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CHAPTER

W. E. B. Du Bois and American Anthropology

Lee D. Baker

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Abstract

W. E. B. Du Bois had a major impact on anthropology because he served as a model and mentor to Franz Boas as he was becoming a public intellectual. Anthropology in the United States changed significantly when Franz Boas (1858–1942) began challenging ideas of racial inferiority and the hierarchy of cultures in the popular press. In first decades of the 20th century the two had developed close relationship. It was Du Bois who invited, pulled, and recruited Franz Boas onto the public stage and into the struggle for Black liberation. Du Bois saw Boas as an ally, and he leveraged anthropology in two specific ways. The first was using anthropology to showcase advanced African civilizations of the past. Second, he used anthropology to demonstrate that there was no proof that one race was inferior to any other. Finally, Du Bois deployed anthropologically inflected categories and types to describe and document the diversity of African American communities.

Keywords: [anthropology](#), [African civilizations](#), [NAACP incorporation](#), [amalgamation](#), [Atlanta University Studies](#), [Franz Boas](#), [decolonizing anthropology](#), [scientific racism](#)

Subject: [Race and Ethnicity](#), [Social Theory](#), [Sociology](#)

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In 1939, W. E. B. Du Bois pointedly quipped that the “Negro ... was the football of Anthropology” (Du Bois 2007: xxxii). However, St. Claire Drake noted, “Du Bois, like all other black intellectuals, judged anthropology partly in terms of how favorable or inimical it was in the ‘vindication’ struggle” (Drake 1980: 10). Du Bois convened a wide range of artists, scientists, activists, historians, and poets to serve as warriors against the daily violence and humiliation of White supremacy. He invited people to speak at conferences, write in the *Crisis* and other publications, review his books, organize events, and so on. Du Bois organized a multiracial and multimodal campaign to change hearts and minds worldwide through science, art, propaganda, and agitation. Early in the twentieth century, he recruited Franz Boas (1858–1942) to work on his campaign. Boas was one of the most accomplished anthropologists in the United States. Today, scholars widely recognize him as a public intellectual who championed social justice and publicly and vociferously denounced scientific racism, the myth of Nordic superiority, military violence, and narrow nationalism (Boas 1945b; Liss 2015). However, W. E. B. Du Bois was the one who dragged him out of the ivory tower and

into the knock-down-drag-out fights in newspapers, monthlies, and public forums in the fight against antiblack racism (Baker 2004). Boas's initial encounter with Du Bois in Atlanta was a watershed moment, literally a turning point, in Boas's life. After that visit and his subsequent relationship with Du Bois, Boas began routinely and systematically producing scholarship for the mass media and publicly weighing in on political debates on race, culture, immigration, and war.

Du Bois also influenced, directly or indirectly, the first generation of African American anthropologists, those receiving their training in the 1920s through the 1940s. He directly influenced Allison Davis, Irene Diggs, St. Clair Drake, Carolyn Bond Day, and Arthur H. Fauset (Bond 1988: 767; Harrison and Harrison 1999: 12; Varel 2018: 61).¹ These pioneers were influential anthropologists because they used their analysis of race and culture, and class and caste, to vindicate Africans throughout the Diaspora from scurrilous claims of inferiority (Harrison 1992: 241). Their scholarship was part of a broader effort to combat the treachery of racism and colonialism in all its forms. Du Bois's multimodal and multidisciplinary (yet singularly focused) use of methods influenced each scholar directly.

This generation of pioneers in anthropology served as a bridge to what Jafari S. Allen and Ryan C. Jobson termed the "decolonizing generation," which emerged in the wake of the Black Power and Black studies movements (Allen and Jobson 2016). Recent scholars have codified the consensus and lore that Faye V. Harrison's landmark book *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation* (Harrison 1991) galvanized, organized, and mobilized a new generation of anthropologists committed to critically and theoretically interrogating the construction of race and the lethality of racism (Allen and Jobson 2016: 129).

In terms of the history of anthropology and the genealogy of knowledge, this is significant because this so-called decolonizing generation and their students have created the most compelling and influential anthropology of race and racism today.² These activist scholars, influenced by Black studies, trace their lineage to Du Bois and the Atlanta School of Sociology via Drake, Davis, and Diggs—not to the beloved Franz Boas, the so-called father of American anthropology (Allen and Jobson 2016, Drake and Baber 1990, Harrison 1990, Harrison 1991; 1995, Morris 2015: 73, Mullings 2005).

Recently, Mark Anderson in *From Boas to Black Power: Racism, Liberalism, and American Anthropology* (Anderson 2019) and Ira E. Harrison, Deborah Johnson-Simon, and Erica Lorraine Williams in *The Second Generation of African American Pioneers in Anthropology* (Harrison, Johnson-Simon, and Williams 2018) have documented and analyzed this generation of anthropologists influenced by Du Bois, Diggs, Drake, Davis, Fauset, and African American studies.

Aldon Morris in *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* has persuasively argued that "Du Bois's sociological, historical, and anthropological works established the social science basis for African American studies" (Morris 2015: 220). Du Bois also established the basis for the anthropology of racism and race relations. For students and scholars interested in the relationship between American anthropology, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the emergence of the social science wing of African American studies, it is instructive to explore how Du Bois engaged anthropology and anthropologists in the early twentieth century. That means revisiting, surveying, and plumbing what Aldon Morris called "a near-perfect scholarly marriage" between W. E. B. Du Bois and Franz Boas (Morris 2015: 83). "Near perfect," maybe? Kind of complicated, absolutely!

By exploring this relationship, however, one also learns how the younger scholar invited, pulled, and recruited Franz Boas onto the public stage and into the struggle for Black liberation. Du Bois served as a model and mentor for Boas as he was becoming a public intellectual. Finally, by exploring this relationship, we also see how much more sophisticated Du Bois was than Boas in analyzing the social construction of race and the devastating outcomes and the deadliness of antiblack racism.

American anthropology of the mid- to late nineteenth century was inimical to the racial struggle for equality because people like Josiah Nott, George Gliddon, and Samuel Morton used anthropology to prove that the Negro was naturally and inherently inferior. Thus, Negroes were not among “all men” who were created equal, and therefore could be property to enslave, trade, and bequeath.

