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Race and the Culture of Anthropology

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Race and the Culture of Anthropology

DESPITE AN UPSURGE in the number of panels on “multiculturalism” and “cultural studies” at annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, the discipline has not been in the vanguard when it comes to debates on race, racism, multiculturalism, or revising the canon. Yet the failure of the discipline to be in the vanguard of such debate stems in part from a belief that it has, all along, been the vanguard. Indeed, has not anthropology stood precisely for the equality and relative value of all cultures: the very issues the “culture wars” seem to raise?

The implication seems to be that, if the advocates of multiculturalism knew more about anthropology, they might resolve the crisis generated by multiculturalism simply by requiring students to take courses in anthropology (see Rosaldo 1994:526). As one anthropologist critical of the political currency of multiculturalism has put it, “At least since the publication of Franz Boas’s *The Mind of Primitive Man* in 1911 (a book that deserves a central place on multiculturalist bibliographies, both for its elaboration of cultural relativism and for its insistent discussion of racial and intercultural issues in the United States), anthropologists have taken some form of cultural relativism as a point of departure” (Roseberry 1992:843). The same writer continues:

One important and vibrant strand of multiculturalist thought is liberal, pluralist and relativist, strongly reminiscent of the relativism of Boas and his students. It stresses an elementary equality of experience, a non-hierarchical view of civilization. In the face of a bullying celebration of Western civilization and the United States, they stress the importance and validity of other experiences and traditions. In the question of context, this aspect of multiculturalism shares much with the Boasians as well. [Roseberry 1992:848]

My objective here is not to argue with this writer’s understanding of multiculturalism. I do, however, think it is a mistake to assume that multiculturalism or cultural studies, because each lays claim to the term *culture*, im-

mediately share something with anthropology. My argument is, in fact, the reverse. Multiculturalism and cultural studies have emerged as counterdisciplinary formations that radically foreground race and racial identity precisely because the modern anthropological notion of culture cannot so do.

I recognize that some will find this a perplexing assertion. Was not the point precisely to move away from race and toward culture as a meaningful explanation of human difference? After all, “Boas, almost single-handedly, developed in America the concept of culture, which like a powerful solvent, would in time expunge race from the literature of social science” (Degler 1991:71). Paul Rabinow, in more measured tones, has similarly affirmed that “Boas’ arguments against racial hierarchies and racial thinking have thoroughly carried the theoretical day. Today his arguments sound timid and far too generous in their serious engagement with his racist opponents. Of course, racism has hardly disappeared, but it is no longer a scientifically credible position” (Rabinow 1992:60). In this article I suggest the disturbing possibility that the attempt to expunge race from social science by assigning it to biology, as Boas and his students did, helped legitimate the scientific study of race, thereby fueling the machine of scientific racism.

Part of the problem, it seems to me, is that we have allowed Boas’s well-known antiracist views, his early support for the NAACP, his own experience of anti-Semitism, and the specter of his books burning in Nazi Germany to substitute for careful analysis of the limits and contradictions of his thinking (see, however, Hyatt 1990; Stocking 1968, 1974; Williams 1996). Progressive scholars also point rather too quickly, I think, to Boas’s 1906 commencement address at Atlanta University, at the invitation of W. E. B. Du Bois, as evidence of shared notions of race between the two thinkers.¹ What then, are we to make of his work for the U.S. Immigration Commission between 1908 and 1910, when he argued as follows in a letter to commission member Jeremiah W. Jenks of Cornell University:

Broadly speaking, the question before us is that of whether it is better for us to keep an industrially and socially inferior

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large black population, or whether we should fare better by encouraging the gradual process of lightening up this large body of people by the influx of white blood. Expressing the same question in other words, we might say the question before us is whether conditions can be so regulated that without a proportionate increase in the black population it will be of advantage to accelerate the infusion of white blood among them. [Stocking 1974:213]

Now, given the social and legal proscriptions against miscegenation or intermarriage, Boas and his students were doubtless progressive for the times.² Indeed, the idea that a deliberate policy of miscegenation or "interracial marriage" could transform a "mongrel nation" into a true "racial democracy" was one to which Boas and his Columbia University-trained Brazilian colleague Gilberto Freyre were quite committed (Stepan 1991:160, 167).³ While it is true that Boas's early work was more influenced by 19th-century racial thought, that he was not a complete relativist (Stocking 1968), and that he was indebted to assimilationist thinking (Harrison 1995), we should not fail to note that, in his letter to Jenks, Boas is equating blood with racial inferiority, a view that he is more often remembered for disputing. The idea that an "industrially and socially inferior large black population" would disappear with a sufficient infusion of "white blood" is consonant with the dominant view that color (race) was at issue rather than racism and that the "Negro problem" might be solved if color difference disappeared (Williams 1996).

In the 1921 essay "The Problem of the American Negro," written for the *Yale Review*, Boas made an explicit analogy between the problem of anti-Semitism and that of race: "The Negro problem will not disappear in America until the negro blood has been so diluted that it will no longer be recognized, just as anti-Semitism will not disappear until the last vestige of the Jew as Jew has disappeared" (1921:395).⁴ In a 1923 essay Boas further argued that the assimilative tendencies of the Jews meant they were not a race but argued that, though assimilation was in part due to environmental factors, "the constant infiltration of foreign blood must be taken into consideration" (Boas 1945:41).

Boas's position on anti-Semitism and assimilation during the U.S. progressive era also influenced the posture he adopted toward Nazi Germany in the early 1930s. In remarks on anti-Semitism made before the Jewish Academy of Arts and Sciences in New York in March 1934, he argued that the conception of race had been falsely deployed because its biological meaning was improperly understood (1934a:33). In the pamphlet "Aryans and Non-Aryans," published later that year, Boas argued that "the present policies of the German government are based on the assumption that an 'Aryan' has certain biologically determined qualities that are entirely foreign to every 'Non-Aryan,'" asserting that

"these beliefs are based on a complete misunderstanding of what constitutes a race and of the way in which we arrive at the concept of a racial type" (1934b:3).⁵ Due to intermarriage and miscegenation, Jews resembled their fellow countrymen more than Jews in other countries (1934b:9). A nation was not defined by its descent but by its language and customs, and "just as Germanized Slavs and French have become German in their culture, as the Frenchified Germans have become French . . . so have the German Jews become German." Thus, the attempt "by those who are in power in Germany to justify on scientific grounds their attitude toward the Jews is built on a pseudo-science" (1934b:11).

