Daniel G. Brinton’s Success on the Road to Obscurity, 1890–99

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“What is relevant about anthropology?” Fashioned as a bright blue computer graphic, this question was stamped across each issue of the Anthropology Newsletter during academic year 1998–99 and served as the annual theme for this widely circulated organ. Articles and commentaries debated and addressed not only what was relevant about anthropology but also how one makes anthropology relevant. During the previous year, 1997–98, the newsletter’s theme asked, “Is it race?” and articles and commentaries over the course of that year debated and addressed this question.

Race and relevance have served as mutually reinforcing themes of anthropology for many years. In the United States, a peculiarly enigmatic relationship has formed between race and the relevance of anthropology on one hand and anthropology and the relevance of race on the other (Baker 1998; Harrison 1995; Smedley 1993; Stocking 1968; Williams 1989). Although social issues are usually engaged by scholars and the broader public, there is an eerie permanence about the fact that anthropology has always addressed issues pertaining to race and that the U.S. public has always grappled with racial issues. Compounded by the fact that anthropology in the United States has never been as eminent as economics or psychology, anthropologists have routinely justified the relevance of their discipline as the science of race. Race and the relevance of anthropology were entwined during the antebellum period with the emergence of the first “American school” of anthropology, which included Josiah Nott, Samuel Morton, and Louis Agassiz. The relationship took on increased importance as the institutional foundations of U.S. anthropology were formed after Reconstruction and at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

These foundations were established, in large measure, by the leadership of Daniel Garrison Brinton at the University of Pennsylvania, Frederic Ward Putnam at Harvard University, and John Wesley Powell at the Smithsonian Institution.1 Each of these luminaries produced volumes of research, touted the practical and public significance of anthropology, provided leadership in various anthropology societies, and, following in the steps of Lewis Henry Morgan,
served as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

Of these "fathers" of U.S. anthropology, D. G. Brinton is perhaps the least well known, but it is his storied past that best illuminates how scholars used the study of race to make anthropology, or in this case their anthropological research, more relevant. The many articles and essays addressing race and the relevance of anthropology in the Anthropology Newsletter and the American Anthropologist in the late 1990s demonstrate the continued salience of these issues, so it is prudent to revisit how one anthropologist grappled with such issues a century ago.

Brinton used the science of race to bolster the relevance of anthropology during a distinguished career that began with antiquarian research in the 1880s and concluded with research that addressed social issues and public problems in the 1890s. In this article, I will map the trajectory of Brinton's career activities and piece together his biography to shed new light on how he articulated an anthropology of race that insists on a neo-Lamarckianism that emphasizes evolution. I also sketch how Brinton's anthropology was eventually replaced by Franz Boas's anthropology of race, which insists on an environmentalism that emphasizes plasticity.

Although the relationship between racial determinism and 19th-century anthropology is well-tilled soil (Baker 1998; Degler 1991; Frederickson 1965; Hinsley 1981; Smedley 1993; Stocking 1968), focusing explicitly on D. G. Brinton will allow me to offer new perspectives on the roles of patrons and publics, physicians and ethnologists, in the production of anthropology in late-19th-century Philadelphia. The history of anthropological activity in Philadelphia is often eclipsed by histories of anthropology that focus on Cambridge, Washington, or New York. Actually, the reasons for the retrospective insignificance of Philadelphia anthropology are yoked, in part, to Brinton's inability to find institutional roots for anthropology there. Finally, I will provide some historical perspective for scholars who call for an anthropology in the public interest (e.g., Peacock 1997) by interrogating that almost Faustian deal between the science of race and the relevance of anthropology by plotting Brinton's success on the road to obscurity.

Mounds and Medicine

In 1886 Brinton became the first professor of anthropology at a U.S. university and served as dean of the Philadelphia axis of the emerging academic discipline. He represents an important bridging figure in the history of anthropology because he actually helped to steer it through distinct phases of its development, beginning with his participation in local antiquarian clubs. He then helped to validate anthropology as a natural science in prominent academies and museums, became a university professor, and later worked to establish the Journal of American Folk-Lore and the new series of the American Anthropologist, both specialized journals that helped to cement U.S. anthropology as a discipline on its own.
Daniel Garrison Brinton was born May 13, 1837 on his family’s farm in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He died October 27, 1899, at the age of 62. Brinton’s lifelong interest in Native American antiquities was piqued as a boy when he explored artifacts of Delaware Indians and read about antiquarian research. His affluent Quaker family hired a tutor, in lieu of formal schooling, to prepare him for Yale University, where he majored in literature. In 1856 Brinton went to Florida for a respite from ill health and the New Haven winters, and he took that opportunity to pursue his interest in antiquities. The result was his first book (at the age of 22), *Notes on the Floridian Peninsula, Its Literary History, Indian Tribes and Antiquities* (1859). It was a prelude to more than 20 books and well over 100 articles and pamphlets documenting Native American history, literature, and linguistics (Smyth 1900:18–20).

Brinton graduated from Yale in 1858 and returned to the Philadelphia area to enroll in Jefferson Medical School, from which he graduated in 1860. He immediately pursued further training in France and Germany, but he came back to the United States when the War between the States intensified. In 1862 he volunteered for the Union Army, in which he was quickly promoted to surgeon-in-chief in the Army of the Potomac, serving in combat at such pivotal battles as Chancellorsville and Gettysburg (Chamberlain 1899:216–217).

The battle at Gettysburg was his last, and he was transferred to Illinois to head up an Army hospital. In 1865 he was discharged from the Army and married Sarah Tillson. He left Illinois and returned to Philadelphia’s Main Line to practice medicine, but medicine was not his sole pursuit. He again began to write about Native Americans, producing, among other articles, “The Shawnees and Their Migrations” (1866c), “Artificial Shell Depositions in the United States” (1866a), and “The Mound-Builders of the Mississippi Valley” (1866b), which is one of the first studies to assert that indigenous peoples had erected those structures.

In addition to developing his medical practice, Brinton began to edit the weekly *Medical and Surgical Reporter*, the quarterly *Compendium of Medical Science*, and the more popularly geared *Napheys’ Modern Therapeutics*. He also educated the populace about public health and hygiene by lecturing at public forums and writing for popular magazines. As he practiced and published in the medical field, he developed a lasting commitment to scientific rigor, professionalism, and the standardization of terminology (e.g., Brinton 1892b; see Darnell 1988:7).

By 1874, he had quit practicing medicine to focus on the management and editing of his journals, but he did not curb his growing interest in American languages. He wrote three books and 11 articles concerning American grammar, linguistics, and folklore, which were directed mostly to enthusiasts of antiquities. Unlike other U.S. physicians who contributed to anthropological inquiry before the Civil War, Brinton never felt compelled to combine his interests in ethnology and medicine (Haller 1971:40–68; Smedley 1993:231–254).

