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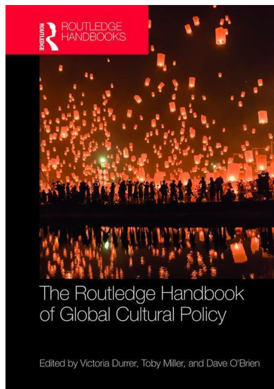

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The political career of the culture concept

Tony Bennett

My concerns in this chapter are with the discursive coordinates that shaped a distinctive episode in the political career of the cultural concept: that comprised by the role it played in the development of assimilationist conceptions of multiculturalism in the inter-war period through to the early post-war period. The key developments here focus on the successive elaborations of Franz Boas's interpretation of the culture concept – briefly, the conception of culture as an ordered way of life – that informed the trajectories of American anthropology during a period when it was both intellectually dominated by Boasians and, somewhat contrary to Boas's own inclinations, entering into increasingly close forms of collaboration with a range of governmental agencies (Mandler 2013; Price 2008). By focusing on this episode in the political career of the culture concept, I also aim to throw some fresh light on a later moment in its history when, in the founding years of British cultural studies, it was annexed to a conception of class politics in which the ways of life of working-class cultures were constituted as potential sources of resistance to dominant class formations. This interpretation of the concept departed from its inter-war history in being fashioned as a source for counter-conducts rather than as a governmental actor and, as an aspect of this, the way in which its relations to aesthetic conceptions of culture were interpreted also changed. I shall show how its earlier history as a policy actor in the United States rested on a particular governmental mobilisation of formalist aesthetics that informed the conception of ways of life as being endowed with a particular shape or pattern derived from the creativity of the people concerned. The initial phases of its use in British cultural studies detached it from the coordinates of race and ethnicity that informed its earlier American anthropological career, coordinates to which the concept has been re-attached in its later career in cultural studies in the light of its re-reading by Stuart Hall and others. While this later episode in the political career of the culture concept goes beyond the historical remit of my concerns in this chapter, it nonetheless informs my engagement with its earlier moments.

The order of discussion will be as follows. I look first at the definitional issues associated with the concept of culture as a way of life across its relations between anthropology and cultural studies. I then look more closely at the Boasian and post-Boasian interpretations of the concept within American anthropology, focusing particularly on its aesthetic properties and the differential interpretation of these across its application to the cultures of

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Native Americans, Caucasians, African-Americans and European migrants. This prepares the ground for a closer examination of the deployment of the concept in the early years of the development of American assimilationist policies and particularly the political logics informing the exclusions effected by these policies. I conclude by reflecting on current critical re-engagements with the relations between the Boasian culture concept and the category of race.

From universal hierarchy to patterned differences

In his classic *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Philippe Descola insists that it was only with Boas 'that there emerged the idea that each people constitutes a unique and coherent configuration of material and intellectual features sanctioned by tradition, that tradition being typical of a certain mode of life, rooted in the specific categories of a language and responsible for the specificity of the individual and collective behaviour of its members' (2013: 73). As such, its significance consisted in replacing the grading of peoples in evolutionary terms 'by a synchronic table in which all cultures are equally valid' (73). It was further, Descola argues, through his acquaintance with Boas that Claude Lévi-Strauss, in subscribing to 'the idea that nothing justified setting up a hierarchy of cultures in accordance with either a moral scale or a diachronic series' (75), contributed to the production of culture as a new surface for the management of differences, ostensibly replacing both race and earlier aesthetic hierarchies, that informed the debates leading to UNESCO's post-war statements on race. There were, of course, other intellectual currents running into UNESCO's founding documents than the Boasian one: Lévi-Strauss's relativism arguably owed as much to his association with Paul Rivet at the Musée de l'Homme as to his acquaintance with Boas (Laurière 2008), and the reworking of the legacy of early twentieth century anthropology effected by Mass Observation also fed into UNESCO's early adjudications of the relations between race and culture (Kushner 2004). These qualifications to one side, however, there can be little doubt regarding the long-term impact of UNESCO's formulations in producing culture as a policy actor for the regulation of differences that have shaped a variety of its programmes – running up to, in the 1990s, *Our Creative Diversity* (1996) and, more recently, its *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (2005) – with significant consequences for the development of a wide range of national cultural policies.

