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FORUM

Voicing the ancestors

Readings in memory of George Stocking

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In this Forum, four anthropologists have chosen an "ancestral" figure to give voice to. Anthropologists' ancestors are generally teachers, mentors, or, less proximally, canonized scholars of prior generations. Anthropologists draw on their ancestors for theoretical wisdom and practical guidance. Yet ancestors are not always shared broadly across our discipline, and they can easily fall into oblivion. Giving voice to them, publicly, allows each contributor to comment on an important scholar and invites readers to renew their acquaintance with disciplinary ghosts who still have much to teach us.

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Voicing the ancestors: Notes on the historical sensibility of anthropologists

Richard Handler

Disciplines differ in the historical sensibility they cultivate with respect to their own past. Liberal arts disciplines that have canons comprised of great works from the past—the humanities and humanistic social sciences, as distinguished from

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the sciences—pay attention, by definition, to their disciplinary past. But teaching a canon is not the same thing as studying the historical circumstances in which the works of a canon were produced, and the subsequent circumstances in which they were canonized. It is the latter approach that we can call, following A. I. Hallowell (1976), the history of anthropology as an anthropological problem.

And yet, anthropologists, who are by disciplinary training exquisitely sensitive to ancestral lines, are as likely as scholars in other disciplines to venerate canonized works without feeling the need to historicize them. And to make the question of anthropologists' historical sensibility even more complicated, those of us who would write histories of anthropology more often than not start from one or another canonized text. So for us, such a text is at once a fetish object and an archival document.

It is this dual nature of canonical anthropological texts that Ira Bashkow and I sought to highlight when we organized a session for the 2014 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association that we titled "voicing the ancestors." Students of George Stocking, the great historian of anthropology who was also a fine theorist (although he would never have said so), we had learned to savor both the historical and the theoretical significance of canonized texts. Anthropology as a discipline, we learned, looped back on itself throughout its historical trajectory; texts that were theoretically salient at one point might fall into insignificance only to be revived a generation or two later, not solely as history but as currently useful theory. And of course, texts that had remained in obscurity hold the potential, we believed, to become theoretically salient again.

Thus a public exercise in voicing the ancestors could be, we thought, an occasion to stimulate anthropologists' historical sensibility in multiple ways. We asked several scholars to pick a text from the past that they found either historically important to the discipline or theoretically important in their own training. We asked them *to read passages from the chosen text*—that is, to give voice to the ancestor—and then to comment on its significance. We hoped that the event—bureaucratically organized as any other scholarly session, but leavened by the ghosts we invited to join us—could arouse awe and appreciation as well as renewed historical and theoretical curiosity.

We are glad that HAU has seen fit to publish some of the contributions to our session, allowing these ancestral voices to be heard more widely and resound in new ways.

* * *

A George Stocking reading, in George Stocking's memory

Ira Bashkow

This American Anthropological Association session in December 2014 was dedicated to the memory of the historian of anthropology George Stocking, who had died the previous year. In his books and essays Stocking gave voice to anthropology's intellectual ancestors. He recreated their own contexts and put them in new contexts. "To contextualize" was his favorite verb. To evoke his spirit, Richard

Handler and I invited anthropologists to choose a short reading by an intellectual ancestor and present it aloud along with some words about its historical context and meaning today. It would be a session for giving new voice to those who have gone before but continue to inspire us, for voicing the ancestors.

To celebrate Stocking's own passage to the firmament of the ancestors, it was fitting to begin with his own voice. I chose a passage from one of his early works, the 1962 essay on "Lamarckianism in American social science, 1890–1915," which appears in revised and augmented form as chapter 10 of *Race, culture, and evolution* (1968).

I chose this essay in part because it marks Stocking's turning to the history of anthropology. I always find it humbling to remember that Stocking did not begin to focus on anthropology until he was nearly finished with graduate school. He took only a couple of graduate courses with the anthropologist Irving Hallowell, but his Ph.D. (at the University of Pennsylvania) was in American studies, with American history the accented field, and the subject of his dissertation was the history of "American social science" generally, not anthropology specifically.

As Stocking often told us, for his dissertation research he read systematically through more than five hundred journal articles by more than two hundred authors—basically, all the articles published in twenty-one journals over twenty-five years—and he created an elaborate index of the ideas about race that were expressed in them (Stocking 2010: 72). What he discovered by this process was in part the unique importance of Franz Boas, which had faded from lore, and in part that the scientific paradigm of evolutionist racism that Boas criticized depended on an unspoken assumption that inheritance is Lamarckian. As usually phrased, this is the idea that acquired characteristics are inherited, so that the giraffe got its long neck, for example, because individual animals habitually stretched and thereby lengthened their necks in reaching up to eat leaves, and then passed on this lengthened form to their offspring. Thanks in large part to Stocking, today we understand that this assumption survived in race science long after it was disproved in biology. On this mistaken assumption, the body is a vessel that converts habits into inheritance. Such an idea, Stocking wrote, was "part of the baggage of European thought for 2,000 years" (1968: 235). It was how "nations" were thought to become "races," and how races were thought to acquire the various temperaments held to be characteristic of them, like "warlike," "nomadic," or "slavish," to quote some sample terms of Herbert Spencer (ibid.: 240).

