The Location of Franz Boas within the African-American Struggle

Lee D. Baker
W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research, Harvard University

In 1896 the US Supreme Court delivered the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. This decision upheld racial segregation and handed down the doctrine of 'separate but equal', which would persist unchallenged for fifty-eight years. The objective of the Fourteenth Amendment, the court found, was to enforce equality between the two races before the law. 'But in the nature of things,' Justice Brown delivered, the amendment could not have intended to 'abolish distinctions based upon color' (163 US 544). The *Plessy* court was disingenuous in stating that 'segregation did not stamp the colored race with a badge of inferiority' (163 US 551). The court did not candidly codify the prevailing social and ideological construct of race. If it had done so, the court would have stated that

> . . . no badge was necessary to proclaim what was self evident . . . everyone understood [that segregation], would prevent contamination of white blood by the defective genes of colored people, whose unfortunate traits stemmed from their tribal origins in densest Africa. (Kluger, 1976: 305)

The *Plessy* case was decided in the midst of post-Reconstruction nativism/racism. Characteristics of this period were increased hostilities, dehumanization and violent repression of European immigrants, African-Americans and Native Americans. In addition, working-class solidarity was shattered along racial lines, because trade unions became battlegrounds between race and class. This period was framed by the emergence of an ideology of progress. Various strands of Social Darwinism provided its theoretical underpinnings. In general, Social Darwinist thought projected a combination of Thomas Hobbes's theory of individuals continually engaged in war with each other and competitive laissez-faire economics on to the natural or organic world (Brinton, 1890: 76). It then projected this 'natural order' back into human history and proclaimed a universal law of

Critique of Anthropology © 1994 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 14(2): 199–217.

evolution (Bloor, 1991: 70). Racio-cultural evolution naturalized social hierarchies and surrendered oppressed people to the laws of 'survival of the fittest'.

Social Darwinism promoted oppression and served to unify the emerging industrial order. It underwrote racial segregation, disenfranchisement and lynchings of African-Americans under the guise of scientific authority (Du Bois, 1986a: 626). Social Darwinism also justified the surge of hostile legislation, deplorable living and working conditions, and also lynchings of Eastern European and Chinese immigrants. Additionally, it provided the underpinnings for violence against trade unionists, anti-union legislation and the denial of safe working conditions. Due to the close association with the ideology of progress, Social Darwinism was linked to Western expansion and imperialism. It thereby legitimated the destruction and displacement of Native American societies, the Spanish-American War, the occupation of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Samoa and the Philippines, all in 1898, plus the annexation of Hawaii and the colonization of Guam in 1899 (Hofstadter, 1955: 38, 172; Higham, 1970: 39).

Henry Ward Beecher wrote to Herbert Spencer, a leading exponent of Social Darwinism, that 'the peculiar condition of American Society has made your writings far more fruitful and quickening here than in Europe' (Duncan, 1908: 128). Spencer's voluminous writings and his many followers provided post-Reconstruction Americans with a synthetic philosophy of progress steeped in biology and physics. Spencer's philosophy vindicated the Anglo-Saxon elite's indifference to the insidious exploitation, violence and hostility which accompanied the reconstitution of industrial capitalism and US imperialism in the late nineteenth century (Hofstadter, 1955: 31–50). By 1896, Social Darwinism provided an ideological cement that fused capitalist development, imperialism, scientific progress, racism and the law into a rock solid edifice within US society.

When he challenged the ascendancy of Social Darwinist assumptions within the academy, Franz Boas began to drive a wedge into the hegemonic ideology gripping the country. However, this wedge did not even begin to fracture the repressive implications of Social Darwinism. It was only when his critique was appropriated by activists engaged in the long processes of razing the entire edifice upon which race was constructed that the fragmentation began.

Melville Herskovits (1953) and others have examined how Boas's conceptualization of race and culture developed during this period. Edward Beardsley (1973), Marshall Hyatt (1985, 1990) and George Stocking (1968) have also examined Boas as a progressive activist. However, there is a need to examine, in detail, the connections between

Boas and those others who were engaged in the struggles for racial equality. This paper examines and contextualizes the role Boas played in the struggle for racial equality between the turbulent years of 1887 and 1909.

