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ABSTRACT

The editors of this volume proclaim their intention to demonstrate the revolutionary influence of Indigenous thinkers on the ideas of Franz Boas, but the work falls far short of their aim. Despite the inclusion of a number of interesting contributions dealing with remarkable individuals, with one exception none of the fourteen papers attempts to make such a case.

KEYWORDS

Boas; Indigenous thinkers

The reputation of Franz Boas has gone through several phases through the years. To generalize crudely, during the height of his activity and influence he was considered the leading anthropologist in America, if not the world, as well as a formidable figure in the fight against racism, fascism, and inequality. As such he was idolized by those on his side of the political divide and execrated by the racial determinists, nativists, and enemies of free thought and speech. Not long after his death, his powerful political role was forgotten and his image in much of the profession of anthropology was seriously tarnished by new paradigms that stressed a form of science that sought “laws” of the sort “mature” sciences such as physics and chemistry required. Marvin Harris, for one, represented him as the obstruction in the way of anthropology as a true science (Harris, 1968). Then the “postmodern” era did away with this requirement, questioning all “science” and “truth,” but in our more recent period of the celebration of diversity, Franz Boas has had a new incarnation as the champion of the Native, the different, and an “alternative approach to modernity.” The editors of this volume of essays celebrate the association between Boas and “the Indigenous” in a novel way, not so much stressing what Boas taught the rest of us about Native peoples but what “his Indigenous compatriots” taught him.

Book jacket blurbs give evidence of the intentions of authors and editors and these are very clear:

–A compelling study that charts the influence of Indigenous thinkers on Franz Boas ...

–*Stunning. A revelatory and transformative volume for our understanding of what Boas became, thanks to the instruction of his Indigenous compatriots.* [James C. Scott].

As the editors put it in the introduction:

The diversity of communities linked by Boasian anthropology testifies to the non-Western origins of some significant modern knowledge. ... [T]he classically defined attributes of Boasian anthropology—from its rejection of the evolutionism and racial typologies inherited from the nineteenth century to its methodological imperatives for thick description—were constituted across sets of ethnographic landscapes not only by professional ethnographers but also by Indigenous intellectuals. ... The interrelations of these actors with Western science yielded a redefinition of the concept of culture, remaking it from a static social status—imposed by the colonizer to justify the permanent subordination of the colonized—into a dynamic social process in which anyone may participate, connecting the expertise of all the world’s peoples. (vii)

In the light of the expression of this noble and agreeable vision, it is surprising how few of the essays in this collection illustrate the theme. Most don’t even try; in fact only one of the 14 can be said to grapple with it directly—Isaiah Lorado Wilner’s lead-off chapter, “Transformation Masks: Recollecting the Indigenous Origins of Global Consciousness.” Most of the contributions are scholarly, interesting, enlightening, but they do not demonstrate “*the influence of Indigenous thinkers on Franz Boas.*” One group of papers concentrates exclusively or almost entirely on European inspirations for Boas’s thought and understandings (those by Ryan Carr, Michael Silverstein, Harry Liebersohn, James Tully), while Martha Hodes’ detailed exploration of Boas’s findings of “utter confusion and contradiction” in the classification of human skin color is based on his direct confrontation with the problem.

A second set of essays deals with outstanding students of Boas who would appear to have been more the recipients of Boas’s inspiration than the source of it (William Jones, Archie Phinney, Zora Neal Hurston, Rüdiger Bilden, and Gilberto Freyre). Two other papers discuss “Indigenous” intellectuals whose brilliance was independent of Boas and of whom Boas was possibly unaware (Haitian-born Antenor Firmin and Edward Wilmot Blyden [born in St. Thomas], and Raphael Armattoe from Togoland). Others who make brief appearances are W. E. B. DuBois and Dr. Carlos Montezuma, while the Harvard-trained Indigenous Peruvian archeologist, Julio C. Tello gets a full chapter.

The editors make the case repeatedly in the introduction, claiming, for example, that in part I, “We examine a group of Indigenous, Africana, and European concepts of Enlightenment—transformation, freedom, expression, and evolution—that all proved crucial to Boas’s intellectual development” (xiv). There are excellent papers in this volume, worth discussing in detail, and we are presented with a wonderful cast of characters, but except for

Isaiah Wilner's paper this claim is only borne out by the reference to European sources.

Wilner begins his paper with a stirring proposal for a major—a monumental—"new narrative," a reorientation of thinking about world history and modernity. "It argues that Indigenous people were no mere recipients of history. ... They were inventors of modernity, innovators on a global stage who transformed the lives of people beyond their communities" (3). "Through their idea power—their agency as makers, shapers, and long-distance communicators of worlds of thought—Indigenous people contributed to the formation of global consciousness: the modern perception that the world is one and that all people belong equally to it" (3–4). Wilner credits the anthropologists (witting or not) as the medium through which Indigenous intellectuals sent their messages out into the world, and above all it was George Hunt who "turned [Boas] from the sign-based project of classification toward a new mode of communication in which the anthropologist recorded Indigenous messages and transmitted them to the West" (4).

