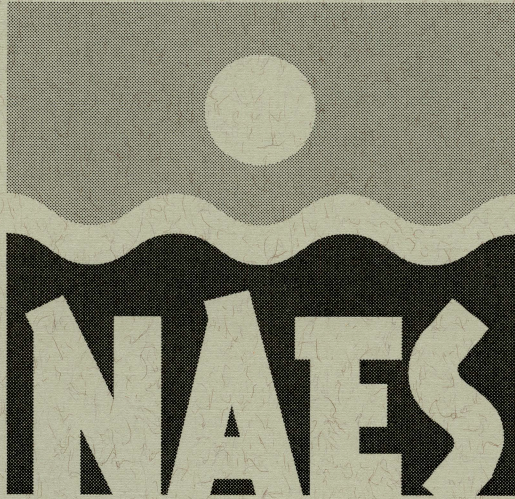


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**EXPLORATIONS  
IN  
ETHNIC STUDIES**



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## The National Association for Ethnic Studies

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# EXPLORATIONS IN ETHNIC STUDIES

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## Editor's Note

This issue of the journal has a wide variety of articles dealing with multiple dimensions of ethnicity. The first article by Arthur S. Evans, Jr. and Sara Torres focuses on the perceptions of domestic abuse among Mexican American and Anglo American women. More importantly, the paper deals with the role culture plays in the perception, definition, and interpretation of domestic abuse issues.

The manuscript by Douglas J. Buege investigates the influence of European American ideologies between Inuit people and the Arctic environments they inhabit. He describes these connections and suggests that these connections be examined, understood and abandoned in order to improve the quality of life for the Inuit. In a related article, Charles W. Hunt discusses the relationship between racism and AIDS by focusing on the African origin theories of HIV-1. He concludes that the African origins theory is based not upon scientific logic but rather upon victim-blaming.

The work of Vernon J. Williams, Jr. in this issue takes a more encompassing view of race relations via social science. The rather recent inclusion of white women, African Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians into historiography has provided an impetus to making American intellectual history more inclusive.

Finally, I am pleased to publish in our journal the work of Susan L. Rockwell, our first NAES Student Paper Competition winner. She has written on the work of Leslie Marmon Silko and how this scholarship has contributed to preserving the oral culture of Native Americans. The Association has developed this paper competition for both graduate and undergraduate students. This competition is an annual event and we want to invite student scholars to submit their work, as well as strongly urge faculty to help identify and encourage their students to submit their work. It is our hope this will allow us to make meaningful connections with scholars who will continue the struggle to write about the past, present and future issues challenging, facing and confronting the discipline of ethnic studies.

Miguel A. Carranza  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

## **Perceptions of Domestic Abuse Among Mexican American and Anglo American Women**

**Arthur S. Evans, Jr.**  
**Florida Atlantic University**

**Sara Torres**  
**University of South Florida**

This paper examines the role of culture in shaping perceptions, definitions, and interpretations Mexican American and Anglo American women hold of domestic abuse. Two theoretical views concerning perceptions that Mexican Americans may hold of domestic abuse are discussed. The first view suggests that Mexican American women follow a pluralist model and therefore differ significantly in their perceptions of domestic abuse from Anglo American women. The second position holds that Mexican American women are quickly becoming assimilated into the American mainstream and consequently share attitudes toward domestic abuse similar to those of Anglo American women. Interviews were conducted with women living in shelters for battered women in 1986. The findings suggest that for Mexican American women, cultural pluralism, rather than assimilation, may be the norm in understanding their perceptions of domestic abuse.

W. I. Thomas first introduced the concept "definition of the situation" in his book *The Unadjusted Girl*.<sup>1</sup> This concept is important because it suggests that stimuli have no fixed quality, and always involve interpretation. Events that seem to have objectified meanings do not exist in reality because they are always subject to shifting definitions and interpretations.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the meanings attached to stimuli are always socially derived through social interaction, rather than inherent in the stimuli themselves.