I

In 1887 Boas began to combat scientific racism. He criticized curators of museum exhibits for arranging their artifacts into categories of savagery, barbarianism or civilization. He argued that this method employed a fraudulent deductive logic, that was 'not founded on the phenomenon, but in the mind of the student' (Boas, 1887a: 614). The debates were conducted through a series of letters to the editor of *Science* and involved Otis T. Mason, the President of the Anthropological Society of Washington, and John W. Powell, the Director of the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology (Boas, 1887a, b, c). Boas demonstrated that arranging exhibits based on the evolution of technology was erroneous. In order to understand primitive technology, he argued, it has to be viewed within its historical and ethnological context. He suggested that an 'ethnological phenomenon is not expressed by its appearance, by the state in which it *is*, but by its whole history . . . therefore arguments from analogies of the outward appearance, such as shown in Professor Mason's collections, are deceptive' (Boas, 1887b: 589). Boas's logic, which was not completely clear, became a cornerstone for the inductive ethnographic studies which he and his students pursued. He argued that:

> The outward appearance of two phenomena may be identical, yet their immanent qualities may be altogether different . . . these remarks show how the same phenomena may originate from unlike causes, and that my opinion does not at all strive against the axiom, 'Like effects spring from like causes', which belongs to that class of axioms which cannot be converted. Though like causes have like effects, like effects have not like causes. (Boas, 1887b: 589)

This was a significant passage because it called into question the assumption that each ethnic group passes through the same succession of cultural stages on the road to civilization. Boas's notion of the relativity of cultures is also solidified in the debates over museum classification. For example, he stated:

> It is my opinion that the main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our

> civilization goes. I believe that this object can be accomplished only by the tribal arrangement of collections. (1887b: 589)

These thoughts were important precursors for much of his work after 1887.

In 1894 Boas extended his critique of theories of social evolution by demonstrating that the theories were racially prejudiced. This was the first time he spoke out publicly against racism. His address 'Human Faculty as Determined by Race' to Section H of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, raised the following question: Does race limit the ability to achieve civilization? Boas argued that the problem with utilizing a nomothetic evolutionary construct is that 'we are always liable to interpret as racial character what is only an effect of social surroundings' (Boas, 1895: 326). He concluded that

> . . . historical events appear to have been much more potent in leading races to civilization than their faculty, and it follows that achievements of races do not warrant us to assume that one race is more highly gifted than the other. (Boas, 1895: 308)

The address had three parts. The first segment detailed how various civilizations arose either independently or through cultural diffusion. He emphasized that civilizations arose in various parts of the world regardless of racial disposition. The second section concerned physical differences, in which Boas concluded that there was considerable overlap of 'so-called' racial characteristics. Further, he insisted that no fact 'has been found yet which would prove beyond a doubt that it will be impossible for certain races to attain a higher civilization' (Boas, 1895: 317). The third part concerned differences in mental ability and in this section Boas explicitly attacked Spencer.

Boas (1895: 307) argued that the primary reason for African-American inequality was racism. He explained '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'. He further suggested that scientists ought to focus on how much Negroes have 'accomplished in a short period against heavy odds' (Boas, 1895: 307). He concluded by stating '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' (Boas, 1895: 307).

To better understand the novelty of Boas's approach, one must juxtapose his arguments against those of other leading anthropologists of the time. Anthropology and ethnology were emerging as professional disciplines in the last years of the nineteenth century. Scientists from various fields were defining the sphere anthropology would occupy in the

sciences. One of these scientists was Daniel G. Brinton, the President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and the Director of the University Museum of Archeology at the University of Pennsylvania. Brinton's presidential address to the AAAS in 1895 was entitled 'The Aims of Anthropology'. It differed in many respects from Boas's address a year earlier. Brinton, in this address, employed an evolutionary construct based on racial inferiority. For example, he wrote:

> . . . when we find a living nation of low culture we are safe in taking its modes of thought and feeling as analogous to those of extinct tribes whose remains show them to have been in about the same stage of culture. (Brinton, 1896: 61)

He further argued that both anatomical and psychological characteristics of a race are 'tremendously potent in deciding the result of its struggle for existence. . . . The black, the brown and the red races differ anatomically so much from the white, especially in their splanchnic organs, that even with equal cerebral capacity they never could rival its results by equal efforts' (Brinton, 1896: 68). Anthropological research, he concluded, 'offers a positive basis for legislation, politics, and education as applied to a given ethnic group' (Brinton, 1896: 69; also see Haller, 1971: 722).

Boas's arguments at this point did not have a significant impact on the scientific community. His arguments were also not allowed to circulate in the magazines geared towards the general public interested in scientific currents. This was in sharp contrast to Brinton's version of anthropological Social Darwinism, which was acclaimed by both the general public and the scientific community. While the editors of *Popular Science Monthly* published a one-column summary of Boas's paper, they published Brinton's whole address (*Popular Science Monthly*, 1894: 568; Brinton, 1896: 59–72). The 1896 volume of *Popular Science Monthly* coincided with the *Plessy* decision and ultimately buttressed its arguments.

The lines of thought that Boas articulated during the museum debates and his paper at the AAAS were his first attempts to differentiate race from culture and language, to rebuke Social Darwinian assumptions regarding racial inferiority and to develop the notion of cultural relativism. However, these lines of thought, which were novel between 1887 and 1894, did not have a significant impact on the fight for racial equality until years later. At this point, Boas only provoked an interesting debate within a scientific community that was rapidly being consolidated and institutionalized in order to produce the technical expertise needed for an industrial society (Stepan and Gilman, 1991: 77).