I am more immediately interested here, however, in Descola's disputation of those accounts that attribute a continuous history to the culture concept as running uninterruptedly from Edward Burnett Tylor's 1871 formulation of culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (1). He has particularly in mind the influential codification of the history of the culture concept effected by two of Boas's students, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, in their *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. In presenting Tylor and Boas as the two key figures on the road leading toward the science of culture they wished to establish, Kroeber and Kluckhohn overlooked what Descola highlights as the crucial difference between them: Tylor's commitment to an evolutionary and hierarchical ordering of the relations between different cultures as calibrated by the degree of their approximation to Euro-American norms of civilisation. This long-standing criticism of Tylor within the anthropological literature has been accompanied by another that, again, accentuates the differences between Tylor and Boas. Whereas Boas viewed culture as a creatively ordered whole in which the elements that comprise it are configured into a distinctively patterned way of life, Tylor's conception of culture amounted to no more than 'a list of traits, with the consequence that culture might be inventoried but never analysed' (Kuper 2000: 57).

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Williams who, in his *Keywords* entry on Culture (1976), relies a good deal on Kroeber and Kluckhohn's text, nonetheless registers his unease at their attempt to draw a clear line of demarcation between a scientific, anthropological approach to culture and its aesthetic conception – a distinction that, it should be added, is given a nationalist inflection in Kroeber and Kluckhohn's interpretation of the former as an American approach developed in opposition to European humanistic traditions (Gilkeson 2010). This is evident, for example, in their comments on T.S. Eliot who, while being congratulated for speaking of culture 'in the quite concrete denotation of certain anthropologists' as exemplified by his famous characterisation of the activities that go together to make up the English way of life (Eliot 1962), is chastised for attempting to reconcile 'the humanistic and social science views' of culture as a misuse of the American anthropological tradition on which he drew (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 32–33). Williams (1965), while failing to acknowledge the differences between them, draws more on the aesthetically inflected registers of the culture concept articulated by Ruth Benedict's conception of the distinctive patterning of the relations between the elements comprising a whole way of life than on Tylor's listing of cultural traits. The same was true of Richard Hoggart who, Richard Handler (2005) has suggested, was influenced by the modernist inflection that was given to the culture concept in the 'culture and personality' school, most notably represented by Edward Sapir, whose contrast between 'genuine' and 'spurious' culture (Sapir 1924) provided a model for Hoggart's analysis of the relations between working class and mass culture (Hoggart 1969). It is the distinctive aesthetically patterned form that it acquires from the situated creativity of the working classes, Hoggart argues, that imbues working-class culture with its resilience – its capacity to resist the synthetic orderings of commercial mass culture. At the same time, if, as Handler puts it, this account rests on 'the assumption (standard in anthropological theory) that the pattern of working-class culture is alive – adaptive, resistant, persistent – precisely because its "bearers," the "natives," hold to it unconsciously' (Handler 2005: 163–164), this failure to attain a critical self-consciousness also entails its devaluation from the modernist perspective that informs Hoggart's work: it might survive but can never become a general model. Williams similarly, Handler argues, universalise a modernist conception of creativity in attributing the dynamism of culture to the general interplay between inherited cultural forms and the creativity of groups or individuals, while nonetheless retaining, in his conception of culture as ordinary, a modernist distinction between 'the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings' (Williams 1989: 4).

I make these points by way of noting how the influence of the American culture concept on the founding texts of British cultural studies was largely filtered through the later, more explicitly high modernist interpretations of that concept by Eliot and Sapir with neither Hoggart nor Williams looking much beyond these to the earlier history of the concept or its political articulations. This was even more true of the subsequent development of the concept in British cultural studies where, in being switched initially from the axes of race in being attached to those of class, the 'anthropological concept of culture', as it came to be known, was typically endorsed for its value-neutral, levelling qualities in asserting the equal value of all forms of cultural creativity irrespective of the place accorded them within official cultural hierarchies. This was an aspect of its early history in post-war Britain, evident, for example, in Williams's role in contributing to a limited shift in the Arts Council's priorities from an initial exclusive focus on high culture to a broader conception of the range and kinds of cultural practice that might merit government support. We need, however, to look to the earlier history of the culture concept and its relations to the fieldwork tradition in American anthropology, to appreciate how its aesthetic properties were initially acquired

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and how these came to be fused with its operations as a policy actor. It's a history in which the idea of culture as a patterned articulation of the relations between elements in a way of life became attached to assimilationist programs within a hierarchical ordering of racial categories.

