

Chapter 10

The Two 20th-Century Crises of Racial Anthropology

by
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INTRODUCTION

Physical anthropology was introduced in America as a rationalization for slavery. The end of the civil war rendered the field largely superfluous, and it would not be reinvented until the employment of Franz Boas by Columbia University (based on his expertise in measuring schoolchildren and collecting Eskimo skeletons), Aleš Hrdlička by the U.S. National Museum (partly on the recommendation of Boas), and slightly later, Earnest Hooton by Harvard.

Physical anthropology had appropriated to itself the professional voice of the study of human variation. Boas came to emphasize what we might now call its norm of reaction or adaptability; Hrdlička and Hooton came to emphasize its specific forms or expressions. The study of race, as different manifestations of the human form, dominated physical anthropology during the first few decades of the 20th century. The shift of physical anthropology away from race as a central focus was catalyzed by two social and political crises on either side of World War II.

The first came with the accession of the Nazis and their implementation of a state policy based in part on scientific ideas about racial superiority and inferiority. These ideas had been articulated by the French aristocrat Arthur de Gobineau, the British expatriate Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and the American lawyer and naturalist Madison Grant (Barzun, 1937; Poliakov, 1974; Spiro, 2009).

In Germany, the racial ideologies flourished symbiotically with the popularity of Ernst Haeckel's first-generation Darwinism. Haeckel saw Nordicism and militarism as the culmination of human bio-social evolution. His principal antagonist was Rudolf Virchow, pathologist, early anthropologist,

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and defender of a tolerant humanist-pacifist vision of modern society. To the extent that Haeckel invoked Darwinism in support of his political ideologies, Virchow was obliged to reject it just as strongly—any evidence for human evolution was ostensibly evidence as well for Haeckel's proto-Nazism (Massin, 1996).

Virchow's death in 1902 created a vacuum that was quickly filled by German Haeckelian Darwinians. Virchow's vision of the disjunction between biological evolution and the nature of the modern political state was taken up in America by his protégé, the physicist turned geographer turned physical anthropologist—Franz Boas.¹ Boas remained cordial for decades with the leading physical anthropologist in Germany, Eugen Fischer, even as Boas's own interests turned more to culture, language, and folklore.

Eugen Fischer, however, was a political opportunist who sought Nazi support for the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Genetics, and Eugenics, of which he was director, and was apparently willing to say and do anything to secure that support (Weiss, 2006). By the end of World War II, the expatriate anatomist Franz Weidenreich (1946) was publicly branding him a war criminal, a view synoptic with that of the expatriate geneticist Richard Goldschmidt (1942).

It may be worth taking a look at some words published for Eugen Fischer's *Festschrift* in 1934, by his student, the physical anthropologist Otmarr Freiherr von Verschuer:

We stand upon the threshold of a new era. For the first time in world history, the Führer Adolf Hitler is putting into practice the insights about the biological foundations of the development of peoples—race, heredity, selection. It is no coincidence that Germany is the locus of this event: German science provides the tools for the politician. (Aichel & Verschuer, 1934, vi)

In 1934 it was pretty clear what the Nazis stood for. Racial science and totalitarian politics existed symbiotically in Germany (Müller-Hill, 1988). To a considerable extent American scientists envied the credibility and political clout that their colleagues in Germany seemed to enjoy (Kevles, 1985; Kühl, 1994). Interestingly enough, the two Americans with articles in the collection honoring Fischer were both future presidents of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins and Charles Davenport of Cold Spring Harbor. We obviously cannot hold them responsible for Vershuer's preface, but the presence of their articles behind those words attests to the casual continuity between normative American and German physical anthropology.

By mid-decade, Earnest Hooton was finding it necessary to distinguish publicly between (bad) German physical anthropology and (good) American physical anthropology. “[A] physical anthropologist . . . desires emphatically

to dissociate the finding of his science from the acts of human injustice which masquerade as ‘racial measures’ or ‘racial movements’ or even ‘racial hygiene.’” he wrote in *Science* in 1936.

In retrospect, he was probably largely unsuccessful, given his long-term attraction to Davenport's eugenics, Lombroso's “criminal anthropology” (Rafter, 2004) and Sheldon's “constitutional anthropology” (Rosenbaum, 1995). Nevertheless, we can admire Hooton for at least giving voice to his apprehensions.

Indeed, the politics of American anthropology at the time was so conflicted that when Boas tried to mobilize senior American physical anthropologists to draft and sign a resolution condemning Nazi physical anthropology, only Hooton and Hrdlička would sign (Barkan, 1992). Raymond Pearl, while acknowledging Nazi anthropology as “wholly absurd, unscientific, and in the highest degree mischievous,” nevertheless refused Boas's overture, on the grounds that “I am unalterably opposed now and all the time towards an attitude of pontifical authoritarianism under the aegis of science” (Oct. 3, 1935, FBP). One can, of course, wonder whether Pearl expressed himself as stridently to Otmarr Freiherr von Verschuer.