II

Boas was Jewish and had first-hand experience with anti-Semitism in Germany and the United States. Marshall Hyatt (1990: 156) has suggested that

> Although his liberalism and commitment to professional science can never be overlooked in assessing his intellectual contributions and social activism, it was his own experience with anti-semitism that usually pushed him to act. This factor led him to attack evolutionary theory, to challenge the structure of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant science, and to defend American minority and immigrant groups.

Boas's reputation began to grow in the late 1890s, and he came to be viewed by African-American leaders as an ally in the struggle for racial equality because of his anti-racist research and theory (e.g. Boas and Wissler, 1905). However, Boas initially did not seem to have been aware of the various strategies used by African-American leaders to alleviate racial inequality. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois were two of the more influential leaders at the turn of the century. Boas ultimately allied himself with Du Bois, who represented the radical integrationist arm of the movement for civil rights. This alliance with Du Bois and the NAACP alienated him from the accommodationist wing of the movement led by Washington and financed by Andrew Carnegie. The accommodationist's wing became powerful because its strategy was the most innocuous.[1]

Booker T. Washington was born enslaved in Virginia in 1858 or 1859. During Reconstruction he walked to Hampton Institute to pursue an education. He was admitted on the basis of his eagerness and hard work. In 1881, after graduating from Hampton he founded a normal school for the colored – Tuskegee Institute. He was only 22 years old. In 1895, he delivered the opening address at the World's Fair in Atlanta. This address catapulted him into international prominence. For the next twenty years, until his death in 1915, no other African-American commanded comparable influence (Meier et al., 1971: 3).

In Atlanta, Washington addressed a largely white audience that was mainly concerned with finding markets for new industrial and agricultural products in the South (Rydell, 1984: 74). Washington argued that the Negro would promote progress in the United States as they 'learned to dignify and glorify common labor and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life' (1902: 220). With an industrial education and hard work Negroes could then prosper and become productive citizens. Washington further argued that Negroes should not migrate north, because in the South 'the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial

world' (1902: 220). He explained that the white race should utilize Negro labor instead of immigrant workers 'of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits . . . [because the Negro, after all has] without strikes and labor wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth' (Washington, 1902: 220–1).

Washington's plan for industrial education for Negroes was widely accepted. Tuskegee received millions of dollars from the Carnegie Foundation and other private philanthropists in the North (Woodson, 1966: 441; Franklin, 1974: 280). His strategy did not challenge the emerging social order or its Social Darwinist underpinnings. Washington's (1902: 222) remark, in the 1895 address, that 'in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress', provided the African-American support for the 'separate but equal' doctrine put forth by *Plessy* in 1896 (Rydell, 1984: 76). Thus he framed the African-American agenda in terms consistent with a Social Darwinist framework. Washington's strategy not only gained popular support but was adopted and actively promoted by the state. By 1905, he was President Theodore Roosevelt's advisor on all matters concerning the Negro (Rudwick, 1982: 87).

Washington's ultimate goal was racial equality. In *The Future of the American Negro*, written in 1899, he outlined this goal:

> The problem is how to make these millions of Negroes self-supporting, intelligent, economical and valuable citizens, as well as how to bring about proper relations between them and the white citizens among whom they live. (Washington, 1969: 5)

His strategy to achieve this goal was simply to provide industrial education to Negroes so that they could, literally, earn their equality. Washington's plan actually inhibited processes of class formation within the African-American community, especially in the South. However, Washington's project rested upon philanthropic and economic support from northern capitalists. These capitalists invested heavily in the construction of railroads, textile factories and steel mills in the South. They were aware of the need for trained labor to operate the machines and perform the other tasks necessary for an industrializing southern economy. The result was separate philanthropic funding for the education of African-Americans and whites. This was done so that one could be played off against the other (Franklin, 1974: 280).

While Washington became the spokesperson for millions of Negroes, there were a number of African-American intellectuals who disagreed with

his strategy for improving race relations in the United States. This group was led by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. After graduating from high school in 1885, he was awarded a scholarship to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He attended graduate school at Harvard University, and spent two years at the University of Berlin. In 1895, he became the first African-American to receive a doctorate from Harvard University.

Du Bois achieved prominence with the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. The book expressed some of the finest prose of the day and was important because Du Bois openly critiqued Washington's agenda. The book exposed the widening rift between young intellectuals and the established leadership. Du Bois summarized his criticism in a chapter entitled 'Of Mr. Booker T. Washington', where he wrote

> Mr. Washington thus faces the triple paradox of his career:
> 1. He is striving nobly to make Negro artisans, businessmen and property owners; but it is utterly impossible . . .
> 2. He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority . . .
> 3. He advocates common-school and industrial training, and depreciates institutions of higher learning . . . (Du Bois 1986b: 399)

The rift was drawn in terms of region and social status. The rift separated the South from the North, a vocationally trained working class from the normal school and college-educated, 'talented tenth'. While Du Bois and his associates gained some prominence, the vast majority of African-Americans claimed Washington as their leader. Furthermore, few whites would venture into matters of race relations without his counsel (Franklin, 1974: 290).

