

**WHO WAS FRANZ BOAS? HOW DO WE KNOW?
AND WHY SHOULD WE CARE?**

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INTRODUCTION

I bring greetings to and gratitude for the hospitality of the Dakota and Anishinaabeg peoples of this region from their Three Fires Confederacy cousins north of the Great Lakes at Walpole Island and Saugeen First Nations. It is a privilege to frame for this General Anthropology Division audience the ongoing legacy of Franz Boas in terms of our discipline and its tendrils into the larger world of the communities with whom we work and the larger arenas where Boas posed anthropology's insights into the complex specificities and ambiguities of the then-contemporary world.

I serve as General Editor for a documentary edition of the professional papers of Franz Boas. This project, supported by a generous seven-year Partnership Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), has encouraged our international research team to reexamine the history of anthropology from the standpoint of its presumed North American founder, as it intersected and continues to intersect with the worlds of the Indigenous communities where Boas worked and, increasingly over his career, the larger publics to which his holistic anthropological politics was directed. His work set the agenda for the anthropology we know today, even though what I have elsewhere

called the “invisible genealogy” of the Americanist tradition is no longer, and indeed was never, the primary identity of all anthropologists. Most, however, at least on this side of the pond, would protest that they already know who Boas was, whether they think his contributions are to be lauded or denigrated. I have referred to him elsewhere as “the elephant in the middle of anthropology’s room,” the figure or force that all must come to terms with in one way or another. At the outset of “the Boas Project,” I would have said I knew quite a lot about Boas, but I rapidly discovered the limitations of what I thought I knew despite multiple cross-overs between my work and his legacy. I did have the sense to know that comprehensive reassessment of Boas was beyond the capacity of any single scholar and I had, in any case, sworn I would never write another biography. My decade-long engagement with the interconnections of the fertile rhizomatic mind (“genius”) of Edward Sapir had extinguished all expectation of closure in such a project. In contrast, the overlapping specializations and substantive revisionist scholarship of our occasionally unwieldy but ever fascinating research team is correcting numerous misconceptions about what Boas was up to and challenging us to rethink how anthropologists come to terms with the past of their own discipline through professional socialization and subsequent practice. The history of anthropology is a significant form of our disciplinary reflexivity. I want to acknowledge the collaboration of the Boas Project team and to share with you some of the milestones of our journey in progress. I have structured that task around the three questions of my title. Who was Franz Boas? How do we know? And why should we care? So:

WHO WAS FRANZ BOAS?

The facts are well documented. Franz Uri Boas was born in Minden, Westphalia in 1858 and died in the arms of Claude Lévi-Strauss in New York City in 1942. Much happened in between. His father, Meier Boas, was a prosperous textile merchant; his mother Sophie Meyer Boas bequeathed to her only son the pedagogical and political ideals of the failed revolution of 1848. He attended the Universities of Heidelberg, Bonn, where he studied physics in a Machian materialist vein, and Kiel, where he received a PhD in 1882 in psychophysics on the optics of seawater. He served his year of compulsory military service at home in Minden and switched fields again, this time to geography. In Berlin, his ambitions focused on preparing for an expedition to the Eskimo. A year living on the land in Baffin Island revealed the richness of Inuit non-material culture and persuaded Boas that environmental determinism was an inadequate explanation for human diversity. Thereafter, his ethnological lens focused on intersections of history, culture and environment on Canada's North Pacific Coast. He returned briefly to the Berlin Museum under the tutelage of Adolph Bastian (of elementargedanken fame), met Bella Coola Indians, and completed his habilitation, the second and more important doctorate. With the help of his uncle-in-law, New York physician Abraham Jacobi, he emigrated to the United States in 1887, ostensibly to escape German anti-Semitism but also to marry Marie Krackowizer which he promptly did. He was underemployed as an editor for *Science* and researcher for the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Bureau of [American] Ethnology under the chafing supervision of Horatio Hale until psychologist G. Stanley Hall hired him at Clark University in 1889 (where his measurements of Worcester MA schoolchildren raised public outcry – a man, a

foreigner and a Jew after all!). He resigned in 1892 along with most of the faculty in protest over academic interference by the founder. Despite serving as museum assistant to Frederic Ward Putnam for the Chicago World's Fair in 1893-94 (where he met George Hunt and the members of his Kwakiutl, now called Kwakwaka'wakw, living exhibit), he was one of the few Clark escapees not snatched up by William Rainey Harper for the new University of Chicago. With behind-the-scenes help from Uncle Jacobi, he was jointly appointed at Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History in 1897. He resigned from the museum in 1906 and built a base for American anthropology at Columbia until his formal retirement in 1936.

