



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE RACIST ANTI-RACISM OF AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Lee D. Baker 

Abstract

In 1909 Franz Boas conducted a massive study entitled Changes in Bodily Forms of Descendants of Immigrants. In this study, he demonstrated that Eastern and Southern European immigrants to the United States were not racially different from other Europeans because of what he called “the marvelous power of amalgamation.” Boas’s study dealt a blow to scientific racism because he demonstrated the plasticity and instability of racial types. Boas chose to emphasize the enormous gulf between the white and non-white races. His research and advocacy were anti-racist, but the way he promoted assimilation was racist. The next year W.E.B. Du Bois invited Boas to give the final lecture at the conference where the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was officially incorporated. Boas presented “The Real Race Problem,” in which he argued that the real problem was the “difference in type.” To solve it, the Negro needed to amalgamate by “encouraging the gradual process of lightening up this large body of people by the influx of white blood.” American anthropologists joined other Progressive Era reformers committed to assimilation, like the orphan train and Indian boarding school movements. They were each striving to be anti-racist but went off the rails, contributing to the consolidation of whiteness and the perpetuation of racism. [W.E.B. Du Bois, racism, Franz Boas, immigration, whiteness]

Work hard, and play by the rules. This simple phrase is an integral part of the mythology of the American Dream. But so many working-class people and people of color know that one can work very hard and play by the rules but still lose the game. The implication is that if you work hard and assimilate American culture, you can make it in the United States. Racism, however, consistently

snatches the American Dream from the clutches of hard-working Americans. As Leith Mullings has demonstrated so well, anti-Black racism prohibits many from achieving the American Dream, but it also increases mortality and morbidity rates and health disparities. Racism kills Black people (Mullings 2005b, 79).

When European immigrants assimilated in the early twentieth century, they became white and American. When African Americans, Native Americans, or Latinx people assimilated, they became respectable.

Exactly one hundred years ago, anthropologist Franz Boas knew that racism and discrimination encumbered and threatened the success of Negro achievement. He also saw his Jewish friends and family assimilate and become white and American. This observation led him to believe that “the negro problem will not disappear in America until the negro blood has been so much diluted that it will no longer be recognized just as anti-Semitism will not disappear until the last vestige of the Jew as a Jew has disappeared” (Boas 1921, 395).

Assimilation or Americanization was a powerful concept because it assumed equal potential and mobility. It did not, however, address racism or discrimination. As sociologist Robert E. Park quipped in 1914, “If they were given an opportunity the Japanese are quite as capable as the Italians, the Armenians, or the Slavs of acquiring our culture and sharing our national ideals. The trouble is not with the Japanese mind but with the Japanese skin. The Jap is not the right color” (Park 1914, 611).

I am going to share stories of assimilation as racism. Even though the characters were striving to be anti-racist, they engaged and articulated racism and contributed to the consolidation of whiteness. These are also historical case studies of

what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva so eloquently explains as racism without racists (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Many institutions and departments are rethinking how they can be more intentional in developing anti-racist practices, policies, and procedures. It is essential to reflect upon cases where anthropologists implemented practices with the very best intentions and sincere commitments to social justice but became disruptive and destructive. In the case I explore in this article, I show that Boas contributed in powerful ways to the consolidation of whiteness in the first decade of the twentieth century, when not-quite-white immigrants were racialized as not white, nor American (Jacobson 1998, 38–90; Painter 2010, 200–11). Boas made a critical anti-racist intervention for Russian Jews and Southern Italians but fueled the hegemony of white supremacy by providing scientific evidence for the nascent Americanization movement. His call for Negro amalgamation was also racist. Boas was very pessimistic about the willingness of white people to relinquish their power and authority, and their privilege bestowed by whiteness. Still, he was also very optimistic that Negroes should be able to assimilate, amalgamate, and participate in the process of Americanization, just like Slavs and Hungarians. His logic was anti-racist and radical. Most people probably thought he was a little cray-cray. W.E.B. Du Bois even responded to his call for amalgamation by stating that “I believe that a wholesale intermarriage of races during the present generations would be a social calamity by reason of the wide cultural, ethical and traditional differences” (Du Bois 1910, 813). Boas’s call for Negro amalgamation was a direct assault on race-antipathy; it is what we would call engaging in anti-racism today. However, his proposal to erase and replace the Negro race was an example of the racist anti-racism of American anthropology.

Exploring Franz Boas’s commitment to assimilation and amalgamation while he was dismantling scientific racism is also an excellent example of what Leith Mullings describes as “anthropology’s contradictory heritage,” of articulating racism while striving to be anti-racist. She argues that this helps to explain why “anthropologists have written extensively about race, [although] anthropological contributions to the study of racism have been surprisingly modest” (Mullings 2005a, 3).

I will start with the orphan train and Indian boarding school movements to demonstrate how integral assimilation was to the idea of an American at the turn of the century. These are also

two examples of a similar type of racist anti-racism. I will then turn to Franz Boas’s massive study of immigrant amalgamation and conclude with his call for Negro amalgamation.

“ALL ABOARD!”

On November 18, 1904, twelve-year-old Bella Quince and nine-year-old Madeline Heller joined a dozen other children ranging in age from nineteen months to thirteen years on the stage of Van Werden’s Opera House in the tiny southern Iowa hamlet of Leon. Hailing from the surrounding counties, family farmers crowded into the opera house that afternoon. Bella and Madeline and the other children had arrived in Leon by train and were a long way from home. Madeline came from the Brooklyn Industrial School and Home for Destitute Children. Bella had grown up with her older brother and younger sister in the Five Points House of Industry in lower Manhattan. She was already separated from her siblings.¹ It was a week before Thanksgiving, and the good people of Leon were looking to expand their “families” with orphans from New York who could also serve as cheap farm labor.

The local paper reported, “The children were the brightest and best dressed lot of waifs that have ever been brought to this county, and there was no trouble in finding people who were willing to take the little ones in as members of their families” (*Leon Reporter*, November 24, 1904, 14). Not unlike a group of prized hogs at a livestock auction, the children lined up and prospective parents carefully poked and prodded, inspected and scrutinized each child before making their selection of who would join them for Thanksgiving.

The previous week, the Children’s Aid Society of New York took out an advertisement in the *Leon Reporter* that announced, “Homes Wanted for Children—A company of Orphan Children . . . will arrive at Leon.” Sandwiched between ads for yeast and “The Great Acorn Gas Burner,” the announcement explained that “distribution will take place at the opera house at 1:30.” There was, of course, fine print:

The object of the coming of these children is to find homes in your midst, especially among farmers where they may enjoy a happy and wholesome family, life where kind care, good example and moral training will fit them for a life of self support and usefulness. . . . The conditions are that these children shall be properly

clothed, treated as members of the family, given proper school advantages and remain in the family until they are 18 years of age. . . . The Society retains the right to remove a child at any time for just cause, and agrees to remove any found unsatisfactory after being notified. (*Leon Reporter*, November 10, 1904, 7)

The Children's Aid Society (CAS) had carefully selected Bella and Madeline to be "placed out." Charles Loring Brace, the founder of the society, began placing out orphaned, abandoned, surrendered, and removed children with new families in 1854. He was an idealistic theologian who responded to the estimated 30,000 homeless children who experienced punishing poverty, wretched housing, infectious disease, and paralyzing immobility in mid-century New York (Gassan 2015, 1080).²

Brace outlined the organization's goals and mission in its "first circular," which began with a lament that "something must be done to meet the increasing crime and poverty among the destitute children of New York" (Brace 1894, 489). Steeped in Protestant righteousness and optimistic rhetoric that all children have the "same capacities," he aimed to aid "this great multitude of unhappy, deserted, and degraded boys and girls" (Brace 1894, 490). The organization was probably sincerely motivated by saving the children, but it was equally concerned with the children growing up poor Democrats in New York. Seeking political and financial support, Brace and the CAS peddled imminent doom.