Franz Boas was no exception. In 1904, Boas wrote to Washington concerning the admission of an African-American student into the graduate anthropology program at Columbia University.

> Dear Sir,
> A young gentleman, Mr. J.E. Aggerey, of Livingstone College, Salisbury, N.C., desires to study anthropology at Columbia University. He is a full-blood negro . . . . I very much hesitate to advise the young man to take up this work, because I fear that it would be very difficult after he has completed his studies to find a place. On the other hand, it might perhaps be possible for him to study for two or three years and take his degree of master of arts, and then to obtain a position in one of the schools for his people . . . (Boas/APS: 11/30/1904)[2]

Boas must not have been completely aware of Washington's strategy which emphasized vocational training and depreciated university education. If

Boas had been aware of Washington's strategy, he would have been able to predict Washington's response:

> Judging by what you state in your letter and knowing what I do, I cannot rid myself of the feeling that the course which he [Mr. J.E. Aggerey] is planning to take, will be of little value to him.
> At the present time I know of so many cases where young colored men and women would have done well had they thoroughly prepared themselves for teachers, some kind of work in the industries, or in the applied sciences, but instead, they have made the mistake of taking a course that had no practical bearing on the needs of the race; the result being they ended up as hotel-waiters or Pullman car porters. (Boas/APS: 12/09/1904)

The letter to Washington demonstrates a certain naivete on Boas's part regarding the various strategies African-Americans employed to achieve racial equality. Boas was characteristically shrewd in his professional relationships. However, this rather naive understanding of the political terrain within the African-American leadership proved detrimental. At least one of Boas's projects did not get funded by Carnegie due to his involvement with Du Bois at Atlanta University.

Du Bois moved to Atlanta University, in 1897, to become Professor of History and Economics. That same year he implemented a new program in sociology. Du Bois's strategy to obtain racial equality at Atlanta was to develop a systematic 100-year program to study Negro life. These studies sought to prove that neither color nor race determined or limited one's capacity. The premise for these studies was that carefully gathered scientific proof would dispel the ignorance of race prejudice. These studies had both anthropological and sociological significance for many fields at this time.

Du Bois's initial contact with Boas was a letter written on 11 October 1905. In this letter, Du Bois explains the 100-year study and asked Boas to participate in the 11th conference, which was on the Negro physique (Boas/APS: 10/11/1905). Boas accepted the invitation (Boas/APS: 04/25/1906) and Du Bois confirmed 'Tuesday May 29th' (Boas/APS: 04/28/1906).

Boas participated in the conference and spontaneously delivered the commencement address for Atlanta University. In the commencement address he empowered African-Americans by saying that their ancestors greatly contributed to the civilization of the human race. He explained that:

> While much of the history of early invention is shrouded in darkness, it seems likely that at a time when the European was still satisfied with rude

> stone tools, the African had invented or adopted the art of smelting iron. (Boas, 1974: 311)

Boas also used other examples: the military organization of the Zulu, the advanced economic and judicial system of the Negro Kingdoms of the Sudan, and the innovative bronze casting of Benin. He further 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 the shores of this continent. (Boas, 1974: 313)

Boas supported the basic argument of the Atlanta studies: the problem of racial inequality was white racism not racial inferiority.[3]

St Clair Drake (1980: 9) has suggested that the Atlanta University address clearly placed Boas and early anthropology at Columbia right in the middle of the 'vindication struggle'. It also placed Boas squarely within the integrationist, radical and anti-Washington wing of the struggle for racial equality.

One may question whether Boas understood the complexities of the political debates within the African-American leadership and whether he fully understood Washington's contempt for both Du Bois and Atlanta University. This contempt is revealed in an open letter Washington sent to the President of Atlanta University. The 1903 letter was published in one of the most popular African-American newspapers called *The Colored American*.

> If Atlanta University intends to stand for Dr. Du Bois' outgivings, if it means to seek to destroy Tuskegee Institute, so that its own work can have success, it is engaged in poor business to start with. . . . Tuskegee will go on. It will succeed . . . not withstanding the petty annoyances of Du Bois and his ilk. . . . Let him [the university president] prove himself by curbing the outgivings and ill-advised criticism of the learned Doctor who is now in his employ. (Rudwick, 1982: 332)

In November 1906, Boas exposed his lack of understanding or naivete regarding the bifurcated agendas set forth by the African-American leadership. Boas wrote a letter to Washington requesting his support for the creation of an African and African-American museum. To prove to Washington that he was sincere about the Negro race, he invoked his work with Du Bois and Atlanta University. Boas writes:

> I am endeavoring to organize certain scientific work on the Negro race which I believe will be of great practical value in modifying the views of our people in regard to the Negro problem. I am particularly anxious to bring home to the American people the fact that the African race in its own continent has achieved advancements which have been of importance in the development of civilization of the human race. You may have seen some of my references to this matter, but I enclose an address that I gave in Atlanta last spring, which will suggest some of the matters that I have in mind . . . (Boas/APS: 11/8/1906)

Clearly, the copy of his commencement address was not warmly received by Washington. Chances are that Boas was seeking the support of Washington so that Carnegie would fund his project. Two weeks later he solicited financial support for the museum directly from Andrew Carnegie:

> 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. . . . It seems plausible that the whole attitude of our people in regard to the Negro might be materially modified if we had a better knowledge of what the Negro has really done and accomplished in his own native country. . . . The endless repetition of remarks on the inferiority of the Negro physique, of the early arrest of development of Negro children, of the tendency in the mulatto to inherit all the bad traits of both parental races, seems almost ineradicable, and in the present state of our knowledge can just as little be repudiated as supported by definite evidence. . . . There seems to be another reason which would make it highly desirable to disseminate knowledge of the achievements of African culture, particularly among the Negroes, in vast portions of our country there is a strong feeling of despondency among the best classes of the Negro, due to the economic, mental, and moral inferiority of the race in America, and the knowledge of the strength of their parental race in their native surroundings must have a wholesome and highly stimulating effect. I have noticed these effects myself in addressing audiences of Southern Negroes, to whom the facts were a complete revelation. (Boas/APS: 11/30/1906)

Carnegie did not support the project. This was not surprising given his support for Washington's 'Tuskegee Machine', his Social Darwinist agenda and his support for eugenics research (Allen, 1987).

Boas clearly supported African-American equality. However, his impact as an activist was limited to influencing a small number of anthropologists at Columbia University and to lending his name to (or basically being appropriated by) a few radical intellectuals. However, Boas was a tenuous but critical link between two nascent groups who would later make profound contributions in the fight for racial equality. The first group which Boas influenced, the Columbia anthropologists, eventually orchestrated a *paradigmatic* shift in the scientific discourse on race because they developed a powerful school of thought based on the relativity of cultures

and the inanity of claims of racial inferiority. Boas became a crucial link between the Columbian anthropologists and the radical intellectuals of the NAACP who eventually orchestrated a *juridical* shift in the legal codification of race. The Black intellectuals developed a nucleus of social scientists at Howard University and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund which tenaciously fought racial segregation in the courts. After Boas's death, these two groups worked together and overturned *Plessy*.

Boas's role in the fight for racial equality was limited in 1906. He did not or could not successfully negotiate the political dynamics within the African-American leadership. His impact was limited within the sciences and among the educated public because of the virulent racism that permeated a society shrouded by Social Darwinism.

III

While Boas may not have realized the depth or significance of the strategic differences and polarization of African-American intellectuals, he continued to struggle for racial equality. He attempted to popularize his views within vehicles of popular culture, in spite of the fact that the Social Darwinists dominated this arena. For example, in September 1906, the influential *Century Magazine* published an article by Robert Bean (1906a) entitled 'The Negro Brain'. Bean expressed the view that:

> The Caucasian and the negro are fundamentally opposite extremes in evolution. Having demonstrated that the negro and the Caucasian are widely different in characteristics, due to a deficiency of gray matter and connecting fibers in the negro brain . . . we are forced to conclude that is is [*sic*] useless to try to elevate the negro by education or otherwise except in the direction of his natural endowments. (Bean, 1906a: 784)

In response to this article Boas wrote to the owner, editor and publisher of this magazine – Richard Watson Gilder. He explained that such an article 'will give strong support to those who deny the negro equal rights; and from this point of view . . . the paper is not just to the cause of the negro' (Boas/APS: 9/18/1906). Boas's letter to Gilder had no effect on curbing the racism perpetuated by Gilder's magazine. A month later, in the October issue of *Century Magazine*, Gilder published another article by Robert Bean (1906b) which espoused the same propaganda couched as 'science'.

A year later, Boas wrote to Gilder again and proposed submitting a non-scientific essay on African culture accompanied by various pictures of native industries (Hyatt, 1985: 287). The article was rejected but subsequently appeared as 'Industries of the African Negroes' in *The Southern Workman*, published by the Hampton Institute (Boas, 1909). This article

had nineteen pictures ranging from 'Pottery made by the Bali tribe' to 'Congo throwing knives'. Between the pictures were statements like the following:

> A broader treatment of the question will require a consideration of the achievements of the Negro under other conditions, and particularly of the culture that he has developed in his own natural surroundings. The conditions for gaining a clear insight into this question are particularly unfavorable in North America, where loss of continuity of development and an inferior social position have made a deep impress on the race that will be slow to disappear. (Boas, 1909: 219)

Boas was unable to publish this article in a magazine that promoted racism. Undaunted by this setback, Boas made several other attempts to popularize his views in widely circulated magazines dominated by Social Darwinists. He published an article entitled, 'The Anthropological Position of the Negro', in the *Van Norden Magazine* (Boas, 1907). The impact of this article was diminished because it was published in the same issue as 'The Race Question' written by Ben Tillman (1907), a Senator from South Carolina. In this article, Tillman sought support to repeal the 15th amendment, basing his arguments on Social Darwinist claims of racial inferiority. In 1907, Boas again attempted to popularize his position by editing an 'Encyclopedia of the Negro', but the project was aborted.