In 1887, at the age of 50, he relinquished managing the medical publications to devote himself full-time to science, which he considered a considerable financial “sacrifice.” Brinton explained, “I deliberately left a profitable business that I might,
on a modest competence, pursue my life as an observer, a thinker and an unpaid writer.” He shared the philosophy behind his decision in a letter to Sara Y. Stevenson, an influential organizer and fund-raiser at Penn’s University Museum:

In some respects, I thoroughly believe in the philosophy of Comte. He taught that society should be divided into two great classes—first, those men and women who are willing to pass their time in the study of science, and for that object, renounce the ambitions of practical life; and second, the money-makers, the producers, the workers in applied science; and from the latter should come the support of the former. It is the duty of the rich, the prosperous, the practical citizens of Phila., to support our institution. Surely were I one of them, I should aid.3

Although Brinton’s personal commitment to science evidently changed over the course of his life, his evocation of Auguste Comte provides a useful reference point to help identify how he viewed himself as a scientist working in society’s interest, how he viewed the folks he studied, and how he employed a neo-Lamarckian social theory to inform his writings.4

Brinton established three patterns within his scholarship that remained constant for the balance of his life. These patterns are clearly articulated even in his first book, Notes on the Floridian Peninsula (1859), published the same year as Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1858). First, Brinton’s method for research included critiquing and synthesizing other peoples’ writings on a given subject, then drawing conclusions from all the work he read. He did not produce original scholarship per se, and fieldwork for him was literally reading everything in the field—as in the “field of philology.” One of the reasons why he did not observe indigenous people as part of his Florida research was “the incredible swarms of mosquitoes” (Brinton 1859:167). Second, Brinton established himself as a meticulous scholar. He had a penchant for source citation and was scrupulous with regard to his footnotes, which are often peppered with German, Spanish, and French works. He fusses about the lack of academic rigor at a time when much of the material written about indigenous peoples was travelogues or missionaries’ accounts. He even bemoaned the fact that he was so “dependent” on the information provided by the “superficial notices of military explorers” who had no “interest in anything” other than the political relations of the nations they were destroying (1859:111). Finally, he adopted a unique blend of theories to explain both the unity of and differences among the “races” of mankind. Brinton combined Lamarck’s idea of acquired characteristics and Spencer’s racialist hierarchies to form a theory that maintains both a determinant view of the environment and a notion of psychic unity.5

George W. Stocking Jr. reminds us that Brinton shared this latter-day doctrine about the inheritance of acquired characteristics with “the three most outspoken and influential Lamarckians,” John Wesley Powell, Lester Frank Ward, and G. Stanley Hall (1962:242). These fin-de-siècle Lamarckians combined the social theories of August Comte, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Herbert Spencer with new methods of research to advance notions about social evolution that
turn on the idea that the "transmission of culture" through the inheritance of acquired characteristics was a key factor in biological evolution, especially the evolution of the mind (Stocking 1962:243; see also Greene 1959). These scholars articulated evolutionary ideas just as those ideas were winning wide acceptance because of their proliferation in nearly every division of scholarship and their popularization through new forms of media (Loewenberg 1941:341).

From Brinton’s perspective, all humans have a common psychic heritage, but long-term effects of the environment allowed certain races to become superior to others—mentally as well as physically. Brinton consistently maintained that “certain mental traits and faculties are broadly correlated to these physical features, and no amount of sentimentality about the equality of all men can do away with this undeniable truth” (1898:273). Brinton used this particular theoretical orientation for three decades as he helped to usher anthropology from an avocation of collectors to a professional academic discipline.

Brinton was a principal steward of institutionalizing the field, but this was not because of his scrupulous scholarship. He knew that if the study of the “primitive races of mankind” was to compete with geology and physics, compelling ideas were not enough; he needed the support of scientific organizations and control over specialized journals (Flagg 1897; Stocking 1968:22). Even before Brinton abandoned his business ventures, he began “volunteering” for positions in scientific societies governing publications and public education, which allowed him access to various venues and enabled him to make the case that anthropology was not only relevant but also necessary as a science that could help identify social problems.

He was a member of many organizations, but the five most important were the American Philosophical Society (APS), the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the American Folk-Lore Society (AFLS), the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (ANSP), and the AAAS.

**Americanist-in-Residence**

In 1869 Brinton was elected to the APS and became one of its most active members and prolific writers (Wissler 1942:189–202). He contributed 48 articles to its *Proceedings*, chaired its publications committee, participated in its council, and served as secretary. For years he played an integral role in selecting speakers for the society’s meetings and submissions to its *Proceedings*. He often invited anthropologists to deliver papers and publish in its organ, which gave added credibility to the aspiring discipline. Brinton methodically rose to power within the society because he worked diligently, and in 1896 he won its vice presidency over William Pepper, a former provost of the University of Pennsylvania. Pepper, who was better known, did not get the society’s nod because he had “presented but one scientific contribution to its publications” and never “manifested any interest in its aims or welfare.”

Brinton published twice as much in the society’s *Proceedings* as he did in any other serial, and most of these articles were papers he had presented to the
society (Darnell 1988:11–12). His overall publication record shifted away from linguistics and grammar, but his contributions to the society remained focused. He did not write about theories of the evolution of races or European racial stratification, as he did for the ANSP; nor did he write about problems of anthropological theory and nomenclature, as he did for the American Anthropologist.8

Since the days of Thomas Jefferson, the APS has promoted “useful knowledge” about Native American language, culture, and history. Brinton proudly upheld its century-long tradition by advancing scholarly research on the Americas—which may explain his rationale for routinely using its Proceedings as an outlet for his linguistic research. Given the society’s long tradition of studying American Indians, it may seem obvious why Brinton maintained his identity as an “Americanist” at the APS. However, there is another compelling reason. By upholding its tradition, he received attention and respect from some of the most distinguished scholars in the country. Brinton never won the same scholarly recognition within anthropological circles, especially from members of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) and the AFLS. William W. Newell, founder of the AFLS, even noted, “He is somewhat sensitive, never having received as much attention from this part of the country [Boston] as he deems himself entitled to.”9

Like other linguists and grammarians, Brinton did not find broad support for his research, so he used his considerable influence over the society’s Proceedings to publish in them. This lack of support seemed particularly glaring in 1887, when he described for Boas, then an editor at Science, the fate of his series, Brinton’s Library of Aboriginal American Literature:

The encouragement extended to my series of publications in the aboriginal languages has been so little that after printing the seventh volume, now in press, I think I shall give up in despair.... When in this country of fifty million shall we find five hundred willing to support with their means the study of the greatest of all sciences—that of man?10

Brinton initially found support for his research at the University of Pennsylvania, but that, too, quickly faded.

**Penn’s Indian Man**

In 1881, William Pepper became provost of the University of Pennsylvania, and he immediately began transforming the institution. On the day of his inauguration, he announced Joseph Wharton’s gift for the new business school, and he never stopped building, erecting the library and more than a dozen departments and schools during his 11-year tenure (Cheyney 1940:285–324). Among Pepper’s many interests were archaeology and ethnology, and he imagined adding “a great ethnological” museum to his expanding university (Brinton, quoted in Darnell 1970:81). In 1886, he appointed three new faculty members to facilitate the process: Hermann Hilprecht, a Babylonian archaeologist; Morris Jastrow, a specialist in Near Eastern philology; and Daniel G. Brinton, appointed as a professor of American archaeology and linguistics.
Brinton shared with Pepper more than APS membership and an interest in anthropology; he shared Pepper's vision for an extensive anthropological museum that was "a vast means of instruction in anthropology and not a mere collection of curiosities" (Pepper, quoted in Darnell 1970:81). In 1889, Pepper convened influential business leaders, scholars, and noted antiquity collectors to form the University Archaeological Association; Brinton became its president the following year. The provost and trustees charged the association with raising funds, sponsoring expeditions, and securing a new building for a financially independent museum. In 1891, Pepper formally established the Department of Archaeology and Paleontology and its Free Museum of Science and Art, now called the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Bulletin of the Free Museum of Science and Art 1900:199; Cheyney 1940:351). Brinton chaired the department's American Section between 1892 and 1894 and quickly established a public lecture series. The series was greeted warmly by Pepper, who pushed the trustees to ratify a resolution that recognized the series "as a movement of the first importance, not only in the interest of the Museum, but of the entire subject of Archaeology in this community." Pepper resolved

that a course of lectures be organized by the chairman of the committee of the American Section of the Museum of the University, illustrative of the objects in that department of the Museum, said lectures to begin in November next, to be delivered either at the Museum or elsewhere as may appear most favorable for interesting the public in the Museum and for the instruction of the students of the University. The course [is] to be free.11

Brinton could not wait until November, so he chose the auspicious occasion of Columbus Day in 1892—the 400th anniversary of the New World's "discovery." Brinton begins that first address by highlighting Columbus's "infinite courage and unswerving faith" but quickly turns his attention to the aboriginal race, identifying how,

wherever you find its representatives, you see the same peculiar hair, color, eyes, and other physical signs of racial unity; and wherever you trace their history, you find the same forms of religious and social life, the same lines of culture-development, and that same ineradicable love of liberty which seems to be inhaled with the air of this New World, and to become a part of the nature of men of whatever race who settled upon its soil...ever urging them to wider horizons and a higher evolution. [1892a:4]

Brinton often gave "Indian appreciation" lectures like this to the public. Like his predecessor in Americanist anthropology, Lewis Henry Morgan, Brinton spoke in romantic terms about Native Americans and the unity of races—but never about racial equality. Brinton viewed racial differences in terms of inferiority and superiority: "Beyond all other criteria of race," he assumed, a scientist first "must rank its mental endowments. These are what decide irrevocably its place in history and its destiny in time.... Thus appraised, the American race
certainly stands higher than the Australian, the Polynesian or the African, but does not equal the Asian” (1891:42).