The achievements of the Columbia years, which Boas himself described in a 1901 letter to Zelia Nuttall as "organizing anthropological research in America," are well-known to our discipline. The university facilitated production of a credentialed cohort of anthropologists while the museum supported fieldwork for an academic program that coincided serendipitously with the professionalization of American science. Academic anthropology was well situated to exercise influence beyond its size or nascent and contested professional identity. Boas' ambitious plans to demonstrate American Indian links to Asia through the Jesup North Pacific Expedition produced seminal ethnography on both sides of Bering Strait but not the promised grand synthesis. Internal museum politics soured Boas' relationship to the museum and he resigned in 1906. He was not a tactful or a patient man.

During this period, Boas established the four-field model for anthropology that still underlies many North American departments, although in practice Harvard

got most of the archaeology and biological anthropology (despite Boas' own primary reputation at the time for anthropometric studies of American Indians) while Columbia trained ethnologists and linguists. Boas reestablished the moribund American Ethnological Society, giving him a nominal institutional base in New York. Our discipline was created of bubble gum and shoestring leavened by a healthy dose of ambition. He collaborated with W J McGee at the Bureau to establish the new series of the *American Anthropologist* as a national journal in 1898; the American Anthropological Association followed in 1903. Boas' students held most of the small but expanding number of academic positions in the country by 1919 when his unpopular pacifism (privileging science over nationalism), sparked by a letter to *The Nation* accusing prominent Mesoamericanists of wartime spying, exacted a rather vicious backlash from the Harvard and Washington WASP establishments. Censured by the AAA and removed from the National Research Council, an unrepentant Boas lost the battle but won the war. Americanist anthropology had become, de facto, Boasian.

The distinctive features of the Americanist tradition arose from the German romanticism that Boas imported to North America by virtue of his European education. He understood culture as a symbolic form, a construction in people's heads rather than a thing accessible to direct observation. He argued that race, language and culture were independent variables subject to vicissitudes of contact, migration, and environment, formulating a paradigm retrospectively labeled as Historical Particularism. This led on the one hand to detailed ethnographies of particular cultures and culture areas and on the other to a critique of unilineal

evolution for its premature generalizations and prejudgment of the relative worth of cultures/civilizations. Thus, in the late 1880s, Boas argued that museum exhibits should be arranged by culture, challenging the universal evolutionary artifact typology of Otis T. Mason at the United States National Museum. He contrasted the inductive method of geography and ethnology with the deductive method of what we now call the natural sciences and emphasized the need for and unique value of each. He anticipated the phonemic principle that so-called “alternating sounds” are not random but result from internalized patterns of the speaker’s native language. His anthropomorphic measurements foreshadow biocultural anthropology with his biometric demonstration of human plasticity and the artificiality of “racial type” as a category. The new anthropology was to be based in first-hand fieldwork, initially to establish the history of groups without written traditions and ultimately to capture “the native point of view” through recording of spontaneous connected texts from native speakers of their traditional languages. The resulting data could be mined for linguistic, ethnological and/or psychological insights. Such research goals required the anthropologist to spend longer in the field with particular groups and encouraged the establishment of long-term relationships with individuals and communities. Although Boas’ field methods patently fail to meet contemporary standards, in the context of his own time, foundations were laid for the kinds of relationships that anthropologists now establish with communities and individuals.

Boas, with his elitist aspirations to professionalization on the German academic model, was confronted by an anthropological establishment based on a natural science approach to human diversity grounded in pragmatist philosophy

and pedagogical populism. His Judaism, never mind his reportedly almost unintelligible German accent, rendered him an outsider at best. From his secure base in the university, however, Boas rapidly proved himself a skilled institutional leader who reoriented and reenergized the discipline, producing a talented first generation of students including Alfred Kroeber, Edward Sapir, Robert Lowie, Clark Wissler, Paul Radin, Alexander Goldenweiser, Frank Speck, Leslie Spier, Fay-Cooper Cole, and somewhat later Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. They were loyal to Boas at both institutional and intellectual levels.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