Boas was not successful in his attempts to popularize his understanding of racial equality. He met substantial resistance to his proposals to further the cause of the Negro from influential capitalists, such as Carnegie and Gilder, men who, through control of financial resources controlled the media, which perpetuated notions of Social Darwinism and the ideology of progress. While Boas's efforts to use African history to educate Euro-Americans about their racism were not entirely effective, they did, however, contribute to the nascent field of African/African-American Studies as early as 1906. He subsequently developed both a personal and a professional relationship with Carter G. Woodson, the founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Boas was a member of its Executive Council and on the editorial board of its journal, *The Journal of Negro Life and History*. Boas should be seen as both a contributing and a pirating interlocutor within the early tradition of African-American studies (Harrison and Nonini, 1992: 234). He never explicitly refers to the influence of the Black Studies tradition in his work. However, there is little doubt that the final chapter in *The Mind of the Primitive Man* (1911), entitled 'The Race Problem in Modern Society' has the imprint of Du Bois (Baltzell, 1967: xxvi; Baker, 1990: 24; Monteiro, 1990: 22; Harrison, 1992: 242).

IV

In 1905, a year before Boas's address in Atlanta, Du Bois organized a Negro rights group called the Niagara Movement. Twenty-nine members of Du Bois's 'talented tenth' attended. The press called them the 'Radicals'. More African-American leaders 'were expected, but according to rumors, they declined at the last minute after being pressured by white friends of Booker T. Washington' (Rudwick, 1982: 94). The Niagara Movement insisted that the government meet several demands: free speech, equal employment, union opportunities, federal aid for education, an end to sharecropping and no further federal subsidies for the Tuskegee Machine's press (Rudwick, 1982: 96).

In 1909, Mary White Ovington, a Euro-American social worker, issued a call to form the National Negro Committee, which would soon become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Her call was to merge the weak Niagara Movement with a group of white reformers. The committee, which met in New York City on 31 May 1909, was inter-racial and stood for racial equality (Rudwick, 1982: 120). The meeting, which was widely publicized, was viewed as a protest movement. Members of the university community – such as William James, Du Bois's former professor at Harvard – thought race prejudice might increase as a result of the publicity the committee would receive (Rudwick, 1982: 22). Furthermore, 'powerful white friends of Washington (such as Andrew Carnegie) also shunned the conclave' (Rudwick, 1982: 122). It was inevitable that the conference would be judged as anti-Washington.

The meeting attempted to forge a new model for the advancement of colored people. Washington's model for African-American advancement was questionable and anachronistic. Washington ignored the future role of urban African-Americans, and he was blind to the growing horror of racial violence, specifically the increased lynchings of African-Americans (Huggins, 1971: 22). For these reasons, the organization convened without Washington.

It opened 'by attempting to answer the basic question of whether or not Negroes were like other men' (Rudwick, 1982: 122). Boas and Burt G. Wilder, a zoologist at Cornell University, delivered the opening address (Beardsley, 1973: 62). Boas also spoke the following year at the organization's second annual meeting. His second address, 'The Real Race Problem', appeared in *The Crisis*, the NAACP's magazine which Du Bois edited. The subtitles in the article once again show Boas's strategy since 1906: 'The Negro Not Inferior . . . The Handicap of Slavery . . . [African] Trade Well Organized . . . [etc.]' (Boas, 1910: 22). Boas continued to support the NAACP and its leaders. In 1911, he wrote the foreword for Mary White Ovington's book, *Half a Man*, which was a socio-historical study of Negro labor relations in New York City (Ovington, 1911).

For the next fifty years, the NAACP led the fight for racial equality and integration. Boas continued to be involved with issues surrounding African-Americans and continued a life-long relationship with Du Bois. The theory and research of Boas and Du Bois gained influence over time. Both men laid the scientific foundation for studying race and culture in the social sciences for the balance of this century. This foundation was the basis for Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* in 1944.

