

## **Introduction: Anthropological Theory and Practice — From Race to Ancestry, Phenotype to Genotype**

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Race as a descriptive and analytical category preceeds the formation of the social sciences; yet, no discipline has articulated, contested, and been shaped by its discursive politics more than anthropology. However, anthropological engagement with race is arguably not the foci of contemporary research emphases, a phenomenon Leith Mullings (2005) attributes to a disciplinary recoiling away from the historical ravages of biological racism. Shifting research attention towards ethnicity has left race — as a constructed social category — undertheorized in cultural anthropology (Mullings 2005:670).

Where have the theorists gone? It could be argued that much of the theoretical and ethnographic engagement has been diffused into Ethnic, Women's, African-American, Latin-American, American Indian, (South, Southeast, East) Asian, Hawaiian, and Cultural Studies programs and departments, where capillary power constrains interdisciplinary possibilities due to inherent epistemological paradoxes which promote methodological and ontological boundedness. However, anthropology as theory and ethnographic practice, the papers in this issue demonstrate, remains vital in offering a transdisciplinary critique of race as a socio-cultural construct.

Equally necessary is a critique of race *in* Anthropology, of the ways in which the discipline itself utilizes race as an investigatory category, and how over time this has come to index racial epistemologies behind both anthropological practice and subjectivity. Franz Boas and George Stocking, Jr. were at the forefront of anthropological battles against evolutionary assertions of racial hierarchy and exceptionalism, arguing that culture, not race, was the source of intellectual and social possibility. While it can be profitably argued that the culture concept is in itself problematic, it did serve to blur the concept of race from one of bio-tangibility, to that of the relative intangibility of culture.

Race as a putatively constructed object of analysis has shifted over time; from cranial measurements, IQ tests, syphilis experiments, and bell curves, to recent genetic and postgenomic technologies. If one thing is clear from these increasingly less tangibly shifting targets of analysis and ascription is that both scientific and anthropological racial gazes have moved from investigating diversity *among* populations to investigating diversity *within* populations. What is also clear is that bioevolutionary, cultural, and political ascriptions and epistèmes concerning race

tenaciously persist. Both the latter and former statements particularly apply to anthropological theory and praxis: vestiges of bio-evolutionary explanations of race (and other ascriptions of difference) still persist in the face of biogenetic declarations of race as having no basis in scientific fact. Epistemology has not kept pace with the technologies, techniques, professional and scientific networks, and capital infusions which have proliferated in the last twenty years. Diversity as a normative condition of existence is an idea whose time has not yet fully arrived.

This special theme issue on "Race and Anthropology, Race in Anthropology," examines how anthropology continues to struggle with older classificatory racial schema in the face of scientific change. In this sense, it provides a comparative contrast to the last KAS edited volume on race, "Racial Anthropology: Retrospective on Carleton Coon's *The Origin of the Races* (1962)", which explored Coon's racial categorizations and the scholarly challenges to them in the face of biological evidence to the contrary, as emblematic of an historical disjuncture in anthropology, when bioevolutionary models of race and culture were losing their tenacity. Post WW II social science theory was forced to reckon with the hubris of that war and the notions of race and culture it very much influenced. Coon's work fueled the smoldering fires of racism extant in social and political life, from which anthropology was not immune. Journal politics and futile recalcitrance on the part of Coon only delayed, but could not ultimately withstand, the theoretical shifts in anthropology exemplified by a resolutely persistent cadre of reviewers who brilliantly connected Coon's theory to his political affines (Marks 2000).

The papers in this issue demonstrate that contemporary biological and anthropological articulations denying the validity of biologized racial categories have not coherently and cogently filtered into individual and group notions of identity, and in many respects have not changed substantially since the time of Coon's The Origin of the Races. This poses fundamental questions about the persistence of bioevolutionary attributions of race as well as the empirical failure of anthropology to make a profound impact on public discourse. More on this later.

The first two papers, by Vicki Wedel, and Pamela Ashmore and Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris, respectively, address the issue of "Race and Anthropology." The last two articles, by Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, followed by Olivia Gall, take conceptual aim at "Race in Anthropology."<sup>1</sup>

Vicki Wedel writes of the epistemological, ethical, and methodological dilemmas facing forensic anthropologists asked to identify the race of skeletal remains found during the course of law enforcement investigations and museum projects. This despite the fact that race as a biological construct has no empirical basis in biological anthropology; however, socially embedded beliefs about race as a biologically ascertainable given are shown in Wedel's paper as driving law enforcement as well as museum curation practices. Wedel argues for an engaged public anthropology in order

to overcome essentialized determinations about race. In this attempt, Wedel persuasively shows how public and administrative policies can be adversely affected by such ellipses between understanding and best practices.