Most anthropologists know quite a lot about the Boas I have just described. I will spare you a literature review and restrict myself to two salient points: First, most of the writing about Boas is by anthropologists and unsurprisingly deals primarily with his career as an anthropologist, although several biographers have emphasized his activism, especially anti-racism in North America and critique of Nazi Germany. The closest thing to a comprehensive biography, by the late Canadian historian Douglas Cole, ends in 1906 with Boas' resignation from the American Museum of Natural History. I remain unconvinced that Cole could have completed the planned second volume, because the post-1906 Boas exceeded the boundaries of his and our discipline in ways that are difficult to track systematically from within. Second, Boas' death in 1942 and the post-war turn to positivism skewed assessment of his legacy in ways that require revisiting and recontextualizing for contemporary audiences. Such a revisionist history of the Boasian legacy has been underway for some time. I note particularly the work of Lee Baker, Ira Bashkow, Matti Bunzl,

Richard Handler, Michael Harkin, Ira Jacknis, John Leavitt, Herbert Lewis, Julie Liss, Michael Silverstein, Han Vermeulen – and of course my own.

When Matt Bokovoy at the University of Nebraska Press (UNP) approached me about the possibility of a documentary edition of the Boas professional papers at the American Philosophical Society (APS), I was immediately intrigued by the idea that a team of scholars might actually capture the stunning range of our founding father's engagements, both within the discipline and beyond it. Moreover, the documents would be able to speak for themselves and provide a textual limit for existing not-always-evidence-based pronouncements about what Boas thought or meant; sadly, many commentators have failed to return to the original documents. As a member of the American Philosophical Society who has worked in the archives since my MA at Pennsylvania I decided that I could function as an effective liaison. The APS expressed enthusiasm. And so we began.

With Robert Hancock, now at the University of Victoria but then doing a post-doc at Western, and Michelle Hamilton, Western's Director of Public History, we obtained a SSHRC conference grant to bring together scholars to reassess Boas' legacy and devise a plan for the proposed documentary edition. We met in the throes of a rare London ON blizzard in December of 2010, with several participants snowed in for three extra days. Revised essays from that conference appeared in 2016 as the first volume of the documentary edition under the title *Franz Boas as Public Intellectual: Theorist, Ethnographer, Activist*. Despite the ambitious agenda reflected in the title and a varied cast of interdisciplinary and international participants, we only scratched the surface. There were gaps in topics we hoped to

include that were unrepresented within the expertise of those who attended. But we agreed that a documentary edition was both desirable and feasible. Regardless of their disciplinary affiliation, those who responded to our invitation focused on cultural or linguistic anthropology. Many were Canadian ethnographers seeking connections from Boas to ongoing issues of land claims, Indigenous rights, community identity, and cultural, linguistic and political revitalization. A later reviewer, however, complained about the Canadian-ness of our ethnographic focus and was nonplussed by the fundamental differences (taken-for-granted by Canadian scholars) between Canadian and American Indigenous contexts and histories. Only Jurgen Langenkämper, a German journalist and scholar from Boas' hometown of Minden, and Julie Liss talked about the later and more cosmopolitan engagements of Boas' later career as activist and public intellectual.

All contributors agreed to serve on our initial advisory board and we turned to the SSHRC Partnership Grant program to support the larger project. With the University of Western Ontario as the home institution and initial support of the APS and the UNP, we approached the Musgamukw Dzawada'enux Tribal Council of the Kwakwaka'wakw and the University of Victoria as additional essential Partners in the collaborative research goals of the documentary edition. The UNP interdisciplinary list encompasses Native American anthropology, history and ethnohistory, linguistics, and literature (publishing many Native writers) as well as history of anthropology. The Press is experienced in documentary publishing, for example, the Lewis and Clark Papers edited by Gary Moulton (not so incidentally also held at the APS). Indians were of urgent and practical concern to the nascent