In 1938, at the urging of Boas, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) passed a resolution denouncing Nazi racism: "Anthropology provides no scientific basis for discrimination against any people on the ground of racial inferiority, religious affiliation or linguistic heritage." It charged that anthropological data in many countries was being distorted and conscripted "to serve the cause of unscientific racialism" but affirmed that "race involves the inheritance of similar physical variations by large groups of mankind" (AAA 1939:30).

Two distinct and contradictory positions on race thus emerge from Boas's experience of anti-Semitism. On the one hand, there is the idea that race could not be separated from negative value and should therefore disappear through assimilation or miscegenation, in order to dilute racial difference and evolve a common culture. On the other hand, there is the belief that race could be separated from racism or negative value through proper science. Faced with the egregious appropriation of the race concept under the Nazi regime, Boas continued to argue for its scientific utility. At the same time he also recognized that "from a purely biological point of view the concept of race unity breaks down" (1928a:62), and racial heredity in the biological sense was losing all meaning (Boas 1945:7). Both positions (with some modification) were argued forcefully by Boas's students Ruth Benedict and Ashley Montagu.

There seem to be, then, important currents and contradictions in Boas's thinking that have been ignored, with troubling consequences for the story we tell about what lies at the heart of the discipline: culture. Paradoxically, Boas, as George Stocking (1968) and others have noted, never provided anthropology with a definition of culture. Indeed, some of his biographers remember him more for his "race theory" (Hyatt 1990:83).

It was, rather, the distinctions Boas made between race, language, and culture that provided the foundation of an Americanist anthropology, with each term tending toward the provenance of a particular subdiscipline. I will argue that the nature of his distinction

between race and culture has led to problems for the development of the modern notion of culture. To the extent that Boas and his students were able to define culture, they did so through a process of negation. Culture was expressed through the medium of language but was not reducible to it; more importantly, it was not race. Culture became everything race was not, and race was seen to be what culture was not: given, unchangeable, biology.

The historical origins of this process of negation lie in what George Stocking terms the sundering of a 19th-century raciocultural paradigm into "opposing currents of biological and cultural determinism" (1993:4). As he puts it, the turn-of-the-century concept of race, while often deployed for racist purposes, did have meaning "as a community of sentiments, modes of thought, an unconscious inheritance from their ancestors" not so different from what came to be called "national character" (Stocking 1993:6, 11). Thus, in the period before 1900, *race* was a catchall term that applied to various human groups whose similarities in appearance, manners, or speech persisted over time and therefore appeared to be hereditary.

"Blood"—and by extension race—included numerous elements that we would today call cultural; there was not a clear line between cultural and physical elements or between social and biological heredity. The characteristic qualities of civilizations were carried from one generation to another both in and with the blood of their citizens. Those of us today who are sophisticated in the concepts of the behavioral sciences have lost the richly connotative 19th century sense of "race" as accumulated cultural differences carried somehow in the blood. [Stocking 1993:6]

In Boas's writing on miscegenation, however, blood was understood as a biological essence. If certain forms of blood were to disappear, certain races would disappear as well, a view that W. E. B. Du Bois would dispute. The challenge, I suggest, is to return to and reframe the "cultural" elements of race that define the historical context of Boas's thinking but that he himself thought best left behind in the struggle against racist science. I will suggest that this is a notion of race already emergent in Du Bois's thinking during an era that might productively be read for a "Du Boisian legacy in anthropology" (see Harrison 1992). Although Boasian anthropology foregrounded racism as one of the most virulent problems of the times, Boas and many of his students never abandoned belief in the value of the scientific study of race (Smedley 1993), even as they actively sought to replace race with the concept of culture or ethnic group.

Boas's strategy will be clear to those who remember his battle against the comparative method and evolutionist attempts to rank the achievements of different races. In his 1894 essay "Human Faculty as Determined

by Race," Boas held that in comparing the social status of civilized and primitive man, "achievement and the aptitude for an achievement have been confounded." Thus,

no great weight can be attributed to the earlier rise of civilization in the Old World, which is satisfactorily explained as a chance. In short, historical events appear to have been much more potent in leading races to civilization than their faculty, and it follows that achievements of races do not warrant us to assume that one race is more highly gifted than the other. [Boas 1974:226–227]

This passage, arguably the backbone of Boas's classic *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), established the importance of environmental influence rather than heredity. Yet this book did not dispute the existence of race and imperfectly questioned the negative evaluations associated with certain races. Boas and his student Melville Herskovits continued to conduct anatomical and anthropometric studies to scientifically describe racial difference (Stocking 1974).⁶

Although much has been written of Boas's "critique of racial formalism," he adhered to a kind of "pure types" thinking for understanding human populations, an intermediate between 19th-century racial typologies and the modern genetic synthesis which proved an intellectual dead end (Allen 1989:82). Ironically, "Boas' critique of racial formalism was successful, but it was more successful and generated a more viable intellectual tradition in the cultural than in the biological realm" (Allen 1989:83; see also Lieberman et al. 1989). It was therefore left to Boas's students of culture to consolidate his intervention against 19th-century evolutionary racism.

As early as 1917, in his essay "Culture and Race," Robert Lowie had begun to set out the terms of this resolution: "If culture is a complex of socially acquired traits, it might appear that race could not possibly have any influence on culture, since by racial characteristics we understand those which are innate by virtue of ancestry" (1917:27). Although he held that race did influence culture, his intervention was to define race as biological ancestry or "hereditary traits" with a view toward understanding the "organic basis for culture."

