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The Anthropologist As Progressive Reformer: Franz Boaz and the Scientific Battle Against American Racism

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THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS PROGRESSIVE REFORMER: FRANZ BOAS AND THE SCIENTIFIC BATTLE AGAINST AMERICAN RACISM

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of
The School of Continuing Studies
and of
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Liberal Studies

By

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Washington, D.C.
November 21, 2007

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS PROGRESSIVE REFORMER: FRANZ BOAS AND THE SCIENTIFIC BATTLE AGAINST AMERICAN RACISM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses Franz Uri Boas's legacy as an anthropologist and progressive social reformer in battling racism in early twentieth-century America. The hypothesis affirms that Boas, "the father of American anthropology," developed the science of anthropology with the progressive goal of building scientific support for the cultural values of equal opportunity and cultural pluralism.

In researching this study, a diverse array of historical and anthropological studies of Boas's life, work, and legacy were reviewed. After summarizing Boas's youth, education, and career in Chapter I, the diverse views and assessments of Boas and his legacy by a selection of key historical and anthropological admirers (Chapter II) and critics (Chapter III) are discussed in detail. Chapter IV examines several important historical and anthropological critiques of Boas and focuses on his work as an American anthropologist and social reformer in battling racism in early twentieth-century America.

The study concludes that Boas was and continues to be a controversial figure both as an anthropologist and a social reformer. Boas's many admirers tend to see him as a heroic figure who methodically developed the science of anthropology carefully

following German and American scientific traditions. Boas's critics, on the other hand, generally condemn his anthropology as guided by personal values and culture rather than objective scientific methods. Nevertheless, this thesis concludes that Boas was first and foremost a prolific scientist who dedicated his life to an objective search for the truth. In his quest for scientific truth, Boas worked to create through anthropology a compelling counterweight to the scientific and cultural forces supporting American racism in the early twentieth-century. In so doing, Boas steadily evolved from a scientist to a powerful and persuasive progressive social, cultural, and political reformer whose views and writings continue to provide a prescription for combating American racism in the twenty-first century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my partner and wife Karen M. Horton for her love, dedication, assistance and support in helping me to realize my dream. I also wish to thank my children Allison, Betsey, Bobby and Caroline for their patience and assistance as I pursued my graduate studies at Georgetown University. Further thanks go to my parents Robert and Lillian Horton for their steadfast support and guidance throughout my life. Finally, I wish to thank Professor Ronald Johnson for inspiring and guiding me throughout my years of study at Georgetown.

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INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER I

THE LIFE AND WORK OF FRANZ BOAS

Revered by many today as "the founder of modern anthropology as well as the father of American anthropology,"[1] Franz Uri Boas developed and employed rigorous anthropological research and analysis as a powerful and effective tool against American racism. From approximately 1894 until his death in 1942, Boas's articulate voice and vision transcended the technical dimensions of the science of anthropology, as he eloquently fought to expand the concept of American freedom through equal opportunity and greater liberty for all Americans.

Youth, Life, Education, and Career

Franz Uri Boas was born in Minden, Germany in 1858. A child of somewhat poor health, Boas grew up in a prosperous middle-class Jewish family. His father was a businessman and his mother was active in education, founding the first kindergarten in Minden. Early in his life, Boas fell in love with books and studies. He was encouraged in his love of the sciences, including botany, geography, zoology, geology, and astronomy, by his parents, whom Boas later described as "liberal and idealistic."[2]

Boas's family did not actively practice Judaism, but his father maintained a

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[1] "Franz Boas", available at http://www.nndb.com/people/861/000097570/.

[2] "Franz Boas: Early Life and Education," available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Boas.

deep affection for the religion, and his family retained its Jewish identity. Writing later of his early years, Boas described his parents as liberal, idealistic, and dedicated to intellectual freedom:

> My parents had broken through the shackles of dogma. My father had retained an emotional affection for the ceremonial of his parental home, without allowing it to influence his intellectual freedom.[3]

The intellectual freedom Boas so admired in his father turned out to be the lodestar of his own life, including his decision to emigrate to the United States in 1886, at age twenty-eight. Boas began pushing for his own intellectual freedom in his last year of high school. A successful businessman, Boas's father felt that Franz should study medicine because it would ensure him a secure and comfortable livelihood. But Boas had "no real desire for medicine," and displayed at age sixteen the relentless drive and determination to chart his own course that typified his later professional life and work.[4] After Boas pressed "a last assault on Papa," his father allowed him to choose his own course of university studies. Boas joyously wrote to his sister Toni: "Papa said that I can decide. Now the whole future lies in my hands. We hope it works. I have dared!... I can become what I want. What more can a heart

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[3] Ibid.; See also, Morris E. Opler, "Franz Boas: Religion and Theory," *American Anthropologist* 69 (1967): 741-744; and Clyde Kluckholn and Olaf Prufer, "Franz Boas: Influences During the Formative Years," reprinted in Walter Goldschmidt, ed., The Anthropology of Franz Boas: Essays on the Centennial of His Birth (Menasha: The American Anthropological Assoc., 1959), 8-11.

[4] Douglas Cole, Franz Boas, The Early Years, 1858-1906 (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1999), 19.

desire?"[5]

Boas began his university studies at Heidelberg, studying a mix of botany, zoology, mineralogy, geology, astronomy, chemistry, physics, philosophy, folklore and cultural history.[6] Initially, Boas "had no friends and could find none," and he was put off by the "irresponsibility" of so many who were "steeped in vulgarity," and enjoyed "loafing, drinking, and sexual liaisons with barmaids or prostitutes."[7] But Boas persevered and ultimately made several good friends and settled into the university life. After Boas's closest friend Reinhard died in a swimming accident, however, Boas decided to move to Bonn in October 1877, where he studied physics for two years.[8] At Bonn, in historian Douglas Cole's words, Boas "settled into the satisfying role of a scholar."[9]

Boas moved to Kiel in 1879, to be close to his sick sister Toni – whom Boas adored.[10] Boas published his first scholarly paper in 1880, and received a magna cum laude degree in physics from Kiel in May 1881.[11] After completing his laboratory

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[5] Ibid., 29-30.

[6] Ibid., 38-39; 56-57.

[7] Ibid., 39.

[8] Ibid., 43-46.

[9] Ibid., 48.

[10] Ibid., 50-53.

[11] Ibid.

work and dissertation, Boas received a Ph.D. degree in physics for his work on "Contributions to the Understanding of the Color of Water."[12]

Historian Douglas Cole has pointed out that from Boas's formative years at Kiel "[came] the earliest record of Boas's encounter with the ugliness of Anti-Semitism."[13] Never one to back down from a fight or a challenge, Boas left Kiel with "a scarred face, the result of at least five university duels."[14]

Following, a year of compulsory service in the German military, Boas felt a strong desire to travel and learn more about the world. Having begun heavily reading books about geography during his year in the German military, Boas decided to "concentrate [his] powers entirely upon geography."[15] Through his reading, Boas became interested in "the relationship between people and their environment," and decided that he wanted to study the Eskimos and their culture.[16]

Boas met the head of the Berlin Geographical Society, who helped arrange an expedition to Baffin Island. Boas prepared rigorously for the trip "learning all that was

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[12] Ibid., 61.

[13] Ibid., 57.

[14] Ibid., 61. Cole added that Boas later credited his independence of thought and action to the German university system. Ibid., 62.

[15] Ibid., 65.

[16] Ibid.

necessary for the scientific traveler and explorer."[17] Boas then carried out a year-long expedition with tenacity and courage, "adopting completely the Eskimo mode of life," and "succeeding despite overwhelming setbacks."[18] As Douglas Cole described, "Boas's plan was extraordinary for its time, breaking with almost all practices of previous polar expeditions in its emphasis upon a detailed study of a limited region over an entire year and its reliance upon a small, virtually one-man expedition living off the land."[19]

Having faced "hardship, privation, and danger,"[20] Boas came to deeply respect "the character of the 'savage' Eskimo" and how "they [bore] all deprivation in common."[21] Boas also came to realize the uniqueness and strength of the Eskimo's culture. Boas wrote: "I often ask myself what advantages our 'good society' possesses over that of the 'savages' and find, the more I see of their customs, that we have no right to look down upon them."[22] As Cole has observed, Boas's expedition was his "initiation" into anthropology, and the trip solidified his growing desire to make anthropology his life's work. "Participation in the life of the Eskimos also sharpened

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[17] Ibid., 67-68.

[18] Ibid., 68-69.

[19] Ibid., 69.

[20] Ibid., 74.

[21] Ibid., 79.

[22] Ibid.

his social sense and his belief in the equality of virtue among peoples."[23]

Before he set out for Baffin Island, Boas met and fell in love with his future wife, Marie Krackowizer, a German-Catholic American visiting Germany with her family. By the end of his Baffin Island expedition, Boas knew that he wanted to marry Marie, and that he hoped to devote his life to studying geography and anthropology. On December 23, 1883, Boas set forth his life goals in a letter to Marie. Boas told Marie that he desired to undertake the "difficult struggle" of dedicating his life to searching for the truth and spreading it, so that "it may [someday] be said that [he] ha[d] not lived in vain."[24]

After visiting New York in 1883-1884, and cementing his bonds with Marie, Boas returned briefly to Germany, where he was named the Docent in Geography at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. But Boas desperately missed Marie, and he also found that he missed the United States, a place where "a willing man has the opportunity to work according to his powers."[25] Pouring out his heart to Marie in 1884, Boas wrote that rather than accepting a German professorship, "I should much prefer to live in America in order to further those ideas for which I live…What I want

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[23] Ibid., 81.

[24] Boas letter of December 23, 1883, to Marie Krackowizer, reprinted in Herbert S. Lewis, "The Passion of Franz Boas," *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 2 (June 2001): 447, 452; reprinted in Franz Boas, Anthropology & Modern Life (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 265-266.

[25] Cole, The Early Years, 84.

to live and die for, is equal rights for all, equal possibilities to learn and work for poor and rich alike!"[26]

Following his dreams of intellectual freedom, and dedicated to pursuing equal rights for all, Boas emigrated to the United States in 1886. Boas's letters to Marie reveal that Boas had begun to see himself as an American even before his emigration through his vision of American equality and liberty.[27] Like so many other first generation Americans through the centuries, Boas "had a difficult time earning a living and finding stability for the first decade."[28] He nevertheless married Marie, and ultimately fathered a large family of six (like many other American families in America's earlier years, one of their children died within the first year). Like many other Americans, Boas fought for fair treatment for himself in employment relationships, leaving the Field Museum in Chicago, which he helped found, "in fury when the permanent curatorship was offered to another man."[29]

After moving back to New York in 1895, to work at the American Museum of Natural History, Boas got his "big break". Boas was offered a teaching position at Columbia University in 1896 (ten years after arriving from Germany). Although Boas

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[26] Boas, Anthropology and Modern Life, 265-266.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 267.

[29] Dustin M. Wax, "Franz Boas and the Rise of Modern Culture"; reprinted at http://www.suite 101.com/article.cfm/jewish_american_history/34831 (2000).

ironically had told Marie in 1884, that he had "little inclination for teaching,"[30] he spent the rest of his life as a professor in Columbia's anthropology department, mentoring and teaching dozens of future successful anthropologists, including Margaret Mead and Melville Herskovits. As noted by the American Philosophical Society, "[f]or the next 37 years, Boas ruled the anthropological roost at Columbia, accruing unprecedented power in his discipline, wielding grants, recommendations, and appointments with remarkable dexterity, and collecting about him a remarkable group of younger scholars as students and colleagues."[31]

Historian Dustin Wax has observed that at Columbia, Boas undertook a lifetime of anthropological research, writing and teaching that led to the creation of "four-field anthropology", which integrated the fields of ethnology, human biology, linguistics, and field anthropology.[32] Anthropologist Marguerite Holloway added that

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[30] Boas, Anthropology and Modern Life, 266.

[31] "Franz Boas Collections (1858-1942)", American Philosophical Society, available at http:/www.amphilsoc.org/library/mole/b/boas.html, 2. Boas's personal papers, "numbering more than 60,000 items, were deposited in the archives of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia shortly after his death. They contain box after box of correspondence, notes, photographs, and memorabilia. That a [full] biography [of Boas] has never been written from this rich collection is partly because of its volume, and partly because so much of the personal correspondence is in German...." Cole, The Early Years, 4.

[32] Wax, "Modern Culture," 2. Historian Douglas Cole added that "Boas, almost alone in his generation, spanned the 'four fields' of the American discipline...[Boas thereby] altered the course of American intellectual life by stressing the role of nurture rather than nature in the development of peoples, especially groups and races. His emphasis on the relativity of cultural values contributed enormously to the success of the idea in the forum of twentieth-century ideas." Cole, The Early Years, 3.

through his work, Boas helped to reconfigure the field of anthropology, a field previously "heavily peopled with untrained adventurers and armchair philosophers [where] racial bias and bigotry [were] rampant and the gathering of information sometimes haphazard and riddled with an assortment of bias."[33] As further noted by the American Philosophical Society, while helping to found the American Anthropological Association and the International Journal of American Linguistics, "Boas championed an anthropology that viewed human cultures as shaped more by historical 'tradition' than biological prosperity."[34]

Boas died in December, 1942, at the age of eighty-four. Characteristically, Boas was hosting a luncheon at the Columbia Faculty Club for his friend Paul Rivet, a French Anthropologist who had escaped Paris shortly before the Nazi invasion in 1939. Boas was in the middle of a dialogue attacking Hitler's racist tenets, when he suffered a sudden massive heart attack, and fell over dead. Boas's friend Rivet pronounced him dead while one of Boas's former students and protégés anthropologist Claude-Levi Strauss held Boas in his arms.[35]

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[33] Marguerite Holloway, "The Paradoxical Legacy of Franz Boas – Father of American Anthropology," *Natural History* (Nov. 1997): 1.

[34] "Franz Boas Collections," American Philosophical Society, 2.

[35] Claudia Roth Pierpont, "The Measure of America: How a Rebel Anthropologist Waged War on Racism," *The New Yorker*, 8 March, 2004,48. Roth Pierpont maintained that Boas "was wearing down by 1942." Ibid. Boas's daughter Gertrude had died of polio in 1924, and his son Heinrich in a railroad accident in 1925. Boas's beloved wife Marie also had died in 1929, after being hit by a hit and run driver while Boas was in Chicago.

Racism in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century America

From the time of Franz Boas's emigration to the United States in 1886, until his death in 1942, African-Americans faced racism that proved to be stubborn and intractable. Noted American historian Samuel Eliot Morrison has explained that following Reconstruction, the North, tired of constant battles and focused on national expansion, accepted the Southern states' rights and the return to power of the "old [Southern] officer class" as part of the price of future nationalism.[36] As stated by cultural historian Ronald Takaki, following Reconstruction, leaders of the "New South" like Henry Grady "were determined to maintain white supremacy – the rule of the race of intelligence and self-control over the races of ignorance and impulsiveness. The 'truth' of the superiority of the white race, Grady said, would 'run forever' in the 'blood of Anglo-Saxon hearts.'"[37] Southerners were not alone in their racism. "We are not of the same race," insisted Senator Thomas Hendricks from Indiana. Hendricks added, "we are so different that we ought not compose one political community."[38] As historian Eric Foner has observed, the nearly universal disenfranchisement of blacks following Reconstruction and "[t]he effective nullification of the Fourteenth and

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[36] Samuel Eliot Morrison, The Oxford History of the American People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 725.

[37] Ronald Takaki, Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th- Century America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 200.

[38] Eric Foner, The Story of American Freedom (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 107.

Fifteenth Amendments occurred with the full acquiescence of the North."[39]

Examining early twentieth-century American racism, sociologist David Riesman remarked that for African-Americans, a "bipartisan deep freeze" reduced freedom to a "sterile propaganda slogan."[40] Poignantly, a former slave Thomas Hall observed: "[t]he Yankees helped free us, but they put us back in slavery again."[41] Segregation, economic injustice, and lynchings made American equality and freedom a cruel distant dream for African-Americans.

An ominous harbinger of the dangerous escalation of racism in the late 1880s and early 1890s was the growth of "professional" opinions in the social, biological, and psychological sciences concerning blacks' purported mental abilities and culture. This growth coincided with the increasing popularity of the science of eugenics, which was founded in 1883 by an English biologist, Sir Francis Galton. Galton's discipline dealt "with all influences that improve the qualities of a race."[42]

Neo-Puritan Victorian values elevating the "lovely white" man also contributed to the spread of racist thinking. White biologists, doctors, and psychologists consistently pointed to perceived physical differences between blacks

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[39] Ibid., 131.

[40] Ibid., 275.

[41] Ibid., 112-113.