In the late nineteenth century, Stocking discovered, the Lamarckian assumption remained the "linchpin" of scientific racism and social evolutionism (2010: 73). But the problem Stocking encountered was that this assumption was usually only tacit. It was rarely articulated and had to be inferred in the sources. It had no explicit advocates and very few critics. In fact, there was only one critic, Alfred Kroeber, who seemed clearly aware of the assumption's key role. So how could the idea have been so scientifically important if people at the time were not aware of it? And how was *Stocking*, at the end of only his third year of graduate school, supposed to speak confidently about an assumption his sources rarely expressed?

Stocking became plunged into a "profoundly depressing epistemological crisis" (ibid.: 72). I believe this crisis catalyzed his turn toward anthropology. He began to see anthropological theory as not just part of his subject, but also as a resource for

dealing with his own methodological problem of how to reconstruct "patterns of unconsciously or quasi-consciously held assumption" (1968: 237).

In other words, Stocking began to identify his own historiographical approach with anthropology, and to suggest that, alongside "the traditional historical notion of Zeitgeist," and "the Kuhnian notion of 'paradigm,'" the "anthropological concept of culture" provided a framework for understanding how "the thinking of social scientists was conditioned by assumptions which rarely came fully into their consciousness" (ibid.).[1]

So Stocking's essay that I quote from below may be thought of as the origin point of his special relationship to anthropology. It is the beginning of his life's work in the history of anthropology, which has inspired so many of us.

The essay is also significant as an origin story of anthropology itself as a separate discipline. The story begins with an initial state of undifferentiation and confusion. This is manifest in the tacit, indistinct quality of the Lamarckian assumption in turn-of-the-century writings, which, in Stocking's metanarrative, represents the confusion of anthropological protoscience. And thus the stage is set for the primordial act of separation. The confusion of the assumption was cleaved: habit distinguished from heredity, culture from biology. And thus did the social sciences gain independence from the biological sciences, and anthropology as we know it was born.

Here's the passage of Stocking's essay. It begins with the problem that even Boas, the culture hero who did more than anyone else to effect the separation, was himself not fully aware of the theoretical importance of the Lamarckian assumption:

> The whole thrust of [Boas'] thought was . . . to distinguish the concepts of race and culture, to separate biological and cultural heredity, to focus attention on cultural process, [and] to free the concept of culture from its heritage of evolutionary and racial assumption, so that it could subsequently become the cornerstone of social scientific disciplines completely independent of biological determinism. This is not to suggest that Boas was solely responsible for this process, or even that he was fully conscious of it. But I would suggest that it is in this context that his work has its full historical significance.
>
> The fact that Boas neither embodied nor perceived the process in all its aspects is emphasized by his ambiguous position on the inheritance of acquired characteristics. For, as Kroeber suggested, the study of cultural phenomena could not achieve fully independent status except in the context of the rejection of Lamarckianism in the biological sciences. Lamarckianism had not been, like the organic analogy, a central theoretical concept of the social sciences; neither had it been, like the comparative method, a major analytic tool. Its role was peripheral, not focal. But standing almost unnoticed at the periphery of social theory, it provided

1. Stocking elaborated this idea in his introduction to the series of volumes on the *History of anthropology* that he edited from 1983: "The history of anthropology differs significantly from that of certain other inquiries. For the historian of physics, the methods and concepts of that discipline do perhaps have relevance only as subject matter. For the historian of anthropology, they are not only the object of inquiry, but may provide also a means [i.e., methods] by which it is pursued" (Stocking 1983: 7).

> the last important link between social and biological theory. The problem facing the social sciences in the early twentieth century was not their domination by notions of biological or racial *determinism,* but rather their obfuscation by a vague sociobiological *indeterminism,* a "blind and bland shuttling" between race and civilization. As Kroeber suggested, the Lamarckian notion of the inheritance of acquired characteristics was the bridge over which this shuttling took place. As long as this bridge remained standing, the fully independent study of society and culture was difficult if not impossible. (Stocking 1968: 264–65)

Another reason to read this passage today is to come to terms with its own implications. As an origin story, it, too, has meaning that is largely tacit and indistinct. When I was a graduate student, I imbibed a vague sense that there is something unholy about having too much truck with biologists. The righteous path, I learned, gives wide berth to biology (except of course when biology is taken as *really* culture in another form: ideology). Many lessons reinforced this in the history of anthropology. Malinowskian functionalism, neoevolutionism, and the many, various zombie formations of racism all reenact the original drama in which crossing back and forth over Kroeber's bridge, between the human being as an organism and as a cultural subject, plunges one into the conceptual murk that must be overcome. Indeed, even to attend to the human being as an organism was surrounded with a sense of taboo.

This is worth revisiting now in light of interesting recent studies that make the case for pushing back across that old line and trying to integrate what anthropologists know about race and culture with what biologists know. To give some examples, I am thinking here of work examining the intersections of race, disease, and medical genetics by John Hartigan (2008), Charles Montoya (2011), Duana Fullwiley (2011), and others; writings on epigenesis by Margaret Lock (2013, 2015), Amy Moran-Thomas, and others; Alan Goodman's (2013) call to "bring . . . culture into human biology and biology back into anthropology"; and the inspiring work of Greg Downey on brain and neuronal plasticity, which is a critical part of the biological basis for human cultural diversity (Lende and Downey 2012; see Gibson 2005; Doidge 2007: 287–305).

