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ANTHROPOLOGY, HISTORY OF

Anthropology is the discipline that studies races, cultures, languages, and the evolution of the human species. It is broad in scope, incorporating the archeologist surveying Inca ruins, the cultural anthropologist collecting folklore in Appalachia, and the biological anthropologist mapping the gene sequences of lemurs. Yet the science of anthropology has long been steeped in debates, discussions, and controversies concerning race, racism, and the very meaning of human differences.

Anthropology has also been concerned with the so-called psychic unity of humankind, and with the fact that races and peoples the world over are essentially the same, both in terms of evolutionary biology and the acquisition and manipulation of culture. Tensions between investigating the universalism or particularism of the human condition, and between calibrating difference in relative terms or in terms of a hierarchy have been responsible for shaping much of this science that politicians, journalists, philanthropists, and even Supreme Court justices have routinely used in the rather messy and contradictory processes of race making in America. Perhaps more than any other social science, the development of anthropology has been instrumental in shaping racial constructs, while the development of racial constructs has also been instrumental in shaping anthropology.

COLONIAL ERA AND SLAVERY

The concept of "race" is a modern one, and the sustained study of it in the United States emerged when proponents of the institution of slavery needed scientists to

defend that institution from religious abolitionists, who called for the unity of God's children, and from Enlightenment critics, who called for liberty, fraternity, and equality of man. During the early colonial experience in North America, "race" was not a term that was widely employed. Notions of difference were often couched in religious terms, and comparisons between "heathen" and "Christian," "saved" and "unsaved," and "savage" and "civilized" were used to distinguish African and indigenous peoples from Europeans. Beginning in 1661 and continuing through the early eighteenth century, ideas about race began to circulate after Virginia and other colonies started passing legislation that made it legal to enslave African servants and their children.

In 1735 the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus completed his first edition of *Systema Naturae*, in which he attempted to differentiate various types of people scientifically. He identified humans as a single species within the primate family and did not explicitly rank types of people within a hierarchy. However, his value-laden judgments that Europeans were "governed by laws" while Africans were "governed by caprice" reinforced ideas that European society was the apex of Christian civilization (Linnaeus 1997 [1735], p.13).

The same year that Thomas Jefferson penned the *Declaration of Independence* and claimed, as self-evident, "that all men are created equal" Johann Blumenbach published *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, in which he divided the human race into separate and unequal varieties. It was Blumenbach who provided the four basic racial categories that people still grapple with in the early twenty-first century: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, and American (he later added a fifth category, Malayan). Despite his claims about the unity of humanity, Blumenbach viewed Europeans as the most advanced, and he argued that all other varieties degenerated from Caucasians, which he believed was "the most handsome and becoming" type (Blumenbach 1997 [1776], p. 84).

Enlightenment scientists helped to shift the discussion of human difference from the ecclesiastical to the natural world, but this did little to reduce institutional racism. In fact, scientific racism flourished in the wake of the French and American revolutions. In North America, the lofty ideals of equality, freedom, and liberty could not be reconciled with the institution of slavery and the acquisition of indigenous land. In Europe, meanwhile, these ideals did not square with colonialism and anti-Semitism. Indeed, the fraternity of those who were equal and free was exclusive: women, children, and the insane were always excluded from the rights and privileges of citizenship and equality under the law, and many began to turn to the science of ethnology to exclude nonwhite men as well (Fredrickson 2002, p. 68). People who had a stake in maintaining the

idea that all people had inalienable rights and a stake in maintaining racial inequality found scientific categories of race useful because those who were deemed racially inferior were also deemed incapable of shouldering the responsibilities of citizenship and thus did not qualify for rights and privileges—rights and privileges were contingent upon the responsibilities of citizenship.

Stated differently, only men of the “superior” white race were considered fully capable, while members of inferior races and all women were not equal, not free, did not have liberty, and could not be citizens. For example, Thomas Jefferson, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, turned to the language of ethnology to advance the notion “that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.” Jefferson was clear that one should and could clearly rank the races and keep them “as distinct as nature has formed them” (1996 [1781], p.143).