The author observes young Franz Boas in 1885 at the beginning his life-long engagement with the Indians of the Northwest Coast of North America, when he spent rich and exciting time with a group of Bella Coola men in Berlin and watched them dance and act, studied their language, and marveled over the masks they used to tell stories. "It was due to the influence of Indigenous performers that his life veered in a new direction and began to take consequential shape," says Wilner (9), but he has a far more detailed and complex tale to tell. His chapter contains a close and ingenious reading of Boas's relations with Kwakwaka'wakw individuals and above all with George Hunt. Hunt is credited by Wilner with being the purposeful agent who would "convert Boas from the study of signs, which may be divorced from their referents, to the study of messages, which retain the meanings of their speakers, thus producing an anthropology of selves" (xv).

For a decade Boas had used masks as signs: clues to a vanishing past that he believed Indigenous people could not know. Now, for the first time, he asked Indigenous people for their thoughts. He looked to masks not as signs of the history of a people to be categorized by an outsider but as messages to communicate from within. The masks, he learned, were sources of insight into Indigenous knowledge not because they defined a cultural type but because they expressed individual lives and standpoints (26).

By focusing on Boas's interest in masks, material objects that can be sketched, photographed, categorized, and hung on museum walls, Wilner makes it seem as though young Franz was one-dimensional and naïve until Hunt converted him. But our hero had previously spent a year among the

people of Baffin Island studying *their* ways, language, knowledge, music and arts, and their humanity. In fact, Wilner notes that, as early as his first encounter with a group at a potlatch in 1886, Boas “talked about himself as the people wanted to see him, not as a collector but as a transmitter of information” (11). George Hunt was certainly essential for much of his primary ethnographic enterprise, but did Franz Boas require such a fundamental transformation of his thinking?

The editors write of the next chapter, “Franz Boas in *Africana* Philosophy,” as “Lewis R. Gordon’s exegesis of *Africana* philosophy” wherein he reconstructs the Haitian anthropologist Antenor Firmin’s “struggle against dehumanization” (xv). I was disappointed to find that barely three of the chapter’s 20 pages were devoted to Firmin but more to Boas on race, hardly an untrodden field. I was not previously acquainted with Firmin (nor, as far as we know, was Boas), but I am very pleased to have been alerted to the existence of his remarkable intellect and his 1885 book, now in English as *The Equality of the Human Races: Positive Anthropology*, with a fine Introduction by Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (Firmin 1999).

In the third chapter, Ryan Carr, professor of English, offers a complex discussion of what he calls “expressive enlightenment” (64). He discourses on the similarities and differences between Daniel G. Brinton and Boas, looking backward at the influence of Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Condillac. Eventually he offers “sideways” glances at the Columbia professor of comparative literature, Joel Spingarn, and, more importantly, Dr. Carlos Montezuma, physician and activist, born to Yavapai Apache parents, one of the founders of the Society of American Indians, “whose rhetoric of worldmaking leads Ryan Carr on a transatlantic venture into the affect of modernity” (xv). However, there is no evidence Boas and Montezuma were aware of each other.

With the title “‘Culture’ Crosses the Atlantic: The German Sources of *The Mind of Primitive Man*,” Harry Liebersohn reminds us of the extent to which Boas was steeped in the developing German scientific tradition. Eschewing the continuing debate over the ultimate sources of German anthropology, whether in Herderian-Humboldtian-Goetheian humanism or fighting German “antihumanism,” Liebersohn looks at the more proximal sources and focuses on one important contemporaneous influence. That was the pioneering work on ethnomusicology of Carl Stumpf, psychologist at the University of Berlin. At the dawning of the age of sound recording, Stumpf was the center of a great project for the documenting of the world’s music, and he argued against the notion of the “primitivity” of “primitive” music, against an evolution from simple to complex, and argued for an “identical intelligence” rather than any “primitive intelligence” (101). This gave support to Boas’s developing arguments. As grist for their mill, the

editors seize upon the fact that Stumpf worked repeatedly with one Nuxalk (Bella Coola) singer “until he [Stumpf] could decipher a musical system that included non-Western tone intervals” (100). Blackhawk and Wilner write, “Though treated as an object (or Other), Nuskilusta imposed his subjectivity (or Self) upon Stumpf, correcting his views of Indigenous culture and expression” (xv). I do not know how they know that Nuskilusta was treated as an object.

Chapter 5, “Rediscovering the World of Franz Boas: Anthropology, Equality/Diversity, and World Peace,” by James Tully, “is an attempt to rediscover the world of Franz Boas by examining his work on two general (non-Indigenous) world visions” (111). Tully labels the first of these CPV for “the civilized/primitive vision” that Boas argued “serves to legitimate the racism, imperialism, genocide, and militarism of the civilized nations,” and the second the EDV for “equality/diversity vision.” The latter, if generally adopted, “would lead away from racism, imperialism, and war toward world peace” (111). He expands at some length on this theme, drawing upon Boas’s political writings as well as the two editions of *The Mind of Primitive Man*.