[42] Roth Pierpont, "Rebel Anthropologist," 14.

and whites, and alleged that blacks were intellectually and culturally inferior. Blacks were painted "as incapable and undeserving of participation in a modern society."[43] Blacks also were attacked as "delinquent, defective, and dependent."[44] A July 1886 study in the New York Medical Journal asserted: "The negro is naturally intemperate, and unrestrained, indulges every appetite too freely, whether for food, drink, tobacco, or sensual pleasures, and sometimes to such extent as to appear more of a brute than a human."[45]

The experts' and social scientists' views were seized upon by racists who "were committed to excluding blacks from the mainstream of society and were willing to use the state toward that end."[46] In 1885, the Nashville American newspaper opined that, the "social question" had "already [been] settled by inexorable natural law."[47] As described by historian Eric Foner: "Just as the idea of the natural superiority of some races to others had earlier been invoked to justify slavery in a free society, social theorists in the Gilded Age called upon science to explain the success and failure of

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[43] Darryl Michael Scott, Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1896 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), xii.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., II.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Joseph H. Cartwright, The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 46.

individuals and social classes…."[48]

From historian Ronald Takaki's perspective, "white men of power and progress could feel confidence in their technology, and as they looked at the interracial scene around them, they could affirm their superiority over peoples of color."[49] In his study of "the damaged black psyche" Darryl Scott noted: "Whereas DuBois spoke of the Negro having a soul, most whites, including many experts, treated blacks as if they had no inner world."[50]

Against this backdrop of scientific bias and racism, Franz Boas emigrated to the United States in 1886, to pursue nearly six decades of anthropological work. For the next two decades, Boas dedicated himself relentlessly to studying and developing anthropology as a science, and to cementing his reputation and position at Columbia University. In Historian Douglas Cole's words, through 1906, "Boas, the developing scholar, scarcely embarked on the battle of ideas outside his anthropological discipline."[51] For two decades, according to Cole, "Boas was an insistent methodologist, attempting to find and propogate the proper method for discovering the physical and psychological aspects of the human past."[52]

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[48] Foner, American Freedom, 120-121; 131.

[49] Takaki, Iron Cages, 214.

[50] Scott, Contempt and Pity, II.

[51] Cole, The Developing Years, 48.

By 1906, however, with his tenured position at Columbia University and his financial future secured, and his reputation as a leading anthropologist cemented, Boas began to "search for opportunities in new fields."[53] As the twentieth-century progressed, Boas increasingly entered into public policy controversies concerning race, immigration, nationalism, and education, and developed his anthropological research and scholarship as tools to combat America's intractable culture of racism. Boas also set out to train a new generation of anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Melville Herskovitz, who could help carry on the battle.

Anthropology and the Battle Against Early Twentieth-Century American Racism

Historian and Boas biographer George W. Stocking, Jr. has aptly observed that "...Franz Boas more than any other man defined the 'national character' of anthropology in the United States...there is no question that he was the most important single force in shaping anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century."[54] Stocking additionally noted that "there is still no single volume that treats the total range of Boas's anthropological endeavors during the decades in which he reshaped American anthropology, defining the major lines of its subsequent development down

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[52] Ibid., 261.

[53] Ibid., 289.

[54] George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology – 1883-1911: A Franz Boas Reader (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), 1.

to the mid-twentieth century."[55]

Addressing Boas's lifetime of achievements, Stocking opined that "Boas is remembered above all else as a critic of racism, and this is quite appropriate."[56] Without question, Boas leveraged his research and notoriety as an anthropologist to become a major progressive force in the battle against American racism in the first four decades of the twentieth-century. Throughout those decades, Boas fought zealously against William Benjamin Smith and the "many [other] early twentieth-century hucksters of white supremacy."[57] In so doing, Boas transcended his professional role as an anthropologist and scientist by becoming an increasingly vocal and articulate advocate of an American society dedicated to, in historian Herbert S. Lewis's words, "equal opportunity for all, understanding and mutual appreciation among peoples, [and] freedom of speech and inquiry."[58]

Chapters II through IV of this thesis review the perspectives and opinions of a variety of historians and anthropologists concerning Boas's anthropological work and

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[55] Ibid., v.

[56] Ibid., 219. Stocking cogently added, however: "[b]ut the context and character of this contribution – the extent to which [Boas's] early argument was conditioned by the racist milieu in which he wrote, the way in which it drew together the various aspects of his anthropological thought, and the conception of culture implicit in his critique of racial determination – are somewhat less well understood."

[57] Lee D. Baker, "Franz Boas Out of the Ivory Tower," *Anthropological Theory* 4, no. 1 (2004): 37.

[58] Lewis, "The Passion of Franz Boas," 302.

legacy with special attention to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century American racism. To better appreciate the diverse historical and contemporary analyses of Boas's legacy, it will be useful to examine Boas's scholarship and writings on race and American racism, and how Boas intertwined his views on these controversial topics with his anthropological writings and work. It is crucial to keep in perspective Stocking's additional point that "[a]lthough we think of Boas today as an intellectual activist, it was not until rather late in his career that he became a public spokesman for the anthropological view point on broader social issues."[59]

Boas on the Origins of American Racism and Racial Tensions

Stocking believed that "[l]ike many intellectuals of the progressive period, [Boas] had great faith in the reformative power of scientific knowledge widely disseminated."[60] Boas felt it was critical to provide scientific and anthropological insights into the scourge of American racism. Stocking noted that Boas "had worked out the substance of his critique of racialism by 1894."[61] However, Boas did not become an outspoken critic of American racism until approximately 1905, after he had become a full professor at Columbia University. Stocking explained: "it was not until his institutional position was secure and his view point no longer that of a young turk

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[59] Ibid., 307.

[60] Ibid., 308.

[61] Ibid., 307.

that Boas could speak with the authority of America's 'leading anthropologist.'" [62]

By September of 1905, however, Boas was speaking out strongly in public about the "Negro problem." Boas later explained that "...scientists can no longer work remote from the social problems of our time...we [must] become more keenly aware of the impact of scientific discovery upon our social structure and the influence of social life upon the progress of science."[63]

Boas believed that it was critical to address the origins of American racism and racial tensions from an anthropological, sociological, and historical perspective. As Boas later observed in a 1931 speech, "[a]mong us race antagonism is a fact, and we should understand its psychological significance."[64] Boas explained that in most groups, "there is a considerable amount of social solidarity which is expressed particularly by antagonism against any other social group."[65] Boas added, "the most modern form of hostility against the outside group is expressed in racial theories, in the ready belief in the superiority of one race over another."[66]

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[62] Ibid., 307-08.

[63] Franz Boas, Race and Democratic Society (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1943), 215.

[64] Franz Boas, Race, Language and Culture, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1940), 14; reprinting Address of Franz Boas on June 15, 1931, to the American Association for the Advancement of Pasadena.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Franz Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 28-29; reprinting Boas's article on "Racial Purity," *Asia Magazine* (May 1948).

Boas understood the historical origins of bigotry and racism based upon differences in physical appearance. Boas believed that "prejudice is founded essentially on the tendency of the human mind to merge the individual in the class to which he belongs, and to ascribe to him all the characteristics of his class."[67] Boas explained: "It does not even require a marked difference in type, such as we find when we compare Negro and white, to provoke the spirit that prevents us from recognizing individuals and compels us to see only representatives of a class endowed with imaginary qualities that we ascribe to the group as a whole."[68] Addressing the American Negro directly, Boas elaborated: "The consciousness that the Negro belongs to a class by himself is kept alive by the contrast presented by his physical appearance with that of the whites."[69]

Boas noted the extraordinary irony that "[w]e in America are particularly given to racial injustice and for the very reason that this country was long a haven for those who yearned to breathe a freer political air or to make the most of freer economic opportunity."[70] Boas explained: "Germans, Swedes, Russians, Finns, Levantines, groups of widely different descent and tradition flock hither. They look down on one

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[67] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 78.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 78.

[70] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 5; reprinting "Race Prejudice from the Scientist's Angle;" an interview in The Forum (August 1937).

another, as close neighbors have always done from time immemorial, and they are looked down on in turn by the long established 'native' population."[71]

Boas rejected the general assumption "that race consciousness and race antagonisms are instinctive, that is to say organically determined."[72] Boas countered that the "numerous cases of racial mixture between whites and all other races show clearly that there is no fundamental racial antipathy that would prevent the closest and the most intimate relations between individuals of the most diverse races."[73]

In Boas's eyes, the history of a slave culture in America had made America a racist nation. Reviewing the history of slavery in America, Boas posited that American racism could not be fully understood "if we confine ourselves to the racial aspect and do not consider other class conflicts."[74] Boas believed that the conquering whites who enslaved the blacks in America rationalized their behavior by concluding that the blacks were an inferior group.[75]

Tracking America's history of slavery, Boas observed that "slavery was

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 21.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 16.

[75] Ibid., 17. Boas stated: "It cannot be overemphasized that the contempt with which these groups are treated is primarily social, and only accidentally emphasized by difference in bodily form, and that the conclusion that the inferior group belongs to an inferior group is merely a rationalization of our behavior." Ibid.

justified on the supposed obvious superiority of whites over Blacks and on mental and social differences that were believed to be innate and unchangeable...."[76] Boas added that the "theory of the racial determination of mental traits...was a convenient prop for supporting slavery and was, therefore, used as the strongest argument against the aims of the Abolitionists."[77]

Boas steadfastly asserted that developing science disproved the tenets supporting racism. Boas also warned about the escalating dangers of continuing American racism. On November 30, 1906, Boas wrote to Andrew Carnegie: "The increasing antagonism between the white and the black races is not only a matter of concern from a humanitarian point of view, but entails serious dangers to the Commonwealth."[78] Boas later added that "the close relations between democracy and individual freedom" in America were being jeopardized by racism.[79] Boas pointed out that the "ideal [of individual freedom] is embodied in our Constitution and the Bill of Rights, but it remains an ideal."[80] Boas believed that science and anthropology must be used to attack bigotry and racism:

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[76] Ibid., 5-6.

[77] Ibid., 20.

[78] Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 316; reprinting Boas letter of November 30, 1906, to Andrew Carnegie.

[79] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 215.

[80] Ibid., 216.

> ...every form of bigotry, every form of self-righteousness that assumes to have found the only right way, should be combated...[Americans] should be educated to withstand the appeals of demagogues, of catchwords and of slogans.[81]

Boas consequently worked tirelessly in the early twentieth-century to educate America about racism.

Boas's Use of Anthropological Tools in Fighting Racism

In developing the science of anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, Boas ultimately employed and refined three critical anthropological tools and philosophies, which he and his students used to combat American racism: 1) the concepts of cultural relativism and cultural determinism; 2) the importance of history in assessing cultures; and 3) the use of physical and anthropometric studies and comparisons. Each is addressed in turn.

As a young doctoral student in physics in late nineteenth-century Germany, Boas was exposed to the developing concept of relativity, which Albert Einstein later described in detail in his 1905 paper on the "Special Theory of Relativity."[82] Einstein explained that a scientist's perspective or relative "frame of reference" impacted his or her scientific observations or measurements relating to motion.[83]

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[81] Ibid.

[82] See Albert Einstein, Relativity: The Special and General Theory (New York: Hartsdale House, Inc., 1947).

[83] Ibid., 69.

Early in his scientific career, Boas learned about the relative perceptions and biases of scientists in describing physical events. For his doctoral dissertation in physics, which Boas successfully completed in 1882, Boas studied the optical properties of water. From the beginning, Boas found that his research was "plagued" by "problems of perception."[84] Boas therefore began to see early on in his scientific career that the relative perception of a seemingly objective scientific observer could have a profound impact on the scientist's scientific measurements, observations, and conclusions. Ultimately, in an 1889 article "On Alternating Sounds," Boas described how the establishment of sound categories in the study of languages was "heavily conditioned by the prior experience and point of view of the observer."[85]

Carrying these experiences to his anthropological work on culture and race, Boas refined the burgeoning concept of "cultural relativism." Boas concluded, according to Stocking, that "both in a methodological and an evaluative sense – races, languages, and cultures could be neither studied nor ranked from a Europocentric point of view."[86] Thus, Boas believed that groups of people must be critically analyzed in light of the variability of their bodily forms, language, and culture. As Boas noted, "[e]ven the rudest tribes do not conform to the picture that is drawn by many a

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[84] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Boaz, 1-2. "Boas's student Alfred Kroeber believed that Boas used his research in physics as a model for his work in anthropology." Ibid.

[85] Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 3.

[86] Ibid., 14-15.

superficial traveller."[87] Boas warned: "If we attempt to interpret the actions of our remote ancestors [or other cultures] by our own rational and emotional attitudes, we cannot reach truthful results, for their feeling and thinking was different from ours."[88] Describing the concept of cultural relativism, Boas stated in 1906: "In judging the work of men, it is, however, well to remember that there have been cultures different from ours and that the qualities that are today dominant and most highly esteemed, and the possession of which makes a person a most useful member of society, have not always had the same value; and may at a later period be superseded by others not so highly valued now."[89]

Employing the concept of cultural relativism, Boas, according to Stocking, attacked "the traditional nineteenth-century linkage of race and culture in a single hierarchical evolutionary sequence…."[90] Boas cited cultural relativism to argue that in terms of the crucial "early advances [of mankind], the Negro race has contributed its liberal share."[91] Boas noted that a review of "the arts of life" such as the domestication of animals and the creation of agricultural villages "point[ed] to an early and energetic

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[87] Boas, Race, Language and Culture, 626.

[88] Ibid., 636.

[89] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 61.

[90] Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 19-20.

[91] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 62.

development of African culture."[92] Comparing African culture to the culture of American Negroes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, Boas observed in 1906:

> In place of indolence you find thrift and ingenuity, and application to occupations that require not only industry, but inventiveness and a high degree of technical skill, and the surplus energy of the people does not spend itself in emotional excesses only. If, therefore, it is claimed that your race is deemed to economic inferiority, you may confidently look to the home of your ancestors....[93]

Boas further linked cultural relativism with the concept of "cultural determinism" to rebut attempts to argue that whites and blacks in the south "showed very material divergence in intellectual achievement."[94] For Boas, cultural determinism meant that "the behavior of an individual is...determined not by his racial affiliation, but by the character of his ancestry and his cultural environment."[95] Relying upon the concept of cultural determinism, Boas argued that any findings

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[92] Ibid., 64.

[93] Ibid., 66.

[94] Ibid., 74.

[95] Ibid., 27. In Stocking's words, for Boas "the clear implication was that the behavior of human beings everywhere, primitive or civilized, was determined, in ways that never came fully to their consciousness, by the particular cultural tradition in which they experienced their 'early bringing up.'" Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 220-221. Stocking explained that "Boas's thinking on cultural determinism was developed in three articles published in this first decade of this [twentieth] century...." Ibid.

showing racial divergences in intellectual aptitude or achievement could be explained "entirely or almost entirely on the basis of social environment."[96] Boas explained: "Owing to the great difficulty of excluding the effects of social environment, the significance of mental tests is always open to doubt…."[97]

Boas contrasted the cultures of blacks in America and Africa, and pointed to the impressive development of industrial arts and political organizations in Africa. Boas showed the "striking" contrast between African industrial and political conditions and conditions among our poor Negroes…."[98] Boas concluded that it was a hostile American social and cultural environment that held blacks back rather then innate genetic differences. In his seminal 1911 book, The Mind of Primitive Man, which later was referred to by Time Magazine as the "Magna Carta of self-respect for the 'lower' races," Boas argued that "the traits for the American Negro are adequately explained on the basis of his history and social status. In short, there is every reason to believe that the Negro when given facility and opportunities, will be perfectly able to fulfill the duties of citizenship as well as his white neighbor."[99]

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[96] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 75.

[97] Ibid., 75-76.

[98] Ibid., 76.

[99] Franz Boas, Anthropology and Modern Life, 184.

Pointing to his comparative studies of culture, Boas concluded that "we must decline to admit that mental superiority depends on the color of a person's skin. There is not the slightest scientific proof that race determines mentality, but there is overwhelming evidence that mentality is influenced by traditional culture."[100] Boas rhetorically asked:

> As long as we insist on stratification in racial layers, we shall pay the penalty in the form of interracial struggle. Will it be better for us to continue as we have been doing, or shall we try to recognize the conditions that lead to the fundamental antagonisms that trouble us?[101]

In addition to cultural relativism, Boas used cultural history to combat racism. Boas pushed American anthropology, in Stocking's words, in the direction of viewing "culture as [] relativistic, pluralistic, holistic, integrated, and historically conditioned...."[102]

Boas saw clearly that late nineteenth-century anthropologists had, in Stocking's words, a "rationalistic Victorian conception of man."[103] Following that conception, Boas observed in 1894, led to the claim "that the white race represents a higher type than all others..., [and that] other conditions being equal, a race is always

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[100] Ibid., 8.

[101] Boas, Race, Language, and Culture, 17.

[102] Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 18-19.

[103] Ibid., 221.

described as the lower the more fundamentally it differs from the white race."[104] Boas added: "[p]roud of his wonderful achievements, civilized man looks down upon the humbler members of mankind."[105]

Boas argued that an objective historical study of cultures would, in Stocking's words, "destroy[] the rationalistic Victorian conception of man."[106] Recounting the Negro's horrible history of slavery and degradation in America, Boas observed in 1894, "that the old race-feeling of the inferiority of the colored race is as potent as ever and is a formidable obstacle to its advance and progress, notwithstanding that schools and universities are open to them." Boas added: "We might rather wonder how much has been accomplished in a short period against heavy odds. It is hardly possible to say what would become of the negro if he were able to live with the whites on absolutely equal terms."[107]

Developing this theme, Boas began arguing in the early 1900s that American racism could be combated by educating Americans about cultural history. For example, Boas observed in 1906: "It seems plausible that the whole attitude of our people in regard to the Negro might be materially modified if we had a better

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[104] Ibid., 222.