This paper explores the role of culture in shaping perceptions (i.e., definitions and interpretations) Mexican American and Anglo

American women hold toward domestic abuse. Domestic abuse of women occurs in families of all ethnic, racial, economic, religious, and educational backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> However, there is a dearth of information comparing perceptions of domestic abuse among ethnic groups. Research on domestic abuse has for the most part focused primarily on Anglo Americans, although in some cases subjects from various ethnic groups have been included as part of the research sample.<sup>4</sup> In the aforementioned research it has generally been assumed that the ethnic group in question holds similar perceptions about female abuse as do Anglo Americans. In other words, in these studies a conception of ethnic culture is held which suggests that the hierarchy of values for the evaluation of domestic abuse is roughly equal despite ethnic differences. Resulting from this reasoning, students of domestic abuse have generally overlooked the possibility of cultural differences in perceptions of domestic abuse. This research attempts to address this flaw by presenting data contrasting the perceptions of domestic abuse among Mexican American and Anglo American women. More specifically, the primary focus of this research is on the interplay of culture and the definition of domestic abuse.

The research of Ramirez,<sup>5</sup> Ramirez and Castaneda,<sup>6</sup> and Martinez<sup>7</sup> shows that it is possible to differentiate between Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans in terms of meanings assigned to culturally sensitive issues such as social relationships between males and females, and the maternal and paternal family roles. In general, these writers have suggested that in contrast to Anglo Americans, Mexican Americans are more likely to hold patriarchal rather than egalitarian attitudes regarding the institution of the family. On the other hand, Hosch<sup>8</sup> has argued that while some Mexican Americans are patriarchal in their orientation to family life, egalitarian notions of sex roles are quickly emerging in practice, particularly for families that are affluent and/or live farther from the United States-Mexican border.

Interviews for this study were conducted with fifty Mexican American and Anglo American women living in shelters for battered women in Texas in 1986. The findings of this research support the position that evaluation of spousal abuse involves a dialectical relationship between a system of objectified meanings and the group (or culture) as a creative unit, both reaffirming and changing those meanings. Because the number of respondents in this study is relatively small, readers are advised to treat this research as exploratory and therefore tentative. Until additional studies on perceptions of domestic abuse are undertaken involving larger samples, one needs to proceed cautiously when attempting to generalize the findings of this paper.

Two theoretical views concerning perceptions that Mexican Americans may hold of domestic abuse are discussed below. The first view suggests that Mexican American women follow a pluralist model

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and therefore differ significantly in their perceptions of domestic abuse from Anglo American women. The second position holds that Mexican American women over the years have become assimilated into the American mainstream and consequently share attitudes toward domestic abuse similar to those of Anglo American women.

The pluralist model holds that Anglo American and Mexican American women's perceptions of domestic abuse are different. This perspective receives support from the observation that Mexican Americans are the most successful of all ethnic groups in the United States in maintaining their cultural heritage by resisting pressure to assimilate into the American mainstream.<sup>9</sup> Stevens<sup>10</sup> has pointed out that Mexican Americans are the exceptions to the pattern of ethnic groups acquiring a preference for English over the ancestral language with each succeeding generation. Moore and Pachon<sup>11</sup> note that while Mexican Americans have lived in the United States longer than other ethnic groups, the Spanish language is used by them to a greater extent than all other non-English languages combined. But other research points out that among native born Mexican Americans language use and preference shifts from Spanish to English by the second generation.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, the percentages of Mexican American children today who learn Spanish as their first language and of households using Spanish as the preferred tongue remain high in contrast to other ethnic groups. Because Mexican Americans are concentrated near the Mexican and United States borders, Spanish speaking and Spanish culture are in part reinforced by the continued influx of new immigrants. In addition, over the generations Mexican Americans have acquired economic power to sustain their speaking of Spanish and the Mexican culture through specialized radio and television programs, newspapers, and other forms of the mass media. For example, today one-half of all foreign language radio broadcasts in the United States are conducted in Spanish. According to Moore and Pachon,<sup>13</sup> between 1970 and 1980 Spanish radio stations in the United States increased from sixty to two hundred. Many commercial advertisers know that the Mexican American market is potentially a profitable one which must be approached and cultivated first on the cultural level. In general then, on a broader level of analysis, Mexican Americans' continued preference for the Spanish language provides an indication that they have been reluctant to give up their Mexican heritage.