Although Brinton demonstrated measured success at the museum in terms of public instruction and directing the American Section, he soon tangled with Sara Stevenson over the museum’s direction. Stevenson stitched together an influential network of support within the museum, the university, and the local philanthropic communities. With the help of her close friend, Provost Pepper, she parlayed her network into a powerful position of leadership. She had a special interest in classical archaeology and made it a priority to curate the museum’s Babylonian, Mediterranean, and Egyptian Sections. Stevenson knew firsthand “the gravity of the responsibility assumed in agreeing to erect and maintain a Museum Building, without expense to the City, or to the university funds.”12 Quite appropriately, she developed the direction of the museum to ensure solid funding, which was not toward Americanist anthropology. She and the patrons of the museum were more interested in the dramatic antiquities of the Near East, not the baskets and arrows of Native Americans. For a variety of interconnected reasons, museum officials advanced classical archaeology, with its emphasis on history and civilization, while neglecting anthropological archaeology, with its emphasis on science and ethnology (Conn 1998:75–114; Kuklick 1996:11–78). The museum’s budget perhaps best reflects the priorities of the museum. In 1893, for example, the Egyptian, Mediterranean, and Babylonian Sections received $8,000, whereas the “American and Prehistoric Section” received $331 (Conn 1998:93).

Stevenson and Pepper’s emphasis on Egypt and the Mediterranean created a wedge between the classicists and the ethnologists. Charles Abbott, Stewart Culin, Brinton, and board member C. Howard Colket each challenged the scope and direction Stevenson and Pepper envisioned. Colket actually resigned because he could not agree with the provost and the trustees that “the Department should be given the broadest scope—as broad, in fact, as the British Museum. This brings the Department in direct competition with two well established Museums in this city, and I do not see the necessity of establishing the third.”13 Abbott resigned after a bitter dispute, and in 1903 Culin filed a defamation of character suit against Stevenson and the museum. His dismissal followed (Darnell 1970:82–83). Brinton eventually distanced himself from the museum, and in July 1894 he severed all ties. In a letter to Stevenson, he explains that he was a “valueless auxiliary” because he had “no money to give, and no capacity for raising any.” Brinton was also incensed about provisions placed on certain collections and the overall direction of the museum:

I learn for instance, that a large collection of Peruvian pottery is to be installed there, under a prohibition forbidding the officers of the Museum from copying or describing specimens in it. In my own department, I am not allowed to study for publication objects placed there? . . . A University-museum, it seems to me, has two main purposes—the one, of investigation, the other of didactic instruction. That it should be made an attractive show room, or a sales room for those with collections to dispose of, is to me unwelcome.14
Brinton finally remarks, “I have no thought of ‘resigning,’ but I do not contemplate a reappointment in connection with the Museum.”15 Although he distanced himself from the museum, he never gave up his title as professor of anthropology at Philadelphia’s most prestigious university.

Pepper's 1886 appointment made Brinton, at least nominally, the first university professor of anthropology in the United States, even though he did not teach formal lectures or receive payment (Darnell 1970:81–85). Brinton used his title at every opportunity. It gave him credentials few other anthropologists possessed, an academic platform from which to advance the field, and the authority to assume the role of a purveyor of science to the Philadelphia public—even though, technically, it was only an affiliation.16

The institution at which Brinton was the most successful was the ANSP. When he did not succeed at curating the American Section at the University Museum and could not find support for Brinton’s Library of Aboriginal American Literature, one can understand why he tried something different when lecturing at the ANSP.

**The Academy’s Public Intellectual**

As Brinton was struggling to define his role as an academic and curator at Penn, he was playing the role of public educator with aplomb across the Schuylkill River at the ANSP. In 1884 he was appointed professor of ethnology and archaeology at the academy, and he immediately embarked on organizing both “regular” and “popular” courses in ethnology for its program of public instruction. Brinton outlined the importance of his lectures in his first prospectus to the committee on instruction:

> Few people understand what ethnology is, or why it should be studied—surprisingly few. They must first be taught this. . . . I [will] deliver eight lectures, two a week, free to the public, on the general principles of the science. If at their termination there is enough interest in it to get together a class for study, I will form . . . sort of weekly ethnological conferences.17

“Delivering the lectures” for Brinton was “a pleasure,” and he enjoyed educating the public about the value of ethnology.18 His lectures were not subjected to departmental politics (as they were at Penn) or held to rigorous academic standards (as they were at the APS). The titles of some of his “popular” courses include “Modern Methods in the Study of Man,” “The Success and Failure of the Races,” “Man’s First Home,” and “Rock Inscriptions and Other Interpretations.”19 He viewed all the lectures as “semiscientific” and described the audience as “a cultivated one. . . . Not large (125 about) largely made up of teachers and persons already familiar with the principles of science.”20

If the formation of the AAAS or the AFLS can be viewed as the constitution of a community without locality, the academy was an intellectual community tethered to the local—the city of Philadelphia. Philadelphia and its Main Line served as the center of a locally based intellectual life that was inhabited through
face-to-face interaction, public education, and fund-raisers. That, of course, was a contrast to intellectual communities fostered within the professions, where community life was constituted through printed texts, higher education, and conferences (Bender 1993:4–5).

Thomas Bender has explored the different roles, relationships, and dynamics between scholars who addressed professional audiences and scholars who addressed civic audiences during the 19th century. He argues that lyceums and museums—urban cultural centers like the ANSP—were the sites of intellectual life during the 19th century: “Only later would one of these institutions, the college converted into the university, achieve hegemony in intellectual life and transform the urban-based world of learning into university scholarship” (1993:33). Interestingly, Brinton, whom Bender does not mention, addressed both types of audiences from different institutions.

The ideas Brinton articulated at the academy were situated within a particular social matrix that constituted his most “civic” audience. Better than other institutions with which he was affiliated, the ANSP provided him with an engaged audience that was motivated to learn. And, following Bender (1993:3–4), Brinton’s audience would have provided him with legitimacy, concepts, motives, and key questions that shaped his public education at the academy in a way that fostered shared meanings and intellectual purposes.

