



# Franz Boas out of the ivory tower

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## Abstract

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, pulled, or better yet, dragged into the public debates on race, racism, nationalism, and war – the issues for which he used anthropology in public arenas. In this article, I seek to accomplish three tasks: first, to highlight how Franz Boas and his work got pulled into the public arena; second, to assess the impact of Boas' work as a public intellectual; and finally, to discuss the ways Boas' writing and research a century ago is being deployed, appropriated, and used in today's public arenas.

## Key Words

Franz Boas • history of anthropology • public intellectual • white supremacy

Franz Boas is making news – again. In October 2002, Corey Sparks and Richard Jantz reported in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* that Boas published erroneous conclusions in his pivotal work *Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants* (1910), which was the landmark study that proved critical in undermining the idea of racial typologies and rigid racial categories. The two authors reanalyzed Boas' statistical findings generated from measurements taken from a sample population of nearly 18,000 New York City immigrants and their children, thus explicitly challenging the empirical foundation of Boas' influential study. *Changes in Bodily Form* was the first authoritative text documenting biological plasticity and it has been routinely cited as evidence that the environment plays an integral role in cranial plasticity and the morphology of so-called racial types (Gravlee et al., 2003: 125). Sparks and Jantz concluded that 'reanalysis of Boas' data not only fails to support his [Boas'] contention that cranial plasticity is a primary source of cranial variation but rather supports what morphologists and morphometricians have known for a long time: most of the variation is genetic variation' (Sparks and Jantz, 2002: 14637).

The same day that the National Academy reported Sparks and Jantz's findings, the *New York Times* ran an article titled 'A New Look at Old Data May Discredit a Theory on Race' (Wade, 2002), which prompted a flurry of email, discussion, and commentary

from a range of divergent perspectives (e.g. Francis, 2002; Holloway, 2002). Independently, Clarence C. Gravlee, H. Russell Bernard, and William R. Leonard reanalyzed Boas' data on immigrant bodies. They reported their findings in the *American Anthropologist*.<sup>1</sup> Gravlee and his colleagues concluded: 'on the whole, Boas was right, despite the limited analytical tools at his disposal' (Gravlee et al., 2003: 125).<sup>2</sup> Associated Press quickly syndicated a story about the dissimilar findings and *Science* ran an article aptly titled 'Going Head-to-Head Over Boas's Data' (Holden, 2002). Debating Franz Boas' research, writing, and his role in early US anthropology is nothing new. Regna Darnell has observed that

Virtually continuously since his death in 1942, North American anthropologists have been obsessed with the role of Franz Boas. Although none have denied his disciplinary hegemony for most of the past century, assessments have ranged from anti-theoretical villain to beloved teacher beyond criticism to institutional and intellectual founder of the contemporary four-field discipline. Boas' scholarship is highly intertextual; anthropologists who are not disciplinary historians follow it avidly. (Darnell, 2000: 896)

Regna Darnell's perceptive observation that the scholarship about Boas 'is highly intertextual' extends beyond the genres of academic scholarship to include the public discourse about Boas. Commentary, discussion, and 'news' about Boas and his research have never been anchored exclusively to academic genres. In many respects, the frontiers of Boas' research and writing shift and expand in the same way that

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. (Foucault, 1974: 23)

This relationship between text and context outside the academy has far-reaching implications, but it is rarely addressed in the scholarship about Boas. Much of the history of anthropological theory documents debates within the field or within the academy, but more attention needs to be paid to the way the public has consumed anthropology, often championing its virtues or punishing it in pillory (see also di Leonardo, 1998).

In the United States, the anthropological imaginary and notions of race and culture continue to captivate Americans' ideological investments in identity. Anthropology's professional purview includes descriptions of the 'other' and assessments of race and culture, so it is not surprising that partisan critics set up anthropologists and the research they conduct in a way that provides rhetorical purchase for arguments that bolster ideological agendas.

By articulating George W. Stocking's historiographic principle of carefully selecting, framing, and developing vignettes or historical case studies, I hope to sketch outlines for broader questions about the way anthropology is deployed outside the academy in an effort to attain a better context for understanding the role anthropology has played in the overall history of ideas.<sup>3</sup> 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 debates on race, racism, nationalism, and

war – the issues for which he used anthropology in public arenas.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I seek to accomplish three tasks: first, to highlight how Franz Boas and his work were pulled into the public arena by using what Stocking calls microscopic analysis; second, to assess the impact of Boas' work as a public intellectual; and finally, to discuss the ways Boas' writing and research a century ago are being deployed, appropriated, and used in today's public arenas.

Generally, 'public intellectuals' are those academics who help shape public policy, public opinion, or popular science. However, the very notion of 'a public' is both contested and amorphous. Beyond questioning what constitutes a public, I also want to raise several open-ended questions. Can academics become public intellectuals as a result of vociferous detractors? And what can we learn about the impact of Boas' scholarship by exploring the public discourse that derides it?

In the past decade, the role of the 'public intellectual' has become an important cog in an information-saturated global economy. There is an increasingly close relationship between the rising influence of public intellectuals and media producers' reliance on 'experts' to provide pithy sound bites on the nightly news, Cable News Network, or National Public Radio. Often via satellite hookup, public intellectuals bring academic and frequently unconventional ideas to bear upon urgent issues, conveniently packaging them for public consumption. Through presidential addresses, articles in *Anthropology News*, and sessions at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, a consensus has emerged in some quarters that the survival of anthropology is contingent upon anthropologists' ability to contribute to public arenas (Peacock, 1997: 12).

Since the mid-19th century, popular science and public intellectuals have played an important role in the popular culture of the USA. For much of this history, anthropologists have had quite a venerable history of using anthropology in the public interest. One need only evoke the names of Ashley Montagu, James Mooney, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Melville Herskovits, Gene Weltfish, or Otto Klineberg to secure anthropology's place in the landscape of American history. Most students of intellectual history link *this* history to that of Franz Boas' efforts to engage broad audiences (Baker, 1994; Barkan, 1988; Beardsley, 1973; Hyatt, 1990; Stocking, 1960; Williams, 1996).

Franz Boas was a public intellectual, but he did not rise to prominence as such because he wrote for popular audiences or was a compelling orator. Prior to 1905, he only produced research and texts for colleagues at scholarly institutions. Although Boas did not venture beyond academic circles early in his career, this did not preclude his participation in public arenas. I have identified two cases depicting Boas' first bouts with public audiences; these cases involve two writers who wrote about Franz Boas and his work within the frame of sensationalist papers and tawdry tracts – the public discourse of the Progressive Era. These cases document how certain individuals launched viperous attacks on Boas and his academic work, but also document Boas' rather muted response. Austin P. Cristy launched the first attack in 1891, which happens to be directly related to the current debate over Boas' data today. The other was by William B. Smith in 1905.

