Life or Death: Biopower and Racism in Huxley’s *Brave New World*

Erik Illerhag

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Supervisor: Marko Modiano
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Abstract

Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* describes how a totalitarian power has taken control over both body and mind of the whole population. A hierarchical caste system, where a person’s role in society is predetermined long before birth, maintains stability together with brain-washing methods and propaganda. Huxley expressed his fears of what might happen if science was used for the wrong purposes, and wrote his futuristic novel *Brave New World* in the beginning of the 1930s, inspired by the turbulent world around him. It was a time preoccupied with race and classification of populations, which ended in the disastrous Holocaust. Huxley’s novel is equally important today when eugenics is on the comeback and democracy is challenged by nationalist and populist movements. This essay will consist of a close reading of *Brave New World*, analyzed from the perspective of the theories of French philosopher Foucault. He launched his concept of biopower in the 1970s, where he linked a negative use of controlling citizens with state racism. The focus of this essay will be to explore how biopower and racism are used by the totalitarian state in the novel to maintain control of the population. The argument will be made that racism, internal division and exclusion are vital tools to achieve that purpose.

Key words: *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley, Biopower, Eugenics, Foucault, Racism
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1. Introduction

In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley depicts a future totalitarian society where personal freedom is sacrificed in the name of economic stability. Everyone is supposedly happy, but most people do not realize that every thought and action is carefully planted, supervised, and regulated by the state, to keep the economic wheels turning. With this gloomy picture, Huxley is highlighting his fears of what might happen if science is kidnapping for the wrong purposes; to oppress people and keep them in line rather than to enrich their lives. *Brave New World* was published in 1932, when fascism and communism were on the advance, but the theme of the novel is equally important to discuss today when populist and nationalist movements threaten freedom and democracy in modern society. In his lecture courses at Collège de France in the 1970s, French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault analyzed the power structures of the modern nation-state. He launched the concept of biopower, which explains how individuals and populations are controlled and regulated. Foucault linked a negative use of biopower with state racism, and the aim of this paper will be to explore that connection in a close reading of *Brave New World*. The question asked is: How are biopower and racism used by the totalitarian state in the novel to maintain control of the citizenry? It will be argued that racism and internal division is a crucial instrument to achieve that purpose.

This essay will start with the theoretical framework, explaining Michel Foucault’s concept of biopower, how this is linked to racism and why it is relevant when analyzing the totalitarian state in *Brave New World*. A section on eugenics follows, describing how selective breeding was considered a suitable solution among intellectuals and scientists, Aldous Huxley included, to problems in society in the interwar period of the 20th century. The textual analysis is divided into five parts. The first two parts serve to establish the World State in *Brave New World* as a state where biopower is used to control both individuals and the population. The third section will analyze the character of Bernard Marx, to highlight the importance of physical appearance and the consequences for acting outside the norms of society. The fourth part focuses on the caste system
and how racism is used to create division, how specific features and colours are considered inferior and also a cause for exclusion and blocked opportunities in society. The fifth section looks at the stereotyping of ethnic groups in *Brave New World* and how this could be considered a reflection of the British society in the 1930s. A conclusion will follow after this textual analysis of *Brave New World*, tying the bits together.

### 2. Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1 Foucault – biopower and racism

*The Oxford Dictionary* defines biopower as “the power of a political entity to control and regulate the lives of the populace” (“Biopower”). That is a broad definition, leaving lots of room for interpretation. What does it mean, to control and regulate the lives of the population? The concept of biopower was developed by the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault in the 1970s. He divides biopower into two parts: the disciplinary power aimed at individuals, and the regulatory power aimed at the population as a whole. Foucault argues that disciplinary power is exercised in schools, hospitals, workplaces and other institutions. He states that this is where society teaches and tell us how we should behave and what the prevailing norms are. The regulatory power concerns the bigger picture and deals with birth rates, life expectancy, fertility, demography, statistics and other areas that cover the whole population. According to Foucault, disciplinary and regulatory power are the two principal tools that the ruling power has to control and regulate the lives of its citizens (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 249-253).

Foucault’s theories on biopower have been reinterpreted and questioned during the 21st century. The regulatory power is most often referred to as "biopolitics", and the term is frequently used when discussing and analyzing topics such as migration and immigration, unequal distribution of medicine, healthcare, retirement ages, abortions and fears of overpopulation, and so on (Campbell and Sitze 3). Foucault died in 1984, leaving a lot of his work unfinished and there are
diverse and often conflicting views on how to interpret and use his theories on biopower. Some argue that it is only bound to rational decision-making and the democratic organization of societies, while others link the term to eugenics and racism (Lemke 1). Thus, biopower, has both a positive side and a negative side. The positive side of biopower concerns life-prolonging measures taken by the state, or measures taken to enhance everyday life for the citizenry. For example, that could be trying to prevent aids, promoting medical research or financing agricultural products (Lemke 1). This paper will concentrate on the negative aspect when biopower is abused by a regime to achieve total control over the population, such as the scenario in *Brave New World*.

