

Blacks were noted among the mountain men, the most famous being James Beckwourth who was adopted by the Crow Indians and rose to the position of a chief. Trailing them would be miners, farmers, cattle drovers, gunslingers, prostitutes, teamsters, lawmen, merchants, and other blacks whose occupations and roles would reflect those of their white counterparts.

Only recently has there been rigorous study of the substantial instances of black and Indian amalgamation which occurred in the West (as well as in all parts of the United States). Some historians have reported that a few Indian tribes actually became predominantly black. In Oklahoma and other areas, for instance, it is not rare to find those who claim both African American and Indian heritage.

History has also glossed over the stories of Westerners who were escaped slaves or free blacks attempting to launch new lives in another part of this country. Some of these people set up all-black towns in Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and elsewhere.

The Negro Cowboys, first published in 1965 on the heels of race riots around the United States, the death of Malcom X, and other major events influencing black America, attempted to address the black West and place the African American in context regarding *his* role. I emphasize “his” because the major shortcoming of this book is that the black woman does not exist. Reflecting romanticized fiction and Hollywood films, women do not even play “supportive roles.” Because of the increasing amount of letters, diaries, and other material which have come to light in the last couple decades regarding the role of black women, an expanded version of this book is in order, or a companion edition written on “Cowgirls.”

This does not mean *The Negro Cowboys* has little value. It does much to document the stories of Ben Hodges, Cherokee Bill, “Deadwood Dick,” plus thousands of other drovers, mustangers, and others who rode the Shawnee, Chisholm, and Goodnight-Loving Trails, and who settled in communities all over the West. Combined with other texts, *The Negro Cowboys* provides an opportunity to begin to examine the lives of African Americans in the West.

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Troy Duster. *Backdoor to Eugenics*. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 201 pp., \$13.95 paper.

During the first decades of this century, the theory of eugenics, which applied social Darwinism to human beings, was an influential movement. Its major contention was that Northern Europeans were genetically superior to other groups—Southern and Eastern Europeans, Asians, blacks and Jews. Therefore, the presence of these “inferior” groups in the U.S. should be limited, both by constraining the growth of their populations and by

restricting their entry into the nation. Rooted in “science,” eugenics was embraced by prominent intellectuals of the era, including Harvard psychologist William McDougall and University of Wisconsin sociologist E. A. Ross. The power of this movement is reflected by the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which virtually eliminated the entry of non-Northern Europeans to the U.S.

In the wake of the Nazi debacle, genetic interpretations of human behavior lost credibility, and from the 1940s through the 1970s, social and environmental explanations were those most commonly offered for variations in abilities and outlooks among human beings. Since the late 1970s, however, we have witnessed a dramatic re-emphasis in genetic interpretations of human “health” and “normality”—as evidenced in programs for prenatal diagnosis, the genetic screening of workers and a vast body of research fixing the basis of crime, shyness, mental illness, IQ and even poverty in inheritance.

In *Backdoor to Eugenics*, Troy Duster explains that while contemporary genetic explanations of behavior are rooted in the high technology discoveries of advanced scientific study, “the social concerns of the age, not the scientific status of the new knowledge structure of genetics” are the real reasons for our current reconsideration of genetic causes for human behavior.

Duster’s central argument is that scientific/genetic explanations of human behavior and “normality” have important and often profoundly disturbing implications for members of highly diverse societies. Yet these findings are often accepted without reflection or criticism by policy makers, the media and the general public.

For example, through genetic screening and amniocentesis, science hopes to assure a “non-defective” fetus—a “benefit” widely celebrated by newspapers and public officials. However, Duster contends that the whole notion of achieving a genetically “non-defective” individual is a potentially frightening one, especially when certain genetic screening programs are directed at oppressed minorities who have little reason to trust scientific elites, as revealed by the Tuskegee syphilis experiments. (More recently, blacks have been denied job opportunities merely because they are carriers of the sickle cell trait—not sufferers of the disease.)

In another section, Duster analyzes government-supported genetic screening and genetic counseling programs. He finds that while these programs are directed towards the population as a whole, nearly all genetic counselors are middle-class white women. The author asks how the interests and needs of all of society—especially in areas as personal and complex as those involved in making decisions about having children—can be served by a program that is so heavily immersed in white middle-class culture.

Finally, in one of the most powerful chapters, Duster shows how much of the research which seeks to find genetic causes for “deviant” attributes, such as low IQ, crime, and mental illness, is framed according to the interests and stereotypes of dominant social groups. For example, research-

ers interested in the genetic basis of crime consistently focus on street crime—the province of the poor and non-white—while failing to investigate the possibility that middle- and upper-class forms of deviance, such as white-collar crime, also have genetic causes.

In its conclusions, *Backdoor to Eugenics* offers two broad insights. The first is that in seeking to fix the cause of “aberrant” or “undesirable” behavior in genetics, society depoliticizes these issues and absolves itself of any responsibility for correcting unjust or inhuman social conditions: if crime, low IQ or mental illness is caused by bad genes, then we need not change the conditions of poverty, racism and bad schools that are often suggested as the nonhereditary causes for such pathologies.

A second significant conclusion is that despite the powerful and impressive accomplishments of genetic research, technology is never value free. The public’s perspective about the implications of genetic technology is constantly framed in terms of the definitions, interests and concerns of scientific elites. As a consequence, few other social, cultural or political questions concerning the meaning and impact of genetic knowledge are seriously considered or debated by those who will ultimately consume genetic technology.

Backdoor to Eugenics would have benefited from the inclusion of some detailed information about the ways in which lower-class and minority populations actually understand the meaning of genetic technologies. While Duster consistently posits that these groups have different beliefs about genetic screening, amniocentesis and the like, he fails to fully demonstrate the content of their beliefs. Perhaps this task will be taken up in a later work.

In conclusion, *Backdoor to Eugenics* is a soundly researched and thought-provoking study. Although it is well written, it requires a careful reading because much of the material—advanced genetic research—is a new topic (at least for this reviewer). All in all, it is an important and valuable contribution. It links technology and science to the social categories of race, ethnicity, class and socially constructed notions of “normality” in a way that considerably broadens our understanding of these phenomena.

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A. Roy Eckardt. *Black, Woman, Jew: Three Wars For Human Liberation*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 229 pp., \$35.00.

In this book, A. Roy Eckardt uses his anger against oppression in its various forms and his extensive knowledge of the literatures in the field to craft a work of the first magnitude. He views oppression, as he explains, from the perspective of a “white, male gentile . . . a privileged minority: the nonoppressed of the world.” Yet his honesty and compassion for the oppressed represented in this