditions of climate and environment, that they live indifferently in the tropics, in the temperate zones, and in the Arctic circle, by sea, lake, and river, in the depths of the forest, in the grassy plains, in the arid deserts, we must conclude that a part of mankind, is in its own nature stricken with a paralysis, which makes it for ever unable to take even the first step towards civilization, since it cannot overcome the natural repugnance, felt by men and animals alike, to a crossing of blood.

Leaving these tribes, that are incapable of civilization, on one side, we come, in our journey upwards, to those which understand that if they wish to increase their power and prosperity, they are absolutely compelled, either by war or peaceful measures, to draw their neighbours within their sphere of influence. War is undoubtedly the simpler way of doing this. Accordingly, they go to war. But when the campaign is finished, and the craving for destruction is satisfied, some prisoners are left over; these prisoners become slaves, and as slaves, work for their masters. We have class distinctions at once, and an industrial system: the tribe has become a little people. This is a higher rung on the ladder of civilization, and is not necessarily passed by all the tribes which have been able to reach it; many remain at this stage in cheerful stagnation.

But there are others, more imaginative and energetic, whose ideas soar beyond mere brigandage. They manage to conquer a great territory, and assume rights of ownership not only over the inhabitants, but also over their land. From this moment a real nation has been formed. The two

racés often continue for a time to live side by side without mingling; and yet, as they become indispensable to each other, as a community of work and interest is gradually built up, as the pride and rancour of conquest begin to ebb away, as those below naturally tend to rise to the level of their masters, while the masters have a thousand reasons for allowing, or even for promoting, such a tendency, the mixture of blood finally takes place, the two races cease to be associated with distinct tribes, and become more and more fused into a single whole.

The spirit of isolation is, however, so innate in the human race, that even those who have reached this advanced stage of crossing refuse in many cases to take a step further. There are some peoples who are, as we know positively, of mixed origin, but who keep their feeling for the clan to an extraordinary degree. The Arabs, for example, do more than merely spring from different branches of the Semitic stock; they belong at one and the same time to the so-called families of Shem and Ham, not to speak of a vast number of local strains that are intermingled with these. Nevertheless, their attachment to the tribe, as a separate unit, is one of the most striking features of their national character and their political history. In fact, it has been thought possible to attribute their expulsion from Spain not only to the actual breaking up of their power there, but also, to a large extent, to their being continually divided into smaller and mutually antagonistic groups, in the struggles for promotion among the Arab families at the petty courts of Valentia, Toledo, Cordova, and Grenada.<sup>1</sup>

We may say the same about the majority of such peoples. Further, where the tribal separation has broken down, a national feeling takes its place, and acts with a similar vigour, which a community of religion is not enough to destroy. This is the case among the Arabs and the Turks, the Persians and the Jews, the Parsees and the Hindus, the Nestorians of Syria and the Kurds. We find it also in European Turkey, and can trace its course in Hungary, among the Magyars, the Saxons, the Wallachians, and the Croats. I know, from what I have seen with my own eyes, that in certain parts of France, the country where races are mingled more than perhaps anywhere else, there are little communities to be found to this day, who feel a repugnance to marrying outside their own village.

1. This attachment of the Arab tribes to their racial unity shows itself sometimes in a very curious manner. A traveller (M. Fulgence Fresnel, I think) says that at Djiddah, where morals are very lax, the same Bedouin girl who will sell her favours for the smallest piece of money would think herself dishonoured if she contracted a legal marriage with the Turk or European to whom she contemptuously lends herself.

I think I am right in concluding from these examples, which cover all countries and ages, including our own, that the human race in all its branches has a secret repulsion from the crossing of blood, a repulsion which in many of the branches is invincible, and in others is only conquered to a slight extent. Even those who most completely shake off the yoke of this idea cannot get rid of the few last traces of it; yet such peoples are the only members of our species who can be civilized at all.

Thus mankind lives in obedience to two laws, one of repulsion, the other of attraction; these act with different force on different peoples. The first is fully respected only by those races which can never raise themselves above the elementary completeness of the tribal life, while the power of the second, on the contrary, is the more absolute, as the racial units on which it is exercised are more capable of development.

Here especially I must be concrete. I have just taken the example of a people in embryo, whose state is like that of a single family. I have given them the qualities which will allow them to pass into the state of a nation. Well, suppose they have become a nation. History does not tell me what the elements were that constituted the original group; all I know is that these elements fitted it for the transformation which I have made it undergo. Now that it has grown, it has only two possibilities. One or other of two destinies is inevitable. It will either conquer or be conquered.