Foucault claims that biopower emerges with the scientific progress in the areas of medicine and public hygiene in the 18th and 19th century. He argues that kings and other sovereigns did not have much influence over birth rates and life expectancy before that (Lemke 35-36). The sovereign could decide that people should be put to death as a punishment or be exposed to death by sending them to war, but when people died of diseases, there was not much the monarch could do about it. With industrial capitalism, a healthy and numerous workforce became increasingly important. There was also an urging need to manage and control a growing population, and this was achieved by measuring and collecting statistics in the new field of demography. Sovereign power did not go away during this period but is overshadowed by a need to manage the population and increase its numbers. Foucault says that "it is as though power, which used to have sovereignty as its modality or organising schema, found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization" (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 249).

Disciplinary power is generally carried out on the institutional level and regulatory power on the state level, but they intertwine, and the distinction is not obvious. It is "two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 139). According to Foucault, there is one important element circulating between them,
and that is the norm. Where the law told people what was forbidden, the norm creates values and an ideal on how people should behave to be seen as "normal". Language is crucial in this process, and the primary power at hand for a person of authority trying to create or consolidate a norm, for example when a teacher or an officer instructs students or conscripts. Propaganda would be another example, and a subject this essay will return to when analysing *Brave New World*. This is Foucault’s concept of discourse, an institutionalized way of speaking or writing about reality that defines what a person should say or think in different situations (“Discourse: Michel Foucault”).

The norm became increasingly more important than the law in the 19th century since it could be “applied to both a body one wishes to discipline, and a population one wishes to regularize” (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 253). Normalization also plays a part in classifying individuals:

In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 184)

There is a paradox. How can a power aimed at improving and prolonging life ever motivate taking lives? In Foucault’s writings, it has to do with racism. He does not claim that racism is a new phenomenon by the end of the 19th century, but he argues that it gets inscribed in the mechanisms of the state following the emergence of biopower. Race in the old sense is described as part of a struggle, a race struggle instigated by sovereigns against external enemies. By the end of the 19th century, it adopts a biological and evolutionist shape: racism. Foucault argues that modern racism is the elimination of the defectives, the cleansing of the abnormalities in society. He defines racism as
“primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 254), and states:

The State is no longer an instrument that one race uses against another: the State is, and must be, the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race. The idea of racial purity, with all its monistic, Statist, and biological implications: that is what replaces the idea of race struggle. I think that racism is born at the point when the theme of racial purity replaces that of race struggle. (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 81)

Racism in the hands of Foucault is not merely about skin colour; he uses the concept in a broader sense and argues that it serves two distinct purposes. Firstly, it is a way of dividing and separating groups within the population into a hierarchy of races; described as good or inferior, healthy or sick, rich or poor or by some other distinction. This way the population that seemingly consists of a biological whole can be subdivided into sub-species, or races (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 255). Secondly, racism manages to create a relationship between the life of the individual and the death of others that does not necessarily include war or confrontation. The concept of war consists of the notion that others must die for the individual to live. With racism this is expressed in a biological way: "The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I – as species rather than individual – can live, the stronger I will be" (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 255). In this case, dying does not necessarily mean killing. It could also mean every form of indirect murder, such as political death, stripping of power, social, ethnic or economic exclusion and so forth. The critical fundament in the concept is that the death of others secures the life of the individual and makes the population as a whole more healthy and pure. Foucault says:

In the biopower system...killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results in a victory, not over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and
the improvement of the species or race. There is a direct connection between the two. In a normalizing society, race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable.

(Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 256)

### 2.2 State racism and totalitarianism

The combination of biopower and modern racism produces what Foucault calls “State racism”, which he exemplifies with colonization, Nazism and Stalinism (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 83, 257, 259). Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union were totalitarian states, a term defined by *The Oxford Dictionary* as "a system of government that is centralized and requires complete subservience to the state" ("Totalitarianism"). The difference between an authoritarian dictatorship, for instance a military junta, and a totalitarian dictatorship is the objective. The primary goal for the authoritarian dictator is merely power, usually employing fear and violence, while the totalitarian dictatorship strives for total control of the lives of the population. In one of the standard works on the subject, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Friedrich and Brzezinski list six basic features characterizing the totalitarian dictatorship. The six features are: (1) a single ideology, (2) a single party, typically led by a dictator, (3) a system of terror, using violence and a secret police, (4) monopoly on weapons, (5) monopoly on the means of communication and (6) central control of the economy (Friedrich and Brzezinski 21). The governing World State in *Brave New World* meets all of these criteria, with the possible exception of having ten dictators spread out around the world instead of a single one.