The aesthetic ordering and differentiation of cultures

From its inception in the work of Tylor, the culture concept has been shaped by the relations between the practices of collecting materials from subordinate cultures and ordering the relations between these and dominant cultures, in ways that have informed practices of governing. While the limitations of ruptural interpretations of the development of the fieldwork phase in anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been widely canvassed (Fabian 2000), the place accorded fieldwork within the Boasian tradition did significantly shift, while not entirely displacing, the place accorded 'primitive cultures' within the earlier paradigm of evolutionary anthropology. Key here was the transition from the style of armchair anthropology practiced by Tylor and the evolutionary assumptions underlying the typological method of museum displays that informed his collecting practices. Objects culled from diverse locations – by missionaries, traders, policemen or looters – were brought together in evolutionary sequences in testimony to a universal path of human development (Bennett 2004). This lack of concern with the configurational ordering of relations between traits comprising a particular culture has often been assessed as a limitation from the perspective of the later Boasian development of the concept. In fact, though, it constituted a different principle of ordering that was shaped by a political program that, in identifying those traits that represented what Georges Didi-Huberman (2002) characterises as a 'spectral time' – a legacy of the past that is disconnected from the present that has superseded it – also identified those aspects of 'primitive cultures' that were to be surgically removed by colonial governance. Tylor was perfectly clear about this implication of his doctrine of survivals that was not, he argued, to be understood as a 'mere abstract truth, barren of all practical importance' but, to the contrary, as a means of identifying those 'streams of folly' that, persisting from the past, have to be eliminated in order to integrate 'the savage' into the culture of the higher races (Tylor 1867: 93).

Although Boas cut his anthropological teeth in projects directed by Tylor, the problem space that he went on to develop was, George Stocking (1968) contends, a quite different one in which the interpretation of fieldwork evidence made the specific patterns produced by the intermixing of the traits comprising any specific culture a particular historical problem that was not susceptible to any general laws of an evolutionary kind. Susan Hegeman develops this line of argument further seeing the Boasian fieldwork problematic as a key moment in the development of a new form of anthropological authority based on the anthropologist's unique ability to decipher the distinguishing qualities of other cultures. In place of a commitment to the collection of objects that could be put on display for all to see as evidence of a universal narrative of humanity, the Boasian paradigm substituted the more abstract object of 'cultures'. This required special methods of collection alert to the interrelations of objects, myths, rituals, language, etc., within a specific way of life accessible only to the trained anthropologist immersed in the culture in question (Hegeman 1999). Each culture, as Boas put it, 'can be understood only as an historical growth determined by the social and geographical environment in which each people is placed and by the way in which it develops the cultural material that comes into its possession from the outside or through its own creativeness' (2010: 4). Ruth Benedict registered the shift that this involved in chastising the

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earlier generation of armchair anthropologists for the undue emphasis they had placed on the collection of material culture:

> Strictly speaking, material culture is not really culture at all. ... Behind every artefact are the patterns of culture that give form to the idea for the artefact and the techniques of shaping and using it. ... The use and meaning of any object depends almost wholly on non-material behaviour patterns, and the objects derive their true significance from such patterns.
>
> *(Benedict 1947: 1)*

This form-giving capacity was subject to different formulations at different moments in the development of the culture concept. Boas was notably reticent on the subject, implicitly drawing on the Germanic tradition to impute the creativity of a people to their unique genius, a capacity he sometime interpreted in terms of Herder's categories, sometimes in terms of those provided by Humboldt and sometimes in Kantian terms (Bunzl 1996; Stocking 1968). As subsequently developed by his various students, however, the distinctive shape of a culture was re-interpreted in more explicitly modernist terms (Hegeman 1999) as the result of a form-giving activity modelled on the work of art that, whether performed by individual or collective social agents, broke through inherited patterns of thought and behaviour to crystallise new social tendencies. This is evident, for example, in Benedict's concept of the pattern of culture that, drawing on Wilhelm Worringer's conception of abstract form (Worringer 1997), she interprets as 'the result of a unique arrangement and interrelation of the parts that has brought about a new entity,' a process she compares to that 'by which a style in art comes into being and persists' (Benedict 2005: 47). Melville Herskovits, like Benedict one of Boas's students, took the analogy further arguing that it 'it is necessary to know the "style" of a culture—which is merely another way of saying that we must know its patterning—in precisely the same way that the student of art must know the styles that characterise the various periods of art-history in order to cope with the individual variations that are exemplified in the works of artists of a given epoch' (Herskovits 1938: 22).

