

## **A History of Race Relations Social Science**

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This essay argues that the inclusion of white women, African Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians into historiography is a fairly recent development; and that the aforementioned development, which did not begin until the 1960s, has resulted in rigorous investigation into the racial thought of Franz Uri Boas, Robert Ezra Park, and Gunnar Myrdal and a hot debate in reference to their significance and influence on today's social sciences. Furthermore, the integration of African American history into the historiography of race relations social science has given impetus to the movement towards making American intellectual history more inclusive.

The purposes of this essay are twofold: first, it seeks to articulate the current scholarly debates centered around the purpose of the writings of Franz Uri Boas, Robert Ezra Park, and Gunnar Myrdal and their contributions to an understanding of Black-white relations in the United States; and second, it examines and analyzes the integration of African American history into the subfield of race relations social science. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate that during the past two decades the race relations social science has been telling Americans more about themselves on the historical issue of race—most of which they are reluctant to hear—than any other subfield in recent American intellectual history.

-I-

For more than five decades historically minded anthropologists and intellectual historians have celebrated the decisive role that Franz Uri Boas played in undermining the racist worldview that prevailed in the social sciences during the years before 1930.<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly little of this literature—especially when one considers the amount of data which is readily accessible—deals with Boas's specific treatment of

African Americans. Most of these scholars were content to assume—and they assumed erroneously—that Boas treated African Americans much like the “primitives” he studied—that is, with a great deal of affection. This section of this essay, which surveys the small body of literature that comments on Boas’s attitudes toward African Americans, suggests that this literature has ignored what I term “the Boasian paradox”—that is, the contradiction between the inferences based on his physical anthropology and his liberal values. This contradiction, I have argued in previous articles, should not be surprising—especially when one considers Boas’s life and career, ethnicity, the historical context, and the controversies surrounding issues concerning the condition and destiny of Africans.<sup>2</sup> Indeed Boas, like most scholars—albeit to lesser extent—was a prisoner of his times.

In an article that was published in *Isis* in 1973, the historian, Edward H. Beardsley, examined and analyzed the historical treatment of Boas during the previous thirty years by students and colleagues of the patriarch of modern American anthropology. Unlike those anthropologists, who believed Boas’s revulsion against antiblack racism was fundamentally motivated by his liberal values, which was directly related to his ethnic status as a German-born Jew in America, Beardsley argued that the “most basic and fundamental explanation” was “his commitment to scientific objectivity and reliability...” Although Beardsley admits that Boas was “from a Jewish background and a foe of anti-Semitism since his youth,” he points out nevertheless that, “Boas did not become actively and publicly involved on that issue until the 1920s, when Nazi racists made a major effort to enlist science in support of their views.” Furthermore, he noted: “Boas also never involved himself with the Indian’s plight as he did with the Negro’s or Jew’s”—primarily because “the idea of Indian inferiority was never a major tenet of scientific racism.”<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, Beardsley vociferously argued that, “Boas was an activist for what were essentially professional reasons.”<sup>4</sup>

Four years later, Hasia R. Diner in a book entitled, *In the Almost Promised Land: Jews and Blacks, 1915-35*, challenged both the Boasian anthropologists and Beardsley, when she argued that there was truth in both of their contentions. Boas wrote for, Diner stated cogently, “social as well as for scientific reasons. He was deeply concerned with the real human suffering created by racist thinking and eagerly shared his findings with the NAACP.” Nevertheless, it is Diner’s thesis that the fundamental reason Boas wrote about African Americans stemmed from his ethnic status as a liberal, German-born Jew in America who believed Blacks and Jews had a common bond of suffering. Yet she admitted that Boas was not naive about his own group’s self-interest in discrediting antiblack racism. “The same principles which Boas and his students used to discredit antiblack thinking,” Diner concluded, “could be employed as effective weapons to combat anti-Jewish sentiment.”<sup>5</sup>

The idea that the fundamental reason behind Boas's skeptical stance towards antiblack racism stemmed from his desire to protect his own group was extended by Marshall Hyatt in his timely biography of Boas, entitled *Franz Boas—Social Activist: The Dynamics of Ethnicity*, published in 1990. Hyatt, in reference to Boas's address as vice president of Section H of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Brooklyn, New York, in 1894, believes "that Boas used blacks as a surrogate to avoid charges of scientific bias." He has written:

The timing of the polemic against prejudice is instructive. Having recently tangled with Washington, the center of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant-controlled anthropological study, over the museum appointment, Boas was still licking his wounds.... Boas conceivably read the incident in ethnic terms. Given his heightened sensitivity to persecution, which colored much of his life in Germany, and the dominant influence of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants in anthropology, this is not surprising. Accordingly, he began his assault on prejudice soon after his disappointment over the Columbian Museum job. However, rather than call attention to his own plight and risk accusations of subjectivity, Boas chose another aspect, that directed against Afro-Americans, at which to vent his distress. This camouflage became part of Boas's *raison d'être* for attacking all forms of human prejudice.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, "it was in the area of race," Hyatt concludes, "that Boas had his greatest impact on America and on future intellectual thought."<sup>7</sup> Yet, ironically, nowhere is the relationship between Boas and Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, R. R. Wright, Sr., George Washington Ellis, Carter G. Woodson, Alain LeRoy Locke, Charles S. Johnson, George E. Haynes, Abram Harris, Monroe N. Work, and Charles H. Thompson explored. Investigation into Boas's correspondence with these major African American intellectuals would have qualified somewhat Hyatt's argument that Boas's indictment of the plight of Afro-Americans was mere camouflage for attacking anti-Semitism.

Another recent work, Carl N. Degler's *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*, concurs in Hyatt's argument that Boas was a progressive on the issue of the equipotentiality of African Americans. Arguing "that Boas did not arrive at" his position on African Americans "from a disinterested, scientific inquiry", but, rather, his ideas "derived from an ideological commitment that began in his early life and academic experiences in

Europe and continued in America,” Degler discounts Boas’s equivocal and racist statements.<sup>8</sup> Degler argued in 1991 that: “Nowhere does Boas’s commitment to the ideology of equal opportunity and the recognition of the worth of oppressed or ignored people become more evident than in his relation to Afro-Americans, a people whose life patterns had long been allegedly ‘accounted for’ by race.” Degler uses as evidence for his position Boas’s attempt to raise money from Andrew Carnegie “to support a new Museum on the Negro and the African Past,” Boas’s 1906 address at the commencement of Atlanta University on the African past that had such a profound impact on the thought of W.E.B. DuBois, and his discussion of the ramification of white-Black intermarriage.<sup>9</sup> Although such arguments seem compelling, it should be noted that Degler, unlike Hyatt, ignores Boas’s racist physical anthropology that was in tension with his liberal ideology. Nevertheless, both Hyatt and Degler fail to demonstrate how that tension was exacerbated by the increasing migration of Blacks from Southeastern states to New York, bringing what was thought to be a peculiar Southern problem to the doorsteps of anthropologists in the urban-industrial North. In short, until the investigation of social structural changes on Boas’s thought are brought to bear, there will be little understanding of the complexity of the paradoxes of this transitional figure’s thought.

It should be noted that the denial of an existence of a paradox in Boas’s thought on African Americans is present in Elazar Barkan’s *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars*. Arguing (erroneously) that Boas was a racial egalitarian whose “political beliefs” were more salient than “scientific commitments,” Barkan constructed a nonsensical argument when he wrote in 1992: “Boas was no racist, but he did reflect the values of his society.”<sup>10</sup> Further investigation into Boas’s writings on African Americans would have revealed the tension in Boas’s writing between his life-long belief in inherent racial differences and his commitment to cultural explanations of human behavior, the tension between his political beliefs and scientific commitments, and that between the science of physical anthropology and his liberal values. Put another way, although Boas certainly believed that African Americans had a defective ancestry as a result of their smaller cranial cavities, which he believed were serially inferior to Euro-Americans, he did not think that it should be used as an excuse for excluding them from partaking as much as their capacity allowed in the community or nation-state as individuals. Indeed, as I will argue in the second chapter, Boas—albeit to a lesser extent than most scholars of the period—was a prisoner of his times.

engaged in two major debates in reference to Robert E. Park's theories. The first debate centers on whether Park was a proponent of racial determinism; while the second centers around whether Park was an advocate of assimilation. Since Park was not a systematic thinker, these debates have been marred by the subjective valuations of the various adversaries.