[105] Ibid., 221.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid., 226.

knowledge of what the Negro has really done and accomplished in his own native country."[108] Boas explained that "all that we can say at the present time is that it seems unfair to judge the Negro by what he has come to be in America, and that the evidence of cultural achievement of the Negro in Africa suggests that his inventiveness, power of political organization, and steadiness of purpose, equal or even excel those of other races of similar stages of culture."[109]

Boas consequently set out to educate the American populace, and especially blacks, about how "the true Negro, the ancestor of our slave population, ha[d] achieved [in Africa] the very advances which the critics of the Negro would make us believe he cannot attain."[110] Boas lectured and spoke at length about "the Negro in his own home, and… [the] advances in culture he has made there."[111] Stocking aptly has observed that "the attempt to strengthen American Negro identity by an affirmation of the value of African culture was at this time quite radically innovative for a white American."[112]

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[108] Ibid., 317.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 61; reprinting "Commencement Address at Atlanta University," May 31, 1906.

[111] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 54; reprinting March 1904 article in the Ethical Record.

[112] Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 308.

Boas addressed the "high development of agriculture" in Africa, and concluded "that the primitive Negro community – with its fields that are tilled with iron and wooden implements, with its domestic animals, with its smithies, with its expert wood-carvers – [was] a model of thrift and industry, and compare[d] favorably with the conditions of life among our own ancestors."[113] Boas also pointed to the "legal trend of mind of the people. No other race on a similar level of culture ha[d] developed as strict methods of legal procedure as the Negro ha[d]."[114] Boas further was impressed by the strength and sagacity of African Kings.[115]

Based on his review of African cultural history, Boas concluded that African-Americans were "capable of social and political contributions," and if treated fairly, would "produce [] great men here, as [] in Africa.[116] Boas emphasized his scientific conclusions to inspire African-Americans to believe in themselves and their ancestry. For example, in his 1906 Atlanta University commencement address, Boas urged: "If, therefore, it is claimed that your race is doomed to economic inferiority, you may confidently look to the home of your ancestors, and say that you have set out to recover for the colored people the strength that was their own before they set foot on

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[113] Ibid., 55.

[114] Ibid., 55.

[115] Ibid., 59. Boas noted that "the number of strong African Kings met by explorers is remarkable. They are found in South Africa as well as in Central Africa and the Sudan. They are the best proof that men of genius and of indomitable will-power exist." Ibid.

[116] Ibid., 60.

the shores of this continent."[117] W.E.B. DuBois was so inspired by Boas's address that he began actively studying African history, and formed a long-term friendship with Boas.[118]

In addition to cultural relativism and history, Boas developed and utilized physical anthropology as a tool to fight the perception that the white race was somehow genetically superior to all others, including blacks. Boas devoted substantial time and energy to anatomical and physical research, including comparative head and cranial measurements. Through such research, Boas emphatically argued that with respect to anatomical and mental characteristics, "the degree of variability in each race is very great."[119] As Boas explained, "In every population, we find persons who are stupid and intelligent, weak and strong, moral and immoral."[120]

Boas believed that lumping individuals according to physical characteristics produced "arbitrary classifications."[121] Boas emphasized that focusing on individuals led to erroneous conclusions because "anthropological study is not a study of

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[117] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 66; reprinting 1906 Atlanta University Commencement Address.

[118] Harold R. Isaacs, The New World of Negro Americans (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 204. DuBois's reaction to Boas's 1906 Atlanta University Commencement Address is discussed in more detail infra.

[119] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 71.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 2-3.

individuals, but of local or social varieties."[122] Boas consequently used physical anthropology, in Stocking's words, "against any attempt to subsume the range of distribution of measured physical differences within an idealized type."[123]

Boas conceded that various outward differences such as skin color existed among populations. For example, in a 1908 address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Boas observed:

> I do not believe that the Negro is, in his physical and mental make-up, the same as the European. The anatomical differences are so great that corresponding mental differences are plausible.[124]

Nevertheless, Boas made it very clear that he did not view any superficial physical differences such as skin color as a sign of genetic superiority. Boas argued that there was "no proof whatever that these differences signify any appreciable degree of inferiority of the Negro....[125] In his 1906 Atlanta University Commencement address, Boas added that: "there is no anatomical evidence available that would sustain the view that the bulk of the Negro race could not become as useful citizens as the members of any race."[126]

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[122] Franz Boas, Race, Language, and Culture, 166.

[123] Stocking, Jr., ed., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 2-3.

[124] Ibid., 92.

[125] Ibid., 92. Boas added that his view was "supported by the remarkable development of industry, political organization, and philosophic opinion, as well as by the frequent occurrence of men of great will power and wisdom among the Negroes of Africa." Ibid.

[126] Ibid., 66.

Summarizing his findings concerning physical anthropology and race, Boas observed in 1940: "In short, then, the claim that any type represents a pure race, essentially different from all others, with all members having the same characteristics, is quite untenable."[127] Boas continued: "It has not been possible to discover in the races of man any kind of fundamental biological differences that would outweigh the influence of culture."[128] Boas concluded: "The claim is not tenable that mental qualities of races are biologically determined. Much less have we a right to speak of biologically determined superiority of one race over another."[129] In 1942, shortly before his death, Boas emphatically added: "The existence of any pure race with special endowments is a myth, as is the belief that there are races all of whose members are foredoomed to eternal inferiority."[130]

Boas's Prescriptions for Ending American Racism

Boas fought tirelessly against American racism until his death. Throughout his relentless battle, Boas fully understood the overwhelming forces he was fighting. In a 1921 article in the Yale Quarterly Review, Boas admitted that "there [was] no great

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[127] Ibid., 33.

[128] Ibid., 35.

[129] Ibid., 37.

[130] Ibid., 18-19; reprinting Boas, Franz, "Class Consciousness and Race Prejudice", *The Christian Register* 122 (1943): 5. Boas further noted in 1937, that "[i]f there were any truth in the belief that social behavior is conditioned solely by bodily structure, the United States would be an aggregation of a hundred different human stocks and cultures instead of a single nation with a common ideal." Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 12.

hope that the Negro problem will find even a half-way satisfactory solution in our day."[131] But Boas never gave up hope "that an increasing number of strong minds will free themselves from race prejudice and see in every person a man entitled to be judged on his merits."[132]

A review of Boas's writings on American racism indicates that Boas offered a three-pronged prescription for ending racism in America. First, Boas urged that Americans must be educated about anthropology and history to change their culturally inherited social attitudes about race. Second, all Americans had to have access to social, educational, and economic opportunities, since racism was heavily tied to economic insecurities and fears. Third, Boas hoped that intermarriage and biological mixing of the races would lessen the superficial physical differences and create a more tolerant populace.

Boas urged Americans to see racism as a problem that was "social rather then biological."[133] Boas believed that education could change America's racist culture. Boas rhetorically asked: "Is a way of life, a way of thinking inherited like kinky hair and a black skin, and is it therefore something inevitable?"[134] Boas answered his own

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[131] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 80; reprinting Boas's article "The Negro in America," *Yale Quarterly Journal* (Jan. 1921): 383.

[132] Ibid. Boas pessimistically added, however, that "[t]he weak-minded will not follow their example." Ibid.

[133] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 6; Reprinting 1937 *Forum* Interview.

[134] Ibid., 6.

rhetorical question with a second: "Are Jews and Anglo-Saxons, whites and Blacks, Asiatics and Englishmen so fundamentally different, because of the stocks from which they spring, that they and their children cannot adapt themselves to a new social environment?"[135]

Boas recognized that "[f]acts that could help us to shape our policies in regard to race problems are almost entirely wanting."[136] But Boas knew that Americans must learn that racial superiority and inferiority were not biologically determined because "[t]he status of a group assumed to be biologically determined cannot change."[137] Boas thus argued that "[t]he obvious remedy is education – teaching the indisputable fact that color of skin, class, religious belief, geographical or national origin are no tests of social adaptability."[138]

Boas further appreciated that economic tensions and insecurities played a pivotal role in exacerbating racist feelings. In 1940, for example, he argued that racist "feelings would be quite different if economic and social forces were not active."[139]

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[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., 95; reprinting 1908 Address before the AAAS.

[137] Ibid., 29; reprinting Boas's article "Racial Purity," *Asia Magazine* (May 1940). Boas added: "Racism as a basis of social solidarity as against the cultural interests of mankind is more dangerous than any of the other groupings because according to its claims the hostile groups are biologically determined, and therefore permanent, while all the other groupings change with the change in cultural pattern." Ibid.

[138] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 14; reprinting August, 1937 Interview.

For Boas, overcoming racism was closely tied to "overcoming social and economic obstacles."[140] Boas consequently argued that America needed to focus on living up to its ideals of equal opportunity:

> It is time to restate the beliefs of the founders of this nation and drive home again the democratic principle that a citizen is to be judged solely by the readiness with which he fits himself into the social structure and by the value of his contributions to the country's development.[141]

Perhaps Boas's most controversial prescription for combating American racism was his belief that an intermixing of the races over time would create a more tolerant society. Addressing racism in 1941 in the Yale Quarterly Review, Boas argued that "...the greatest hope for the immediate future lies in a lessening of the contrast between Negroes and whites which will bring about a lessening of class consciousness...intermixture will decrease the contrast between the extreme racial forms, and in the course of time, this will lead to a lessening of the consciousness of race distinction."[142] Boas therefore argued against laws prohibiting interracial marriages.[143] Boas further pointed out: "Intermixture between white males and Negro

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[139] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 29; reprinting 1940 *Asia Magazine* article on "Racial Purity."

[140] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 12.

[141] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 14.

[142] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 81.

[143] Ibid. Boas argued: "There is absolutely no biological evidence which would countenance the assumption that race mixture of itself would have unfavorable results...It would seem, therefore, to be in the interest of society to permit rather than restrain marriages between white men and Negro

females has been common ever since Negroes were brought to our continent, and the efficacy of the modern attempt to repress this intermingling is open to grave doubt."[144] Making one of his most controversial remarks, Boas concluded:

> Thus it would seem that man being what he is, the Negro problem will not disappear in America until the Negro blood has been so much diluted that it will no longer be recognized just as anti-Semitism will not disappear until the last vestige of the Jew as a Jew has disappeared.[145]

In short, beginning at least as early as 1894, and accelerating starting in approximately 1905, Franz Boas courageously used his anthropological research and professional standing to scientifically challenge American racism, and to offer potential prescriptions for battling racism. Although America was not yet ready to fully embrace Boas's science or prescriptions for ending racism, Boas nevertheless continued his crusade to inspire both his students and the general American populace to reject racism through education and historical and cultural understanding throughout the next four decades. Although Boas did not live to see the ultimate fulfillment of his dreams, in developing the science of anthropology as a powerful and effective tool against the scourges of American racism, Boas left behind a road map

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women." Recognizing the potentially sexist and racist hue of his statement, Boas added: "It would be futile to expect that our people would tolerate intermarriages in the opposite direction, although no scientific reason can be given that would prove them to be detrimental to the individual." Ibid.

[144] Ibid., 80-81.

[145] Ibid., 81.

for an America that values each individual and offers them equal opportunities and freedom.

CHAPTER II

THE LEGACY OF BOAS: THE ADMIRERS – PIERPONT, STOCKING, BUNZL, AND LISS

It is surprising that someone as extensively admired, critiqued, and studied as Franz Boas "lack[s] a full biography…"[1] Although extensively "studied by many superb scholars, among them George W. Stocking, Jr., Douglas Cole, Ira Jenkins, Julia E. Liss, Lee D. Baker, and Aldona Jonaitis,"[2] it seems that no one scholar has been able to get his or her arms completely around Boas and the values that drove him, or his rich life of diverse accomplishments and societal contributions. Thus, as with other individuals of great genius and accomplishment, to fairly assess Boas's values, legacy and contributions, we must not only review his voluminous original research and writings, but a broad array of studies and critiques written about him.

Boas has been lavishly admired and praised by some historians and anthropologists and harshly criticized by others. Consequently, to fairly assess Boas's legacy and the core values, environmental factors and teachings that influenced him, one must examine and carefully weigh the opinions of both Boas's admirers and critics.

Boas would have admonished both his admirers and his critics to study and evaluate him as a historical figure, as he studied cultures, recognizing that "the idea of

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[1] Roth Pierpont, " Measure of America", 23.

[2] Ibid.

a [historical] individual is merely relative."[3] As with other extraordinary historical subjects, each of Boas's reviewer's unique frames of reference and personal biases necessarily contributed consciously or subconsciously to his or her assessment of Boas - an irony Boas himself would have appreciated and enjoyed given his prolific writings on cultural and historical relativism. Boas would have delighted at the thought that a historian's unique "*Herzenbildung*" - or the cultivation of their own heart - could be revealed through their historic review and assessment of Boas.

This chapter will review the historical assessments of some of Boas's admirers, including Claudia Roth Pierpont, George W. Stocking, Jr., Matti Bunzl, and Julia Liss. These historians believed that Boas's work as an anthropologist and progressive reformer could be traced directly to his years in Germany. These historians differed, however, in their assessments of the educational and cultural factors that drove Boas as a scientist and a progressive reformer. Roth Pierpont emphasized Boas's Jewish roots, while Stocking, Bunzl, and Liss traced Boas's work and ideals to his German education and scientific training. Nevertheless, these historians ultimately were united in their admiration of Boas's legacy as an anthropologist and progressive reformer.

Claudia Roth Pierpont: The New Yorker (Mar. 8, 2004): Boas as a Heroic Jewish Reformer

Chapter III discusses how critics like Carl N. Degler, Kevin MacDonald and others have seized upon Boas's Jewish heritage to criticize him for allegedly pursuing

[3] Franz Boas, quoted in Ibid., 6.

a "Jewish agenda." Yet others have lionized him for purportedly pursuing such an agenda. On March 8, 2004, Claudia Roth Pierpont published an extensive and highly acclaimed review of Franz Boas's life in *The New Yorker*. Titled "The Measure of America: How a rebel anthropologist waged war on racism," Pierpont's 23 page article portrayed Boas as an iconoclastic Jewish "rebel" hero who stood virtually alone in battling racism throughout his life.

Roth Pierpont set the stage for her heroic portrait of Boas by describing him as "not by nature a timid soul. Small in stature but formidably intense, he had a shock of dark hair like an eagle's crest and a face slashed with mysterious scars. (People whispered of early duels.)"[4] Pierpont then boldly asserted that "the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which in 1954 swept away more than a century of racist law, is impossible to imagine without his influence."[5] Roth Piermont continued: "Such consuming fights were not what Boas had intended in coming here - he had thought that the country might save him - but, given his background and his beliefs, he had no choice but to spend his life making a reality of American ideals."[6]

What accounted for the heroic life of this brilliant and iconoclastic scientific 'rebel'? To Roth Pierpont, the answer was simple. "[Boas's] enlightened German

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[4] Roth Pierpont, "Measure of America", 2.

[5] Ibid., 4.

[6] Ibid., 4.

home was Jewish, and he was born in 1858, ten years after the democratic revolution failed, when the freedoms that had been gained by German Jews were being violently stripped away."[7]

Roth Pierpont went on to suggest that Boas's scientific drive resulted from a combination of a Jewish upbringing and his having to defend himself in his early German university days against "insults [that] had become deliberate, and virulent, and focused on his being a Jew."[8] In deciding to devote his life to studying cultures, Boas "was not proposing to discover why little German Jewish boys were plagued with headaches or why they grew up to have faces slashed with scars. This was too complex and much too close."[9]

Boas was happily married to a Catholic, Marie Krackowizer, "belonged to no religious organization," and did not raise his five children in any religious practice. Nevertheless, Roth Pierpont asserted that Boas's Jewishness defined him, and argued that "however personal the origins of his thinking, his intellectual program was based on an unswerving German Enlightenment belief (and was there anything that more clearly marked him as a German Jew?) in the common humanity of all."[10]

Without historical support, Roth Pierpont concluded that Boas's definitive

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[7] Ibid., 4.

[8] Ibid., 5.

[9] Ibid., 6.

[10] Ibid., 12.

work, The Mind of Primitive Man,[11] was driven by a desire to combat American anti-Semitism. She argued that "Boas saw the Negro's social plight as related to that of Jews and other 'so called lower types' whom many Americans feared were creating a 'mongrel' nation."[12]

In Roth Pierpont's estimation, Boas was able to "[stand] up against the will of a nation"[13] because in the words of Margaret Mead, "Jews had a chromosome for social justice."[14] Indeed, Roth Pierpont contended that Boas was able to keep going physically during the last decade of his life because of "Hitler's assumption of power, in January, 1933, which roused a sense of anger so tremendous that the old man rose from his bed and, as [Margaret Mead] put it, 'flung himself back into the world.'"[15] Roth Pierpont then credited Boas for "[p]ublic revulsion against Nazi doctrine [which] ultimately finished off the Eugenics movement."[16] She correctly noted that in 1936, Boas appeared on the cover of *Time*, as a national hero.[17]

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[11] Franz Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man (New York: MacMillan Co., 1938).