Michael Silverstein’s “Of Two Minds about Minding Language in Culture” demonstrates the way in which Franz Boas systematically dismantled the evolutionary and racially biased beliefs about “primitive languages” that were prevalent when he began his career. He did this, not by some formulaic “relativism,” but through the application of empirical evidence and solid critical reasoning by a mind freed of the prejudices that had blinded his predecessors.

Turning to another realm of Boasian activity, Martha Hodes illustrates the futility he experienced during the World’s Columbian Exhibition of 1893 when faced with the task of measuring and describing the skin color of American Indians. While Boas was concerned with scientific problems of racial typology and variations within types, in the wider society of that era skin color evaluation was important for determining the “race” of individuals both for purposes of racial segregation of “Negroes” and, Hodes says, for determining “fractions of Native American ‘blood,’ with the unstated intent of absorbing Indians into whiteness, necessary for the appropriation of Native lands” (189).

The author discusses the attempts and difficulties other investigators had with the problem of defining and classifying individuals by their skin color as well as Boas, who realized not only the futility of that quest but the wider problem of racial typology. It has long been recognized that Franz Boas was caught between his developing recognition of the fallacy of racial classification (“heredity occurs only in family lines” and a “race” is “a group of people descended from a common ancestry” [Lewis 2015, 29–30])

and his inability to completely break from the then-current canons of “science.” Hodes makes this point, citing Vernon Williams (1996), among others, but she adds another dimension to the discussion. Noting that Boas didn’t publicize the failure to measure and describe human complexion, she suggests that he might have recognized “that a profusion of labels produced by the persistent striving for scientific objectivity in the quest to map human complexion could serve to shore up racism” (202).

The rest of the chapters, with one distinctive exception, are about individuals with varying degrees of relation to Boas, from a great deal to none. Sean Hanretta tells the tale of two figures, one of whom formed his ideas well before Boas published his, and the other who knew Boas’s work so well that he published the great man’s obituary in *Man*, the journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (Armattoe 1943).¹ Edward Wilmot Blyden, was born in 1832 on St. Thomas in the (then) Danish West Indies, lived in Liberia, and died in Sierra Leone in 1912. Blyden was a towering figure in the history of “Africana” thought (to employ the editors’ term). Long considered “the father of Pan-Africanism” and a pioneer of Afrocentrism, the polymath Blyden, pastor, educator, writer, politician, had a long and distinguished life and left a major legacy and memory—honored in the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. Raphael Ernest Grail Armattoe, born in 1913 in German-ruled Togoland, of Ewe ethnicity, had a significant career in medicine and biological anthropology and was deeply involved in the politics of decolonization—which apparently cost him his life. He died in Hamburg in 1953, at the age of 40, by poisoning. Hanretta’s wide-ranging article considers the varying uses of the culture concept as they were employed (deployed?) by these two remarkable people.

Julio C. Tello, the dominant figure in Peruvian archaeology in the first half of the 20th century, is featured in Christopher Heaney’s “Seeing Like an Inca: Julio C. Tello, Indigenous Archaeology, and Pre-Columbian Trepanation in Peru.” Although Tello, a Quechua-speaking Indigenous Peruvian, received his archaeological training from Harvard, rather un-Boasian terrain in those days, he and Boas did share one trait: they were both disliked and opposed by Alex Hrdlicka (365). Heaney recounts Tello’s history and rise to prominence through his intelligence, shrewdness, training as a surgeon as well as an archaeologist—and his almost lifelong connection with pre-Columbia skulls. Most importantly, he was able to establish his claim that the many skulls that had been trephined—had holes in them—had been subjected to medical procedures rather than having been victims of violence. By achieving this in the face of great skepticism from many in the scientific community, Tello was able to raise the

estimation of his pre-Columbian ancestors from mindless violent savages to pioneers of surgery and medicine.

Maria Lucia Pallares-Burke presents us with “A Two-Headed Thinker: Rüdiger Bilden, Gilberto Freyre, and the Reinvention of Brazilian Identity.” Bilden was a promising student, an immigrant from Germany just before the start of World War I, who entered Columbia University in 1917 and was first inspired by William R. Shepherd, Columbia professor and one of the few American historians of Latin America at that time. Rüdiger also became attached to his fellow German immigrant, Franz Boas, and began to apply Boas’s style of thought to the study of Brazil, making a field trip to Pernambuco, partly inspired by Boas, in 1925. Gilberto Freyre, from Recife in Pernambuco, entered Columbia in 1921 where he started a master’s thesis under Shepherd, and the two young men became close—the older man as Freyre’s intellectual mentor. As it turned out, Freyre would write the great Brazilian classic, *Casa-Grande & Senzale*, usually translated as *The Masters and the Slaves* (Freyre 1963), and two sequels, and would die at 87 celebrated as one of the greatest Brazilian writers and intellectuals of all time. Rüdiger Bilden published a two-page forerunner to Freyre’s masterpiece in *The Nation* in 1929 (“Brazil: Laboratory of Civilization”), circulated some brilliant proposals, and died in total obscurity, out of contact with his friends, at the age of 87. (The editors refer to Freyre’s “loving theft of Boas disciple Rüdiger Bilden’s ideas about Brazil” [xvii]).

