The Academic Success of Mixed-race Children. Study by the Institute for Anthropology in the Sciences and Humanities (1956)

Abstract

Between 1945 and 1955, tens of thousands of occupation children were born in West Germany as the result of sexual relationships between German women and foreign occupation soldiers. In the mid-fifties, the Berlin-based Institute for Anthropology in the Sciences and Humanities [*Institut für Natur- und Geisteswissenschaftliche Anthropologie*] undertook a thorough study of the "part Negroes" ["*Negermischlinge*"] among the occupation children. These children, who were fathered by African-American GIs, usually grew up with their mothers or with maternal relatives. The report concludes that the academic achievement of these children was not substantially different from that of their fellow students and that "racial mixing" therefore entailed no negative consequences. At the same time, however, the report also imputed several specifically "Negroid" character traits, such as a heightened temperament, a tendency toward spontaneity, greater physical agility, and so on. Government officials in the educational realm were making efforts to sensitize teachers, parents, and fellow students, and they claimed that the mixed-race children had not been exposed to overt discrimination thus far.

Source

1. *Introduction*

In the first report of "Studies of the Institute for Anthropology in the Sciences and Humanities," an attempt was made to provide a picture of the mental and physical development of the colored occupation children in Berlin. This study is now four years old. By now, the majority of the children on whom these observations were based have enrolled in school. The oldest, who were then five years old, have already been attending school for two to three years. Since it was possible to continue to track the life paths of these children with the help of the *Hauptschulamt* [Office of the *Hauptschule*], a second report now completes the picture we have. Here, one must recall with special gratitude the patience and willingness of the officials and teachers who alone made it possible for the report to be assembled piece by piece, like a mosaic.

The primary purpose of the 1952 article was to determine the form in which the interplay of predisposition and environment shaped the children. By contrast, the present report intends to focus on how the *Mischling* [mixed-race child] is getting along in his human environment, and on what, from a social perspective, he can accomplish and become within society in its present form. Of course, one must remain cognizant of the fact that the active and passive elements cannot be separated in sociology. Managing life and being shaped by life – this is a reciprocal process. Thus, the question of how the environment responds to the *Mischlinge* cannot be avoided. Since the release of the first report, the German section of the World Brotherhood, Frankfurt am Main, has taken up the problem of the colored mixed-race children in a special way and published their observations (*H. Ebeling*). This collection of material, which is worthy of gratitude, has been used in formulating what follows here.

Finally, to round out the picture beyond the childhood setting, the experiences of Negro *Mischlinge* between twelve and twenty years of age have also been drawn upon. A city like Berlin provides an opportunity for doing so. Thus, one can say that the entire timespan during which young people become

part of life has been subjected to examination.

2. *Preliminary remarks*

The decisive factor in the life of the *Mischling* is the "climate" of public opinion into which he is born, that is to say, the current assessment of the race question as such. This is not to say that the *Mischling* problem is merely a sociological one; the first report was tasked with shedding light on the biological side of the issue. It would appear, though, that the biological aspect was overemphasized for a long time. We know that this exaggerated emphasis at times creates the sociological problem of race-mixing in the first place or at least exacerbates it. […]

Now, if one holds up the situation of the Negro *Mischlinge* in Germany (West Germany and West Berlin), the following picture emerges. Frist: their number is relatively small. Leaving aside the scattered cases in which there was a relationship between a white woman and a colored man before 1945, that is, if we limit ourselves to the occupation children with a Negro or a mixed-race father, the number of 4,000 can be seen as approximately correct. What characterizes them is their descent from members of the occupation forces and the fact that this is evident from looking at them – in contrast to the approximately 90,000 other occupation children fathered by white soldiers. The attitude of the environment is thus determined not only by their racial otherness, but also by the dominant attitude toward the occupation power and to the girls and women who get involved with foreign soldiers. Incidentally, this also depends largely on which women (in terms of social background and character) maintain relationships with members of the occupying forces – and thus there is an important milieu factor. Needless to say, the inherited status of the mixed-race children also depends on the proclivities of the mother.