### THE CALIPER QUESTION

In 1889, G. Stanley Hall hired the inaugural faculty of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Franz Boas was hired as part of a stellar team of scientists and researchers

at Clark, which sought to rival Johns Hopkins as the nation's leading research university. Serving as a docent and teaching twice as much as his colleagues on the regular faculty, Boas launched an aggressive program researching growth and racial plasticity to complement his ongoing research in ethnography and folklore (Cole, 1999: 137–9).

After a decade and a half of experiments, measurements, and careful documentation that took him from Oakland to Toronto, Boas began challenging some basic assumptions of physical anthropology while advancing biostatistics in the United States (Camic and Xie, 1994). These efforts culminated in a major study Boas conducted between 1908 and 1910 for the US Immigration Commission and published as *Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants* (1912). In it, he demonstrated that the environment played a significant role in determining physical attributes, like head size, which were so often used to demarcate racial difference (Stocking, 1974: 189–90).

The method and preliminary findings for this study were conducted at Clark in 1891. When Boas arrived in Worcester to begin his teaching career, the city had a population of just less than 80,000. From its bucolic dairy and produce farms to its bustling business district and factories, the city was a major hub of the industrial revolution. Inhabited by blue bloods from some of New England's best families, but rapidly populated by immigrants from Europe and Canada, Boas arrived during a tumultuous period. The city's industrial might centered around a successful wire and machine manufacturing industry that spawned subsequent industry and services to produce, among other things, thousands of miles of barbed wire shipped to the west for fencing (Southwick, 1998: 37–42). Although the metal and machine trades predominated, there was no single industry that dominated and many independent industries made Worcester its home – textiles, boots and shoes, paper products, to name a few. 'In the US Census of Manufacturers, the category "other" perennially led the list of Worcester's industries' (Rosenzweig, 1983: 12).

As factories belched black smoke from hundreds of stacks across the city, workers poured into the city to fill the need for labor. In subsequent waves of immigration, beginning with French and English Canadians in 1860, the population of Worcester grew sixfold between the 1840s and 1890s. By the mid-1890s, one-third of the population was foreign born. Most of the immigrants were from Ireland, Sweden, and Canada, but there were sizeable communities of Armenians, Poles, Lithuanians, Syrians, Finns, Norwegians, Assyrians, Germans, Danes, Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Italians, and Albanians as well (Southwick, 1998: 38).

Although Worcester's ethnic and religious diversity was unmatched by any inland city of its size, the gulf between factory workers and the educated and moneyed elite was typical of many industrializing cities of the 1890s (Gutman, 1973: 571–85). As a result of (or perhaps because of) Worcester's diversified industries, the gulf between ethnic groups within the working class was atypical of industrializing cities of the 1890s. Segregated by language, occupation, leisure activities, and religion, each ethnic group worked, worshiped, and lived *together*, rarely reaching across ethnic lines or bridging language barriers. As a result, union activity was limited and the Knights of Labor could not organize effectively. Historian Roy Rosenzweig has carefully outlined these dynamics.

On the one hand, ethnic divisions militated against class-wide mobilization of workers in trade unions or political parties. . . . Consequently, the insularity and separatism of the immigrant communities limited immigrant working-class influence

over economic or political issues. On the other hand, these ethnic enclaves . . . provided a refuge and resource for those who confronted the unemployment, poverty, disease, and accidents that accompanied life and work in industrializing America. (Rosenzweig, 1983: 31)

Worcester's factory owners fostered and manipulated this segregation by favoritism, paternalism, and ruthless labor practices. Town boosters even used the city's great 'number of nationalities' as a pitch to attract new business. An advertisement sponsored by the local board of trade, for example, explained that Worcester was a great place to locate a new factory because 'these nationalities do not affiliate, [and] concerted efforts for promoting strikes, labor unions, and similar movements among the working class become impossible' (quoted in Rosenzweig, 1983: 24). Along with this diversity came bitter political contests, aggressive assertion of ethnic interests, and a bevy of well-disciplined and politically savvy social and civic clubs, temperance societies and parish churches, each organized along ethnic lines. Among poor and working-class Yankees, however, a long tradition of anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant hatred found an institutional home first in the Know-Nothing Party, but later in the American Protective Association and the Ku Klux Klan (Meagher, 2001: 138, 309; Southwick, 1998: 58).

With an array of immigrants and a public school system that counted half of its student body as 'foreign-born' or 'children of immigrants', Boas had at his disposal an ideal laboratory with which to gather data on patterns of growth from people with a wide range of backgrounds (Southwick, 1998: 38). With a proposal to study patterns of children's growth, Boas quietly secured the permission of the Worcester school committee to set up a small station in each school for 'measuring' children. As a public service, Boas also proposed testing the hearing and eyesight of each child from which he took head, girth, and height measurements (*Worcester Daily Telegram*, 3 April 1891). Although he had ideal subjects to measure, the ability to measure them proved less than ideal.

His modest program, modeled after the studies conducted by Henry P. Bowditch in Boston's public schools (1877), alarmed some parents because they did not understand exactly what he was going to measure and why. To assuage any 'misapprehension [that] exists regarding measurements', Boas printed a circular distributed to all the parents detailing the purpose of the measurements, which had the 'object of getting data regarding growth of the head, growth of the brain, [and] growth of the bodies with questions as to nationality, occupation of parents, numbers of brothers and sisters, etc.'. He carefully explained to a reporter from the *Worcester Daily Telegram* (*WDT*) that he did not 'desire to measure any child against its own wish or the will of his parents' (*WDT* 7 March 1891).

This initial study of school children, which served as a foundation for his seminal work in physical anthropology, was almost derailed by Austin P. Cristy, the acerbic publisher of the *Worcester Daily Telegram* – Worcester's most popular daily. 'Franz Boas, the man who has received from the school board the open sesame to the anatomies of the public school children of the city', the *Telegram* reported, 'must have been a scrapper from way back'. The paper described how, 'he has scars on his face and head that would make a jailbird turn green with envy. His scalp is seared with saber cuts, and slashes over his eyes, on his nose, and on one cheek from mouth to ear, [which] give his countenance

an appearance which is not generally considered au fait, outside the criminal class' (*WDT* 5 March 1891). Cristy sarcastically asked parents, how they would 'enjoy the hero of German duels feeling their sons' and daughters' heads and bodies over, just as he did those of the Eskimaux' (*WDT* 5 March 1891). On a more sanguine note, Cristy reported: 'The chances are if Franz Boas, PhD Kiel, should enter one of the schools, the boys – as soon as they recognize his battle scarred visage – will draw their pea-shooters with one accord and annihilate him with a volley' (*WDT* 7 March 1891).<sup>5</sup>

It is unclear exactly what motivated Cristy's attack. Did he want to protect the human subjects? Was he concerned about what Boas would discover? Did he know about other anthropologists' findings and believe Boas would reproduce racial hierarchies within the immigrant population? What is known is that Cristy routinely exploited several cross-cutting tensions within the city in order to fuel the circulation of his paper.