Although there exists a consensus among scholars that Park was one of the first social scientists to subordinate racial determinist explanations of human behavior to social and/or cultural ones, it should be noted that in 1918 Park penned the concept of "racial temperaments," which reads as follows: "Everywhere and always the Negro has been interested rather in expression than in action; interested in life itself than in its reconstruction or reformation. The Negro is, by natural disposition, neither an intellectual nor idealist like the Jew, nor a brooding introspective like the East Indian, nor a pioneer and frontiersman like the Anglo-Saxon. He is primarily an artist, loving life for its own sake. His metier is expression rather than action. The Negro is, so to speak, the lady among the races."<sup>11</sup>

The late Ralph Ellison, and the sociologist, John H. Stanfield, II, have branded Park's concept of "racial temperaments" as racist. Stanfield, for example, argued persuasively in 1985 that, "biological determinism was apparent in his [Park's] concept of 'racial temperaments,' which he believed was the factor behind the so-called cultural uniqueness among blacks."<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, scholars such as Morris Janowitz, César Graña, and, most recently, Barbara Ballis Lal, have sought to excuse or justify Park's usage of the concept of "racial temperament." In 1990, in her *The Romance of Culture in an Urban Civilization: Robert E. Park on Race and Ethnic Relations in the Cities*, Barbara Ballis Lal sought to counter the arguments of Ellison and Stanfield. "Park," Lal declared unequivocally, "rejected Social Darwinism, all its implications regarding the biological basis of cultural differences and its belief that racial stratification reflected a 'national order' of selection and fitness." Furthermore, Lal believes Park's "emphasis upon race relations, rather than the alleged hereditary attributes of races,... suggests that the influence he accorded to racial temperaments was very limited."<sup>13</sup>

In 1992, Stanford M. Lyman, who has treated the concept in "relation to his larger discussion of assimilation and the problems attending the modern civilizational process," attempted to resolve the debate and has stated: "...what Park seems to have been doing in his invocation of a racial temperament is attempting to respecify, in as exact a way his knowledge and observation would allow, precisely what amount of the Negro's character and personality was biological in origin, what amount a survival of African culture, and what amount a product of acculturation in America. Furthermore, Park sought to get at the effects that the internalization of this tripartite and emergent compound of constitutional elements, cultural survivals, acculturative adaptations would have

on the incorporation of African Americans into an ever modernizing United State of America.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Lyman admits that, “in the end, the precise weight that should be assigned, respectively to hereditary and acculturative factors eluded Park.”<sup>15</sup>

My reading of Park suggests, however, that at that juncture in his career he believed that there was a fundamental hereditary basis for the African Americans’ racial temperament, and that the temperament was an obstacle to assimilation. Like Franz Boas, Park was a transitional figure, caught between racial deterministic thought and the trend towards initiating a cultural and social determinism, whose thought on the character and capabilities of African Americans and the nature of prejudice was uneven. Peter Kivisto, in reference to deficiencies in Professor Lal’s work has summed up the matter quite aptly when he wrote in 1992: “Indicative of the fact that the break [Park’s] was not entirely ambiguous was his occasional relapse to the language of instincts as well as his unfortunate characterization of African Americans as ‘the lady among races’.”<sup>16</sup>

-III-

The second debate surrounding Park’s theories centers on whether he was an advocate of assimilation. It should be noted that historians and historically minded social scientists of American race relations virtually ignored Park’s concept of a biracial organization of society—despite the fact that the concept was central to his explanation of Black-white relations for over twenty five years. Perhaps most post-Myrdalian scholars of race relations concurred in E. Franklin Frazier’s criticism of the concept which he stated in 1947. The theory of a biracial organization of society, Frazier argued persuasively, was a “static theory of race relations. His theory not only contained the fatalism inherent in Sumner’s concept of mores. His theory was originally based upon the assumption that the races could not mix and mingle freely.”<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, in 1981 R. Fred Wacker published a small volume that argued Park’s biracial theory of white-Black relations was his *true* theory of white-Black relations. Seeking to educate the revisionists of the 1960s who believed social scientists such as Park “thought that all groups would shed their distinctive cultures and become WASPs,” Wacker declared unequivocally: “My study of the ideas and attitudes of Robert Park leads me to conclude that he did not believe all minority groups in America would be assimilated.” In reference to Park’s theory of a “biracial organization,” Wacker argues that Park “did not predict the outcome of conflict and competition.”<sup>18</sup> Wacker believes Park was a pluralist. He presents an argument which states that Park, like Horace Kallen, was focusing on “groups and group needs” and thereby rejecting “the individualistic perspective of most social scientists.” Furthermore,