3. *The domestic environment of the mixed-race children*

What characterizes the environment of the colored children? More so than with adults, the domestic environment is the primary milieu that shapes the child. The school and the community of children come second. All of this, as has been stated, is influenced by the way in which the entire problem is assessed by the public. *Table 1* shows the domestic circle in which the mixed-race children grow up:

Table 1

Federal Republic	**1951**	**1953**	**Berlin**	**1951**
with the mother	71%	71%	}	76%
with relatives	8%	5%		
in homes	12%	12%		12%
with foster parents	9%	11%		12%
with American adoptive parents	–	6%		–

(The figures in the first column come from a survey by the *Internationale Vereinigung für Jugendhilfe* [International Association for Youth Aid], Geneva; those in the second column come from surveys by the World Brotherhood. Discrepancies in the sum arise in column 2, because some of the children adopted by Americans were also included in one of the other categories).

The fact is that the great majority of the colored children live with the mother or the mother's relatives, that is, for the most part with the grandparents. In those cases, what does the home of the *Mischling* look like? *Table 2* gives the educational level and learned vocation of 37 mothers of colored children (Berlin):

Table 2

Formal education *Hilfsschule*	**1**
Elementary School	28
	4
Secondary School	2
unknown	2
learned vocation	8
Artist	1
domestic, saleswoman	5
tailor, cleaner and the like	5
gymnastics teacher, kindergarten teacher	3
typist and the like	10
no vocation	5

Also of interest in this context is the age of the mother at the time of the birth of her – or her first – colored child:

Table 3

17 to 19 years	**6**
20 to 22 years	16
23 to 25 years	12
26 to 28 years	3
Older	3
Average 22 years	

[…]

In fact, the fathers of the mixed-raced children, the Negroes, that is, play a minor role in their lives. Apart from those cases in which there was only a fleeting affair with the mother to begin with, a relationship with the colored soldier mostly exists only as long as he is stationed in Germany. Until they return to America, some of the fathers take care of mother and child. For example, in 1953, Nuremberg reported this in 23 of 148 cases, which is 15.5 percent. It is rare for colored soldiers to continue sending meaningful amounts of support after that. From Fürth, we heard of two cases in which the father sends a monthly dollar amount equal to 200 DM. Sometimes, the parents of the soldier show an interest in their grandchild in Germany for a while, perhaps even with the serious intention of taking it in. Essentially, however, one can say that as time goes by, the mothers are increasingly left to their own devices.

A negative public reaction penetrates into the domestic sphere chiefly in an indirect way. There can be no doubt that the attitude of a mother toward her colored child would be influenced if she faced discrimination because of it. In fact, this has remained rare. A decidedly rejectionist attitude of the population toward the mixed-race children cannot be recorded. Thus, as long as the children only have occasional contact with strangers, that is, until they enter school, they are rarely exposed to difficulties. On the contrary, the passerby on the street is more likely to spoil the mixed-race children or act toward him with pity, at least not with unfriendliness.

4. *School days*

In 1952, as the time approached for the first segment of the colored occupation children to be enrolled in

school, the ministers of culture of the West German states issued directives to the elementary schools calling for the tolerant treatment of the problem. An occasionally-mentioned plan to teach mixed-race children separately was dismissed. Decisive here was the view that the colored children must grow into their situation early and under the guiding hand of the teacher. In class, however, the mixed-race children should not receive any treatment that singles them out. A particularly felicitous formulation was included in the directive from the Bavarian minister of culture of May 20, 1952, which speaks of "inconspicuous care." In addition, teachers were obligated to deal with the problem of the colored occupation children within the framework of parents' evenings and to get the parents of white classmates to support their efforts. […]

In fact, the educators have approached the problem without prejudice and have tackled it with as much skill as understanding.

It was clear from the outset that the behavior of the fathers and mothers of the white classmates would be the decisive factor in the entire calculation. For one, they could make the situation more difficult through direct protests, for another, their attitude would be reflected in the relationship of the white pupils to the mixed-race children. And in fact, occasional protest from the parents was voiced, especially in the beginning. On the whole, however, they have not shown any effect; public opinion was against them. By contrast, there was one case in which parents, after initial tolerance, complained that the unruliness of a colored classmate was leading their own children astray. Such a statement should definitely be taken seriously, since it springs not from prejudice, but obviously from a sense of responsibility. That the issue touched on by these complaints, namely the integration of the mixed-race children into the class community, is frequently not an entirely easy task for the teacher is something one must not overlook – but it has for the most part been mastered.