At the time, the United States and Germany were on friendly terms, and many Americans (and American scholars) had no interest in provoking their German counterparts. Unable to get a resolution condemning the Nazis passed at the 1937 meetings of the American Anthropological Association meeting, because it was (correctly) perceived to be initiated by Boas, AAA President Edward Sapir contrived the following year to have the resolution introduced and seconded by two impeccably WASP physical anthropologists: Hooton and Chicago's Fay-Cooper Cole. This time it passed (Barkan, 1992).

The controversial AAA resolution seems banal, almost ridiculously so, today:

Whereas, the prime requisites of science are the honest and unbiased search for truth and the freedom to proclaim such truth when discovered and known, and

Whereas, anthropology in many countries is being conscripted and its data distorted and misinterpreted to serve the cause of an unscientific racialism rather than the cause of truth: Be it resolved, That the American Anthropological Association repudiates such racialism and adheres to the following statement of facts:

1). Race involves the inheritance of similar physical variations by large groups of mankind, but its psychological and cultural connotations, if they exist, have not been ascertained by science.

2). The terms Aryan and Semitic have no racial significance whatsoever. They simply denote linguistic families.

3). Anthropology provides no scientific basis for discrimination against any people on the ground of racial inferiority, religious affiliation or linguistic heritage. (AAA Proceedings, 1938)

This does, however, give us the proper lens for viewing the scientific study of race in the middle third of the century. The appearance of the body, the form of the skull, and its manifestations as mind or culture, were all thought to be intimately, if cryptically, related. And each large group of people had its own peculiarities of all three.

POSTWAR ANTHROPOLOGY

After World War II, the fields of physical anthropology and human genetics lay in tatters and had to be utterly reinvented. The task fell principally to James Neel and Theodosius Dobzhansky in human genetics (the former emphasizing medical genetics, and the latter evolutionary theory) and to Sherwood Washburn in physical anthropology. In 1950 Dobzhansky and Washburn organized a major conference on the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, and began to set forth a radical new agenda, emphasizing evolutionary dynamics over static typology, locally adapted populations over ephemeral and arbitrary clusters of people, and the common themes of being human over the minor differences among peoples—a “new physical anthropology” (Washburn, 1951).

Concurrently, UNESCO President Julian Huxley decided that the time was right for a formal statement about the science of race and convened an international committee of anthropologists and sociologists, along with the head of UNESCO’s Social Science Department, the Brazilian anthropologist Arturo Ramos. Upon the sudden death of Ramos, the role of *rapporteur* fell to the Anglo-American Ashley Montagu.

Montagu had been born Israel Ehrenberg, in London’s East End, and reinvented himself in college as Montague Francis Ashley Montagu, then emigrated to America. Self-reinvention was actually not an altogether uncommon practice at the time. The social anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, the journalist Henry Morton Stanley, the conductor Leopold Stokowski, all concealed their humble or pedestrian origins with name changes. And of course the movies quickly became littered with discarded monikers, usually either too ethnic or too cacophonous, and thus transforming Isidore Demsky into Kirk Douglas and Frances Gumm into Judy Garland.

Montagu had studied social anthropology in England, and had studied physical anthropology largely informally with Sir Arthur Keith, the great British anatomist. After coming to America he managed to land a job

teaching dental anatomy, with the help of Aleš Hrdlička. That year he wrote to Hooton,

I am twenty-six, educated at Cambridge, Oxford, London, Florence, and Columbia. M.A., Ph.D., etc. fifteen anthropological publications. Recommended very generously by Sir Arthur Keith, who has furnished me a too-glowing testimonial which you may see if you wish. Sir Arthur once told me that I can always say that he will speak for me, so I may as well mention this too, for if you hold him in as great respect as I do, this should be impressive. (28 Dec 1931, EAHP)

It is not clear that Montagu had any significant education other than in London, and it is quite clear that he possessed no such advanced degrees when he wrote Hooton. He would, however, earn a doctorate in cultural anthropology from Columbia before the end of the decade. Although Montagu kept up a warm correspondence with Hooton, the latter would include an otherwise positive letter of recommendation for Montagu, “I should advise that his qualifications be inspected very carefully” (Hooton to T. H. Sollman, Feb. 27, 1939, EAHP). You can’t really blame him.

By 1950, however, Montagu had distinguished himself as an eloquent critic of the concept of race. Indeed, his criticisms owed a great deal to Julian Huxley himself, whose 1935 book *We Europeans*, co-authored with the Cambridge cultural anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon, went so far to suggest that the very word “race” be supplanted by “ethnic group.” This, in fact, would become a signature crusade of Montagu’s. As his friend Dobzhansky would write to him good-naturedly upon returning from the field one year, “The ethnic groups of Australian Drosophilae proved to be most interesting” (Oct. 7, 1960, AMP).