Anthropology in the United States changed significantly when Boas began challenging ideas of racial inferiority and the hierarchy of cultures. A German immigrant of Jewish heritage, Boas was influential in challenging and debunking scientific racism in scientific journals, public forums, and the popular press. In the late nineteenth century, anthropology moved out of museums and government bureaus of investigation and into colleges and universities. A new generation of anthropologists influenced by Boas began to head up new departments and old journals throughout North America at the dawn of the twentieth century—forever hobbling scientific racism.

Always the pragmatist, Du Bois saw Boas and anthropology as an ally, and consistently “used,” or perhaps leveraged, anthropology and, by extension Franz Boas, in two specific ways. The first was using anthropology to showcase advanced African civilizations of the past, which proved that people of African descent could participate in a civilized society and were capable of creating it (Morris 2015: 81–88). Second, he used anthropology to demonstrate that there was no proof that any one race was inferior to any other. Any claim otherwise was not rigorous science and was fueled by race antipathy. Finally, Du Bois deployed anthropologically inflected categories and types to describe and document the diversity of African American communities.

In this article on Du Bois and anthropology, I outline the relationship between Du Bois and Boas during the first decade of the twentieth century and describe how Du Bois pragmatically used anthropology in the *Crisis* and other publications to elevate and vindicate African Americans in the struggle for freedom, liberty, and justice for all. I also demonstrate that Du Bois served as a model and mentor for Franz Boas as he cut his teeth on the way to becoming one of the nation’s most influential public intellectuals.

Du Bois Invites Boas to Atlanta, 1905

At the turn of the century, the grip of Jim Crow paralyzed Black people, lynching extinguished them, and sharecropping eroded their lives and their humanity in the South. Although just a trickle initially, the Great Migration began as the suffocating caste system in Dixie started to push the pioneering migrants north. These tempest-tossed migrants joined the huddled masses of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in dilapidated tenements and the low-wage labor force. And like the Slavs before them and the Italians before them, settlement houses, charities, and reformers were there to help integrate and assimilate these newcomers to the cities. Prominent among these organizations in New York was the Charity Organization Society, which employed the new “scientific philanthropy.” They were motivated by a desire to uplift the poor from poverty, through discipline, religious education, and employment, in order to support themselves without government assistance or individual handouts. Reformers applied this new science in settlement houses and orphanages. The primary goal was to use science to determine who were the deserving poor and who weren’t. Immigrants who were insane, feeble-minded, blind, crippled, criminal types, alcoholics, or prostitutes did not need uplifting. They needed to be off the streets in asylums, sanatoria, or correctional facilities (Abel 1997; Myers-Lipton 2006: 68–69; Ruswick 2013; Stuhler 2013; Tice 1992). Research, surveys, investigations, and statistics were critical to the success of so-called scientific charity and philanthropy. The society published its studies in *Charities: A Review of Local and General Philanthropy*.

In 1905, Paul U. Kellogg was the review’s managing editor. He organized a special issue “devoted from cover to cover to the social interests of the Negroes in the northern cities” (Kellogg 1905a: 1). The contributors to

this ninety-six-page volume were a veritable who's who of experts on "the Negro problem." Booker T. Washington advocated that business should come to and stay in the South. Frances A. Kellor wrote about the exploitation of women coming north, and Mary White Ovington wrote about housing challenges. Others reported on the causes of Negro migration, crime, disease, Negro settlement houses, labor unions, and efforts to stem the migration north. Kellogg commissioned W. E. B. Du Bois to write an article titled "The Black Vote of Philadelphia." He elegantly and succinctly answered the question "Why are Philadelphia politics dirty? Because the most influential and respected citizens of the town are using public business for private gain" (Du Bois 1905a: 35).

Joining this familiar cast of Christian reformers, social workers, and social scientists was a newcomer—Franz Boas. In his essay, "The Negro and the Demands of Modern Life: Ethnic and Anatomical Considerations," he explained—in language typical of the early twentieth century—that "the negroid races are characterized by a higher degree of pigmentation, wavy to frizzly hair ... thick lips, and size of the brain less than that of the other division of mankind" (Boas 1905a: 85). But he also explained that "our knowledge of physiological data that have a bearing upon the question of racial capacity is entirely inadequate." W. E. B. Du Bois, the previous year, had emphatically stated that "all men, black and brown and white, are brothers, varying through Time and Opportunity, in form and gift and feature ... and alike in soul and in the possibility of infinite development" (Du Bois 1904). Boas was more indecisive and suggested that "almost all we can say with certainty is, that the differences between the average types of the white and of the Negro that have bearing upon vitality and mental ability are much less than the individual variations in each race" (Boas 1905a: 86).

Boas then explained that one should look to African civilizations—and African art—to showcase their "love of labor," "thrift," and "the power of organization as illustrated in the government of native states ... and when wielded by men of great personality has led to the foundation of extended empires." Boas posed a poignant question about so-called undesirable traits among Negroes. He questioned whether they were innate racial traits or "due to social surroundings for which we are responsible" (Boas 1905a: 86).

He concluded:

The tearing away from the African soil, and the consequent complete loss of the old standards of life which were replaced by the dependency of slavery and by all it entailed, followed by a period of disorganization and by a severe economic struggle against heavy odds, are sufficient to explain the inferiority of the status of the race without falling back to the theory of hereditary inferiority. In short, there is every reason to believe that the Negro when given facility and opportunity will be perfectly able to fill the duties of citizenship as well as his white neighbor. (87)

Kellogg explained to Du Bois that the "special number of 'Charities'" would be published on October 7, and a "complimentary bundle of a dozen copies will be mailed you on that date" (Kellogg 1905b). When Du Bois received his bundle, he immediately wrote to Franz Boas asking him for "the best and latest works bearing on the anthropology of the Negro" because the subsequent year's Atlanta conference was to focus on the "Negro Physique." He then asked Boas: "would it be possible for you to consider coming here next May and addressing the conference?" To make the invitation even more enticing, he offered up his "2000 Negro pupils and students who could be carefully measured" (Du Bois 1905b). Boas wrote back within a week that there was no work that was "particularly good on the physical anthropology of the Negro" (Boas 1905). Good news for Du Bois, because it confirmed that he and the Atlanta conferences would be at the forefront of creating and producing cutting-edge science on the health and physiques of Negroes. Boas eventually accepted Du Bois's invitation to the conference at the end of May (Boas 1906). Du Bois gave Boas specific instructions, and explained that the audience would be "400-700 city Negroes—working people, teachers and professional men and women" (Du Bois 1906a). Edward T. Ware, the acting president of Atlanta

University, even asked the eminent anthropologist to give the commencement address after the conference and said that he hoped “the occasion will prove one of real interest for” Boas (Ware 1906).