Unlike Brinton’s all-male audience at the APS, his audiences at the academy were virtually all female. Most of his lectures were free and open to the public, and there was no record of attendance. The academy did keep records of the classes, for which it charged a $1 or $2 fee. For example, there were a dozen members in both Brinton’s second and third offerings of “Course in Archaeology and Ethnology,” taught in 1885 and 1886, but only one man attended. For his class “Popular Course: Friday Evening Lectures, January 25, 1889,” 77 attended, of whom more than 50 were women.21

Brinton’s constituents were Philadelphia society ladies. He was often supportive of women who wanted to pursue science, not as an avocation but as a career, even though many men thought this was an exclusively male domain. Yet Brinton never hesitated to share either the scientific details of their so-called reproductive shortcomings or ethnographic descriptions of their “savage sisters.” For example, in an 1896 lecture to the ANSP entitled “The Relations of Race and Culture to Degenerations of the Reproductive Organs and Functions in Woman,” he paints a sweeping organic analogy between the reproductive functions of women and animals. Relying on Herbert Spencer, Brinton describes the “maxim that the increased mental and moral development of women in modern times necessarily leads to degeneration of her reproductive powers” (1896b:2). To describe the disparity between birthrates of “Aryans” living in the cities of Europe and America and the “savage woman” in the hinterlands, Brinton simply remarks, “The same contrast is seen in the lower animals. . . . The highbred Silesian ewes of Saxony can scarcely drop their lambs without artificial assistance; ‘pedigree’ cows, bitches, and mares are always greater sufferers in natural labor than the lower and wild varieties” (1896b:3).
What Brinton calls "the perfectly developed modern white women" has, he argues, a larger pelvis than other women, and that is "the criterion and the necessary condition of racial progress of the evolution of the human species" (1896b:5). According to Brinton, the pelvis is the only physical advantage the "Aryan American woman" has over her "savage" sisters; Aryans, with a "high moral and intellectual education," suffer the postponed "appearance of menses," "an impairment in the function of lactation," and an "underdeveloped and adherent clitoris" (1896b:5). Brinton notes, however, that "the clitoris is well developed in most anthropoid apes and also in the negro race" (1896b:4). He elaborates at length on the "passionless" girls from New England and the oversexed and amoral savages. This lecture, like many of his "popular" lectures, was widely circulated in print, appearing as a feature article in Philadelphia's *Medical News*.

Brinton's interest in both brains and sexual organs was not unique. Nineteenth-century investigators routinely deemed those corporeal locations as the most definitive in their pursuit of ranking and ordering the races of mankind while analogically wedding white women to the so-called lower races (Wiegman 1995:43–78). Although Brinton noted the putative moral and intellectual prowess of white women, he did not hold out the possibility of their participation in duties of citizenship. The duty of women, he underscored, was that of advancing racial progress by means of their reproductive organs. In the later part of the 19th century, natural history ceded its epistemological framework to both biology in the life sciences and anthropology in the social sciences. Each became a site for identifying natural gender-specific functions and structures, temperament, and abilities that scholars and laymen alike recruited for the legitimation of women's subordination and explanation of women's exclusion from the public sphere of citizenship (Laslett et al. 1996:1–3). Like his work on racial difference, Brinton's work on gender difference was at the forefront of science because it synthesized old ideas in new ways. What made him unique in the history of anthropology was his ability to recruit different sciences into the burgeoning field of anthropology while introducing anthropology to those fields from which he recruited—again, trying to make the science of anthropology relevant.

**Racial Inferiority: The Key to Brinton's Success**

Two of Brinton's most influential books grew out of public lectures delivered at the ANSP. These are *Races and Peoples* (1890b) and *The American Race* (1891). His lectures at the academy marked a shift away from antiquarian or academic focus on Native American linguistics and grammar to a broader and more popular focus on racial classification and ethnography. In addition, they demonstrate his shift from a local intellectual to an international scientist, and they appear to have been the key to his success in scientific societies. The irony is that his careful linguistic classification, analysis of grammar, and detailed transcription of folklore were far more rigorous and original than his synthetic overview of racial hierarchies.
On the heels of publishing *Races and Peoples*, his most extensive exegesis on racial hierarchies, Brinton became president of the AFLS (1890), president of the International Congress of Americanists (1893), president of the AAAS (1894), and vice president of the APS (1896). The lectures that inspired *Races and Peoples* were originally billed as “Outlines of Ethnology: The Study of Race, Peoples, and Nation.” Convening the series in the Library of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Dr. Brinton was to hold forth for ten consecutive Monday evenings beginning in January 1890.\(^2\)

Many of these topics he had addressed in previous “regular” courses, but evidently they were retooled and delivered as this “popular” course. In the introduction to *Races and Peoples*, he states that he was writing a compendium of the “latest and most accurate researches on the subjects treated,” and he did not depart from his technique of culling and critiquing all of the available material (Brinton 1890b:5).

Although Brinton’s definition of *ethnology* is evident in the title of his 1890 lecture series, his methodology—ethnography—was not exactly what we would consider ethnography today. For Brinton, the aim of ethnography was to “study the differences, physical and mental, between men *in masses*, and ascertain which of these differences are least variable and hence of most value in classifying the human species into its several natural varieties or types” (1890b:18), or what he also called races and subspecies (1890a:100). So, like geography, ethnography for Brinton involved mapping, recording, and classifying races and peoples.

In the first chapter of *Races and Peoples*, “Lectures on Ethnography,” Brinton begins with a survey of the “Physical Elements of Ethnography,” detailing the range of features used to classify and rank races. Some of his “physical criteria of racial superiority” include cranial capacity, color, muscular structure, stature, ethnic relations of the sexes, vital powers, and sexual preference. He concludes the chapter, “We are accustomed familiarly to speak of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ races, and we are justified in this even from merely physical considerations. These indeed bear intimate relations to mental capacity. . . . Measured by these criteria, the European or white race stands at the head of the list, the African or negro at its foot” (1890b:47–48).

With prose resembling a “how-to guide,” Brinton linked his physical elements of ethnography to so-called social and psychological elements of ethnography. He assumed that the only successful way to “rank-order” the races was to consider mental and physical differences equally because “the mental differences of races and nations are real and profound. Some of them are just as valuable for ethnic classification as any of the physical elements” (1890b:51). These “mental criteria” for racial superiority include another array of factors, such as social instincts, dispersive elements, arts of life, migratory instincts, and combative instincts. The first section of the book, “Elements of Ethnography,” mirrors chemistry’s periodic table of elements. Brinton essentially produced an ethnographic table of elements with specific criteria to classify different races.
In chapter 3, “The Beginnings and Subdivisions of Races,” Brinton discusses evolution, but he simply recycles the same Lamarckian view he held when he wrote Notes on the Floridian Peninsula (1859), 30 years earlier. He does develop an elaborate discussion of the various origins and variations within the “White Race,” which of course was “the leading race in all history” (1890b:103). Challenging the prevailing view that so-called Aryans, Teutons, and Caucasians originated in Europe or Asia, Brinton argues that these so-called white races originated on the great Libyan Plateau, which he calls “Eurafrica.” He sustains this argument by carefully distilling extant paleontology, philology, geology, and ethnography to provide what one reviewer called “formidable opposition” to the then-orthodox view that Western European groups originated in Europe or Asia (Crane 1890). Like his initial work on the Mound Builders of the Mississippi Valley, some of his findings presage later conclusions. At the time, however, his findings flew in the face of contemporary science, which was based on so-called common sense and grounded in racist assumptions (for example, Native Americans could not have erected the mounds, and Aryans could not have come from Africa).

When Brinton described the various stocks and groups of black people, he merely restated widespread racial stereotypes and validated them as scientific facts. Some were long-standing and quite blatant: he suggests, for example, that “the true negroes are passionately fond of music, singing and dancing” (1890b:192). Others were more caustic, placing the “African negro midway between the Orang-utang and the European white” (Brinton 1890b:25), based on what he saw as the Negroes’ exaggerated prognathism; after all, “the African black . . . presents many peculiarities which are termed ‘pithecoid’ or apelike” (1902:133).

Brinton wove the authority of science into the tapestry of contemptuous images dispersed throughout magazines, lithographs, and minstrelsy, but the themes he recast as ethnology in the 1890s were already routinized in American popular culture, helping to sell everything from maple syrup to toothpaste. His scheme mirrors other schemes that position each race on a rung of the ladder to civilization.