The problem of separating the organic or biological from the social in understanding human culture was taken up again in Alfred Kroeber's well-known 1917 essay "The Superorganic." If Lowie, like Boas, seemed to temporize on the nature of race and the value of racial explanation, Kroeber concluded unequivocally that "complete and consistent explanation can be given, for so-called racial differences, on a basis of purely civilizational and non-organic causes" (1917:182–183). He asserted that "most ethnologists . . . are convinced that the overwhelming mass of historical and miscalled

racial facts that are now attributed to obscure organic causes . . . will ultimately be viewed by everyone as social and as best intelligible in their social relations" (1917:183).

By 1924, the Boasian resolution of the problem of evolutionary racism was clearly stated by Edward Sapir, who distinguished race from language and culture:

If we can once thoroughly convince ourselves that race, in its only intelligible, that is, biological sense, is supremely indifferent to the history of languages and cultures, that these are no more directly explainable on the score of race than on the laws of physics and chemistry, we shall have gained a viewpoint that allows a certain interest to such mystic slogans as Slavophilism, Anglo-Saxondom, Teutonism and the Latin genius, but quite refuses to be taken in by any of them. [1985:222]

Some years later, Melville Herskovits, in responding to the question "What is a race?", was less confident than Sapir but also affirmed the standard Boasian move:

I know of no definition of race that is both clear-cut and adequate; and yet the question is fundamental to all discussions of the part the biological basis of society (or race, if you wish to make the two synonymous) is said to play in the formation and maintenance of the bewildering variety of cultures which man has devised. [1928:67]

In thus assigning race to biology, the Boasians instinctively reacted to the deployment of race as an ideological category, which, in their view, inevitably led to racist judgements about the status of different groups. They thereby sought to make race a scientific, biological, and therefore value-neutral fact. As Ruth Benedict was to reaffirm repeatedly in her 1940 treatise *Race: Science and Politics*, "Race is a scientific field of study" (1940:18) which has "nothing to do with the superiority and inferiority of given races. . . . It distinguishes between a group of people who constitute a nation and a group of people who constitute a biological type (race)" (1940:65).

Benedict's Affirmation of Race

Drawing on the modern synthesis of genetics, Ruth Benedict refined the biological definition of race, describing it as "a classification based on traits which are hereditary. Therefore when we talk about race, we are talking about 1) heredity and 2) traits transmitted by heredity which characterize all the members of a related group" (1940:9). The difference between race and culture, she argued, was that "culture is the sociological term for learned behavior, behavior which in man is not given at birth . . . but must be learned anew from grown people by each new generation," whereas race "is biologically transmitted" (1940:13). Here we can see the ap-

pearance of culture and race as antonyms for one another. Culture draws its identity from race because it constitutes everything race is not: learned behavior. Race draws its identity from culture because it constitutes everything culture is not: biologically inherited traits.

Yet culture and race are also distinct from one another because "in world history, those who have helped to build the same culture are not necessarily of one race, and those of the same race have not all participated in one culture. In scientific language, culture is not a function of race"; rather, "when we hold culture as the constant, race is a variable" (Benedict 1940:14, 16).

For Benedict, the fact of race had to be distinguished from the mystifying values attached to it. Arguing against Ashley Montagu, she held that racism, not race, was the "modern superstition" (1940:97–98). She stipulated that, "in order to understand race persecution, we do not need to investigate race; we need to investigate persecution. Persecution was an old, old story before racism was thought of" (Benedict 1940:146).

Similarly, in order to understand race conflict we need to understand the nature of conflict, not race:

If civilized men expect to end prejudice—whether religious or racial—they will have to remedy major social abuses in no way connected with religion or race, to the common advantage. Whatever reduces conflict, curtails irresponsible power, and allows people to obtain a decent livelihood will reduce racial conflict. . . . For the friction is not primarily racial. [1940:150]

In Benedict's writing we can see clearly the notion that race is adjectival: it modifies particular nouns (*persecution, prejudice, conflict*), but race itself is not determinative. Persecution and conflict are not *about* race, but the result of general processes that direct categories of discrimination against particular groups.⁷ Thus

Conflict arises whenever any group—in this case a race—is forged into a class by discriminations practiced against it; the race then becomes a minority which is denied rights to protection before the law, rights to livelihood and to participation in the common life. The social problem does not differ whether such a group is racially distinguished or whether it is not; in either case, the healthy social objective is to do away with minority discriminations. [1940:155]

While Benedict seems to understand that social formations arise out of histories of institutional and social discrimination, she cannot answer the question of why it is that race continues to be one of the most prevalent forms of social distinction and discrimination. If race is only epiphenomenal, how does it continue to ground material reality?

The Boasian desire to separate race from negative cultural valuation, and therefore racism, is understandable, and, some would still argue, laudable. Yet

in separating race from racism (that is, from race conflict or persecution), Benedict left no means for anthropologists to understand how racism produces the objective reality of race at any given historical moment. Her ultimate claim, that difference is threatening and that "minority discriminations" should be done away with, underscores the myth that we can, and should, live in a color-blind society. If Boas once sought to make color disappear through miscegenation, Benedict turned a blind eye to it. Her conclusions thus follow from Boas's attempts to separate race from value, an analytical move that has not allowed anthropologists to see that race cannot be separated from racism and that races are cultural/historical formations that may also entail positive affirmations of social identity as acts of survival.

Benedict's 1940 text, written at the height of World War II and directed specifically at Nazi racism, represents, I think, the clearest expression of the Boasian contribution to the modern culture concept. Yet in accepting the distinction between race and race prejudice, anthropologists have failed to recognize that the significance they attach to the apparently biological character of race is itself cultural or ideological in nature (Harding 1993). Today, the fact that race is socially and historically constituted seems almost too commonsensical to note. But if previous generations of anthropologists agreed that what Benedict called "false premises and bastard science" were the result of a cultural bias that transformed "race" into racism, it was best to strive for proper science, which would make race the object of biology, not culture.

The paradox of the Boasian legacy is that it was the cultural anthropologists among his students who most strongly affirmed the biological existence of race in order to clearly distinguish culture from it. The physical anthropologists among Boas's students, especially Ashley Montagu, sought to deal with the problem of the negative value assigned to race by arguing that, since the concept of race could never be value-free, it could not be scientific.⁸ Montagu viewed race as a "prejudiced term" that should be dropped from our vocabulary altogether (1942, 1963).