Marshall Hyatt (1990) has argued that there is a direct link from Boas's view to the 1954 US Supreme Court judgement in *Brown v. The Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education*. He points out that Chief Justice Earl Warren broke precedent when he delivered the *Brown* opinion, which overturned the 1896 *Plessy* decision. Warren cited a few studies which influenced the Court's thinking and summarized them, saying 'and see generally Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 1944' (Kluger, 1976: 785). As Carleton Putnam (1967: 70) remarked, 'This reference, however oblique, was an effective way of saying see generally Boas and his disciples, for Myrdal's *American Dilemma* was Boas from beginning to end.' Or was it? On closer inspection, the answer is yes and no. One does see the imprint of Boas's notion that phenotypic characteristics do not elevate one group above the other, but not his concept of culture.[4] According to Walter Jackson (1990: 194), Myrdal wrote *An American Dilemma* in order to implement policies for African-American assimilation. Although Myrdal was a great admirer of Franz Boas, he feared the conservative implications of the culture concept. Further, 'he profoundly disagreed with Herskovits' thesis that Afro-Americans maintained distinctive [African] cultural patterns that resisted assimilation into the dominant culture' (Jackson, 1990: 194).

In 1887, Boas began to drive a wedge into the Social Darwinism that cemented capitalist development, imperialism, scientific progress, racism and the law. However, African-American intellectuals and the NAACP seized the wedge and drove it even deeper into the very fabric of US society with the *Brown* decision. Thus, Boas's critique of Social Darwinism had ramifications far beyond the academy, especially when he forged linkages with African-American intellectuals and the radicals of the NAACP. Franz Boas *should* be seen as an activist who played an important role in the continued struggle for racial equality. One gets a clearer or perhaps more textured appreciation of his efforts when his role is located or contextualized within the African-American struggle.

NOTES

1. Logan alludes to this argument. He suggests that President Harrison's appeal for Negro suffrage and education was an attempt to alleviate 'the prejudices and paralysis of slavery [which] continue to hang upon the skirts of progress'. Employing this type of rhetorical strategy Harrison argued that concessions should be given to Negroes. If they were not given, Harrison feared, Negroes would fall prey to the Farmers Alliance or the Socialists. Logan argues that Harrison's views were precursors for the overwhelming acceptance of Washington (Logan, 1972: 64).
2. The collection of professional correspondence of Franz Boas is held at the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA, hereafter (APS).
3. Quoting Diggs, Harrison (1992: 242) suggests that both the method and theoretical point of view in such classic studies as Franz Boas's *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), W. I. Thomas and Znaniecki's *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1921), W. Lloyd Warner's school of community studies at Harvard and Chicago, St Clair Drake's *Black Metropolis* as well as the classic Yankee City series are all found in *The Philadelphia Negro* (Du Bois, 1967) on which the Atlanta Studies were based. Monteiro (1990: 22), Baltzell (1967: xxvi) and Baker (1990: 24) each contend that Boas's chapter in *The Mind of Primitive Man* entitled 'The Race Problem in Modern Society' was influenced by Du Bois's *Philadelphia Negro* (1967) and the Atlanta Studies.
4. For example, M.F. Ashley-Montagu's text 'Origins, Composition and Physical Characteristics of the American Negro Population' was used to explain racial equality. However, Herskovits's texts on the African continuities in African-American culture were side-lined.

REFERENCES

Allen, Garland (1987)
'The Role of Experts in Scientific Controversies', in A. Caplan and H. Englehart (eds) *Experts in Scientific Controversy: A Case Study in the Resolution Enclosure in Disputes in Science and Technology*, pp. 169–202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baker, Lee (1990)
'The Problem of the Color Line and the Cultural Aspects of Race: Shaping American Social Science for the Twentieth Century', paper presented at the 3rd Annual National Black Graduate Student Conference. 29 May. Berkeley, California.

Baltzell, E. Digby (1967)
'Introduction', in W.E.B. Du Bois *The Philadelphia Negro*, pp. ix–xliv. New York: Schocken Books.

Bean, Robert B. (1906a)
'The Negro Brain', *The Century Magazine* 72: 778–84.

Bean, Robert B. (1906b)
'The Training of the Negro', *The Century Magazine* 72: 947–53.

Beardsley, Edward H. (1973)
'The American Scientist as Social Activist; Franz Boas, Burt G. Wilder, and the Cause of Racial Justice, 1900–1915', *Isis* 64(1): 50–65.

Bloor, David (1991)
Knowledge and Social Imagery. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Orig. 1976.)

Boas, Franz (1887a)
'Museums of Ethnology and Their Classification', *Science* 9: 587–9.

Boas, Franz (1887b)
'The Occurrence of Similar Inventions in Areas Widely Apart', *Science* 9: 485–6.

Boas, Franz (1887c)
'Museums of Ethnology and their Classification', *Science* 9: 614.

Boas, Franz (1895)
'Human Faculty as Determined by Race', *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science* 43: 301–27.

Boas, Franz (1907)
'The Anthropological Position of the Negro', Van Norden Magazine April: 42–7.

Boas, Franz (1909)
'Industries of African Negroes', *Southern Workman* 38: 217–29.

Boas, Franz (1910)
'The Real Race Problem', *The Crisis* 1(5): 22–5.

Boas, Franz (1911)
The Mind of Primitive Man. New York: Macmillan.