These waifs, warned Brace, "will soon form the great lower class of our city. They will influence elections; they may shape the policy of the city; they will, assuredly, if unreclaimed, poison society all around them. They will help to form the great multitude of robbers, thieves, and vagrants who are now such a burden upon the law-respecting community" (Brace 1894, 490).

The Children's Aid Society explicitly challenged Tammany Hall and fueled the anti-Catholic, anti-Irish, anti-immigrant fear and scapegoating so integral to racializing the Irish as not quite white (Golway 2014, 159). Although the CAS was quite ecumenical in its association of poverty with depravity, it only subtly veiled its visceral disdain for Catholics. As Brace later reflected, "Among all the hundreds of families I knew and visited I never met but two that were Protestants. To all words of spiritual warning or help there came the chilling formalism of the ignorant Roman Catholic in reply" (1880, 154).

The CAS challenged the philosophy of many reform organizations because it did not believe that "idleness, improvidence, [and] drunkenness" were "hereditary in character" (Golway 2014, 159). Fresh air, hard work, the Gospel of Christ, and a family could transform these poor wretches, street "Arabs," and urchins into real Americans, which meant white Protestants. That is why the CAS was so committed to "draining the city of these children" and, of course, future voters (Brace 1894, 491). Brace was an indefatigable crusader called by God Almighty. He was adamant that "the family is God's reformatory, and that it is in accord with a great natural principle that the Children's Aid Society is aiming at the removal of children from the city streets to farmers' homes in the west" (Brace 1894, 171). And so it did.

Between 1854 and 1929, the Children's Aid Society and other organizations that followed were responsible for putting an estimated 250,000 children on trains from Northeastern urban city streets to Midwestern rural farms.³ One donor to the CAS believed that "the law of child-supply and child-demand can be adjusted like that of commercial commodities" ("Export New York's Surplus Children: A Business Man's Flier on Child Market," *Birmingham Age-Herald*, March 9, 1908, 7).

As the number of orphan trains began picking up steam, the CAS developed a tightly choreographed ritual. It selected children who were not sickly, developmentally disabled, incorrigible, or Black. It then gained legal custody of the children. Not all "inmates" of orphanages were orphans. Poor parents sometimes had to abandon or surrender children, and sometimes CAS agents took children from parents due to neglect.

The agency deployed "western agents" to identify prospective towns and convene local leaders to screen applications. Small, tightly knit towns rarely rejected one of their own. Agents and chaperones would give the children a haircut and a new set of clothes. The children would board the so-called orphan trains in a precarious state of liminality leavened by a collective sense of excitement and hope. When the thunderous trains came to small towns like Leon, shopkeepers and barkeeps, leaders and laborers would watch with curiosity and amusement as "the company of orphans" disembarked.

At each stop, agents lined up the children for inspection at a church or opera house. The preapproved parents would have an opportunity to examine each child, make their selection, and take one or two home. There was only scant regard for

keeping siblings together. Children not selected would be put back on the train and taken to the next town down the line, and the ritual of “distribution,” as the CAS called it, would begin again. CAS agents would make a follow-up visit to ensure the placement was acceptable. The CAS also expected parents or children to write annual letters updating it on the child’s progress toward the stated goal of becoming “credible members of society.” In reality, there was little oversight and even less accountability (Cook 1995; Jackson 1986; Trammell 2009). Although many children found loving and supportive families, many others were victims of physical abuse, sexual violence, and labor exploitation (O’Connor 2004, 228).

The orphan train movement is one of many complicated examples of how assimilationist ideas produce racism, caste hierarchy, and white supremacy (Kendi 2016, 9). Simultaneously, it also contributed to indigenous land dispossession, Native American displacement, and the destruction of tribal nations’ sovereignty.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the Homestead Act of 1862, the Dawes Act of 1887, and other legislation conspired and collided with massacres at places like Bear River, Sand Creek, Marias River, and finally Wounded Knee in 1890 to make the second half of the nineteenth century a formative period in the long history of dispossession and genocide of indigenous nations. Homesteaders played a critical role in the process of displacing and dispossessing indigenous nations in the plains states (Hamalainen 2016, 482). Homesteaders needed cheap labor, and New Yorkers needed to get rid of homeless children. As Poles, Italians, and Slavs replaced the Irish as the newest and most impoverished immigrants, the locomotives kept running these not-quite-white orphans west.

During this period, nativists juxtaposed purity with danger and suspected people who were not quite white of polluting the nation’s blood and character, taking jobs of real Americans, making crime rates rise, and assimilating neither American values nor American behaviors. Fear and anxiety shrouded Southern and Eastern European immigrants because their beliefs, religions, ideologies, and political persuasions seemed inimical to the American way.

The children riding the orphan trains played almost perfectly aligned roles in empire-building, indigenous genocide, and the consolidation of whiteness. After a four-day train ride, Leon, Iowa, transformed Bella and Madeline from hungry

peddlers and pickpockets to corn-fed white girls helping their new “family” establish a homestead on the plains.

Promoters of this overnight civilization of waifs copied their much more sophisticated *doppelgänger*, the Carlisle Indian School, by staging dramatic before and after portraits.

In 1879 Richard Henry Pratt took command of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in south-central Pennsylvania. Known for his infamous slogan “kill the Indian . . . and save the man,” Pratt’s philosophy was to erase and replace indigenous culture with Christian civilization through strict discipline that combined military organization, penal incarceration, and industrial education. The day his first “party” of students arrived, he requisitioned “4,000 feet of picket fence six feet high to keep the Indians in and the citizens out.”⁴

Some children came by choice, and others came by force. Most came by train. The first group of eighty-two children, mostly Oglala Lakota, arrived by train on October 6, 1879. Other early recruits were from the Cheyenne and Kiowa nations.

In one of those eerie mirrored plotlines that happen so routinely in the construction of race and white supremacy preservation, the trains ran in opposite directions. Carlisle agents took children from families in the Midwest and put them on trains to institutionalize them in the East. In contrast, CAS agents took institutionalized children in the East and put them on trains to place them with families in the Midwest. Deploying the very same logic regarding assimilation or Americanization, agents institutionalized Indian children while emancipating white ones.

Between 1879 and 1918, Carlisle enrolled over 10,000 students from over 140 nations and became the template for the twenty-six Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools and hundreds of missionary boarding schools. These institutions became critical operations in the campaign to assimilate and eradicate American Indian bodies, culture, and identity (Peterson 2013, 97).

The orphan train and Indian boarding school movements were just two of many, many policies and programs committed to assimilation that went off the rails. Assimilation or Americanization was a compelling discourse and movement that challenged and served as a foil to segregation, eugenics, xenophobia, and anti-immigration. But here is the thing about foils, and heroes or villains—they are characters in the same story. And this is the story of white supremacy.

Polish immigrants, African Americans, and Native Americans had different experiences when they abandoned or masked their traditional names, religions, languages, dress, grooming preferences, and worldviews. Eastern European immigrants who followed the seductive prescription of a strict regime of assimilation became white and American, while Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans became respectable. Both nativists and assimilationists viewed Chinese and Japanese immigrants as unassimilable.

Settlement house workers, missionaries, and the YMCA viewed Americanization rhetoric and assimilationist policies as a progressive way to unite all Americans. People viewed its cognate cousin, amalgamation, as even radical. Yet, assimilation was a racist idea that contributed to white supremacy because it equated Americanness with whiteness. It was a coercive social control mechanism that disciplined and surveilled European immigrants while using a Sharpie to demarcate the color line.

AMERICANIZATION

Assimilationists served as a counterpoint to nativists, who fueled anti-immigrant antipathy that collided with the panic over race suicide and the promotion of eugenics to calcify and solidify a hierarchy of racial distinctions among white people. Race suicide was an alarmist fear that less “fit” dusky and swarthy Catholics and Hebrews would overwhelm native-born Protestants who had fewer children. “The question of race suicide, complete or partial,” President Theodore Roosevelt argued, “is fundamentally infinitely more important than any other question in this country.... The man or woman who deliberately avoids marriage and has a heart so cold as to know no passion and a brain so shallow and selfish as to dislike having children, is in effect a criminal against the race” (Roosevelt 1904, 508–09). Of course, the race he was referring to was the so-called old stock or Western European immigrants who became synonymous with American or the American type.