Montagu's Repudiation of Race

In the 1941 paper "The Meaninglessness of the Anthropological Conception of Race," read before the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, Montagu accused his colleagues of taking "completely for granted the one thing which required to be proven, namely, that the concept of race corresponded with a reality which could actively be measured and verified" and failing to prove that individuals of any particular group bore "a certain aggregate of characters which in-

dividually and collectively serve to distinguish them from the individuals in all other groups" (1942:30).

Montagu argued that while anthropologists might cling to the race concept, geneticists had already moved beyond it. Moreover, when anthropologists were confronted by evidence that the concept could not be systematically applied, "they sought to escape the consequences by calling the term a 'general' one" (1942:31). Montagu also criticized the method of "averaging," which, he implied, obscured the fact that variation within a group was as great as variation between groups.

Unlike Benedict, who sought to incorporate the genetic "modern synthesis" into a definition of race, Montagu concluded that a proper understanding of population genetics actually proved the concept of race had no validity.

If it be agreed that the human species is one and . . . consists of a group of populations which . . . replace each other geographically or ecologically and of which the neighboring ones intergrade or hybridize wherever they are in contact, . . . then it should be obvious that . . . the character of these populations must lie in the study of the frequency distribution of the genes which characterize them—and not in the study of entities which are purely imaginary. [Montagu 1942:36]

This is the position taken by Frank Livingstone in his 1962 article "On the Non-Existence of the Human Races." He finds that the frequency of distributions of traits constitutes a cline, not a race.⁹ (See also Lieberman et al. 1989 and Keita and Kittles 1997.) This is, in my opinion, the correct view: race has no meaningful biological definition outside of the social assignment of race to biology.

Despite the differences between Boasians such as Benedict and Montagu, we can see that they agree on two fundamental points: that race historically implied negative valuation, and that race was not a meaningful explanation for human social differences. For these reasons, Benedict sought to separate race from racism, or negative value. Montagu, like Boas in his assimilationist moments, did not think that race could be separated from negative value; race always implied racism. Benedict thought that the social expressions of race conflict or consciousness were epiphenomenal and really about class relations or economic deprivation. Montagu, as a Jewish scientist who came of age in anti-Semitic Britain (Lieberman et al. 1995; Shipman 1994), saw the concept of "race" as itself racist and advocated the abolition of the term (Brace 1964; Montagu 1942). Both denied that the social existence of race could be productively analyzed. Both positions represent the two poles of current debate. On the one hand, race is an essence: it exists and can be documented scientifically.

On the other hand, race is an illusion: it does not exist except as an arbitrary set of social designations masquerading as biological reality and should be banished from our vocabulary altogether. The second position is as dangerous as the first: if race is too contentious politically, say its proponents, we must simply refuse to speak of it, unwittingly amplifying the nature of culture so that it becomes as essentialist and deterministic as race was once seen to be.

My contention is this: after World War II, race dropped off the agenda of the cultural anthropologist (Harrison 1995; Mukhopadhyay and Moses 1997), in part due to the very success of the Boasian maneuver that argued that culture, not race, was a more meaningful explanation of significant differences between groups of people.¹⁰ During the drafting of the 1950 UNESCO *Statement on Race*, Montagu (one of its principal authors) went so far as to say that “the biological fact of race and the myth of ‘race’ should be distinguished. For all practical purposes ‘race’ is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth” (UNESCO 1950:139). Montagu’s formulation caused an uproar, as did his suggestion (first elaborated five years earlier) that the term *ethnic group* be substituted for the term *race* (Montagu 1963):

National, religious, geographic, linguistic and cultural groups do not necessarily coincide with racial groups: and the cultural traits of such groups have no demonstrated genetic connection with racial traits. Because serious errors of this kind are habitually committed when the term “race” is used in popular parlance, it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term “race” altogether and speak of *ethnic groups*. [UNESCO 1950:139]

The last line, drawn from Julian Huxley and A. C. Haddon’s (1935:108) recommendation that “ethnic group” more accurately described human “subspecies,” proved particularly contentious and was dropped from the revised *Statement on Race* (UNESCO 1952).

Montagu’s more controversial assertions notwithstanding, the idea of “race defined from the biological standpoint” remained intact.¹¹ What is striking, then, is not so much the rejection of the idea that “race” could be better termed “ethnic group” but that both versions assign race to biology and underscore a definition of race by negation, or contrast with culture: race is not nationality, ethnic group, or language (UNESCO 1950:139, 1952:91). The major difference between the two statements was that the revised version left open the possibility that races differed in their capacity for emotional response and intellectual achievement (Stepan 1982:172). Although Montagu might have thought he lost the ideological battle over the first UNESCO statement, subsequent statements reaffirmed his view that races did not differ in innate ability.

Montagu made less headway among physical anthropologists at the time, though a decade later, his criticism of the anthropological conception of race had been strengthened by the notion of cline, drawn from population genetics. Between 1962 and 1964, a debate on the existence of race was waged on the pages of *Current Anthropology*, sparked by the publication of Livingstone’s (1962) essay. C. Loring Brace’s (1964) response to Livingstone affirmed the essentials of his argument but charged Livingstone with ignoring the role Montagu (and others) had played in arguing the no-race position.