Boas, Franz (1974)
'Commencement Address for Atlanta University', *Atlanta, University Leaflet* (No. 9), in G. Stocking (ed.) *A Franz Boas Reader*, pp. 310–16. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Orig. 1906.)

Boas, Franz and Clark Wissler (1905)
'The Statistics of Growth', in *Report of The U.S. Commissioner of Education for 1904*, pp. 25–132. Washington, DC.

Brinton, Daniel G. (1890)
Races and Peoples. New York: Hodges.

Brinton, Daniel G. (1896)
'The Aims of Anthropology', *Popular Science Monthly* 48(1): 59–72.

Drake, St Clair (1980)
'Anthropology and the Black Experience', *Black Scholar* 11(7): 2–31.

Drake, St Clair and Horace R. Cayton (1962)
Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City. New York, Torch Books. (Orig. 1945.)

Du Bois, William E.B. (1967)
The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study. New York: Schocken Books. (Orig. 1899.)

Du Bois, William E.B. (1986a)
'Dusk of Dawn', in N. Huggins (ed.) *Du Bois Writings*, pp. 349–703. New York: Library of America. (Orig. 1943.)
Du Bois, William E.B. (1986b)
'The Souls of Black Folk', in N. Huggins (ed.) *Du Bois Writings*, pp. 357–547. New York: Library of America. (Orig. 1903.)
Duncan, David (1908)
The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer. New York: D. Appleton.
Franklin, John Hope (1974)
From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans, 4th edn. New York: Knopf.
Haller, John S., Jr (1971)
'Race and the Concept of Progress in Nineteenth Century American Ethnology', *American Anthropologist* 73: 710–22.
Harrison, Faye V. (1992)
'The Du Boisian Legacy in Anthropology', *Critique of Anthropology* 12(3): 239–60.
Harrison, Faye V. and Donald Nonini (1992)
'Introduction to W.E.B. Du Bois and Anthropology', *Critique of Anthropology* 12(3): 229–37.
Herskovits, Melville Jean (1953)
Franz Boas: The Science of Man in the Making. New York: Scribner.
Higham, John (1970)
Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism. New York: Atheneum.
Hofstadter, Richard (1955)
Social Darwinism in American Thought. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
Huggins, Nathan Irvin (1971)
Harlem Renaissance. New York: Oxford University Press.
Hyatt, Marshal (1985)
'Franz Boas and the Struggle for Black Equality: The Dynamics of Ethnicity', in *Perspectives in American History* New Series (2), pp. 269–95. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Hyatt, Marshal (1990)
Franz Boas: Social Activist. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
Jackson, Walter (1990)
Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
Logan, Rayford, W. (1972)
The Betrayal of the Negro. New York: Collier Books. (Orig. 1954.)
Kluger, Richard (1976)
Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education. New York: Knopf.
Meier, August, F. L. Broderick and E. Rudwick (1971)
Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
Monteiro, Anthony (1990)
'Harvesting the Literary Legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois', *Political Affairs* June: 22–7.

Myrdal, Gunner (1944)
An American Dilemma. New York: Harper and Row.
Ovington, Mary White (1911)
Half a Man: the Status of the Negro in New York. New York: Schocken Books.
Popular Science Monthly (1894)
'Are Civilized Races Superior?', *Popular Science Monthly* 46(4): 568.
Popular Science Monthly (1896)
'The Present Position of Anthropology', *Popular Science Monthly* 48(1): 122–4.
Putnam, Carelton (1967)
Race and Reality: A Search for Solutions. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press.
Rudwick, Elliot (1982)
W.E.B. Du Bois: Voice of the Black Protest Movement. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
Rydell, Robert W. (1984)
All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Stepan, Nancy Leys and Sander L. Gilman (1991)
'Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism', in D. LaCarpa (ed.) *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, pp. 73–103. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Stocking, George W. (1968)
Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology. New York: Free Press.
Thomas, William I. and Florian Znaniecki (1918)
The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Tillman, Benjamin R. (1907)
'The Race Question', *Van Norden Magazine* April: 19–28.
Washington, Booker T. (1902)
Up From Slavery. New York: Doubleday. (Orig. 1901.)
Woodson, Carter G. (1966)
The Negro in Our History, 11th ed. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers.

TELOS

A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought

Since its appearance in May 1968, *Telos* has introduced into the English-speaking world the best of continental thought and tackled major international issues. Committed to the development of an *American* Critical Theory, *Telos* analyzes American and international questions from a broad geopolitical perspective.

Issue No. 96 *Summer 1993*

Special Section On Russia

Articles

Notes and Reviews

Subscriptions cost $32 per year (four issues) for individuals; $80 for institutions. Foreign and Canadian orders add 15%. Checks must be in US funds drawn on US banks. No Canadian checks will be accepted. Back issues are $9.50 each (institutions pay $25). Back issues available: 13, 17-18, 20-51, 53-95. For subscription, back issues or information, write:

Telos Press Ltd., 431 E. 12th Street, New York NY 10009