At the turn of the twentieth century, influential men like Theodore Roosevelt and Francis A. Walker, the superintendent of the census, began to stoke the fear of race suicide and fuel enthusiasm for eugenics. They peddled the notion that Eastern European immigrants were destroying the character of America. In an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, aptly titled “Restriction of Immigration,” Walker explained,

Only a short time ago, the immigrants from southern Italy, Hungary, Austria, and Russia together made up hardly more than one per cent of our immigration. To-day the proportion has risen to something like forty per cent, and threatens soon to become fifty or sixty per cent, or even more.... They have none of the inherited instincts and tendencies which made it comparatively easy to deal with the immigration of the olden time. They are beaten men from beaten races; representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence. (Walker 1896, 828)

The exploitation of immigrants and the poverty that followed created some of the most pressing social problems of the day—deplorable living conditions and health outcomes, class conflict and violence, and corrupt political machines. Despite nativist fear-mongering, immigrants were consumers, cheap laborers, and soon-to-be voters (Ngai 2014, 17).

Social Darwinists like Walker clashed with assimilationists like Frances Kellor. Kellor was the chief architect of the Americanization movement and a leader in the settlement house movement. She believed that it was the collective duty of all Americans to help new immigrants swiftly “Americanize.” She implored that “the Americanization movement is the future of America—whether we shall survive as one nation or perish as a conglomeration of racial colonies” (Kellor 1916, 5). During the first decade of the twentieth century, there was quite a bit of slippage between notions of assimilation, Americanization, and even amalgamation, which mirrored the slippage between race, nation, and type.

In 1904 immigration to the United States exceeded 800,000 (Bureau of Statistics 1905, 428). President Theodore Roosevelt told a joint session of the Fifty-Eighth Congress that “we cannot have too much immigration of the right kind and we should have none at all of the wrong kind. The need is to devise some system by which undesirable immigrants shall be kept out entirely, while desirable immigrants are properly distributed throughout the country” (Roosevelt 1904, 251). Congress agreed and set out to develop a fair and scientific system. Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge was adamant that the government needed to restrict the lowest European races steaming to our shores.

We are admitting annually an immigration which equals in numbers the population of a

great city, wholly unsifted, in great measure ignorant, in part Asiatic, and drawn largely from the lowest and most backward populations of Europe. . . . It fills our labor market with the cheapest and most objectionable labor of eastern Europe and Asia Minor. If anyone will take the trouble to study the statistics of our prisons, insane asylums, and almshouses, he will see by the percentages what an enormous direct burden it places upon the States and upon the taxpayers. (Lodge 1904, 469)

Vermont Republican senator William Dillingham was the chair of the Senate Committee on Immigration and brought Roosevelt two bills to sign: the Naturalization Act of 1906 (34 Stat. 596) and the Immigration Act of 1907 (34 Stat. 898).⁵ Together, this legislation outlined new processes and federal standards for naturalization and immigration, and it made speaking English a requirement for citizenship. It also clarified that “all idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded persons, epileptics, insane persons, and persons who have been insane within five years previous,” were to be denied entry. It also denied access to people “likely to become a public charge,” criminals, anarchists, polygamists, prostitutes, and contract laborers. Chinese exclusion remained intact. It also authorized a bipartisan joint commission to study different aspects of the immigration question scientifically. The hope was that science could inform legislation to mitigate, manage, and restrict the throngs of tempest-tossed masses arriving on America’s shores.

THE DILLINGHAM COMMISSION

President Roosevelt appointed a nine-member joint commission that included the moderate Dillingham and conservative Henry Cabot Lodge. The president also appointed Jeremiah Jenks, a political economy professor at Cornell University (Lund 1994). The nine-member commission convened in April of 1907 and elected Dillingham as its chairman. Although it was known as the Dillingham Commission, it was professor Jeremiah Jenks who drove the capacious research agenda that deployed over 300 staff members to investigate nearly every aspect of the immigrant “problem.” Jenks assembled an impressive team of distinguished scholars and commissioned them to write book-length monographs.

The commission began its work in 1907 and concluded it in 1911. The report was encyclopedic in both breadth and scope and was the most exhaustive study on immigration in American history and

“one of the largest investigative surveys Congress ever conducted.”⁶ Totalling forty-two book-length volumes, it was a multidisciplinary assessment of virtually every aspect of immigration.

The commission’s work was quintessential Progressive Era science: zealous, thorough, and putatively “objective.” Looking at it today, the bias against Asian and Eastern European immigrants is stark; the unquestioned belief in social Darwinian principles is sobering. As Mae Ngai has so eloquently articulated, “demographic data were to twentieth-century racists what craniometric data had been to race scientists during the nineteenth” (Ngai 1999, 77).

Samuel Morton, Louis Agassiz, and the anthropologists of the so-called American School measured facial angles and cranial capacity, and the enumerators of the Dillingham Commission counted inmates in asylums and prisons. Both groups of scientists began with a priori categories and conveniently confirmed a causal relationship between their data and racial groups. If the statistics found that certain immigrants were less wealthy, healthy, and educated, the logic then followed that these immigrants had inferior bodies and brains that retarded their ability to adopt American customs and behavior.

In March of 1908, Jenks approached the prominent anthropologist Franz Boas about investigating “the question relating to the immigration of different races into this country.”⁷ Franz Boas was an assimilated German Jew who had come to the United States to pursue a science career and his fiancée in 1887. He had conducted linguistic research in the Pacific Northwest, ethnographic research in Greenland, and physical anthropological studies on so-called half-blood Indians and immigrant children. Columbia University had recently appointed him as a professor of anthropology (Boas 1894, 1898).

Influencers reinforced the strict racial hierarchy with science that purported that Teutonic and Aryan whites were naturally and morally superior to others who were less fit and socially inferior. The perceived superiority of Christian civilization was all the evidence they needed to confirm it. As early as 1894, Boas argued that “historical events appear to have been much more potent in leading races to civilization than their faculty.” Therefore, we cannot “assume that one race is more highly gifted than the other.” “It’s hardly possible to say,” he wondered, “what would become of the negro if he were able to live with the whites on absolutely equal terms.” Instead of viewing the

Negro as inferior, we might rather “wonder how much has been accomplished in a short period against heavy odds” (Boas 1895, 307–08).

Boas was one of the most accomplished anthropologists in the country. He was consistent and effective in the battle against scientific arguments that positioned races or cultures in a hierarchy. He was also an immigrant and incredibly skeptical of reformers who used the science of pure and superior races to support regulating and restricting immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe.