Montagu’s hand lay so heavily upon the UNESCO Statement that it was widely assumed to have been written by Montagu alone (Stewart, 1961). In the protracted discussion in the British journal *Man*, it came to be known as “the Ashley Montagu Statement” (Anonymous, 1951). The statement’s most obvious feature stemmed from the composition of the group that drafted it: of the committee of seven, only two were physical anthropologists—Juan Comas of Mexico and Montagu himself. This alone served to de-center physical anthropology as the field that pronounced scientifically and authoritatively on race.

To be sure, the statement was sent around and vetted by another panel of experts, including the biologists Edwin G. Conklin, L. C. Dunn, H. J. Muller, Gunnar Dahlberg, and Dobzhansky. Upon receiving the final statement, Dobzhansky wrote to Montagu, “Although I would have changed a few more words, they are excellent and I believe you have done a fine job in pushing them through” (Oct. 15, 1950, AMP).

In some circles, however—which shows just how close to normative the German physical anthropology of World War II had in fact been—the Statement was greeted with hostility, if not outright contempt. Led by right-wing British biologists such as Ronald Fisher and C. D. Darlington, the critics charged that race was a biological problem, and consequently the domination of the UNESCO committee by non-biologists meant that the true nature of race had been improperly represented (Brattain, 2007; Müller-Wille, 2007).

Of particular salience were two passages from the 21-paragraph statement. From paragraph 7, “For all practical social purposes ‘race’ is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth.” And from the final paragraph, “[B]iological studies lend support to the ethic of universal brotherhood; for man is born with drives toward co-operation, and unless these drives are satisfied, men and nations alike fall ill” (UNESCO, 1952). The first seemed to de-legitimize biological approaches to human variation altogether; the second to make a far-reaching and eloquent claim with no actual scientific support. In some cases these statements became a wedge that allowed scholars who disagreed with the statement’s assertion that innate racial differences in intellect or disposition were negligible ultimately to undermine it.

Thus the primate anatomist W. C. Osman Hill (1951) could voice his distaste for the statement by invoking “the well-known musical attributes of the Negroids and the mathematical ability of some Indian races.” He was already on record (1940) with the belief that human races could be considered as taxonomic species.

Under mounting pressure, UNESCO convened a second panel the following year, to be dominated by biologists, of whom the only carryover was Montagu himself. Even Dobzhansky perceived the affair as a political backlash, writing to Montagu, “On the genetical side the group may consist of some people (such as Darlington) who are out and out racists. . . . The British objectors will be present. This may result in a statement which will be pretty sad” (Feb. 24, 1951, AMP).

The (liberal) geneticist L. C. Dunn was chosen as rapporteur, and the Second UNESCO Statement on Race emphasized the indeterminacy of many of the innate differences in intellect and temperament that the first statement had repudiated. The Second Statement walked a fine line between complementing and superseding the Ashley Montagu Statement. A vicious book review by T. Dale Stewart, published in *Science* in 1961, called the statement “so unacceptable that it had to be rewritten.” Montagu responded by noting the difference in specialties of the members of the two committees, and emphasized their similarity and complementarity: “The difference is as between Tweedledum and Tweedledee” (Montagu, 1961). Stewart rebutted

by rhetorically asking why a textbook by Juan Comas, a member of the first committee, presented only the Second Statement?

Why such a catfight would spill over into the pages of the leading science journal in America a decade later is a good question. Clearly the scientific meaning of race had not in fact been adequately resolved.

Nevertheless, the Ashley Montagu Statement was not even as radical as it was made out to be. Emphasizing the equality of races, the statement did not deny that races exist. Thus, paragraph 7 tells us that “most anthropologists agree in classifying the greater part of present-day mankind into three major divisions, as follows:

The Mongoloid Division

The Negroid Division

The Caucasoid Division.”

Calling them races, ethnic groups, or divisions, however, does not much matter if the fundamental concept remains the allotment of human beings into a small number of fairly discrete natural categories. The statement’s offense lay solely in its aggressive assertion of the fundamentally equal abilities of the members of all races.