Wacker states unequivocally that Park saw “the rise and revitalization of ethnic and racial consciousness as a natural response to prejudice and domination.” In other words, for Park “racial consciousness was part of a movement toward mental health”.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Wacker, the historically-minded sociologist, John H. Stanfield, II, has made a compelling case for the validity of the traditional labeling of Park as an assimilationist. Taking Wacker’s view of Park as an advocate of the intrinsic worth of Black consciousness to task, Stanfield in *Philanthropy and Jim Crow in American Social Science*, in 1985, stated persuasively that: “Since Park presumed the assimilation of physically dissimilar groups was problematic yet inevitable, it followed that segregated black communities were necessarily temporary, and, therefore, that race consciousness was also temporary.” Stanfield is critical of Park’s view of race consciousness as a temporary response to oppression—insofar as Park “did not consider the normality of race consciousness, in dominant as well as in subordinate populations. Since Park did not consider race consciousness as a form of enculturation in a racially stratified society,” Stanfield concludes that Park not only “ushered into sociological literature an a-cultural and an a-sociological conception of race consciousness” and, “set the stage for succeeding generations of sociologists to view black race consciousness negatively as a product of antagonistic relations with whites, which materialized through conscious white racism and the formation of ghettos.”<sup>20</sup>

Stanfield’s criticisms of Park, as he clearly recognizes, are ahistorical and thus leave unanswered the question of whether Park deserves a place among the pantheon of key figures in the discussion of condition and destiny of African Americans. A work which avoids the debunking that characterizes Stanfield’s work is the revised edition of John Higham’s *Send These to Me*. In a monumental essay, entitled “Ethnic Pluralism in American Thought,” the distinguished social and intellectual has restored Park to his rightful historical place in the history of race relations experts. Reconciling the debate between Wacker and Stanfield, Higham has demonstrated that Robert Ezra Park made two modifications in the “classic American ideal of assimilation”: First, Park extended the ideal “to include Negroes, as well as immigrants; second, he gave it [the concept of assimilation] an international and fully interracial formulation; he also incorporated within it a quasi-pluralistic appreciation.” In short, “Park interpreted the problems of a multiethnic society,” Higham correctly concludes, “in a way that took account of pluralist as well as assimilationist claims.” Park’s broad international vision, Higham points out, was not applied by his successors. Ignoring the Boasian Melville J. Herskovits’s emphasis on African retentions in the African American population, and relying instead on E. Franklin Frazier’s judgments, Higham argues that Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* represented the renationalization of Park’s

international “melting pot.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1987 Stow Persons qualified the arguments of Stanfield and Higham and suggested that Park struggled with “the problem of assimilation as well as his growing doubts about its inevitability...” Towards the end of his life, Persons noted that Park believed that, “the potentialities of a rational and humane order could be realized only if people become thoroughly familiar with one another’s characteristics and problems.... Park knew that any such achievement was remote.”<sup>22</sup> More recently, sociologists, such as James B. McKee and Stanford M. Lyman have also noted Park’s doubts about inevitability of assimilation in the near future in one of his last papers in 1943. McKee has stressed the idea that “Park gave to his fellow sociologists an image of a racial future marked by militant action, conflict, and possible violence, instead of one of gradual, peaceful change leading to increased tolerance and social acceptance.”<sup>23</sup> For Lyman, Park’s later works indicated that, the struggle [between races] was “inevitable even if its outcome was less certain.”<sup>24</sup>

Most scholars involved in the discourse on Robert Ezra Park, in short, treat his thought as if it were static. In my research on Park’s theories I have found that they evolved during his long lifetime. During the years between 1905 and 1913, he both contributed to Booker T. Washington’s myths in reference to race and race relations, while also recontextualizing and universalizing scientific racist data concerning the socioeconomic status of Blacks. Later, during his tenure at the University of Chicago, from 1913 until 1932, Park occasionally relapsed into reversals and transvaluations; but, perceiving the influences of Franz Boas and the Great Migration, continued to recontextualize his analyses of race, prejudice, and race relations. Finally, during the years 1937 to 1943, due to the obvious impact of the evidence of Black progress and his travels abroad, Park adopted an “alternative ideology”—defined by Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman as a “radically different world view, with different perceptions of reality goals and points of reference.”<sup>25</sup> The hows and whys of Park’s transition from the perspective of African Americans as a homogeneous race to a perspective in which one’s racial status and class are supposed to be increasingly confused, will enable us, in short, to understand why current debates on these issues assume such volatility.