Still, relative agreement on the meaning of race within the anthropological community came only with Sherwood Washburn’s 1962 presidential address to the American Anthropological Association in Chicago. As one anthropologist who attended the meetings that year recalled, “At the end of it, [there was] a standing ovation that went on for minutes and minutes and minutes” (De Vore 1992:422). Even today it is difficult to remain unmoved by the last stirring passages of that speech, which used the calculus of scientific description to portray the costs of discrimination.¹²

Washburn had reluctantly agreed to speak on the subject because of the difficulty the AAA Executive Board had in drafting a position on race. After some discussion, it was agreed that the executive board would endorse Washburn’s speech as its position (De Vore 1992:422). Still, from today’s vantage point, Washburn’s argumentation appears compromised in contrast to Montagu’s unequivocal clarity. Although Washburn never refuted the existence of race, he did not define it either. He did argue that, since the unit of evolution was the species, “race isn’t very important biologically” (1963:524), but emphasized the importance of understanding “raciation,” the creation of racial differences through selection, to argue for a concept of race derived from population genetics (1963:525). He speculated that the actual number of races was between six and nine (rather than three) but held that unless the criteria for racial classification were clearly specified, the number of races was likely to increase. He argued that “if classification is to have a purpose . . . the concept of race is useful,” but only insofar as it was concerned with the “anatomical, genetic, and structural differences which were in time past important in the origin of races” (1963:527). Useful though it might be, “race in human thinking is a very minor concept,” and “racism is based on a profound misunderstanding of culture, of learning, and of biology of the human species” (1963:527–528). Washburn’s position, then, was closer to Benedict’s than Montagu’s.

Consensus on race had not yet been achieved within the international scientific community, however. As if wishing to clarify the confusion between race and

racism reflected in the 1950 and 1952 statements, UNESCO met twice again during the civil rights era, with the objective of separating the two subjects from each other. The statement of August 1964, *Proposals on the Biological Aspects of Race*, covered the same terrain as the earlier statements but pronounced unequivocally that “the concept of race is purely biological” (1975:357). The UNESCO *Statement on Race and Racial Prejudice* of September 1967 held that “racism grossly falsifies the knowledge of human biology” and defined it as “antisocial beliefs and acts which are based on the fallacy that discriminatory intergroup relations are justifiable on biological grounds” (UNESCO 1975:360). It then went on to offer a series of programmatic recommendations for combating race prejudice.

If Montagu’s role in the drafting of the original UNESCO *Statement on Race* produced controversy rather than consensus, his view that “ethnic group” replace “race” seems to have won out, at least among cultural anthropologists (see also Sanjek 1994:9). Indeed, the anthropological concept of culture is consonant with what Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) term the ethnicity-based paradigm of race relations, which also emerged in the 1920s. Thus *culture* came to be seen as interchangeable with *ethnic group*, and *ethnic group* or *culture* came to substitute for *race* (see also Harrison 1995).¹³ One critic has concluded that “when the object of anthropological attention is ‘ethnicity’ instead of ‘culture,’ the effort to avoid race is even more obviously a failure” (Michaels 1992:681). It is precisely because *race* cannot be avoided that the terms *culture* and *ethnicity* are deployed in its stead. But as the dominant view of race is a biological one, when this substitution of terms is effected, culture and ethnicity are themselves essentialized or biologized. What Paul Gilroy (in a different context) terms “ethnic absolutism” also specifies a kind of “culturalist racism” (1993:65).

Cultural essentialism or culturalist explanation—the emphasis upon cultural difference for determining outcomes to the “neglect of normative and political aspects of a cultural process” (Hanchard 1994:21)—is every where on the increase. (Witness the resurgence of “culture of poverty” scenarios as the ethnography of “inner-city street culture.”) In this context, Lila Abu-Lughod’s notion of “writing against culture” is an important intervention, for “despite its anti-essentialist intent, the culture concept retains some of the tendencies to freeze difference possessed by concepts like race” (1991:144). But Abu-Lughod does not tell us why or how the concept of culture has become essentialized, only that

the concept of culture operates much like its predecessor—race—even though in its 20th century form it has some important political advantages. Unlike race, and un-

like even the 19th century sense of culture as a synonym for civilization, the current concept allows for multiple rather than binary differences. This immediately checks the easy move to hierarchizing; the shift to “culture” . . . has a relativizing effect. The most important of culture’s advantages, however, is that it removes difference from the realm of the natural and the innate. . . . Culture is learned and can change. [1991:143]

In other words, because Abu-Lughod sees race and culture as antonyms, the former being “natural and innate” and the latter as learned and changeable, she cannot explain how the very distinction between the two terms is implicated in the substitution of one term for the other, with the result that culture operates as race.

In another recent essay, Verena Stolcke attempts to understand the rise of anti-immigration sentiment in France as a form of “cultural fundamentalism.” But she is faced with a paradox, since “the demons of race and eugenics appeared to have been politically if not scientifically exorcised partly by the work done by UNESCO and other bodies in defense of human equality in cultural diversity in the Boasian tradition after 1945” (1995:2).

I would argue that it is precisely because the “demons of race and eugenics” were not obliterated by UNESCO statements on race or work in the “Boasian tradition” (see Duster 1990) that Abu-Lughod and Stolcke can only describe how the concept of culture has become essentialized or fundamentalist but are unable to tell us why. Part of the reason may well be, as Stolcke suggests, that because everyone “talks culture” (that is to say, has access to the concept of culture), its relativist outlines have been increasingly filled by racist content. But does that not illustrate how culture has come to stand in for race? Without a way of describing the sociohistorical construction of race, culture is asked to do the work of race. This is perhaps what Walter Benn Michaels means by the title of his essay “Race into Culture.” He writes, “Our sense of culture is characteristically meant to displace race, but . . . culture has turned out to be a way of continuing rather than repudiating racial thought” (1992:684). When race functions at all, “it works as a metonym for culture; and it does so only at the price of biologizing what is culture or ideology” (Appiah 1986:36).

The failure to supply an account of our own role in propagating a notion of culture that lent itself to essentializing and fundamentalist tendencies signals not only an analytical weakness but a poverty of vision as well. Benedict’s and Montagu’s works on race were some of the most popular to emerge in the late war years and, over the succeeding decades, have achieved a level of generalization unchecked by contemporary theorizing on culture. Meanwhile, racism has not abated but is

rather increasingly legitimated by both science and law (Harrison 1995).

We will not vindicate ourselves by claiming that Boas and his students were only "racialists," that is, that although they believed races existed, no positive or negative valuation was placed on the nature of race (Appiah 1994:13). Given the intractable nature of racism, I would argue that racialism and the Boasian vision of a scientific study of race are themselves a part of the problem (see also Appiah 1986). We fail to recognize that the categories of nature/biology and culture are themselves culturally constructed (see Schneider 1980) and that the distinction between them is central to our notion of (civil) society. What we assign to the realm of biology has everything to do with the modernity of social classification. Races certainly exist, but they have no biological meaning outside the social significance we attach to biological explanation itself.¹⁴ While such a position does not, in my view, entail a rejection of science, it does require a rethinking of its truth value(s).