Brinton’s style of ethnography was heartily embraced, and Races and Peoples (1890b) received positive reviews on both sides of the Atlantic. Journalist Agnes Crane, for example, raved to her middle-brow readers in the English Channel resort community of Brighton that

no popular work of this scientific character has appeared since the publication of M. [F]r [mand] de Quatrefages’s “L’espece humaine” in 1877 . . . . But twelve years are an epoch in ethnography—no science advances with more rapid strides—and every epoch needs its special chroniclers. If M. de Quatrefages is now somewhat behind the age, Dr. Brinton may be said to be a little ahead of it, for he is an advanced evolutionist, au courant of the times and prodigal of original speculation. [1890]
Franz Boas gave the book a judicious—qualified, yet positive—review, both as an anonymous reviewer for *Science* and as an associate editor of the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*. In identical opening sentences, he gingerly approves of Brinton’s work: “Dr. Brinton has undertaken the difficult task of presenting the whole vast field of anthropological science in a concise and readable form, and he has admirably succeeded in giving us a book that is attractive, and in all its parts suggestive” (1890:276, 1891:87). In *Science*, Boas comments on the didactic value of *Races and Peoples* for the greater public: “Therefore not only will it prove useful in making the public acquainted with the facts and some theories of ethnological science, but it will also incite the painstaking student to more thorough investigation of mooted questions, and open new vistas in many fields of research” (1890:276).

The way Brinton compares Africans with apes did give Boas pause, and he voices this concern in a comment in the anonymous review in *Science*, stating that "too much is made of the peculiarities of the ‘lower’ races, which in some respects might be called rather exaggerated human types than simian in character" (1890:276). Boas chose to take issue with the way Brinton conflated linguistic groups with racial groups. The review in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore* is much shorter and provides only an outline of the book. Each review concludes by stating that Brinton emphasizes "justly the close relations between ethnography and historical and political science. [This/His] work will undoubtedly greatly contribute to making this close connection better known and more thoroughly understood" (Boas 1890:277, 1891:88).24

**Boas in the Bull Pen**

Even though Boas is generally recognized for debunking such racialist research in anthropology, his critique did not find firm footing until he was established in a university department. Moreover, his critique was not sustained until 1911, when *The Mind of Primitive Man* appeared (Boas 1911; Stocking 1968:161–194; Williams 1996:4–36). Although many scholars recognize Boas as a crusader against racial formalism and for racial justice, his biographers demonstrate that this role emerged slowly. Julie E. Liss, for example, points to his identity formation as way of explaining that

Boas’ early attempts to establish a secure scientific position for himself were frustrated, at least in part because his vision of an unformed scientific field awaiting the rectifying genius of Germanic science was not appropriate to the realities of the American scientific scene. . . . Paradoxically, Boas’ early efforts to establish himself in America had the effect of affirming a German identity which, as a Jew in Germany, had been very problematic for him. [1996:181–182]

George W. Stocking Jr., on the other hand, suggests that Boas’s criticisms of racial formalism emerged slowly because of "the current state of biological knowledge" (1968:169). "Furthermore," Stocking argues, Boas “carried with him a residue of polygenist and evolutionary assumption which was the baggage of physical anthropology generally” (1968:169–170).
Both lines of inquiry offer important insights into Boas’s shift toward a more critical view of the science that maintained racial hierarchies in the United States. At least at the beginning of his career, however, the speed with which Boas tackled scholars and scholarship articulating ideas about racial inferiority was pegged, in lockstep, to his incremental institutional security—within the American Anthropological Association, Columbia University, and the American Museum of Natural History.

When Boas wrote his two reviews of Brinton’s work in 1890, he was a 32-year-old Jewish immigrant without steady employment; not until the following year did he receive his first academic appointment, as a docent at Clark University. Boas was only beginning the long-term research project that would become *Changes in Bodily Forms of Descendants of Immigrants* (1912), which would provide evidence to bolster his later challenges to Brinton’s style of ethnology. At this time, Boas had neither the data nor the power to launch direct and public assault on Brinton, who was well ensconced in the type of institutional framework Boas needed to advance himself and his vision of anthropology.

After all, Brinton was president of the AFLS when *Races and Peoples* was published in 1890. Boas chaired both the editorial committee and the council of the society, and his committee members included such influential anthropologists as Frederic Ward Putnam, Brinton, and Otis T. Mason of the Smithsonian’s National Museum, who was elected president of the AFLS the following year (Boas et al. 1891:5). William W. Newell, a staunch ally of Boas, understood the stakes involved if Boas were to give Brinton’s book a negative review. However, Newell was the journal’s editor, and he also understood the stakes involved in allowing only a cursory review of the president’s magnum opus. In a letter to Boas about his review of *Races and Peoples*, Newell proposes a compromise:

> As Dr. Brinton is our president, and the notice [of *Races and Peoples*] is perhaps rather brief, and as you, of course, have not been able to enter at length into any of the theoretical questions of which Brinton treats, I should like, if you have no objection, to add to your notice the words here enclosed, or some equivalent, if you prefer it, which merely state the fact, that we have not space to enter on a general discussion in our reviews.  

Newell does provide a rather cryptic line at the end of the review section of that issue, stating, “Want of space forbids us to extract further” (1891:93).

Regna Darnell (1988:64–81) has discussed in detail the cordial, polite, but somewhat tense relationship between Brinton and Boas during the early 1890s. It is not clear, however, whether Boas was tempering his animosity toward the senior ethnologist in order to ensure his upward mobility within the organizations in which Brinton held sway or actually supported Brinton’s findings. Vernon J. Williams Jr., in *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries* (1996), offers a compelling argument for the latter. I initially questioned Williams’s claims in support of the former (Baker 1996:909; Williams 1996:10), but, after closely examining the text and context of Boas’s “Human Faculty as
Determined by Race” (1895), his first antiracist address to a scientific society, I concluded both that Boas was being careful not to challenge Brinton directly and that he accepted some of Brinton’s findings.

In 1894, Boas served as vice president of the AAAS’s Section H (anthropology), and he delivered his address to the section at the August meetings. During that month, he was also mourning the death of his young son, avoiding his creditors, and facing unemployment. Without using names, Boas addresses “observers” and “recent writers” who have “claimed that the white race represents a higher type than all others” (1895:301). He focuses on how proponents of evolutionary hierarchies always “interpret as racial character what is only an effect of social surroundings” (1895:326).

He explains how various civilizations developed independently and through cultural diffusion, emphasizing that they arose in various parts of the world, regardless of the inhabitants’ race. Even though this contradicted the prevailing notions of race, Boas deferred to (or conceded) much of Brinton’s ethnology. He challenges Brinton’s notion about the relationship between Negroes and apes in his anonymous review of Races and Peoples in Science, but in this public address he evidently concurs with Brinton that Negroes express a certain primate-like morphology: “The alveolar arch is pushed forward [in Negroes] and thus gains an appearance which reminds us of the higher apes. There is no denying that this feature is a most constant character of the black races and that it represents a type slightly nearer the animal than the European” (Boas 1895:311). Boas also concedes the discourse that links head size and brain weight to so-called cultural achievement:

It would seem that the greater the central nervous system, the greater the faculty of the race and the greater its aptitude to mental achievements. Let us review the known facts. . . . There are . . . sufficient data available to establish beyond a doubt the fact that the brain-weight of the whites is larger than that of most other races, particularly larger than that of the negroes. In interpreting these facts we must ask, does the increase in the size of the brain prove an increase in faculty? This would seem highly probable and facts may be adduced which speak in favor of this assumption. [1895:314]

It is difficult to discern in this address whether Boas accepted or just interpreted extant findings. The broader conclusions that he draws from the data, however, are in stark contrast to Brinton’s conclusions. Boas argues that there is considerable overlap of racial characteristics and underscores the fact that nothing “has been found yet which would prove beyond a doubt that it will be impossible for certain races to attain a higher civilization” (1895:317). In a direct challenge to Brinton’s ethnography, Boas declares that the main reason for African American inequality is not depreciated faculties, arguing instead “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” (1895:307). He suggests that scientists should investigate how much Negroes have “accomplished in a short period against heavy odds” because “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” (1895:307). Boas is adamant 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” (1895:308). Although Boas was careful, he essentially challenges Brinton while erecting the scaffolding for his later sustained critique of scientific notions of racial inferiority (Baker 1994; Hyatt 1985; Stocking 1968; Williams 1996).