Some researchers have concluded that another area in which Mexican Americans have resisted joining the American mainstream is in their perception of domestic abuse. For example, in the literature, the Mexican American family has often been portrayed as traditional, religious, and patriarchal. Males (especially older males) are described as controlling the family sometimes in a violent and strict manner, while females are portrayed as subordinate sufferers. Such characterizations of Mexican American family life are attributed to a cultural carry-over from the

Mexican heritage. Oppenheimer<sup>14</sup> has provided some insight into the treatment of Indian women in some Mexican villages. Though his observations deal primarily with Indian women in remote regions of Mexico, they are nevertheless important in helping us understand why some writers believe there is a general link between the status of women in Mexico and Mexican Americans. For example, in some regions of Mexico men are often seen chatting cheerfully as they walk on the roadside, while their wives walk at least ten yards behind them, carrying heavy loads with children clinging to their clothes. In these villages, most of the men wear sandals or shoes, but virtually all women go barefoot. After cooking meals women feel it their responsibility to serve their husbands first, then their children; prior to eating what remains. Discriminatory treatment against women results in their lower than average educational achievement and poor health. According to Oppenheimer more than fifty-one percent of Mexico's Indian women are illiterate compared with twenty-nine percent of Indian men, and as a result of their inferior social status Indian women are more likely to suffer from malnutrition, disease, and birth related deaths.<sup>15</sup>

Speaking specifically of the Mexican American woman, Horowitz<sup>16</sup> and Schaefer<sup>17</sup> have explained that among Mexican American males, there is considerable pride in maleness. This perception of virility, of personal worth in one's own eyes is called *machismo*. According to Schaefer<sup>18</sup> *machismo* varies and is demonstrated differently. For some individuals it may entail resorting to weapons, fighting, being irresistible to women, and/or beating women.<sup>19</sup> Other writers have suggested that the domination of women is a valued attitude among Mexican American men because they are the products of a collectivist culture rather than an individualist one. According to Hosch<sup>20</sup> and Hofstede,<sup>21</sup> Mexican Americans are taught to subordinate their personal goals to those of the group, and to define the self in in-group terms. Within their collectivist culture, Mexican American behavior is seen as regulated by social hierarchies and harmony. Males generally are superordinate to females, and within the family the father is the boss. Both homogeneity of views and face-saving are believed by in-group members to be salient for maintaining group norms and social cohesion. In-group members are required to conform and not let out-group members be aware of differences or disagreements. People are free to think deviant thoughts as long as they behave correctly. Persons in collectivist cultures show great concern for the entire in-group and, in turn, are greatly influenced by the group—family integrity, obedience, and conformity are valued more than achievement, pleasure, and competition.<sup>22</sup>

Horowitz's<sup>23</sup> description of the role behavior of Mexican American males closely resembles Oppenheimer's observations of the Mexican male and supports the notion of the existence of a Mexican American collectivist



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culture. For example, she noted that Mexican American fathers tended to make familial decisions, and were served within the home by their wives and daughters. It was the fathers that determined whether or not children were to be punished, and if the women could work outside the home. If a male came home late it was expected that the wife would have dinner prepared. When clothing needs occurred, males demanded that the women of the house take care of them.<sup>24</sup> Young women learn to expect this from men. While many women submit readily to male wishes, others do so only reluctantly.<sup>25</sup>

Inferring from the pluralist perspective then, one would expect that because of their cultural heritage, Mexican American women differ in their perceptions of incidents of domestic abuse from Anglo American women; i.e., they may not perceive abuse of females in domestic situations as seriously as the latter. To some extent this expectation rests on the notion that Mexican American assimilation into the American mainstream has been considerably slower than for other ethnic groups. As a result the pluralist perspective suggests that Mexican American culture has not been appreciably changed through social contact with dominants. In contrast, Anglo American women for the most part are seen as more likely to be active participants in American mainstream culture and its institutions. They are also viewed as more likely to have greater wealth, power, and prestige, in addition to more alternatives outside an abusive family relationship at their disposal than Mexican American women. Moreover, the pluralist perspective further assumes that because of the rise of the feminist movement and the increasing awareness and sensitivity of women's issues in the United States, Anglo American women are more likely than Mexican American women to learn early in life not to tolerate abusive treatment from males. Some indirect empirical evidence on Hispanics in general supports this contention. For example, data from Berenson et al.<sup>26</sup> shows that the prevalence of reported domestic abuse was three and one-half times higher among white non-Hispanic women than it was among Hispanic women. Their study also illustrated that risk factors generally associated with domestic abuse (e.g., being divorced, being separated, being unemployed, and alcohol or drug use by either partner) had no effect on amounts of domestic abuse of Hispanic women. Indeed, Berenson et al.<sup>27</sup> concluded that a Hispanic woman's response to an abusive situation is likely to be influenced by her culture, and in particular, Hispanic women may be more reluctant to leave an abusive partner than are white non-Hispanic or Black women.