Editorially, Cristy's paper was hostile to immigrants and labor, but the paper also had an anti-elitist bent. His target audience was native-born working-class white men and women who voted Republican. Working-class Yankees who voted Republican usually identified with the elite, seeking social mobility through the fraternal organizations and Protestant churches their bosses and employers frequented (Rosenzweig, 1983: 86). In his bid to increase circulation and articulate his anti-elitist position, however, his reporters often covered developments important to Worcester's ethnic and working-class communities (Rosenzweig, 1983: 291).

This was not the first time that Cristy had targeted the faculty at Clark University to articulate his agendas. In 1890, the *Telegram* had launched a bombastic and graphic antivivisectionist campaign detailing laboratory experiments conducted on animals at the university. The paper was sending a clear message that the new university was not welcome in Worcester (Koelsch, 1987: 34). At this time too, there was a power struggle going on within the school committee, which pitted the superintendent, Albert Marble, who was sympathetic to the interests of Irish and Catholics, against 'loyalist republicans' who organized to oust him (Meagher, 2001: 223). Whatever the motivation of the paper, it now targeted Boas and his proposal to measure the thighs of the town's schoolgirls (Cole, 1999: 142). Although the editor caused a stir, the majority of school committee members continued to support Boas. After all, this was the age of science and they were not going to let a provincial publisher get in the way of progress. Members of the school committee stood by their decision to provide Boas the opportunity and facility with which to measure students' bodies, and they spoke out against Cristy's efforts to derail scientific research.

The committee's major concerns included the fact that the *Telegram* did 'not give them an opportunity to demonstrate the wisdom and value' of the research, did not reflect the views of the 'large majority of the best people of the city who approve of the action of the school committee', and finally, did 'not fairly reflect the prevailing public sentiment in opposing the measurements' (*WDT* 15 April 1891). Cristy railed against each charge, noting that his paper printed the written 'opinions or letters of those with whom it differs', and 'not a line attempting to demonstrate the wisdom or value of the proposed measure has been offered to the *Telegram* for publication'. As for 'correctly reflecting public sentiment', Cristy lamented, 'the *Telegram* don't pretend to try to; it reflects its own "sentiment" to a hair and that is all the "sentiment" it ever pretends to "reflect".' Cristy was particularly upset with the charge that he should report the views of 'the

majority of the best people in the city [who] supported the school committee'. He clarified that 'The *Telegram* is not very well posted as to "best people"; it don't take much stock in "best people", anyway' (*WDT* 15 April 1891).

Although Cristy was explicit that 'The *Telegram* does not believe that anything like a majority . . . approve' of the board's action, he decided to give the committee 'a chance to demonstrate the *Telegram* is mistaken', by giving '“public opinion” a chance to “reflect” itself' (*WDT* 15 April, 1891).

In an article headlined '*Telegram* Offers All a Chance to Vote on Boas Measurements', Cristy argued that 'the only known way to get anything like the sentiment of a community is by voting. Therefore, vote and find out how Worcester stands.'

There is but one way to get the facts; if the measurers and their friends have got the public sentiment they boast of, let them say so in votes. If the opponents of the scheme are the more numerous or sufficiently numerous to be entitled to immunity from having any such outside enterprise thrust upon the school system – let them say so in votes. . . . The votes, 'yes', or 'no', must be written upon a ballot printed in the *Telegram* and sent by mail, or brought to the *Telegram* office. Everybody buys the paper anyway. . . . The *Telegram* has always advocated female suffrage, and mothers as well as fathers and all teachers and all school pupils and all others can vote during this expression of the sentiment of all the people. School committeemen and docents can vote, also. Prepare your ballots! (*WDT* 15 April 1891)

Cristy's timing could not have been better, and Boas' timing could not have been worse. After several fits and starts, Boas went forward with his plan for measuring eighth and ninth graders in the Woodland Street School on 16 April 1891, the day after Cristy printed the ballots and called for the vote.

Cristy, of course, shouldered the press' responsibility as community watchdog and dispatched one of his reporters to the school to write 'a detailed description of the way they do it'. The *Telegram* reported, 'Docent Boas and his two assistants, Docent G.M. West and Mr. A.F. Chamberlain of Clark University . . . arrived before 8:30 o'clock.' The reporter detailed how the scientists used their 'paraphernalia', which included calipers, sheet lead, paper, a square box, a 'machine for measuring the strength of the eyes', and a 'chart used for detecting astigmatism of the eyes'. While the reporter detailed what Boas measured, he was more concerned with how he measured – especially the girls.

The reporter watched carefully as Boas and his assistant weighed and measured children. The *Telegram* reported the entire process, which began by the student answering questions about nationality, age, color of eyes and so on. 'Next the docent took a small strip of sheet lead, a quarter of an inch in thickness, and, telling the subject to shut the eyes, leaving the impression [of the nose] in the soft lead' (*WDT* 17 April 1891). The paper painted Boas as a lecherous foreigner who pawed at the bodies of innocent girls with 'a hand that fooled around the topknots of medicine men and toyed with the war paint of bloodthirsty Indians' (*WDT* 5 March 1891).

'Please remove the shoes', was the next request. This did not trouble the boys, but when there were two girls and one boy together with Docent West and a [*Telegram*] reporter in the little room . . . the reporter noticed the girls, young ladies, rather, of



15 or 16 years, glance from one to the other hesitatingly before removing the shoes and appearing in stockings.

There was more removing, too. The young ladies who had long hair braided and knotted on the back part of the head had to take it down, and hair-pins and ribbon had to be removed. Then the subjects were ready for Docent Boas and his calipers . . . Those calipers of Docent Boas's are triple-jointed affairs, made of cold steel. One end of the cold steel Docent Boas put in amongst the young lady's back hair till it rested on the extreme point of the occiput. Then he closed them together over the top of the head till the other end rested on the middle of the forehead. (*WDT* 17 April 1891)

The votes and editorials began to pour into the offices of the *Daily Telegram*. After the first day of voting, there were 870 'No' votes and only 11 votes affirming Boas' research. Quickly deemed the 'caliper question', editorials proposed 'giving Mr. Boaz [sic.] a new suit of clothes made of tar and feathers, and a free ride on a rail . . . to the wharf where he can get a nice whiff of sea air as he returns to the land of his nativity' (*WDT* 17 April 1891).

