

and in surmounting racial politics in providing for children, and on the history of affiliation and conflict between Blacks and Jews.

This confrontation with national issues has seemed to overwhelm issues of personal racial/ethnic identity such that multiracials have been forced to develop strategies to negotiate the borders of race. Strategies range from using situational ethnicity and, having linguistic flexibility, to the ability to simultaneously embrace multiple perspectives. These “border crossings” by multiracial individuals defy the traditional monoracial classifications of race and force us to think of ways in which the new dialog may help dismantle negative constructions of race. In the final analysis, the author leads us to a discussion, not only of individual race identity in process, but the more profound implications of national identity. By releasing its firm hold on the rule of hypodescent, the United States is itself in the process of a new identity which may bring the country full circle to the original notion of the ideal of a “melting pot.”

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Vernon J. Williams, Jr. *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996) 152 pp., \$34.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

The term “Jim Crow II” is frequently used by African Americans to describe contemporary American race relations, by which they mean that just as legal segregation, lynching and voting restrictions followed emancipation, so has a period of racist reaction followed the successes of the Civil Rights movement. Williams sees parallels between the two periods: “I have attempted to describe and analyze the ideas of persons who provided, in a time comparable to our own, the bases of sophisticated discussion of race and race relations.” Williams is too good a historian to settle for merely demonstrating parallels; he also traces the continuing conflict between American social science which, with some notable exceptions, has been aggressively anti-racist since the 1930s, and America’s deeply ingrained racism.

Franz Boas, born into a German Jewish household, and described by Williams as the “father of modern American anthropology,” is the pivotal figure in *Rethinking Race*. In his work and his relations with colleagues, white and Black, Boas embodied white America’s conflicting ideas about race. Once Boas “had established that white prejudice was the major obstacle to black progress, rather than assumed innate racial traits, it became exceedingly difficult for anthropology and

sociology” to justify American racism. However, Boas himself was not fully convinced that Blacks were able to produce as many “men of high genius” as were whites, although he did argue that not all Blacks were intellectually inferior to all whites and that racist legal barriers were therefore unfair.

Williams traces the complex web of institutional, academic and personal relationships along which Boas’ ideas moved during the first four decades of the twentieth century. He does so by drawing on the correspondence of Boas himself as well as on that of such leading figures as W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, Robert E. Park, and Booker T. Washington. Washington “initially conceived of his African ancestors as primitive barbarians” and exonerated “white Southerners of responsibility for the so-called Negro problem and placed it squarely on the shoulders of blacks. Learning the virtues of common labor, he believed, would yield far more gains than politics.” Washington also insisted that during Reconstruction, Blacks had relied far too much on the federal government and had not done enough for themselves. But influenced by Boas, Washington changed his position, noting in a 1915 speech that while the African American was believed to be inferior, in practice “the idea appears to be that he is a sort of superman. He is expected with about one fifth of what whites received for their education to make as much progress as they are making.”

In tracing the influence of Boas’ ideas as they were refracted through such white institutions as Columbia University, the Rosenwald Foundation, and the American Association of University Professors, and such Black ones as Howard University, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, and *The Negro Year Book*, Williams writes a history that is neither intellectual nor social, but carefully examines the complex interplay of ideas, patronage (academic, institutional and financial), and organizations. Williams demonstrates that the ideas held by Blacks were not free floating but were enmeshed in organizational, professional, and personal relationships, and he shows that Blacks were not people to whom things happened, but rather played a strong role in fighting racism. Boas suffered a fatal heart attack while denouncing Nazi anti-semitism in 1942, but according to Williams had already received strong support in his attacks on Hitler’s race theories from many African American intellectuals.

Williams observes “that only by understanding the pre-1945 social scientific scholarship on African Americans can we come to an understanding of their potential contribution(s) and destiny in the twenty-first century.” *Rethinking Race* is a good place to begin this understanding.

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