Now "plasticity" was a word that Boas himself used, and we find it also in writings by his students, like Ruth Benedict in her *Patterns of culture* ([1934] 1989: 14). A central argument of Boas' immigrant headform studies was that the *biology* of the cranial cavity was plastic, shaped by cultural factors (Stocking 1968: 174–80). So perhaps not all is well historically with seeing the origin of anthropology in the cleaving asunder of culture from biology!

But, as is so often the case, when I think I have reached a fresh historical insight, I eventually discover that it is already written somewhere by George. He anticipated this problem in a later passage from the same essay, discussing Kroeber:

> [Although drawing] a sharp line between physical man and his cultural works . . . , Kroeber was well aware that there was an area of study where biology and culture overlapped. Indeed, he called this "the special province of anthropology." At that time it was a "no-man's-land" largely claimed by the biologists, but the cultural anthropologist was by disciplinary self-preservation forced to dispute this claim. To test the

> efficacy of culture one not only assumed the equality of races, one pushed the cultural explanation into the disputed areas as far as one could—as Boas had indeed done in regard to immigrant headform. In this sense, the basic assumptions of cultural anthropology—and eventually of the social sciences in general—were asymmetrical, in that while they allowed biology no role in culture, they attempted to show that many phenomena which had been thought to be biological were in fact culturally conditioned. This asymmetry, however, was not an expression of irresponsible disciplinary expansionism. It had an heuristic purpose—to test the "actual efficiency" of culture. Ultimately Kroeber seems to have envisioned a day when the area between biology and culture would no longer be a fighting ground, but would be "surveyed" and "fenced." However, he clearly felt that such fencing could only be done on the basis of the prior development of the independent study of culture. And for this, it seemed necessary to burn all bridges between biology and the social sciences. (Stocking 1968: 268)

In a concluding paragraph, Stocking optimistically suggested the time had come for the bridges between anthropology and biology to be "rebuilt."[2] The original separation long behind us, we anthropologists are now in a different, stronger position. We inherit a "culture concept strengthened," Stocking wrote, "by over half a century of study as a conceptually independent entity" (ibid.: 269).

So in this essay we find both the charter for wariness about too much ado with biology, and the permission we need to contribute to rebuilding the bridge, both by continuing the Kroeberian project of showing how "phenomena . . . thought to be biological" are "culturally conditioned" (requoting the passage above) and by reconsidering those biological processes that support human diversity and may condition culture.

It's time to overcome my vague sense of taboo. It's good to revisit the work of our intellectual ancestors, and voice it anew in changed times.

* * *

2. Besides Kroeber's bridge metaphor, the trope of surveying intellectual territory was one that Stocking made use of for the history of anthropology itself. In his introductory editorial for the *History of Anthropology Newsletter*, he referred to the study of anthropology's history as a "developing field" whose "prospects are inviting, but the problems are many. It is nice to have all that unobstructed acreage, but it would also be nice to have a few more landmarks to guide one through it." While he does not invoke fencing with its connotation of exclusivity, he does characterize the field as intellectual terrain to which anthropologists could "no longer claim privileges of sole occupancy," and which was in fact being "invaded" by graduate student and "professional historians" (such as Stocking himself), as "intellectual history has expanded its frontiers" (Stocking 1973: 1). (I thank Richard Handler for reminding me of this citation.) For the current version of the *History of Anthropology Newsletter* (*HAN*), recently relaunched as an online publication by an editorial collective led by John Tresch, visit http://histanthro.org.

Igor Kopytoff

Jacqueline Solway

> From a cultural perspective, the production of commodities is also a cultural and cognitive process: commodities must not only be produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing. (Kopytoff 1986: 64)

> What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its [the commodity's] "status" and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" and periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? (Ibid.: 66–67)

> Commoditization is best looked upon as a process of becoming rather than as an all-or-none state of being. Its expansion takes place in two ways: (a) with respect to each thing, by making it exchangeable for more and more things, and (b) with respect to the system as a whole, by making more and more different things more widely exchangeable. (Ibid.: 73)

> The counterdrive to this potential onrush of commoditization is culture. In the sense that commoditization homogenizes value, while the essence of culture is discrimination, excessive commoditization is anti-cultural—as indeed so many have perceived it or sensed it to be. Culture ensures that some things remain unambiguously singular (Ibid.: 73)

> If sacralization can be achieved by singularity, singularity does not guarantee sacralization. Being a non-commodity does not by itself assure high regard, and many singular things (that is, non-exchangeable things) may be worth very little. . . . Once, when trying to find out the precolonial exchange value of various items, I asked about the barter value of manioc. The response was indignant scoffing at the very idea that such a lowly thing as manioc should have been exchangeable for anything: "One eats it, that's all. Or one gives it away if one wants to. . . . But one doesn't *trade* it." Lest the outburst be misunderstood and sentimentalized, let me stress that the indignation was not about a suggested commercial corruption of a symbolically supercharged staple. . . . . [There is] no disdain for trade. Manioc was part of a class of singular things of so little worth as to have no publicly recognized exchange value. To be a non-commodity is to be "priceless" in the full possible sense of the term, ranging from the uniquely valuable to the uniquely worthless. (Ibid.: 74–75, emphasis in original)