There is, according to Foucault, no coincidence that two of the most murderous states at the same time were the most racist. Hitler fought the race enemy and Stalin the class enemy, both combining biopower and racism into State racism. The Nazis invented a superior race, and were determined to exterminate both external enemies and "inferior" races within and without the population; such as Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, gays, socialists and people with physical and mental
disabilities. In Soviet State racism, everyone who opposed the regime was a class enemy and therefore a biological threat to the population in the eyes of the paranoid Stalin (Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* 83). In *Foucault and Politics: A Critical Introduction*, Kelly states that Foucault’s “criticism of socialism would seem to be that it aimed at getting rid of the state, but in so doing produced a racist state which victimised those who seemed to stand in the way of its project” (Kelly 135).

This essay will not deal with all aspects of biopower represented in *Brave New World*; the focus will be on eugenics and psychological conditioning (propaganda). The reason for this is that these two aspects represent both the regulatory and the disciplinary power in Foucault’s biopower structure. They are also the totalitarian state’s two most important means of power to maintain control and to create a hierarchical order within the population. The consequences for deviating from the norms of society, created by eugenics and propaganda, will also be covered since this includes exclusion and racism. Following this account of Foucault’s theories on biopower and racism, there will be a short introduction on the subject of eugenics, explaining why selective breeding and sterilization was a controversial but also scientifically acclaimed method at the time *Brave New World* was written and published. It will also be explained why Aldous Huxley thought it could be the solution to problems he experienced in society.

### 2.3 Eugenics and the historical background

Eugenics is “the science of improving a population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics” (“Eugenics”). The term “eugenics” was coined by the British explorer and nature scientist Francis Galton in 1883. He was influenced by Charles Darwin’s theory on natural selection among plants and animals and was convinced it could be implemented on humans. In 1909, Galton combined data from a social survey with his findings to create a map of genetic worth in human beings. He divided the population into five categories;
criminals and paupers, poor and low-paid, "respectable" working class, skilled workers and independent professionals or large employers. The main body of the population belonged to the category in the middle, with numbers decreasing exponentially in both directions. (Grue 237, see fig 1). Eugenics gained support following the popularity of Social Darwinism; the notion that those best equipped would survive and prosper in society. Social Darwinists believed that poverty and social exclusion was a natural way of purifying the genetic pool, the "survival of the fittest", and opposed social welfare (“Social Darwinism”).

Fig 1: Galton’s map of genetic worth.

The ideas behind eugenics were similar, and it was divided into two main branches – positive and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics meant encouraging reproduction among the groups in society that was considered members of "good stock". In turn, negative eugenics meant to prohibit breeding among those deemed as defectives, by the methods of marriage restrictions and sterilizations (Kevles 94). For instance, for the leading eugenicists, nature rather than social environment was the explanation to a low score on an IQ test. In the interwar period of 1918-39, eugenics became a widespread movement in the world; supported by intellectuals, scientists and political leaders from left to right (Kevles 94). By the mid-1930s some twenty thousand people had
been legally and compulsory sterilized in the United States (Kevles 112). Governments in Sweden, Denmark and Finland also enacted eugenic sterilization measures (Kevles 115) before Nazi Germany took it to a whole new level. By the end of the Second World War 400,000 men and women had been sterilized in the Nazi racial hygiene programs (Nelson).

British politics at the beginning of the 1930s was in turmoil. The optimism of the post-war period of the 1920s was gone in the wake of the Great Depression. The economic slump caused high unemployment rates, especially in the mining districts, and Parliament seemed inadequate to solve the problems. Aldous Huxley, like other liberals at the time, was impressed by the efficiency of the Soviet five-year plan and also by the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley’s plans for a "strong executive" and reorganization of industry and agriculture (Bradshaw p. xviii). This was in 1931, before the Stalinist cleansing in the mid-1930s, before the Nazi party’s rise to power and before the violence shown by Mosley’s Blackshirts in London rallies. Huxley would revert his position a few years later. But, given the circumstances and the turmoil in British politics at the time, Huxley preferred any form of order than none at all. In a BBC broadcast in January 1932 he said: "Our civilization is menaced with total collapse. Dictatorship and scientific propaganda may provide the only means for saving humanity from the miseries of anarchy" (Bradshaw 111). He seemed to think that loss of personal liberty, for a limited amount of time, perhaps was a price worth paying.

*Brave New World* was written in 1931 and published in 1932, only two weeks after the radio broadcast. It is most often read as a satire of the consequences when science falls into the wrong hands and is used for the wrong purposes – a nightmarish peek into the future of genetic engineering. However, scholars such as David Bradshaw, James Sexton and Robert Baker have edited and published letters and essays by Huxley from the 1920s and 1930s. The essays and texts show that the biological caste system in *Brave New World*, based on the notion of hereditary intelligence, correlates with the views expressed by Huxley at the time. He was a known supporter
of eugenics. His brother Julian was a prominent member of The British Eugenics Society, an organization which advocated for voluntary sterilization. Huxley went one step further and called for the compulsory sterilization of the unfit (Bradshaw 112). In "What is Happening to Our Population", an article published in 1934, Huxley expressed concerns about a rising number of "defectives" in society due to a decline in infantile mortality. "Mentally deficient children who, in the past, would have died in the cradle are now enabled to reach maturity. An environmental change for the better has resulted... in a hereditary change for the worse" (Bradshaw 148). If nothing was done, he predicted that a quarter of the population of the British Isles was going to consist of "half-wits" in a century or two. The solution would be to encourage the "normal" and "super-normal" members of the population to have larger families and prevent the "sub-normals" from having any families at all (Bradshaw 151). Huxley wrote:

The Mental Deficiency Committee advised that the accommodation for mental defectives should be quadrupled. But even if this most desirable measure were carried through, about two-thirds of the present population of half-wits would still be at liberty to have children at the expense, biological and financial, of the community as a whole. There is one simple and, so far as it goes, effective way of limiting the multiplication of subnormal stocks: certified defectives can be sterilized. (Bradshaw 152)

Besides being an eager supporter of eugenics, Huxley also shared his belief that an intellectual elite, "an aristocracy of mind", was best suited to rule society (Bradshaw p. xiii). In 1933, he wrote:

About 99.5 % of the entire population of the planet is as stupid and philistine... as the great masses of the English. The important thing, it seems to me, is not to attack the 99.5 %... but to try to see that the 0.5 % survives, keeps its quality up to the highest possible level and, if possible, dominates the rest. The imbecility of the 99.5 % is appalling – but, after all, what else can you expect? (Bradshaw p. xx)
Huxley’s documented views on eugenics undoubtedly leave a stain on the reputation of the great humanist. It seems strange today, but Aldous Huxley only shared a widespread opinion that eugenics and selective breeding was the solution to stop a perceived degeneration of the intelligence of the British people. In the hands of the humanist Huxley was convinced that eugenics was "an instrument for giving to an ever-widening circle of men and women those heritable qualities of mind and body which are, by his highest standards, the most desirable" (Bradshaw 112). However, a pessimistic Huxley concluded that science probably would be misused by economic forces to breed a loyal, mass-producing, mass-consuming labour force in the name of stability. That scenario is exactly what he portrays in Brave New World, expressing his fears. The test tubes with foetuses moving along the production line in the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre are perhaps a somewhat exaggerated prophecy, who knows? But what the modern reader simply think of as satire certainly contained some elements of real hopes and prospects of what science would be able to achieve in the future. Knowing this adds an interesting perspective when reading Brave New World. Joanne Woiak, author of the article “Designing a Brave New World: Eugenics, Politics, and Fiction”, points out that a more nuanced reading of the novel is valuable since “fiction can help to create public memory about the popularity, diversity, and legacy of the historical eugenics movement, and it can stimulate critical thinking about the social role of science in the past, present, and future” (Woiak 112).

3. Method

Brave New World was written in the inter-war period of the 1930s, and influenced by dramatic events taking place in Europe and around the world at the time. It is one of the great dystopian novels, with a narrative that feels both remarkably and alarmingly contemporary. That is why Aldous Huxley’s classic novel was chosen for this essay. Foucault’s biopower structure, with its links to State Racism, fits well into the story and the political governance of the totalitarian state in
By juxtaposing Foucault’s theories with Huxley’s writings, hopefully a new perspective can be added to the novel. In the upcoming textual analysis, specific events and characters in *Brave New World* will be looked at more closely to get a better understanding of how and why biopower, in this case eugenics and propaganda, are used to control individuals and the population in the World State. Representation of the negative aspect of biopower, particularly racism and exclusion, will be examined. The textual analysis is divided into five sections. Every section reviews relevant parts of the text, and is followed by an analysis using the theoretical framework and personal comments and discussion.

4. Textual analysis

4.1 Eugenics in the World State

*Brave New World* (from now on abbreviated BNW when referencing) is set in the future, more than 600 years from now. People in *Brave New World* have jobs; they are young and healthy, have sex with whoever they want and are always happy. It is a world of stability to keep the factories and consumerism going, emphasized in the society motto “Community, Stability, Identity”. The governing body in *Brave New World*, the World State, was founded when liberalism and democracy had failed, and the world lay in ruins after a chemical war and an economic collapse. The novel starts with the Director of the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre guiding some students around the facilities. He explains how the birth process works. Eggs are fertilized, embryos tampered with and foetuses nurtured in a process that resembles the assembly line in any modern factory. Delivering babies has become an altogether mechanical process, with test tubes and bottles slowly moving along the conveyor-belt before the content eventually get decanted as new-borns. In the name of stability, the population is limited to precisely two billion inhabitants, divided into five different categories; five different "races" or social groups. There are Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons. Each group is also divided into sub-races or sub-groups, the total population
ranging from Alpha Double Plus down to Epsilon Semi-Morons. Which group a person belongs to is predetermined and decided long before birth. Life expectancy is also predetermined to about 60 years. After that the person is transported to a special hospital to die, with the phosphorus recycled in the crematorium. Everyone is at least "physico-chemically equal" (BNW 63). Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons are multiplied, through a process where 96 identical twins can originate from the same egg and several thousand from the same ovary. Measures are taken to give them the appropriate physical and mental features that characterize their caste. For that purpose, oxygen levels for the lower caste embryos are lowered, affecting both the mind and the body. “The first organ affected was the brain. After that the skeleton. At seventy percent of normal oxygen, you got dwarfs” (BNW 11). Embryos are also conditioned to thrive on cold or heat, to withstand illnesses and to tolerate chemical substances (BNW 13), all depending on what kind of work the person will perform as an adult. An example would be the future rocket-plane engineers, where the embryo containers are kept rotating for the improved sense of balance. “We slacken off the circulation when they´re right way up, so that they are half-starved, and double the surrogate when they´re upside down. They learn to associate topsy-turvydom with well-being; in fact, they´re only truly happy when they´re standing on their heads”, the Director says to his students (BNW 14).