It was, then, this conception of a configurational order arising out of the form-giving principles that expressed the inner necessities of group life – of culture as 'an integrated spiritual totality which somehow conditioned the form of its elements' (Stocking 1968: 21) – that differentiated the Boasian culture concept from Malinowski's functional conception of the social whole as an amalgamation of the pragmatic functions performed by different traits. The anthropologist's attention was redirected accordingly: 'The anthropologist,' as Margaret Mead put it, 'is trained to see form where other people see concrete details' (1942: 4–5). At the same time that it was advanced as a general theory of culture, however, the culture concept also distinguished between cultures – and it did so along lines derived from the principles of aesthetic modernism. This was clear in Boas's *Primitive Art*, his most extended treatment of the subject in which he explicitly disputed the various grounds on which earlier generations of anthropologists had either denied colonised peoples any capacity for aesthetic creativity or acknowledged it only in a diminished form. The conception of a universally valid sequence for the development of art forms; the contention that the mental capacities of 'primitives' are inferior to those of 'civilised' peoples; the denial of any capacity for aesthetic innovation to 'primitive people' as a consequence of the force of habit in inhibiting the development of originality: all of these are given short shrift. Like their modern counterparts, Boas argues that primitives differed from one another in the degree to which their aesthetic capacities are developed: 'intense among a few, slight among the mass' (Boas 2010: 356).

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There are, however, still differences between moderns and primitives – relative rather than absolute, and accounted for in sociological rather than biological terms – but differences nonetheless:

> What distinguishes modern aesthetic feeling from that of primitive people is the manifold character of its manifestations. We are not so much bound by a fixed style. The complexity of our social structure and our more varied interests allow us to see beauties that are closed to the senses of people living in a narrower culture. It is the quality of their experience, not a difference in mental make-up that determines the difference between modern and primitive art production and art appreciation.
>
> *(Boas 2010: 356)*

It was, however, a hallmark of the Boasian tradition that the closure of primitive cultures was always presented in relative rather than absolute terms. Its unity, accordingly, was always conceived as incomplete and provisional. If the unity of a culture is derived from the aesthetic form-like properties that give a distinctive shape to the elements comprising a way of life, that unity, Benedict argued, is always a fractured one. Why? Because most of the traits that comprise the building blocks of a culture come from sources that 'are diverse and unlike' (Benedict 1947: 1), thus constituting contradictory elements that either cancel each other out or are brought together in a new form of synthesis. It is in the processes through which such new syntheses are produced that the aesthetic and the spatial aspects of the culture concept – most fully expressed in the concept of culture area – are brought together. For the Boasians, culture was always both territorially grounded and subject to disruption from the trans-territorial flows of cultural traits carried by the histories of peoples in movement. It is to these matters that I now turn as a prelude to considering how the aesthetic and spatial registers of the culture concept combined in shaping its qualities as a policy actor.

Mutable spatialisations of cultures in movement

Let me go back to Williams. In opening his essay 'Culture is ordinary', Williams first looks to connections between place and way of life to convey a sense of culture's ordinariness. 'To grow up in that country,' he says, 'was to see the shape of a culture, and its modes of change' (1989: 4). The country in question – the Border Country between England and Wales – is richly evoked by recounting a bus journey from Hereford to the Black Mountains. Orchards, meadows, hillside bracken, early iron works, Norman castles, steel mills, pitheads, the railway, scattered farms, town terraces – this is the regional scene that Williams starts with before populating it by describing his own working-class affiliations to it through his father and grandfather. But it is the sense of a wider spatially defined culture that comes first, and class second. The complex interplay between these regional and class co-ordinates also spills over into questions of Englishness as, with T.S. Eliot in his sights, he insists that working-class culture – and not the petty niceties of the English ruling class – gives English culture, understood as a way of life, its distinctive coherence. Welsh culture too, of course; however, in this essay, it is Englishness that most concerns Williams in pinning his colours to the principles of 'a distinct working-class way of life … with its emphases of neighbourhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment as … the best basis for any future English society' (8). Ways of life are thus defined spatially as well socially; they are regionally embedded, and the relations between them are nationally defining.