-IV-

What Higham calls “the ideational approach to social issues” began to dominate the social sciences with the publication of Myrdal’s work in 1944. The how and whys of this occurrence are the subject of Walter A. Jackson’s *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-87* (1991). Arguing that “An



*American Dilemma* ... emerged from a complex process of interaction between this politically minded intellectual and a foundation, a community of American social scientists, broaden currents of social, of political social, and economic change," Jackson traces Myrdal's life from his youth in Dalarna, Sweden, to his death in 1987. It is Jackson's argument that Myrdal's commitment to social engineering and moral reform grew out of the egalitarianism and moral values of his childhood and his fascination with the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Jackson notes, however, that "there remained in his thought a tension between his commitment to equality and his infatuation with an elitist conception of social engineering." In short, when Myrdal arrived in the United States in 1938, he "brought a conception of social science as a process of moral inquiry and a belief that social engineering" was the primary goal of the social sciences.<sup>26</sup>

The Carnegie Corporation, which chose Myrdal to conduct *An American Dilemma*, took the initiative of race relations research away from the American social scientists who were writing for small audiences, and placed it in the hands of a "pragmatic problem solver who promised to come up with a fresh approach in a book aimed at a broad audience of educated Americans."<sup>27</sup> Through the cooption of centrist, liberal, and radical social scientists, Myrdal created a consensus behind a liberal analysis of race relations in America.

During his travels in the South and the Northern urban ghettos, Myrdal witnessed a degree of poverty and suffering among Blacks that he had not seen before. Yet he also heard many white Americans profess a desire to do something about those conditions. Furthermore, the moral earnestness and optimism that Myrdal thought he saw in most white Americans was lacking in most Europeans. This led Myrdal to challenge white Americans to live up to their ideals. Encouraged by the New Deal, Myrdal predicted erroneously the reconciliation between American ideals and practice. Ignoring the work of African American scholars such as DuBois, Woodson, Charles S. Johnson and white scholars such as Herskovits, who had made the case for the strength of Black culture, Myrdal adopted Frazier's and Bunche's position that African American culture was pathological.

*An American Dilemma* captured the attention of many white Americans on the issue of race relations and educated them on the problem of racial discrimination. Furthermore, the work influenced political leaders, judges, and civil rights activists, and although Myrdal's ideas were durable for twenty years, Jackson points out correctly that he offered "few guidelines for the next phase of the black struggle from the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act."<sup>28</sup>

I have a serious reservation about Jackson's splendid work. By emphasizing the importance of African American culture, he seems to suggest that a monolithic culture determines the behavior of its members. It should be noted, however, that a monolithic African

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American culture does not exist and perhaps never existed. Divided by regional, religious, occupational and class lines, the existence of African American cultures perhaps explains why at this historical juncture, as Harold Cruse pointed out in the 1960s, it is necessary to create a cultural nationalism that would unify the African American groups. Despite Jackson's call for giving attention to African American culture, Myrdal was certainly correct on some issues. As the last twelve years bear out that Black standards such as family, incomes, nutrition, housing, health, and education—as Myrdal correctly pointed out—were dependent upon opportunities in employment. For most Blacks, the opportunities in employment in the new service economy are severely limited, due primarily to both historical deprivation and present-day discrimination. Given the persistence of racism—albeit uneven—in the United States, it seems nothing short of both a *redistribution* of wealth and an accompanying *revitalization* of the African American cultures, can resolve satisfactorily the historical contradiction between ideals and practices.

-V-

It should be noted that scholars in the history of social science of race relations have drawn on the field of African American history in an attempt to create truly ecumenical myths. This interest in the pioneering students of race and race relations has resulted in the resurrection of an early African American sociologist who was involved in debates at the turn of the century: Monroe Nathan Work. He is the subject of Linda O. McMurray's *Recorder of the Black Experience*. Work's contributions to scholarship and Black uplift were substantial. His biennial, *The Negro Year Book, A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America*, and his early scholarly and popular articles expressed "his desire to eliminate outmoded white prejudice and to inspire black confidence." Work was also an activist. He established a National Negro Health Week, and published the *Tuskegee Lynching Report*, which contained statistics that were distributed to hundreds of newspapers. Furthermore, he actively sought to increase the number of Black registered voters in Macon County. For McMurray, however, Work's historical significance does not stem from his activism or his scholarship. Rather she views him as important because of the insights "his life provides into the age in which he lived". Indeed, Work was representative of Afro-American scholars who were "forced to become 'race men' in the face of the failures of white scholarship." For Southern Blacks, McMurray thinks persons such as Work "are part of the rock from which the civil rights movement was hewn".<sup>29</sup>