Foucault’s biopower structure assumed a disciplinary and a regulatory power working together, the first aimed at the individual and the latter aimed at the population. In the theory section, it was established that the focus of this essay was to take a look at the two most important means of biopower used by the World State – psychological conditioning (individual) and eugenics (population). The World State takes regulation very seriously, and uses eugenics to create the optimal population. The Hatchery and Conditioning Centre is the core of the scheme to build and maintain stability; this is where the obedient citizen is manufactured and adjusted to a predetermined role in the futuristic society. The caste system in Brave New World resembles the mapping done by eugenicist Francis Galton based on genetic worth. The eugenicists believed that
the health and purity of the national population could be enhanced by encouraging the "good stock" to reproduce and prevent the "defectives" and the "abnormals" from breeding, calling this positive and negative eugenics. In *Brave New World*, eggs are checked for abnormalities, and only the best are used for fertilization, so the State decides who should be allowed to be born and to what purpose, based on heredity. Also, only the most suitable females are permitted to reproduce, the rest are sterilized, assigned the roles as “freemartins” and disallowed to spread their genes (BNW 10). In the World State, racial purification and enhancement are only aimed at the two upper castes, the Alphas and the Betas. For social stability, there is a hierarchy, with lower “races” willing to do unskilled and hard labour. This view was confirmed by the disastrous Cyprus experiment where a batch of only Alphas populated Cyprus. The consequence was a civil war when no one was prepared to do Epsilon work (BNW 196). Mustapha Mond, an Alpha Double Plus and one of ten world controllers ruling the World State, describes the caste system as the "gyroscope that stabilizes the rocket plane of state on its unswerving course" (BNW 195). He stresses its importance for social stability: "The optimum population is modelled on the iceberg – eight-ninths below the water line, one-ninth above" (BNW 197). The eugenics practised by the World State is the regulatory power in Foucault´s model of biopower. This is how the totalitarian state puts together the perfect population, with exact numbers of people assigned to work in factories, and with an intelligent upper class suitable for leadership. But why do the Epsilons and the Deltas accept their assigned roles? Why do they not protest and demand equal rights? The answers to those questions can be found in the upper floors of the Hatchery and Conditioning Centre.

4.2 Psychological conditioning in the World State

It is on the upper floors the psychological conditioning takes place, brain-washing with the use of propaganda. The World State uses hypnopedia, or sleep-learning, on children. When the children sleep a radio transmission is repeated over and over again and the message drummed into their
memory. The technique was discovered by accident when a young Polish boy, Reuben Rabinovitch, fell asleep with the radio on and remembered an entire George Bernard Shaw lecture the day after. He could repeat it word by word but did not understand its meaning. A few hundred years later the scientists finally realized that intelligence could not be learnt by sleep-teaching; only moral education could (BNW 21). When the Director and his students visit the sleep dorms, a message focused on class consciousness is repeated:

Alpha children wear grey. They work much harder than we do because they’re so frightfully clever. I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because I don’t work so hard. And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid. They all wear green, and Deltas wear khaki. Oh no, I don’t want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able to read or write. Besides, they wear black, which is such a beastly colour. I’m so glad I’m a Beta. (BNW 22)

The children, in this case, Beta children, are taught to despise the lower castes and admire the higher ones. As all hypnopedia in *Brave New World*, it slowly creates emotional memories in the brain associated with correct behaviour. There are many other hypnopedia messages frequently repeated by the characters in the novel. A few examples: "Everyone belongs to everyone else", "Ending is better than mending", and "A gram is better than a damn" (BNW 40, 42, 47). These messages reject monogamy, encourage consumerism and recommend the invented drug of soma to escape reality. The Director calls hypnopedia "the greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time" (BNW 23), a force that slowly grinds down every possible resistance in the minds of the children. A child would normally be morally guided by the parents, but in the World State, there are no parents present. Moral education is all in the hands of the state, and creating normative behaviour is significantly more important than prohibitions and brute force. The sleep-learning, or brainwash, guide the citizens of the World State for the rest of their lives, telling them what to do
and how to act in every situation. They might imagine that they are free to make their own choices, but that is only because hypnopedia has taught them that. Mustapha Mond says:

The world’s stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get. They’re well off; they’re safe; they’re never ill; they’re not afraid of death; they’re blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they’re plagued with no mothers or fathers; they’ve got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they’re so conditioned that they practically can’t help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there’s soma. (BNW 194)

Hypnopedia is the most important disciplinary power executed by the World State, a method that shapes individuals into obedient citizens with no desire to question the current order. Together with eugenics, it is the foundation of the biopower executed by the World State. It is a normalizing society where physical appearance, as well as mental capacity, are of utmost importance. This importance and the consequences of acting outside of the norms will be further examined in the next section through the character of Bernard Marx, an Alpha Plus working in the Psychology Bureau developing hypnopedia.