Brinton essentially accepted Boas’s challenge the following year, 1895, when he delivered “The Aims of Anthropology” (1896a) as the presidential address to the AAAS. Brinton took that opportunity to upstage Boas’s vice presidential address to the section and (of course) to put young Boas in his place.27

Laws of Nature and the Law of the Land

Brinton saw industrialization as the only road to civilization: “The progress of man is his progress of gaining independence from nature, of making her forces his slaves and not leaving them his masters” (1898:276). His view of inevitable progress and his notions of racial hierarchies were commensurate with fin-de-siècle ideas of laissez-faire fitness that curbed regulatory reform, emboldened monopolies, and structured racial segregation (Brinton 1898:276; Hofstader 1955:45; Wiecak 1992). Brinton presented these notions with force and candor in his 1895 presidential address to the AAAS. Calling anthropology “a natural science” that seeks to test and explain “organic laws,” he declares that “the black, the brown and the red races differ anatomically so much from the white . . . that even with equal cerebral capacity they never could rival its results by equal efforts” (1896a:67–68). Although Brinton employed the same ideas about racial inferiority as he had in his earlier books, the address had a much wider audience because it was published by Popular Science Monthly.

As president of the AAAS, Brinton advanced anthropology along the lines he had developed at the ANSP, not along the lines he continued to practice at the APS. Brinton was adamant that anthropology’s future rested on producing “very direct or visible practical applications” and on a “concern with the daily affairs of life” (1896a:59). To make anthropology more relevant, he turned to race. He understood the structures and expectations of various institutions, at a time when success or popularity as a man of science was tethered to analyzing problems, providing practical solutions, or reinforcing (with science) ideologies articulated by benefactors, trustees, and public opinion.

One of the most salient concerns in the daily affairs of people in the United States during the 1890s was the so-called Negro problem, and Brinton argued that anthropology could address this issue in practical ways. Anthropological research, he concludes, “offers a positive basis for legislation, politics, and education as applied to a given ethnic group” (1896a:69; see also Haller 1971:722). As president of the AAAS, he issued a popular call for legislation that conformed to putative organic laws—ratifying and naturalizing white supremacy. Although there is no evidence that the U.S. Supreme Court took any judicial
notice of Brinton’s address, these ideas were so widespread that the Court un-
wittingly answered his call and ruled on *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 US 537 [1896])
the following year.28 *Plessy* made the idea of racial inferiority constitutional
law, forcing African Americans into inferior schools, bathrooms, accommoda-
tions, and Jim Crow train cars.

*Plessy* was one of many examples of laissez-faire constitutionalism. This
form of jurisprudence assumed that the Constitution simply reinforces the laws
of nature and rules of common law. Natural market forces, the inferiority of cer-
tain races, and the inequality of women were so natural or organic that any con-
stitutional tinkering was tantamount to slapping the hand of God.29 Brinton’s
1895 presidential address exemplifies how his vision of anthropology fit neatly
within these ideas of the Gilded Age, dovetailing with elaborate rationales used
to underwrite legislation that sustained oppression along racial and gender lines
and to prevent legislation that regulated commerce and working conditions. Al-
though laissez-faire constitutionalism held sway in the Supreme Court well into
the 20th century, during the late 19th century state legislatures and Congress be-
gan to heed the demands of journalists and reformers for regulatory laws that
curbed monopolies and regulated maximum hours and minimum wages. These
reforms impugned tooth-and-claw notions of the survival of the fittest, marking
the waning of the so-called Gilded Age and the waxing of the Progressive Era
(McCormick 1993:319). From this perspective, Brinton’s retrospective insignif-
ance can be understood in new ways: he engaged in discursive practices that
slowly became eclipsed by the reform-minded intellectuals of the Progressive
Era. It is not that racism or stereotypes abated during the Progressive Era; the
eugenics movement, for example, blossomed during this period. The science of
race, however, slowly veered from a natural science to a “social” science with
the aim of solving, rather than simply identifying, problems. In the wake of
widespread concern about child labor, unsafe working conditions, monopolies,
overcrowded tenements, and a myriad of public health issues, intellectuals pro-
posed new theories, and legislators imposed new regulations. Whereas most
Americans still had an unwavering faith in progress, it was not inevitable—prog-
ress had to be managed.

Daniel G. Brinton: Radical or Reactionary?

Although there is little direct evidence that Brinton’s shift away from In-
dian linguistics and grammar caused his ascension to positions of leadership in
science, his stands on race and gender mirrored popular stereotypes, public
opinion, and legislative statutes and no doubt facilitated an increase in his popu-
ularity. I cannot draw a conclusion from the historical record as to whether Brin-
ton had a mission to advance anthropology in the public’s interest and simply
chose the most effective way to do so or just abandoned whatever failed and
chose a path to ensure his own popularity. What should be clear from the record
is that Brinton won accolade after accolade from prestigious institutions of sci-
ence during the tumultuous 1890s and that he validated ideas of inferiority that
were consumed as “popular science” in lectures, magazines, and books. Brinton’s
scholarship simply crystallized, in vivid relief, many prevailing views, even among people who were considered open-minded or even "radical."

At the same time, Brinton began to write scientific essays that seemingly promote racial and gender inequality, and he appears to have become more politically radical, to have adopted certain socialist values, and to have been embraced by people committed to socialism and anarchist communism. Horace L. Traubel, editor of The Conservator (one of Philadelphia's more radical papers), notes that "at one period Brinton was a bigoted antagonist of industrial [socialist] revolution. I had encounters with him when the brute power of his prejudice astonished me. But in his mellower final years all such rudimentary quality seems to have gone out of his composition" (1899:131). The following year a contributor to the same paper explains how

there was a latterday Brinton who seemed to some of us as much more valuable to the community. . . . It was only in his later life that in the domain of economics, of property, of government, his views were collaterally liberalized and seemed to some of his alarmed orthodox associates on the border line of the dangerous if not actually reaching into the territory of the hallucination. [The Conservator 1900:189]

"During Dr. Brinton's later years," Helen Abbott Michael notes, "it was known in a small circle of comrades" that he "believed that a duty devolved upon scholars with socialistic views to carry the force of scholasticism to their own social class as well as to bring whatever aid it might to the masses" (1899:103, 102). In a letter to Stewart Culin, she even notes that "Doctor Brinton always stood as the advocate of women and he has always been fair to her in her efforts towards intellectual freedom." Brinton's reputation as an insurgent voice in his final years even reached across the Atlantic. An obituary in London's Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism suggests that "it would be straining a point to call [Brinton] a comrade," but "we are doing no injustice to his memory when we say he was nearer to us than to any of the various schools of thought which deal with the social problem; and had he begun the study of this question earlier in life he would have been a worker for Anarchist Communism" (1899:74).

Virtually nothing in Brinton's published works and professional correspondence documents his political views of the government or the economy. Although his Quaker background and these obituaries raise some intriguing questions, they demonstrate how deeply ingrained notions of white supremacy were even among putative radical scholars and activists, how accepted notions of racial evolutionism were among the intelligentsia regardless of political orientation, and how integral notions of racial hierarchies were to anarchist ideology during the last decade of the 19th century. They also reflect Brinton's ability to contribute to and operate within various circles and institutions that pursued different goals and agendas.