In Atlanta, Boas contributed to the Conference on Negro Health and Physique by providing extemporaneous remarks that mirrored those published months before in *Charities*. His observations were not well received (Morris 2015: 85; Zumwalt and Willis 2008: 53). After the conference, Du Bois, Boas, and Richard R. Wright, the Black president of Georgia State Industrial College, drafted the conference resolutions. They resolved that Negroes were capable of human accomplishments and recommended expanding health care services and studying Negro problems systematically (Du Bois 1906b: 110).

For his commencement address, Boas tried to strike an optimistic and inspirational tone for the young graduates—most of whom were to become schoolteachers whose pupils would be growing up in a world defined by a whirlpool of mob violence, degrading humiliation, and confined opportunities. The influential Columbia University professor implored: “the fundamental requirement for useful activity on your part is a clear insight into the capabilities of your own race” (Boas 1945a [1906]: 62). He did not draw examples from the heroism of Ida B. Wells’s antilynching crusade, the magisterial oration of Frederick Douglass’s abolition campaign, or the poignant poetry of Phillis Wheatley. The graduates could have easily identified with these inspiring African Americans. Instead, Boas chose to inspire with examples from African empires.

“While much of the history of early invention is shrouded in darkness,” he thundered, “it seems likely that at a time when the European was still satisfied with rude stone tools, the African had invented or adopted the art of smelting iron” (Boas 1945a: 63). He explained to his august audience that this “was an achievement of the highest order, as great as the discovery of steam power or electricity, if not greater” (63).

“The evidence of African ethnology is such that it should inspire you with the hope of leading your race from achievement to achievement.” He extolled the virtues of Zulu military organization, praised the “intricate” forms of government that united kingdoms of “heterogeneous tribes,” and enthused about the vast commodity markets and sophisticated judicial systems. “Nothing, perhaps, is more encouraging,” he bellowed in his staccato German accent, “than a glimpse of the artistic industry of native Africa” (1945a: 64–65). Stone Hall Chapel was sweltering, but the audience of dignitaries and students were captivated as he drew to the climax of his address, preaching: “This picture of native Africa will inspire strength ... if therefore, it is claimed that your race is doomed to economic inferiority, you may confidently look to the home of your ancestors, and say that you have set out to recover for the colored people the strength that was their own before they set foot on the shores of this continent. You may say that you go to work with bright hopes, and that you will not be discouraged by the slowness of your progress” (65–66). He extended this theme of slowness in the conclusion of his address. Deploying examples of Indian castes, Armenians in Turkey, and the Manchurian conquest of China, he instructed the students “to take up your work among your race with undaunted courage. Success will crown your endeavors if your work is carried out patiently, calmly and consistently” (67). He reiterated that “in every single case in history the process of adaptation has been one of exceeding slowness. Do not look for the impossible, but do not let your path deviate from the quiet and steadfast insistence on full opportunities for your powers” (69).

Although Boas inspired the graduates with the accomplishments and inventions of ancient African empires, his advice was to be respectable and work twice as hard and expect half as much and wait until White people figure out that you are not inferior. “If, therefore, you want to overcome the old antagonism, you have to be on your watch all the time. Your moral standards must be of the highest.” He explained that the stakes were high because “any failure of one of your race ... will be interpreted only too readily as a relapse into the old ways of an ‘inferior race’” (Boas 1945a: 69).

Boas never mentioned in this address the impossibility of mobility in the southern caste system fueled by White supremacy. Nor did he say anything about debt peonage, convict leasing, Jim Crow segregation, disfranchisement, lynching, or mob violence, which structured African American social, cultural, and economic oppression while elevating even dirt-poor Whites to a station of esteemed privilege. This omission is even more glaring in the context of the Atlanta Conferences, where some of the nation's top scientists systematically explored these aspects of White supremacy and more (Morris 2015: 80).

Boas's message of patient accommodation came on the heels of the Niagara Movement issuing its "Declaration of Principles"—largely composed by Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter—calling on Black Americans to demand, protest, and agitate for "our civil rights" ("Niagara Movement" 1905: 1).

Nevertheless, the address had a profound impact on Du Bois. In *Black Folk Then and Now* (1939) Du Bois reflected on portions of that address: "Franz Boas Came to Atlanta University where I was teaching History in 1906 and said to the graduate class: You need not be ashamed of your African past; and then he recounted the history of black kingdoms south of the Sahara for a thousand years. I was too astonished to speak. All of this I had never heard and I came then and afterwards to realize how the silence and neglect of science can let truth utterly disappear or even be unconsciously distorted" (Du Bois 2007 [1939]: xxi). Although he acknowledges the influence of Boas, Du Bois pursued research on African history and ethnology much more broadly and robustly than Boas ever did. The research Du Bois did about Africa dwarfed that of Boas.

But that initial push came from Boas. In 1963, Harold R. Isaacs interviewed Du Bois, asking him to reflect on how his interest in Africa had blossomed. "But Africa still never came to the center of my thought," Du Bois revealed. "It was something in the background. There was always a lack of interest, a neglect, a resentment at being classed as Africans when Negroes felt that they were Americans.... I did not myself begin actively to study Africa until 1908 or 1910. Franz Boas really influenced me to begin studying this subject and I really began to get into it" (Isaacs 1963: 207).

Historian Tracey Thompson notes that while Du Bois reflects on the influence of Boas, he does not mention others. She calls this "the puzzle of Du Bois's silence." She is skeptical of Du Bois's implication that he was not aware of the work done by Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, David Walker, and William Wells Brown, all of whom extolled the virtues of African civilizations well before Boas (Thompson 2011: 96). To add to the puzzle, there are many references to Africa in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), which preceded his meeting with Boas by two years.

Anthropology and the Pride of African History and Culture

Du Bois wrote three books that plumb the depths of African ethnology, history, and culture: *The Negro* (1915), *Black Folk Then and Now* (2007 [1939]), and *The World and Africa* (2007 [1946]). *The Negro* was volume 91 of the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge. Highly respected and widely distributed, this "library" was an international series of commissioned books by eminent authors on a wide array of subjects.