4.3 Bernard Marx – abnormality and exclusion

As shown, the World State is in total control of the lives of the population. The control spans over a lifetime, deciding who should be allowed to be born and when it is time to die. It is totalitarian biopower in its most extreme form, and as Foucault argued it is closely accompanied by racism. He suggested that racism primarily serves two purposes in the modern state. Firstly, to divide the population into sub-races and secondly; to emphasize the notion that others must die for the individual to live, to keep the population pure and healthy without the bloodiness of war. To repeat his words: “In a normalizing society, race or racism is the precondition that makes killing
acceptable” (Foucault, Society Must be Defended 256). The sub-races in Huxley’s Brave New World are the castes, supposedly a necessity for social stability. The health and purity of the population are connected to physical appearance and normative behaviour. To highlight how this second point is practised we might take a look at the character of Bernard Marx. This Alpha Plus does not have the physical appearance that normally goes with his caste. The higher the caste, the more well-built body due to the tampering done in the Hatchery, but Bernard Marx is a deviation. His friend Helmholtz Watson is "a powerfully built man, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, massive, and yet quick in his movements, springy and agile... In a forcible emphatic way, he was handsome and looked... every centimetre an Alpha-Plus” (BNW 57). Bernard Marx, in comparison, has a physique "hardly better than the average Gamma... eight centimetres short of the standard Alpha height and slender in proportion" (BNW 55). For Bernard, this is a problem since Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons have been conditioned to associate corporeal mass with social superiority. Subsequently, he does not get the treatment or respect from the lower castes that he feels that he deserves given his position as an Alpha Plus (BNW 55). His persona is ridiculed and avoided in the upper castes, who think that smallness is so "horribly and typically low-caste" (BNW 39). The repeated explanation to his shortness is that someone must have thought Bernard was a Gamma and put alcohol in his blood-surrogate as a foetus. His physical shortcomings combined with his knowledge in psychological conditioning that enables him to see through most of the propaganda affects his behaviour: "...feeling an outsider he behaved like one, which increased the prejudice against him and intensified the contempt and hostility aroused by his physical defects" (BNW 56). When he behaves like an outsider, Bernard also behaves like an individual. He prefers privacy, dislikes sports or drugs, and wants to feel passionate about both nature and love. "I want to look at the sea in peace. It makes me feel... more on my own, not so much part of something else. Not just a cell in a social body" (BNW 78), he says to the uncomprehending and wholly brainwashed Lenina Crowne. Of course, this causes him problems, since conformity is the norm of the World State, not
individuality and personal freedom. The World State disposes of bodies in the crematoriums but also has another way of disposing of bodies – by deportation to remote islands. The decision is made to send Bernard to Iceland due to his unorthodox behaviour, and the Director wants to make a public display in front of other Alphas when delivering the message. He says: “It is better that one should suffer than that many should be corrupted... Murder kills only the individual – and, after all, what is an individual? We can make a new one with the greatest ease – as many as we like. Unorthodoxy threatens more than the life of a mere individual; it strikes at Society itself.” (BNW 128)

The Director uses the word "murder" and equates it to leaving society. In the eyes of the World State, Bernard is dead the moment he leaves for Iceland. Bernard’s ideas and behaviour are considered a disease, something possibly contagious that must be removed from the social body to keep the population healthy and pure. He is an enemy of "Society... all Order and Stability, a conspirator against Civilization itself... In Iceland he will have small opportunity to lead others astray by his unfordly example" (BNW 130). The rumours circulating, that Bernard by mistake was exposed to alcohol as a foetus, serves as a biological explanation for his behaviour. Because of this people do not want to be associated with him, except when he can bathe in the reflected glory of John the Savage. The unconditioned heathen that Bernard brought home from the visit in a savage reservation, is a success at the London parties, and the reason Bernard can postpone the deportation for a while. This new acceptance of Bernard abruptly ends when John locks himself up and refuse to take part in the spectacle. There is outrage among the distinguished party guests who are furious to have been "tricked into behaving politely to this insignificant fellow with the unsavoury reputation and the heretical opinions... this wretched little man who had alcohol poured into his bottle by mistake – by a creature with a Gamma-minus physique" (BNW 151).