Wedel's urging of greater public anthropological voicing of race's lack of saliency as a biological concept, is taken on in Pamela Ashmore and Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris' paper examining how one such program in St. Louis, Missouri sought to bring anthropological ideas about race to middle school, junior, and senior high school students. Undertaken by UM – St. Louis, preliminary surveys found that sampled undergraduates and even faculty still believed in biological racial ascriptions. From an applied perspective, many of the academic biological and cultural anthropologists involved had difficulties translating their ivory-tower language about race to pre-college youth. This poses questions about the boundaries, arbitrarily constructed or not, between the discourses of the academy and those of the public sphere.

Tiffany Willoughby-Herard engages how race *in* anthropology appears in the everyday realities of minority anthropologists seeking a place in what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1993) calls a "North Atlantic conversation." A decline in emphasis of cultural anthropological interrogations of race is seen by Willoughby-Herard as indexing the rise of the African Diaspora Studies department across the country, enlivened by Black anthropologists shunted to the professional and topical margins of anthropology, by anthropology itself. In a sense, both biological and cultural anthropologies' movement away from bounded notions of race are seen as informative of African Diaspora Studies expansion beyond the bounded nationalisms of African-American Studies, towards an anthropological epistème more characteristic of Paul Gilroy's (1993) *Black Atlantic* than the sociological nationalism of a du Bois. As a pedagogical lens, Willoughby-Herard uses anthropological critique to interrogate diasporic epistèmes while using diasporic critique to interrogate anthropological epistèmes — the former objects of study are now the subjects of inquiry.

Is it problematic that "race" and "culture" are no longer relevant, just as the former "objects of study" have begun to articulate their subjectivity in these terms? And where does this subjectivity begin? Is it to be located in the ascribed and inscribed racial subjectivities of an older anthropology, or in the self-prescribed subjectivities articulated from within Diaspora studies? Willoughby-Herard opines the latter, arguing that conversations surrounding African Diasporic peoples, historically and ethnographically not welcome in mainstream anthropology (by Black scholars, particularly), found fertile, new, intellectual ground in African-American-cum African Diaspora Studies programs and departments. Anthropological rigor brought new epistemological and methodological approaches to a discipline known more for the temporal verticalities of its historical orientations: anthropology's attention to the spatial, horizontal phenomena of human experience through ethnography is shown by Willoughby-Herard as bringing analytical depth to African Diaspora Studies. This should not be new to anthropology or to anthropologists:

Melville Herskovits, a student of Franz Boas, was the first chair of an African Studies department in the United States in 1948 at Northwestern University.

Finally, Olivia Gall's theoretical exposition on race and modernity is an elaboration of historical notions of race and difference, and the ways in which they have been articulated and rationalized. She explores race and modernity in the narrative mythic constructions of the nation-state. Ascribed and inscribed positionalities within national hierarchies of power effect not only situated, but agentic roles and possibilities within the narrative. This, Gall shows, also affects the epistemological grounding of the social scientist, a social product of these histories and genealogies of assumption. Gall warns the social scientist, who, unreflexively seeking to interrogate racism without first interrogating his own set of universalized assumptions, reproduces the language of racism in his scholarship.

Implicit in these narratives is that the enrichment of other disciplines, such as Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, African-American Studies, Latin-American Studies, and Cultural Studies programs and departments by anthropology and anthropologists tells another story: one of a discipline unwilling or unable to come to terms with the historical and epistemological weight of the intellectual diversity now writing in its name. That the promise of anthropology as *anthropos* is being fulfilled in other departments and disciplines says as much about the persistence of structure as it does about professionalism and the politics of knowledge production and valuation. Yet what is clear here is that, while capillary power can constrain, it is not absolute; osmotic pressure reverses its movement into the venous circulation. Right back to the heart of the anthropological project.

I would agree with Laura Nader's (1994) assertion that the collapsing of spatial distance and boundedness due to the globalized speed of the present makes redundant anthropological approaches born in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – rendering culture as an analytical domain no longer the exclusive province of anthropological and sociological theory. But I would further submit that anthropological theory is best equipped among social sciences and humanities approaches in engaging social constructions of time and space in both local and global contexts; and that the circulation of globalized capital, discourses, practices, and the knowledge contained within and produced by them will have different local ethnographic outcomes either resistant to or enabling of essentializing narrative tropes such as race, ethnicity, ancestry, and culture.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The collection of papers in this theme issue on race tell another story: all of the articles published here, as well as all of the papers submitted for consideration for this issue, were written by female academics. While not a representative sample, it is perhaps a sample representation of the theoretical and ethnographic one hundred and eighty degree turn that both, ideas about race in anthropology, and race and anthropology have taken, but also the positionality and ethnographic authority of women anthropologists to inscribe them (cf. Behar and Gordon, eds. Women Writing Culture. UC Press. 1996.)