Describing the diversity and complexity of precolonial African societies enabled Du Bois to demonstrate that Africa was the cradle of many civilizations. Africans participated in the cultural exchanges with the Middle East and the Mediterranean long before the Europeans began enslaving and trading in Africans (Law 2007; Wesley 1965: 154). Du Bois also wanted Negroes to be proud of their African ancestry.

On February 23, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., gave a tribute to W. E. B. Du Bois, marking his 100th birthday. Eleven days later, the Memphis sanitation workers went on strike. King's homage to Du Bois was among his last formal addresses before he gave his prophetic last sermon, "I've been to the Mountain top," before the

assassin's bullet ripped through his spinal cord. In the rhythmic cadence of his baritone voice, King praised Du Bois: "virtually, before anyone else and more than anyone else, [he] demolished the lies about Negroes" (King 1970: 15), because "Dr. Du Bois knew that to lose one's history is to lose one's self-understanding and with it the roots for pride" (17).

Finally, Du Bois used African ethnology and the study of complex civilizations in Africa to challenge the idea that segregation was somehow charitable. And Negroes were not ready to vote because "for nearly four thousand years" Africans had never "invented a machine, nor painted a picture, nor written a book, nor organized a stable government, nor constructed a code of laws" (Curry 1899: 179). Such had been the pointed prose of Jabez L. M. Curry in *Popular Science Monthly*. Curry was a former Confederate officer who had become a proponent of public education in the South. He had become a founding trustee of the influential General Education Board, whose mission was, in part, to fund industrial and teacher training schools in the South for Negroes (General Education Board 1915: xiii). Curry, like many others, rationalized as beneficent Jim Crow practices that maintained the punishing and constricting caste system because, after all, something is better than nothing. Aping the salacious stereotypes circulating in popular culture, Curry proclaimed: "for thousands of years there lies behind the race one dreary, unrelieved, monotonous chapter of ignorance, nakedness, superstition, savagery" (Curry 1899: 179; Jones 1950: 34).

Du Bois strategically and pragmatically deployed descriptions of African cultural achievements as a rhetorical device to assassinate specious claims like the one that the editor of the *Macon Daily Telegraph* spewed in September 1919: "the black man lived for uncounted centuries in Africa on his own resources and never so much as improved the make-up of an arrow, coined a new word, or crept an inch nearer to a spiritual religion." In the pages of the *Crisis*, Du Bois aimed at this editor and fired. "As to Africa and the Negro," he retorted, don't believe "the Anthropology of Macon" but trust "that of Dr. Franz Boas, a professor of Anthropology in Columbia University, who says: ... 'when the European was still satisfied with rude stone tools, the African had invented or adopted the art of melting iron.'" Du Bois then quoted "a volume in the Home University Library [of Modern Knowledge that said] 'That the Negro peoples were the beginners of Civilization along the Ganges, the Euphrates, and the Nile, seems proven. Early Babylon was founded by a Negro race. The Assyrians show a distinct Negroid strain, and early Egypt was predominately Negro'" (Du Bois 1920: 110). He did not disclose to the readers of the *Crisis* that the statements he quoted with such authority (Du Bois 1915: 103, 104) were from volume 91—his own contribution to the massive encyclopedia.

The *Crisis* strategically and consistently used African ethnology, archeology, and history to educate and empower African Americans about their collective heritage (Thompson 2011: 137–139). Du Bois began executing this strategy in the second issue of the first volume when the indefatigable managing editor, Mary Dunlop Maclean, wrote "African Civilization," which David Levering Lewis has called an "astonishing Afrocentric essay" (Lewis 2009: 271). In this well-researched and dense essay, she documented the Black origins of Egyptian civilization, debunked the theory of Phoenician remains in Upper Rhodesia, detailed the benevolent rule of the Nubians, and cataloged Black kings and queens for a millennium. She even quotes "our greatest anthropologist, Professor Boas of Columbia," who supported the theory that "the black man, not the white, was the first to discover the art of working metals and gave this knowledge, which was the first great step forward in civilization, to Europe and near Asia" (Maclean 1911: 24).

The following year, articulating the same strategy, Du Bois excerpted in the *Crisis* "The Contribution of the Negro to Human Civilization," by Alexander Chamberlain, an anthropologist at Clark University and a former student of Boas (Chamberlain 1911a). *Crisis* readers experienced how, during medieval times, "Negro Africa" produced large kingdoms with "kings" who were "men of genius" (Chamberlain 1911b: 125).

Activist, educator, and historian Horace Mann Bond explained in an interview how vital the *Crisis* had been to his intellectual development. He explicitly reflected on the influence African ethnology and history had

on him: “and Africa! For an American child growing up between 1910 and 1920, there was scarcely an antidote anywhere for the poisonous picture of Africa and of Africans, painted in the school geographies, the newspapers and magazines, and by the movies. The Crisis magazine gave me the one antidote available ... I have long counted it as one of my great blessings that I read Du Bois on Africa when I was very young” (Foner 1970: 5–6). Du Bois’s editorials, research, and rhetorical strategy of advancing positive “propaganda” and scholarship about African empires and civilizations presaged the enthusiastic embrace of African cultural motifs by members of the New Negro Movement, the Black arts movement, the Black Power movements, and beyond.

The Real Race Problem

The board of the NAACP officially incorporated that organization during its second annual conference in New York City in mid-May 1910. The theme of the conference was “Disfranchisement and How it Works.” Members convened during the morning and afternoon sessions at the stately United Charities Building on Park Avenue, near Gramercy Park. On the first day, they distributed credentials and conducted a business meeting (NAACP 1910: 3). For the evening plenary, distinguished panelists convened at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. “Seven or eight hundred Negroes” packed the auditorium where Ray Stannard Baker, influential journalist and author of *Following the Color Line* (1908), led off the panel. The inestimable Ida B. Wells followed and provided a “vivid description of the lynching of Will James in Cairo [Illinois] last November” (“Socialist Advises” 1910: 2). Renowned labor lawyer Clarence Darrow came to the dais next. He gave a sarcastic and irreverent yet biting address. “What the Negro needs is not more work but more wages,” he barked. “It may be a long way in the future,” he forewarned, “but intermarriage between the races finally will settle all difficulties as it has in the case of the Irish and German and other people.”³ Darrow took swipes at industrial education, the clergy, and the franchise itself. “The world, so far,” he jeered, “has failed to prove that it can vote itself into any condition that is worthwhile.” Loud whoops, uproarious laughter, and thunderous applause emanated “from the younger Negroes in the audience and increasing silence and embarrassment among the philanthropists on the platform.” However entertaining, Darrow did not strike the keynote envisioned by the staid and serious-minded reformers, so the master of ceremonies “tiptoed across the big platform” and instructed him to return to his seat (“Socialist Advises” 1910; “Darrow Says” 1910).