Although not at first particularly influenced by Boas, Freyre would later claim to have been very much indebted to him as he discarded his earlier acceptance of the “scientific racism” and eugenics of his time and made the celebration of miscegenation, diversity, hybridity, and Indigenous and black culture in Brazil the core of his intellectual and literary outlook.

In “‘A New Indian Intelligentsia’: Archie Phinney and the Search for a Radical Native American Modernity,” Benjamin Balthaser writes of one of Boas’s three noted American Indian proteges and collaborators. Whereas Ella Deloria and William O. Jones devoted their lives (a tragically short one in Jones’s case) to academic research, Archie Phinney chose the route of activism and public service on behalf of Indian welfare. A member of the Nez Perce nation, after Phinney graduated from the University of Kansas, then “[e]namored of anthropology—whatever its faults, it gave him an opportunity to consider Native Americans as historical actors—Phinney went to study at Columbia University as a student of Franz Boas” (261).² After four years of productive study and research (completing a volume, *Nez Percé Texts* [Phinney 1934], and more), in 1932 Phinney took up teaching and research at the Leningrad Academy of Sciences with Boas’s encouragement and support. Boas had close connections with Russian anthropologists as a result of his organization of the Jesup North Pacific

Expedition (1897–1902) and he was interested in “Soviet methods for the incorporation of Siberian natives into the Soviet state” (Willard 2004, 9). Phinney studied Soviet minority policies, especially with respect to Siberian hunting and gathering peoples as well as Indigenous peoples of the Caucasus. He received a doctorate in Leningrad for his work on Nez Perce (Numipu) history and culture in 1937.

On his return to the United States, again at Boas’s suggestion, he began work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) under the reign of the “prophetic” Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, who was determined to reform the Bureau and bring the New Deal to the Indians. Phinney was assigned to the Reorganization Division working under the terms of the Indian Reorganization Act, “to perform studies of American Indian governments, and to determine their readiness for the potential move toward self-governance” (Willard 2004, 15). He continued to work for the BIA in various roles until his early death in 1949 at the age of 45.

In 2002, *Wicazo Sa Review* edited and published a manuscript that Phinney wrote in 1936 or 1937 containing both a critique of the situation of his people (Numipu) as well as recommendations for a better approach to the future of American Indians. Referring to what he hoped from the New Deal policies he wrote,

The principal objective of the new Indian policy is to make Indian groups economically self-supporting on the basis of cooperative (tribal) organization and corporate (common) ownership of the means of production. ... This present effort, promoted and subsidized as it is by the government, is undoubtedly a practical means of arousing the Indians from morbid lethargy. The present task, from any point of view, must be to make Indians participate in American life as alert, modern communities struggling for their own interests. (Phinney 2002, 41)

Balthaser discusses Archie Phinney’s critique of past and contemporary policies as well as his prescriptions for the future, noting the lessons apparently drawn from his experience with Marxist thought as well as Soviet praxis regarding its Indigenous peoples. Phinney was also one of the founders of the National Congress of American Indians, an organization of like-minded members whom he considered to be the “new Indian intelligentsia.” He thought that this group of younger and largely non-reservation Indians “would serve ... as a way to respond to the meaning of being Indian in the modern world” (271). The author concludes, “Phinney thus proved through his own example that modernity and sovereignty are not opposites; rather, a radical and race-conscious modernity could be one way for American Indians to express their sovereignty” (274).

Kiara M. Vigil presents the saga of another of Boas’s Indian students, William O. Jones, in “The Death of William Jones: Indian, Anthropologist, Murder Victim.” Jones was Boas’s second successful Ph.D. student at

Columbia University (1904, after A. L. Kroeber in 1901) and one whose accomplishments, knowledge, dedication, and personal traits the teacher prized highly. Tragically, “he fell a victim to his devotion to science” (Boas 1909, 139), murdered by Ilongot men, the Indigenous people among whom he was living and doing research in Luzon. In his tribute to his late student and colleague Franz Boas wrote,

In possession of a fund of knowledge, he was modest and averse to display. Persistent and courageous in carrying out the work to which he had once devoted his energies, he did not shrink from privations and danger. His uprightness, courage, and modesty commanded the respect and love of all who came into close contact with him. (1909,139)