[12] Roth Pierpont, "Measure of America," 12.

[13] Ibid., 15.

[14] Ibid., 16.

[15] Ibid., 20.

[16] Ibid., 21.

[17] Roth Pierpont's portrayal of Boas as a heroic Jewish reformer was anticipated nearly three decades earlier by historian Hasia R. Diner in 1977, in her book In the Almost Promised Land: Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977). Diner argued that in addressing race, Boas wrote "for political as well as for scientific reasons... He was deeply concerned with the real human

George W. Stocking, Jr.: Boas as the Product of the German Anthropological Tradition

Rather than following Roth Pierpont and Diner, several historians including George W. Stocking, Jr., Matti Bunzl, and Julia Liss, have focused upon Boas's German background and formal education, as opposed to his Jewish family roots, in assessing his anthropological work and legacy. In 1996, George W. Stocking, Jr., compiled a set of essays highlighting Boas as a German bred and educated scientist in Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition.[18] Stocking's central thesis was that with respect to Boas's anthropological work and legacy, "his underlying orientations were established in the three decades before he emigrated from Germany."[19] Stocking lauded Boas's anthropological legacy, which he believed could be traced to the German intellectual tradition.[20]

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suffering created by racist thinking and eagerly shared his findings with the NAACP." Ibid., 142-47; quoted in Williams, Jr., Rethinking Race, 105. Diner's thesis was "that the fundamental reason Boas wrote about African-Americans was his ethnic status as a liberal, German-born Jew in America who believed that blacks and Jews had a common bond in suffering." Williams, Rethinking Race, 105. Diner concluded that "the same principles which Boas and his students used to discredit anti-black thinking could be employed as effective weapons to combat anti-Jewish sentiment." Diner, Promised Land, 142-47.

[18] George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

[19] Stocking, Jr., Volksgeist as Method and Ethic, 4.

[20] Ibid., 4.

Stocking set the stage for various supportive essays by discussing the German intellectual traditions of *Natur* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, which respectively related to the natural and human worlds. Stocking focused upon Boas's 1887 article "The Study of Geography,"[1] which "defined two fundamentally different epistemological and methodological approaches to the understanding of the natural and human worlds: that of the physicist and that of the cosmographer (which Boas also called the 'historical')."[1]

Boas spent his formal educational years studying "the cosmographic and physical tendencies within the German anthropological tradition…."[21] Stocking believed that Boas "never fully resolved" the tension "between the physical and cosmographical approaches" embraced by nineteenth-century German science.[22] Stocking argued that Boas nevertheless came to favor the cosmological approach. As Stocking observed, "it was the cosmological impulse that motivated both his critique of evolutionary racialism and his emerging conception of culture – insofar as any given human culture, like the geography of a single country, was a totality which had a

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[21] Ibid., 5.

[22] Ibid., 5. Stocking explained: "Boas set up a series of oppositions: between 'aesthetic' and the 'affective' as motivating impulses; between phenomena with an 'objective' unity and phenomena with a 'subjective' unity; between the 'deduction of laws' and the 'thorough understanding of phenomena ' for their own sake; between the resolution of a phenomenon 'into its elements' for systematic comparative study and the study of the whole phenomenon' by a more subjective method which Boas at one point described erotically as a loving penetration (as opposed to a 'systematical arrangement')." Ibid.

'merely subjective connection' existing 'in the mind of the observer' (or, by extension, in the mind of the self-conscious native enactor)."[23]

Bunzl: Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition

Matti Bunzl's article "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture," represented "the first systematic attempt to explore" Boas's "intellectual connections" to "the cosmographic and physicalist tendencies within the German anthropological tradition, as those tendencies were available to Boas in his formal education and informal enculturation."[24] Bunzl argued that Boas's anthropological views could be traced back to the German brothers Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt.[25]

Bunzl emphasized "the cosmographical tendency in Boas's thought," and interpreted "the more physicalistic aspects of his early anthropology as an intellectual accommodation to his institutional situation, in which he was dependent on evolutionary anthropologists for the support of his ethnographic research."[26] Bunzl's primary thesis was that Boas's anthropological studies and philosophies ultimately

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[23] Ibid., 5.

[24] Ibid., 5. Bunzl's essay, "Franz Boas and the Humbodtian Tradition: From *Volkgeist* and *Nationalcharakter* to an Anthropological Concept of Culture" is reprinted at p. 17. At the time of publication, Bunzl was a graduate doctoral student in the departments of anthropology and history at the University of Chicago. His research on Boas was part of his dissertation research on issues of race, class, gender and sexuality in late imperial Vienna.

[25] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 5-6.

[26] Ibid., 5-6.

could be traced to "an orientation that was grounded in a German anthropological tradition extending back through Bastian and Ritter, through Steinthal and Waitz, to the brothers Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt. It [was] in that tradition that one finds the roots of Boas's critique of evolutionism and its racial concomitants, as well as of his linguistic relativism and his cultural historicism."[27]

Like Stocking, Bunzl described in detail the conflicting physical and historical scientific methodologies taught in nineteenth-century Germany.[28] Bunzl explained that "underlying this dichotomy was the traditional German separation between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*," or between the law-given sciences and the historical sciences.[29] Bunzl observed that "the former, such as physics and experimental psychology, sought to find the exact laws governing the natural and human realm; the latter recognized the limitations of positive knowledge and focused on individual phenomena as historical products."[30]

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[27] Ibid., 72-73.

[28] In "The Study of Geography", Boas explained that physical scientific methodology aimed "to deduce laws from phenomena," and the "single phenomenon itself" was insignificant, and merely served as "an exemplification of a law..." Ibid., 17. "In contrast, the historical method had as its goal 'the investigation of phenomena themselves,' and was 'unwilling to consider them as subject to stringent laws." Ibid. Boas added that "the physical method sought to arrange the myriad phenomena of the world 'systematically' so as to 'put the confused impressions in order. The historical method, in contrast, grew out of an 'affective' impulse; 'the mere occurrence of an event' triggered the desire to study its 'true history.'" Ibid., 17.

[29] Ibid., 18.

[30] Ibid., 17-18.

Bunzl traced in detail the development of these ideas in German intellectualism, and the contributions of Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt and their intellectual disciples to their growth. As a nineteenth-century German anthropologist, Wilhelm von Humboldt sought to merge the various spirits of the natural scientist, the historian and the philosopher, achieving a unification of "the transcendental with the empirical."[31] Humboldt emphasized the importance of detailed observations rather than gross generalizations.[32]

In addition to studies of comparative anthropology, which Bunzl believed heavily influenced Boas, Wilhelm von Humboldt carried out an important set of comparative language studies. Bunzl likewise believed that these studies helped inspire Boas's detailed comparative studies of languages and their relationship to cultures.[33] Bunzl noted that Humboldt developed a deep respect and admiration for the world's various languages, a respect also seen in Boas's extensive studies of language and culture. [34]

Most importantly to Bunzl, Humboldt was "skeptical of natural laws as the governing agents of human behavior, [so] he remained committed to the uniqueness of

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[31] Ibid., 22.

[32] Ibid., 23

[33] Ibid., 24.

[34] Ibid., 34; citing Wilhelm von Humboldt, Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development (1836) (Miami Linguistics Series, 9) (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971) (1971 trans. by George C. Buck and Frithjof A. Rauen).

each language and national character."[35] In this sense, Bunzl believed that Humboldt strongly foreshadowed Boas by recognizing "all of the word's peoples as carriers of culture, whose development could be studied by methods analogous to those of cultural history."[36]

Bunzl further traced the influences of Wilhelm von Humboldt's brother Alexander upon Boas. "While Wilhelm von Humboldt greatly influenced the humanistic disciplines, his brother Alexander was a central figure in the development of the natural sciences in Germany."[37] Alexander's "contributions to geology, mineralogy, meteorology, and related fields helped to establish geography as a scientific discipline, and his concern with the relations of humans with their immediate environment dominated German geography in the nineteenth century…."[38]

Like his brother Wilhelm, Alexander von Humboldt developed scientific philosophies that Bunzl believed Boas rigorously followed in developing the science of anthropology. For example, Alexander Humboldt "demanded 'induction and reasoning' to eclipse 'conjecture and assumption.'"[39] He also "demanded the thorough description of the physical reality of nature as the primary object of cosmography."[40]

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[35] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 35, citing Humboldt, Linguistic Variability.

[36] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 36.

[37] Ibid., 36.

[38] Ibid., 37.

Bunzl tracked the development of the Humboldt's philosophies and teachings through such German scientific protégés as the geographer Karl Ritter, the philologist Theodore Waitz, the medical doctor and natural scientist Adolf Bastian, and the zoologist Friedrich Ratzel. For example, following the Humboldts, Ratzel "took a decisive stand against Ernest Haeckel and Herbert Spencer and their 'crude hypothesis of the survival of the fittest'... In a review of Principles of Biology, Ratzel scolded Spencer for making careless use of ethnographic facts to support his theories, claiming he lacked any understanding of their meaning, and rejecting his generalizations as schematic and hasty...."[41]

Similarly, Bunzl observed, Waitz relied upon the work of the Humboldts to move "a step closer to the historical relativism implied in the historical world view, but never fully realized by its early proponents."[42]

> Like the young Boas, [Waitz] used the pivotal term 'culture' in the humanistic sense of the accumulation of mental achievements of a people....insisting that every society had a unique position within humanity and afforded equal satisfaction for its members...confronted with the diversity of cultural life forms, all that one could do was to 'refrain from comparing their value and to appreciate them in their totality as a magnificent spectacle, in whose colorful interchange, rich

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[39] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 38; citing Beck, H., ed., Alexander von Humboldt: Studienausgabe (Cuba: Work, 1992).

[40] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 38; citing Beck, ed., Studienausgabe.

[41] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 46; citing F. Ratzel, Anthropogeographie (Stuttgart, Volal: 1882).

[42] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 46.

intricacy, and delightful unfolding one relished, participated, and learned.[43]

Reviewing the scientific work of Adolf Bastian in the 1860s and 1870s, Bunzl impressively compared his writings on ethnology to Boas's later writings to show a substantial foreshadowing. For example, in 1881, Bastian noted the difficulties in drawing sweeping ethnological conclusions and generalizations about complex systems.[44] Eighteen years later, in his papers on the Jessup North Pacific Expedition, Boas echoed Bastian.[45]

Similarly, Bastian foreshadowed Boas by cautioning "against dividing the world into savage and civilized peoples, refusing to place diverse ethnic groups on a hierarchical ladder, or to assume a uniform progression of either particular ethnic groups or of humanity at large."[46] In 1871, he anticipated Boas's later anthropological writings in his own criticisms of the "ethnocentrism characterizing much of the social evolution of the day."[47]

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[43] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 46, citing Theodore Waitz, Anthropologie der Naturvolker (Leipzig: FA Brockhaus, 1859), 478, 484.

[44] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 50, citing Adolf Bastian, Die hielige Sage der Polynesier – Kosmognie and Theognic (Leipzig: FA Brockhaus, 1881).

[45] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 50, citing Franz Boas, "Jessup North Pacific Expedition Papers " (1898).

[46] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 51.

[47] Bunzl, 51; citing A. Bastian, Die Cultur und ihre Entwicklung auf ethnologischer Grundlage (1871).

The aptness of Bunzl's comparison of Bastian's and Boas's thoughts is shown by Boas's 1920 essay on "The Methods of Ethnology," which has been reprinted in Boas's Race, Language, and Culture.[48] Boas wrote:

> It may be recognized that the [evolutionary] hypothesis implies the thought that our Western European civilization represents the highest cultural development towards which all other more primitive cultural types tend, and that, therefore, retrospectively we construct an orthogenic development towards our own modern civilization. It is clear that if we admit that there may be different ultimate and co-existing types of civilization, the hypothesis of one single general line of development cannot be maintained.[49]

Bunzl credited protégés of the Humboldts such as Bastian and Waitz with paving the way for Boas by arriving "at a more inclusive understanding of the human condition." [50] Bunzl concluded that by "uniting the historical with the psychological and the physiological with the physical, Waitz and Bastian prepared the intellectual ground for Boas's embracive anthropology."[51]

Bunzl further tracked Boas's anthropological research and writings to show how Boas progressed from being early in his career "much like the physicist he was by academic training, explicitly subordinating the investigation of individual historical phenomena to the search for general laws," to an anthropologist dedicated to exploring

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[48] Franz Boas, Race, Language and Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940).

[49] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 51; citing F. Boas, Race, Language, and Culture, 282.

[50] Bunzl, "Franz Boas", 52.

[51] Ibid.

the uniqueness and value of the world's diverse cultures.[52] Bunzl explained that as Boas developed "early twentieth-century American anthropology," he increasingly "called into question the underlying assumptions of evolutionary anthropology," and urged "a detailed study of the customs in their relation to the total culture of the tribe practicing them, in connection with the investigation of their geographical distribution."[53]

Bunzl additionally argued that through his scientific growth, Boas "tied together the theoretical currents of [German historical] Counter-Enlightenment thinking:"

> first, the skepticism of finding natural laws governing human behavior; second, the rejection of a psychic unity of humanity, operating according to rational principles regardless of space and time; third, the focus on the individuality and diversity of phenomena as opposed to their similarity and universality; [and] finally, the emphasis on actual historical development in place of conjectures and speculation, on induction as opposed to deduction.[54]

Bunzl completed his essay by addressing a recent "current of historiography emphasizing the American as opposed to the Germanic roots of American cultural anthropology."[55] While crediting the contributions of Boas's American anthropological predecessors John Wesley Powell and Frank Hamilton Cushing,

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[52] Ibid., 58-59.

[53] Ibid., 61-62.

[54] Ibid., 61.

[55] Ibid., 72.

Bunzl argued that it would be historically perverse "to minimize the contribution of Franz Boas," or to underestimate Boas's "ground[ing] in a German anthropological tradition extending back through Bastian and Ritter, through Steinthal and Waitz, to the brothers Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt."[56] Bunzl concluded: "It is in that [Germanic intellectual] tradition that one finds the roots of Boas's critique of evolutionism and its racialist concomitants, as well as of his linguistic relativism and his cultural historicism. By this route, one may trace the later American anthropological idea of culture back through Bastian's Volkergadanken and the folk psychologist's Volksgeister to Wilhelm von Humboldt's Nationalcharakter...."[57]

Julia Liss: German Culture and Science in the *Bildung* of Boas

Like Stocking and Bunzl, Professor Julia E. Liss of Scripps College in Claremont, California chose to highlight Boas's German background in assessing his rise to prominence in American anthropology and his contributions as a progressive reformer. While Bunzl focused on the "cosmographical/cultural and physicalist/biological background" of German intellectualism, Liss highlighted Boas's German upbringing and lifelong German roots. In "German Culture and German Science in the Bildung of Franz Boas," Liss showed "how the intellectual and cultural

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[56] Ibid., 72-73.

[57] Ibid., 73. Bunzl noted the irony that many of the Germanic intellectual ideas that heavily influenced Boas were later adapted and corrupted by the Nazis to bolster their claims of Nordic superiority. Ibid., 73 n. 10.

influences which formed his mature anthropological viewpoint were manifest in his family relationships, his education in the Gymnasium and university, his entrance into German science, and his affiliation with the New York German liberal émigré' community after his arrival in this country."[58]

Liss believed that focusing on Boas's educational and family backgrounds, "enables us to see the scientific and the personal as mutually reinforcing and illuminating, and to appreciate the basis of certain enduring and unresolved tensions in Boas's life and work."[59] Liss noted the "tensions which endured in [Boas's] work, between wholes and parts, universals and particulars, objective and subjective interpretations, and emotional (affective) and rational (aesthetic) approaches."[60] Liss argued that it was in Boas's native Germany where "he had struggled with these emotional, intellectual, and epistemological tensions as he encountered them in his formal education, in the dynamics of family relations, and in his psychological development."[61] Liss concluded that Boas's German background "casts light on the

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[58] George W. Stocking, Jr., Volksgeist as Method and Ethic, 6. Professor Liss's essay, "German Culture and German Science in the Bildung of Franz Boas" is reprinted at p. 155 of Stocking's book.

[59] Ibid., 155.

[60] Ibid., 156.

[61] Ibid., 156.

confluences of person, culture, and profession which, Boas himself suggested, helped to define the scientific enterprise."[62]

Liss first addressed Boas's Jewish faith, and implicitly criticized historians and critics who saw Boas's anthropological work primarily as a consequence of his Jewish family background. Liss noted that the "family's Jewish identity seems to have been more a matter of tradition and family loyalty than of faith."[63] Liss further observed that Boas was able to join a college fraternity that "helped him differentiate himself from the 'Jewish society'...."[64]

Liss conceded that Boas's Jewish background caused him to have to deal "with anti-Semitic challenges" and led him to engage "in public confrontations on university campuses."[65] Indeed, Liss noted, in 1881, Boas wrote to his parents that he was bringing home:

> this time for the last time again a few cuts, one even on the nose! I hope you will not say too much about it because with the damned Jew baiters this winter one could not survive without quarrels and fighting.[66]

Liss nevertheless argued that "Boas's anger and resistance did not lead, however, to a heightened attachment to his Jewishness."[67] Liss explained: "[Boas] seems to have

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[62] Ibid., 156.