In contrast to the pluralist perspective, those ascribing to the assimilationist perspective argue that as ethnic groups continue to live together, there occurs a progressive blending of the smaller group into the larger one. In this process individuals in the smaller group will increasingly adopt the culture of the larger group. Hence, as minority

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groups interact over time, they are expected to make adjustments by becoming more like dominants.<sup>28</sup>

Some writers have suggested that to the extent that a masculine culture persists among Mexican Americans, several factors are contributing to its demise.<sup>29</sup> For example, Williams<sup>30</sup> explains that the portrayals of *machismo* are inflamed and heavily influenced by prejudice and stereotypical definitions of Mexican Americans held by dominants. Indeed, her study demonstrated that the power of Mexican American males in the family has declined significantly over the years, and that it never was as great as the idea of *machismo* suggests. She sees the decline in *machismo* as a result of responses to sociological processes such as industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization which operate on both the societal and global levels. In addition, she notes that these processes not only have influenced the characteristics of Mexican American families but Anglo American families as well.

Other writers have suggested that the feminist movement in the United States has functioned to change the way men and women both relate and respond toward one another. For example, Keefe and Padilla<sup>31</sup> explain that today Mexican Americans, like their Anglo American counterparts, are highly urbanized and therefore more likely to be exposed to more cosmopolitan influences quickening the pace of their assimilation into the American mainstream. Other processes such as marital assimilation, urbanization, upward mobility, and acculturation have been identified as functioning to bring about rapid assimilation of Mexican Americans.<sup>32</sup> In other words, those ascribing to the assimilationist perspective stress that Mexican Americans are an acculturated group—or at least quickly becoming one—and therefore do not differ significantly in terms of behavior, attitudes, and perceptions from Anglo Americans. Some empirical evidence on the family which exists supports this position. For example, several studies comparing Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans have found that there are no significant differences in family life between the groups. The variations that did occur were found to be of degree rather than kind.<sup>33</sup> Zinn's<sup>34</sup> research demonstrates that as Mexican American families achieve social mobility and move beyond the confines of the ethnic community, they develop egalitarian orientations. In summary, then, because of the operation of social processes, some believe that the Mexican American family displays the same values as the Anglo American family. The assimilationist view then, leads one to expect that there are few, if any differences between Mexican American and Anglo American women in terms of perception of domestic abuse.

## **Data**

The data reported in this paper were collected in 1986 in the state of Texas. The respondents in the study were women (seventy percent of them married) who lived in shelters for battered women. All respondents were eighteen years of age or older and had been physically abused at least two times during their relationship. To be included as Anglo American the respondents had to have been white, born in the United States, and personally identified themselves as Anglo Americans. Persons who were considered as Mexican American had to have been born in the United States or Mexico, personally identified themselves as Mexican Americans, and able to trace their Mexican ancestry. In all the sample consisted of fifty respondents (i.e., twenty-five Anglo American and twenty-five Mexican American). Table 1 (on page 132) illustrates the demographic features of the Anglo American and Mexican American groups. Both groups were compared along the lines of age, social class, educational level, occupation, religion, relationship status, and length of relationship.

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with all respondents. The interview was an attempt to ascertain the degree of seriousness of abusive acts. Respondents were shown a list of twenty-one acts normally regarded as abusive,<sup>35</sup> and were asked to determine whether or not these items constituted abuse. Next, using this list the interviewer asked respondents to determine the degree of seriousness of each act, if it were to be committed against them one time. Lastly, respondents were asked to determine the degree of seriousness of items on the list if they were to be committed against them on a regular basis. Respondents rated the seriousness of each item using a Likert type scale, with five categories of responses (i.e., 1. Very Serious; 2. Serious; 3. No Opinion; 4. Not Serious; 5. Definitely Not Serious). In our Table presentations we collapsed the categories Very Serious and Serious into one and disregarded the other categories. In other words, only those respondents who considered an act to be serious or very serious are included in the analysis.