Studying the example of Bernard Marx it is clear that deviating from the norms created by eugenics and brain-washing is considered the most significant destabilizing force by the ruling
power in the World State. Conformity must be upheld at any cost, and there is no room for the kind of abnormalities displayed by Bernard. Bernard Marx is also a way for Aldous Huxley to show that no system is "perfect". There is no such thing as total control, not even in a totalitarian state such as the one in *Brave New World*. There are evident flaws and cracks in the character of Bernard, flaws that become more and more apparent as the novel progresses. First, he is envious of his friend Helmholtz’s natural ability to attract women (BNW 58), only to boast about his own romantic conquests when he suddenly becomes popular (BNW 136). He shows cowardice when he does not dare to help John and Helmholtz during a riot at the hospital for the dying (BNW 190), and then sobbingly tries to blame his friends to save himself from deportation (BNW 199). In a dehumanized world, where every measure is taken to suppress emotional outbursts he is displaying feelings and reactions that are all too familiarly human. Huxley’s point seems to be that a political system that tries to use science and propaganda to control the human mind never can be entirely successful. After all; emotions and intelligence are what makes us human. However, this intelligence is denied the major part of the population through the tampering in the Hatchery. In the following section, a closer look will be taken at how the World State uses the caste system and racism to keep the population in place.

4.4 The caste system – racism and division

So far this reading of *Brave New World* has dealt with the consequences of breaking the norms and being different in a society that uses the negative aspects of biopower to maintain control. As the example of Bernard Marx shows, this results in exclusion and deportation. But the State Racism in *Brave New World* goes deeper than that. Foucault’s definition of racism is broader than just skin colour, but colour is indeed one important aspect and plays a big part in the World State. As mentioned earlier, there is a hierarchical division within the society based on the caste system, and also sub-races within the upper castes in terms of plus and minus. The upper and the lower castes
are kept separated. Alphas and Betas use helicopters; the lower castes have to take the monorail. The upper castes live in houses, the lower castes in barracks where a dividing wall keep them segregated (BNW 63). Every caste wears the same colour. Alphas are grey, and Betas wear mulberry, Gammas are green, Deltas wear khaki and Epsilons are black. Black is associated with low intelligence and poor physique, an inferior colour in the World State. There are no accounts of any black or even dark-skinned Alphas or Betas, but plenty in the lower castes. The Delta attendants in a hangar are "small, black and hideous" (BNW 55), and the Delta twins working at a hospital are "dark and dolichocephalic" (meaning an elongated skull form) (BNW 183). A man operating an elevator is described as a "small simian creature, dressed in the black tunic of an Epsilon-Minus Semi-Moron" (BNW 50) and an "Epsilon-Plus Negro porter" carries Bernard’s suitcase. When Bernard and John the Savage visit a factory, there are plenty of ethnicities in the labour force; "eighty-three almost noseless black brachycephalic Deltas" and "one hundred and seven heat-conditioned Epsilon Senegalese" (BNW 138). Each group of workers is described with physical traits and characteristics. They are dwarfs, left-handed, aquiline, or have deviating skull forms. In the eyes of society, they are abnormal, with characteristics that signal inferiority. The physical appearance or the skin colour of the Station Manager or the Resident Meteorologist, both of upper caste, is not mentioned with a single word. Neither are the features of the Alpha and Beta students at Eton College that Bernard and John visit after the factory. They are just "young Etonians" (BNW 141), all deriving from single eggs. It is easy for the reader to make the assumptions that if they are not black, they must be white; if not short, they must be tall; if their skulls are not broad or long, their skulls must have "perfect" shape. This means that the World State only breeds people with fair skin for the two upper castes, at least in the Western European zone that is the setting for Brave New World. This order is preserved with the use of eugenics, where “blackness” is associated with inferiority and people with darker skin or of lower caste are disqualified for any important positions in society.
This norm is further manifested in the propaganda machine called “feelies”, the movie theatres of *Brave New World*. Lenina and John the Savage watch "Three weeks in a helicopter" where a "gigantic Negro" has a helicopter accident which knocks all conditioning out of his head. The "black madman" develops a passion for a Beta blonde and kidnaps her, but three handsome young Alphas, “fortunately”, rescue her. The black madman is sent to a re-conditioning centre, and the film ends "happily" with the woman becoming the mistress of her three rescuers (BNW 147). The black man is of lower caste, and the only way he can even imagine approaching the Beta blonde is to forget all about his conditioning completely. The black man could be seen as symbolizing the Epsilon worker wearing a black uniform, and the plot a warning to the feelie-goers what might happen if the system is destabilized. Without conditioning in society the upper castes could be overrun by Epsilons, so, therefore, it is in the feelie-goers’ interest to preserve the caste system. And acting individually and unorthodox, as the black man does when he goes after a Beta woman, can only end badly for the individual. Lenina and John’s reaction to the film is opposite to each other. Well-conditioned Lenina thought it was a lovely film while John is appalled. "It was base... it was ignoble", he says (BNW 148). He shuts himself up in his room to read Shakespeare’s *Othello*, where "Othello... was like the hero of “Three weeks in a helicopter” – a black man” (BNW 149). From John’s point of view, the black man was the hero. He was the one acting outside of the norms of society, only to be punished for it. But John has not been conditioned or disciplined like Lenina. He is, just as Bernard, an outsider looking in because he grew up in the savage reservation.