[63] Ibid., 157.

[64] Ibid., 168.

[65] Ibid., 168.

[66] Ibid., 168-169; citing Boas's letter to his mother of April 6, 1881.

been aware of his ethnicity only as a result of external designation rather than through any subjective identity. For this reason, his experience contributed to what might seem a paradoxical orientation: he grew increasingly impatient with prejudice, especially that deriving from generalizations about racial or physical characteristics, while at the same time trying to prove himself as part of the mainstream culture."[68]

Liss believed that Boas found his true "religious experience" at a young age in his love for science and his desire to fully explore the world around him.[69] Noting that "from his early childhood, it was nature that provoked his own greatest fascination," Liss argued that Boas's broad German education foreshadowed "his later concern with a multifaceted, integrative approach to natural and human phenomena."[70] Boas's education, Liss observed, mixed rigorous scientific training with "more traditional humanistic topics."[71]

Ultimately, Liss argued, "what shone through to Boas was not any particular program or agenda, but the importance of idealism, pure and simple, and the sense that one could frame one's life around a coherent set of goals or principles."[72] Moreover,

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[67] Stocking, Volksgeist, 169.

[68] Ibid., 169.

[69] Ibid., 157.

[70] Ibid., 159.

[71] Ibid., 160.

[72] Ibid., 165.

Boas's love of German humanism and poetry helped create in him "his powerful drive to fight injustice..," as well as the sense that he "was the architect of his own fortune."[73]

Liss saw a watershed moment for Boas being his decision to confront his father in 1877, and to turn from a prospective career in medicine to a life of science. Liss quoted from a letter Boas wrote to his sister Toni exulting about ultimately receiving his father's permission to pursue his scientific calling:

> I have dared! I may now also carry out my life like Ulrich von Hutten, because I have dared to tell Papa that I want to study mathematics and natural sciences… Now the entire future lies in my hands and let's hope that I succeed. I have dared![74]

Liss later tracked Boas's life-changing decision to emigrate to America. Liss noted that in making his decision, Boas was "torn by conflicting loyalties and goals, [and] weighed the relative advantages of staying in Germany and moving to America."[75] Liss noted that "[Boas] still identified himself with the strongly institutionalized intellectual power of German science, which on several occasions he contrasted with the unformed and amateurish state of science in America."[76]

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[73] Ibid., 165.

[74] Ibid., 167; citing Franz Boas's letter of March 18, 1877, to his sister Toni Boas.

[75] Stocking, Volksgeist, 178.

[76] Ibid., 178; citing letter of Franz Boas to Marie Krackowizer of April 10, 1885.

Liss argued that "ironically, what attracted him to America was the chance to realize German scientific goals and the idealistic values he had proclaimed in the crisis of his adolescence."[77] Liss cited Boas's letter to Marie Krackowizer of December 17, 1886, in which Boas stated that he wanted to remain in America "to bring scattered efforts into focus scientifically and above all, in any small way, thus to work for the German idealism, which I possess and which is my driving force."[78]

Liss observed that after Boas permanently moved to America in 1886, he continued to live among German-Americans. "The local community of German immigrants into which Boas integrated himself epitomized the combination of German heritage and universalistic values."[79] Boas's father-in-law Ernest Krackowizer was "eminently a German in education and memories," and Boas admired him greatly.[80]

Moreover, Liss argued, "despite his early optimism, Boas's early attempts to establish a secure scientific vision for himself were frustrated, at least in part because his vision of an unformed scientific field awaiting the fructifying genius of Germanic science was not appropriate to the realities of the American scientific scene."[81] Thus, Boas wrote to his parents in 1888, that even though he then lived in America,

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[77] Stocking, Volksgeist, 178.

[78] Ibid., 179.

[79] Ibid., 179.

[80] Ibid., 179.

[81] Ibid., 181.

"scientifically he felt like a German."[82] Indeed, in a separate letter to his parents, Boas described himself as still "the idealistic German."[83]

Liss concluded that the ultimate theories of scientific method that Boas applied in developing the American science of anthropology were "the quintessential statement of the scientific vision he had brought with him from Germany to the United States."[84] Indeed, Liss believed that Boas continued to feel a strong identification as a German throughout his personal and professional life, and felt "very little Americanized."[85]

As seen, Boas's admirers differ dramatically as to their assessments of the social, cultural, and educational factors that inspired and drove Boas as an anthropologist and a social critic and reformer. Some, like Roth Pierpont, have focused on his Jewish family background. Others, like Stocking, Bunzl, and Liss, have highlighted and emphasized different aspects of his German roots and educational background. Nevertheless, like the admiring historians discussed in Chapter IV, who have focused on Boas's contributions to American anthropology, each of Boas's

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[82] Ibid., 182; citing Franz Boas's letter to his parents of June 10, 1888.

[83] Stocking, Volkgeist, 182, citing Boas's letter to his parents of February 14, 1888.

[84] Stocking, Volksgeist.

[85] Ibid., 182; citing Franz Boas's letter to his sister Toni Boas of November 30, 1888.

admirers ultimately is united in their respect for his legacy as an anthropologist and a progressive reformer.

CHAPTER III

THE LEGACY OF BOAS: THE CRITICS – DEGLER, MACDONALD, BARKAN, SPARKS AND JANTZ, AND COLE

Like other assertive and innovative scholars, Boas has his fair share of critics. Boas's critics tend to be united in their criticisms of his scientific methods, and generally accuse him of reaching scientific conclusions based upon his personal and cultural values, as opposed to objective scientific evidence. Some critics, like Douglas Cole, have questioned Boas's legacy as a progressive reformer. Others, like Carl Degler, have gone so far as to assert that Boas's scientific conclusions and prescriptions were themselves racist. Others, like Kevin MacDonald, have launched anti-Semitic attacks against Boas in order to demean his powerful scientific and historical legacy. It is a testament to the power of Boas's legacy that he continues to generate such controversy more than a half-century after his death.

Carl N. Degler: Boas as a Biased Liberal Jewish Reformer

Historian Carl N. Degler is Boas's best-known critic. In 1989, Degler presented to the German Historical Institute a provocative interdisciplinary study on "Culture Versus Biology in the Thought of Franz Boas and Alfred K. Kroeber."[1] Ironically, Degler began his presentation by praising Boas and lauding his achievements. Degler observed that "[i]n the history of many fields of inquiry there

[1] Carl N. Degler, "Culture Versus Biology in the Thought of Franz Boas and Alfred K. Kroeber" (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1989).

comes a time when the standard or accepted modes of explanation or analysis shift fundamentally and dramatically. This occurred in the social sciences in the course of the first-third of the twentieth century. Biology in the shape of racial explanations for human behavioral differences was replaced by a new explanatory mode: that of social environment or culture."[2] Degler asserted that "[t]wo anthropologists, Franz Boas and his former student, Alfred L. Kroeber, laid the foundation for that concept."[3] Degler added that Boas and Kroeber "not only provided the catalyst for change, but also shaped the content of the concept of culture, a concept that became fundamental in twentieth-century social science."[4]

Degler set out to define Boas's "conception of culture" and to explain why he "developed it."[5] Degler first reviewed "Boas's German origins," which "played a significant role in the intellectual evolution of the idea of culture."[6] He then summarized Boas's major works, emphasizing Boas' complementary and seminal works: The Mind of Primitive Mind and Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants. Degler noted that "[b]oth of the 1911 works declared war on the

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[2] Ibid., 1.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 3.

significance of race and the power of heredity."[7]

Summarizing Boas's dual 1911 works, Degler argued that: "Boas's attack on the concept of biological race as a behavioral determinant breaks down into several parts."[8] Boas's "first and most important" form of criticism "was historical and strongly relativistic."[9] From Degler's perspective, Boas believed that "the physiological and psychological state of an organism at a certain moment is a function of its whole history."[10] Therefore, "all people are essentially alike in their intellectual or cultural potentialities."[11]

Degler observed that "Boas's second mode of attack on race was to question the ethnological evidence advanced by authorities like [Herbert] Spencer."[12] Boas disputed Spencer's belief "that certain behavior showed that primitive people were impulsive and therefore lacked a necessary trait to develop civilization."[13] Boas also "challenge[d] directly the validity of [Spencer's] ethnological evidence itself, often on

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 4.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 5.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

the basis of his own work in the field."[14]

Degler added that "[f]or Boas, a third order of criticism was to draw upon his fieldwork more positively - to show from the language, the folklore, and the music of primitive peoples that they were not different from civilized people in their emotions or intellectual abilities."[15] Finally, Degler asserted that Boas "placed the burden of proof on those who accepted racial explanation."[16] Through this line of analysis, Degler explained, "Boas was committed to an approach that denied race as an explanation for social differences."[17]

Having seemingly praised Boas's extraordinary contributions to the development of culture and its use as a powerful weapon against racism and discrimination, Degler suddenly and ironically reversed course and harshly criticized Boas both professionally and personally. Degler argued that Boas's scientific ideas and conclusions "lack[ed] any change over time, any development. They remained substantially the same in 1911 as they were in 1887... In short, from the outset of his career..., Boas was committed to an approach that denied race as an explanation for social differences."[18]

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 6.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

For Degler, the "sources of [Boas's] ideas" ultimately could be traced to his German education, and even more importantly, "his family background as a German Jewish liberal."[19] Boas's background, Degler asserted, "predisposed him to follow an ideology that asserted the equal potentiality of people, and called, consequently, for individual equality of opportunity."[20] Degler harshly concluded that "Boas's concept of culture…grew out of a long-held commitment to a certain social outlook, not from disinterested, scientific inquiry into a vexed question."[21] Degler believed that Boas "was deeply interested in collecting whatever evidence he could find to support his preconceived view and was determined to call into question any evidence or argument that lent support to a racial explanation."[22]

Having leveled the harshest professional charge that a scientist can face - a lack of objectivity - Degler then turned his criticism towards Boas's humanism. Degler contended that "[w]hile there can be little doubt that Boas showed a consistent and determined concern for the fate of black people in America, that same level of concern was not apparent in regard to Amerindians, despite his students' and his own deep

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 6-7.

[20] Ibid., 7.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

professional involvement with them."[23] Alleging that "Boas's public writings and his professional correspondence are almost devoid of expressions of concern or even interest in the status of Amerindians," Degler accused Boas of seeking the constructive extinction of Amerindians through "the ultimate integration of the Amerindians into the general American population."[24] Blasting Boas's calls for assimilation and intermarriage, Degler contended that "Boas's future for blacks left no more place for racial or cultural survival than did his future for Amerindians."[25] Noting that Boas had "opposed the segregation statutes then recently enacted in the Southern states, especially the prohibitions against interracial marriages," Degler argued that Boas "continued to see the elimination of the different appearance of blacks as something to strive for, especially if ending racial prejudice were the goal."[26] Degler trenchantly concluded:

> [Boas's] solution of course looked forward, by definition, to the eventual disappearance of blacks, just as his answer to the uniqueness of the Amerindians was their ultimate integration or submergence into the general population. Boas, in short, was no cultural pluralist.[27]

Finally, Degler attacked Boas for allegedly secretly believing that European

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 8.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 7-8.

[27] Ibid., 8.

culture was "the highest culture."[28] Degler contended that "Boas retained the idea that behind all cultures stood a common set of values which were especially evident in the culture of Europeans."[29] Degler noted that "for all his repeated emphasis on culture, Boas never excluded heredity or biology from his conception of human nature."[30] Indeed, Degler charged that a thin line existed between Boas's beliefs and the "apocalyptic fears [that] animated the eugenicists."[31] Degler thus transformed a seemingly favorable historical review of Boas's contributions to a fundamental paradigm shift in America's thinking about race, biology and culture into a harsh intellectual jeremiad against Boas's scientific objectivity and ultimately, his humanity.[32]

Two years later, Degler continued his attacks against Boas's scientific objectivity in his book In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought.[33] Degler focused on Boas's "life-long assault on the idea that race was a primary source of the differences to be found in the mental

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 9.

[31] Ibid., 11.

[32] See Ibid., 11.

[33] Carl C. Degler, In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).

or social capabilities of human groups. He accomplished his mission largely through his ceaseless, almost relentless articulation of the concept of culture."[34]

As he had done in his 1989 lecture, Degler attacked Boas's "concept of culture, which, like a powerful solvent, would in time expunge race from the literature of social science."[35] Degler again called Boas's scientific methods and conclusions into question, and accused him of "pressing his social values upon the profession and the public."[36] Addressing Boas's "famous head-measuring project in 1910," Degler argued that Boas's motive "was his strong personal interest in keeping the United States diverse in population."[37] Noting Boas's strong support for liberal immigration policies, Degler accused him of "ad hoc interpretation" of data driven by "his desire to explain in a favorable way the apparent mental backwardness of the immigrant children."[38]

Kevin MacDonald

It was hardly surprising, and perhaps inevitable, that Degler's criticisms of Boas would be developed into anti-Semitic attacks against Boas and his followers. An excellent example of such an attack can be found in Kevin MacDonald's The Culture

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[34] Ibid., 61.

[35] Ibid., 71.

[36] Ibid., 82-83.

[37] Ibid., 253.

[38] Ibid., 75.

of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements.[39] MacDonald's central "thesis" was that Boas's anthropological work "may be seen" as an attempt "to alter Western societies in a manner that would end anti-Semitism and provide for Jewish group continuity…."[40] For MacDonald, the common thread throughout Boas's lifetime of scientific studies and writings was a "Jewish agenda."[41]

Relying heavily upon Degler, MacDonald first questioned Boas's scientific objectivity. MacDonald argued that Boas and his followers "attempted to clothe their rhetoric in the garb of science – the modern arbiter of truth and intellectual respectability."[42] Further citing Professor White of Rice University, MacDonald asserted that "with respect to the Boasian school of anthropology, the aura of science is deceptive."[43] MacDonald alleged that rather than representing objective science, "the cultural determinism of the Boasian school of anthropology functioned to combat

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[39] Kevin MacDonald, The Culture of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements (Westport: Praeger Publishing, 1998).

[40] Ibid., vii.

[41] Ibid., 2.

[42] Ibid., 9-10.

[43] Ibid., 10. See L. White, "The Social Organization of Ethnological Theory," *Rice University Studies: Monographs in Cultural Anthropology* 52, no. 4 (1966): 1-66. Referring to the Boasians, White asserted: "They would make it appear and would have everyone believe that their choice of premises and goals has been determined by scientific considerations. This is definitely not the case...They are obviously sincere. Their sincerity and group loyalty tend, however, to persuade and consequently to deceive."

anti-Semitism by combating racialist thinking and eugenic programs advocated mainly by gentiles."[44]

Citing Degler's 1991 work, MacDonald posited that "the shift away from Darwinism as the fundamental paradigm of the social sciences resulted from an ideological shift rather than from the emergence of any new empirical data."[45] Focusing on the alleged "ethno-political agenda" of Boas, MacDonald argued that in anthropology, the ethnic "conflict was played out between leftist Jewish social scientists and an old-line empirically oriented Protestant establishment that was eventually eclipsed."[46]

After discussing Boas's "Jewish-liberal" family background in a single paragraph, MacDonald "conclude[d] that Boas had a strong Jewish identification and that he was deeply concerned about anti-Semitism…It was [therefore] reasonable to suppose that his concern with anti-Semitism was a major influence in the development of American anthropology."[47] Building on this sweeping unsupported allegation, MacDonald surmised that "Boas and his students were intensely concerned with pushing an ideological agenda within the American anthropological profession."[48]

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[44] MacDonald, The Culture of Critique, 11.

[45] Ibid., 21.

[46] Ibid., 22.

[47] Ibid., 24.

[48] Ibid., 25.

MacDonald trenchantly concluded that "because of its rejection of fundamental scientific activities such as generalization and classification, Boasian anthropology may thus be characterized more as an anti-theory than a theory of human culture…."[49]

If Boas's anthropological views were not scientifically based, why did they gain so much support within the scientific community? According to MacDonald, Boas succeeded by building a tightly-knit group of disciples who ruthlessly pushed their ideological agenda within the American anthropological profession. "[MacDonald] argued that Boas and his associates had a sense of group identity, a commitment to a common viewpoint, and an agenda to dominate the institutional structure of anthropology."[50]

Although most of the "small, compact group of scholars…gathered about their leader…were Jews,"[51] MacDonald argued that "Boas recruited gentiles into his movement out of concern 'that his Jewishness would make his science appear partisan and thus compromised.'"[52] Boas built loyalty among his followers, according to MacDonald, by "strenuously promot[ing] and cit[ing]" their work, while "rarely

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[49] Ibid., 25.

[50] Ibid., 25; citing G. W. Stocking, ed., Race, Evolution and Culture: Essays in the History of Anthropology (New York: Free Press, 1968).

[51] Ibid., 25; citing White, Social Organization, 26.