Although Boas was 'fed up with the whole thing',<sup>6</sup> he was unmoved by the popular sentiment reflected in the paper and continued to measure children for whom he had received written permission slips. Apparently, Boas and his measurements were more popular than Cristy and his paper would have the public believe. As the weeks wore on, 80 per cent of the permission slips given to the schoolchildren were returned with the signatures of their parents (Cole, 1999: 143, cf. *WDT* 23 April 1891). However, the support of the parents and enthusiasm of the students did not square with overwhelming opposition for the measurements voiced by the public. On 12 May 1891, Cristy reported the final tally on the caliper question, 'Shall Docent Boas and "his assistants" measure the public school pupils of Worcester?' It stood at 15,116 'No' and 345 'Yes'. Yet Boas was none the less able to measure hundreds of children with their parents' consent. Cristy's grand scheme to derail Boas' research ultimately backfired, but not without a thorough investigation by a newspaper reporter.

Cristy sent out reporters to investigate the discrepancy between public opinion as measured by his poll and the success of Boas' data collection. For the teenagers of Worcester, being measured by an exotic man with unusual instruments, while raising the ire of parents and the press alike, became fashionable and irresistible. In an article that was headlined 'Parents Send "No" Votes But Sign Permission Blanks', the paper explained that 'a great number' of children 'beg their parents' permission to have the measurements made. . . . "My boy teased me so much to let Docent Boas measure him", said a parent yesterday, "that I signed the blank presented for the purpose, although I am opposed to the measurements and have voted 'no' in the *Telegram's* vote contest" ' (*WDT* 23 April 1891). 'When a reporter asked [some boys from a local baseball team] if they had been measured, they said they had and that they liked it first rate. "I've voted, too", said one of them. "So has pa and ma." "What did you vote?" queried the reporter. "I voted 'no' and so did all of us. But we like to get measured all the same because it is such fun".' The reporter continued:

The pupils of the lowest grades are having even more fun out of Docent Boas than those of the higher grades. The youngsters haven't the slightest idea whether they are



being sized up according to the requirements of the Shamanistic rites with which Docent Boas is conversant, or to furnish statistics for gumdrop manufacturers. They wink and blink at the shining calipers and cabalistic measuring beam, and step on the scales as if they were going to receive a stick of candy at the conclusion of the examination. All the while they keep up a huge expression of merriment and, the thought of studies and recitation never enters their heads. (*WDT* 23 April 1891)

So thanks in large measure to the indiscretion of Worcester teens, Boas was able to circumvent the ‘power of the press’ and the putative ‘will of the people’, to conduct a pilot study that laid an important foundation for his efforts to challenge the science of the body in the late 19th century.

### **A BRIEF ON BEHALF OF THE UNBORN**

As the 19th century closed, Boas was establishing his leadership in the field and moving anthropology in new directions. Content with organizational leadership and debating with scholars via scholarly publications and association meetings, Boas remained focused on contributing to the academic arena. By the turn of the century, Boas was trying to move anthropology beyond the comparative method and rigid racial topologies. As early as 1894 he addressed the so-called ‘Negro problem’ by bringing together his critique of the comparative method and his understanding that one could not prove racial inferiority. Titled ‘Human Faculty as Determined by Race’, Boas gave this paper at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and it was subsequently published in its annals (Boas, 1895). One could safely say it did not get wide circulation.<sup>7</sup> However, this essay formed important scaffolding for *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), which did get wide circulation. A full decade after Boas presented ‘Human Faculty’, William Benjamin Smith gave it national attention when he subjected it to a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis in an effort to ‘refute it thoroughly’ (Smith, 1905: xi).

In Smith’s popular book, *The Color Line: A Brief on Behalf of the Unborn*, he committed an entire chapter to challenging Boas’ 1894 address to the AAAS, calling it ‘by far the ablest plea yet made for the “backward races”’.<sup>8</sup> Smith framed his book by asking and then answering what he saw as a central question:

*Is the South justified in this absolute denial of social equality to the Negro, no matter what his virtues or abilities or accomplishments? We affirm, then, that the South is entirely right in thus keeping open at all times, at all hazards, and at all sacrifices an impassable social chasm between Black and White. This she must do in [sic] behalf of her blood, her essence, of the stock of her Caucasian Race. (Smith, 1905: 7, emphasis original)*

William Benjamin Smith (1850–1934) was one of many early 20th-century hucksters of white supremacy who peddled, to rich and poor alike, ideological and scientific rationales for lynching, defamation, and the subjugation of the ‘lesser races’. Although he practiced science in the lyceum tradition, he was no amateur. W.B. Smith was the chair of the Mathematics Department at Tulane University, an active participant in the social and intellectual circles of New Orleans, and wrote on a wide range of topics for

both the scholarly and popular press. Such topics included international trade, disease, and the origins of Christianity. Smith also labored for years producing a line-by-line translation in dactylic hexameters of *The Iliad of Homer* (Cattell and Brimhall, 1921: 641; Smith and Miller, 1944; <http://indigo.lib.lsu.edu/la/s.html>).

Smith's 1905 'Brief on Behalf of the Unborn' had far-reaching and lasting influence. In 1916, attorneys for the state of Kentucky used it as scientific proof of Negro inferiority when they argued the constitutionality of Louisville's residential segregation before the Supreme Court in *Buchanan v. Warley*, 1917 (Bernstein, 1998: 849). In 1931, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints used it to scientifically defend their belief in the racial inferiority of Negroes (Roberts, 1931: 231–3). And in 1947, Mississippi Senator Theodore G. Bilbo featured it prominently as a scientific source in his invective tract *Take Your Choice; Separation or Mongrelization* (1947). Today, William B. Smith is cited as an authority on websites like 'Imperial Klans of America', outlining how interracial dating will ultimately destroy the white race (*Interracial dating*, 2003: <http://www.k-k-k.com/story.html>).

Smith wrote his book about the color line in the South during the first decade of the 20th century. Awash in racial tension that simply translated into the brutal oppression and repression of African Americans, the omnipresent color line was circumscribed by Jim Crow segregation, disfranchisement, poor sanitary conditions, and little to no wage work. The rationale for the color line had to be constantly described and inscribed by the rich and poor whites who had a stake in perpetuating split-labor markets, hobbling the Republican party, and maintaining the 'Southern way of life'.