> A Picasso, though possessing a monetary value, is priceless in another, higher scheme. . . . But in a pluralistic society, the "objective" pricelessness of a Picasso can only be unambiguously confirmed to us by its immense market price. . . . Singularity, in brief, is confirmed not by the object's structural position in an exchange system, but by intermittent forays into the commodity sphere of singular "art." But the two worlds cannot be kept separate for very long . . . . (Ibid.: 82–83)

> Although the singular and the commodity are opposites, no thing ever quite reaches the ultimate commodity end of the continuum between them. There are no perfect commodities. (Ibid.: 87)

The passages derive from Igor Kopytoff's best-known piece of anthropological writing, "The cultural biography of things: Commoditization as a process," in the book edited by Arjun Appadurai, *The social life of things* (1986). This seminal essay has inspired and informed much scholarship since. Indeed, Kopytoff's ideas were one of the inspirations for the book itself. He may not have been the first to appreciate how the singularity, commonness, uncommonness, sacralization, or terminal qualities of things transform during their life-course, that humans discriminate and attribute different meanings to the same things in different contexts, that things, like people, have a biography, and that the history of a thing can tell us a great deal about a culture and society, but he did so with elegance, humor, and a good deal of originality. Many of his insights seem obvious now; this reveals how they have been absorbed into our anthropological practice and how influential they remain.

My choice of Kopytoff is influenced by the fact that he is one of three important anthropologists who died within a month in 2013, the others being George Stocking, who is the inspiration for these papers, and Keith Basso. While one might propose an uncanny correlation, we know this is happenstance and ordinary, a statement Kopytoff would support, but it is nonetheless intriguing in this context, especially as he wrote another seminal piece, appropriate to this symposium, entitled "Ancestors as elders in Africa" (1971), to which I will return.

Kopytoff's influence is subtler and his name possibly less recognizable than many of the ancestors we honor here. He was a middle-range theorist with penetrating insights and fierce scholarship to support them. As I gather from people who knew him and from his writing, especially letters to editors, he was a bit ornery; but he also had a playful, at times acerbic, sense of humour. I believe his work has been profound, especially, but not only, for the anthropology and history of Africa.

There are many tropes that we Africanists take for granted, that come to us as received wisdom, that are ubiquitous, and that convey so much meaning in just a few words. It is surprising how many of them can be traced to Kopytoff. For instance, the theme "wealth in people," as opposed to wealth in things, can be traced to the introduction to Suzanne Miers and Kopytoff's very original 1977 book *Slavery in Africa*. Where land is not scarce and material goods are relatively readily accessible, a person's greatness, their wealth, can be based upon their ability to "gather" people (1977: 72), as followers, dependents, supporters, clients, and kin. Indeed, many African kinship systems appear almost as machines designed with an infinite capacity to absorb people. This cultural logic marks the past more than the present, but it continues to inform social and cultural life. Indeed, controversies over Miers and Kopytoff's proposition and how the logic has transformed over history have provided analytical impetus for further important work (see, for instance, Guyer 1995 and Ferguson 2013).

It is virtually de rigueur for Africanists to speak of ethnic identities as fluid, multiple, shifting, overlapping, and nesting—this may apply everywhere, but it is certainly the case in sub-Saharan Africa. Kopytoff's magisterial 1987 book, *The*

African frontier, provides an original analysis in which he grounds ethnic fluidity in the manner in which the continent was settled. At the same time, he provides a compelling explanation for the remarkable linguistic, cultural, and structural continuities evident on the continent. Kopytoff takes as his starting point Frederick Jackson Turner's ([1893] 1961) thesis of the American Frontier and its "tidal wave" expansion, "civilizing" the "uncivilized" and thereby contributing to the American character, but turns it around. He argues that for Africa, the frontier was internal and movements from so-called metropoles into interstitial areas or "institutional vacuums" constituted a process he defines as "ethnogenesis." While African kinship systems have seemingly infinite capacity to absorb people, they also provide almost infinite possibilities for fracture, fission, and segmentation, enabling ethnogenesis—that is, the birth of new polities: some that developed hierarchical structures and others that remained largely egalitarian, fluid, amorphous, ambiguous, or marginal. The frontier explains the common phenomenon one sees in the majority of ethnographies of specific African groups or "tribes," where there are categories of people mentioned that just don't fit, that emerge in what is supposed to be an ethnically homogeneous area; they appear anomalous and residual. In fact, such situations are the norm, not the exception. African frontierspeople were both adventurous and conservative, often replicating, at times with innovation, their earlier cultural and structural patterns, hence contributing to the significant degree of structural, cultural, and linguistic uniformity across the continent.

Themes central to Kopytoff's work are process and transformation; things have a life-course; they move in and out of various states of commonness and uncommonness. They can be commoditized, decommoditized, or re-commoditized. People are wealth and move into and out of slave status, dependent status, kinship status; they can be dehumanized and rehumanized. New groups hive off from existing ones and adventure into new zones, retaining and conserving, to use Kopytoff's terms, but also experimenting with new cultural and structural forms. In most African societies authority is central to social structure and is granted increasingly to people as they age and mature; this is a continual process that does not cease at death.