Although *Recorder of the Black Experience* is a significant work, I disagree with McMurray's assessment of Work's scholarship. While it is true that his scholarly articles were concise and seemed "almost devoid of interpretation," it should be remembered that within

the context of turn of the century sociology, his works were supposed to be “scientific” attempts to undermine racism. Like DuBois, R. R. Wright, Jr., George E. Haynes, and Kelly Miller, Work believed it was a necessity that his discipline shed its ties to moral philosophy and present an “objective” picture of society. Of course recent students of the sociology of knowledge have shown that values impinge on all aspects of the social scientific enterprise. Still, Work’s insistence on attempting to write scientific sociology was a necessary attack on those white scholars and commentators who approached the study of Blacks as if the issues were clear cut—as if detailed statistical studies were not prerequisite for their broad conclusions.

The exasperation of scholars like McMurray with Black scholars’ empiricism perhaps could not have been avoided in 1985. As a consequence, scholars of the history and race relations social science should be deeply indebted to Jeffrey C. Stewart for uncovering and meticulously reconstructing in 1992 a series of extant lectures by the philosopher better known for his later contributions to the Harlem Renaissance than his social scientific theorizing: Alain LeRoy Locke. Entitled *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race*, the book is an invaluable source on the thought of an African American intellectual on the subject of the nature of race relations during the Progressive Era and on its relationship to ethnic and class relations as well. Unlike the empiricist Work, Locke was a theoretician. So fecund are these lectures with insights and hypotheses which deserve further investigation and analysis that it would require a work of equal length to do justice to this collection of lectures. As a consequence, I will focus only on Locke’s treatment of race prejudice and race relations.

Problematical for most recent scholars, and an indicator that he was indeed a prisoner of his times, is Locke’s analysis of racial prejudice. Believing that since ancient times racial prejudice had been “automatic and instinctive,” it is not surprising that Locke held what the Swedish political economist Gunnar Myrdal called a “laissez-faire, do-nothing” approach in reference to the potency of the law in changing race relations in establishing a *modus vivendi* between conflicting racial groups. (It should be noted that Locke’s works were influenced significantly by the theories of Robert Ezra Park.) “It would seem,” Locke remarked, “that in the majority of instances, almost as there is any recognition or sense of a difference, the law springs up to help confirm it and perpetuate [the difference]”. Written in the period when the Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* had legitimized Jim Crow, Locke concluded on a fatalistic note that: “One of the saddest phenomena with which the study of society can concern us is the way in which every legal, every customary, prescription accentuates and perpetuates differences [and] handicaps which would perhaps pass off as temporary accidents if they did not have the sanction and the perpetuation of the legal or the customary

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forms. [This is the] *stereotype function of the law*.<sup>30</sup> In reference to the relationship of race relations to class relations, Locke argued: "Race issues are only very virulent forms of class issues, because as they can be broken up into class issues they become possible of solution in society."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, he perceived a similarity between race relations and ethnic relations. For Locke, the relations that existed between dominant and minority groups in Europe, which were separated not by skin color but rather by speech dialects, customs, and religious faith, were the basis for group domination and exploitation. It should be noted that those of us with historical hindsight might disagree with Locke's enjoining on race and ethnicity, but there is no doubt that his views which were brought forth in 1916 are worthy of serious consideration.

In short, the contributions of McMurray and Stewart are the types of booklength studies that African American history can bequeath to the subfield of the history of race relations social science. What is needed at this juncture are new interpretations of W.E.B. DuBois's Atlanta University publications and of Alain LeRoy Locke's forays into sociology and anthropology before the 1920s; and studies of George Edmund Haynes, Richard R. Wright, Jr., and Kelly Miller as pioneers in the early period of professional sociology. It should be noted also that the period from 1920 until 1930 is also *terra incognita* in reference to African American participation in the newly emerging social sciences. "By the early 1920s," Stanfield wrote in 1985, "there was a noticeable void in the production of quality scholarship on the black experience relating to that done between the 1890s and 1910."<sup>32</sup> It should be noted, however, that popular publications such as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* contained discursive articles that were products of scholars. Rather than simply dismiss the 1920s as a "void," scholars in the future should pay attention to the popular works of African American psychologists, such as Howard H. Long, Joseph St. Clair Price, and Horace Mann Bond—especially their relationship to the skeptical stance taken by Boas and his students *vis-a-vis* the mental testers who were in the heyday of their influence on the general public.