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In highlighting the relations between place and way of life, Williams followed in the footsteps of T.S. Eliot who included among the three main conditions for culture 'the necessity that a culture should be analysable, geographically, into local cultures' (Eliot 1962, Kindle loc. 70). He acknowledges his debt to the American school of anthropology in this regard: 'By "culture", then, I mean first of all what the anthropologists mean: the way of life of a particular people living together in one place' (loc 1687; see further Manganaro 2002). Although these connections between culture and place were, in the Boasian tradition, fluid and mutable, they have often been read as binding different ways of life, people and territories into essentialist relations to one another. There are several reasons for this. Some have to do with the interpretation of the culture concept in the context of American assimilationist policies in the late 1920s and 1930s in which the conception of America as a melting pot defined an emerging American national self-consciousness that was differentiated from European nationalisms (Gilkeson 2010; Mandler 2013) – and I shall have more to say on this shortly. Others derive from the territorialisation of the culture concept during the 1939–1945 war and the post-war period when it was revised to refer to a field of national differences that were to be made commensurable with one another through the new geopolitical-diplomatic order of the United Nations (Price 2008).

Some of Boas's early work also echoed Herder's conception of culture as the expression of a geographically delimited people. Later, however, he rejected any sense that regional environments might be regarded as having a determining influence on cultures. 'It is sufficient,' he wrote in 1932, 'to see the fundamental differences of culture that thrive one after the other in the same environment, to make us understand the limitations of environmental influence', adding, as a pointed contrast, that the 'aborigines of Australia live in the same environment in which the White invaders live' (Boas 1932: 256). The key questions here bear on Boasian conceptions of the relations between processes of cultural diffusion and the organisation of cultural areas. These questions have been revisited in a substantial body of recent work that argues that the Boasian construction of these relations anticipates contemporary accounts of the relations between trans-border cultural flows and migration in breaking with the modern order of nation states. It was, Ira Bashkow argues, 'axiomatic to the Boasians that cultural boundaries were porous and permeable', citing Robert Lowie's contention that any given culture is 'a "planless hodgepodge," a "thing of shreds and patches"' as economically summarising the view that any particular culture 'develops not according to a fixed law or design but out of a vast set of contingent external influences' (Bashkow 2004: 445). These are brought into historically contingent, impermanent and unstable fusions with one another in particularly territorially marked culture areas, only to be later disaggregated in the context of different relations of cross-cultural contact and population migrations. Brad Evans similarly interprets Boas's significance as consisting not in his pluralisation of the culture concept – something that Herder had already done – but in his conception of the 'detachability' of the texts and objects that comprise the elements of a culture from any organic association with any particular spatial or historical culture so that they might serve as 'vehicles for the articulation and disarticulation of meaning across discontinuous geographies and temporalities' (Evans 2005: 15). Recounting Boas's role in the reconceptualisation of folklore studies under the influence of turn-of-the-century developments in philology, Evans argues that these undermined earlier romantic and nationalist conceptions of an inherent connection between a particular people and a particular culture by reconceptualising cultures as being, like languages, 'public objects' formed by processes of historical interaction and migration beyond the control of individual speakers or speech communities.

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The pattern of a culture, then, is not expressive of an essential set of relations of a people, place and way life but is a conjunctural and pliable articulation of those relations that derives its distinctive qualities from the creative, form-giving capacity of the people concerned. As cultural traits are diffused across cultural areas, their meaning is transformed: 'The nature of the trait,' as Benedict put it, 'will be quite different in the different areas according to the elements with which it has been combined' (2005: 37). In turning now to consider how these spatial and aesthetic aspects of the culture concept informed the governmental rationalities that characterised the development of the relations between earlier 'settlers' and more recent immigrants and between both of these and Native Americans and African Americans, I engage with recent re-evaluations of the relations between the culture concept and racial categories.