Initially I was drawn to Kopytoff as my ancestor by one of his more original and important articles, "Ancestors as elders in Africa" (1971), in which, among other things, he argues that Western categories which distinguish social structure from religion have distorted understandings of African cosmologies. The debates and confusion in the literature about ancestor cults and worship, he argues, are misguided owing to Westerners' need to sanctify the realm of the 'afterlife' and to encompass non-Western phenomena within familiar Western categories of sacred and profane, natural and supernatural. Kopytoff recognizes much of the scholarship on ancestor cults and ancestor worship as helpful (Meyer Fortes in particular), but ultimately flawed or compromised by its insistence on sacralizing the sphere of ancestors. Kopytoff argues that ancestors in many African societies are very ordinary and find their place in the lineal structure of authority that grants status to relative elders. Ancestors are mundane, treated and approached differently from living elders only because they are dead, because a discussion with them is one-sided, and because they prefer different food from the living. Yet, because they are the most senior elders, their authority and thus power is greater than that of

the living; this is encompassed within the social order. Kopytoff also observes that such adult—elder—ancestor continuities are widespread in Africa. He carries out a broad semantic analysis across many Bantu languages to reveal that they do not evoke a meaningful cognitive distinction between the categories of elder and ancestor. In his words, "the selection by anthropologists of the phrases 'ancestor cult' and 'ancestor worship,' in dealing with African cultures, is semantically inappropriate, analytically misleading and theoretically unproductive" (Kopytoff 1971: 140).

Our theme here is ancestors. I am not suggesting that we Bantuize our relationship with our ancestors, that we think in Bantu cognitive terms about the great intellects that we honor here, but perhaps as academics our concern for our ancestors might constitute a unique or special relationship. We think with them, we quote them, we take inspiration from them, we argue with them; they return to us in new forms and old tropes and they inhabit our imaginations. We work anew, but always with our ancestors perched on our shoulders, somewhat akin perhaps to the impartial spectator of Adam Smith (in his 1759 *Theory of moral sentiments*) enjoining us to evaluate, think and act with particular care and in particular ways. They both enable and bind us in complicated ways.

The lucky ones among us who gain tenure are reborn with what is called academic freedom. Our ancestors might appear as our chains, not as chains of servitude or unfreedom but perhaps as chains of both discipline and inspiration, as a series of muses, as stimuli to both check and encourage us. These are chains we do not wish to lose.

I am not sure whether Kopytoff would appreciate my evocation of Smith or Rousseau in a discussion of his work, but I do suspect my evocation of Marx would have sat less easily upon his shoulders. However, his life bears Marx's imprint. Kopytoff lived much of his life in a kind of exile; his parents escaped Russia after the Revolution, he grew up in Shanghai but learned only European languages, then moved across continents, a stateless person; eventually he gained citizenship in the United States. His biography, like the things he analyzes, reveals movement in and out of different conditions, ongoing transformation, and motion. Perhaps his fertile and imaginative mind can in part be attributed to a life lived in liminality.

* * *

Adversary as ancestor: Fear, panic, and anthropology for civil rights

Lee D. Baker

Chronicling, studying, and celebrating the ancestors of a family, institution, or discipline is an important way to remember and memorialize those who came before and honor those who made significant contributions, but it is not an effective way to write history. History of anthropology not only involves exploring scholars who produced knowledge, it also involves how anthropology was consumed by the broader public, and used either in the service of or to the detriment of society. History of anthropology also involves exploring how anthropologists collectively mobilized to serve society, how they contributed to movements and to the public discourse.

To punctuate this larger point, the "ancestor" I chose to highlight was a historical figure who was a detractor and adversary of anthropology—George Lincoln Rockwell. Rockwell was an ardent white supremacist and leader of the American Nazi Party. He notoriously perpetuated a virulent conspiracy theory in the 1960s that blamed the erosion of white supremacy on Franz Boas.

Conspiracy theories are a type of folklore that provides a semblance of control and order when people feel powerless and out of control. Often gaining momentum in the context of moral panic and fear, usually a scapegoat, folk devil, or some form of evil antagonist is conjured up at the center of the story. Conspiracy theories function in two ways: they grant reprieve from fear and the loss of power and control, and they provide a target at which to direct rage (Walker 2014: 11). Fredric Jameson even suggested that conspiracy theories are "the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age" (1988: 356). Exploring the cultural history and the historical context of this particular conspiracy theory, most notably perpetuated by Rockwell, is one way to index anthropology's ascent as a powerful science that influenced the course of the civil rights movement. The response of anthropologists to the racialist science that spawned this far-fetched conspiracy of the 1960s also provides an example of how anthropologists can mobilize and organize in the face of narratives about race, immigration, and cultural differences that are not grounded in evidence, facts, or scientific consensus.

* * *

Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren did not slam down his gavel and proclaim the end of segregation "forthwith" in the 1954 landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Instead, he used the more cautious invitation to desegregate schools with "all deliberate speed." School districts were slow to respond, and it was not until the 1957 constitutional crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas, that the white supremacists fully believed segregation might fall. In the aftermath of Little Rock, scholars like Wesley C. George and Henry E. Garrett quickly aligned with the newly formed International Association for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics to advance a freshly recycled brand of racialist science to be used by public intellectuals like Carleton Putnam, who was organizing another run at justifying segregation with science and states' rights.