For the purpose of presentation we have divided the twenty-one items into two categories (i.e., acts which may result in physical harm and those which for the most part result in emotional stress). Those acts which may result in physical harm included the woman being pushed (or shoved or grabbed), threatened with a knife or and/or gun, having a knife and/or gun used against her, being slapped, having objects thrown at her, being bitten, being hit with a fist, being choked, being beaten with an object, having her hair pulled, being burned with a cigarette, and being raped. Those acts which could result in emotional stress included the male's verbal abuse (and/or verbal threats), psychological abuse, not providing food and shelter, withdrawal of affection, ignoring the female,

**Table 1**

**Demographics of Battered Women Sample**

	Anglo American (N=25) Percentage	Mexican American (N=25) Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
18-30	72	72
31-40	12	12
41-50	12	12
51+	4	4
<b>Social Class</b>		
Middle	20	20
Lower	80	80
<b>Educational Level</b>		
Advanced Degree	4	4
College Degree	8	0
Some College	36	12
High School	32	20
Less Than High School	20	64
<b>Occupation</b>		
Management	4	12
Clerical	32	8
Skilled	12	8
Unskilled	20	20
Housewife/Unemployed	32	52
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic	16	64
Protestant	68	28
Other	8	8
None	8	0
<b>Relationship Status</b>		
Married	80	60
Cohabiting	20	28
Divorced	0	4
Separated	0	8
<b>Length of Relationship</b>		
1-2 Years	36	12
3-6 Years	48	32
7-15 Years	12	48
Over 20 Years	4	8

### *Evans and Torres - Perceptions of Domestic Abuse*

providing no emotional support, refusing to communicate, and constraining the woman against her will.

We tested the data for significance on the difference between proportions from independent samples to determine whether or not Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans differed in their perception of those acts which constituted abuse. In order to justify using the test for differences between proportions, we assume that each of the observations are independent and that the samples are independent. It is further assumed that the samples are simple random samples of the population. The assumption that the null hypothesis is true serves as a rationale for getting a pooled estimate of the population proportion and using it to compute the standard error.<sup>36</sup>

### **Findings**

The data in Table 2 (on page 134) show that in general both Anglo American and Mexican American women regarded acts that could result in physical harm as abusive behavior. However Anglo Americans, in contrast to Mexican Americans, were significantly more likely to perceive punching, slapping, throwing objects, and pulling hair as abusive. With respect to acts which may result in emotional stress, Mexican Americans were significantly less likely to agree with their Anglo counterparts that the failure to provide and constraint against one's will were forms of abuse.

Table 3 (on page 135) shows the results for perceived abuse if an act is committed one time. Anglo Americans were more likely than Mexican Americans to believe that punching, threatening with a knife, slapping, throwing objects, biting, beating with an object and/or fist, pulling hair, and burning with a cigarette were abusive behaviors. With respect to those acts which may result in emotional stress there existed no significant difference between the two groups.

Lastly, respondents were asked about their perceptions of the items on the lists if these were to be committed against them on a regular basis. Table 4 (page 136) shows that unlike Anglo Americans, Mexican Americans were significantly less likely to perceive behaviors which could result in physical harm as abusive. Mexican Americans proved statistically different from their Anglo counterparts with respect to eleven out of the thirteen items listed in the category of physical harm. The groups also differed significantly with respect to those behaviors which could result in emotional stress. For example, a higher percentage of Anglo Americans than Mexican Americans reported that psychological abuse, failure to provide, showing no emotional support, and constraint against one's will are acts of abusive behavior if committed over time on a regular basis.