THE MARVELOUS POWER OF AMALGAMATION

After the initial inquiry by Jenks, Boas wasted no time and fired off an ambitious seven-page proposal to examine the head shape and bodily form of immigrants’ children. He began by describing the “change in composition of our immigrant population,” from the “tall blond northwestern type” to the “masses of people belonging to the east, central and south European types [that] are [now] pouring into our country.”⁸

Boas confidently proposed a simple but profound research question to frame his elaborate proposal. How will this change in the “physical type” of immigrants “influence the marvelous power of amalgamation our nation has exhibited for so long a time? The importance of this question can hardly be overestimated, and the development of modern anthropological methods makes it perfectly feasible to give a definite answer to the problem that presents itself to us.” Boas carefully described how he planned to measure immigrants on Ellis Island, in New York public schools, in parochial schools, and in settlement houses. He proposed comparing and contrasting “1. North Europeans, 2. East Europeans, 3. Central Europeans, 4. South Europeans (particularly Italians of the region south of Rome).” Boas proposed adding a “fifth group,” that could be “Russian Jews or the inhabitants of Asia Minor or Syria.” In total, he proposed measuring a whopping 120,000 immigrants. “Assuming that one observer can measure 40 individuals a day, 3000 days’ work would be required.” In addition to twenty observers, he needed three recorders, six computers (women who just crunched numbers by hand), one stenographer, and \$19,510.⁹

Boas’s enthusiasm for this massive project and his posture as an assimilated and white American is evident in the proposal’s last line. “I can assure you that the practical results of this investigation

will be important,” because it “will settle once for all the question whether the immigrants from southern Europe and from eastern Europe are and can be assimilated by our people.”¹⁰

Jenks apprised Boas that he had consulted two anthropologists at Cornell, who expressed “a strongly favorable opinion” regarding the quality of the proposal, “altho [*sic*] both of them are of the mind that possibly the concluding sentence . . . is somewhat too enthusiastic.”¹¹

Even before Congress officially authorized the study, Jenks put pressure on Boas to complete his detailed report by March. It was now May, and Boas panicked because “schools are going to adjourn very soon,” and it would take time to ramp up and prepare the requisite forms, secure equipment, and assemble a team. Boas proposed October.¹² By the middle of May, the commission finally authorized the study but only allocated \$1,000 and expected a narrower scope and a preliminary report before committing to fund it in its entirety (Zeidel 2004, 93).

Boas wasted no time, and he assembled his team, which mainly consisted of graduate students, Columbia colleagues, and a handful of paid assistants. His main assistants were Dr. C. Ward Crampton and Dr. Maurice Fishberg. Crampton was vital because he was the director of physical training for the New York Board of Education and got Boas into the public schools.¹³ In a mad dash to measure as many schoolchildren as possible before the summer recess, they scattered across the city. They were armed with an official letter of introduction from the United States Immigration Commission that implied that it was one’s patriotic duty to participate because by doing so, you were “rendering a genuine service to the public.”¹⁴

One team went north to the brand-new Gothic campus on 130th Street to measure students at City College and its affiliated high school. Crampton set off with “five hundred slips” and went to work measuring students in the public high schools throughout the city. Boas took a crew down to Ellis Island. As the health officers checked for trachoma, lameness, and insanity, Boas weighed and measured the new arrivals with tape and calipers. One team went to parochial schools and private schools like the Ethical Culture School on Central Park West. They eventually made their way to the schools and orphanages of the Children’s Aid Society. If Bella and Madeline had not boarded the orphan train to Iowa four years earlier, Boas would have measured them too.¹⁵

Boas and his team measured over 10,000 people that summer. It was a frenetic season of weighing and measuring, tabulating and correlating, organizing and categorizing. In the middle of it all, Boas sent Jenks an optimistic note: "I think these results . . . will throw a great deal of light upon the processes that are at work in Americanizing or keeping distinct from the American population the descendants of the recent immigrants" (Zeidel 2004, 91).¹⁶

Boas submitted an update to Jenks at the beginning of September. Although characteristically cautious, he reported, "Much to my surprise, an important change in type may also be noticed in the East European Jews . . . the race is very short headed, but there is decided tendency to an increase in length of head among the later immigrants."¹⁷ The commission agreed to continue funding the project but in a paltry and piecemeal fashion. The research continued apace into the school year, focusing on Russian Jewish and Southern Italian immigrants. Boas had difficulty finding competent translators and trouble with Washington's bureaucracy; he had to use a cumbersome voucher system to compensate staff and requisition supplies.¹⁸

As autumn wore on, Boas became bitter because he was not getting paid. Boas reminded Jenks that he was "putting practically all of my free time into this work," and "because I have to drop so much other remunerative work . . . I trust . . . that the Commission will allow the salary to me which you agreed it would be right for me to have."¹⁹

As winter turned to spring, the team kept measuring children and families throughout the boroughs. Boas was optimistic he could complete collecting data "by the middle or end of June." Money problems continued to bedevil the project. "I am very much embarrassed on account of the payments to my assistants . . . my assistants have not received any pay so far." Boas was exhausted and exasperated. "This is exceedingly embarrassing to me," he lamented and pleaded with Jenks and just wished that the entire matter could be "straightened out."²⁰

Although frustrated by funding shortfalls, Boas was buoyed by his data, particularly among the Eastern European Jews and the Southern Italians. He was confident the data would "enable us to draw unassailable conclusions in regard to the influence of American environment upon these two types."²¹

Boas spent the summer tabulating, organizing, and analyzing over 13,000 immigrants' measurements compiled into 504 pages of raw anthropometric data. An astonishing pattern emerged from the detailed statistics. In October, Boas confidently reported to Jenks that "as far as the head-form is concerned, the exceedingly short-headed East European Jew and the exceedingly long-headed South Italian converge to the same form even in the first generation of descendants of immigrants. I believe this fact is highly significant." Jenks wanted the full report by March, but Boas begged for more time. "The statistics are so involved, and the results so radically opposed to all our present theories, that it seems indispensable to exclude in the most careful manner every possible source of error which might serve as the basis of an attack on the validity of our results."²²

His findings were radical. Less than a year prior, the Royal Anthropological Institute in London had awarded the coveted Huxley Medal to the first American, William Z. Ripley, the author of *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (Ripley 1899). In his 624-page tome, he classified and consolidated the races of Europe into three distinct and stable types:

- Teutonic—members of the northern race, who were long-skulled (or dolichocephalic), tall in stature, and possessed pale eyes and skin.
- Alpine—members of the central race, who were round-skulled (or brachycephalic), stocky in stature, and possessed intermediate eye and skin color.
- Mediterranean—members of the southern race, who were long-skulled (or dolichocephalic), short in stature, and possessed dark eyes and skin.

Others, like Daniel G. Brinton and Joseph Deniker, classified up to twenty different races and subtypes in Europe. When Boas reviewed *The Races of Europe* for *Science* in 1899, he did not question that Europe had different types. He just didn't think those types should be called races. "I am inclined to reserve the term [race] for the largest divisions of mankind," he explained. "The differences between the three European types are certainly not equal in value to the differences between Europeans, Africans, and Mongols. . . . The term 'type' appears most appropriate for the sub-divisions of each race" (Boas 1899, 294).

Ripley observed that the environment, chance, and selection could influence stature, hair color, and skin. He demonstrated that the cephalic index,

the percentage of the breadth to the length of the skull, was the primary “expression of racial differences.” Ripley relied heavily on the head form because of

its immunity from all disturbance from physical environment . . . the colour of the hair and eyes, and stature especially, are open to modification by local circumstances . . . On the other hand, the general proportion of the head seemed to be uninfluenced either by climate, by food supply or economic status, or by habits of life; so that they stand as the clearest exponents which we possess of the permanent hereditary differences within the human species. (Ripley 1899, 52)

Boas understood that his data would challenge the scientific consensus that racial features like the cephalic index characterized a stable and permanent type that lasted without variation “from the beginning of our modern geological period up to the present time” (Boas 1940, 35). His data indicated that immigrants’ children became much more like the American norm, an intermediary between the two, in one generation.

On December 2, 1909, Boas sent Jenks his preliminary report of his findings for the commission. In his transmittal, Boas explained that “a very large amount of work remains to be done on the material that has been accumulated during the past year.” He was confident, however, about “the fact that the points which have been brought out bring about a radical change in our whole conception of racial stability.”²³

The commission presented Congress with Boas’s preliminary report on December 16, 1909. It posed a provocative question to Congress: “If the American environment can bring about an assimilation of the head forms in the first generation may it not be that other characteristics may be as easily modified and that there may be a rapid assimilation of widely varying nationalities and races to something that may well be called an American type?” (*Pittsburgh Post*, December 17, 1909, 5).