I will give it the better part, and assume that it will conquer. It will at the same time rule, administer, and civilize. It will not go through its provinces, sowing a useless harvest of fire and massacre. Monuments, customs, and institutions will be alike sacred. It will change what it can usefully modify, and replace it by something better. Weakness in its hands will become strength. It will behave in such a way that, in the words of Scripture, it will be magnified in the sight of men.

I do not know if the same thought has already struck the reader; but in the picture which I am presenting—and which in certain features is that of the Hindus, the Egyptians, the Persians and the Macedonians—two facts appear to me to stand out. The first is that a nation, which itself lacks vigour and power, is suddenly called upon to share a new and a better destiny—that of the strong masters into whose hands it has fallen; this was the case with the Anglo-Saxons, when they had been subdued by the Normans. The second fact is that a picked race of men, a sovereign people, with the usual strong propensities of such a people to cross its blood with another's, finds itself henceforth in close contact with a race whose inferiority is shown, not only by defeat, but also by the lack of the attributes that may be seen in the conquerors. From the very day when the conquest is accomplished and the fusion begins, there appears a noticeable change

of quality in the blood of the masters. If there were no other modifying influence at work, then—at the end of a number of years, which would vary according to the number of peoples that composed the original stock—we should be confronted with a new race, less powerful certainly than the better of its two ancestors, but still of considerable strength. It would have developed special qualities resulting from the actual mixture, and unknown to the communities from which it sprang. But the case is not generally so simple as this, and the intermingling of blood is not confined for long to the two constituent peoples.

The empire I have just been imagining is a powerful one, and its power is used to control its neighbours. I assume that there will be new conquests; and, every time, a current of fresh blood will be mingled with the main stream. Henceforth, as the nation grows, whether by war or treaty, its racial character changes more and more. It is rich, commercial, and civilized. The needs and the pleasures of other peoples find ample satisfaction in its capitals, its great towns, and its ports; while its myriad attractions cause many foreigners to make it their home. After a short time, we might truly say that a distinction of castes takes the place of the original distinction of races.

I am willing to grant that the people of whom I am speaking is strengthened in its exclusive notions by the most formal commands of religion, and that some dreadful penalty lurks in the background, to awe the disobedient. But since the people is civilized, its character is soft and tolerant, even to the contempt of its faith. Its oracles will speak in vain; there will be births outside the caste-limits. Every day new distinctions will have to be drawn, new classifications invented; the number of social grades will be increased, and it will be almost impossible to know where one is, amid the infinite variety of the subdivisions, that change from province to province, from canton to canton, from village to village. In fact, the condition will be that of the Hindu countries. It is only, however, the Brahman who has shown himself so tenacious of his ideas of separation; the foreign peoples he civilized have never fastened these cramping fetters on their shoulders, or any rate have long since shaken them off. In all the States that have made any advance in intellectual culture, the process has not been checked for a single moment by those desperate shifts to which the law-givers of the Aryavarta were put, in their desire to reconcile the prescriptions of the Code of Manu with the irresistible march of events. In every other place where there were really any castes at all, they ceased to exist at the moment when the chance of making a fortune, and of becoming famous by useful discoveries or social talents, became open to the whole world, without distinction of origin. But also, from that same day, the nation that was originally the active, conquering,

and civilizing power began to disappear; its blood became merged in that of all the tributaries which it had attracted to its own stream.

Generally the dominating peoples begin by being far fewer in number than those they conquer; while, on the other hand, certain races that form the basis of the population in immense districts are extremely prolific—the Celts, for example, and the Slavs. This is yet another reason for the rapid disappearance of the conquering races. Again, their greater activity and the more personal part they take in the affairs of the State make them the chief mark for attack after a disastrous battle, a proscription, or a revolution. Thus, while by their very genius for civilization they collect round them the different elements in which they are to be absorbed, they are the victims, first of their original smallness of number, and then of a host of secondary causes which combine together for their destruction.

It is fairly obvious that the time when the disappearance takes place will vary considerably, according to circumstances. Yet it does finally come to pass, and is everywhere quite complete, long before the end of the civilization which the victorious race is supposed to be animating. A people may often go on living and working, and even growing in power, after the active, generating force of its life and glory has ceased to exist. Does this contradict what I have said above? Not at all; for while the blood of the civilizing race is gradually drained away by being parcelled out among the peoples that are conquered or annexed, the impulse originally given to these peoples still persists. The institutions which the dead master had invented, the laws he had prescribed, the customs he had initiated—all these live after him. No doubt the customs, laws, and institutions have quite forgotten the spirit that informed their youth; they survive in dishonoured old age, every day more sapless and rotten. But so long as even their shadows remain, the building stands, the body seems to have a soul, the pale ghost walks. When the original impulse has worked itself out, the last word has been said. Nothing remains; the civilization is dead.