The decade between the *Brown v. Board* decision of 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was turbulent, but the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) challenged a well-financed campaign to reignite scientific arguments that racial inferiority, and, hence, racial segregation, had a basis in science. An important narrative thread to this effort to sustain segregation was the story that Franz Boas somehow orchestrated an elaborate conspiracy to use anthropology and anthropologists to convince the American people that there was no scientific basis to justify segregation.

The AAA responded to efforts to resurrect the scientific basis of segregation by holding a press conference during its 1959 annual meeting. Margaret Mead held forth denouncing scientific racism and argued that "racial segregation must not be handled as a regional problem but rather considered as part of an international moral responsibility for the welfare of the children of the world" (*New York Times* 1958: 19).

The maelstrom of scientific racism gained momentum in 1961 when Carleton Putnam's popular *Race and reason: A Yankee view* was published within a year of his cousin Carleton Coon's influential and seemingly authoritative seven hundred--page treatise *The origin of races* (1962). In May 1962, the AAA Executive Board devised an attack against racism cloaked as science to stem the rising tide of continued press coverage, paid advertisements, and private mailings of offprints of articles published in *Mankind Quarterly*. Financed largely by the Pioneer Fund, this discourse continued to tout both the racial inferiority of the Negro and the idea that Franz Boas and cultural anthropology somehow tricked the nation into believing that Negroes were not an inferior race.

The approach taken by the AAA leadership consisted of reaching out to the AAAS to develop a statement on race and directing AAA president Sherwood Washburn to use his presidential address at the November meetings to articulate the scientific position on the subject (Jackson 2001: 267).

The leadership of the AAA was pulled into the political debate during the battles to maintain Jim Crow segregation in the South, and it successfully confirmed the scientific consensus that there was no basis to justify segregation through science. Although the AAA was reactive, Washburn's presidential address in 1962 provided an important scientific and cultural barricade or fire-break for the civil rights movement, essentially stopping the racist science flank of the white supremacist movement during the precarious period between the *Brown v. Board* decision and the Civil Rights Act.

Washburn's address prompted the *New York Times* to headline an article "Race categories termed useless," and it reported that "the anthropological position . . . has [a] direct bearing on the segregationist argument that there are inherent racial inequalities favoring whites over Negroes." The article went on to explain how "anthropologists are trying to undercut the argument that the segregationist has science on his side" (*New York Times* 1962).

During the early months of 1963, Margaret Mead began working closely with the interdisciplinary "AAAS Committee for Science and the Promotion of Human Welfare," chaired by the Washington University biologist Barry Commoner. In a sharply worded report titled "Science and the race problem," the committee carefully dissected the work of Wesley C. George and Carleton Putnam. Using lengthy quotations from Putnam's *Race and reason* (1961) and George's *The biology of the race problem* (1962), the committee peeled apart each author's claims with detailed descriptions of the latest scientific findings in the contexts of the principles of democracy (Commoner 1963: 559).

The committee reported its findings in *Science* on November 1, 1963. During the months that followed the AAAS statement on race, the civil rights movement became more violent, bloody, and militant. The movement transformed into Black Power and antiwar movements as hard-core segregationists and white supremacists began to slowly recede from Congress, state houses, and governors' mansions.

The bad-guy Boas narrative and the recycled scientific racism of Putnam were rendered insignificant in the mainstream media during the 1960s because new understandings of culture, the environment, and population genetics complemented the changing attitudes and perspectives brought on by television, activism, and social change. The Boas conspiracy narrative, however, was taken up with renewed

attention by radical and less mainstream white supremacists like George Lincoln Rockwell, who prominently recited his hatred of Franz Boas in the widely read interview of him by Alex Haley for *Playboy Magazine*.

In the April 1966 issue of *Playboy Magazine* Alex Haley interviewed the "self-appointed führer of the American Nazi Party and self-styled messiah of white supremacy" (Haley 1966: 71). A charismatic publicity-seeking extremist, Rockwell was a frequent speaker on college campuses who galvanized some support for his unimaginative, yet invective, white power movement among young men disaffected by the war in Vietnam, urban riots, and the civil rights movement (Schmaltz 1999: 271).

In 1966, Rockwell and his American Nazi Party (ANP) successfully disrupted the nonviolent demonstrations of the Southern Christian Leadership Council, antagonized the Freedom Riders, and physically assaulted Martin Luther King, Jr. in Birmingham, Alabama (ibid.: 167–237). Haley, author of the blockbuster *Roots: The saga of an American family* (1976), interviewed Rockwell while he was completing his coauthored *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965).[3] In the introduction to the interview with Rockwell, Haley describes the setting of his initial meeting:

> About a dozen Nazis stared icily as the guards walked me past them up the stairs to Rockwell's door, where a side-armed storm trooper frisked me. . . . Finding me "clean," the guard ceremoniously opened the door. As if for dramatic effect, Rockwell was standing across the room, corncob pipe in hand, beneath a portrait of Adolf Hitler. Warned about my Negritude, he registered no surprise. . . . [Then] he took out a pearl-handled revolver, placed it pointedly on the arm of his chair, sat back and spoke for the first time: "I'm ready if you are." (Haley 1966: 72)

Alex Haley's skills as an informed journalist and a seasoned interviewer erected a stage for Rockwell to give a command performance. Rockwell began by asserting that "I don't mix with your kind, and we call your race 'niggers.'" Indicative of Haley's wry cynicism and ability to remain unflappable, he cleverly responded, "I've been called 'nigger' many times, Commander, but this is the first time I'm being *paid* for it. So you go right ahead. What have you got against 'niggers'?" (ibid.: 74). Haley's gambit was perfect; Rockwell goes off, spewing the invective rhetoric that earned him his nickname "the Barnum of the bigots."