The next day and for weeks after, newspapers and magazines wrote articles, summaries, and editorials across the country and the pond. The two-year-old United Press wired a dispatch to its syndicates, so even the smallest papers reported the story. The *Fargo Forum and Daily Republican* ran it with the headline “An American Type.” It noted that “the chief ‘surprising result’ thus far attained is that of rapid assimilation in the new

environment of the physical conformation to a distinctively American type, reaching even to the shape of the head” (December 22, 1908, 4).

The *Santa Fe New Mexican* described how “the descendant of the European immigrant changes his type even in the first generation entirely” (December 17, 1909, 3). The same day, Wilmington’s *Evening Journal* reported the story with the headline “America Changes Immigrant’s Form” (December 17, 1909, 6). The *Washington Times* suggested that “if all comers to American soil merge in the direction of a common American type, the logic of the situation is that we have no cause to fear immigration” (December 22, 1909, 8). The *Perth Amboy Evening News* was quite explicit. It reported to its readers that “there seem to be certain forces working in the East Side of New York that tend to produce a head of a certain length and certain breadth. If one’s head is too long to satisfy the New York requirement, then the heads of one’s children will shorten; if one’s head is too short, then the children’s head will lengthen” (May 12, 1909, 3).

The *Baltimore Sun*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Chautauquan*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Evening Star*, and even the *Napa Weekly Journal* ran articles detailing the preliminary report’s findings and hailing the American type.

Britain’s *Manchester Guardian* wrote that the report “should bring some comfort” to those “patriotic Americans” who believe that “foreign immigrants to the United States” are a “menace” to their race (January 18, 1910, 8). *Hampton’s Magazine*, with a circulation of almost a half-million, used the occasion of the preliminary report to introduce its readership to Boas in its “personalities” section, where it published short biographies of celebrities and newsmakers. The magazine thoroughly misquoted Boas when it wrote that Boas “asserted that children of immigrants become Americanized by the very air of America, forming a type distinct from their parents . . . [and] that the new type was American, not foreign, and that therefore there was no need to worry about the deterioration of American physical and mental characteristics from immigration.” The article was titled “A Great Anthropologist,” and it continued with a cloying biography (April 1, 1910, 577).

Burton J. Hendrick, a staff writer for *McClure’s Magazine*, wrote one of the most sophisticated and detailed reviews of Boas’s report in the popular press. Replete with detailed pictures, maps, and graphs, the fifteen-page essay directly challenged the more salacious interpretations. “We must

understand,” he wrote, “that the term ‘American type’ is, from the standpoint of science, pure nonsense. Physical types recognize no national boundaries. . . . The southern Italian is as different from the northern Italian as the Spaniard is from the Englishman” (Hendrick 1910, 47).

He emphasized the environment alone could explain these differences.

Much may be said against the tenement districts of New York, but clearly they are an improvement over the ghettos of Russia. There is better food and more of it, more fresh air, more light, better sanitation. The Jewish child, instead of picking up scraps of Talmudic lore in an insalubrious *cheder*, begins his education in the free public kindergarten, thence finds his way to the grammar schools, the high schools, and even the Normal College and the College of the City of York. (Hendrick 1910, 48)

He concluded, “If . . . it is possible, in a single generation, to give the child a different shaped skull from his parent, it is likewise possible to fill it with high ideals—to make him, what his father was not and probably never can become, an intelligent, self-respecting, industrious American” (Hendrick 1910, 47).

Boas’s report went viral—well, for its day—as Israel Zangwill’s influential play *The Melting Pot* concluded its four-month run on Broadway. *The Melting Pot* followed George Cohan’s super-patriotic musicals like *Little Johnny Jones*, featuring “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” in 1904, and *The American Idea* in 1908, each depicting recent immigrants becoming true-blue, or more accurately true-white, Americans (Kraus 1999, 9; Roberts 2007). Boas’s report also coincided with the incorporation of the North American Civic League for Immigrants. Headed by Daniel Chauncey Brewer, this pro-immigrant, anti-labor organization was leading, in its own words, “a patriotic movement for the assimilation of immigrants” through “Agitation! Protection! [and] Education!” (Brewer 1910, 16).

The *New York Times* ran several less sensational and more skeptical articles about the report, suggesting that “Prof. Boas has convicted himself of advancing an unnecessary theory without warrant of facts” (December 30, 1922, 8).

The *New York Times Magazine*, however, published two full broadsheet spreads that were

very supportive. One article was headlined “An Army of a Million Immigrants Came Here Last Year.” It was a detailed ten-year retrospective of immigration to the US. The piece broke down how many people from which “race” arrived, where immigrants go once they come, what industries immigrants gravitated to, and how much money each race brought. The final part of the article was a comprehensive review of Boas’s research, which has “brought forth some startling theories.” “If all of which is true,” the article concluded, “then the fears of the native American that he may be swamped by this influx of Magyars, Slovaks, and other impossible peoples are utterly groundless. New York’s climate will fix things all right” (October 16, 1910, SM13).

The other *New York Times Magazine* article was a lengthy interview with Boas about his report findings. It ran the day after Christmas. It had pictures, graphs, and research tables, and the headline read, “Prof. Boas Gives Startling Results.” “‘Startling’ is a large word to use,” the *Times* admitted, “but it is only what is called for by the results of Prof. Boas’s work. For a long time scientists have come to believe more and more in the influence of environment, but never before have such astonishing truths been brought forward in support of this theory.” The final sentence concluded with an optimistic quote from Boas: “So far as the races of Europe are concerned, there is nothing in evidence that would stamp one as inherently less able than the other” (December 26, 1909, SM3). The reporter did not follow up. Was Boas implying that races other than European ones were stamped from the beginning?

Four days later, on New Year’s Eve, 1909, Boas provided some critical insight into this question. Taking advantage of his recent publicity, he asked for more funding to expand the study. Boas explained to Jenks that if his research could be extended, “all fear of an unfavorable influence of South European immigration upon the body of our people should be dismissed.” He continued,

Perhaps even more important . . . is the problem of mixtures of distinct types . . . here it is particularly the question of the mixture between negro and white that should receive particular attention. With the large immigration from southern Europe, the time is not distant when the problem of racial intermixture between these two types will become acute: and we ought to know what social and hygienic

significance the recent laws of Southern States, forbidding intermarriages between the two races, will have.

Broadly speaking, the question before us is that of whether it is better for us to keep an industrially and socially inferior 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 still other words, we might say the question before us is whether conditions can be so regulated that without proportionate increase in the black population it will be of advantage to accelerate the infusion of white blood among them.²⁴

Regulating reproduction through segregation and sterilization were the cornerstones of the eugenics movement. Indiana had just implemented the nation's first eugenic sterilization law, and Washington and California were soon to follow. Early on in the eugenics movement, many scientists across the political spectrum were intrigued by the emancipatory prospects of using the science of better breeding to improve the human condition. Boas was not supporting sterilization, just the opposite. He was floating the wacky idea that the federal government should develop a eugenics program to incentivize or regulate a "process of lightening up" Black people by the infusion of white blood. He did not speculate about the details. The "marvelous power of amalgamation," which he touted in his original proposal, transformed Eastern and Southern Europeans effortlessly into the "American type." The power of amalgamation was not so marvelous for the "industrially and socially inferior" Negro. They would need some assistance to become American.

Franz Boas was an indefatigable crusader against scientists and policymakers who used their authority to argue that races and cultures were superior or inferior. He attacked their logic and flimsy evidence with rigor and enthusiasm (Baker 1998, 2004, 2010). However, there were limits to his liberalism. In the winter months of 1909–10, Boas presented compelling evidence to Congress that Sicilians and Russian Jews, two distinct and inferior races of Europe, became American in one generation. With the eager press riding shotgun, he won a significant shootout in the battle for whiteness consolidation, which buoyed the nascent Americanization movement with scientific evidence.