Despite using race to justify inequality, most enlightenment thinkers still believed in the doctrine of “mono-genetic origins,” of a single creation of all humanity. Although beliefs in monogenism were neither coherent nor consistent, ideas of human unity did not of themselves imply equality, and consequently monogenism did not necessarily support arguments for the abolition of slavery and the sovereignty of indigenous nations.

Several Enlightenment scholars, however, used the language of ethnology and scientific methods in an attempt to prove that racial differences were inconsequential and that it was a fool’s errand to rank the races and view racial differences in terms of inferior and superior. For example, Samuel Stanhope Smith (1751–1819), a Presbyterian minister and the president of Princeton University, passionately argued that blacks and whites shared innate characteristics. He persuasively documented how “it is impossible to draw the line precisely between the various races,” explaining that it would be “a useless labor to attempt it” (1810 [1787], p. 240). Benjamin Rush, a prominent Philadelphia physician who signed the *Declaration of Independence*, was certain that science and Christianity both demonstrated the “original and natural equality of all mankind” (1987 [1798], p. 686).

JACKSONIAN AMERICA AND POLYGENISM

Late eighteenth-century ethnology established the scientific foundation for the field, which began to mature during Andrew Jackson’s term as president of the United States (1829–1837). Jackson was responsible for implementing the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which resulted in the coerced and forced removal of an estimated 100,000 persons racially identified as American Indians. In addition,

Jackson’s policies insured that the franchise was extended to all white men, irrespective of financial means while virtually all black men were denied the right to vote. He also suppressed abolitionists’ efforts to end slavery while vigorously defending that institution. Finally, Jackson was responsible for appointing Roger B. Taney as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. It was Taney who would decide, in *Scott v. Sandford* (1857), that Negroes were “beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race . . . and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” As a result of this decision, black people, whether free or enslaved, were denied citizenship in the United States.

It was in this context that the so-called American school of anthropology thrived as the champion of polygenism (the doctrine of multiple origins), sparking a debate between those who believed in the unity of humanity and those who argued for the plurality of origins and the antiquity of distinct types. Like the monogenists, the polygenists were not united in their views, and they often used words such as *race*, *species*, *hybrid*, and *mongrel* interchangeably. A scientific consensus began to emerge during this period that there was a genus *Homo* made up of several different primordial types of species. Charles Caldwell, Samuel George Morton, Samuel A. Cartwright, George Gliddon, Josiah C. Nott, Louis Agassiz, and even South Carolina Governor James Henry Hammond were all influential proponents of polygenetic origins. While some were apparently disinterested scientists, others were passionate advocates who used science to promote slavery in a period of increasing sectional strife. All were complicit in establishing the putative science that justified slavery, informed the Dred Scott decision, underpinned miscegenation laws, and eventually fueled the establishment of Jim Crow laws. Samuel G. Morton, for example, claimed to be just a scientist, but he did not hesitate to provide evidence of Negro “inferiority” to John C. Calhoun, the prominent proslavery secretary of state, to help him negotiate the annexation of Texas as a slave state.

TYPES OF MANKIND, 1854

The high-point of polygenetic theories was Josiah Nott and George Gliddon’s voluminous 800-page book entitled *Types of Mankind*, published in 1854. Reprinting selected works by Louis Agassiz and Samuel Morton, the authors spread vituperative and explicitly racist views to a wider, more popular audience. The first edition quickly sold out, and by century’s end the book had undergone nine editions. Although many proponents of slavery felt that the Bible provided enough justification, others used the new science to defend slavery and the repression of American Indians, and abolitionists felt compelled to take on this science on its own terms. In the immediate



John Wesley Powell with Paiute Indian. Powell headed the U.S. Geological Survey from 1881 until 1894. He created a Bureau of Ethnology to collect information on Indian societies, believing this knowledge would help the government “civilize” the Native population. He is seen here on a survey of Arizona in 1873. AUTHENTICATED NEWS/GETTY IMAGES.