"The white man is getting too soft," Rockwell bellowed, explaining how desk work, electric lawnmowers, and fur-lined toilet seats had made the white man "soft and squishy." White women, Rockwell asserted, were also to blame for the perversion of white youth. "Some of our white women," Rockwell continued, "especially in the crazy leftist environment on our college campuses, get carried away by Jewish propaganda into betraying their own instincts by choosing a healthy black buck. . . . . I have to admit that a healthy nigger garbage man is certainly superior physically and sexually to a pasty-faced skinny white peace creep" (ibid.).

Rockwell describes the great civilizations that whites have built, while Haley counters with the great civilizations that Africans have built, but Rockwell quickly turns his argument about the superiority of white blood into a discussion of

3. The analysis of this interview is taken in part from Baker (2010: 167–70).

evolution and the pathological impact of "mongrelization." Haley points out that "the words superior and inferior have no meaning to geneticists . . . neither does mongrelization. Every authority in the field has attested that the world's racial groups are genetically indistinguishable from another. All men . . . are created equal." At this point in the interview, Rockwell's adversarial tone comes to a palpable halt.

Dripping with sarcasm and with a hint of paternalism, Rockwell evokes Boas as if he is going to present exculpatory evidence that would cinch the case that all men are not created equal:

> You're bringing tears to my eyes. Don't you know that all this equality garbage was started by a Jew anthropologist named Franz Boas from Columbia University? Boas was followed by another Jew from Columbia named Gene Weltfish. And our present Jew expert preaching equality is another Jew named Ashley Montagu. Any anthropologist who dares to preach the facts known by any farmer in the barnyard—that breeds differ in quality—is simply not allowed to survive in the university or in publishing, because he can't earn a living. You never hear from that side. But Carleton Putnam has written a wonderful book called *Race and Reason*, showing that there is plenty of scholarly evidence to back up my contention that the nigger race is inherently inferior to the white race intellectually. (Haley 1966: 76)

After Haley challenged several of his assertions, Rockwell retorted, "I don't feel like quibbling. What I am saying is that I believe the Jews have consciously *perverted* the study of anthropology and biology and human genetics in order to reach this phony conclusion—and thus destroy the great white race" (ibid.). Rockwell then explicitly links the work of Boas, Weltfish, and Montagu to a larger Jewish conspiracy to destroy the white race. Haley asks, "You said the Jews are behind this plot. Since they are whites themselves, how would they benefit from their own destruction?" "They won't be mingling like the rest of us," Rockwell responds; "they believe they're the chosen people—chosen to rule the world. But the only world they could rule would be a world of inferior beings. And as long as the white man is pure, they cannot succeed."

Although many Americans had never heard of George Lincoln Rockwell before the much-publicized interview, the Federal Bureau of Investigation perhaps made a decent assessment in an internal memorandum that called him a "professional bigot, a 'con' man, a malcontent, and a chronic failure, who will stop at nothing to gain notoriety." They warned their agents (several of whom infiltrated Rockwell's barracks through the infamous Counter-Intelligence Program) that,

> though small in numbers and influence, the ANP is a dangerous organization of misfits who are psychologically and physically capable of perpetuating acts of violence. . . . Hilter, like Rockwell, was ridiculed and scorned. . . . We would do well to heed the American Nazi Party and to remember that history is replete with incidents where a nucleus of an organization and the "right" conditions merged to shake the foundations of the world. (Schmaltz 1999: 153)

Margaret Mead's efforts to mobilize scientists to marginalize the narrative that scientific evidence justified racial segregation may be a model for how anthropologists

can mobilize when stories and affect, not evidence and fact, fuel the insecurities and fear of the white precariat, which too often leads to racist violence and oppressive policies against immigrants, racial minorities, religions, and sexual identities. Stories that resonate are powerful, but evidence that persuades is always a more powerful way to impact lasting change.

* * *

Xenophanes unbound

Gregory Schrempp

The text I have chosen—one that enjoys a small cult following—is from the sixth-century BCE Presocratic philosopher Xenophanes:

> The Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, the Thracians that theirs have light blue eyes and red hair. But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves. (Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983: 169)

The fragment illustrates all that Xenophanes considered to be misguided in the way humans think of deities. And, on the surface at least, the text would also seem to offer a terse round-up of nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century anthropological concerns.

First and foremost, there is the issue of centric knowledge: situational or positional bias in the construction of the cosmos, including the construction of "others."

Second, the issue of race is mixed in with culture via the claim that each group projects its physical characteristics onto the deities. Divergence in religious iconography flows from divergence in race. The relation of race and culture of course proved to be one of the engendering issues in twentieth-century anthropology.

Third, as much as divergence, the passage also displays convergence, offering an intriguing angle on the relation of the universal and the particular in advancing an anthropological claim. While starting with the fact that each group constructs the gods in its own image, Xenophanes is more interested in the universal human proclivity toward which this sampling of particulars points. He adduces ethnocentrism to demonstrate anthropocentrism.