The following two days included a packed schedule of intense business meetings and star-studded panels. Professor Kelly Miller from Howard and Professor John Dewey from Columbia, author Charles Chesnutt, the powerful banker-cum-philanthropist Jacob Schiff, and of course Professor Du Bois each contributed to the proceedings (Charity Organization 1910: 124).

The dramatic three-day extravaganza coincided with a close encounter with Halley’s comet, which illuminated the night’s sky each evening. The celestial omen proved propitious because the incorporation of the NAACP that weekend created a galactic shift in the movement for civil and human rights (Stephenson 1955).

The grand finale of the conference took place in midtown, twenty blocks north of the Charities Building at the storied Berkeley Theater. The closers, Albert Bushnell Hart, Mary Church Terrell, and Franz Boas, were three of Du Bois’s most esteemed and influential collaborators, and there is little doubt they were each handpicked by him (Charity Organization 1910: 124). This is also an explicit example of the way Du Bois leveraged his relationship with Boas to pragmatically conscript anthropology into the service of the struggle for vindication, uplift, and civil rights.

Hart was the president of the American Historical Association. A distinguished professor at Harvard University, he was a prolific writer and influential editor who covered a vast array of subjects in American

history. He was also Du Bois's dissertation advisor (American Historical Association 2020). Mary Church Terrell was past president and one of the founders of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs and sat on the executive committee of the newly minted NAACP ("N.A.A.C.P." 1910: 13). Among the first African American women to earn a master's degree, she was a leader in the women's club, suffrage, and civil rights movements (Evans 2007: 77).

Terrell brought the thunder that evening. She was direct and forthright. "The cold acquiescence of the North in the disfranchisement of men in the South," she forewarned, "is treason to the Constitution," and she underscored the high stakes. As the *New York Times* reported, "she predicted disastrous consequences to the Nation from this disfranchisement, because she said it would either make the negroes a cowardly, supine, useless race or a race of desperados and Anarchists seeking violent vengeance for their wrongs."

Hart was more sedate, contending that the "interests of the Nation are better served when the negroes of ability are so educated that they have an opportunity to be of service to their race." He challenged a handful of the massive array of debilitating myths that formed the warp and weft of the fabric of White supremacy. He denounced, for example, the myths "that education unfits the negro for the work he was put in the world to do; that education breeds crime, and that the negro race has deteriorated since slavery" ("Prof. Boas" 1910). He was articulating many of the themes of the book he had just completed, *The Southern South* (1910). To the esteemed audience in the Berkeley Theater, however, he did not mention the inference he drew in his book that "the Negro is inferior, and his past history in Africa and in America leads to the belief that he will remain inferior in race stamina and race achievement" (Hart 1910: 105).

Boas began his lecture, titled "The Real Race Problem," by serving as a scientific skeptic and debunker-in-chief, which was his signature formula and preferred tactic for combating the "science" of racial superiority. He criticized "empirical" claims that there were any pure race types, that there was any correlation between capacity for civilization, intelligence, and duties of citizenship among the different "types of mankind," and that individuals with mixed-race ancestry were deficient or degraded. Sometimes, but not always, he threw in the achievements of the African empires.

Decrying the lack of data, he applied overlapping bell curves of statistical distributions of various measurements to demonstrate how many similarities there were between the White and Black races. He challenged and debunked stock and deeply rooted claims of innate Negro inferiority and White supremacy. This formula enabled him to argue that the present condition of the Negro was more likely caused by social, economic, and historical conditions rather than by hereditary endowment. This tactic was a powerful and successful formula that enabled Boas to toll the death knell for mainstream scientific racism and for Du Bois to leverage anthropology in the service of civil rights. In this lecture at the Berkeley Theater and other forums, however, Boas never explicitly or categorically declared that Blacks and Whites were equal, just that we could not prove they were not (Anderson 2019: 67; Baker 1998: 105; Williams 1996).

At the Berkeley Theater, Boas advanced a provocative strategy that was nothing short of conceding "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em."⁴ Boas stated: "it seems obvious that our race problems will become less intense, the less the difference in type" there is "between the different groups of our people." In 1921, Boas described this strategy more succinctly: "the negro problem will not disappear in America until the negro blood has been so much diluted that it will no longer be recognized just as anti-Semitism will not disappear until the last vestige of the Jew as a Jew has disappeared" (Boas 1921: 395). Concluding that "one aspect of the solution of the Negro problem lies entirely in the hands of the Negro himself" (25).

Perhaps he should have said *herself*. Boas sincerely, if not naïvely, believed that African American women should take proactive steps to quicken the inevitable process of lightening the race through amalgamation, and he gave the NAACP a full-throated exegesis on the gendered dynamics of interracial sex and the racial politics of classifying children born from those sexual encounters—voluntary or not: "the simple facts that

Negroes and Europeans live side by side in our country, that the European receives constant large additions from abroad, while the amount of Negro blood receives no additions from outside, must necessarily lead to the result that the relative number of pure Negroes will become less and less in our country. The gradual process of elimination of the full-blooded Negro may be retarded by [antimiscegenation] legislation, but it cannot possibly be avoided" (Boas 1910: 25). Boas was aware of what he called "the bulky literature of this subject" of miscegenation, most of which did not "stand up to serious criticism" (Boas 1909: 849). He also understood Whites' phantasmic panic and fear and ensuing violent terror meted out on the bodies of Black men who allegedly polluted the purity of White womanhood. He implied, however, that there was no need for fear because there was "a very serious misunderstanding of the actual conditions of intermixture between Negro and white":