Moreover, the Second Statement (“On the nature of race and race differences”) generated considerable opposition as well, and from the same quarters. This time, however, UNESCO solicited and collected the criticisms, and published them along with the statement itself.² The academic criticisms ran a bizarre gamut, beginning with Fritz Lenz, a former Nazi geneticist, politely disputing the attribution of all human beings to a single species. That position was not completely unique, being espoused by the anatomist W. C. Osman Hill, as noted above, and as well by the geneticist R. R. Ruggles Gates (1944). Many reasonable suggestions to amend certain phrases were made by respected figures such as W. E. Le Gros Clark, William Howells, Stanley Garn, Kirtley Mather, Ernst Mayr, Wilton Krogman, Melville Herskovits, and Joseph Birdsall.³

However, when the subject turned to the existence of innate mental characteristics for different groups, the fur began to fly. According to the Second Statement, “It is possible, though not proved, that some types of innate capacity for intellectual and emotional responses are commoner in one human group than in another, but it is certain that, within a single group, innate capacities vary as much as, if not more than, they do between different groups” (UNESCO, 1952). The geneticist and left-wing eugenicist Hermann Muller objected to the statement’s downplaying the possibility of a history of differential selection for psychological traits in different races. Other geneticists, especially C. D. Darlington and Ronald Fisher, concurred. The anthropologist Melville Herskovits noted that simply talking about what we know

about culture would have been valuable here. Carleton Coon was blunter in insisting that “racial differences in intelligence may or may not occur.” Even James Neel felt “that just as there are *relatively minor* physical differences between races, so there may well be *relatively minor* mental differences” (emphasis in original). When it came to denying the influence of genetics upon “cultural achievement” Fritz Lenz again demurred. And on the absence of biologically harmful effects of race-mixture, an old controversy among early 20th-century biologists, Darlington again objected, while another former Nazi anthropologist, Hans Weinert, rhetorically questioned “which of the gentlemen who signed the statement would be prepared to marry his daughter to an Australian aboriginal, for example.”

The overall statement, now revised and reconceptualized by a panel of physical anthropologists and geneticists, could still not win unanimous scientific assent. “[C. D.] Darlington, [Ronald] Fisher, [Giuseppe] Genna and [Carleton] Coon are frankly opposed to the Statement.”

Indeed, the assertion of racial equality remained a hot-button issue, both in American society and in academic anthropology, even a century after the Civil War. The legal and political machinery at work during the Civil Rights movement would rely to some extent for a scientific grounding upon Boasian anthropology—emphasizing cultural difference and the malleability of human form at the expense of the older essentialist, craniometric, and hereditarian anthropological traditions. Not only would this fulfill Edward Tylor’s ambition of seeing anthropology as “a reformer’s science,” but it would also expose anthropologists especially to vicious political forces at work in American society in the 1950s.

CRISIS II: PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

If scientists on the right were swimming against an egalitarian tide, scholars on the left were burdened by the vagaries of history. As Karl Marx had astutely written, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please . . . [t]he tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”

In the 1930s, as the Nazi menace loomed, many young intellectuals sought to oppose not only their racialized view of history and society, but also the hypocrisy in America that spoke toward equal rights, but in fact concealed institutionalized mechanisms for denying large groups of people those very rights. Further, since the primary enemies of the Nazis were the Communists, not the Americans, it was reasonable to gravitate to the Communists if your

primary political issue was to combat racism. The Communists were the ones who most aggressively opposed the Nazis and who seemed to stand most idealistically for the creation of a society without racial prejudice.

This bubble burst with two developments: (1) the non-aggression pact signed by Hitler and Stalin (1939), which seemed to indicate that Communism and Nazism could happily coexist; and (2) the entry of the United States into World War II (1941), which created a new synonymy between being pro-American and being anti-Nazi.

A few years later, the Nazis had been beaten, and the Americans had new enemies: the Communists. Suddenly, anyone with a past that involved having actively worked against racism and Nazism twenty years earlier very likely had an old connection to the American Communist Party. And even if they were never formal members themselves, they had friends who had been.

In the early 1950s the president of Rutgers summarily fired Ashley Montagu, who was an untenured full professor in anthropology. Unable to find another comparable academic post, he became a full-time writer and speaker (Spertling, 2000, 2008).

More notorious, however, was the fate of Columbia’s Gene Weltfish (Price, 2004). A respected ethnographer, Weltfish had been teaching at Columbia for many years without tenure. In 1943, at the request of the USO, Weltfish and her senior colleague Ruth Benedict had written a pamphlet called “The Races of Mankind,” ostensibly to tell our boys what they were fighting for, and which enjoyed a wide circulation. The chair of the House Military Affairs Committee, Rep. Andrew J. May of Kentucky (D), found its assertions about the equal intellectual abilities of races to be offensive, indeed subversive, and had the pamphlet withdrawn.⁴

Called to testify before a congressional committee investigating Communist infiltration of academia, Weltfish refused to answer the question whether she had ever been a Communist. Columbia University terminated her a few months later, which made the front page of the *New York Times* (Lissner, 1953), but without effect.

Interestingly, Weltfish was the embodiment of a bizarre caricature that would soon be brandished by segregationists attempting to discredit their ideological opponents: the Jewish Communist anthropologist.