[52] Ibid., 26; citing J. M. Efron, Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe (New Haven: Yale University Press,1994).

cit[ing] works of people outside his group except to disparage them."[53] MacDonald asserted that "Boasian anthropology, at least during Boas's lifetime, also resembled traditional Judaism in another critical manner: It was highly authoritarian and intolerant of dissent."[54]

To MacDonald, the results of Boas's "highly authoritarian political movement centered around a charismatic leader" were "extraordinarily successful".[55] MacDonald believed that the end result of Boas's efforts was "an ideology of 'romantic primitivism' in which certain now-Western cultures epitomized the approved characteristics Western societies should emulate."[56] MacDonald also noted the "tendency for negatively perceived behaviors" such as "rape and concern for virginity to be attributed to western influence."[57] Indeed, MacDonald argued that the ultimate "result" of Boasian anthropology was "a 'pacified past'...and an 'attitude of self reproach'...in which the behavior of primitive peoples was bowdlerized while the behavior of European peoples was not only excoriated as uniquely evil but also as

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[53] Ibid., 27.

[54] Ibid., 27; citing Stocking, Race, Evolution and Culture, 305-306; and White, Social Organization, 25-26.

[55] Ibid., 28; citing Stocking, Race, Evolution and Culture, 296.

[56] Ibid., 28-29.

[57] Ibid., 29.

responsible for all extant examples of warfare among primitive peoples."[58]

Elazar Barkan[59]

In 1992, historian Elazar Barkan joined Degler in asserting that"Boas was a racial egalitarian whose political beliefs were more salient than his scientific commitments...."[60] Barkan began his review of Boas's work by critically noting that "Boas's overwhelming influence on American anthropology of the first-half of the century, through his own work and that of his disciples, has been acknowledged in memoirs and anecdotal biographies, mostly by admiring students."[61]

With little historical or scientific support, Barkan hastily concluded that "Boas's views on race were determined by his professional position, intellectual commitments and personal psychology."[62] Barkan argued: "In his writings on race,

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[58] Ibid., 29-30. MacDonald also criticized Boasian anthropology for "the decline in evolutionary and biological theories of race and ethnicity [that] facilitated the sea change brought about by the 1965 [Civil Rights] law." According to MacDonald, by 1965, "the Boasian perspective of cultural determinism and anti-biologism had become standard academic wisdom. The result was that it became intellectually fashionable to discount the very existence of persistent ethnic differences. The whole reaction deprived popular race feelings of a powerful ideological weapon." Ibid., 253; quoting J. Higham, Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

[59] Elazar Barkan, The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and The United States Between the World Wars (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992).

[60] Vernon Williams, Jr., Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 106; quoting Barkan, Retreat of Scientific Racism, 86.

[61] Barkan, Retreat of Scientific Racism, 76.

[62] Ibid., 77.

Boas integrated information that ranged from biology through the social sciences to linguistics. To imagine that such a complex combination of sources could merge into a coherent and comprehensive framework was perhaps simplistic and unrealistic."[63] From Barkan's perspective, Boas's "anti-racist legacy stems as much from his ideas as from his actions to mobilize opinion among his peers and the public in favor of his egalitarianism."[64]

Further criticizing Boas's attempts to tie his egalitarianism to objective science, Barkan broadly asserted that "Boas's creativity has led at times to a wild-goose chase."[65] Barkan explained:

> Scientists often are tempted to speculate beyond their knowledge in their field of expertise on a topic with political implications, and the resulting confusion can be especially great. The expertise cannot be questioned by a layperson, and the sanction of science gives credence even to the most absurd claims.[66]

Barkan concluded that Boas used his scientific studies "in a direct political way," by "straddling the factual and the hypothetical" to bolster his egalitarian world view."[67]

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[63] Ibid., 77.

[64] Ibid., 77.

[65] Ibid., 82.

[66] Ibid., 82-83.

[67] Ibid., 84-85. Historian and Boas biographer Vernon Williams, Jr., discussed infra, was extremely critical of the shallowness of Barkan's "nonsensical argument." Williams observed that "further investigation into Boas's writings would have revealed the tensions between his lifelong belief in inherent racial differences and his commitment to cultural explanations of human behavior,

Corey Sparks and Richard Jantz and Their Controversial Re-analysis of Boas's Cranial Measurement Data

The arguments of historians such as Degler, MacDonald, and Barkan unfortunately, but not surprisingly, have been seized upon by contemporary racists and bigots to discredit Boas and his work. For example, a recent website alleged that "it now turns out that Boas was guilty of no small degree of unscientific blunder – and maybe even fraud."[68]

The website pointed to an attack on Boas's scientific work that was launched in October 2002, by anthropologists Corey Sparks and Richard Jantz.[69] After reanalyzing Boas's statistical findings from his measurements of 18,000 New York City immigrants and their children, the two anthropologists challenged the empirical

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between his political beliefs and his scientific commitments, and between the science of physical anthropology and his liberal values." Williams, Rethinking Race, 106. The mirror image of Barkan's simplistic argument can be found in historian Edward G. Beardsley's 1973 article, "The American Scientist as Social Activist: Franz Boas, Burt G. Wilder, and the Cause of Racial Justice, 1900-1915," Isis (March, 1973). Beardsley argued that "Boas was an activist for what were essentially professional reasons." Ibid., 53. Rejecting the arguments of anthropologists and historians who believed Boas's attacks on racism were fundamentally tied to his liberal values and his Jewish background, Beardsley argued that "the most basic and fundamental explanation... was [Boas's] commitment to scientific objectivity and reliability." Ibid., 55.

[68] See Sam Francis, "Franz Boas – Liberal Icon, Scientific Fraud," reprinted at http://www.udare.com/francis/boas.html. Such arguments are used as alleged "support" for twisted anti-semitic websites ridiculing "the very notion of America-as-melting pot, calling it a 'hoax contrived by Franz Boas, a twisted little Jew, who popped into the United States, and was, for undisclosed reasons, made Professor in Anthropology in Columbia University, and founded a school of fiction writing called 'social anthropology.'" See Lee Baker, "Franz Boas Out of the Ivory Tower," *Anthropological Theory* 4, No. 1 (2004): 29, 45; citing Oliver, 2002; http://stormfront.org/rpo/ENEMY1.html.

[69] C. Sparks, and R. Jantz, "A Reassessment of Human Cranial Plasticity: Boas Revisited," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 99, No. 23 (2002): 14636-14639.

foundation of Boas's influential study Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants (1910).[70] The two anthropologists concluded that the observed changes in cranial variation that Boas attributed to environmental changes actually were caused by "what morphologists and morphometricians [had] known for a long time: most of the variation was genetic variation."[71]

Picking up Spark's and Janzen's article, the *New York Times* ran an article titled "A New Look at Old Data May Discredit a Theory on Race." The *Times*' article sparked a flurry of arguments about anthropology and race "from a range of divergent perspectives."[72]

Interestingly, three other anthropologists, Clarence C. Gravlee, H. Russell Bernard, and William R. Leonard, also independently reanalyzed Boas's data and alternatively concluded that Boas's scientific analyses of the data and conclusions were correct, "despite the limited tools at his disposal."[73]

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[70] Franz Boas, Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants, Senate Document 208, 61st Cong. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910).

[71] Sparks and Jantz, "Reassessment", 14637.

[72] Lee Baker, "Ivory Tower", 29-30.

[73] C. C. Gravlee, H.R. Bernard and W.R. Leonard, "Heredity, Environments, and Cranial Form: A Reanalysis of Boas's Immigrant Data," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 1 (2003): 125-38; discussed in Lee Baker, "Ivory Tower", 30.

Douglas Cole: Boas as a Mugwump

In many ways, historian Douglas Cole can and should be classified as an admirer of Boas. Cole joined the admirers of Boas in lauding his legacy as an anthropologist. Nevertheless, I have included Cole among Boas's critics because in his detailed 1999 biography of the first forty-eight years of Boas's life,[74] Cole questioned the portrayals of Boas as a progressive American social reformer. Cole alternatively concluded that "while Boas remained liberal in his political position, he was not a reformer or a progressive in any meaningful sense."[75] Cole explained:

> [Boas] made no active commitment to reform causes or to political parties. He no doubt had opinions on the events around him, but concerns about poverty, housing, trusts, strikes, Tammany, jobbery, and other civic and social concerns of the day are almost entirely absent from his writings, public or private. His recorded reaction to Seth Low's crusade to reform New York City was merely the regret that it took Low away from Columbia's presidency.[76]

Cole continued that "a classification of his position is difficult, but, on the little evidence he left, [Boas] might better be seen as a mugwump than a progressive. He possessed some of the traits that characterized mugwumpery – a concern for

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[74] Douglas Cole, Franz Boas, The Early Years, 1858-1906 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

[75] Ibid., 278.

[76] Ibid.

independence, conscience, honor, and a sense of being, by status and intelligence, above the fray."[77]

Cole cited Degler with approval in questioning Boas's scientific objectivity. Cole declared that the "values of liberty and individualism, toleration for deviation and difference, and a dislike for any restraint that tradition and dogma might impose," which accompanied Boas's anthropological views, "reflected Boas's version of nineteenth-century liberalism."[78] Cole added that the Boasian program "correspond[ed] rather closely with the fundamental ideological outlook associated with left-of-center political liberalism."[79] Cole concluded:

> Much of Boas's anthropology, to borrow from Carl Degler, was not the result of 'disinterested, scientific enquiry', 'but' derived from an ideological commitment that began in his early life and continued to shape his professional and personal outlook. They were facets of Boas's own cultural values, which he accepted 'as a practical manifestation of social truth.'[80]

Cole additionally questioned portrayals of Boas as a critic of "stages of human evolution – classically progressing from savagery to barbarism to civilization."[81] Cole

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., 277.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., 277; citing Degler, "Culture Versus Biology".

[81] Cole, The Early Years, 263.

argued that Boas "was not opposed to evolutionary thought."[82] Moreover, Cole contended, the "practitioners whom [Boas] targeted were not so much Tylor, Morgan, Spencer, and Bachofen, the great remembered names of evolutionary theory, but his immediate Americanist predecessors…."[83] Cole saw it as "striking [] that Boas's own belief in progress supported a social evolutionary diagnosis that implicitly foresaw a progression of the ethical concept of the fellowship of mankind into something superceding its existing limitations. Boas remained a social evolutionist, a believer in the progressive elevation of humanity."[84]

Cole addressed the issues of Boas's German and Jewish heritages discussed by other historians and anthropologists. To Cole, Boas's German heritage was far more important. Cole argued that "Boas was consciously and ineradicably German."[85]

Cole contended that on the other hand, "while sensitive to his Jewishness and slurs upon it, [Boas] conspicuously did not identify himself as a Jew."[86] Cole contended that "Jewish tradition had a small role in his rearing, and, like most German Jews of his generation, he showed no interest in rediscovering it. He was in virtually

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid., 279.

[85] Ibid., 280.

[86] Ibid.

every sense, raised with an assimilated milieu and had little to 'assimilate out of existence.'"[87]

Again echoing Degler, Cole highlighted Boas's alleged acceptance of the process of assimilation as a way to end racial prejudice.[88] Cole added that Boas ultimately turned "to a personal philosophy compounded of rationalism, cultural relativism, and ethical humanism, and identified himself as an enlightened universalist who had transcended both ethnic provincialism and supernatural religion. This was, indeed, Boas's personal set of values, held in common with many others of German-Jewish descent…."[89] Cole concluded that Boas's legacy "of his formative years as a German-Jewish liberal…with its stress upon rationality, individualism, liberty, and the cultural determinants of thought and behavior, characterized his outlook and his anthropology."[90]

Like Boas's admirers, each of Boas's critics applied a somewhat different frame of reference in their evaluation of Boas. Degler, for example, admired and lauded Boas for battling racism, but ultimately criticized Boas because he believed his prescriptions for fighting race such as intermarriages could lead to the extinction of

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[87] Ibid., 280-81.

[88] Ibid., 281.

[89] Ibid., 282.

[90] Ibid.

diversity and pluralism. Others, like MacDonald and Barkan, ultimately presented little more than anti-Semitic diatribes camouflaged as scholarship. Cole, on the other hand, greatly admired Boas, but raised scholarly questions about Boas's legacy as a progressive reformer.

Anthropologists like Sparks and Jantzen have raised serious and legitimate questions about Boas's scientific methods and conclusions – echoing the concerns of Degler and other critics. As a scientist who dedicated his life to searching for the truth, Boas ironically would have appreciated such questions, and would have happily subjected his scientific results and conclusions to the more rigorous examinations made possible by advances in technology.

Boas also would have appreciated the critics' concerns that his culture and background strongly influenced his thinking as a scientist. After all, Boas spent his professional career demonstrating how critical culture was in human's development and outlooks. Ultimately, however, Boas would have countered that he did all in his power to separate his scientific pursuit of the truth from his personal biases and preferences.

CHAPTER IV

BOAS AS AN AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

By focusing on Boas's German and Jewish roots and upbringing, both admirers and critics have shed valuable light on the environmental and cultural factors that influenced Boas as an anthropologist and reformer. Nevertheless, in ultimately evaluating Boas's legacy, it is crucial to keep in mind that the anthropological and reform work for which Boas is historically and scientifically recognized occurred throughout the nearly six decades after he emigrated to the United States in 1886, at age twenty-eight. A number of historians have focused their evaluations of Boas on his contributions as an American anthropologist and progressive reformer. This chapter reviews several key positive historical critiques of Boas as an American anthropologist and progressive reformer.

Regina Darnell and Continuity in American Anthropology

While various historians and commentators have highlighted Boas's German and Jewish roots in analyzing his development and contributions as an anthropologist and social reformer, University of Pennsylvania-trained historian Regina Darnell has chosen to emphasize the "substantial continuities from the government-sponsored professional anthropology spearheaded by John Wesley Powell in the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) after 1879 to Boasian anthropology...."[1] In And Along Came Boas: Continuity and Revolution in Americanist Anthropology, Darnell

[1] Regina Darnell, And Along Came Boas: Continuity and Revolution in Americanist Anthropology (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Co., 1998); xi.

initially noted that the "central problematic in the history of anthropology, as perceived by American anthropologists, has been the role of Franz Boas."[2]

Setting forth a detailed history of the development of American anthropology in the nineteenth-century, Darnell concluded that "Boas initially worked within the existing anthropological establishment and adopted many of its characteristic preoccupations…."[3] Similarly as "Boasian anthropology diversified into various competing paradigms after the second World War," there were "continuities and cross-fertilizations" rather than a "virtual eclipse" of earlier Americanist anthropology.[4]

Darnell maintained that her conclusions contradicted the many accounts of "history in which Boas took North American anthropology by storm, importing graduate education on the German model and mounting an instantly devastating critique of cultural evolution."[5] Although Darnell praised Boas and reviewed in detail his accomplishments as an American anthropologist and social reformer, she was concerned that:

> Oral histories of American anthropology have generally assumed…that professional anthropology in America sprang forth full-blown about 1900 when Boas began teaching at Columbia. Consequently, the roots

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[2] Ibid., 1.

[3] Ibid., 1-2.

[4] Ibid., xii.

[5] Ibid., xi.

> of Boas's anthropology in an older and firmly established tradition of American ethnology have been glossed over.[6]

Darnell argued that her research tying Boas and his anthropological and social contributions to "an established tradition of American ethnology" were critical to "the debate about how our past shapes our continuing present and emerging future."[7] Furthermore, her historical work was important in "broaden[ing] the perspective of American anthropologists toward their own past."[8] This was especially so because "continuity and change co-exist in the emergence of every scientific paradigm."[9]

Seeking to "reconstruct the context, largely invisible to contemporary practitioners, within which early Boasian anthropology emerged and came to dominate American anthropology," Darnell traced the early development of professional anthropology in America.[10] Darnell tracked the progression from "much of the nineteenth-century, [when] the few anthropologists were amateurs with loose affiliations to localized scientific societies…,"[11] to the 1880s, when "American science…was becoming more professional."[12]

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[6] Ibid., 6.

[7] Ibid., xiv.

[8] Ibid., 4.

[9] Ibid., 5.

[10] Ibid., 7.

[11] Ibid., 11-12.

[12] Ibid.

For Darnell, a pivotal event in American anthropology was the founding of the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1879, which was spearheaded by John Wesley Powell.[13] Darnell noted that both Powell and Boas "were trained in natural science – Powell's first career was in geology and Boas's doctorate was in physics…."[14] Ultimately, Darnell contended, "Powell and Boas were of like mind, foregrounding the linguistic/symbolic/humanistic tradition and placing considerably less emphasis on the physical/archeological/natural science tradition."[15]

Darnell argued that Powell's work and philosophies helped pave the way for the "paradigm transition" carried out by Boas and his anthropology students.[16] For example, "in a laissez-faire atmosphere with wealth as the basis of political power, Powell insisted that scientific research must be controlled and defined by scientists themselves."[17] Similarly, the Bureau of American Ethnology's work under Powell's direction helped push anthropologists "to systemize and publish the results of their work."[18] Darnell observed that "although Boas gradually redefined research standards in American anthropology, he also took over many of the continuing projects of the Bureau and used it resources…[to] shape[] much of the early development of 'Boasian

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[13] Ibid., xii.

[14] Ibid., 13.

[15] Ibid., xii.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 27.