The trade-off and the long-term consequences for non-white people were devastating. Boas had to emphasize the broad gulf of difference between the white races or types and non-white races. By slip-sliding between race and type, American type and American, assimilation and amalgamation, Boas also contributed to, and the press enthusiastically influenced, the alignment of whiteness with what it means to be American.²⁵

NEGRO AMALGAMATION

Boas first proposed the idea of Negro amalgamation in December 1908 when he gave his vice-presidential address to Section H of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in Baltimore. The bulk of his paper argued that there are no pure races or stocks in Europe, and while there are subtle regional differences, most Europeans are admixtures of these types. He concluded his talk with a discussion about Negro admixture. "When compared with the contrast between the negro and the white," Boas explained, "the differences of the European types seem insignificant; and the unity of the European race, as contrasted with the negro race becomes at once apparent." He continued to describe the vast gulf of difference. "I do not believe that the negro is in his physical and mental make-up, the same as the European." Boas continued, "The anatomical differences are so great that corresponding mental differences are plausible." He quickly followed up that "there is, however, no proof whatever that these differences signify any appreciable degree of inferiority of the negro, notwithstanding the slightly inferior size, and perhaps lesser complexity of structure, of his brain." Boas proceeded by predicting the future.

Looking into a distant future, it seems reasonably certain that with the increasing mobility of the negro, the number of full-bloods will rapidly decrease; and since there is no introduction of new negro blood, there can not be the slightest doubt that the ultimate effect of the contact between the two races must necessarily be a continued increase of the amount of white blood in the negro community. (Boas 1909a, 848)

Boas published his address in the May issue of *Science*, and W.E.B. Du Bois reprinted most of it in the November issue of *The Horizon* (Boas 1909a, 1909b). Du Bois and Boas had collaborated previously, and Du Bois would often cite Boas's

claim that Africans were smelting iron when Europeans were still using stone tools. Du Bois must have been intrigued with the address because he invited Boas to expand on it for the final lecture at the upcoming NAACP conference in May of 1910.

The dramatic three-day extravaganza (May 12–14, 1910) coincided with Halley's Comet's close encounter, illuminating the night's sky each evening. The celestial omen proved propitious because the NAACP's incorporation that weekend created a galactic shift in civil and human rights (Stephenson 1955).

The conference's grand finale took place in midtown at the storied Berkeley Theater. The closers were Albert Bushnell Hart, Mary Church Terrell, and Franz Boas. They were three of Du Bois's most esteemed and influential collaborators, and there is little doubt they were each handpicked by him (Charity Organization Society of the City of New York 1910, 124).

Boas's paper was titled "The Real Race Problem," and he began his lecture using his signature formula and preferred tactic to combat the science of racial superiority, which was serving as a scientific skeptic and debunker-in-chief. He criticized empirical claims that there are any pure race types and that there is any correlation between capacity for civilization, intelligence, and duties of citizenship among the different "types of mankind," and he demonstrated that individuals with mixed-race ancestry were not deficient nor degraded. Sometimes, but not always, he threw in achievements of African empires.

Decrying a lack of data and applying overlapping bell curves, Boas challenged and debunked stock and deeply rooted claims of innate Negro inferiority and white supremacy. This formula enabled him to argue that the present condition of the Negro was more likely caused by social, economic, and historical conditions rather than by hereditary endowment. The tactic was a powerful and successful formula that enabled Boas to toll the death knell for mainstream scientific racism. In this lecture at the Berkeley Theater and other fora, however, Boas never explicitly nor categorically declared that Blacks and whites were equal, just that we cannot prove they are not (Anderson 2019, 67; Baker 1998, 105; Williams 1996).

He framed the finale for this historic conference like many others. "The first question to be answered by scientific investigation is, in how far the Negro type may be considered the inferior, the white type the superior." He asserted that "the anthropologist recognizes that the Negro and the

white represent the two most divergent types of mankind." After a brief description of differences in child development, limb size, and hair texture Boas focused on "the capacity for mental achievement" (Boas 1910, 22). "It is true that the average size of the Negro brain is slightly smaller than the average size of the brain of the white race," he explained, but "the difference between the two races is exceedingly small as compared with the range of variability found in either race." Boas explained that "the whole anatomical and physiological comparison of the Negro and the white race may be summed up" by the fact that "hardly any" traits develop in a manner that we "are justified in calling one race anatomically or physiologically higher than the other" (Boas 1910, 23).

Boas then pivoted from physiology to culture. He discussed the "handicap of slavery" and African cultural achievements past and present. Boas also contended that mulattoes were not inferior. He explained that Africans have been mixing with people from the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and throughout the Americas without consequence. "I think, therefore, that biological analogy as well as historical evidence do not favor the assumption of any material inferiority of the mulatto" (Boas 1910, 25).

So far, Boas had given what had evolved as something of a formulaic stump speech that was a mashup of an article in *Charities Magazine* and the commencement address at Atlanta University he had given, at Du Bois's invitation, a half-decade earlier (Boas 1905, 1945).

Unlike in previous lectures, Boas shifted gears from describing and debunking to prescribing and provoking. Boas shared an observation that in countries around the world inhabited by Northern Europeans, "particularly Teutonic nations," "the intensity of race feeling" is calibrated by the magnitude of "the social divisions." When "the other race is represented by a few individuals only, [the] intensity of race feeling is rather slight" (Boas 1910, 25). "Intense race feelings easily develop" when Teutonic nations inhabit colonies, kingdoms, or republics and must compete with other types that "form large social divisions, characterized by habits of their own, and representing a strong economic influence." Boas was not optimistic that "our general attitude will change to any appreciable degree within a measurable time" (1910, 25). So, he prescribed for the Negro the somewhat successful strategy of German Jews, not necessarily the Russian Jews, of actively assimilating within American society (Glick 1982, 554–56).

At the Berkeley Theater, Boas advanced a provocative strategy. It was nothing short of conceding that “if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em.” Boas stated, “It seems obvious that our race problems will become less intense, the less the difference in type” there is “between the different groups of our people,” concluding that “one aspect of the solution of the Negro problem lies entirely in the hands of the Negro himself” (Boas 1910, 25). Perhaps he should have said *herself*.

Boas sincerely, if not naively, believed that African American women should take proactive steps to quicken the inevitable process of lightening the race through amalgamation. The previous year he had presented a rather clinical description to the AAAS (Boas 1909a, 847–49). For the NAACP, however, he gave a full-throated exegesis on the gendered dynamics of interracial sex and the racial politics of classifying children born from those sexual encounters—voluntary or not.

The simple facts that Negroes and Europeans live side by side in our country, that the European receives constant large additions from abroad, while the amount of Negro blood receives no additions from outside, must necessarily lead to the result that the relative number of pure Negroes will become less and less in our country. The gradual process of elimination of the full-blooded Negro may be retarded by [anti-miscegenation] legislation, but it cannot possibly be avoided. (Boas 1910, 25)

Boas was aware of what he called “the bulky literature of this subject” of miscegenation, most of which did not “stand up to serious criticism” (Boas 1909a, 849). He also understood how miscegenation ginned up phantasmic panic and frenzied fear that fueled violent terror meted out on the bodies of Black men who allegedly polluted the purity of white womanhood. However, Boas implied there was no need for fear because there was “a very serious misunderstanding of the actual conditions of intermixture between Negro and white”:

The fear is often expressed that by intermixture between whites and Negroes the whole mass of the white population might be infused with a certain amount of Negro blood. This is not what has actually occurred, but would result if unions between white women and Negro men were as frequent as unions between Negro [wo]men and white [men].²⁶ As a matter of

fact, however, the former type of union—that of the Negro male and of the white female—are exceedingly few in number as compared to the others. It therefore follows that our mulattoes are almost throughout the offspring of Negro mothers and white fathers. . . . It thus appears that in all cases where mixture between whites and Negroes occurs, as long as this mixture is predominantly a mixture of white fathers and colored mothers, the relative proportion of blood in the following mixed generation becomes less, and that therefore a gradually increasing similarity of the two racial types may develop. (Boas 1910, 25)

Boas stated that this “one aspect of the solution of the Negro problem lies entirely in the hands of the Negro himself” (Boas 1910, 25). Wittingly or not, Boas was prescribing a program of applied eugenics as a solution to the race problem. He declared that white people need not fear amalgamation because it only improves the Negro race and does not impair the white race. Boas does not address the so-called one-drop rule, where even the lightest Negroes were crushed by the punishing weight of Jim Crow. He also never mentions the 300 years of industrial terrorism in the form of routinized rape of Black women by white men. Yet, he not so subtly implied that the solution to the real race problem lies between the legs of Black women.