While much has been written of late on the admirable role that Boasian cultural anthropologists played in the American Civil Rights movement of the 1950s (Baker, 1998), rather less has been said about physical anthropology. This is probably because there simply isn’t much in the history of physical anthropology to connect it to progressive politics. Indeed, far from being the “reformer’s science” envisioned by Edward B. Tylor, physical anthropology is burdened by the weight of phrenology, polygenism, racial formalism,

eugenics, and sociobiology. One could make the case that from its inception, physical anthropology's role lay in naturalizing difference, while the rest of the field was busy culturalizing it.⁵

The tensions in the field emerged again in the 1950s, shortly after the Cold Spring Harbor Symposium, Washburn's call for a "new physical anthropology," and the two UNESCO statements. One can detect, retrospectively, four strategies for following the political intellectual climate, while still retaining the authority of physical anthropology as the science of human biological variation.

Washburn, for example, simply defined the study of race out of modern physical anthropology, filling the resultant vacuum with primate field studies and evolutionary genetics.

Another strategy was to replace anatomically designated races with genetically designated ones, as attempted by the Boston University serologist William C. Boyd (1950; 1963). Boyd's critique of race was a critique more specifically of race as traditionally defined anatomically, which triggered a controversy in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* (Stewart, 1951; Strandkov & Washburn, 1951; Birdsell, 1952). There was, at the very least, something crassly self-serving about geneticists asserting that genetic races were somehow "realer" than anatomical ones. Serological races had been the subject of considerable debate since the 1920s (e.g., Young, 1928), and Boyd's 1963 paper identifying 13 human races—Africans, Asians, American Indians, Indo-Dravidians, Melanesians, Micronesians, Indonesians, Australians, and five from Europe—appears to have killed off the field for good. Boyd does not seem to have appreciated either the arbitrariness or the cultural values implicit in identifying five races of Europeans, but only one race of Africans, for example.

A third strategy was to retain the formalism of races, but to dismiss or downplay any correlated differences in behavior or intellect (e.g., Coon et al., 1950; Garn, 1962). This was the most conservative solution, retaining the traditional methods and foci of physical anthropology. Unfortunately, this also concealed a central paradox: If evolution really did divide the human species into a small number of fairly distinct natural groups physically or genetically, then why not mentally as well?

And a fourth would be to re-conceptualize the fundamental patterns of human biological variation and to emphasize familiar aspects of human biology: local diversity and adaptation, and general overall plasticity or adaptability. Thus, Livingstone's famous epigram from 1962, "There are no races, there are only clines." This approach turned out to be most harmonious with the emergence of "critical race theory" by humanists—relativizing and historicizing the concept of race, to de-legitimize it as a scientific concept and reciprocally to illuminate its fundamentally political nature.

Adherents to the idea that the human species indeed came packaged into a small number of relatively discrete, relatively natural units, which might have different physical and mental abilities, were aging and dwindling in number. Their last stand came in the early 1960s when a convergence of interests brought together a political activist named Carleton Putnam, a psychologist named Henry Garrett, an anatomist named Wesley Critz George, a geneticist named Reginald R. Ruggles Gates, and the physical anthropologist Carleton S. Coon (Jackson, 2005).

A philanthropy called the Pioneer Fund had come into existence in 1937 as an outlet for the racist interests of its founder, Wickliffe Draper. Draper had supported the notorious "Race-Crossing in Jamaica" study by Charles Davenport and Morris Steggerda, which purported to show the physical inferiority of interracial hybrids, but was deemed signally incompetent even by those of a similarly eugenical bent (Castle, 1930; Pearson 1930). In the 1940s, Draper supported studies showing the intellectual inferiority of blacks and in the 1950s was subsidizing the work of segregationists like Henry Garrett, who testified for the State in the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* case in 1953 (Winston, 1998; Tucker, 2002; Kenny, 2002).

Ruggles Gates was a Canadian-English plant geneticist, who found a home at Harvard. Rejecting the interbreeding criterion, he argued in the *AJPA* (1944) and in *Human Ancestry* (1948) that human races were so fundamentally different as to be equivalent to species. His 1948 book came with a foreword by Hooton, who politely disavowed it, and would not even recommend it when queried by Robert Yerkes (July 12, 1949, RMYPP). In India, the geneticist J. B. S. Haldane refused to host a visit from Ruggles Gates; in New York, the geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky referred to him privately as "a mutant" (Dobzhansky to Ashley Montagu, July 12, 1947, AMP).

Gates and Garrett served together starting in 1960 as the founding associate editors of *Mankind Quarterly*, funded by Draper. The journal's contents and orientation set off a huge controversy in biological anthropology, loudly denounced by mainstream scholars, notably Juan Comas (1961) and G. A. Harrison (1961). In the journal's first number, Garrett (1961) outlined "the equalitarian dogma"—leveling the accusation that American higher education a generation ago had been hijacked by Jewish Communist anthropologists, led by Franz Boas, promoting the insidious idea of racial equality.