The fear is often expressed that by intermixture between whites and Negroes the whole mass of the white population might be infused with a certain amount of Negro blood. This is not what has actually occurred, but would result if unions between white women and Negro men were as frequent as unions between Negro [wo]men and white ... [men]. As a matter of fact, however, the former type of union—[unions] ... of the Negro male and of the white female—are exceedingly few in number as compared to the others. It therefore follows that our mulattoes are almost throughout the offspring of Negro mothers and white fathers.... It thus appears that in all cases where mixture between whites and Negroes occurs, as long as this mixture is predominantly a mixture of white fathers and colored mothers, the relative proportion of blood in the following mixed generation becomes less, and that therefore a gradually increasing similarity of the two racial types may develop. (25)

Boas stated that this "one aspect of the solution of the Negro problem lies entirely in the hands of the Negro himself." Wittingly or not, Boas was prescribing a program of applied eugenics as a solution to the race problem: White people need not fear amalgamation because it would only improve the Negro race and would not impair the White race. Boas never considered the implications of the so-called one-drop rule, which ensured that even the lightest Negro was subjected to the crushing weight of Jim Crow oppression. Nor does Boas mention the 300 years of industrial terrorism in the form of routinized rape of Black women by White men. Not so subtly, he implied that the solution to the real race problem lay between the legs of Black women. As Boas quipped a decade later: "in a race of octaroons, living among whites, the color question would probably disappear" (Boas 1921: 395).

The *New York Times* headlined: "Professor Boas Predicts Race Amalgamation; Means Negro Elimination; Union of White Fathers and Black Mothers Will Bring This About" ("Prof. Boas" 1910). The Baltimore *Afro-American* reported extensively on the three-day conference and excerpted many of the conference speeches. The editors declined to mention Boas, except as one of the many speakers ("Second Annual Conference" 1910).

W. E. B. Du Bois selected Boas's lecture as the "lead article" for the second issue of the first volume of the *Crisis*. To frame this article for the issue's readers, Du Bois explained that "the editor of *Science* reports that the leading scientists of America regard this department of Columbia as the strongest in the country. This gives a peculiar weight to Dr. Boas' words, which were first delivered at the Second National Negro Conference in May 1910" (Boas 1910: 22). In 1912, Du Bois reissued this excerpt as one of the NAACP's many standalone "pamphlets" (Mitchel 2004: 213).

It is not entirely clear to me why Du Bois promoted this address so conspicuously. Did the ever-pragmatic Du Bois make a calculated decision that the body of the address, in which the nation's foremost anthropologist explicitly argued that Negroes were not inferior to Whites mentally and physiologically, outweighed his cringe-worthy solution? Or did Du Bois want to promote any legitimate science that endeavored to hush the relentless din of panicked scholars reinforcing Jim Crow by claiming that African

Americans were inherently inferior and warning that miscegenation would fell American civilization? (e.g., Bilbo 1947; Smith 1905; Schultz 1908; Shufeldt 1915). Although cringe-worthy today, the vast majority of Americans would have found his solution not only repugnant but profane. Du Bois may simply have wanted to promote a pugnacious yet distinguished scholar using scientific evidence to articulate the principle of equality.

Negro Types

In the months between Boas's address at the Berkeley Theater and its publication in the *Crisis*, Du Bois wrote "Marrying of Black Folk," in which he addressed some of the issues raised by Boas. Writing in the first person, Du Bois averred: "I believe that mingling of blood between white and black and yellow races is neither 'unnatural' nor physically deleterious," and the choice of one's spouse is an individual decision. One should, however, choose a spouse wisely. He cautioned: "I believe that there are human stocks with whom it is physically unwise to intermarry, but to think that these stocks are all colored or that there are no such white stocks is unscientific and false." In those cases where there is physical, cultural, and emotional compatibility across the color line, he clarified, "such unions are not necessarily undesirable and race blending may lead, and often has led to new, gifted, and desirable stocks and individuals" (Du Bois 1910: 812).

As if responding directly to Boas's naïve prescription for widespread amalgamation, Du Bois warned: "I believe that a wholesale intermarriage of races during the present generations would be a social calamity by reason of the wide cultural, ethical and traditional differences" (Du Bois 1910: 813). According to Du Bois, differences in culture and traditions were far more salient a barrier to amalgamation than differences in limb length and hair texture. Du Bois dismissed Boas's rather fanciful solution and vehemently opposed the hereditarian doctrines of White supremacy that used science as the rebar of racism.

Like many intellectuals of the Progressive Era, Du Bois found the pervasive and persuasive principles of eugenics somewhat appealing (Dorr and Logan 2008: 72). Always privileging the role of the environment, Du Bois was not categorically opposed to the central tenets of eugenics—one can sort humans by fitness and increase the procreation of the fit and reduce the fecundity of the unfit to improve society. Daylanne K. English notes that "eugenics, including eugenic expressions of visual culture, found a ready partner in the period's class-based, intraracial improvement project for African Americans—that is, uplift" (English 2004: 12).

Early in his career, Du Bois organized the diversity of Black communities with the anthropologically inflected nomenclature of types like the "talented tenth" (1903: 45) and the "submerged tenth" (1899: 311). Du Bois not only categorized Black folk by behavior but also by skin tone and hair texture.

At the very beginning of his 1906 Atlanta Studies *The Negro Health and Physique*, he arranged portraits of "56 young people, all of whom I have known personally." The types included Negro, "Mulatto," "Quadroon," and "White with Negro blood." His detailed descriptions of color and hair included notes about personality. He described the young man on plate 1: "very dark brown in color, crisp, tightly curled hair, jaw slightly-prognathous; short and stocky in build, strong; honest and reliable." The young woman on plate 47: "white, very light golden hair, light blue eyes, tall and stately; ordinary ability, very reliable, quiet and kind" (Du Bois 1906b 31, 33).

He was clear that this "cursory sketch" could not form the "basis for any very definite conclusions." He also observed that the best physiques, mental abilities, and "moral stamina" were scattered throughout the range of Negro types. The one boy who was the smartest of the lot, plate 18, was a brown-skinned Negro type with only a "slight if any" admixture. "In all these cases of physical and mental development and

moral stamina,” Du Bois inferred, “it is naturally very difficult to judge between the relative influence of heredity and the environment” (Du Bois 1906b: 37). Du Bois understood that both the environment and heredity could be managed and controlled to benefit the race. In an often-cited editorial, Du Bois chided his readers: “the Negro has not been breeding for an object” (Du Bois 1922: 157). Only now are we “beginning carefully to train and breed,” Du Bois reported cautiously, “for brains, for efficiency, [and] for beauty” (158).