wake of *Types of Mankind*, African American intellectuals joined the effort and waded into the contemptuous debate. For example, during the pitched political battles that led to the Civil War, the statesman and persuasive abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) directly attacked the leading theorists of the American school. In an 1854 address, entitled “The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered,” Douglass underscored the peculiar logic in these arguments:

By making the enslaved a character fit only for slavery, [slave owners] excuse themselves for refusing to make the slave a freeman. . . . For let it be once granted that the human race are of multitudinous origin, naturally different in their moral, physical, and intellectual capacities . . . a chance is left for slavery, as a necessary institution. . . . There is no doubt that Messrs. Nott, Glidden, Morton,

Smith and Agassiz were duly consulted by our slavery propagating statesmen. (p. 287)

Critiquing the same science in the service of racism, Haitian anthropologist Joseph-Anténor Firmin published *De l'égalité des races humaines* (*On the Equality of Human Races*) in 1885. This painstakingly researched tome was a direct rebuttal to Count Arthur de Gobineau's politically motivated four-volume work *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (*Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, 1853–1855). Gobineau had asserted flatly that the Aryan race was superior and that Negroes and other people of color were simply inferior. Firmin argued the opposite, that “all men are endowed with the same qualities and the same faults, without distinction of color or anatomical form. The races are equal” (2000 [1854], p. 450). Firmin grew up in Haiti, but served as a diplomat in Paris where

he was admitted to the Société d' Anthropologie de Paris in 1884. His persuasive arguments and penchant critique of many of that society's leading members made him one of the first to engage in the so-called vindicationist struggle in anthropology. Many scholars also associate his work with early ideas of Pan-Africanism.

THE BUREAU OF ETHNOLOGY

Although the American Civil War and Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection brought about the eventual demise of theories of polygenism, the close relationship between scientific racism and ethnology continued. After the Civil War, anthropology in the United States became professionalized, associated with museums, and focused almost exclusively on the "Indian problem." The institution that led the way was the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology. In the spring of 1879 the Civil War hero John Wesley Powell (1834-1902) convinced Congress to consolidate various geographical surveys into the U.S. Geological Survey and establish a special bureau of ethnology. Powell emphasized the application of knowledge to justify the bureau's inception. Ethnology, he argued, could help to solve the Indian problem. In a prospectus for the bureau, he demonstrated the utility of having a stand-alone agency that could use science in this regard:

The rapid spread of civilization since 1849 had placed the white man and the Indian in direct conflict throughout the whole area, and the "Indian Problem" is thus thrust upon us and it *must* be solved, wisely or unwisely. Many of the difficulties are inherent and cannot be avoided, but an equal number are unnecessary and are caused by the lack of our knowledge relating to the Indians themselves. (Powell 1878, p.15)

Powell indicated that ethnology could provide intelligence about Indians, and that this was important because their practices "must necessarily be overthrown before new institutions, customs, philosophy, and religion can be introduced" (1878, p. 15). His blueprint for the bureau was twofold: it would serve Indian agencies by providing information to help manage and control dissimilar tribes, and it would serve Smithsonian science by providing research about disappearing societies. The bureau produced research under the rubric of natural history. The discovery, description, and cataloguing of Indian languages, customs, and kinship terminologies soon filled the elaborate annual reports, which highlighted the collective work of the bureau as well as individual staff members. Although most of the Bureau's scientists respected American Indian culture, all were clear in their belief that whites were racially superior. James Mooney (1861-1921), however, was a strident

force within the bureau. He carefully analyzed American Indian religious practices and argued that "the difference is only relative," explaining that there was not a hierarchical or vast difference between so-called savage Indians and civilized whites. He also wrote, under the auspices of the bureau, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, which was a devastating critique of the U.S. Army's massacre at Wounded Knee and an eloquent explanation of the Ghost Dance religion.