Professor Vigil is more critical. In her analysis, once William Jones accepted the charge of the Field Museum of Natural History to carry out anthropological investigations in the newly acquired American colony of the Philippines, he became an Indigenous imperialist (219) and an “agent of American empire” (217). It is clear that Jones was not possessed of the anthropological wisdom that we all have now; he was trained as a linguist rather than an ethnographer and he was a man of an earlier time, the late Victorian era, before we all became sensitized to extreme cultural differences and understood the lessons of moderate cultural relativism. Although he was not there as an official, a missionary, or a teacher, but a researcher, he could be high-handed, intolerant, and showed mighty bad judgement on the day he was murdered. He let his frustration get the better of him and threatened to detain the elder (“chief”) of the people he was with. But is it reasonable to speculate that his murder was “the resistance of the Ilongot to the imposition of an empire” (223)? It is a clever idea, but does it really represent what the men were thinking or their motivations when they suddenly slashed and stabbed him to death?

Vigil quotes from a letter to a friend about the ignorance of the American military of the “natives.” Jones wrote, “It is the same old thing we have become familiar with in our country: army officers have been stationed for years among some of our most interesting Indians, and yet know nothing about them” (Rideout 1912, 130). She interprets this as evidence that he “repositioned himself as a new kind of imperial agent. He could tame and balance the drive of empire, humanizing its prospects, owing to his success as a ‘civilized’ Indian” (217). According to the (unfortunately named) video documentary “Head Hunting William Jones,” he wrote to his superior at the museum that he would have accepted a position as a governor of a sub-province, saying “that the essential thing wanted was a man who would be in sympathy with the people and would get them in something like the right attitude toward the government and its purposes” (Davis 2016). This supports Professor Vigil’s point, but

I would like to have seen more appreciation of the pressures on him as a complex person and less speculation about him as a stereotyped Indian, along with sparser use of labels like “American civilization” and “Indigenous anthropologist.” (Jones once said that he was “more white than Indian” [Rideout 1912, 27].) It might be charitable to see him first of all as an unfortunate human being, out of his depth living among men used to killing their enemies and removing their heads (see Rosaldo 1980), and less of an object lesson of American colonialism.

Zora Neale Hurston has to be included in any work on the Boas Circle, but the subject of Eve Dunbar’s contribution to the growing Hurston “industry” (Carby 1990, 72) would probably not have been pleased with the product. Hurston wrote in her autobiography, “What I wanted to tell was a story about a man, and from what I had read and heard, Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem. I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color” (1984, 206). “Woman on the Verge of a Cultural Breakdown: Zora Neale Hurston in Haiti and the Racial Privilege of Boasian Relativism” is deeply mired in the race and gender problem and the person—and what a person she was!—gets lost. Professor Dunbar indulges in complex analyses, offering paradoxical interpretations that, as far as I can see, have little basis.³

For example, in *Tell My Horse*, in the chapter “Women in the Caribbean,” Hurston offers a devastating view of the way “darkish men” treat women. It is not a “scientific” account; it is largely based on hearsay and anecdote, with a dose of ethnocentrism. (“The text is considered Hurston’s least culturally sensitive, most blatant work of US imperial gazing” [Hurston 1990:243].) She gives her account in her rather breezy way, with some sarcasm, but it seems straightforward and heartfelt. Dunbar has a different way of reading it: “I would encourage us to understand Hurston’s assumption of the identity of an ‘American woman’ [wasn’t she?] as an attempt to project her universal anthropological voice upon an imperial context” (248). I would encourage us to see it, more parsimoniously, as an outspoken woman condemning sexist attitudes and nasty behavior toward women in another culture.

Hurston’s chapter about zombies in Haiti, of course, gets major emphasis. What I read, again, as a straightforward account of the tales that people tell about zombies becomes, in Dunbar’s telling, an “ethnographic strategy of resistance,” and a “most masterful intervention in the metadiscourse of American anthropological methods” (249). Somehow those stories of people who die or disappear and are then discovered to be doing hard labor, in rags, sans affect or consciousness,

... tell an untold story about race, gender, and anthropology. In Hurston's work we can begin to understand that *the horror of zombie existence lies not in the fear that the undead might mindlessly devour the living, but in the reality that the act of documenting zombies speaks volumes about the horrors of the discipline into which Hurston was trained to write*. When one looks upon Hurston's snapshot of Felicia Felix-Mentor, the first "zombie" ever captured on film, we are forced to face her proposition. Hurston is asking her readers to think deeply about the limits of "looking" at a black culture through the lens of American anthropology. (232; emphasis added).

Really?