The mass media played an integral role in shoring up the ideological demarcation of the color line. Technological advancements and rising literacy rates increased the circulation and decreased the prices of magazines, newspapers, and books. By 1905, stereotypes that had previously been reinforced by folklore or expensive texts were now voraciously consumed by the public in the mass media.

In his 'Brief on Behalf of the Unborn', Smith explored one 'of the most important questions that is likely to engage the attention of the American People for many years and even generations to come' (Smith, 1905: ix). Like the latter-day authors of *The Bell Curve*, he framed his study by suggesting he had made every 'effort to make the whole discussion purely scientific, an ethnological inquiry, undisturbed by any partisan or political influence' (Smith, 1905: x). Smith used what he called 'ethnological principles' to defend the South's rigid color line, explaining 'that *in the South* the colour line must be drawn firmly, unflinchingly – without deviation or interruption of any kind whatever' (Smith, 1905: 5, emphasis original).

Smith was unequivocal 'that the Negro is markedly inferior to the Caucasian [and, it] is proved both craniologically and by six thousand years of planet-wide experimentation; and that the commingling of the inferior with superior must lower the higher is just as certain as that the half-sum of two and six is only four' (Smith, 1905: 12). Like many politicians, tycoons, and Supreme Court justices at the turn of the century, he turned to Social Darwinianism to rest his case (Baker, 1998: 54–81).

If accepted science teaches anything at all, it teaches that the heights of being in civilized man have been reached along one path and one only – the path of selection, of the preservation of favoured individuals and of favoured races. . . . It is idle to

talk of education and civilization and the like as corrective or compensative agencies. All are weak and beggarly as over against the almightiness of heredity, the omnipotence of the transmitted germ-plasma (Smith, 1905: 13). . . . If this be not true, then history and biology are alike false; then Darwin and Spencer, Haeckel and Weismann, Mendel and Pearson, have lived and laboured in vain. (Smith, 1905: 14)

Smith carefully laid out his argument, although it was not necessarily a novel one. He recycled the same rationales that had been routinized in American popular culture and reified within scientific literature. He trotted out accounts about cranial capacity, arrested development of children, and higher rates of crime, immorality, and disease (all of which were linked). He devoted much of the book to depicting the horrors of miscegenation and how ‘mulattos’ receive the worst traits of both races. He couched these dire straits in terms of ‘the race instinct’ and ‘blood purity’ and warned: ‘The moment the bar of absolute separation is thrown down in the South, that moment the bloom of her spirit is blighted forever . . . the idea of the race is far more sacred than that of the family. It is, in fact, the most sacred thing on earth’ (Smith, 1905: 10). Smith really believed he was acting as a scientist, as did many of his readers. Charles Ellwood, for example, highlighted the book’s polemic style in a review for the *American Journal of Sociology*, but he emphasized that Smith’s style ‘should not be permitted to obscure its value as a contribution to the study of the Negro problem in the United States’ (Ellwood, 1906: 570).

As a good scientist, Smith wanted to test his theories against the strongest counter-arguments. He believed, and perhaps rightfully so, that Franz Boas’ ‘Human Faculty’ offered the most prestigious and best defense of people of color within the then current discourse on race. Smith’s whole argument rested on the notion that Africans and African Americans were the most inferior of the races both anatomically and culturally. He sought to ‘prove’ that sub-Saharan Africans had no art, religion, philosophy, or morality and West Africans in particular had never demonstrated ‘even one single aspect of civilization or culture or higher humanity’ (Smith, 1905: 32).

Smith titled the chapter in which he challenged Boas ‘Plea and Counter Plea’, and opened it by noting: ‘This distinguished anthropologist, now of Columbia University, New York City, speaks from the pinnacles of science, and his words must not go unregarded. We shall notice every salient point in his twenty-six pages . . . such a formal defense seems to call for an equally formal rejoinder’ (Smith, 1905: 111). Smith cited Nott and Gliddon, De Gobineau, and Quattrefages, to challenge Boas’ two major claims in ‘Human Faculty’: that various peoples contributed to each major civilization, and that the evidence is not conclusive that certain races are inferior to others.

Although Smith exempted the ‘present backward races’, he concurred with Boas that different races contributed to various forms of civilization (1905: 113). While Boas viewed the so-called ‘contribution’ of one race as just as important as the contribution of another towards a civilization, Smith questioned:

But to all in equal measure? Or to some in far higher measure? That is the question. We must not think of the Senate, where all states vote alike; but of the House of Representatives, where ‘Little Rhody’ vanishes by the side of New York or Texas. Even if all races did contribute to the sum total, which is far from true, there is an immense

difference between contributions that may vary from a penny to a pound. (Smith, 1905: 115)

Smith dismissed Boas as 'a penny wise, and a pound foolish' (1905: 21), and suggested that 'the savant has been unscientific in his procedure; he has gone too far; he has thrown out the baby with the bath' (1905: 131).

Smith's 'Brief on Behalf of the Unborn' simply mirrored that of many earlier 20th-century pundits. Yet Smith effectively dragged Boas out of the halls of the academy, where gentleman scholars discussed cultural diffusion and Inca ruins in scholarly tomes, and into the streets, where reformers and racists vociferously debated the 'problem of the Negro' in sensational monthlies and newspapers. According to William S. Willis, the impact of Smith's chapter on Boas was twofold: it introduced Boas' work to reformers and scholars engaged in so-called racial uplift, and it formed the basis for lasting labels. Some quickly labeled Boas a 'nigger lover', but others viewed him as a much-needed 'friend of the Negro'.<sup>9</sup>

In the wake of Smith's incendiary text, Boas published his first article about African Americans in a popular magazine. In the autumn of 1905, Boas wrote 'The Negro and the Demands of Modern Life: Ethnic and Anatomical Considerations' for the 7 October issue of *Charities*, which was a special volume addressing Negro migration. A modified version of the article that Smith had challenged, it was sandwiched between W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Mary White Ovington – the reformer who initially organized the NAACP (Boas, 1905). From that point forward, Boas was identified as an important scholar who could be called upon to help 'uplift the race'. W.E.B. Du Bois wasted no time. Four days after that issue of *Charities* was published, Du Bois wrote Boas a letter inviting him to Atlanta University to address a conference scheduled for May of the following year (Du Bois to Boas 1905, 11 October).<sup>10</sup> That letter, on the heels of Boas' article in *Charities*, which came on the heels of Smith's effort to attack Boas' work, was the beginning of a long and profitable relationship between Du Bois and Boas and the endeavors they pursued (Baker, 1994).

### A MATTER OF TIME

It is perhaps significant that Boas' preliminary research for both *Changes in Bodily Form* and *The Mind of Primitive Man* precipitated his debut as a public intellectual or an intellectual for which the public held interest, albeit hostile interest. Of his hundreds of books, manuscripts, and essays, it was basically these two books that had the most impact on American history.