The *New York Times* announced in a headline, “PROF. BOAS PREDICTS RACE AMALGAMATION; MEANS NEGRO ELIMINATION; Union of White Fathers and Black Mothers Will Bring This About” (May 15, 1910, 2). The Baltimore *Afro-American* reported extensively on the three-day conference and excerpted many of the conference speakers. The editors declined to mention Boas, except as one of the many speakers (May 21, 1910, 1).

W.E.B. Du Bois selected Professor Boas’s “The Real Race Problem” as the “lead article” for the second issue of the first volume of *The Crisis*. In 1912 Du Bois subsequently reissued it as one of the NAACP’s many standalone pamphlets (Mitchell 2004, 213).

It is not entirely clear to me why Du Bois promoted this address so conspicuously. Did the ever-pragmatic Du Bois make a calculated decision that the body of the lecture, in which the nation’s foremost anthropologist explicitly argued that Negroes were not inferior to whites mentally and physiologically,

outweighed his cringeworthy solution? Or, did Du Bois want to promote any legitimate science that endeavored to hush the relentless din of panicked scholars (see e.g., Bilbo 1947; Shufeldt 1915; Smith 1905) reinforcing Jim Crow by claiming that African Americans were inherently inferior and warning that miscegenation would befall American civilization?

What is clear to me is that progressive ideals grounded in assimilation can go off the rails like the orphan train or American Indian boarding school movements.

Franz Boas was engaging in racist anti-racism. “The Real Race Problem” was written as he was wrapping up *Changes in Bodily Forms of Descendants of Immigrants* (Boas 1911). He believed that to show how little white racial groups diverged, he must emphasize the vast gulf between whites and other races, and he contributed to aligning whiteness with what it means to be an American in critical ways. With his so-called solution of amalgamation, one could surmise that for Boas in 1910, the real race problem was that the Negroes were not white and the New Negro should be no Negro at all.

C. Loring Brace, Richard Henry Pratt, and Franz Boas sincerely believed in the power of assimilation and that the right environment can improve life outcomes. Bella and Madeline were proof of that. Like many Progressive Era reformers, each was striving to find solutions to combat race antipathy—what we would call engaging in anti-racism today. However, each also contributed to the impact of white supremacy.

Racism is an ideology that is a ravenous scavenger because it maintains its power by being able to appropriate, pick out, recycle, and deploy ideas from other ideas and values. It also uses different ideas toward the same end of consolidating and institutionalizing white supremacy (Fredrickson 2003, 8; Solomos and Back 1996, 18–19; Winant 2015, 4). Many of the twentieth-century solutions to its many problems—Negro, immigrant, Indian, Asian—turned on the lose-lose and inherently racist debate around segregation, with its autonomy and agency, or assimilation, with its dependency and conformity. For out-of-the-way others like Native Americans and people in American colonies such as Samoa, anthropologists articulated a powerful and persuasive anti-racist discourse of cultural autonomy, agency, and racist segregation. For in-the-way others like immigrants and Black people, anthropologists joined sociology and social work to articulate a powerful and

persuasive anti-racist discourse of equality and potentiality and racist assimilation.

Lee D. Baker *Department of Cultural Anthropology, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708*
E-mail: ldbaker@duke.edu

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my wife, Sabrina L. Thomas, and our daughter, Yaa A. Baker, for helping me to frame, structure, and edit this piece. I would also like to thank Henry Louis Gates Jr. for inviting me to present it as one of the W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures for the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University. I am also grateful for Kaya Naomi Williams for serving as my interlocutor at the lecture. Angela Wei, my research assistant in the summer of 2020, was so valuable. Orin Starn and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt also provided critical feedback and encouragement as I was formulating some of these ideas. Early on in my career, Leith Mullings encouraged, supported, and validated my writing and research on the history of anthropology. So, thank you, Leith! Finally, I would like to thank my birth mother, Kaaren E. Mach (1943–81), for having the courage to surrender me to the Children’s Aid Society in 1966. It all worked out!

NOTES

1. Twelfth Census of the United States, New York, New York City, Borough of Brooklyn, Population Schedule No. 1, Enumeration District 810, Sheet 4, Home for Destitute Children, Inmate 96, Heller, Madeline. Ancestry Library Edition database. Accessed June 22, 2021. https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/7602/images/4114532_00530?treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pId=48491646. Twelfth Census of the United States, New York, New York City, Population Schedule No. 1, Enumeration District 1077, Sheet 3, Five Points Home of Industry, Inmate 15, Quince, Bella. Ancestry Library Edition database. Accessed June 22, 2021. https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/7602/images/4114582_00752?treeid=&personid=&rc=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=jAO106&_phstart=successSource&pId=55972818.

2. National Orphan Train Complex. n.d. “History.” National Orphan Train Complex (website).

Accessed October 23, 2020. <https://orphantraindepot.org/history/>.

3. See note 2. Children were sent to the forty-eight contiguous US states. The majority were sent to the West, but New England, the South, and the Eastern Seaboard had their share.

4. Pratt, Richard Henry. 1879. "Materials Request for Picket Fence." Telegram to Commissioner of Indian Affairs. RG 75, Series 79, Box 571, Miscellaneous-1879-P-#0989. National Archives and Records Administration. Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center (website). Accessed April 30, 2021. <http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/documentsmaterials-request-picket-fence>.

5. Fifty-Ninth Congress, Sess. I, Ch. 3592. 1906. H.R. 15442/Public Law No. 386, June 29, 1906. Accessed June 6, 2021. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/59th-congress/session-1/c59s1ch3592.pdf>. Fifty-Ninth Congress, Sess. II., Ch. 1134. 1907. S. 4403/Public Law No. 96, February 20, 1907. Accessed June 6, 2021. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/59th-congress/session-2/c59s2ch1134.pdf>.

6. Cornish, Audie. 2013. "Dillingham Commission's Ranking of Immigrant Groups Affected U.S. Policy for Decades." *All Things Considered*, January 28. Accessed January 15, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2013/01/28/170494504/dillingham-commissions-ranking-of-immigrant-groups-affected-u-s-policy-for-decad>.

7. Jeremiah Jenks to Franz Boas, March 11, 1908, Boas Personal and Professional Papers, Mss.B.B61p, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as BPP).

8. Franz Boas to Jeremiah Jenks, March 23, 1908, BPP.

9. Boas to Jenks, March 23, 1908, BPP.

10. Boas to Jenks, March 23, 1908, BPP.

11. Jenks to Boas, April 29, 1908, BPP.

12. Boas to Jenks, May 2, 1908, BPP.

13. Crampton was a lifelong advocate of daily exercise, and he was a leader in the Boy Scouts and the YMCA (*New York Times*, October 22, 1964, 35). Dr. Maurice Fishberg was a Russian Jew who had come to the United States in 1889. He was a self-taught physical anthropologist who argued that Jews were not a separate race and often indistinguishable from the populations with which they reside (Fishberg 1911).

14. Jeremiah Jenks to WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, June 5, 1908, BPP.

15. C. W. Crampton to Boas, June 2, 1908, BPP; Boas to Jenks, June 3, 1908, BPP; Maurice

Fishberg to Boas, June 9, 1908, BPP; Boas to Jenks, June 9, 1908, BPP. See also King (2019, 97); Zeidel (2004, 92).

16. Boas to Jenks, June 26, 1908, BPP.

17. Boas to Jenks, September 3, 1908, BPP.

18. Boas to Jenks, November 18, 1908, BPP.

19. This one quote is taken from two different letters complaining about money (Boas to Jenks, November 23, 1908, and December 4, 1908, BPP).