Unlike the 1920s, the social scientific studies of African Americans published during the 1930s and 1940s have been subject to close scrutiny by scholars (such as Stanfield, Persons, Jackson, McKee, and myself). The work of E. Franklin Frazier on the African American family which has had public policy implications, is a center of heated debate. In his timely biography, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered*, Anthony M. Platt, a professor of social work at California State University at Sacramento, has attempted to challenge two contradictory myths which have been created by intellectuals since the distinguished American scholar's death in 1962. The first tale, which according to Platt, is told mainly by progressives, "derives from his posthumous association with *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*." The progressives accept "at

face value the derisive nomination of Frazier as father of the Moynihan Report." The second tale, told mainly by respected academicians, raises Frazier to "sainthood." Its narrators "return to Frazier's graduate training in Chicago but, unlike his detractors commemorate him as a loyal and capable disciple of Robert Park and other white academics who were generous enough to recruit Afro-American students despite the prevalence of racism in academia."<sup>33</sup> Platt draws on numerous archival sources; memories and files of Frazier's colleagues, acquaintances, and friends and the heretofore undisclosed FBI and Department of State files on Frazier to reveal the complexity of and contradictions in the sociologist's life and work. Platt invites his readers to consider Frazier "as somebody who tried ... 'to provide answers to important questions' about the persistence of racism and social inequality."<sup>34</sup>

Although Platt's work will not be considered the definitive biography of Frazier, it is nevertheless a work with numerous strengths. Platt is adept in depicting some of the contradictions that characterize the "Enfant Terrible's" life. For example, he points out that when Frazier turned thirty-four, both of his parents and his sister were dead; Frazier had cut himself off from his brother; and Frazier's wife had "found out that she could not bear children." "E. Franklin" Platt concludes, "who devoted many years to studying the Afro-American family spent his own adult life outside the conventions of a traditional or extended nuclear family. Perhaps his father's emphasis on the importance of being a self-made man also stamped Edward with the character of a loner, a person who valued independence almost to the point of isolation."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Frazier, who challenged Melville J. Herskovits' theme that West African customs "played a decisive role in the development of Afro-American culture" "claimed that he was of Ibo descent and he was very proud of it."<sup>36</sup>

Despite its flashes of brilliance, Platt's book will undoubtedly produce controversy. First, by anchoring Frazier's political ideology in the period between 1922 and 1927, when Frazier was director of the Atlanta School of Social Work, Platt turns Frazier into a "militant race man." I generally associate the phrase "race man" with persons such as Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammed, and the middle period of Malcolm X's life, not with reflective, integrationists like Frazier. Second, Platt's attempt to disconnect Frazier from what Chares Valentine labels the "pejorative tradition" in the culture of poverty debate is unconvincing. It is my contention that Frazier cannot be viewed as a post-modern man. The product of the Victorian Age and born into a family with a father who was a strong male role model, Frazier should not be viewed as a progressive on the issue of the extended nuclear family. Furthermore, Platt does not seem to comprehend the vicissitudes of the decade in which Frazier's studies of Afro-American families were written.

The 1930s were years of extreme hardship for a vast major-

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ity of the Black population, as well as for a large proportion of the white population. Historical deprivation, compounded by racism, however, made the economic vulnerability of Blacks especially chronic. As a member of the elite concerned with social problems emanating from the economic crises, Frazier sought a solution to those problems. He wanted to assist the vast majority of Blacks in persevering the economic crisis in order that they could eventually escape poverty. Although he was naive in believing that the escape from poverty was only possible through the establishment of strong patriarchal families, this should not detract attention from the desperate plight of Black intellectuals during this period. Like most of them, Frazier placed the onus of the responsibility for bringing about concrete change on Blacks themselves.

The history of the social science of race relations has accomplished at least one goal: It has raised the issue of race in general to a level of primary concern on the agenda in the field of intellectual history. And although this subfield is dominated by historians and historically minded social scientists who have a bias, that is, persons who ignore that scholars such as Boas, Park, and Myrdal cannot be dismissed solely as either prisoners of their times or harbingers of the future—they have at least revealed the complexity of the problems with which these social scientists were confronted and the profundity of their paradoxes. Furthermore, although the history of the social science of race relations has a long way to go towards integrating the numerous historically significant African American social scientists into their new field, it is important to remember that the work has begun. If this trend continues, the subfield will soon reach its goal of creating truly ecumenical “mythistory.”