American nation and the gentleman scholars, including Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Albert Gallatin, John Pickering, and Peter Stephen Duponceau, who founded the American Philosophical Society in 1743, in Franklin's words "for the pursuit of useful knowledge." In addition to the Boas papers per se, the American Council of Learned Societies donated to the APS the ethnographic and linguistic manuscripts in Boas' possession at the time of his death, establishing a suite of Boas collections that continues to grow. The recently established Centre for Native American and Indigenous Research (Timothy Powell, Founding Director), warmly supported by APS Librarian Martin Levitt and now by his successor Patrick Spero, builds on this collection by establishing connections to descendent communities and facilitating their aspirations for linguistic and cultural revitalization. CNAIR has established collaborative MOUs with the Penobscot, Leach Lake Ojibwe, Tuscarora and Eastern Band of the Cherokee. I serve on the Native American Advisory Committee that emerged from these initiatives. In the summer of 2015, the Committee finalized a Protocol incorporating descendant communities in the approval of use, citation and further dissemination of Native American materials at the APS. A conference in October this year assembled multiple parties, primarily Indigenous, at which Angie Bain (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs; Lower Nicola Indian Band), Sarah Moritz and I spoke about our collaborative work for the Boas Project. Our Partnership with the Tribal Council has facilitated Kwakwaka'wakw advice on the Boas collections. The APS and FBP attended the potlatches of Ol' Siwidi (Mikael Willie) in 2015 and Gwi'molas (Ryan Nicolson) in 2016 and gifted the communities with unpublished and previously unavailable texts

recorded by George Hunt. These young chiefs, along with others of their generation, aspire to reconstitute traditional governance through the potlatch system.

Partnership with the University of Victoria has ensured connection to British Columbia Indigenous students.

The two-year SSHRC application process was byzantine, with an application to apply, then permission to prepare a full application. I could not have survived it without the support of Joshua Smith, who would soon become our Associate Editor. Meanwhile, the expanded team of Partners, Co-Investigators and Collaborators set out to meet SSHRC expectations for a combination of “Insight” (academic scholarship, the research not the documentary product as such) and “Connection” (value to Canadian society beyond the academy and beyond Canada). The project began with and retains a strong commitment to the Indigenous communities with whom Boas did his research. We are governed by an Indigenous Advisory Council co-chaired by Susan Hill (Mohawk), Director of First Nations Studies at Western and Rob Hancock (Metis) at the University of Victoria, supported by a Communities Liaison on Vancouver Island (currently Dawn Hill, an officer of our tribal partner organization). The IAC has three primary mandates: 1) to facilitate the adjudication of culturally sensitive materials, in British Columbia often the property of families or clans; 2) to return materials long inaccessible to community members in far-off Philadelphia through digital knowledge sharing; and 3) capacity building within these communities through training in archival research and interpretation and through support of Indigenous graduate students in their programs.

One of the anomalies of Boas' position as founding figure of "American" anthropology is that his fieldwork was actually not in the United States, a fact rarely acknowledged by American scholarship as consequential in historiographic retrospect. What Boas called the Northwest Coast is in fact the West Coast or North Pacific Coast of Canada; but the region has become canonical for the discipline of anthropology as "the Northwest Coast." To redress this hiatus, we decided that the core team should be Canadian, supplemented by an international advisory board composed of volume editors who are experts on various aspects of Boas' oeuvre.

Partly as a result of this structure, we decided that volumes should be thematic rather than chronological. The sheer size of the Boas collection at the APS (40,000 documents) precluded publishing everything. Although the source text for the documentary edition remains the APS, we quickly realized that Boas documents languish in the papers of other institutions and scholars, primarily in the U.S., Canada and Germany (but also James Teit correspondence in the Shetland Islands). The APS obtained funding to digitize the Boas professional correspondence, with an eventual aim of posting scanned documents on-line; the Press contracted for up to 25 volumes in electronic and print format. Since selections were inevitable, thematic organization allowed each editor or editorial team to concentrate on documents of relevance to their volume. Just as we could not expect editors to read the entire Boas correspondence, members of descendant communities could not be expected to buy a multivolume edition of which only parts would be relevant to them. Because so much more is known about Boas' early career than about his later more interdisciplinary and public engagements, retracing existing ground seemed

an inefficient use of resources, both human and financial. The publication of Inuit fieldwork diaries by Canadian geographer Ludger Müller-Wille and Kwakwaka'wakw by Ronald and Evelyn Rohner already included detailed annotation. Much of Boas' early correspondence is in German and our skills in that domain were, and still are, fairly limited (despite the herculean efforts of Sarah Moritz), although we have assembled a substantial team of German scholars interested in collaborating to locate and publish Boas documents in German archives and a team at Dalhousie is now working on translation and transcription under the aegis of Brian Noble.