4.5 Stereotyping in *Brave New World*

It would have been interesting if Aldous Huxley had turned the roles around and made white the inferior colour instead of black. But that prospect had probably not been well received by the readers of his time and certainly considered both an implausible and at the same time threatening future by the white population. Britain was still a colonial power in the 1930s, with the racial
inequalities that came with it. The British Empire was often seen as evidence of supremacy, and the idea of the black man as an inferior race was reinforced in popular culture during the interwar period. British people were encouraged to imagine themselves as physically, socially and culturally superior to other ethnic groups, and a lot of this was associated to their "whiteness". Black and other ethnic groups were stereotyped and racial difference emphasized with opposing distinctions such as black/white, civilized/savage, ancient/modern and master/servant (Rajabi 190-191).

An example of this stereotyping in popular culture can be seen in *Brave New World* when Bernard and Lenina visit the Savage Reservation in New Mexico and meet John for the first time. John, born by the Beta woman Linda who got lost in the reservation long ago, has "straw-coloured hair, pale blue eyes and a white skin, bronzed" (BNW 100). He is contrasted by the Indians who have "dark-brown bodies painted with white lines... their faces inhuman with daubings of scarlet, black and ochre" (BNW 93). While the rest of the world has undergone dramatic scientific development, time in the reservation has stood still for 600 years. The "savages" live in poverty, cannot read or write, and indulge themselves in uncivilized and violent religious ceremonies. They are portrayed as too lazy to clean up their own village (BNW 94) and cruel and vicious when the women punish Linda by whipping her (BNW 109). The argument can be made that we merely witness the village of Malpais from the eyes of the visitors, that the reservation functions as the narrative contrast to the perfect and hygienic life in the World State. But the view of the Savage as unable to rise up and achieve a "civilized" life without the aid of the white man also corresponds with the colonist view still dominant in Britain in the interwar period. Huxley’s motives may have been satirical rather than an expression of his prejudices. We cannot know which, but nonetheless, in *Brave New World* he is manifesting the stereotypes used in the popular culture of his time.

Whatever the reasons, it can be read as a reflection of the society around him. Where the modern reader might find pejorative descriptions, the reader in the 1930s would most likely not react at all.
5. Conclusion

The question asked at the beginning of this essay was how biopower and racism were used by the totalitarian state to maintain control. Using the terminology of Foucault, The World State relies on both regulatory (population) and disciplinary (individual) control. The two most important forms of control are eugenics and psychological conditioning. With the help of eugenics, an optimum population is created based on a caste system, with people either predestined for factory work or skilled work and leadership. This hierarchical order is reinforced with a brain-washing method, sleep-learning, where the norms and moral codes of the society are implemented. The caste system creates division and sub-groups within the population where different physical appearance, low mental ability and wrong skin colour are causes for exclusion, segregation and blocked opportunities. Therefore, the World State in *Brave New World* is not only a totalitarian state but also a racist state.

Aldous Huxley believed in eugenics, at least at the time when he wrote *Brave New World*. He argued that it could be used to enhance desirable hereditary characteristics in the British population. But he feared that economic forces probably would use eugenics for the wrong purposes; to create an obedient and mass-consuming populace. And this will of course always be the concern with science; how will it be used and by whom? In *Brave New World*, Huxley puts science in the hands of a totalitarian state when liberal democracy has failed and ceased to exist. Today, our free and democratic society is threatened by nationalist and populist movements gaining ground in European elections, some with fascist tendencies. It is worth remembering that both Mussolini and Hitler were elected democratically, only to abolish that civil right once in power. Terrorist attacks call for more surveillance, and indifferent voters reject traditional political parties when the global economy and not the governments seem to have the real power. Nationalist movements of today primarily target migrants and Muslims, emphasizing values and cultural differences over racial issues. But internal division and racism is still part of the strategy, only
expressed with different terminology. This is how *Brave New World* can give the reader new perspectives on the times we live in, in spite of the fact that it was written almost 90 years ago. For instance, eugenics might seem like an eerie echo of the past, but it is coming back. The first IVF baby was conceived 40 years ago, and In Vitro Fertilization is now a mainstream treatment for couples not being able to get pregnant the natural way. Scientific progress makes it possible to screen several embryos for diseases or abnormalities, choosing a winner. The difference from the past is of course consent. Parents have the choice to use the technology or not, and no one is forced to do so. So why could that propose a problem? Robert Pollack, a professor in Biological Sciences at Columbia University, says that there is a risk that the population is divided into first class and second-class individuals: "Imagine that, many years hence, there are two sorts of people: those who carry the messy inheritance of their ancestors, and those whose ancestors had the resources to clean up their germ cells before IVF" (Nelson). A division into a good and an inferior stock of people? It sounds awfully familiar to the theme of *Brave New World*. 
Works cited


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