Although I could not determine exactly how Brinton "mellowed" in his final years, his last book, The Basis of Social Relations (1902), demonstrates that on the issues of race and sex as they relate to black people in the United States,
he was as acerbic as ever: "I fail to see any difference from a physical standpoint," Brinton observes, "between the sexual furor of the negro and that which prevails among the lower animals . . . namely, that the furor sexualis in the negro resembles similar sexual attacks in the bull and elephant" (1902:160). He even notes how these so-called attacks have "been especially frequent among the negroes in States cursed by carpetbag statesmanship" (1902:161).

I do not think it helps us better understand the checkered past of anthropology to indict Brinton as a racist, for he conducted his research during a period marked by some of the most virulent racism ever experienced in U.S. history. After all, he was quite innocuous compared with such legislative lapdogs of white supremacy as Benjamin Tilman or John Sharp Williams or with such hucksters of scientific racism as Madison Grant or Nathan S. Shaler. Moreover, if one wanted to measure the influence Brinton had on articulating notions of racialized evolution, he would pale in comparison with someone like Booker T. Washington, whose countless speeches, addresses, and pamphlets promote racial uplift, imbued with similar neo-Lamarckian ideas. Brinton's career trajectory does help us, however, understand how the enduring relationship between race and the relevance of anthropology was forged during this important period.

**Brinton's Retrospective Insignificance**

I began this narrative with a discussion of race and relevance, but part of the story is why Brinton became irrelevant in historical narratives of the field. As an actor in the production of late-19th-century anthropology, Brinton played a starring role. He was an actor who lived and worked in this period, an agent who exercised power within specific structures, and a subject who chose with purpose and candor different voices and was aware of his own vocality (Trouillot 1995:22).

As Stocking (1960), Darnell (1971), Bronner (1986), and others have explained, Brinton was integral to the movement to professionalize the field and make anthropology a relevant discipline at the close of the 19th century, and it was this movement that established the institutional apparatus anthropologists are using today to advance their discipline in the 21st century. So why is so little known—and even less written—about this venerable "father" of anthropology? The easy answers for this lack of significance include the fact that he never left a legacy in terms of students and scholarship and that he never found an institutional base where he could successfully and securely articulate his vision of anthropology. Brinton worked during a period when institutional change was rapid and significant. Although he contributed to nascent national organizations, his attempts to address and respond to various audiences at different institutions in Philadelphia suggest that there was no single type of institution where he could effectively anchor anthropology in the Delaware Valley. Even within these institutions, Brinton held tenuous positions. He was neither a conventional professor, nor independently wealthy, nor a charismatic orator. He was not even a professional fieldworker like his colleagues at the BAE.
As a heuristic device, compare briefly the retrospective significance of Brinton and Boas. Although the significance of Boas to the history of anthropology has oscillated from decade to decade, Leslie White aptly notes that Boas’s “reputation grew like a rolling snowball” (1947:373), and Darnell shows how Boas’s stature reached legendary proportions (1971:90). An easy explanation for this disparity is the fact that Boas has an enduring legacy in terms of scholarship and students and that he had a position in an institution from which he could securely and successfully articulate a vision for anthropology. These dynamics can also go a long way to explain F. W. Putnam’s retrospective significance. Lewis Henry Morgan and John Wesley Powell, however, did not have students or institutional security. Their retrospective significance can be linked to efforts of scholars to resuscitate their research and revive their writing in order to identify the “historical roots” of contemporary theoretical or political concerns (e.g., Baron and Junkin 1986; Fluehr-Lobban 1987; Leacock 1979; Roscoe and Larkin 1995).

I want to illustrate a less obvious distinction. Both Brinton and Boas worked to professionalize and institutionalize the field, in an effort to make it a less “dilettante occupation, suited to persons of elegant leisure and retired old gentlemen” (Brinton 1896a:59). Brinton advanced his vision that the professional anthropologist would identify and explain problems and address the “daily affairs of life,” whereas Boas eventually developed his vision that the professional anthropologist would conduct fieldwork and teach in a university. The critical success factor was the security and insularity of a university department. Although Boas engaged in dramatic battles with university administrations, the structure of a department enabled him to produce basic research and instruct students and then to engage in public affairs. Although dependent on philanthropists, Boas was able to advance his anthropology through university instruction, the Journal of American Folk-Lore, and organizational leadership. His strategy was not sutured to the needs of Congress, as Powell’s was; to the wishes of museum patrons, as Putnam’s was; or to the appetites of the public, as Brinton’s was. Brinton’s late-19th-century model led to a dead end; Boas’s model was sustained throughout the 20th century.

At one level Brinton successfully straddled institutions—introducing anthropology to other fields and other fields to anthropology. This was a particularly successful strategy in the late 19th century, when so-called vernacular science of a more popular nature flourished in lyceums, museums, and public lecture halls (Bender 1993:26). Although he succeeded at this type of science at the ANSP, his success was contingent, to a certain extent, on a “market” in which people’s demands and desires supported particular content—like the University Museum’s privileging of Near Eastern over American archaeology. Thomas Bender poses the argument that the vagaries of the market steered academics into more esoteric research, and he explains that “intellectuals turned to academic culture as a hedge against the market—whether to insist upon the superiority of honor to market values, or for a sanctuary from intellectual chaos and competitiveness, or to purify and clarify discourse, even at the risk of social...
irrelevance” (1993:xv). The irony, of course, is that Brinton did not hedge. Quite the contrary, he participated in that market to make anthropology as relevant as possible by using it to address one of the most pressing and popular issues of his day: the Negro problem. And, although professional science of a more esoteric nature became increasingly isolated, the anthropologists who took that tack are more relevant today, as is their anthropology. The way it turned out, the vagaries of history and historiography contributed to Brinton’s seeming irrelevance in the annals of anthropological history. Of course, obscurity does not mean irrelevance, and Brinton’s career and record of publication are particularly salient as anthropologists look toward the past to help grapple with those enduring, albeit changing, themes: race and relevance.

Conclusion

What can we learn from Brinton’s rise in popularity? What are the stakes a century later, when anthropologists argue that the future of anthropology in the 21st century is contingent on a more public anthropology that addresses contemporary social issues and produces more public intellectuals?

During the past decade, the role of the “public intellectual” has become an integral cog in the multimedia and information-saturated global economy. As it was a century ago, scholars who emerge as public intellectuals are able to bring academic and often unconventional ideas to bear on urgent issues or package them for public consumption. While I prefer the moniker of a scholar in the public interest or, cynically, a scholar in which the public has interest, “public intellectuals” help to shape public policy, public opinion, and even the popular science generated by the Mars Pathfinder’s Rover.

In 1995, James L. Peacock delivered his compelling presidential address entitled “The Future of Anthropology” to the 94th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Washington, D.C. The future of anthropology, Peacock implores, depends on anthropology’s ability to “contribute beyond the discipline and beyond the academy, to society and to thought” (1997:14). Peacock warns that the survival of the discipline rests on anthropologists’ ability to “communicate to the outside: by teaching, speaking, and doing and by writing textbooks, opinion pieces, and reports” (1997:12). Peacock was renewing a call for a more public anthropology that can become integral and responsive to a changing and complex society.

From Leo Chavez’s documentaries of undocumented workers in Southern California to Michael Blakey’s massive anthropological investigation of the African Burial Ground in New York City, anthropologists throughout the country, indeed throughout the world, have been advancing the discipline within the public sphere. Although many anthropologists have worked diligently to make anthropology more salient outside the academy, the fact remains that the anthropologist who has influenced and contributed the most to public opinion and public policy in the last few years has been Glynn Custred, the ardent spokesperson and coauthor of anti-affirmative action Proposition 209—the so-called California Civil Rights initiative.
The double-edged sword of public anthropology and the need to grapple with both race and the relevance of anthropology are obviously nothing new. It takes exceptional courage and diligence to argue within public arenas positions that are not popular. This narrative focuses on the various capacities and institutional contexts in which Brinton served as an anthropologist: it should not be read as an indictment of public or practicing anthropology. I am a staunch supporter of both and wholeheartedly agree with Peacock’s assessment. If anything, this narrative should be read with the understanding that the rise of the social sciences is tethered as much to institutions as to the scholars within those institutions.