It was quite literally just a 'matter of time' before most Americans would begin to recognize the inherent contradictions in the science underwriting much of the ideology of white supremacy, racial inferiority, and the belief in the superiority of 'civilization'. Although it took two world wars, and protracted campaigns both in and outside the academy by intellectuals of color, people eventually incorporated Boas' work on race and culture into the paradigm shift that forever eclipsed at least mainstream views 'that certain racial groups were inherently inferior or superior' (Baker, 1998: 125–6).

Although it is easy to memorialize the venerable 'Papa Franz', Leslie White was correct when he stated that 'many scholars regarded Boas as great because "everyone" acclaimed him as great. His reputation grew like a rolling snowball' (White, 1947: 373). In an

effort not to pass down another ‘origin myth’, it is prudent to assess the role of Boas’ impact on the public beyond the scope of sympathetic anthropologists or Manhattan intellectuals. Therefore, let us fast forward to the end of Boas’ career.

In May of 1936, an aged Franz Boas graced the cover of *Time Magazine*. It was a distinction few anthropologists past or present have received, and it served as a testament, in Boas’ own words, to his ‘task of weaning the people from a complacent yielding to prejudice, and help[ing] them to the power of clear thought, so that they may be able to understand the problems that confront all of us’ (Boas, 1945: 2). The cover story begins with a brief description of the various fields in anthropology and highlights the careers of Sir James Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl, ‘Harvard’s Hooton’, and ‘The Smithsonian Institution’s famed Ales Hrdlicka’. The article explained that

Franz Boas got into anthropology 53 years ago. He has invaded almost every branch of this science: linguistics, primitive mentality, folklore, ethnology, growth and senility, [and] the physical effects of environment. He reminds his colleagues of the old-time family doctor who did everything from delivering babies to pulling teeth. (‘Environmentalist’, 1936: 37)

The story highlighted several key contributions Boas made as a public figure and as a formidable, but controversial, scholar in the field. It was careful to note, however, ‘by no means do all anthropologists share Dr. Boas’ belief in the tremendous physical influence of the environment’ (‘Environmentalist’, 1936: 37). The staff writer and editors devoted several columns of text to Boas’ *Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants* (1912), underwritten by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1908. The article stated how ‘over the ensuing 27 years Dr. Boas piled up a mountain of evidence that such changes do occur’. The author asked Boas to summarize this research:

‘It has been known for a long time’, said Dr. Boas, ‘that the bulk of the body as expressed by stature and weight is easily modified by . . . favorable conditions of life. . . . Just in the same way as the proportions of body, head and face of animals born in captivity change when compared to their wild-born ancestors, thus the bodily proportions of man undergo minute changes in new environment[s]’. (‘Environmentalist’, 1936: 37)

For *Time*’s readership, the author asked Boas to ‘sort out the biological from cultural factors’ with regard to the differences between the ‘motor habits’ of various ethnic immigrant groups, particularly the ‘Italians’ and ‘Jews’, and to explain why ‘Americans’ ‘do not gesticulate’. The author prefaced Boas’ explanation by stating that indeed ‘the way people use their bodies – seems to be closely linked with the biological make-up’. The evidence? Well, the author noted that motor habits ‘are fairly uniform over wide areas’ (‘Environmentalist’, 1936: 38). The author allowed Boas to draw from his years of research to offer a rather abstruse elucidation, but the author sardonically summarized, as if the long-winded professor could not get to the point: ‘Dr. Boas’ conclusion from all this is direct and simple: motor habits are cultural, not biological’.

When this article was written, Hitler’s ‘New Order’, eugenic courts, and the notorious blood purges were swinging into motion. For the first time since the Civil War,

Americans began to witness the full sweep of state-sponsored racism. The *Time* article explained that scientists in the United States and England were 'engaged in knocking the flimsy props from under Nazi ideas of race purity and race superiority', but it recognized that 'a quarter-century ago Franz Boas was attacking the same sort of ideas. At that time the view was popular that different races had their characteristic mentalities that determined their culture. Boas had piled up enough data to convince him that such was not the case' ('Environmentalist', 1936: 39).

The article was of course referring to Boas' 1911 book, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, or what *Time* referred to as the 'Magna Charta of self-respect for the "lower" races'. The author noted how 'Boas observed that nowhere on earth was there such a thing as a pure race, and that the term "race" was vague and approximate at best', and how, 'he doubted there were any "superior" races'. Furthermore, the author continued, 'Dr. Boas has no confidence in intelligence tests as measures of race superiority, because such tests cannot be divorced entirely from environment and experience' ('Environmentalist', 1936: 40). The author of the article went on to note Boas' contempt for war and nationalism, citing his optimistic explanation that through anthropology world leaders can 'come face-to-face with those forces that will ultimately abolish warfare' ('Environmentalist', 1936: 40).

The last section concerned Boas' background as a young scholar in Germany, as an editor of *Science*, an organizer of Chicago's World Fair, a leader in the Jesup expedition, a professor at Clark University, and as chair of the anthropology department at Columbia University. The article concluded by asking Boas how he felt when the Nazis lit a great bonfire at his beloved Kiel University to burn his books. 'Commented "Papa Franz": if people want to be crazy, what can you do about it?' (1936: 42).

This article can actually help situate and assess Franz Boas' national stature as a public intellectual because it can serve as a reference point on something like a spectrum. On the one hand we have *Time*: driven by its middle-class markets coast to coast, the magazine's editors exemplify how Boas was presented, and perceived, by a 1936 'middle-brow' American public. *Time Magazine* portrayed him as a purveyor of the equipotential of ethnic and racial groups, a proponent of the nurture side of the nature vs. nurture debate, and as a quirky if not pugnacious father of American anthropology. It is important to note that by the mid-1930s Boas had earned a reputation as a strict environmentalist, although he was not. By 1936, however, Boas had made such significant contributions to American society that the editors of *Time* knew a cover story about him would cover *their* bottom line.

On the other hand, we have the editors of *The Nation*, *Charities*, *The New Republic*, and *The Crisis* who targeted a market that was educated, liberal, and located mainly in the Northeast. Quite often the editors of these magazines published or excerpted Boas' 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, Thorstein B. Veblen, Ida B. Wells, Charles A. Beard, and Louis Brandies. However, if we limit our view of Boas' public personae to the ways in which he was presented within vehicles of public discourse that he often contributed to, we would perhaps view Boas' contributions as more far-reaching than they were, and thus recapitulate the reason for concern voiced by Leslie White (1947). Yet, if we limit our understanding solely to articles like the one in *Time*, we would 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. 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.