[18] Ibid., 20.

anthropology.'"[19] Indeed, urged Darnell, "the roots of Boas's achievement in the early twentieth century lay in the work of his immediate precursors and presupposed an institutional context dominated by the Bureau of America Ethnology."[20]

Darnell also believed that John Wesley Powell and several other American scientists helped lay the foundations for Boas's intellectual approach to anthropology. Darnell traced Boas's "critique of evolutionary theory" to the earlier scientific work of Powell focusing on comparative linguistics and humanistic traditions. Darnell noted that early on, Powell committed the BAE "to mapping the cultural and linguistic diversity of the continent."[21]

Darnell further observed that Powell was persistent in identifying the "tensions between the scientific and humanistic poles of the discipline and between the forms of institutionalization most receptive to each…."[22] Darnell believed that Powell blazed a trail for Boas and his disciples in seeking to emphasize the linguistic/humanistic traditions, as opposed to "the constraints both of biological evolution as modeled by

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[19] Ibid., 18.

[20] Ibid., 179-180. Darnell detailed a mandate of Powell to organize anthropological work in America, which "reflect[ed] the increasing professionalization of American anthropology under the Bureau's auspices. The Bureau was one of the first institutions to provide full-time employment for a substantial number of anthropologists." Ibid., 69-70. Darnell further explained how Powell predated Boas by urging the formal education of anthropologists, which "did not yet exist in 1879. Thus, many early staff had difficulty meeting the increasingly rigorous standard of the professional competence, which grew, ironically, in large part out of the work of the Bureau itself." Ibid., 70-71. Furthermore, "a large part of the Bureau's contribution to the development of American anthropology lay in its facilitation of fieldwork…Insistence on fieldwork is often attributed to Boas, but in fact it was already present in the early Bureau." Ibid., 73.

[21] Ibid., xi.

[22] Ibid., xii.

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and social evolution as appropriated by Herbert Spencer."[23] She further observed that Powell's "political enemies were enraged" by Powell's land use models, which were based upon the "relationship between social organization, technology, and environment."[24] She argued that Powell's insights were "not different in kind from [those] resulting from Boas's sojourn among the Eskimo of Baffin Island…[recognizing that] in spite of the extremity of their environment, the Eskimo had produced a complex symbolic culture."[25]

Seeking to articulate the "Boasian paradigm," Darnell urged that "it was the content of the Bureau [of American Ethnology] paradigm which initially legitimized Boasian efforts to break away from established disciplinary forms."[26] She argued that Boas followed Powell in recognizing the concept and importance of culture, and Boas then took the critical next step of insisting "that race, language, and culture were analytically independent…."[27] Whereas "evolutionary anthropology had equated culture and civilization," she argued, Boas used the diversity and complexity of comparative cultures to attack evolutionary anthropology. "Stressing the complexity of ethnographic phenomena," Darnell contended that Boas developed in The Mind of Primitive Man the crucial tenet that "culture rather than race" should serve as "the

[23] Ibid., xiii.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 273.

[27] Ibid., 274.

frame of reference for scientific discussion of cultural diversity."[28] Thus, Boas argued that a "satisfactory classification of peoples was ultimately unattainable because of the actual, historically-situated diversity of each group of people."[29]

Boas, according to Darnell, further followed in the footsteps of Powell in recognizing that "the methods of natural science, as adopted uncritically from evolutionary biology, had proved insufficient for the study of culture, which had a historical and aesthetic dimension requiring a different sort of analysis…The meaning of ethnographic phenomena in the present had to be sought in the details of each cultural context."[30] Thus, in The Mind of Primitive Man, Boas developed Powell's insights that "laws had [] been formulated prematurely by the evolutionists:"[31]

> As we have penetrated more deeply into these problems we have observed that the general laws for which we have been searching prove elusive, that the forms of primitive culture are infinitely more complex than supposed, that a clear understanding of the individual problems cannot be reached without taking into consideration its historical and geographical relations.[32]

Consequently, Darnell noted, "the artificiality of the concept of race and the ethnocentrism of the particular cultural practices of Western society were persistent themes…."[33]

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[28] Ibid., 276.

[29] Ibid., 275.

[30] Ibid., 277.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Franz Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1938), 642.

[33] Darnell, Along Came Boas, 277.

Darnell lauded Boas for carrying on relentlessly in Powell's early footsteps by recognizing "that that studies of particular cultural elements provided an empirical basis for a critique of the evolutionary paradigm which previously dominated Americanist anthropology."[34] Boas's and his students' studies of diverse cultures illustrated "that unilinear sequences did not exist, that the parts of culture advanced at different rates, and that the patterning in culture which anthropology sought to elucidate was to be found within single cultures."[35] In other words, the "critique of evolutionary theory sought to invalidate its unilinear sequences by illustrating the complexity of actual culture histories."[36]

Darnell further tied the development in Boas's studies and scientific attention to the "interaction between the individual and society."[37] Darnell posited that this shift enabled Boas to systematically criticize race as an artificial concept that limited the growth and development of individuals, and minimized their potential contributions to society.

Darnell summarized her historical arguments about the growth and development of Boas's anthropological contributions by concluding:

> American anthropology crystallized once around Powell and his Bureau in the years just after 1879 and again around Boas and his

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[34] Ibid., 285.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 286.

[37] Ibid., 288.

> students at Columbia during the first two decades of the 20th century. Nonetheless, continuity across the paradigm shifts were more salient in historical retrospect than it seemed to its participants. The Americanist tradition, Boasian rhetoric to the contrary, retained a considerable amount from the ethnographic and linguistic mapping projects of the Bureau and built on its date base. Professionalization was a gradual process, beginning with the Bureau, moving to museums and universities, fully accomplished over a considerable period of time.[38]

Ultimately, Darnell honored the broad consilience of liberal studies by concluding that American anthropology, as developed initially by Powell, and later by Boas and his disciples, involved a tradition "of continuity and cross-fertilization with other national traditions, most particularly British functionalism and French Structuralism, and other disciplinary explorations, especially feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and postmodernism."[39] In Darnell's words, a "mentalist, reflexive, symbolic anthropology persists at the intersection of anthropology, linguistics, and an open-ended, ongoing Americanist tradition."[40]

Marshall Hyatt: Boas as a Progressive American Social Activist

In 1990, historian Marshall Hyatt published the results of his extensive research into Boas's life and legacy, as part of an American Philosophical Society grant. His biography, Franz Boas: Social Activist – The Dynamics of Ethnicity,[41]

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[38] Darnell, Along Came Boas, 296-297.

[39] Ibid., 297.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Marshall Hyatt, Franz Boas: Social Activist – The Dynamics of Ethnicity (American Philosophical Society, 1990). Hyatt's book followed an earlier 1985 paper: Marshall Hyatt, "Franz Boas and the Struggle for Black Equality: The Dynamics of Ethnicity," *Perspectives in American History*, 2 (1985), 269-95.

portrayed Boas as a progressive reformer who effectively used detailed scientific studies to battle a rampant culture of racism that existed in America in the early twentieth century.

Although Hyatt believed that Boas ultimately fought against racism as a way to also combat anti-semitism, Hyatt focused less on the supposed origins and roots of Boas's thinking, and honed in on Boas's immense contributions as a social activist to developing the concepts of respect, tolerance, and equal opportunity in American thought. Although he reviewed and lauded the wide breadth of Boas's anthropological work, Hyatt concluded that "it was in the area of race that Boas had his greatest impact on American society and on future intellectual thought. By emphasizing the importance of each culture's values and by promoting an understanding of the human misery, degradation, and demoralization that can result when one people imposes its way on another, Boas changed many minds both within academic circles and in the general community. His tolerance for other ways of life then his own, and his willingness to proclaim this publicly and actively, significantly transformed American racial thought."[42]

Hyatt thoughtfully reviewed many of the criticisms of Boas by Degler and others, and conceded that "Boas's legacy is complex and must be viewed quite broadly."[43] Hyatt, however, believed that Boas's many critics were missing the forest for the trees, and underestimating the harsh and dangerous environment in which Boas

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[42] Hyatt, Social Activist, 155.

[43] Ibid., 157.

carried out his anthropological studies and social criticisms. Hyatt ultimately concluded that "Boas was a humane man who was tormented by humankind's imperfections, and who desired nothing more than to help overcome them."[44]

Hyatt's work is important in focusing on the immense positive long-term societal impact of Boas's dedicated scientific work and his courageous writings and speeches. As historian Eric Foner has noted, while Boas's writings may have "had little impact on public policy" in early twentieth-century America, Boas helped "plant [] the seeds of a pluralist vision of Americanism that would eventually become a touchstone of liberal enlightenment."[45]

Vernon J. Williams, Jr.: Boas as a Progressive

An important counterweight to Cole, Hyatt, Roth Pierpont and other Boas historians and commentators discussed above is found in historian Vernon J. Williams Jr.'s seminal 1996 work: Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries.[46] Williams' study of Boas "relie[ed] on both the published work and the correspondence of Franz Boas, Robert E. Park, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois, George Washington Ellis, and Monroe Nathan Work."[47] Williams explained that "through

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[44] Ibid., 159.

[45] Eric Foner, The Story of American Freedom (New York and London: w. w. Norton & co., 1998), 190.

[46] Vernon J.Williams, Jr., Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

[47] Ibid., 3.

their writings one can trace the tensions that were commonplace at the beginning of the twentieth-century for both Euro-Americans and Afro-Americans."[48]

Unlike some of the Boas historians and commentators discussed above, "Williams does not paint Boas as the esteemed 'father' of anthropology, the indefatigable Jewish crusader, nor as the little darling of political correctness. He presents Boas as a complicated intellectual whose struggle to understand the saliency of race in the U.S. at the beginning of the century defined the parameters from which we still grapple with racial issues at the end of the century."[49]

Williams began by "exploring certain tensions in Boas's writings from the 1890s to the 1920s."[50] Williams admitted that "between 1894 and 1938, when Boas addressed the issue of the capabilities of African Americans, his writing exhibited contradictions between his commitment to science and his commitment to the values of his liberal ideology."[51] For example, Williams observed that "on the issue of the 'defective ancestry' of African Americans his statements were ambiguous."[52]

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Lee D. Baker, "Review of Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries," *American Journal of Sociology*, 192(3) (1997): 909-910.

[50] Ibid., 909.

[51] Williams, Rethinking Race, 4.

[52] Williams, Rethinking Race, 5.

Williams viewed Boas as "a captive of nineteenth-century physical anthropology, [who] never quite escaped."[53] Williams added: "the level of the discussion of the intellectual capabilities of Africa Americans was an obstacle that Boas, because of his adherence to physical anthropological background assumptions and his methodological Puritanism, had great difficulty surmounting."[54] Williams quoted Boas biographer George W. Stocking, who noted that "given the atmospheric pervasiveness of the idea of European racial superiority, it is hardly surprising that Boas wrote as a skeptic of received belief rather than a staunch advocate of racial equipotentiality. Despite his basic liberal humanitarian outlook, he was a white-skinned European writing for other white-skinned Europeans at the turn of the century, and he was a physical anthropologist to boot."[55]

Given Boas's background and the setting of "turn-of-the-century America, [where] Negro phobia pervaded every aspect of the nation's life and was a formidable obstacle to rational discussion of the condition of African Americans," Williams found it all the more remarkable and admirable that Boas "argued vociferously that the

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[53] Ibid., 35. Williams' views in this area presage important ideas developed in Ronald Takaki, Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America, revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Takaki sought to relate the "history of racism in America" to the "broad political, social, and economic developments that occurred during this formative and crucial [nineteenth] century." Ibid., x. Although neither Williams nor Takaki cited the other in their works, the parallels in their thinking and historical approaches are striking. While Williams did not employ Takaki's vivid metaphor of an "iron cage," he noted that Boas was "never fully able to extricate himself...[from] his belief that some racial differences were real." Williams, Rethinking Race, 13.

[54] Ibid., 9.

[55] Williams, Rethinking Race, 9; citing George Stocking, Jr., ed., A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 220.

variability of black intelligence precluded the justification of blatant discrimination in the marketplace."[56] Williams added that "for Boas, persons who were black were to be treated as individuals."[57] Moreover, "in his attempts to foster the uplift of African Americans, Boas reacted against the dominant discourse on race and sought to modify the biologistic paradigm that had evolved since the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859."[58]

Not content with simply describing Boas's "gargantuan stature in intellectual history because of his pioneering role in initiating the antiracist creed in American social science,"[59] Williams broke new ground by "shed[ding] new light" upon Boas's associations with, and influences upon, black intellectuals that include Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and Zora Neal Huston," as well as his "relationships with historically important but less well known African-American intellectuals like Monroe N. Work, George E. Hayes, Abram L. Harris, and George W. Ellis."[60]

Williams first took on Marshall Hyatt, discussed above, who had argued in 1990, that "Franz Uri Boas throughout his long career used blacks as a 'camouflage…for attacking all forms of prejudice."[61] In other words, Hyatt saw

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[56] Williams, Rethinking Race, 1 and 9.

[57] Ibid., 1.

[58] Ibid., 1.

[59] Ibid., 1.

[60] Baker, "Review", 909.

[61] Williams, Rethinking Race, 37; quoting Marshall Hyatt, Franz Boas – Social Activist: The Dynamics of Ethnicity. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 33-34.

Boas's indictment of anti-black racism as part of his desire to protect his own ethnic group. Based on his extensive review of Boas's correspondence with leading African-American intellectuals, Williams concluded that Boas "not only displayed an astonishing degree of real empathy with the plight of African-American intellectuals and the black masses but also performed such practical functions as assisting them in obtaining jobs and foundation support, fighting for academic freedom, and nurturing studies of African American history and life in the social sciences."[62]

Perhaps most illuminating was Williams' development of the close relationship between Boas and W.E.B. Dubois, "a friendship that lasted for more than three decades."[63] Williams described how DuBois first reached out to Boas on October 11, 1905, by asking Boas to "help in identifying the best and latest works bearing on the anthropology of blacks – particularly their physical measurements, health, and so on."[64] Boas's responses led to an invitation to Boas to deliver at Atlanta University the commencement address on May 31, 1906, "speaking to an audience that included black working people, preachers, and professionals on the African background of African Americans rather than on their anthropometric measurements."[65] DuBois was so inspired by Boas's address that he later credited Boas with influencing him to begin studying the subject of African history. DuBois later wrote:

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[62] Williams, Rethinking Race, 37.

[63] Ibid., 41.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

> I did not myself begin actively to study Africa until 1908 or 1910. Franz Boas really influenced me to begin studying this subject and I began to really get into it only after 1915.[66]

Indeed, Williams noted, in DuBois's first book on Africa, "he brought to bear...not only the historical knowledge then available, but also the latest anthropological studies, including the work of Franz Boas."[67]

Williams also credited Boas with helping Booker T. Washington to evolve in his writings about Africans to acknowledge their contributions to world civilizations, and to portray African Americans as "normal human stock."[68] Indeed, by 1915, Washington relied upon Boas's writings in stating:

> There is sometimes much talk about the inferiority of the Negro...[but in practice] the idea appears to be that he is a sort of superhuman. He is expected with about one fifth of what whites received for their education to make as much progress as they are making.[69]

Williams further observed that although "harboring doubts about the eventual achievement of a biracial egalitarian society, Boas trained, corresponded, and was actively involved with blacks in reform movements based on the belief that African

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[66] W.E.B. Dubois, quoted in Harold R. Isaacs, The New World of Negro Americans (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 204.

[67] August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980, (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986), 7.

[68] Williams, Rethinking Race, quoting Booker T. Washington, Selected Speeches of Booker T. Washington, E. Washington, ed., (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran: 1932), 282.

[69] Ibid., Williams also addressed in detail how "some African-American scientists, in their efforts to recontextualize the findings of scientific racists, sought the expertise and support of Franz Boas." Williams, Rethinking Race, 46.

Americans should be assimilated."[70] Although historians such as Carl N. Degler found the idea of assimilation problematical, Williams countered:

> Despite the confines of his period, Boas was a prisoner there to a lesser extent than most white scholars: he not only helped lay the foundation of Afrocentrism and multiculturalism, he defined the parameters of the current controversy concerning the saliency of 'race,' 'culture,' or class as the chief determinant of African-Americans' life chances.[71]

Williams also preemptively took on the later 1999 arguments of Douglas Cole discussed above that Boas was neither a dedicated social reformer nor a progressive. Williams pointed out that Boas "joined with progressives – urban reformers such as Mary White Ovington, Victoria Earle Mathews, Frances A. Kellor, and William Lewis Bulkley who were concerned with the welfare of African Americans – and searched for order in a city characterized by disorganization and pathological conditions."[72] Williams further pointed out that Boas was a member "of the Greenwich House Committee on Social Organization, a moral reform organization," and that "Boas penned an article for the first issue of The Crisis, the organ of the NAACP."[73]

Williams credited Boas with helping the Progressive Era, "one of the lowest points in the history of black-white relations in the United States," to "foster a rational

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[70] Williams, Rethinking Race, 5.

[71] Ibid., 5.

[72] Ibid., 16.