I must emphasize, however, the importance not only of seeing race as socially constructed but of describing *how* it is constructed: that is, understanding the historical conditions under which racial categories are produced and made meaningful (Harrison 1995; Mukhopadhyay and Moses 1997). In other words, to say that race has no biological meaning is not to say race lacks meaning. The point is not so much that racism often inadequately somatizes itself or that it resorts to false biology to do so. The point is that racism cannot be separated from race. Were it possible to separate the two, the so-called postracial era would give rise to its greatest contradiction: the persistence of racism without race.

The Boasian attempt to assign race to biology, without understanding biology itself as a field of sociopolitical meaning (Smedley 1993), has led to anthropology's inability to develop a theory of race as culturally and historically constructed. The Boasian notion of culture drew its very identity from assigning race to biology. This is the Boasian legacy, and burden.

The Du Boisian Turn Again: Race and Cultural Studies

I want to conclude by suggesting that the failure of U.S. anthropology to develop an understanding of race as cultural or ideological in more than a negative sense (that is, to see race itself as a productive and generative social category) is linked to the rise of transdisciplinary discussions, under the rubric of cultural studies or multiculturalism, that radically foreground race and racial identity as modes of sociality and resistance (see Giroux 1992).¹⁵ The notion that Boasian anthropology and

multiculturalism are somehow the same or interchangeable is fundamentally flawed. Not only are they distinct historically, but they are ontologically dissimilar as well. I would argue that cultural studies, as a discursive formation in the United States, has arisen immediately out of the failure of the modern concept of culture.¹⁶ This is precisely why challenges to the anthropological understanding of culture in the form of "critical race theory" have come from outside and explains, in part, why the discipline has remained particularly hostile to work in ethnic studies and cultural studies (see Rosaldo 1994).

For their part, scholars in ethnic studies and cultural studies remain skeptical of mainstream anthropological scholarship. It seems to me that these two intellectual formations, spurred by members of groups least protected by culturalist arguments and consequently the most at risk from the so-called scientific study of "race," have actively contributed to the demise of the culture concept simply by sidelining it. I suggest that without a notion of culture as lack (that is, as comprising everything race is not) the modern concept of culture can no longer exist.

The issue is not, to my mind, that anthropologists have lost culture to ethnic studies and cultural studies, as Renato Rosaldo (1994:526) has recently argued. It is rather that the modern anthropological concept of culture has lost any descriptive ability with regard to the construction of racial identities. This is also why there is little mainstream scholarship on race in cultural anthropology (Harrison 1995), why we do not usually turn to anthropology for accounts about what it is to function as racialized subjects.¹⁷ Following Omi and Winant, then, I suggest that cultural anthropologists must learn to see that "race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" and to understand racial formations as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (1994:55).

Now, Du Bois confronted the same 19th century as Boas, but he was unwilling to leave behind a culturally constituted notion of race. Like Boas, Du Bois emphasized the significance of "blood," but for him it was more a metaphysical than a biological entity, and he underlined its sociohistorical essence. In his 1897 essay "Conservation of Races," he argued that race "is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life" (Du Bois 1995a:21). It is thus possible to see, even in Du Bois's early formulation, that race is less a static category than a fluid one,

bound up in existential striving, in the making of a group.¹⁸

Since Du Bois held that "race is a cultural, sometimes an historical fact" (1940:153), his response was not to assign race to biological science, as Boas and his students had done, though he was "casting about to find a way of applying science to the race problem" (1940:55). Du Bois was convinced that "the world was thinking wrong about race" (1940:58), and his solution was to pioneer the scientific study of "the Philadelphia Negro" through *sociological* research. From 1896 to 1920, Du Bois undertook a series of studies at Atlanta University on the "health and physique of American Negroes, economic cooperation and the Negro American family, . . . efforts for social betterment, the college-bred Negro, the Negro common school, the Negro artisan, . . . [and] morals and manners among Negroes" (1940:65).¹⁹

Like Boas, Du Bois lamented that he had "too often seen science made the slave of caste and race hate" (1940:100). But unlike Boas, he did not place his faith in correcting bad science. After an initial endorsement of "anthropological measurement" as part of what he termed "the study of the Negro problems" (1995b), Du Bois saw the anthropometrics of race as suspect (see also Williams 1996). Especially after his studies in Germany, he increasingly saw race as a "matter of culture and cultural history" (1940:98).

The first thing that brought me to my senses in all this racial discussion was the continuous change in the proofs and arguments advanced. . . . I was skeptical about brain weight; surely much depended upon what brains were weighed. I was not sure about physical measurements and social inquiries. For instance, an insurance actuary published in 1890 incontrovertible statistics showing how quickly and certainly the Negro race was dying out in the United States through sheer physical inferiority. I lived to see every assumption of Hoffman's "Race Traits and Tendencies" contradicted; but even before that, I doubted the statistical method which he had used. [1940:99]

Similarly, when Boas and Hershkovits's own measurements of brain weights and cephalic indexes determined that the American Negro was not a pure type due to an "influx of blood" from whites and Indians but an "amalgam" that might itself disappear (Hershkovits 1928:17, 52), Du Bois opposed their conclusions: "There was not the slightest idea of the permanent subordination and inequality of my world. Nor again was there any idea of racial amalgamation. I resented the idea that we desired it" (1985:101).

As if in response to Hershkovits's suggestion that he would "not claim the term 'race' for the American Negro" because there was "nothing but the most striking type of mixture represented in him" (1928:81–82), Du Bois countered with a question of his own: "What is this group; and how do you differentiate it; and how can you

call it 'black' when you admit it is not black?" He continued, "I recognize it quite easily and with full legal sanction; the black man is a person who must ride 'Jim Crow' in Georgia" (1940:153). Du Bois thus asserted that the experience and category of race is created not by blood but through the experience of racial discrimination.