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' words, 'Nordic Nonsense'. Although the consensus did not crystallize until after the ravages of the Jewish Holocaust were widely exposed, its catalyst was the pivotal 'Scientists' Manifesto' that was released to the public on 10 December 1938, just as the Nazis' Aryan Nation threatened Europe. It had the signatures of 1284 scientists from 167 universities – 64 were members of the National Academy of Sciences. This 'manifesto' was the result of a dogged five-year campaign led by Franz Boas whose explicit goal was to unite scientists and their organizations in an effort to 'counteract the vicious, pseudo scientific activity of so-called scientists who try to prove the close relation between racial descent and mental character' (F. Boas to P. Baerwals, 12 February 1933). Elazar Barkan (1988), in 'Mobilizing Scientists Against Nazi Racism, 1933–1939', has detailed this complicated campaign, but notes that this was his last and most successful campaign outside the academy. Boas actually cut his teeth as a public intellectual when Albert Cristy lambasted him in the *Worcester Daily Telegram* in the late 1880s.

### EXPERT NOT ADVOCATE

The colorful critiques of Boas' early work by Smith and Cristy raise an important historiographic issue: Franz Boas, and subsequently early professional anthropology, had a wider impact on public issues in the United States than historians of anthropology have previously considered. The way Boas' early research and writing was challenged in newspapers and tracts confirms the fact that his work was being read and interpreted by the public in different regions of the country. Much to his chagrin, Boas was an actor on the public stage well before he cast his role on his own terms.

Within the context of Boas' career, the early challenges and late *Time Magazine* article raise another issue that speaks to contemporary views of Boas and the post-Boasian legacy of public scholarship within anthropology: 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 inquiry. 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. In many respects, this is the way he approached being a public intellectual for most of his career. By consistently crossing the boundary between academic and public spheres in this fashion, Boas circumvented many of the 'flaws of public scholarship' (Wolfe, 1997: B4). From the vantage point of the early 21st century, academics can and perhaps should be critical of Boasian anthropology (Baker, 1998: 123; Visweswaran, 1998: 71; Williams, 1996: 6; Willis, 1972), but even from a presentist perspective, critics of public scholarship would find it difficult to find fault with Boas' approach.<sup>11</sup>

Members of the American Anthropological Association are clearly not alone when



they call for more scholarship in the public interest; actually, anthropologists trail other disciplines. Scholars of journalism and African American studies were the first to rekindle the role of the public intellectual within the media, so prominent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Haas, 2000: 27). Anthropologists are more aware than most that race and culture are notoriously slippery concepts, which are as politically volatile as they are complicated. Moreover, anthropologists may feel reticent about informing public policy as it relates to the public's interest because of tricky ethical issues and anthropology's checkered past with colonial intelligence and military espionage (Fluehr-Lobban, 1991; Pels, 1999; Starn, 1994). Anthropology has nevertheless entered this arena. Perhaps Boas' approach will provide suggestive ways to sidestep the most glaring flaws of public scholarship. On the other hand, examining Boas' approach may underscore the fact that effective public scholarship is bedeviled by politics and can never be a clean, hermeneutic exercise, even when playing the role of scientific expert.

Whereas there is a consensus regarding the need for public scholarship today, there is quite a controversy over what role public intellectuals should play. The need is simple: the gulf between academic life and public life is quite large for the majority of academics. John Smyth and Robert Hattam succinctly summarize the way many academics have abandoned public debates, describing how 'academics as intellectuals have tended to write themselves up textual cul-de-sacs' that make them accessible only to a handful of people, while retreating 'to a narrow and safe politics of the sign' (Smyth and Hattam, 2000: 158). Moreover, the guild-like structure of discipline-specific organizations promotes and rewards a withdrawal to insularity. One of the best examples of the 'disconnect' between self-referential scholarship and everyday life gets played out in the print media's perennial ritual of highlighting the most absurd sessions at the annual meeting of the Modern Languages Association.<sup>12</sup>

Even while acknowledging the lack of participation of academics within civil society, many scholars remain skeptical about the lasting value of public scholarship. Supporters of public scholarship should at least consider the skeptical line of reasoning articulated by Alan Wolfe in his now notorious essay 'The Promise and Flaws of Public Scholarship'. Wolfe begins his critique by describing how 'disastrous' public scholarship can be, and uses the example of how many scholars worked closely with the government to justify the war in Vietnam. Wolfe questions, 'is the situation any different if the publics with whom the scholar works are not foreign policy experts but poor people, or community-based political movements, or the underrepresented?' (1997: B4). Wolfe's most salient criticism of public scholarship turns on the fact that political trends and 'progressive ideas' are fickle and shift with the winds of change. Warning that academics should not be in the business of advancing ideas today, only to retract them tomorrow, he notes: 'People who strongly believed in colorblind principles are now enthusiastic about affirmative action; some feminists who once thought women were fundamentally different from men may now believe they are fundamentally the same; the right to privacy looks good when abortion is the issue but looks bad when domestic abuse is the issue' (Wolfe, 1997: B5).

If the major flaw of public scholarship *is* inconsistency, Franz Boas' public scholarship sidestepped that 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 in 'Human Faculty' were recycled, over and over, and remained

little changed (Boas, 1945: 76). In some respects, Boas was consistent to the point of becoming anachronistic towards the end of his influential career.

Of course, I am using Alan Wolfe's argument as a foil to illustrate a point. In some respects, if public intellectuals do not respond to political changes that continually reshape the terms and conditions of people's everyday life, scholars will become just as 'out of touch' as anyone who buries him or herself within the narrow sub-fields, writing for a small group of peers. Wolfe and the critics of public scholarship, who view the consistency factor as a fundamental flaw, employ a type of logic that assumes that the social world within which we live is static and not changing, shifting, and quaking under our feet.

### **RATTLING THE RIGHT AND RIGHTEOUS**

Just as Boas was denounced in the popular media of the 19th century (in tracts and newspapers), it continues in the 21st century – on the internet. For example, one online pundit ridiculed 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 of Anthropology in Columbia University, and founded a school of fiction-writing called "social anthropology"' (Oliver, 2002: <http://www.stormfront.org/rpo/ENEMY1.html>).

The powerful, conservative right challenges multiculturalism and reasserts the value of assimilation (implicit in the melting pot metaphor) through PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) or mainstream publishing houses like the Free Press, which published both *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994) and *The End of Racism* (D'Souza, 1995). When scholars appropriate Boas within these venues to articulate those agendas, they must adhere to a modicum of academic standards, and cannot use blatantly offensive rhetoric. The less powerful, righteous right, however, furthers its claims to white supremacy, anti-Semitism, nativism, and heterosexism through the internet. When individuals appropriate Boas within chat rooms, websites, and discussion groups to articulate their agendas, they do not have any standards to meet. One quickly understands how Franz Boas gets graphically painted as 'the bad guy'.