Many intellectuals flirted with some of the ideas of eugenics during the Progressive Era. Kelley Miller, the dean of arts and sciences at Howard and founding board member of the NAACP, enthusiastically embraced eugenics. In his article “Eugenics of the Negro Race,” published in *Scientific Monthly*, he announced with bravado and hubris that “eugenics is ready to aid one of the greatest problems of the 20th century, that of the Negro” (Miller: 1917: 178). He framed his rationale with the suggestion that “man needs not only improved soil but improved seed. Sociology can assist the Negro by improving the soil, eugenics can assist by improving the seed” (177).

Eventually, Madison Grant, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Charles Davenport hijacked eugenics to galvanize a racist movement that fused antiimmigrant, antisemitic, and anti-black racism into a powerful and authoritative science with which to cement White supremacy.

Combining eugenics with racial uplift and focusing on the role of the environment undermined appeals to hereditary biology alone as justification for inequality. Du Bois, Miller, Terrell, and Boas forced reformers to consider that inequity resulted from the environmental constraints of racism, not the inheritance of inferior germ plasm.

Conclusion

Du Bois and Boas cultivated a lifelong friendship. For example, in 1911, Du Bois and Boas were two of the handful of American speakers at the First Universal Races Congress in London (Spiller 1911). Du Bois continued to use anthropology and anthropologically inflected methods and texts when he felt they could serve his priorities. Unlike many of his peers, Du Bois did not embrace folklore to describe and explain the vernacular culture of Black folk. Instead, he used the humanities and engaged the feeling and experience of people as a living culture (Lamothe 2008: 62). Supporting, publishing, and promoting Allison Davis, Irene Diggs, St. Clair Drake, Carolyn Bond Day, and Arthur H. Fauset was Du Bois’s most direct contribution to the field of anthropology. Perhaps an even more significant contribution to the discipline was introducing Franz Boas to the power of being a public intellectual and using one’s knowledge and voice to advance social justice and help change society. Before his invitation to Atlanta, Boas primarily published specialized books, scholarly journals, and conference proceedings. He also answered press queries in a measured and careful manner.

His public-facing work was exhibits in museums and the 1893 World’s Fair. When he did want to share his opinion or wanted to advocate for change, he wrote editorials in *Science*. During his trip to Atlanta, Du Bois showed Boas the power and poignancy of public scholarship. After the Atlanta trip, Boas pivoted and began routinely using the media, popular magazines, mass audiences, and popular books as an integral method of promoting American anthropology, most notably *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911).

Boas modeled this approach for his graduate students and close colleagues, for example Ella Deloria, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, Ruth Benedict, Otto Klineberg, Melville Herskovits, and Alfred Kroeber. They would form a powerful group of renegade scholars who used science to challenge the notion that White Europeans were superior to all others in terms of race, civilization, cognition, and the ability to rule. They argued that arbitrary cultural rules bound all people who lived in groups. Therefore, the categories used to

divide people, like race, gender, sexual orientation, nobility, and serf, were bound by rules of society's making that were often invisible or taken for granted as natural (King 2019: 9).

This group of scholars and public intellectuals were very effective at articulating cultural relativism and moving the nation to consider that there were no meaningful differences between arbitrary racial categories. They demonstrated that the differences people perceived in "others" were not natural but cultural and social. However, they were not as effective in describing and analyzing the terror, humiliation, and day-to-day violence that racism and White supremacy wrought on Black folk or the creative ways they used to resist and persist.

Leith Mullings describes this as "anthropology's contradictory heritage"; she argues that this helps to explain why "anthropologists have written extensively about race, [although] anthropological contributions to the study of racism have been surprisingly modest" (Mullings 2005: 3). Boas was so pessimistic about the likelihood of whites' surrendering ideas of superiority and of the nation mitigating racism and antisemitism that his solution was to erase and replace African American culture through assimilation and amalgamation or what reformers often called Americanization. Americanization only worked to transform not-quite-White immigrants into well-assimilated Americans. Boas did not appreciate that the Negro amalgamation he called for was not analogous to the Americanization of the Czech, Hungarian, or Russian Jew. It was more like the so-called vanishing policies articulated by the influential reformers of "The Lake Mohonk Friends of the Indian (affluent former abolitionists who advocated for "civilizing" American Indians)" These were the violent tactics the government and missionary boarding schools used to force assimilation on American Indians. These "vanishing" policies were perhaps best typified by Richard Henry Pratt, superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, who routinely quipped that his goal was to "kill the Indian, and save the man" (Baker 2010: 1). Native American assimilation policies and African American amalgamation recommendations represented the embodiment and imposition of White supremacy. Boas's advocacy of Negro amalgamation was a poignant example of the racist antiracism of American anthropology.

Du Bois continued to call on Boas to join his campaign for truth and justice and, in the process, modeled ways to use science, evidence, and truth in the service of social justice. Du Bois may not have been a traditional mentor to Boas, but he showed him how to do it, and Boas was an enthusiastic student and a quick study. For example, a year after Du Bois invited Boas to give the closing lecture at the NAACP conference, they teamed up in the *New York Times* to discredit and debunk Georgia governor and senator-elect Hoke Smith.

On September 17, 1911, the *New York Times Magazine* profiled Smith. The headline read: "The Negro Is the South's Drawback." Edward Marshall, the veteran *Times* reporter, framed his interview with Smith by explaining that Smith "takes the negro and the problem which he offers very seriously. He is sorry we have either in this country. He refuses, as a Southerner, to let the blame be wholly laid upon the South" (Marshall 1911: 80).