Du Bois would also argue that the kinship which defined African Americans was based less on blood (or the "badge of color") than upon the social heritage of slavery. In answering Countee Cullen's question "What is Africa to me?", he mused that the mark of his ancestors' heritage was "upon (him) in color and hair," though these are "obvious things . . . of little meaning in themselves" (Du Bois 1940:117). Of more importance

is the fact that since the 15th century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. The actual ties of heritage between individuals of this group, vary with the ancestors that they have in common and many others. . . . But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa. [1940:117]

If we recognize, as did Du Bois, that the experience (and indeed, the category) of race is produced by racism and that different forms of racism produce differing effects of race (Hall 1992), I think we can productively build from and extend Omi and Winant's project. The middle passage, slavery, and the experience of racial terror (Gilroy 1994) produce a race of African Americans out of subjects drawn from different cultures. Genocide, forced removal to reservations, and the experience of racial terror make Native Americans subjects drawn from different linguistic and tribal affiliations: a race. War relocation camps, legal exclusion, and the experience of discrimination make Asian American subjects drawn from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds: a race. The process of forming the southwestern states of the United States through conquest and subjugation and the continued subordination of Puerto Rico constitute Chicanos and Puerto Ricans as races.

In the *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois ultimately saw "the concept of race" as a "group of contradictory forces, facts, and tendencies" (1940:133). But he also saw that the collective and individual acts of surviving political domination and racial terror make for positive affirmations of social identity, what he also termed "beauty and health of body, . . . mental clearness and creative genius, . . . spiritual goodness and receptivity; social adaptability and constructiveness" (1940:141). In this conception of race, racial identities must be seen as changing

over time because they are coalitional, contingent, and performative. The project of seeing race as being about the dynamic production of racial identities, I think, links up with forms of nonessentialist work, such as calls for ethnographies of the processes of diasporic identification (Gordon and Anderson 1996). It affirms the work of feminists who argue that the category of woman only operates through the experience of interlocking patriarchal structures. That is to say, if women share something in common, it is not the result of a universal bodily maturational process but of mutually experienced interpolations of race, class, and sexual orientation through patriarchal formations.

The importance of affirming a conception of race which is socially dynamic but historically meaningful and which foregrounds questions of gender or sexuality must be understood in the current political context of proposals to eliminate racial categories from the U.S. census altogether or to add a "multiracial" category, either of which might weaken the demographic claims of minority racial groups. If race has no meaningful biological basis but is socially constructed and continually shifting, so the argument goes, it must not be determinative. Yet a fall 1993 *Time* cover featuring the computer-generated image of a multiracial woman as the "new face of America" suggests that Boasian dilution or Herskovitsian amalgamation are being re-envisioned as solutions to the "race problem" in ways few could have predicted. Many forms of reproduction are at stake here (political, social, heterosexual), suggesting that "deracialization" might actually be the sign of a more pernicious racialization: light is right.

Postscript

There are many now who would put David Schneider's work to use in understanding everything from the cultural construction of the modern genetic sciences to social analysis of the human genome project. This is extremely worthwhile and important scholarship. My fear, however, is that anthropologists still too quickly cede the realm of biology to natural science. In our talk of science as socially constructed, we forget to make Schneider's first-order distinction, which is that the category of nature (or biology) is itself founded on the cultural distinction between nature and culture. It thus comes as no surprise that the parameters of what counts as "nature," and therefore as the object of scientific study, have not narrowed but, rather, widened immeasurably in the last 20 years, so that we have once again arrived at the question of genes and intelligence. The discovery that genetic disorders were distributed differentially across racial and ethnic groups refueled on old logic with a new question: if such disorders were distributed by race and ethnicity, what about other hu-

man traits or characteristics? (Duster 1990:2-3). Intelligence, like race, is seen to have a physical reality that can be measured and quantified; the study of group differences in achievement on standardized tests does not imply that a value need be attached to the results, say its advocates. Yet perhaps scientific racism results not just from the misunderstanding or misuse of science, as Boas and his students once believed, but from our normative understanding of what constitutes the proper objects of experimental science.

Clearly cultural anthropologists did not win the battle against sociobiology by insisting on "nurture" over "nature." Indeed, our very failure to confront the epistemological apparatus (the history of a discipline) that gave us those terms may be one reason the pace of sociobiological study has quickened rather than declined. Unfortunately, it has not proved to be, as Clifford Geertz pronounced 14 years ago, "a degenerative research program designed to expire in its own confusions" (1984:268). I suggest that the sociobiological and genetic bases of intelligence studies are once again the dominant paradigm because the modern concept of culture is too weak to offer substantial resistance. Indeed, its political content was evacuated in its initial refusal to speak of race and in its later ascendancy within the dominant ethnicity-based paradigm of the social sciences. The modern concept of culture is weak because of its inability to confront the false nature-culture split from which its very identity was drawn. To the extent that we have leaned too heavily on a diseased culture concept, we have all contributed, indirectly, to its demise.

I suggest, however, that we not mourn the passing of the modern concept of culture (Fox 1995; Kahn 1989; Yengoyan 1986), for in accounting for its failures, what we create out of its ashes may actually be a strengthened and more politically astute defense of relativism itself. This means moving beyond Geertz's (1984) articulation of an "anti anti-relativism," which in my opinion was a highly inadequate defense of the constructivist notion of culture. The task of a critical and politically engaged, relativist position, it seems to me, is to actively interrogate the history of relativism itself: its fracturing into biological and cultural determinisms and its proliferation of a notion of culture so weak that its normative deployment was increasingly biologized or essentialist rather than constructivist. The solution is not to replace culture with race but to keep the two terms in constructivist tension with one another. The historical moment of splitting race from culture cannot be sutured, but we must learn to make a revitalized notion of culture name the conditions of that splitting, so that culture is not substituted for race and a notion of race as culturally constructed becomes as viable in anthropology as it is in ethnic and cultural studies.

Notes

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1. See, for example, Mintz 1990, Sanjek 1994, and Winant 1994.