Fourth, can an anthropologist (at least of the traditional kind) read this passage without thinking of the topic of totemism? As suggested in Boas' and Lévi-Strauss' writings on this topic, it may be that one of the reasons humans tap *inter*species *physical* differences from nonhuman organisms to stand for human *intra*species *social* differences is to lend an exaggerated physical character to the latter, visibly marking their importance. Some such dramatizing appears also to be the goal of Xenophanes' totemic gesture.

Fifth, the passage hints at an ideal of objectivity—specifically that human parochialism can be transcended. In complex and changing ways this ideal has been

interwoven with anthropological theory ever since Xenophanes. Like Plato after him, Xenophanes advocated a deity beyond human desires and limitations, aloof and self-content. The great religious issue of the time was not whether there were gods, but whether gods would be interested in humans and their affairs. The ideal of objective knowledge became strangely tied to the ideal of a non-anthropomorphic deity, an idea that was later to surface in the (anthropomorphic) metaphor of the "God's-eye view."

Finally, the passage might suggest that Xenophanes was engaging in some sort of methodological irony, since his argument relies on the very process he seeks to dislodge: he anthropomorphizes cattle, horses, and lions as part of his demonstration of the anthropomorphic fallacy. Any attempt to cast Xenophanes as a reflexive thinker, however, must be tempered by his failure to notice just how much the new deities that came to be advocated by philosophers resemble philosophers! The vision of gods as philosophers later came through with special force in Aristotle's *Nicomachean ethics*.

* * *

The problem of centrically biased knowledge has undergone a series of interesting historical reformulations.

For Xenophanes and Plato, the root of anthropocentric bias appears to be human self-infatuation and intellectual slovenliness. Fundamentally, we like stories about ourselves—and not just that, but our worst selves: stories of philandering, deceit, and so on. For Enlightenment philosophers such as David Hume, who passed his concern on to such early anthropological figures as E. B. Tylor and James Frazer, the root of anthropocentric bias was ignorance: humans originally did not have the knowledge to conclude other than that rain was caused by someone up there pouring out pitchers of water. The problem was not slovenliness, for according to Tylor the human mind is inherently rational and rigorous. The problem was ignorance, and the solution was science, which for Tylor was the epistemological concomitant and manifestation of "civilization."

In the late twentieth century it was as if, after a long gestation, anthropocentrism and ethnocentrism begat a number of new progeny, which include Euro-, logo-, and phallo-, as well as lesser knowns such as hodie- (or today-centrism, which has a family resemblance to George Stocking's "presentism"). The problem of centric bias splinters with the identification of subspecies, accompanied by calls for "decentering" imperialist knowledge claims. Also, in a quirky way, the problem of anthropocentrism itself turns more anthropocentric, for no longer is the main concern how we think about distant, divine others, but how we think of human others.

Going back to the fragment from Xenophanes, there are two other strands of theory in which the spirit of the fragment still manifests itself. One lies in what we might generally refer to as the projectionist thesis, or the idea that humans construct the cosmic through projection of the local. Refracted in different ways through Freud and Durkheim, the projectionist thesis has significantly informed anthropological theory of religion, sometimes in ways that are quite explicit: think of Abram Kardiner's controversial and methodologically-innovative (and also fascinating) midcentury work *The psychological frontiers of society* (1945).

The other strand lies in the mythologizing of science that goes on in popular science writing, which contributes to the ambience in which contemporary

anthropology operates. The fragment from Xenophanes continues to appear as a kind of prophecy for an objectivity that still lies beyond the horizon. The late Carl Sagan liked the Xenophanes fragment, and that says it all.

* * *

As a student, I was less interested in doing the digging-through-personal-letters historiography that characterized George Stocking's approach than I was in exploring anthropology as a new turn in big ideas with a longer history—a history of ideas approach in other words. Still, stemming from the sheer magnetism of George, the person and the scholar, I took every course that he offered during my time at Chicago, and would certainly do so again.

What would George say about my musing on Xenophanes? He might squirm and ask whether my reading might not be a bit presentist. There is not much by way of evidence about Xenophanes, so thankfully we will probably never know. Or he might point to my long-term interest in mythology, and ask whether I might not be searching for an *ur*-origin myth of modern anthropology.

The reaction I would hope for, however, is one I actually did get once upon a time when, after reading one of my papers, George, an endearing and supportive taskmaster, said, "Brilliant paper, Greg, let's talk about what's wrong with it."

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Donner une voix aux ancêtres: Lectures en mémoire à George Stocking

Résumé : Dans ce Forum, quatre anthropologues ont choisi de donner voix à une figure "ancestrale". Les ancêtres des anthropologues sont des instructeurs, ou des mentors, et parfois, de manière moins intime, des chercheurs reconnus des générations précédentes. Les anthropologues s'inspirent de la sagesse théorique et des conseils pratiques de leurs ancêtres. Cependant les ancêtres ne font pas toujours l'unanimité au sein de notre discipline, et ils peuvent facilement sombrer dans l'oubli. Leur donner une voix, publiquement, permet à chaque contributeur d'évoquer un chercheur important, et invite le lecteur à raviver sa connaissance de nos fantômes disciplinaires et de ce qu'ils ont toujours à nous apprendre.

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