The necessity of selection fairly dramatically modifies what most documentary editors mean by a documentary edition in that we were left free to envision each thematic cluster as revisionist. Annotations are "objective" in the sense of providing context, identifying places and people, and framing the issues raised in the correspondence within wider political and social discourses no longer familiar to non-specialist readers. Each editor or editorial team is encouraged to offer revisionist interpretation in the volume introduction. Nonetheless, colleagues in the Association for Documentary Editing are overwhelmed by the scope of what we are attempting. I will return shortly to thematic clusters now well underway.

The APS began scanning and digitizing the professional papers in October 2012 as its matching contribution to the documentary edition. We soon reached an impasse, however, over the searchability of these materials (limited to year, name of correspondent and length of document). UNP had contracted for a print and electronic version of each volume but their format was also non-searchable across

volumes, counter to our initial naïve expectation that electronic meant digital. We already knew that our Indigenous partners required criteria of relevance to community users, e.g., family and clan names, named titles and prerogatives, place names, and items of traditional culture. All of these come in alternative spellings, orthographies and cross-community variants. In short, we needed a concordance and a synonymy. This would be a lot easier in digital format than in Word files. Nonetheless, our intrepid digital editor M. Sam Cronk has adapted an Omeka database that is user-friendly for volume editors and student transcribers. We are still working out the kinks; this process has delayed completion of additional volumes but added immensely to their annotational sophistication and accuracy and allowed feedback from Indigenous collaborators. Each volume editorial team includes at least one representative of the IAC. After the end of the funding in 2020, the Omeka system will be available for integration with the scanned documents at the APS and to the consulting communities and community researchers. Further experimentation with a Scalar 2 platform that will permit digital experiments with GIS, musical and art productions, museum exhibits, and other yet-to-be-imagined applications. This system has been workshopped with community partners (UBCIC) and digital collaborators at Guelph University and Claremont Colleges. Those of you who know me will not be surprised that I do not go into further detail.

Let me turn now to a few examples of the revisionist work underway.

The **process** of negotiating and sustaining Indigenous Partnerships is more complicated than the ostensible documentary **product**. The IAC is preparing a volume on contemporary Indigenous Uses of the Boas Papers (edited by Susan Hill,

Angie Bain, Rob Hancock, Ryan Nicolson and Deanna Nicolson) to balance the academic perspectives of v. 1, emphasizing that the Indians made Boas rather than the other way around. In the 2016 volume of *Histories of Anthropology Annual*, German scholar Rainer Hatoum largely deciphered Boas' idiosyncratic shorthand and compared the original field notes to the published version of the 1894 potlatch that George Hunt sponsored for his son David; the only potlatch that Boas ever observed firsthand became "the Kwakiutl potlatch." The fieldnotes contain detailed information lost to the community through the impacts of colonialism. These records have been "sleeping" and access to Hunt materials from Boas archives reawakens them for use in contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw revitalization agendas. Community discussion continues among the various Kwakwaka'wakw tribes, although there is currently no central mechanism to examine culturally sensitive materials held by families and clans or to approve public dissemination of ethnographic documents. The projected volumes on Kwakwaka'wakw will not be completed within the confines of the Boas project per se. Nonetheless, discussion of possible consensus-creating mechanisms is well underway; project personnel, through the IAC, the communities liaison, support of community members in their academic programs, and the local distribution of unpublished materials all bode well for the longer term. For archival research as much as for fieldwork, it takes a long time to do things the right way.

Franz Boas, James Teit and the Texts of Early 20th Century Plateau Ethnography, edited by Andrea Laforet, Angie Bain, Sarah Moritz, John Haugen and Andie Diane Palmer, reflects the retrospective baseline paradigm of Plateau

ethnography into the present. Although contemporary experience is not captured by these materials, they remain critical resources for community revitalization efforts. Extensive Boas correspondence has been located and consulted in archives beyond the APS source collection, particularly at the American Museum of Natural History and the Canadian Museum of History.