In fact, in her autobiography Hurston is very pleased that she took the photo of a poor, sick old woman, which today we consider a terrible invasion of privacy (Hurston, 1984, 205). Just how Professor Dunbar arrived at this very different and paradoxically deep insight into the mind of her subject escapes me.⁴

Eve Dunbar builds on what she calls the "racial privilege of Boasian relativism." She argues that Hurston's work in Haiti was badly compromised because the "deep relativism" that her teacher Ruth Benedict could practice was not available to her as a black American woman. In an unpublished essay, "If I Were a Negro," Benedict "imagines herself 'suffering' [Dunbar's quotation marks] under the social stigma of race." We are told that "what reads as *an acute capacity to imagine and empathize with the culture of others owes much of its possibility to Benedict's access to aspects of white supremacy*," but this ability is "inaccessible to Hurston" because she is a "black person living in the Caribbean" (244, my italics). The argument is a bit more complex, but not much. If this is the case, how is it that so many Black women writers can exercise their empathetic imagination, akin to Benedict's effort to imagine herself in another's skin, to write marvelous novels and short stories that involve characters of different "racial" and class backgrounds in different situations and locales?

The chapter by Audra Simpson, "Why White People Love Franz Boas; or, The Grammar of Indigenous Dispossession," is a peculiar piece for this volume. Not only does it not conform to the theme of the book, it is an attempt to trash its hero. Nor does the author in any way address her title, unless her answer is that white people are in favor of the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and think that Boas was, too. This paper is a confused attempt at character assassination based on a misreading of a couple of passages of *The Mind of Primitive Man*.

It begins with epigrams by the two villains of the piece, Lewis Henry Morgan and Franz Boas. The Morgan quote, "Our Indian relations, from the foundation of the Republic to the present moment, have been administered with reference to the ultimate advantage of the government itself" (Morgan 1922, 121), comes from his discussion of the evils done to the Indian, calling for more honorable treatment. Interestingly, in the same pages, he claims that the "sentiment" that *"The destiny of the Indian is*

extermination” (his italics) “... is not only founded on erroneous views, but it has been prejudicial to the Indian himself” (1922, 120–121; my italics). Now, this declaration might not sound too bad for a white man in 1851, when Morgan’s book was originally published—it sounds very much like a major point of Simpson’s, actually—but unfortunately Morgan wrote of “*Our Indian relations*” (italics Simpson’s) and this is apparently a sign of “possession” by that white man. Yet—is it possible that he could he have been expressing a feeling of kinship to the Indigenous peoples by saying “our Indian relations”? (But this would be presumptuous, I guess.)

Briefly, this paper consists of a series of red herrings, false trails leading nowhere, trying to tie Boas to Morgan, with no actual demonstrated connections, and linking both of them to settler colonialism. I am impelled to mention at least one such aspect of the paper that implicates our field and its history. Simpson draws upon Mark Rifkin’s book, *When Did Indians Become Straight?* (Rifkin 2011), in Simpson’s words: “a crucial intervention that demonstrates the biopolitical techniques of settler society to render Indigenous romance, governance and philosophical systems knowable and governable. ... The system relies on a model-driven social science that is blind to a people’s true family relationships, circuits of affection, and modes of governance” (173). According to this invention, it was through the study of “kinship” (her scare quotes) that “much was effaced: philosophical order, political order, and the practice and representation of sovereignty” and thus by reducing “Indigenous life to a discernible unit of analysis, the clan, meaning and political possibility—sovereignty, romance, gender formation—are served up for governmental management by the state” (173).

Where is the logic or the history in this claim? When were kinship studies developed and how widely known were they; who read them and understood them and took them to heart and then applied them to the governing of Indigenous peoples? As I read the record, Europeans began invading America about 1492—North America a century later—and did quite a job of “managing” the Indigenous population (primarily through displacement and extermination) without any reference to sibs, clans, gens, or bifurcate merging. Morgan’s magnificent contribution to the beginning of actual kinship studies was not published until 1871, and we may wonder how many administrators and settlers read it and needed its discovery of different sorts of kinship terminology to force and cheat Indians off of their land (Morgan 1871). After that great work it is not until about the second decade of the 20th century that we can actually speak of kinship studies, once Robert Lowie returned to Morgan’s work.

Still more egregiously, Simpson complains that Morgan’s other great work, *The League of the Ho-De-No-Sau-Nee or Iroquois*, by rendering “clan” (her scare quotes) “the basis of Iroquois political order,” denied the Ho-De-No-

Sau-Nee the possibility of sovereignty, and so forth. But all a reader has to do is open that book and find that from the first page Morgan reports on the “federal system,” of the Iroquois, a “remarkable civil organization,” by means of which, “[I]n the drama of European colonization, they stood, for nearly two centuries, with an unshaken front, against the devastations of war, the blighting influence of foreign intercourse, and the still more fatal encroachments of a restless and advancing border population” (Morgan 1922, 3). And this formidable organization that permitted them to maintain their sovereignty [Morgan’s word!] for so long was composed, at the base, of “clans”—or as he preferred to call them, “gentes.” Then these “clans” were linked into phratries and the phratries formed tribes. In the next step, “[s]everal tribes first united into one nation.” “By a still higher effort of legislation several nations were united in a league or confederacy” (Morgan 1922, 129). So much for Morgan limiting the Iroquois because he claimed that “clans” were the basis of their social organization. There is nothing in the nature of “clans” that they cannot be the basis for political—and military—organization, which anyone familiar with classical history or with African kingdoms would know. In any case, how could Morgan have caused such grievous harm by writing it in a book few would read—while the world was moving on in its own way?