The culture concept, race and assimilation

While the reappraisals of the Boasian tradition that I have drawn on above accentuate those aspects of the culture concept that resonate with contemporary accounts of processes of cultural hybridisation, they are also careful to stress the differences. Moreover, many of the other qualities conventionally attributed to the culture concept – its rebuttal of hierarchical orderings of the relations between different cultures and its critique of racial categories – do not withstand scrutiny. Although Boas contested the conception of 'primitive cultures' as having had no history ('even a primitive people has a long history behind it' [1909: 68]) the distinction between primitive and civilized peoples was never entirely jettisoned. As we have seen, it informed Boas's account of the difference between 'modern aesthetic feeling' (2010: 356) and that of the primitive. Perhaps more crucially, however, this relative generosity toward the primitive was not matched by a corresponding assessment of the cultural creativity of contemporary African or Native Americans. These exclusions were constitutive of the culture concept during this period. When Boas wrote about the 'creative genius' of Africans, it was always only with reference to their traditional culture in Africa. He took no account of the consequences of the Middle Passage or the contemporary cultural creativity of African Americans, even though he produced his most important work at the University of Columbia at the time of the Harlem Renaissance (Lamothe 2008; Zumwait 2008). When discussing African Americans his attention focuses on 'the backwardness, inertia, and lack of initiative of the great masses in the South', contrasting this with the 'active life that the same people led before the baneful influence of the whites made itself' as the slave trade separated the Negro from 'the culture that he has developed in his natural surroundings'.[1] While, courtesy of the anthropological fieldworker, the cultures of Native Americans provided a defamiliarising device that highlighted the distinctive qualities of American culture (Hegeman 1999), there was never any sense – in Boas, in Benedict or in Mead – that they might be counted a part of that culture. As Steven Conn (2004) has shown, Boasian anthropology played a key role in detaching Native Americans from the realms of American history and painting and assigning them to a timeless anthropological present that was in America, but not of it.

This bears on the third limitation of the culture concept: its relations to a set of biological race categories that excluded African Americans and Native Americans from the machineries of assimilation that the concept established. This is not to discount the significance of Boas's persistent probing of racial accounts of human difference. 'It has not been possible,' he wrote in 1920, 'to discover in the races of man any kind of fundamental biological differences that would outweigh the influence of culture' (Boas 1920: 35). This was, however, never a matter that he entirely put to rest. Throughout his career, and paralleling his 'fieldwork' among

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the Kwakiutal, the public school provided Boas with another context for collecting – not, though, stories, myths or languages, but anthropometric data relating to changes in the body types of second, relative to first, generation immigrants (Baker 2010: 137–146). Boas conceived this work as a critical engagement with the problem space of anthropometry: 'we have to consider the investigation of the instability of the body under varying environmental conditions as one of the most fundamental subjects to be considered in an anthropometric study of our population' (Boas 1922: 59). However, while demonstrating the plasticity of bodily types in ways that suggested that immigrants might be just as malleable in their physiognomies as in their ways of life, Boas – and his followers – retained a distinction among 'Caucasoid', 'Mongoloid' and 'Negroid' as biologically differentiated stocks of humanity. Although not organising the relations between them in hierarchical terms, these categorisations led Boas to place the Negro in a different position from the immigrant with regard to processes of assimilation. He interpreted this as not just a cultural process but as a physio-anatomical one that would likely depend on the disappearance of the Negro as a distinct physical type through miscegenation. Arguing that this would lead to a progressive whitening of the black population, he concluded that the continued persistence of 'the pure negro type is practically impossible' (Boas 1909: 330).

The situation with regard to Native Americans was different but scarcely more auspicious. On the one hand, in racial terms, they hardly mattered. The degree of intermarriage between Indians and settlers, Boas argued, had not been sufficient in 'any populous part of the United States to be considered as an important element in our population' (1909: 319). Nicely distanced from the urban centre of metropolitan America, Native Americans were not a part of the mix from which the future of America's population stock or its culture was to be forged. The 'skeleton in the closet' of Boasian anthropology, William Willis has argued, consists in the fact that, when applied across the colour line separating Caucasian from other populations, its lessons regarding the plasticity and conjunctural mutability of inherited cultures was translated into the one-way enculturation of coloured people into white culture. 'The transmission of culture from coloured peoples to white people was largely ignored,' he argued, 'especially when studying North American Indians' (1999: 139). Either that or, in Ruth Benedict's conception, the cultures of the Indian and of white Americans had – after an initial period of interaction – come to face each other as two impermeable wholes, each unable to find any space for the values of the other within its own. 'The Indians of the United States,' as she put it, 'have most of them become simply men without a cultural country. They are unable to locate anything in the white man's way of life which is sufficiently congenial to their old culture' (1974: 1) and were thus located outside the melting pot of an emerging American culture.