The following year, Carleton Putnam published *Race and Reason*, developing the "scientific" case against school integration, and blaming the influence of those Jewish Communist Boasians once again for the idea of racial equality. The introduction to *Race and Reason* was co-authored by Garrett, Gates, and George (as well as by the editor-in-chief of *Mankind Quarterly*,

Robert Gayre). Moreover, Putnam seemed to have access to some insider's knowledge about the field of anthropology.

[A]nthropologists—apart from their position as equalitarian or non-equalitarian—may be divided into two classes, social and physical. It is the social anthropologists who have led the equalitarian movement although they are the least qualified to pass upon racial biology. The physical anthropologists, along with the physiologists and anatomists, are the ones who are expert in this field. (Putnam, 1961, 51–52)

Besides intimidation there has, of course, been a false indoctrination of our younger scientists, although some hope on this score may be found in the following statement in a letter to me from a distinguished scientist younger than I am, a scientist not a Southerner, who is a recognized international authority on the subject we are considering: "About 25 years ago it seemed to be proved beyond a doubt that man is a cultural animal, solely a creature of the environment, and that there is no inheritance of instinct, intelligence or any other capacity. Everything had to be learned and the man or race that had the best opportunity for learning made the best record. The tide is turning. Heredity is coming back, not primarily through anthropologists but through the zoologists. It is the zoologists, the animal behavior men, who are doing it, and the anthropologists are beginning to learn from them. It will take time, but the pendulum will swing." (Putnam, 1961, 50)

Speculation was rife as to who Putnam's source might be. Meanwhile the American Anthropological Association acted quickly, censuring Putnam's book at their 1961 meeting. The resolution was introduced by the outgoing president, archaeologist Gordon Willey, and Putnam was notified of the resolution afterwards by the incoming AAA president. He fumed back: "It is not sociologists, nor cultural anthropologists, who are best qualified to speak on this subject, but physical anthropologists and geneticists." He was apparently unaware that his correspondent, the incoming AAA president, was in fact a noted physical anthropologist—Sherry Washburn (Putnam to Washburn, Dec. 12, 1961, WCGP).

Putnam, however, had been corresponding and socializing for a few years with a senior physical anthropologist, Carleton Coon of the University of Pennsylvania, the incoming president of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists. In fact, Coon had written to Putnam on June 17, 1960 (CSCP):

Now about 25 years ago the scientific angle was all against you. It seemed to be proved and salted away that man is a cultural animal and there is no inheritance of instinct, intelligence, or anything else. Everything had to be learned, and he who had the best opportunity for learning came out on top.

The tide is turning. Heredity is coming back into fashion, but not through anthropologists. It is the zoologists, the animal behavior men, who are doing it, and the anthropologists are beginning to learn from them. It will take time, but the pendulum will swing.⁶

A few weeks later (Sept. 1, 1960, CSCP), Putnam negotiated with Coon over rewriting the passage so as to conceal its source.

I must find some way of keeping the quote while disguising the source. There are various ways of doing this. Suppose I cut out the "prize-winning" and the "physical" and the "international reputation" and simply referred to the writer as a "Northern anthropologist," would you let that pass?

Coon agreed. He spent early 1962 finishing up his own magnum opus, *The Origin of Races*, and retrofitting the second edition of his popular book, *The Story of Man*, to accommodate his new theory. In particular, he reduced the number of races from six to five, and changed the order in which they evolved. Coon had written in the first edition, "The Mongoloids are probably not as ancient as the Negroids" (1954, 198), which would no longer do, as he was now trying to associate a ranking of civilizational (i.e., intellectual) capacities with a ranking of racial age, and the Mongoloids would have to become more ancient than the Negroids.

As president of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, he was the sole dissenter against a motion to condemn Carleton Putnam's book, introduced by Stanley Garn, and he stormed out of the business meeting rather than "preside over such a craven lot" (Coon, 1981, 335; Lasker, 1999, 149).

Coon promptly sent Putnam excerpts from *The Story of Man*, as well as comments on a manuscript by the anatomist Wesley Critz George. By June, Putnam was writing to his correspondents that "the president of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard and a native of New England, states that recent discoveries indicate the Negro to be 200,000 years behind the White race on the ladder of evolution" (Putnam to James A. Moss, June 4, 1962, CSCP; Putnam to Earnest S. Cox, June 22, 1962, WCGP). Wesley Critz George's manuscript was a pamphlet called "The Biology of the Race Problem," and had been commissioned by the governor of Alabama, and underwritten by Wickliffe Draper. George was a crusader against the races intermingling—in any sense of the term—and his "scientific" study was intended to demonstrate the mental inferiority of the Negro and the left-wing anthropological conspiracy to suppress that knowledge.