20. Boas to Jenks, March 8, 1909, BPP; Boas to Jenks, March 9, 1909, BPP.

21. Boas to Jenks, March 8, 1909, BPP.

22. Boas to Jenks, October 18, 1909, BPP.

23. Boas to Jenks, December 2, 1909, BPP.

24. Boas to Jenks, December 31, 1909, BPP.

25. Anti-immigrant zealots and nativists weaponized eugenics to limit the number and type of immigrants coming to the United States from Europe. They eventually crushed the notion of racial plasticity and assimilation among European immigrants with their hegemonic idea that Americans had to protect pure and fit races, which did not fully wane until World War II.

26. In the original text Boas wrote women, not men.

REFERENCES CITED

- Anderson, Mark. 2019. *From Boas to Black Power: Racism, Liberalism, and American Anthropology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Baker, Lee D. 1998. *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Baker, Lee D. 2004. "Franz Boas Out of the Ivory Tower." *Anthropological Theory* 4(1): 20–51.
- Baker, Lee D. 2010. *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bilbo, Theodore Gilmore. 1947. *Take Your Choice: Separation or Mongrelization*. Poplarville, MS: Dream House Publishing.
- Boas, Franz. 1945. "Commencement Address at Atlanta University, May 31, 1906, Atlanta University Leaflet, No. 19." In *Race and Democratic Society*, 61–69. New York: J. J. Augustin.
- Boas, Franz. 1894. "The Half-Blood Indian." *Popular Science Monthly* 45(6): 761–70.
- Boas, Franz. 1895. "Human Faculty Determined by Race." In *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science*, 301–27. Salem, MA: Salem Press.
- Boas, Franz. 1898. "The Growth of Toronto Children". In *Report of Commissioner of Education*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Boas, Franz. 1899. "Review of *The Races of Europe*, by William Z. Ripley." *Science* 10(244): 292–6.
- Boas, Franz. 1905. "The Negro and the Demands of Modern Life: Ethnic and Anatomical Considerations." *Charities: A Review of Local and General Philanthropy* 15(1): 85–8.
- Boas, Franz. 1909a. "Race Problems in America." *Science* 29(752): 839–49.
- Boas, Franz. 1909b. "Race Problems in America." *The Horizon: A Journal of the Color Line* 5(1): 9–10.
- Boas, Franz. 1910. "The Real Race Problem." *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 1(2): 22–5.

- Boas, Franz. 1911. *Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants*. Final Report. Reports of the Immigration Commission, vol. 38. United States Immigration Commission (1907–10). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Boas, Franz. 1921. "The Problem of the American Negro." *Yale Quarterly Review* 10(2): 384–95.
- Boas, Franz. 1940. *Race, Language, and Culture*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bois, Du, and William Edward Burghardt. 1910. "Marrying of Black Folk." *The Independent, Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 69(3228): 812–3.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2018. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 5th edn. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Brace, Charles Loring. 1880. *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years' Work among Them*, 3rd edn. New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck.
- Brace, Charles Loring. 1894. *The Life of Charles Loring Brace, Chiefly Told in His Own Letters*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Brewer, Daniel Chauncey. 1910. "A Patriotic Movement for the Assimilation of Immigrants." Reprint from the *Editorial Review*, August 1910. Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930. Harvard University. Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/immigration-to-the-united-states-1789-1930/39-990085191280203941>.
- Bureau of Statistics. 1905. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, vol. 27. Department of Labor and Commerce. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Charity Organization Society of the City of New York. 1910. "National Negro Conference." *The Survey: Social, Charitable, Civic: A Journal of Constructive Philanthropy* 24(April 16): 124.
- Cook, Jeanne F. 1995. "A History of Placing-Out: The Orphan Trains." *Child Welfare* 74(1): 181–97.
- Fishberg, Maurice. 1911. *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment*. London: Walter Scott.
- Fredrickson, George M. 2003. *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gassan, Richard H. 2015. "Fear, Commercialism, Reform, and Antebellum Tourism to New York City." *Journal of Urban History* 41(6): 1077–90.
- Glick, Leonard B. 1982. "Types Distinct from Our Own: Franz Boas on Jewish Identity and Assimilation." *American Anthropologist* 84(3): 545–65.
- Golway, Terry. 2014. *Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Hamalainen, Pekka. 2016. "Reconstructing the Great Plains: The Long Struggle for Sovereignty and Dominance in the Heart of the Continent." *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6(4): 481–509.
- Hendrick, Burton J. 1910. "The Skulls of Our Immigrants: How the New York Environment Is Bringing About Fundamental Changes in Physical Type." *McClure's Magazine* 35(1): 36–50.
- Jackson, Donald Dale. 1986. "It Took Trains to Put Street Kids on the Right Track Out of the Slums." *Smithsonian* 17(5): 95.
- Jacobson, Matthew Frye. 1998. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kellor, Frances A. 1916. "Would Americanize All the Immigrants." *El Paso Herald*. February 22, 1916, 5.
- Kendi, Ibram X. 2016. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. New York: Nation Books.
- King, Charles. 2019. *Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Doubleday.
- Kraus, Joe. 1999. "How the Melting Pot Stirred America: The Reception of Zangwill's Play and Theater's Role in the American Assimilation Experience." *MELUS* 24(3): 3–19.
- Lodge, Henry Cabot. 1904. "A Million Immigrants a Year: Efforts to Restrict Undesirable Immigration." *Century Illustrated Magazine* 67(3): 466–9.
- Lund, John M. 1994. "Boundaries of Restriction: The Dillingham Commission." *UVM History Review* 6(December): 40–57.
- Mitchell, Michele. 2004. *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Mullings, Leith. 2005a. "Interrogating Racism: Toward an Antiracist Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34(2005): 667–93.
- Mullings, Leith. 2005b. "Resistance and Resilience: The Sojourner Syndrome and the Social Context of Reproduction in Central Harlem." *Transforming Anthropology* 13(2): 79–91.
- Ngai, Mae M. 1999. "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924." *Journal of American History* 86(1): 67–92.
- Ngai, Mae. 2014. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America. Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- O'Connor, Stephen. 2004. *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. 2010. *The History of White People*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Park, Robert E. 1914. "Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups with Particular Reference to the Negro." *American Journal of Sociology* 19(5): 606–23.
- Peterson, Lindsay. 2013. "'Kill the Indian, Save the Man,' Americanization through Education: Richard Henry Pratt's Legacy." Honors thesis, Colby College. Paper 696. Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorsthesis/696>.
- Ripley, William Zebina. 1899. *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study (Lowell Institute Lectures)*. New York: Appleton.
- Roberts, Sam. 2007. "A Passover Sermon, a Play, and a Century of the Melting Pot." *New York Times*, April 8, 2007, 28.
- Roosevelt, Theodore. 1904. *Presidential Addresses and State Papers*. New York: Review of Reviews.
- Shufeldt, Robert W. 1915. *America's Greatest Problem: The Negro*. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.
- Smith, William Benjamin. 1905. *The Color Line: A Brief in Behalf of the Unborn*. New York: McClure, Phillips.
- Solomos, John, and Les Back. 1996. *Racism and Society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stephenson, Bill. 1955. "The Panic over Halley's Comet." *Maclean's* 68(10): 31, 96–101.
- Trammell, Rebecca S. 2009. "Orphan Train Myths and Legal Reality." *Modern American* 5(2): 3–13.
- Walker, Francis A. 1896. "Restriction of Immigration." *Atlantic Monthly* 77(June): 822–30.
- Williams, Vernon J. Jr. 1996. *Rethinking Race: Franz Boaz and His Contemporaries*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Winant, Howard. 2015. "The Dark Matter: Race and Racism in the 21st Century." *Critical Sociology* 41(2): 313–24.
- Zeidel, Robert F. 2004. *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900–1927*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.