[73] Ibid.

scientific approach to the problem of race relations."[74] Williams concluded that Boas's work "countered the political mythology that defended the status quo…."[75]

Lee Baker on Boas's Consistent Scholarship

In 2004, Professor of Anthropology Lee D. Baker of Duke University followed in Vernon J. Williams, Jr.'s footsteps by publishing an article in Anthropological Theory praising Boas's dedication to science and his profound contributions to American views on race and equality. [76] Baker began by noting that although "the idea that Franz Boas was a public intellectual is widely embraced, there is nothing written that specifically addresses the way he initially got pushed or pulled into the public debate on race, racism, nationalism, and war – the issues for which he used anthropology in public arenas."[77] Baker felt it was "prudent to assess the role of Boas's impact on the public beyond the scope of sympathetic anthropologists or Manhattan intellectuals."[78]

Baker discussed how Boas's scientific work was seized upon by "a spectrum" of commentators who presented his achievements in different lights for different audiences. For example, in 1936, *Time Magazine*, "driven by its middle-class markets

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[74] Ibid., 85.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Lee D. Baker, "Franz Boas Out of the Ivory Tower," *Anthropological Theory* 4 (1) (2004): 29-51.

[77] Ibid., 30-31.

[78] Ibid., 41.

coast to coast," presented Boas to a "1936 middle-brow American public…as a purveyor of the equipotential of ethnic and racial groups, a proponent of the nurture side of the nature vs. nurture debate, and a quirky if not pugnacious father of *American Anthropologist*."[79] "On the other hand,… the editors of *The Nation*, *Charities*, *The New Republic*, and *The Crisis*… targeted a market that was educated, liberal and located mainly in the Northeast."[80] These editors often "published or excerpted Boas's work to help bolster their editorial agendas, which placed Boas shoulder to shoulder with reformer-intellectuals of the Progressive Era like Jane Addams, John Dewey, Thorsten B. Veblen, Ida B. Wells, Charles A. Beard and Louis Brandeis."[81] Baker concluded that it was important not to limit our understanding of Boas to the depictions in any particular set of articles because one could miss a key piece of his legacy. Instead, "one should conclude that Boas made significant contributions in various public arenas, although his most profound influence was felt amongst a multi-racial and educated elite on the Eastern seaboard."[82]

Baker argued that "by far the greatest contribution made by Boas and his students as public intellectuals was to solidify the scientific and mass media consensus that ideas about racial inferiority and superiority were, in Boas's words, 'Nordic

[79] Ibid., 42.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 42-43.

Nonsense.'"[83] Baker, like Williams before him, believed that we should not "miss how influential Boas was in shaping the thoughts and actions of the people who were engaged in progressive reform, especially philanthropists, social workers, and the Negro elite."[84]

Baker also addressed the historians and commentators who criticized Boas's scientific objectivity. Baker contended that "the provenance of anthropology has always been race and culture, and Boas maintained a steady and consistent 'scientific position' on these politically volatile subjects of anthropological theory. Always anchored to his putative science, Boas lent his scientific expertise (ceding both social and political capital) to advocates who used it in the public interest, and he responded vigorously in popular media to scholarship he believed to be either wrong or unscientific – regardless of the political winds of change."[85] Baker added that through his scientific consistency, "Boas circumvented many of 'the flaws of public scholarship.'"[86] Baker explained:

> If the major flaw of public scholarship is inconsistency, Franz Boas's public scholarship sidestepped the flaw. Throughout his career, Boas was remarkably consistent with regard to issues of race, racism, nationalism and war. In terms of race and racism, the arguments he laid out… were recycled, over and over, and remained little changed….[87]

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[83] Ibid., 43.

[84] Ibid., 42-43.

[85] Ibid., 43.

[86] Ibid., 43; quoting A. Wolfe, "The Promise and Flaws of Public Scholarship," The Chronicle of Higher Education 43 (18) (1997): B4-B5.

[87] Baker, "Ivory Towers", 44-45.

Reviewing the widespread incessant attacks on Boas over the last 120 years, Baker observed that "there is a striking parallel between the way Boas was attacked in the 19th century and the way he is attacked in the 21st century because his steady and consistent scholarship has changed, in important ways, the way many Americans view difference."[88] Baker eloquently concluded:

> The countless pages Boas wrote that articulated the limitless capacity of the human brain and body across racial and language groups, the importance of culture as well as the physical and social environment on shaping lifestyles and life chances, and the inanity of grouping races in a hierarchy remain, today, a threatening body of work for those vested in maintaining white supremacy. If Boas gets bashed in similar ways by white supremacists and nativists across the span of three centuries, he must have been doing something right![89]

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[88] Ibid., 46.

[89] Ibid.

CHAPTER V

BOAS'S LEGACY AS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AND PROGRESSIVE REFORMER IN BATTLING RACISM

Franz Boas was a visionary scientist whose articulate criticisms of racism transcended the technical dimensions of anthropology, as he eloquently fought to expand the concept of American freedom through equal opportunity and greater liberty for all Americans. One of Boas's visions was to create through anthropology a compelling counterweight to the scientific and cultural forces supporting American racism in the early twentieth-century. Boas consequently developed the science of anthropology with the progressive goal of building scientific support for the social values of equal opportunity and cultural pluralism. In so doing, Boas steadily evolved from a scientist to a powerful and persuasive progressive social, cultural and political reformer.

In evaluating Boas, it is essential to keep in mind that "the father of American anthropology" was first and foremost a prolific scientist. As a rigorously trained scientist devoted to his field, Boas dedicated his life to an objective search for the truth. Boas recognized early in his professional career that "it is a difficult struggle for every individual and every people to give up tradition and follow the path to truth."[1] Yet Boas passionately believed, as he wrote to his future wife Marie in late 1883, "that

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[1] Franz Boas, letter of December 23, 1883, to Marie Krackowizer, reprinted in Boas, Anthropology and Modern Life, 265-266.

all service…which a man can perform for mankind must serve to promote truth."[2] Boas further believed that "our democracy [gave] us the right and impose[d] on us the duty to devote ourselves to the development of intellectual freedom."[3]

Boas found all bigotry to be repugnant and dangerous to the quest for intellectual freedom and the truth. Boas believed that "freedom implie[d] two fundamental ideas – one, that each man is to be treated according to his individual worth, no matter what his racial, national, or religious affiliation may be; the other, that there should be no tyranny of public opinion that may shackle the freedom of individual thought."[4]

Boas warned that racism was inconsistent with American democratic ideals, and ultimately endangered our freedom of thought:

> A bigoted democracy may be more intolerant, more oppressive, than any other form of government. Its functioning must be based on the freedom of thought of the individual.[5]

Boas observed that "political democracy is no guarantee of intellectual freedom."[6] Boas explained:

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 189.

[4] Ibid., 166.

[5] Ibid., 189.

[6] Ibid., 216.

> A bigoted democracy may be as hostile to intellectual freedom as the modern totalitarian state which casts all thought into a Procrustean bed…The bigoted democracy, although not as powerful as the totalitarian machine, is for all that no less a danger to intellectual freedom.[7]

Boas further understood that scientists could fall prey to bigotry, and that their scientific research and findings could be corrupted to serve demagogues and bigots. Boas asked:

> Can we say conscientiously that scientists are not influenced by demagogues, catch-words and slogans? Is it not rather true that a great many of us, who may be clear thinkers in our own fields, are so little versed in public affairs, so much confined in our own narrow field, that we are swayed by passionate appeals to outworn ideals or to selfish interest that runs counter to the interest of the people?[8]

Boas consequently warned his fellow scientists to focus on continuing their own educations, and to reject "uncontrolled emotionalism":

> So when we speak of the need for education do not forget that we have to educate ourselves. Uncontrolled emotionalism is the greatest enemy of intellectual freedom.[9]

In using anthropological science to combat American racism, Boas saw himself as fighting for a free society dedicated to the "fullest intellectual freedom" - - a society "where the actions of the individual are not restricted as long as they do not

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 217.

[9] Ibid.

interfere with the freedom and welfare of his fellow citizens."[10] For Boas, using anthropology to fight racism and bigotry was a natural outgrowth of his scientific quest for intellectual freedom and the truth:

> We unite at the present time to act because we are stimulated by the consciousness that such freedom as I have just described has not yet been fully achieved. The ideal is embodied in our Constitution and in the Bill of Rights, but it remains an ideal.[11]

Historians like Carl Degler and Kevin MacDonald, who have attacked Boas's scientific objectivity, have ignored or glossed over the thousands of pages of technical scientific analyses of physical measurements and cultural data involving languages, folklore, and traditions presented by Boas. They also have minimized Boas's rigorous scientific training as a physicist, which Boas relied upon throughout his career as an anthropologist in demanding rigorous methodology in all research.

A detailed examination of Boas's lifetime of anthropological research and writing compels the conclusion that Boas endeavored to look very hard at all of the potentially different sides of the research and evidence on complex issues. As a physicist who had studied the developing concept of relativity and the importance of an observer's frame of reference, Boas appreciated the scientific importance of viewing an issue from as many different angles as possible. This trait ironically has led Degler and others to accuse Boas of scientific inconsistency. But as historian George

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[10] Ibid., 216.

[11] Ibid.

Stocking Jr. aptly has noted, "there is an inner consistency to Boas's anthropology."[12] Rigorous thinking and analysis were key parts of Boas's scientific objectivity and consistency.

Early in his anthropological career, Boas came to the critical realization that a scientist's cultural and personal biases could dramatically impact his or her analyses of other cultures. As Boas observed, "[i]f we attempt to interpret the actions of our own remote ancestors by our rational and emotional attitudes we cannot reach truthful results, for their feeling and thinking was different from ours."[13] Boas thus refined the concept of cultural relativism, and spent his life teaching students to respect the diversity and values of cultures throughout history.

Boas also recognized the deep complexity of social and cultural issues and the dangers of drawing simple conclusions from detailed data. Boas understood that matters of causation required the most rigorous proof possible. As Boas observed in 1932:

> Not every correlation signifies a causal relation…Proof has to be given by biological and psychological methods…[as the]uncritical use of the concept of correlation leads to unjustifiable conclusions.[14]

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[12] Stocking Jr., The Shaping of American Anthropology, 2.

[13] Ibid., 636.

[14] Boas, Race, Language, and Culture, 193.

As Stocking has noted, for Boas, "the bias was always toward complexity."[15] Stocking aptly added that "in each area [of anthropology, Boas's] emphasis was on the empirical study of the actual distribution of phenomena, and the publication of huge masses of data – whether head measurements or the texts of folktales and myths – to provide the basis for future inductive study."[16]

Boas would have appreciated the diverse historical analyses of his own life and career and the myriad forces that drove him as an anthropologist and a progressive social reformer. Boas would have agreed that ultimately he was a product of his own cultural environment, and that his personal feelings and outlooks were heavily shaped by his upbringing and education. But Boas never would have classified himself primarily as a German or a Jew or an American. Rather, Boas would have characterized himself as a scientist born and trained in Germany, who fought for intellectual freedom and truth in his adopted country the United States. Boas, who placed his duties above parochial nationalism or religion, stated: "The foremost duty of every individual and every country is to serve the interests of mankind."[17]

Boas emphatically would have rejected the historical analyses that emphasize his Jewishness. Boas himself wrote objectively about "the so-called 'Jewish

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[15] Ibid., 15.

[16] Ibid., 14-15.

[17] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 155.

question.'" Boas said that the Jews "represent[ed] a thorough mixture of divergent racial types," and that there was "no such thing as that racial purity which stimulates their emotional life."[18] Boas continued:

> Summing up the whole evidence we may conclude that we have just as little right to say there is a Jewish race as that there is a French, a German, or a Spanish race.[19]

Historians like Degler, Roth Pierpont, and MacDonald are incorrect in arguing that Boas used science in pursuit of a "liberal Jewish agenda." Boas did not set out as a scientist to prove any set of social tenets or to follow any particular philosophy – liberal Jewish, German or otherwise. Instead, Boas devoted his life to a search for the truth. As an anthropologist, Boas spent six decades developing and refining anthropological methodologies and analyses in furtherance of his noble quest.

Boas dedicated himself to a relentless and focused quest for truth and intellectual freedom. Boas appreciated that the quest for truth and intellectual freedom could best be pursued in a free society where every individual had an equal opportunity to realize his or her full potential. By the time he had reached his mid-twenties, Boas had decided that: "What I want to live and die for, is equal rights for all, equal possibilities to learn and work for poor and rich alike!"[20] Boas's lifetime of

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[18] Ibid., 38-39.

[19] Ibid., 42. Boas added: "There is nothing that would indicate the existence of any definite mental characteristics which are the common property of the Jews the world over, or even of a large part of the Jews of any one community." Ibid.

[20] Boas, Anthropology and Modern Life, 265-266.

rigorous anthropological work confirmed for him that "the whole history of mankind points in the direction of a human ideal as opposed to a national ideal."[21] Believing "in the absolute value of equal rights and equal opportunity for all individuals,"[22] Boas admirably employed rigorous scientific and anthropological analyses to fight racism and "to further those ideas for which [he] lived… equal rights for all."[23]

As Boas reached middle age and earned a measure of professional and financial security, he increasingly spoke out against racism and other social problems, which he viewed as being bolstered by weak pseudo-science. Thus, by 1906, Boas was constantly speaking out on behalf of the concepts of cultural relativism and cultural determinism in order to combat American racism.

Boas also used his tenured position at Columbia University to educate and inspire a new generation of anthropologists, who could carry on the battle. Boas respected the intellectual freedom of his students, and pushed them to always pursue their anthropological work with patience and scientific rigor. For example, in 1925, Boas encouraged his struggling student Margaret Mead to keep going with her exhausting field work no matter the results:

> I am fully aware that the subject you have selected is a very difficult one and is, I believe, the first serious attempt to enter into the mental attitude of a group in a primitive society…I trust you will not feel

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[21] Boas, Anthropology and Modern Life, 194.

[22] Ibid., 260-261.

[23] Ibid.

> discouraged if the results are coming slowly and not to the extent you would like to get. Conditions are such that even if you do not get all you want in your principal subject, there are plenty of other aspects in regard to which material will be accumulated all the time that will be of value and many of which will have a bearing on a matter that you really want to investigate.[24]

Although this thesis has focused on Boas's use of anthropology to battle racism, it is important to point out that Boas applied anthropology to myriad other controversial social issues, including immigration, sexism, and the rampant nationalism that fueled two World Wars in the second half of his life. In each of these controversial areas, Boas was an outspoken advocate for applying anthropological research and conclusions to help solve societal problems.[25]

Degler and other historical critics have unfairly twisted Boas's statements about the need for intermarriages and racial mixing to argue that Boas somehow was not a cultural pluralist. Over and over, Boas wrote about the nobility and value of all cultures, and argued that the best of mankind appeared in all cultures. Given the overwhelming forces of racism Boas was confronting, his prescription for additional racial intermixing cannot and should not be twisted into the absurd notion that Boas

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[24] "The Correspondence between Margaret Mead and Franz Boas exchanged during Mead's 1925-26 Samoan research project (and related material)," reprinted in James E. Cote, "The Mead-Freeman Controversy in Review," *Special Issue of the Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 29, no. 5 (Oct. 2000): 525.

[25] For example, based on his worldwide cultural studies, Boas long argued that women should be accorded "the freedom of action enjoyed by man." Boas added, "the creative power and independence of man and woman seem to me largely independent of the physiologically determined differences in interest and character." Boas, Anthropology and Modern Life, 234-235.

himself somehow was not a cultural pluralist – especially since Boas deserves credit for advancing the scientific notion of cultural relativism. As aptly observed by historian Eric Foner, "...Boas[] and others planted the seeds of a pluralist vision of Americanism that would eventually become a 'touchstone of liberal enlightenment.'"[26]

In developing and using the science of anthropology as a compelling counterweight to the scientific and cultural forces supporting American racism in the early twentieth-century, Franz Boas faced vicious personal attacks and vilification. Boas also had to fight his battle in a country that was not nearly ready to free itself from the yokes of racism.[27] Yet Boas never faltered in his progressive battle to use science to make the American dream a reality for all. As Boas said in 1917; "I wish to see the United States of America the exponent of the highest ideals of the State as the servant of mankind."[28]

Franz Boas's noble ideal of a diverse America that values each individual and offers them equal opportunities and freedom lives on. Boas's writings continue to

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[26] Foner, American Freedom, 190.

[27] Historian Eric Foner has observed that "[a]t the time," Boas's writings "had little impact on public policy." Foner, American Freedom, 190. Similarly, historian Michael McGerr has noted that "Boas's work ultimately proved influential, but it did not change popular thinking very much in the 1910s." Michael McGerr, A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America: 1870-1920 (New York: Free Press, 2003), 245. Indeed, Boas himself wrote poignantly in 1916 about the "rude awakening" he had experienced after arriving in the United States "filled with admiration of American political ideals." Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 168.

[28] Boas, Race and Democratic Society, 155.

provide a prescription for combating American twenty-first-century racism. At a time of increasing symbolic lynchings and festering racial hostility, Americans should heed Boas's prophetic admonition in The Mind of Primitive Man:

> Freedom of judgment can be attained only when we learn to estimate an individual according to his own ability and character. Then we shall find, if we select the best of mankind, that all races and all nationalities would be represented. Then we shall treasure and cultivate the variety of forms that human thought and activity has taken, and abhor, as leading to complete stagnation, all attempts to impress one pattern of thought upon whole nations or even the whole world.[29]

[29] Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man, 242.

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