At less than 100 pages, the pamphlet was distributed widely in the South. Released on October 3, 1962, the pamphlet also had two curious citations.

One was a summary of Coon's new theory, although directing the reader to the new edition of *The Story of Man*, which had been published the previous May, but did not actually articulate the radical new theory. The other was a footnote which read, "Full documentation of Dr. Coon's position will be found in his *The Origin of Races*, to be published by Alfred Knopf in the autumn of 1962."

On the same day, Carleton Putnam took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times*, in the form of an open letter to President Kennedy, directing him to read George's pamphlet, demonstrating the biologically based inequality of the races. A week later, the *Times* published a letter by the cultural anthropologist Morton Fried, calling attention to the resolutions by both the AAA and AAPA condemning Putnam's scientific racism and case for segregation. On October 24, the *Times* published a response from Henry Garrett and Wesley Critz George, quoting Coon's *The Origin of Races*, which they noted had been published on October 15. But the date on their letter was actually October 14.

In other words, not only were the segregationists invoking Coon's work to support their case, but they had privileged access to it prior to publication. The actual publication of *The Origin of Races* was therefore eagerly anticipated. Coon was deluged by queries about what he really meant. The first, and most obvious, response to the segregationists' invocation of Coon is that they were somehow misrepresenting or misinterpreting him (Price & Sanders, 1962), a position Coon himself never adopted. Coon adopted, rather, an apparently naive (if transparently self-interested) position of apolitical scientific detachment. In a response he wrote, but ultimately declined to send to the *New York Times* (CSCP), he articulated this position:

I submit that I have neither finally proved nor the anthropological communities utterly disproved the superiority or inferiority of any group of people, which are matters presently beyond all of us. . . . Meanwhile let those of us who call ourselves scientists stick to our work, and let our books be read by everyone interested in what we have to say, without prejudice of any kind, remembering that for us who call ourselves scientists to enter into political disputes only breaks down the communication between us, and will hinder the progress of science in the end.

But people on both sides of the political spectrum saw the political value of Coon's work. On the left, most anthropologists deferred politely to Coon's scientific stature, while decrying the segregationists' apparent abuse of his scholarly work. Theodosius Dobzhansky, the great evolutionary geneticist, was the one who ultimately called the question on Coon: either Coon didn't mind being misrepresented by the segregationists (which would be so non-normative

as to be remarkable), or he wasn't actually being misrepresented by them at all (which would suggest that his book really was intended to provide some kind of naturalistic justification for racist practices).

Dobzhansky, it emerged, was an ideal person to go after Coon. As a fruit fly geneticist, a member of the Russian Orthodox church, and an émigré from the Soviet Union, he was especially immune to the charges of being a participant in the Jewish-Communist-anthropologist cabal. (Putnam later numbered him incorrectly as among the students of Boas.)

Asked to review *The Origin of Races* for the *Saturday Review*, Dobzhansky wrote the review, submitted it, and mailed a copy as a professional courtesy to Coon himself. Coon had actually written him rather obsequiously a few months earlier, upon reading Dobzhansky's *Mankind Evolving*:

I have made an astonishing discovery. What you say is almost identical to what I am saying in my book, *The Origin of Races* . . .

We have obviously drawn on the same sources and come up with the same results. This makes me very happy, because now I have much more confidence that I am right. (Coon to Dobzhansky, May 26, 1962, TDF)

Dobzhansky, however, did not find their ideas all that similar, and was politely critical of the degree of parallel evolution that would be necessary to change five subspecies of *Homo erectus* separately into five subspecies of *Homo sapiens*, as Coon's theory held. But more bluntly, he held Coon at least partly responsible for the way the segregationists were making from his work.

It is most unfortunate that some semantic mischief in Coon's work has made it usable as grist for racist mills. A scientist should not and cannot eschew studies on the racial differentiation of mankind, or examine all possible hypotheses about it, for fear that his work will be misused. But neither can he disclaim all responsibility for such misuses. . . . There are absolutely no findings in Coon's book that even suggest that some human races are superior or inferior to others in their capacity for culture or civilization. There are, however, some unfortunate misstatements that are susceptible to such misinterpretation. (Dobzhansky, 1963)

Coon, however, would have none of it, and not only prevailed upon the editor to pull Dobzhansky's review (later published in both *Scientific American* and *Current Anthropology*), but threatened the geneticist with a lawsuit as well:

You accused me of "mischievously" altering my style so as to provide easy quotes for political people. That is libel. (Coon to Dobzhansky, Oct. 29 1962, CSCP)

And Dobzhansky wrote him right back:

If you “mischievously altered” your “style so as to provide easy quotes for political peoples,” I was unaware of that. No such allegation is contained in my review. Should I then offer you apologies for what I did not write? What I did write is that you got yourself “into semantic mischief,” and this makes your “book usable as grist for racist mills.” (Dobzhansky to Coon, Oct. 29, 1962, CSCP)

Coon would ultimately even complain to Detlev Bronk, president of Rockefeller University, Dobzhansky’s home at the time, and in the pages of *Science*. And yet he would not repudiate the segregationists’ apparent abuse of his work (Jackson, 2001). The reason, of course, is that the segregationists were not abusing it at all; they were citing it in the way the author intended for it to be cited. There was nothing to repudiate. Coon hoped to say anything he pleased as a scientific authority, without assuming responsibility or bearing consequences for his words and ideas.