I think I now have all the data necessary for grappling with the problem of the life and death of nations; and I can say positively that a people will never die, if it remains eternally composed of the same national elements. If the empire of Darius had, at the battle of Arbela, been able to fill its ranks with Persians, that is to say with real Aryans; if the Romans of the later Empire had had a Senate and an army of the same stock as that which existed at the time of the Fabii, their dominion would never have come to an end. So long as they kept the same purity of blood, the Persians and Romans would have lived and reigned. In the long run, it might be said, a conqueror, more irresistible than they, would have appeared on the scene; and they would have fallen under a well-directed attack, or a long siege, or simply by the fortune of a single battle. Yes, a State might be overthrown

in this way, but not a civilization or a social organism. Invasion and defeat are but the dark clouds that for a time blot out the day, and then pass over. Many examples might be brought forward in proof of this.

In modern times the Chinese have been twice conquered. They have always forced their conquerors to become assimilated to them, and to respect their customs; they gave much, and took hardly anything in return. They drove out the first invaders, and in time will do the same with the second.

The English are the masters of India, and yet their moral hold over their subjects is almost non-existent. They are themselves influenced in many ways by the local civilization, and cannot succeed in stamping their ideas on a people that fears its conquerors, but is only physically dominated by them. It keeps its soul erect, and its thoughts apart from theirs. The Hindu race has become a stranger to the race that governs it to-day, and its civilization does not obey the law that gives the battle to the strong. External forms, kingdoms, and empires have changed, and will change again; but the foundations on which they rest, and from which they spring, do not necessarily change with them. Though Hyderabad, Lahore, and Delhi are no longer capital cities, Hindu society none the less persists. A moment will come, in one way or another, when India will again live publicly, as she already does privately, under her own laws; and, by the help either of the races actually existing or of a hybrid proceeding from them, will assume again, in the full sense of the word, a political personality.

The hazard of war cannot destroy the life of a people. At most, it suspends its animation for a time, and in some ways shears it of its outward pomp. So long as the blood and institutions of a nation keep to a sufficient degree the impress of the original race, that nation exists. Whether, as in the case of the Chinese, its conqueror has, in a purely material sense, greater energy than itself; whether, like the Hindu, it is matched, in a long and arduous trial of patience, against a nation, such as the English, in all points its superior; in either case the thought of its certain destiny should bring consolation—one day it will be free. But if, like the Greeks, and the Romans of the later Empire, the people has been absolutely drained of its original blood, and the qualities conferred by the blood, then the day of its defeat will be the day of its death. It has used up the time that heaven granted at its birth, for it has completely changed its race, and with its race its nature. It is therefore degenerate.

In view of the preceding paragraph, we may regard as settled the vexed question as to what would have happened if the Carthaginians, instead of falling before the fortunes of Rome, had become masters of Italy. Inasmuch as they belonged to the Phœnician stock, a stock inferior in the citizen-virtues to the races that produced the soldiers of Scipio, a different

issue of the battle of Zama could not have made any change in their destiny. If they had been lucky on one day, the next would have seen their luck recoil on their heads; or they might have been merged in the Italian race by victory, as they were by defeat. In any case the final result would have been exactly the same. The destiny of civilizations is not a matter of chance; it does not depend on the toss of a coin. It is only men who are killed by the sword; and when the most redoubtable, warlike, and successful nations have nothing but valour in their hearts, military science in their heads, and the laurels of victory in their hands, without any thought that rises above mere conquest, they always end merely by learning, and learning badly, from those they have conquered, how to live in time of peace. The annals of the Celts and the Nomadic hordes of Asia tell no other tale than this.

I have now given a meaning to the word *degeneration*; and so have been able to attack the problem of a nation's vitality. I must next proceed to prove what for the sake of clearness I have had to put forward as a mere hypothesis; namely, that there are real differences in the relative value of human races. The consequences of proving this will be considerable, and cover a wide field. But first I must lay a foundation of fact and argument capable of holding up such a vast building; and the foundation cannot be too complete. The question with which I have just been dealing was only the gateway of the temple.