Smith confidently explains to Marshall and all the readers of the Sunday *Times* magazine that to grasp the Negro problem, you must go back "to the Negro in Africa—and see what has been done after thousands of years of opportunity, in a country rich with possibilities, where they have had things their own way, free of the white man's control, [and consider what have they] accomplished for civilization and themselves?" (80). Smith continues: "the negro was advanced from savagery to civilization during slavery—an enforced advancement to be sure, but an advancement.... Despite the days of slavery, they have made more progress here than they have at home in freedom" but little to no progress since slavery. This lack of progress, Smith rationalizes, is why "the enthusiasts of the East and North" are so wrong—because they "believe that simply by educating[,] the Negro's character can be changed." Pulling together a rather tortured logic, he surmises: "it is a mistake for the negro to seek in any way to force himself into competition with the white

man. His history and the history of his race should make his sympathizers hesitate about urging him to such a course. In Georgia there are more negroes than any other State in the Union. We find that, with few exceptions, they succeed only in the simpler walks of life, and there only when they receive the benefit of kindly direction from white men" (80). Smith laid bare the rhetoric, ideology, and mythology that fueled White supremacy, structured Dixie's stifling caste system, and justified industrial terrorism. W. E. B. Du Bois and Franz Boas would not let the readers of the *New York Times* consume this Senator's bile without a scientific rebuttal. In the following Sunday's magazine supplement, the *Times* ran a full-page interview featuring the withering critique Du Bois and Boas brought to bear. The September 24, 1911, headline read: "Scientists Answer Hoke Smith's Attack on Negroes" (1911: 88). To accompany the dynamic duo's assault on the senator-elect were nine compelling images of bronze sculptures from Benin, "Ancient Bambala Weaving," intricate swords, and men forging iron. Boas began the interview: "I must say it is obvious that Mr. Smith does not know what he is talking about." He continued: "along their own lines negroes in Africa have progressed far. Their industrial development is very high. Their pottery and wood carving are admirable, while their weaving compares favorably with the highest type anywhere.... In metal work they are distinguished. It is probable, although of course it can not be proved, that the production of iron originated near the sources of the Nile among negroes. Certainly the art of smelting was known to the negro before it was understood by the most highly developed Europeans" (88). Recounting Yoruba proverbs and describing complex states, laws, judicial systems, and diplomacy, Boas described modern and ancient Africa as full of progress, diversity, and vibrancy. The *Times* felt obligated to note: "Prof. Boas, who has no bias for or against, and is just a man of science with a desire for the truth, feels very strongly on the subject of the misrepresentation of the negro ... so that what he says is nothing more nor less than careful scientific truth" (88). Next up was W. E. B. Du Bois. The *Times* introduced him as "Dr. Du Bois, who rejoices in a large number of degrees accumulated in this country and in Germany, is himself a negro, and he has spent most of his life in the south collecting facts, some for the Government and some for his own books." Du Bois demonstrated that Smith was flat out wrong. He specifically challenged Smith's claim that the negro had "made no economic progress since slavery, but has, if anything, retrograded. This charge, fortunately, need not rest on a basis of mere opinion. There are incontrovertible facts of public record which may be appealed to" (88). Du Bois unleashed a torrent of statistics derived from Georgia public records to bury any doubt about Negro progress against all odds. "In 1874, negroes had property that was assessed at \$5,393,000 ... by 1893 it had amounted to \$14,960,000 ... [and it had risen] to \$30,000,000 in 1910." He continued: "a very large part of this property is land. Three hundred and ninety-six thousand acres owned in 1875 have expanded until today they hold over a million and a half acres." He concluded that "no one can deny the enormous advance in economic power which this accumulation of property represents."

One can almost feel Du Bois's exasperation as he rattled off the numbers to the reporter. "What now has the State of Georgia done to help this accumulation? ... The white people of Georgia, through lynching and lawlessness and discrimination have done much toward discouraging the accumulation of property" (1911: 88). Du Bois reminded the readers that "Hoke Smith himself in his celebrated campaign for the Governorship went throughout the state urging white people not to sell land to negroes and to neglect their schools." Turning to the disparity of school funding, Du Bois compared and contrasted tuition dollars. "The average tuition for a white child varies [between the counties] from \$1.16 to \$2.05. For the colored children from 66 to 78 cents. Georgia has almost equal numbers of white and colored school children. In 1909 the whites had 4,500 schools and the negroes 2,803. In these schools, there were 7,384 white teachers and 3,512 colored teachers." Without further comment, Du Bois sardonically quipped: "the wonder is not that the negroes have not surpassed the whites, but that they make such a remarkable economic showing" (88).

This interview demonstrated how closely the two scholars worked together as public intellectuals. I do not know how they coordinated their efforts. Du Bois had firsthand knowledge of Hoke Smith as an agent of state violence, and he probably initiated the response and asked Boas to pitch in. Regardless, they each worked intensely together that week as an intellectual team. They had to pull together so much information

in such little time. It is evident by the myriad of precise details that they each meticulously researched the reporter's questions and wrote out their answers ahead of time. This publication is also an example of the influence Du Bois had on Boas as a public intellectual. He had never produced this type of rapid-response public scholarship before meeting W. E. B. Du Bois.

Finally, Du Bois's influence over the NAACP led to its tenacious legal fights for civil rights in the courts. Boas's influence over a generation of anthropologists led to an evidence-based science of race and culture. Their respective spheres of influence came full circle when Thurgood Marshall deployed Boasian anthropology as a critical stanchion in the NAACP's argument that school segregation was unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

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Notes

- 1 Du Bois's interaction and correspondence with Zora Neale Hurston focused on her plays and fiction.
- 2 There are many anthropologists who view themselves as working within a Du Bois-inspired intellectual tradition of anthropology. (A few examples of recent work include Barnes 2015; Davis 2019; Jobson 2020; Louis 2014; Mariner 2019; Ralph 2020; Rosa 2019; Reese 2020; Shange 2019; Slocum 2019; Thomas 2019; B. C. Williams 2018; E. L. Williams 2013.)
- 3 Many newspapers, Black and White, picked up an Associated Press dispatch and emphasized this quote. Alternatively the story was headlined "Advises Negroes to Marry Whites: Clarence S Darrow of Chicago Urges Amalgamation" or more simply "Equal[i]ty of Privilege" ("Advises Negroes" 1910, 5). The following week the *Chicago Daily Tribune* headlined "Darrow Says He Never Said Blacks Should Marry Whites" and quoted Darrow directly: if "anyone had asked or should have ask me if I believe in or advocated the marriage of blacks and whites my answer would be 'no.'" ("Darrow Says" 1910: 1).

- 4 The research for this section on Boas's "The Real Race Problem" overlaps with Baker (2021: 36–39).