With the publication of *The Origin of Races*, and Coon’s help with Putnam’s *Race and Reason* and George’s *The Biology of the Race Problem*, the segregationists had good reason to number him as an ally. Coon was quickly invited to join the editorial board of the *Mankind Quarterly* on Ruggles Gates’s death (he declined the honor, while expressing sympathy with the cause). The connection between Coon and Gates was not terribly obscure, either: Coon’s racial taxonomy (which split subSaharan Africans, and lumped Americans into Asians) was identical to the one presented by Gates in *Human Ancestry*, but at a lower taxonomic level; and Gates had acknowledged Coon’s assistance in reading and commenting on his 1948 book (see Eckhardt, 2000).

Ultimately, Coon was unable to evade the responsibility and consequences of his work. Sherry Washburn, in his 1962 Presidential Address to the American Anthropological Association, consigned Coon’s work to the trash bin of history (as he had been doing for about a decade). A tradition emerged among Coon’s friends that Washburn had personally attacked Coon in the address (Shipman, 1994). This seems unlikely, given that Washburn’s principal argument was to sideline Coon’s work, by defining it as anachronistic (Washburn, 1963)—an intellectual survival, perhaps analogous to that of the horseshoe crab. In any event, standing against the evils of scientific racism and whatever support it may have enjoyed within the ranks of the scholarly community, this was arguably American physical anthropology’s finest moment.

CONCLUSION

The aftermath of the Nazi crisis in the 1930s and the segregationist crisis of the 1960s is that physical anthropology largely abandoned the study of race, to the population geneticists on one side, and to the cultural anthropologists on the other. Two influential texts of the 1970s, for example, Frank Johnston’s *Microevolution of Human Populations* (1973) and Jane Underwood’s *Human Variation and Human Microevolution* (1979), could get by without even mentioning “race” in the index.

The problem with that generation’s approach to race is that it effectively undermines what is really biological anthropology’s major contribution to the study of race—mediating the cultural and natural realms. It is not that the problem of race is reducible to natural patterns of allele frequencies (on the one hand) or to political violence (on the other), but rather that race is itself the result of a constant negotiation between objective patterns of difference (i.e., biology) and subjective perceptions of otherness (i.e., culture).

Biological anthropology has always been uniquely situated to speak authoritatively on race, as a result of partaking of both anthropology and biology. The 20th century was the century in which the domains of the cultural and the natural were set apart and analytically fenced off from one another, which was itself one of the major (and largely unheralded) advances in modern scientific thought. The 21st century will be the one in which the fences come down and we look once again at the ways in which our reality is a co-construction of what is “out there”—the naturalistic product of human microevolution—and what is “in here”—the culturalistic product of local social and political history. As scholars such as Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway have been articulating it, we study not so much the boundary of discrete nature and culture, but an organically integrated “nature culture” (Goodman et al., 2003).

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

- FBP: Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society.
 AMP: Ashley Montagu Papers, American Philosophical Society.
 TDP: Theodosius Dobzhansky Papers, American Philosophical Society.
 EAHP: Earnest A. Hooton Papers, Peabody Museum, Harvard.
 RMPY: Robert Mearns Yerkes Papers, Sterling Library, Yale.
 CSCP: Carleton S. Coon Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian.
 WCGP: Wesley Critz George Papers, University of North Carolina.

ENDNOTES

1. It should be noted that Boas's liberal humanism and work against the stability of racial form, and his stance against racism, are all continuous with the work of his mentor Virchow, and are not necessarily related at all to his Jewish origins (*contra* Sarich & Miele, 2004).
2. All quotations are from UNESCO, 1952.
3. Conspicuous among the non-respondents was Earnest Hooton.
4. May himself, ironically enough, was pardoned by President Truman in 1950 after being convicted of accepting bribes, which he apparently did not consider subversive or unAmerican.
5. Although eugenics was in many ways a progressive movement, it was also elitist, totalitarian, and in most versions, racist.
6. Coon's perspicacity here is worth noting, given the publication of E. O. Wilson's *Sociobiology* fifteen years later, and its attendant controversy.

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