My account here draws on the work of Mark Anderson (2013), Kamala Visweswaran (2010) and, more particularly, Matthew Jacobson (1998) who interpret the significance of the culture concept in terms of the role it played, alongside changing conceptions of whiteness, in adjudicating capacities for citizenship against the backdrop of the longer history of American republicanism. Jacobson focuses particularly on the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act as prompting a pivotal revision of the category of whiteness. Whereas whiteness and citizenship were linked in a 1790 Act of Congress according to a 'nativist' concept limiting citizenship to free white persons with rights of residence, the period from 1840 to 1924 witnessed a strategic redefinition of whiteness designed to address the dilemmas of American white nativism faced with new waves of immigration from diverse sources. This produced new racialised divisions within the earlier undifferentiated category of whiteness, disbarring some 'white' groups from the liberal criteria defining fitness for self-government by producing new shades

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of darkness that differentiated groups like the Poles and the Irish from Anglo-Saxons, the privileged representatives of white nativism. The 1924 Act constituted a new articulation of this tendency in differentiating desirable European migrants (defined as 'Nordic', a wider category than Anglo-Saxon in that it also included German and Scandinavian migrants) from 'Alpines' and 'Mediterraneans' (who had been the main sources of new immigrants since the 1880s, and whose numbers were curtailed by this measure). The logic governing the revision of the category of whiteness after 1924, when the tensions around immigration from southern Europe lessened somewhat as a consequence of the reduction in their numbers, was, Jacobson, argues, 'one in which the civic story of assimilation (the process by which the Irish, Russian Jews, Poles, and Greeks became Americans) is inseparable from the cultural story of racial alchemy (the process by which Celts, Hebrews, Slavs, and Mediterraneans became Caucasians' (1998: 8).

This conception of a project of assimilation organised around a newly homogenised category of the Caucasian defined against the categories of the Mongolian and the Negro provided the political rationality informing the governmental mobilisation of the culture concept. I have argued elsewhere the need to attend to the relations between the processes of 'making culture' and 'changing society', arguing that the cultural disciplines have played a key role in organising distinctive 'working surfaces on the social' through which governmental practices are brought to bear on the conduct of conduct (Bennett 2013). The trajectory of the Boasian culture concept is a case in point. From the late 1920s through the 1930s and into the 1940s, the relations between the aesthetic conception of the pattern of culture, its spatial coordinates, and its malleability came to inform a program in which cultural planners, guided by anthropologists, were to regulate the conditions in which American society would creatively transform itself by absorbing immigrant cultures in an assimilationist logic that focused exclusively on the relations between different periods of European migration. The culture concept was, Anderson argues, integral to 'the larger processes whereby stigmatized European immigrant populations were "whitened" and rendered assimilable into the "American" mainstream' (Anderson 2013: 5). The key reference point for this governmental rationality was that of the 'third generation'. In applying the culture concept to ask what were the uniquely defining characteristics of the American character, Mead argued that Americans establish their ties with one another by finding common points on the road that they are all expected to travel 'after their forebears came from Europe one or two or three generations ago' (Mead 1942: 28). It is a road defined by the forging of new ties and by a dialectic of 'remembrance and purposeful forgetting of European ancestry' and an initial clinging to European ways of life in Little Italies followed by a scattering 'to the suburbs and the small towns, to an "American" way of life' (Mead 1942: 29). It was in this sense, she argued, that 'however many generations we may actually boast of in this country, however real our lack of ties in the old world may be, we are all third generation' (31). Negroes, Native Americans and, in some formulations, Jews were special cases to be dealt with differently.

Anthropology, Willis argued, was the discipline that, in one way or another, made non-white people into different human beings from white people. Whereas this had earlier been done by explicit racist ideologies, the Boasians achieved the same end through the concepts of culture and cultural relativism – sleights of hand, he suggests, which avoided black outrage at white dominance while retaining the status of non-whites as objects to be manipulated in a 'laboratory' setting, be it that of the field, the Indian reserve, or the public school. These were, however, more than just sleights of hand. They constituted, albeit partially and problematically, a displacement of race but also, as John

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Dewey (1939) recognised, a displacement of the primacy hitherto accorded individuals in liberal forms of rule as cultures, and the relations between them, came to be conceived as providing the working surfaces on the social through which the relations between the populations constituting a multicultural polity were to be managed. This was, however, a polity with its own constitutive exclusions.