FRANZ BOAS

Anthropology soon began to move from museums to universities and liberal arts colleges, beginning with Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania. Anthropology was slowly institutionalized at Columbia University, and by 1904 Columbia's program was under the leadership of Franz Boas (1858-1942). A German-born Jew, Boas came to Columbia by way of the American Museum of Natural History, where he pursued research on American Indians of the Pacific Northwest. He was skeptical of theories of culture or civilization that ranked and ordered objects and races from low to high and from simple to complex. Drawing on German philosophy, he argued that people around the world created distinct and particular cultures, and that these should be viewed holistically and relative to other cultures, not within a hierarchy. He was a critic of the comparative method, which compared different groups and races within the rubrics of savage, barbarian, and civilized. Boas believed that the objects people make, the languages they speak, and the gods they worship contribute to unique cultures that have a specific history and view of the world.

This was an important paradigm shift in an era when restrictive immigration, Jim Crow segregation, and forced sterilization were justified by racialist science and eugenics, which entailed the use of selective breeding and sterilization to improve society. Boas, who is widely perceived as the father of American anthropology, worked closely with such notable African-American intellectuals as William E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Alain Locke, Arthur Fauset, and Zora Neale Hurston, and anthropology emerged as an important tool to challenge ideas of Negro inferiority during the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro movement.

Boas also trained many students who became leading professors and instructors around the country. In the United States during the nineteenth century, anthropology was used to defend slavery, Jim Crow segregation, Indian removal and assimilation schemes, restrictive immigration, and forced sterilization. However, it was also used by activists and intellectuals to combat these policies and fight for religious freedom, equality under the law, and human and civil rights.

SEE ALSO Boas, Franz; Eugenics, History of; Forensic Anthropology and Race; Genetics, History of; Human and Primate Evolution; Human Genetics.

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ANTHROPOMETRY

Anthropometry is the scientific study of variation in the size and shape of the human body. Anthropometric data have been used both to justify the belief in human biological "races" and to discredit this erroneous belief. This entry provides an overview of anthropometry and its relationship with "race" and racism.

EARLY ANTHROPOMETRIC BELIEFS

The earliest written records about human size date from about 3500 BCE in Sumeria. Several texts from this period mention a positive relationship between health, social status, and stature. The Sumerians were thus surprisingly astute, for this essentially echoes the current biocultural view of the causes of variation in human body size and shape. Groups of people growing and developing under social, economic, and cultural conditions that foster better nutrition and health tend to be, on average, taller and have longer arms and legs than groups of people growing up under less favorable sociocultural conditions. After more than a century of scientific research, this view may seem commonsensical, but it has not always been so.

The philosophers of the ancient Greeks, such as Plato and Aristotle (c. 350 BCE), considered living people and their cultures to be imperfect copies of an ideal type of physical human being and sociocultural system. The variation in body size and shape among various cultures was seen to be a consequence of the degree of imperfection within different societies. The Greeks of ancient Athens believed that they were closest to the ideal, and that the people of other societies were less perfect. However, the Greeks did not believe in the concept of "race," of fundamental biological divisions of humankind. Rather, they accepted the unity of all humankind.

MODERN ANTHROPOMETRY

The term "anthropometry" was coined by Johann Sigismund Elsholtz (1623–1688), who also invented an anthropometer, a device for measuring stature and the length of body parts such as arms and legs. Elsholtz was interested in testing the notion of the Greek physician Hippocrates (460?–357 BCE) that differences in body proportion were related to various diseases. In 1881, the French anthropologist Paul Topinard (1830–1911) applied anthropometry to the study of human "races, so as to distinguish them and establish their relations to each other" (Topinard 1881, p. 212).

Another line of racial investigation was craniology, the study of the skull. The Dutch physician Petrus Camper (1722–1789) and his followers measured various angles of the facial bones to determine the race and sex of skulls. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), a German naturalist and anthropologist, identified five "races," based on a visual inspection of skull shape and size. One of these was named the "Caucasian race," based on skulls from the Caucasus Mountains region of Georgia. Blumenbach believed that the living people of Georgia were the closest to the original form of the primordial Caucasian type, with European Caucasians being the next closest to the original.