The internet is increasingly a populist medium. Like passionate pamphleteers of yesteryear, people believe deeply in their cause. One of many examples of the way Boas and his work become appropriated can be found on the 'White Nationalist Resource Page' (advocating 'White Pride – World Wide' and boasting 7000 hits a day). This site posts an article about the power of propaganda, which illustrates the way Jews have used it 'to make it a dogmatic "fact" that there are no measurable, scientific differences between races and, therefore, no races at all!' The author of the article explains how

The Jews first got a few of their boys into top university spots . . . with the express purpose of giving academic respectability to their 'there-is-no-such-thing-as-race' lie. One of the first and most important of these was Franz Boas, a Jew heavily involved in communist causes. . . . The whole of Jewry pitched in to boost their boy. Boas was praised in every Jewish-owned newspaper and periodical and given every academic prize they could promote. Little by little, Boas gained such 'stature' by this Jewish mutual-admiration society technique that he became an 'acknowledged authority' in social anthropology and ethnology. His students and colleagues at Columbia

– Herskovits, Klineberg, Ashley Montagu, Weltfish – as unsavory a collection of left-wing Jews as one might hope for – spread his doctrines far and wide, deliberately poisoning the minds of two generations of American students at many of our largest universities. (Rockwell, 1966: [www.stormfront.org/posterity/ns/prop.html](http://www.stormfront.org/posterity/ns/prop.html))

Madison Grant, Thomas Dixon, Lothrop Stoddard, and the entire cast of late 19th- and early 20th-century characters who advanced a science of white supremacy are disseminated along with latter-day racial determinists like J. Philippe Rushton and Charles Murray on the internet today as if there was an uninterrupted and uncontested claim to the racial supremacy of whites. Just like the clubby atmosphere of the local historical or science society in the 19th century, millions of interest-oriented websites and electronic discussion groups with their unique blend of chat, debate, correspondence, and passionate texts have an uncanny resemblance to the broadsheets, pamphlets, and tracts so popular in the 19th century. Websites that promote white supremacy use the authority of science and the history of that science to bolster, interpret, and explain their view of the world.

As we move into the 21st century, Franz Boas remains the scholar hard-core nativists and white supremacists love to hate. There is a striking parallel between the way Boas was attacked in the 19th century and the way he is assailed in the 21st because his steady and consistent scholarship over the years has changed, in important ways, the way many Americans view difference. 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!

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### **Notes**

- 1 The article was released early on the association's website in the wake of media attention generated by Sparks and Jantz.
- 2 The journalist for *The New York Times* who described Corey Sparks' and Richard Jantz's recent reanalysis of Boas' work concluded his article by noting Alan H. Goodman's view 'that the authors were setting up a straw man by "purporting to

show that Boas was a rampant environmentalist, when in fact he wasn't" (Wade, 2002: p. F3).

- 3 Two macrocosmic questions I am concerned with ask why Franz Boas and early anthropology both gain a reputation for being a public 'friend of the Negro' and why Boas' research was often understood in strictly environmentalist terms? Neither is historically accurate. Both questions, however, turn on the consumption of Boas' work within public arenas, making Boas one of the most public of scholars within anthropology. The microcosmic analysis that could frame this question could be approached from a number of different directions. For example, one could explore why Carter G. Woodson in an early Afrocentric treatise, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, advocated the study of 'the African background from the point of view of anthropology and history' (Woodson, 1933: 150). It is also worthwhile considering why famed civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall declined to put any Boasians on the stand to testify in the cases that led up to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), instead relying on Robert Redfield from the University of Chicago to instruct judges about the role of the environment and racial equality, not the particularity of cultures (Baker, 1998: 201). Woodson and Marshall were each engaged in very different political projects. Woodson (the historian who promoted Negro history week in 1926) was on a mission to educate African Americans about their rich cultural heritage and illustrious history. Marshall (known as Mr Civil Rights) was on a crusade to tear down the walls of segregation and tout the virtues of assimilation. Each leader used anthropology's reputation outside of the academy to articulate their respective agendas.
- 4 For an interesting discussion of Boas' rhetoric as public scholarship, see Droge, 2001. Anthropology, of course, has its share of public intellectuals who are doing the work to ensure the discipline's survival. For example, Micaela di Leonardo writes for the *Village Voice* and *The Nation* to reveal how gender, class, and race paralyse democracy; Leo Chavez produces documentaries that reveal the inhumanity experienced by undocumented immigrants, Brett Williams gets federal funds to share the joys and pains, the pride and prejudice experienced by the residents in our nation's capital; Leith Mullings works tirelessly in the diverse communities of Harlem to insure the health of women and babies; and Michael Blakey halted the construction of a skyscraper near Wall Street to excavate a burial ground of enslaved Africans – the list goes on (Baker, 2000: 22).
- 5 See John Higham's 1957 classic, 'Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation', especially pages 564–78, for an interesting discussion of the various and ambivalent forms anti-Semitism took on during the Gilded Age.
- 6 (FB to Parents 4/19/1891, Quoted in Cole, 1999: 143) Although Boas' Professional Correspondence is somewhat incomplete during this period of his life, there is no evidence that the so-called caliper question had any impact on his research, writing, and his day-to-day activities. There is no mention in his professional correspondence during this affair of anything related to his public school research or the issues raised by the paper. Quite to the contrary, during the weeks of this local scandal he corresponded with many people and neither he nor the people who wrote to him mentioned the attention he received in the press.

- 7 See Baker (2000) and Williams (1996) for longer discussions about the impact of this article.
- 8 Charles Ellwood notes the high sales volume as well as comments on the publisher's marketing practices (Ellwood, 1906: 570).
- 9 Mss. Coll. 30. William S. Willis Papers, American Philosophical Society, Folder: 'Research Notes' Franz Boas – Boas Goes to Atlanta.
- 10 Professional Correspondence of Franz Boas, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA.
- 11 It is important to note that this is a theoretical, tempered, and relatively staid criticism of Boas' theories and approaches. University professors advanced these critiques (I include Sparks and Jantz here too) within academic or scientific venues, and I do not want to confuse it with the vitriolic attacks on Boas launched by self-proclaimed conservatives within the media, which I discuss in the concluding sections. In many ways these scholars are diametrically opposed to those conservative pundits.
- 12 For an overview of these debates see Bender, 1993; Gieryn, 1999; Haas, 2000; Rosen, 1996; Smyth and Hattam, 2000.

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