Conclusion

I want, in concluding, to look more closely at the position from which these exclusions were organised, and at the distinctive form of aesthetic ordering they embodied. It will be instructive to go back to Tylor whose ordering, constructed from the vantage point of a generalised European cultural superiority, effected an equally generalised devaluation of the primitive as representing a generalised level of backwardness that was abstracted from any particular national or colonial history: the ordering of cultures was always that of their relative placement on a universal sequence of development. In being cut to the cloth of American assimilationism, the forms of governmental action effected by the culture concept were significantly transformed albeit in ways that also differed from the abstracted forms of relativism and universalism that were attributed to the concept in the founding texts of UNESCO's post-war cultural programmes. For the ordering principles of the 'third generation' were those of a diversity of traits, brought together from diverse sources, that were to be woven into a distinctively American 'cultural pattern' whose political logic arose from a fusion of white nativist and European perspectives into which, once they had shed their differentiating racial characteristic, African Americans and Native Americans would eventually be melded. Benedict articulated this political logic clearly when, in asking why public schools, in arranging assembly programmes 'where the Negro children sing their spirituals and the Balkan children dress in their native costumes and wonder why they don't like it,' she answers:

> In Eastern Europe such programs would be realistic-each group is proud of its traditional customs and they have perpetuated them generation after generation. In America each generation wants to be more and more American. It is the barriers we native born set up against their learning how which hinders them. They have the will to be Americans until we prevent it. Each new generation is ashamed of its hang-overs. Those who are working to promote race relations should take advantage of this if they would, and watch for occasions where the aliens could work shoulder to shoulders with the native born of the ward or the village or the city for better city administration, better schools, better housing-occasions when they would be working as citizens of America and not as a group singled out and labelled for their differences from other citizens.
>
> *(Benedict 1941: 4)*

It is significant in this regard that the most influential interpreters of the culture concept – Boas and his students – shared two characteristics. First, they were either white nativists – like Benedict and Mead – or they were first- or second-generation European migrants, like Boas himself, Sapir and Kroeber. Second, they were all, in their family backgrounds, schooling and early intellectual careers, steeped in European aesthetic traditions – the influence of Kantian conceptions of Bildung on Boas is well-covered territory (Cole 1999) while both Benedict and Mead had backgrounds in literary education prior to their acquaintance

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with anthropology, particularly Benedict during her years at Vassar College (Banner 2004). It is, however, notable that none of the other participants in the Boasian fieldwork tradition played any significant role in the development of the culture concept. It was not something that George Hunt, Boas's Native American 'informant' at Fort Ruppert, contributed to (Briggs and Bauman 1999). Nor was it an aspect of Boas's work that significantly engaged Zora Neale Hurston. An African American woman who had studied with Boas, Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1986) brought Boasian methods to bear on the collection of African-American folk tales in a significant departure from the black folklore collecting practices that had earlier been developed in association with the 'uplift' programmes of the Hampton Folklore Society. However, her affiliations were much more strongly with the Harlem Renaissance – which also recruited Melville Herskovits's interests (Jackson, 1986) – rather than with the practical applications of anthropology developed by Boas's white American and European students.

If the culture concept did not cross the line separating white nativists and European immigrants from Native Americans, nor did it travel across the colour line. Rather, it was rebutted in favour of a politically inflected early nineteenth-century 'raciocultural' paradigm – most influentially articulated by Hippolyte Taine (Evans 2005) – in which race is interpreted not according to the biological template derived from later evolutionary paradigms but as 'accumulated racial differences carried somehow in the blood' (Visweswaran 2010: 56). It was on the basis of such conceptions, Visweswaran argues, that W.E.B Dubois maintained his distance from the culture concept. Yet Dubois, like Boas, was profoundly influenced by the post-Kantian history of Bildung, albeit interpreting it differently in his concern to harness that 'striving in the souls of black folk' to be co-workers in the 'kingdom of culture' (DuBois 1994: 3, 7) to a theologically inflected political program in which African Americans would take the lead in mobilising the capacity of culture to overcome the schisms of a divided humanity.

There is not space to pursue this line of argument further here. My purpose in ending on this note, however, is to underscore the continuing, unresolved tension between the roles performed by the categories of culture and race in the field of differences.

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Note

1 Taken from an undated paper in the Boas Papers held by the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.

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