Similar complexities of documentary repository (adding the Field Museum in Chicago and the Smithsonian Institution in particular), plague *Ethnology under Glass: Franz Boas, Museology and the Politics of Display*, edited by Michelle Hamilton, Evan Habkirk and M. Sam Cronk. Under Boas' museum mandate, the exhibits focused on environment and local cultural adaptation through dioramas and live exhibitions (as at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893). The Boas gallery at the American Museum still retains its architecture of separate alcoves for the distinctive cultural traditions of the "Northwest Coast." Despite the inclusion of materials that would today be considered culturally sensitive, the powerful contrast of styles retains its monumental aesthetic impact. In *The Way of the Masques* (1982:5), Lévi-Strauss lauded the "subtle and poetic inspiration of the Tlingit," the "monumental vigour of the Haida," the "stately style of the Bella Coola," the "quiet realism of the Nootka," the "angular and schematic style of the Salish," and the "unbridled imagination of the Kwakiutl." Boas, of course, left such generalization to the viewer. His conclusions are historical, tracing the borrowing of myth motifs and art forms through intermarriage and trade, with consistencies in the mainland versions suggesting that they preceded hybrid forms elsewhere.

The so-called “salvage ethnography” paradigm may have been dismissed too lightly by academics who gloss over continuities in favour of contemporary change and adaptation. In a period when no one else was listening, when children and grandchildren did not want to learn from the experience of their elders, the anthropologist was often a welcome, though not ideal, alternative to traditional forms of knowledge transmission. Words that were written down were available for subsequent revival. Continued utility of archival documents thus encourages knowledge keepers today to ensure access for a new generation of learners.

Not all of Boas’ massive oeuvre, however, dealt with Native Americans. Quetzil Castaneda and Edy Dziz (Mayan) are extending Boas’ tendrils into Mexico beyond the well-known case of Manuel Gamio in both individual and institutional relationships. Sergei Kan is working on Boas’ contacts with Russian scholars, beyond the ethnographers affiliated with the Jesup North Pacific Expedition. Han Vermeulen’s recent *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (2015) explored German and Russian expedition contexts and distinguished two distinct strands of German anthropology; Boas brought the folkloristic one to North America. Related work on Boas’ engagement with primarily Jewish refugee resettlement during two world wars intertwines with the story of Boas’ New York intellectual and artistic circle, home base for the American anthropology of the interwar years. The volume on environment edited by Sarah Moritz, Jarrad Reddekop, Robert Wishart and myself, focuses on the intellectual history of Boas’ German education, museum connections and continued ties to the

geography of his early career. He did not entirely switch disciplines but rather grafted new perspectives atop the old, a fine holistic strategy of his new identity.

The institutional leadership, pedagogy and political activism of Boas' career has received minimal attention. Joshua Smith's *Sovereign Anthropologies: Indian Law and Indian Policy in the Interwar Years* under the John Collier administration focuses on worldviews and aspirations to sovereignty. Boas as activist emerges in these policy debates but also in his support for Indigenous students (Archie Phinney, William Jones and Ella Deloria in particular). I am working on a volume about the classic first generation of Boas' students and the process of "organizing anthropological research in America." The sequel volume will pursue the so-called culture and personality school most closely associated with the work of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead and Edward Sapir (whose interdisciplinary contribution was abortive due to his premature death). C & P both follows from Boas' own emphasis on "the native point of view" and aligns with the professionalization of psychology and psychiatry in the interdisciplinary ferment of the interwar years. "Papa Franz" did not pursue this though he had mellowed sufficiently in his latter years not discourage it. The "cultural relativism" now associated with his name, however, proves to be largely the invention of his students and colleagues. The questions posed by culture and personality persist in contemporary mentalist perspectives in ways that have not previously been explored.

The recent centennial of Boas' 1911 paradigm statement *The Mind of Primitive Man* produced a raft of new scholarship. I was amazed to find that this seminal work did not say precisely what I remembered from a long ago reading.

Some of its theoretical insights are so widely accepted that they now seem trivial, while others prefigure positions to be developed in the future. We are preparing an annotated comparison of the 1911 and 1938 editions, finding the differences quite minimal despite his updating the evidence for some conclusions that were based on surprisingly limited evidence in 1911. The anti-racist strand added as the introduction to a sequence of previously published papers, each building a piece of the overall statement in *Mind of Primitive Man*, was tied to “Race in America” in 1911 and to Nazi anti-Semitism in 1938. Boas further consolidated the career summary of his legacy with the selected essays in *Race, Language and Culture* in 1940 (here, language provided a mediating methodological rigour between biology and culture). These papers, ostensibly presented in different contexts, were carefully juxtaposed within Boas’ evolving explanatory framework. The companion volume, edited by myself, Alexis Dolphin and Gregory Smithers, documents Boas’ movement from anthropometry to plasticity; the larger argument is posed against the eugenics of the day but is presciently attuned to the epigenetics of our own. Boas’ deconstruction of “racial type” as a stable biological construction left him, and the discipline of anthropology, with **racism**, a social category. Anthropological critics of Boas’ anthropometric studies for the U.S. Census Commission in 1910-12 have tended to focus on the statistics he used rather than the scientific racism he was willing to question. The foundations of a biocultural synthesis had been laid, yet Boas switched gears after 1911 and thereafter dealt largely with culture.