[…]

What is advantageous for the mixed-race children in their integration into the classroom community is their liveliness, a quality that can be observed almost without exception. Added to this, for the most part, is physical dexterity, which, in girls, often manifests itself in gracefulness. Something like this almost always ensures a leadership role among the classmates. Of course, to adults, this energetic behavior often seems like misbehaving; in children, especially boys, who experience little domestication at home, it is at times even a little rowdyish. There is no doubt that in later years this could lead to problems. […]

Behind the liveliness of the mixed-race children lies an animated emotional life. Fits of anger are immediately followed by demonstrations of affection; selflessness stands next to willfulness. It is inevitable that the impression of moodiness arises, and one often finds the same child very different today than yesterday. What is evident here is that the mixed-race children are generally more likely to respond spontaneously than to process things internally. In this context, it should also be said that the children are more affected by their experiences than their white classmates, or at least feel a stronger urge to communicate – to virtually reenact with facial expressions or play-acting – these things.

It cannot come as a surprise that these qualities of character have an effect on the academic intelligence/performance of the mixed-race children. Thus, one often hears complaints from teachers that the children lack concentration, are careless and inattentive in the classroom. They show fleeting interest only in those tasks that appeal to them somehow, but here, too, their persistence quickly slackens. However, the inability of students to concentrate, in particular, is something that people generally complain about today. For all that, one can by no means speak of a below-average intellectual ability of the mixed-race children, as all teachers emphasize. If one considers all those factors that come under the umbrella of "domestic environment," and also what, in most cases, is the – at best – average aptitude of the mothers, one can readily register a good, or at least normal, overall impression of the children's intelligence. […]

[…]

8. *Result*

The theory of the inequality of the races goes back further than Count *Gobineau*; he merely combined the craving for recognition that is always latent and that exists in all nations into an intellectual edifice that corresponded to the consciousness of his time and was in this way able to exert a broad impact. That *Gobineau's* theses were not grounded in knowledge of the facts – even if they made it seem as though they were – can no longer be denied today. *Gobineau's* decisive mistake was equating dissimilarity with nonequivalence. The dissimilarity of the human races in the positive sense is obvious. But if this difference leads one to speak of higher and lower races, then this invariably raises the question of the yardstick. However, every measure that is to have general meaning must be based on metaphysical principles; any other measure can be invoked merely for statements that move within the boundaries of the partial aspect from which it has been taken and can therefore never lead to such far-reaching conclusions as were drawn by *Gobineau* and his successors.

The biological dissimilarity of the races is one aspect; the unity of the human race is the other. The personal being of the person, with its criteria of reason, liberty, and conscience, the embodiments of being human, that is, is something that all individuals of the species *Homo sapiens* possess, independent of differences of biological type (*Muckermann*). That this circumstance also remains untouched by the fact of racial mixing clearly follows.

What remains is the question of what consequences racial mixing has in biological and sociological terms. In recent times, the notion has been put forth, especially by *Mjöen*, *Abel*, and others, that racial mixing as such results in a diminishment of the human capacity. The combination of strongly divergent heredity supposedly leads to disharmonies and serious harm to body and soul. This theory is based largely on findings from experiments with domestic animals. Against this, it must be said that human races do not even remotely vary as extremely as dog and rabbit breeds, for example. Apart from a few stringently selected characteristics, it is likely that in humans most characteristics differ racially only through distribution differences against the backdrop of a largely congruent range of variation (especially in the psychological realm), as a result of which racial mixing in humans can hardly have such critical consequences as in the extremely diverse breeds of domestic animals. At any rate, the findings with Negro *Mischlinge* in Germany provide no support for this theory of disharmony through racial mixing.

By contrast, one cannot dismiss the possibility that the *Mischling* has genetic material passed on to him which will make him into an outsider in the environment in which he finds himself. In fact, something like this could also be discovered in the *Mischlinge* discussed above. Quite apart from such striking – though in principle, of course, insignificant – characteristics such as dark skin color, curly hair, and so on, there are racial peculiarities of their Negroid heredity, which – psychological in nature – can become a problem sociologically.

If, in this respect, the biological and sociological problems of racial mixing collide, the prejudice against the *Mischling* and its consequences, already mentioned at the outset of the discussion, is a purely sociological problem and as such is subject to historical changes. As could be shown, it is currently receding in Germany with respect to the Negro *Mischlinge*, but it is undoubtedly present in latent form. In addition, we have endeavored to show how one can prevent this prejudice from erupting. This prejudice with its intolerance is, in essence, the core problem of the entire racial issue, for overcoming it makes it possible, sociologically, to also overcome all other problems that arise from the coexistence and intermixing of people of different races.

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Source*: Studien aus dem Institut für Natur- und Geisteswissenschaftliche Anthropologie Berlin-Dahlem*, ed. Hermann Muckermann. Fifth Report. March 31, 1956.

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