Morgan’s book, made possible with the assistance of Ely Parker and the cooperation of Seneca chiefs, is a work of great complexity, always conscious of political dynamics, and one that recounts the history of a people that we too easily claim as a “people without history”—as though they had been ignored.⁵ No matter how many statements may be extracted from the 332 pages of this work that by today’s sensibilities can be considered offensive, it stands as a magnificent monument to an inquiring mind who wrote it: “To encourage a kinder feeling towards the Indian, founded upon a truer knowledge of his civil [Note—**civil**] and domestic institutions, and of his capabilities for future elevation [Oh, Darn], is the motive in which this work originated” (ix).

The bottom line is this: Audra Simpson is furious with Franz Boas because, in a book in which his intention is to deal with the major problems of racial prejudice, examine the complex relations among race, language, and culture, ethnocentrism, and explain the incorrectness of the evolutionary view that sees “primitives” (let’s say “the Other”) as lesser human beings, he hasn’t said anything much about her people. But what he did say about the Native population supplies the motive for her paper. “In the composition of *our* people, the indigenous element has never played an important role, except for very short periods” (Boas 1911, 252; Simpson italics). And, “Without any doubt, Indian blood flows in the veins of quite a number of our people, but the proportion is so insignificant that it may well be disregarded” (Boas 1911, 253).

It is clear that Boas, in these passages, is speaking about the *physical* aspect of the population of the United States, its hereditary composition, its genetic

makeup. In 1910 the U.S. census discovered that the total population was 92,228,496, of whom 265,683 were Native Americans. Their number accounted for .03% of the total population, which some folks might consider insignificant in a statistical, demographic sense—not in a historical, moral, ethical, cultural, or political one. But Simpson pulls a fast one, claiming—from out of nowhere, with no explanation or evidence—that, “By considering the racial and biological discourse that creates *this structure of disappearance*, Boas develops new considerations about difference. *He distinguishes culture as an attribute of the biopolitical and raced thinking of the day, pushing back against the dominant, popular thinking of the day on difference*” (176; my italics). This is naught but smoke and mirrors, and she follows it by a great non sequitur, writing of the important things the Mohawk and other Indians were doing at the very moment Boas wrote. But this was not relevant to or appropriate for his discussion. He ended the chapter (and the book) saying:

I hope the discussions contained in these pages have shown that the data of anthropology teach us a greater tolerance of forms of civilization different from our own, and that we should learn to look upon foreign races with greater sympathy, and with the conviction that, as all races have contributed in the past to cultural progress in one way or another, so they will be capable of advancing the interests of mankind, if we are only willing to give them a fair opportunity. (278)

I hope it is not only white people who love this.

To recapitulate, unless someone else can detect evidence of “the influence of Indigenous thinkers on Franz Boas” that I missed in 13 of these 14 articles, I have to conclude that the editors are proclaiming their wishful thinking rather than describing the actual product. There is another matter that deserves critical attention, however, and that is the question of just what is “Indigenous” or “Africana” thinking or vision. Or, as Kirin Narayan put it in a well-known article, “How Native Is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” (Narayan 1993).

Antenor Firmin was born in Haiti in 1850, was educated in the best schools, and inculcated with the French tradition of *éclaircissement*, featuring Voltaire and Auguste Comte. (Firmin considered himself a “positivist” following Comte.) He was well-read in English, French, German, Greek and Latin (!!), impressed by Fichte and Kant, and a member of the *Société Anthropologique de Paris*. (See Fluehr-Lobban’s introduction to the English edition, 1999.) He published a brilliant work even more explicit about the uselessness and viciousness of the European discourse of “racial determinism” than Boas was. *The Equality of the Human Races*—a refutation of Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des Races Humaines* (Gobineau 1915)—was published in 1885, while Boas was in Baffinland deciding what to do with his life. What does it mean to say that Firmin’s “vision” was “Africana”—as the editors do? Is there something distinctly Haitian, or Caribbean, or African about it?

What of W. E. B. DuBois, who was born and raised in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, educated at Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin? He was a brilliant human being—who reports that he didn't think much of or about Africa until he heard Franz Boas deliver a lecture about its significance, at Atlanta University in 1906. Armattoe's father was an "industrialist," and the boy was given a German education in Togoland, went to medical school in Lille and the Sorbonne, practiced medicine in Northern Ireland and did research on blood groups in biological anthropology.

William O. Jones, who had a "white" father and a Mesquakie Fox mother, was raised at an early age by his mother's parents but was educated (only briefly) at Hampton Institute, then at the elite Phillips Academy in Andover, then Harvard and Columbia Universities (Ph.D. 1904). As we saw, he is quoted as saying that he was more white than Indian. To judge from the letters Vigil cites, he didn't have any special wisdom that was "Indigenous" when he was working in Luzon.