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Melvin J. Herskovits, *Franz Boas: The Science of Man in the Making* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953); Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963); Idus A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1909-30* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1966); George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Leonard Lieberman, “The Debate Over Race: A Study in the Sociology of Knowledge,” *Phylon* 29 (1968); Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968); Edward H. Beardsley, “The American Scientist as Social Activist: Franz Boas, Burt G. Wilder and the Fight for Racial Justice,

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1900-15," *Isis* 79 (1973); Hasia R. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-35* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977); Hamilton Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution: American Scientists and the Hereditary-Environmentalist Controversy, 1900-41* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978); Vernon J. Williams, Jr., *From a Caste to a Minority: Changing Attitudes of American Sociologists Toward Afro-Americans, 1896-1945* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1989); Marshall Hyatt, *Franz Boas—Social Activist: The Dynamics of Ethnicity* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Vernon J. Williams, Jr., "Franz Boas' Changing Attitudes Towards Afro-Americans, 1884-1925," *The Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution: Reflections on the Black Experience*, edited by Earl S. Davis (New York: New York University Institute of Afro-American Affairs, 1988): 81-94; "Franz Boas' Paradox," *The Griot: The Journal of Black Heritage*, 10 (1991): 9-17; "The Boasian Paradox, 1894-1915," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 16 (1992): 69-85; "Franz U. Boas and the Conflict Between Science and Values, 1894-1915," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, 92 (1993): 7-16. See the second essay in this book also.

<sup>3</sup> Edward H. Beardsley, "The American Scientist as Social Activist: Franz Boas, Burt G. Wilder, and the Cause of Racial Justice, 1900-15," *Isis*, (March 1973): 55.

<sup>4</sup> Beardsley, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: Jews and Blacks, 1915-35* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 142-147.

<sup>6</sup> Marshall Hyatt, *Franz Boas Social Activist—The Dynamics of Ethnicity* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 33-34.

<sup>7</sup> Hyatt, 155.

<sup>8</sup> Carl N. Delger, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 82.

<sup>9</sup> Degler, 75-80.

<sup>10</sup> Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 86.

<sup>11</sup> Robert E. Park, "Education and Its Relation to the Conflict and Fusion of Cultures: With Special Reference to the Problems of the Negro and Missions," *Publications of the American Sociological Society* (December 1918): 59.

<sup>12</sup> John H. Stanfield, II, *Philanthropy and Jim Crow in American Social Science* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 50.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Ballis Lal, *The Romance of Culture in an Urban Civilization: Robert E. Park on Race and Ethnic Relations in the Cities* (London: Routledge, 1990), 154-5.

<sup>14</sup> Stanford M. Lyman, *Militarism, Imperialism, and Racial Accommodation: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Early Writings of Robert E. Park* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1992). 107-108.

<sup>15</sup> Lyman, xvii.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Kivisto, Review of *The Romance of Culture in an Urban Civilization: Robert E. Park on Race and Ethnic Relations in Cities* by Barbara Ballis Lal, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 (1992): 110.

<sup>17</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, "Sociological Theory and Race Relations," *American Sociological Review* 12 (1947): 269.

<sup>18</sup> R. Fred Wacker, *Ethnicity, Pluralism and Race: Race Relation Theory in America Before Myrdal* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Wacker, 57, 49.

<sup>20</sup> Stanfield, II., *Philanthropy and Jim Crow in American Social Science*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> John Higham, *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America: Revised Edition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1984), 220.

<sup>22</sup> Stow Persons, *Ethnic Studies at Chicago, 1906-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 90.

<sup>23</sup> James B. McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 145-146.



<sup>24</sup> Stanford M. Lyman, *Militarism, Imperialism and Racial Accomodation*, 125.

<sup>25</sup> Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman, "Approaching the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism," *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*. Edited and with an Introduction by Dominick La Capra (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 99.

<sup>26</sup> Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-87* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Jackson, 313.

<sup>28</sup> Jackson, 320.

<sup>29</sup> Linda O. McMurray, *Recorder of the Black Experience: A Biography of Monroe Nathan Work* (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana State University Press), 109.

<sup>30</sup> Alain LeRoy Locke, *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race*. Edited and with an Introduction by Jeffrey C. Stewart. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1992), 49.

<sup>31</sup> Stewart, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Stanfield, II., *Philanthropy and Jim Crow in American Social Science*, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Platt, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Platt, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Platt, 16.