2. Melville Herskovits was more reserved, "rais[ing] the larger and more difficult question of the way in which our dominantly White culture acts upon the Negro community," but concurred that "should the current attitude toward so-called 'race-crossing' change. . . . [T]he introduction of this new stock would change the [Negro] type. . . . so that it would no longer be recognizable" (1928:52).

3. This period marks the rise of the Brazilian race relations model in contrast to U.S. racial segregation. From the turn of the century until 1940, black leaders from Booker T. Washington to W. E. B. Du Bois visited Brazil to verify whether blacks were treated better there (see Hanchard 1994:51).

4. A similar dynamic marked the thinking of his student, Melville Herskovits, who wrote in 1925 that "the social ostracism to which [the Negro is] subjected is only different in extent from that to which the Jew is subjected. . . . But whether in Negro or in Jew, the protest avails nothing, apparently. All racial and social elements in our population who live here long enough become acculturated" (in Mintz 1990:xii). Herskovits would reverse this position with the publication of *The Myth of the Negro Past* in 1941 (Herskovits 1990).

5. Boas held that *Aryan* and *Semitic* were linguistic terms that had "nothing to do with race" and that to speak of either as races was an "undemonstrable hypothesis" (1934b:4, 8).

6. Boas's "Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants" appeared in 1912, "Modern Populations of America," in 1915, and "Report on an Anthropometric Investigation of the Population of the U.S.," in 1922 (see Boas 1940). The empirical materials for the study of immigrants were finally published in 1928 as *Materials for the Study of Inheritance in Man* (1928b).

7. Such argumentation is related to the view that race is the surface manifestation of deeper phenomena such as class conflict. Despite critiques by Gilroy (1987), Omi and Winant (1994), and Roediger (1991), some cultural anthropologists have continued to argue for the reducibility of racism to class conflict, for example: "Racism has usually provided a rationalization for class prerogatives by naturalizing the socioeconomic inferiority of the underprivileged" (Stolcke 1995:4). My

point here is not that class is never analytically useful but that we should guard against reducing race to class positioning. The goal is to see how race structures class experience and to understand how class shapes the experience of race.

8. Herskovits is the exception here. He began his career with a Boas-sponsored study on the physical characteristics of the American Negro (1928). Although he began by assigning race to biology, by the end of the work he, like Montagu, had questioned the meaning of the word *race*, setting the stage for the sociohistoric conception that underlies his elaboration of the "Negro past" in his 1941 work. Debate currently exists as to whether most physical anthropologists accept a biological definition of race (see Lieberman et al. 1989; Mukhopadhyay and Moses 1997).

9. "A cline is a continuous gradation over space in the form or frequency of a trait" (Harding 1993:133).

10. The period from the end of World War I until the end of World War II actually saw the production of a number of ethnographies of race or studies of race relations within anthropology: Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* (1990[1938]) and *Mules and Men* (1990[1935]); Hortense Powdermaker's *After Freedom* (1939); Allison Davis's *Deep South* (1941); Melville Herskovits's *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1990[1941]); Ella Deloria's *Speaking of Indians* (1944); Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake's *Black Metropolis* (1945); and Ruth Landes's *City of Women* (1947). An examination of these texts awaits another article. Suffice it to say that none of these texts were taught as part of the canon of anthropology until quite recently. See also Faye Harrison's essay "The Du Boisian Legacy in Anthropology" (1992).

11. But the "Statement on Race, 1951" did admit that "because of the complexity of human history, there are also many populations which cannot easily be fitted into a racial classification" (UNESCO 1952:90).

12. "As the life expectancy of the Whites increased from 48 to 62 to 67 years, that of the Negroes increased from 32 to 52 to 61 years. They died of the same causes, but they died at different rates.

"Discrimination, by denying equal social opportunity to the Negro, made his progress lag approximately 20 years behind that of the White. Somebody said to me, 'Well that's only six years.' But it depends on whose six years it is. There are about 19 million people in this country sociologically classified as Negroes. If they die according to the death rate given above, approximately 100 million years of life will be lost owing to discrimination" (Washburn 1963:530).

13. Again, it is not that "ethnic group" is never useful as a concept; I point only to one more body of theory that subordinates race to another explanatory paradigm.

14. Appiah (1994) argues for nonessentialized racial identities by holding that, while biological races do not exist, "racial identities" that are socially constructed certainly do. This view is close to mine, but we disagree on whether it is important to speak of the social existence of race(s).

15. As Hazel Carby puts it, "Multiculturalism is one of the current code words for race" (1992:190), and we should not forget her trenchant critique of this process.

16. In the United States, cultural studies has sometimes been seen as the domain of white scholars, but Lawrence Grossberg et alia's (1992) edited collection and the journal

Cultural Studies include the work of a number of scholars of color (see Chabram 1991, among others). Work in cultural studies, as it originated in the United Kingdom, emphasized the importance of developing a notion of culture within the Marxist tradition to sustain class-based analysis (Hall 1980; but see also Gilroy 1987 and Hall 1992 for the treatment of race and racism).

17. Exceptions include work by scholars of color in the discipline, such as Faye Harrison, Dorinne Kondo, and Renato Rosaldo (see also Gregory and Sanjek 1994), which highlight the production of racial identities. Angie Chabram's (1991) and Lisa Lowe's (1996) work in cultural studies and ethnic studies represent powerful accounts of the formation of racialized identities outside the discipline. Sociologists and historians (Frankenberg 1993; Roediger 1991) have led the field in defining "whiteness" as a nonneutral, racialized category (but see Dominguez 1986).

18. Later in this essay Du Bois says that "the forces which bind together the Teuton nations are, then, first their race identity and common blood; secondly, and more important, a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life" (1995a:22), apparently effecting a separation of "blood" from common history. This has led some critics to conclude that Du Bois had a more "social-biological" notion of race in his early work than in his later (see Holt 1990:308). See Appiah 1994 for a divergent reading of Du Bois's notion of race that argues its general failure to overcome a scientific or biological reading, resulting in an insufficiently sociohistorical concept of race.

19. See Du Bois's "The Study of the Negro Problems" (1995b), which outlines the proposed methods for the Atlanta University studies.

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