The case of Dr. Carlos Montezuma is particularly interesting. At the age of 5, he was kidnapped and taken from his Yavapai family by Akimel O'odham raiders and sold to an itinerant Neapolitan photographer who raised him in Chicago and Brooklyn. He continued his education in Urbana, Illinois, from high school through university, then completed medical school in Chicago. His education in Indian matters came when he worked as a physician for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and at Carlisle Indian Industrial School with Richard Henry Pratt. He became an important figure in the movement for Indian rights and education but it is not easy to discern the "Indigenous" in the background to his thought.

Brazilian Gilberto Freyre was "white" (as these things are generally reckoned), the scion of a wealthy (one-time) slave-owning family. We seem to be getting pretty promiscuous with the term "Indigenous" if it stretches to include him.

The attribution of a special Indigenous or African vision to an individual because of her or his putative ethnicity or nationality alone, without further evidence of distinctive thinking resulting from a particular cultural tradition, is mystical at best and possibly racist at worst. It is unlikely that Indigenous or Africana visions are in the genes or mothers' milk, so those searching for such visions should be more careful to demonstrate the distinctive cultural roots and nature of such ways of thinking.

Notes

1. Armattoe's obituary of Franz Boas is a lovely piece, packing much important information into two-thirds of a page, including this: "But Boas was not out for public fame; his was the spirit of the true scientist whose greatest reward was the solution of difficult problems, thereby making the task of others easier. He eschewed

publicity and did not believe in dressing facts to suit prevailing fashions, a fact which explains the hostility with which influential circles greeted his conclusions.” (“Obituary: Franz Boas: 21 December 1942,” *Man* 43, no. 72–74, 1943: 91.)

2. I assume the bit about “faults” is the English professor author’s post-Delorian interpolation. He does not present any evidence that Phinney himself would have put it this way.
3. We are told that Hurston’s career in graduate school in 1935 was “short-lived because her graduate funding source, the Rosenwald Fellowship, does not honor its original agreement to fund her through two years of study” (242). We are not told the reason. The letter to Boas states, “The young woman, while unquestionably brilliant, has a capacity for keeping her plans—and her friends and sponsors—in tumult” (Embree, March 26, 1935). Or, as it is phrased in the “Chronology” that follows the 1990 edition of *Tell My Horse*, “In fact, she seldom attends classes.” It seems clear that by that time, Hurston, a committed writer, long a published author, had little intention of being an academic anthropologist.
4. Hurston’s zombies are a gift that keeps giving to the critique of Boasian anthropology. Here is what A. F. Emery has to say:

The hospital doctor assists Hurston in her quest to capture the zombie’s wretched image, despite her instinctive resistance. Similarly, Hurston’s mento *Dr. Boas aids, abets, and legitimates her intrusions into the private space of others in the name of scientific knowledge. Anthropology, in this light, may be seen as a parasitic practice bent on turning subjects into horses/zombies.* In this sense, the zombification of vulnerable human beings as embodied in the silenced, abject woman photographed by Hurston is *suggestive of what the process of textualization of oral speech at the heart of Boas and his colleagues’ salvage operations* threatens to become: something parasitic and aggressive that sucks the life/soul out of its subjects.” (Emery 2005; my italics)

The wonderful irony of this is that Boas wrote to Barnard college student Hurston recommending that she spend *less time collecting texts*, “the kind of material that has been collected so much.” “You remember ... I asked you particularly to pay attention, not so much to the content, but rather to the form of diction, movements, and so on.” “The methods of dancing, habitual movements in telling tales, or in ordinary conversation; all this is material that would be essentially new” (Boas letter to Hurston May 3, 1927).

5. Simpson had the opportunity to contribute an essay that would have conformed more closely to the editors’ design. Morgan owed much of his knowledge and the success of his project to the aid of an Indigenous person, a Seneca teenager. Here is the dedication to the volume: “To HÄ-SA-NO-AN-DA (Ely S. Parker) A SENECA INDIAN, *This Work*, the Materials of Which are the Fruit of our Joint researches, *Is Inscribed: In Acknowledgement of the Obligations, and in Testimony of the Friendship of THE AUTHOR.*” For those not familiar with Ely Parker’s subsequent career as, among things, engineer, officer on General Grant’s staff, and Commissioner of Indian Affairs, see, e.g., Armstrong 1978).

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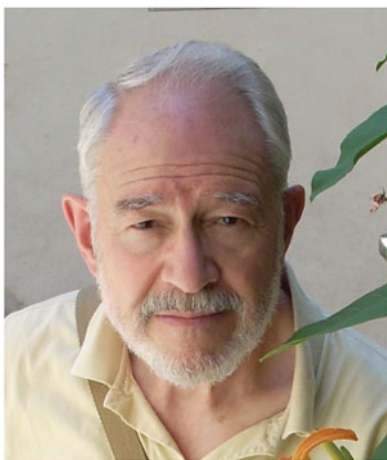
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