Notes

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1. Although anthropological inquiries had been around since the Enlightenment, the systematic and secular study of anthropology did not fully develop in the United States until after the Civil War. Anthropology did not begin to be an academic discipline until the 1880s, but then it developed quickly. As Franz Boas puts it, “The speculative anthropology of the 18th and the early part of the 19th century is distinct in its scope and method from the science which is called anthropology at the present time” (1904:513).


4. Auguste Comte devised a scheme of social evolution based on both cooperation and competition, and the scientist played one of the most important roles in this progressive movement. From Comte’s perspective, people have an instinct to understand their world and control it. In this process of gaining a better understanding, people pass from a theological understanding through a metaphysical understanding and finally reach a scientific way of thinking. One of the specific roles that Comte identifies for the scientific thinker is identifying the “chain of successive transformations [of] the human race.” “Starting from a condition barely superior to that of a society of great apes,” Comte
argues, scientists should help find out how the human race "has been gradually led up to the present stage of European civilization" (1911:237–238).

5. Brinton envisions, for example, that the mind of man is "everywhere different yet everywhere the same," concluding that the condition of "savages" is the product of "the same great natural forces [that] are eternally at work, above, around and beneath us, producing similar results in matter, educing like conceptions in mind" (1859:126). Yet the "peninsular tribes of the sixteenth century," he explains, were sparsely "peopled by a barbarous and quarrelsome race of savages, rent asunder into manifold petty clans, with little peaceful leisure wherein to better their condition, wasting their lives in aimless and unending internecine war" (1859:111).

6. Almost 40 years later, even after distilling Darwin's theories, Brinton still hung onto virtually the same admixture of ideas: "We must accept ethnic characteristics as originally acquired traits, slowly strengthened by repetition and natural selection in some more plastic stage of the life of the species than the present, and hence impressed indelibly upon its members" (1898:275).


8. In a review of Darnell's biography of Brinton, Curtis Hinsley notes, "The key to understanding Brinton lies in his self-definition as an 'Americanist,'" questioning the way Regna Darnell labels Brinton an "anthropologist" (1989:775). The evidence is clear that Brinton was committed to advancing anthropology as a science that would identify and explain problems for American society. However, he had a passion and an unusual skill for classifying and analyzing American languages. He knew that this alone would not help advance the field of anthropology and elevate him as a leading intellectual. Brinton was quite ambidextrous with regard to his identities as an Americanist, an anthropologist, and a general scientist. I think the key to understanding Brinton is how flexible he was with his scholastic identities. When he was on Independence Mall he was the resident Americanist at the APS. When he crossed the Schuylkill River to the University of Pennsylvania he embraced his role as an anthropologist. But on 13th and Race Streets he emerged as a great man of science to give popular lectures at the ANSP.


10. D. G. Brinton to Franz Boas, June 6, 1887, American Philosophical Society, Professional Correspondence of Franz Boas.


12. C. Tower, 1895, Report from the President of the Board of Managers of the Department of Archaeology and Paleontology to the Board of Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives, Director's Office Records, Dept. of A&P—Pres. C. Tower, 1892–1894, Brinton, American Section Folder.


16. At Harvard University in 1887, Frederic Ward Putnam became the next appointed professor of anthropology.

17. D. G. Brinton to Rev. Dr. M.C.L. [?] K., Committee on Instruction, April 24, 1884, Ewell Sale Stewart Library, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Collection 567, ANSP Correspondence.

18. D. G. Brinton to Angelo Heilprin, September 6, 1889, Ewell Sale Stewart Library, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Collection 567, ANSP Correspondence.

19. D. G. Brinton to Angelo Heilprin, December 17, 1890, Ewell Sale Stewart Library, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Collection 567, ANSP Correspondence.


21. If the gendered form of address was not specified by the female students who signed the roll, Brinton dutifully marked “Miss.” or “Mrs.” in the margin. See “List of Lectures and Lecturers 1881–1898,” Ewell Sale Stewart Library, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Collection 289D, ANSP Education.


23. For a detailed discussion of Brinton’s ideas about the racial stratigraphy within the white race, see Patterson and Spencer’s (1994) excellent discussion of “buffer races.”

24. The one difference between these sentences is that in the Journal of American Folk-Lore Boas uses This and in Science he uses His.


26. Boas had recently resigned from the Chicago Natural History Museum under protest, for his dismissal was imminent (Herskovits 1953:16; Williams 1996:8).

27. Boas’s vision of anthropology had to wait until after World War I, when the first generation of professional ethnologists had died and he and his graduate students from Columbia University could begin to dominate the field. Boas’s notion of the equipotentiality of all races clearly challenged the prevailing popular and scientific discourse on race, and the structure of the university department allowed him to keep advancing research and articulating a vision that did not have widespread public support. Although Boas tried in vain to raise money for further research and to speak or write publicly to advance his more critical understanding of race, nothing prevented him during the ensuing decade from teaching students, gathering data, working with black intellectuals, and publishing his work in the Hampton Institute’s Southern Workman and the NAACP’s Crisis Magazine (Baker 1994:207–213; Boas 1909, 1910; Liss 1998).

28. Although Brinton was not cited in Plessy, his book Races and Peoples (1890b) was cited as an authority as late as 1925 in United States v. Cartozian (6F 2d 919[1925]), which was a District of Columbia appellate case about who was considered “free white” with regard to naturalization laws.

29. There is some debate about how much social Darwinism informed this style of jurisprudence (Ely 1995:57–82). I have found evidence to suggest that certain anthropologists who advanced ideas of racial inferiority interacted with the justices who decided Plessy. In 1893, a member of the Anthropological Society of Washington, Robert H. Lamborn, offered two cash prizes to the anthropologists who could write the “clearest statements of the elements that go to make up the most useful citizen of the
United States” (Lamb 1906:573, emphasis added). Because Brinton was the expert on the “elements” of ethnography, he was selected as one of the judges to decide the winners. He was joined by Daniel Gilman, president of Johns Hopkins; Adlai E. Stevenson, vice president of the United States under Grover Cleveland; and Melville W. Fuller, chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, who concurred with Plessy (Lamb 1906:573–574). Associate Justice Henry Billings Brown, the author of Plessy, and Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes were both members of the Cosmos Club of Washington, D.C. That club was founded by anthropologist John Wesley Powell and was dominated by his associates from the Anthropological Society of Washington during the 1890s. Ely makes the argument that the justices were not in contact with people who were articulating these scientific ideas of racial hierarchy, but the Cosmos Club at that time was dominated by scientists articulating them (Cosmos Club 1968:14, 56; Washburn 1978:15–25).

30. Horace L. Traubel is perhaps better known as Walt Whitman’s biographer.
32. Each time someone dials (703) 528-1902 to reach the American Anthropological Association in Arlington, Virginia, it is a wink to the culmination, in 1902, of contentious processes that finally led to a sustainable national organization.
33. Of course, Boas was an intellectual in the public interest and was often involved in public affairs. However, he only actively engaged in issues outside the academy after 1905, when he had a firm institutional foundation. Although Columbia promoted Boas from lecturer to professor in 1898, he joined Columbia’s faculty “full-time” in 1905 when he left the American Museum of Natural History. I should add that faculty members at colleges in the early 20th century did not have the security of tenure, which was first proposed in 1925 when representatives of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), founded in 1919, and of the Association of American Colleges outlined a set of guidelines for “academic freedom and tenure.” In 1940, these organizations agreed on a restatement of principles set forth earlier. The restatement, widely known as The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure (AAUP 1940), standardized guidelines and protocols for procedures to insure academic freedom and grant tenure across universities and colleges.

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