The story of Boas’ engagement with Afro-American cultural politics will require additional interdisciplinary collaborations. We have envisioned volumes for

which editors have not yet emerged or at least coalesced to the point of précis here, e.g., Boas' engagement with Afro-American cultural politics, art, ethnomusicology linguistics, the New York Jewish milieu of the interwar years, European refugee engagements, and so on. Despite the size and complexity of our team, and with apologies to those I have not named in this brief overview, there remains a decidedly accidental or at least contingent quality to the documentary edition.

There is no closure to the question of how we know about Boas and there probably shouldn't be.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

The General Anthropology Division has provided a welcome umbrella for the history of anthropology interest group over recent years and we have thrived under the benign neglect of pursuing our own agendas. I'm glad to report something back, although of course the Boas documentary edition is far from the only product of this group. Recent revival of the *History of Anthropology Newsletter* based at the University of Pennsylvania portends further synergies, as do the various publication series at the University of Nebraska Press. *Histories of Anthropology Annual* has published 10 volumes, the last three with stand-alone book titles; volumes 11 and 12 are in various stages of production. *Critical Studies in History of Anthropology* now numbers 26 volumes out with several more underway. So there are ample indications that anthropologists care about their past.

As A. Irving "Pete" Hallowell (one of my own early teachers of anthropology) argued long ago, the history of anthropology is an anthropological problem and fits well with the ethnographic tools of our fieldwork with cultures presumably more

exotic than our own. Pete, however, did not engage the trend toward reflexivity that has emerged in the wake of postmodernism. Post-postmodernism, however, has rejected many of the excesses of lamenting our absence of authoritative voice but has left us with tools for more rhizomatic and flexible responses to human diversity in all of its local forms. The heavy reliance of many anthropologists on narrative presentation, perhaps arising from the still predominantly oral traditions that many of us study, is often under assault these days. My graduate seminar this term is called "Qualitative Method Must Be Defended, with apologies to Foucault." I believe that we are on the cusp of a scientific revolution in which positivism in both social and natural science will be to chaos and complexity as the physics of Isaac Newton is to that of Albert Einstein. Boas argued that the evolutionary theory and scientific racism of his day leapt too quickly to universals. History, geography and culture introduced significant local variants and local senses of belonging, of "home" on traditional territory constituting the centre of the world. In the first flush of globalization, an homogenized world appeared inevitable as margins were drawn into the orbit of centres externally defined. Resistances to what we used to call assimilation are rampant and effective. Local communities want to be modern or postmodern in their own ways, to have access to the resources of the larger world but not to become interchangeable with those from elsewhere. Anthropologists are preadapted to value such local worlds. Our methods produce relational ontologies that draw us into conversations and collaborations, at individual and community levels. Boas set parameters that facilitate such a position, all the while remaining a scientist.

The great man theory of history has limitations to be sure, presumptive gender being only one. But Franz Boas was certainly among the giants of our discipline and he made a mark far beyond it. Around every great man are layers of professional and personal network, institutional affiliation and theoretical implication. Boas was a consummate bricoleur across disciplines, cultures and public audiences. His legacy offers a mandate for such holism of method and vision.

It has been a privilege to spend the last decade of my career in a project that integrates my personal commitments to cross-cultural miscommunication, First Nations ethnography -- from language revitalization to ecosystem health and public health, to ethics and protocols for collaborative research to the history of anthropology. I do not consider the latter to be an arid academic exercise. Rather, it provides the perspective from which we can work with and alongside individuals and communities in what the late Dennis Tedlock called "the dialogic emergence of culture."

No history, of anthropology or of anything else, stands outside the context of its production. The Boas documentary edition will continue in multiple forms as each editor pursues their piece of the puzzle. There have been many "aha" moments along the way. I hope that I have conveyed the complexity of our coming to discover who Boas was. Nonetheless, our revisions of the inherited Boas will themselves be subject to revision in due course, if only because they are not static. The Boas our own successors know will change in response to changes in the discipline. And that is as it should be.