**Table 2**

**Perceptions of Acts Constituting Abuse by Ethnicity**

	<b>Anglo Americans %</b>	<b>Mexican Americans %</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b><u>Acts Resulting in Physical Harm</u></b>					
Pushing	92	80	.097	1.23	.109
Punching	100	88	.066	2.00	.022*
Threatening with Knife	100	96	.039	1.02	.153
Use of Knife or Gun	100	96	.039	1.02	.153
Slapping	96	80	.091	1.75	.040*
Throwing Objects	96	80	.091	1.75	.040*
Biting	100	80	.084	.24	.409*
Hitting with Fist	100	96	.039	1.02	.153
Choking	100	100	.000	0.00	.500
Beating with Objects	100	96	.039	1.02	.153
Pulling Hair	100	84	.076	2.10	.017*
Burning with Cigarette	100	92	.055	1.45	.073
Rape	100	96	.039	1.02	.153
<b><u>Acts Resulting in Emotional Stress</u></b>					
Verbal Abuse	96	88	.093	.86	.19
Mental Abuse	100	80	.084	-.24	.409
Failure to Provide	96	56	.120	3.33	.000*
Withdrawal of Affection	72	56	.135	1.18	.119
Ignoring Spouse	64	44	.140	1.42	.077
No Emotional Support	76	64	.129	.93	.176
Refusing to Communicate	64	48	.140	1.14	.127
Constraint Against Will	100	64	.108	3.33	.000*

\* =  $p < .05$

**Table 3**

**Perception of Acts Constituting Abuse  
if Committed One Time**

	<b>Anglo Americans %</b>	<b>Mexican Americans %</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b><u>Acts Resulting in Physical Harm</u></b>					
Pushing	48	64	.140	.11	.127
Punching	96	80	.090	1.77	.038*
Threatening with Knif	100	88	.060	2.00	.022*
Use of Knife or Gun	100	92	.050	1.60	.054*
Slapping	88	60	.120	2.33	.009*
Throwing Objects	88	68	.050	4.00	.000*
Biting	84	76	.030	2.66	.003
Hitting with Fist	96	80	.090	1.77	.038*
Choking	96	92	.050	.80	.211
Beating with Objects	96	80	.090	1.77	.038*
Pulling Hair	88	72	.030	5.33	.000*
Burning with Cigarette	96	72	.100	2.40	.008*
Rape	88	80	.100	.80	.211
<b><u>Acts Resulting in Emotional Stress</u></b>					
Verbal Abuse	60	76	.130	1.23	.109
Mental Abuse	76	68	.126	.63	.103
Failure to Provide	76	60	.130	1.23	.109
Withdrawal of Affection	60	52	.140	.57	.284
Ignoring Spouse	24	32	.130	.62	.270
No Emotional Support	36	44	.138	.58	.284
Refusing to Communicate	36	52	.140	1.14	.127
Constraint Against Will	70	64	.133	.46	.322

\* =  $p < .05$

**Table 4**

**Perceptions of Acts Constituting Abuse  
if Committed on a Regular Basis**

	Anglo Americans %	Mexican Americans %	Standard Error	Z	Significance
<b>Acts Resulting in Physical Harm</b>					
Pushing	96	76	.098	.22	.017*
Punching	100	84	.076	2.10	.017*
Threatening with Knife	100	84	.076	2.10	.017*
Use of Knife or Gun	100	84	.076	2.10	.017*
Slapping	100	68	.103	3.10	.001*
Throwing Objects	100	64	.108	2.96	.001*
Biting	100	76	.129	1.86	.031*
Hitting with Fist	100	80	.080	2.50	.006*
Choking	100	96	.039	1.02	.153
Beating with Objects	100	80	.080	2.50	.006*
Pulling Hair	96	76	.098	2.04	.020*
Burning with Cigarette	100	80	.080	2.50	.006
Rape	88	80	.129	.12	.109
<b>Acts Resulting in Emotional Stress</b>					
Verbal Abuse	96	88	.076	.10	.146
Vental Abuse	100	84	.076	2.10	.017*
Failure to Provide	100	72	.098	2.85	.006*
Withdrawal of Affection	76	80	.117	0.34	.3666
Ignoring Spouse	76	64	.072	1.66	.048
No Emotional Support	84	64	.124	1.61	.053*
Refusing to Communicate	76	64	.072	1.66	.048*
Constraint Against Will	96	80	.091	1.75	.040*

\* =  $p < .05$



## **Conclusions**

This paper has explored perceptions of domestic abuse of Mexican American and Anglo American women. In this work we argued that humans, unlike other animals, are not born with complex innate behavior patterns that enhance their survival in society. It is only because of culture that humans have the unique ability to select, interpret and form different meanings of stimuli. Each person learns through culture how to adapt to the environment. These learned ways of acting always involve a "definition of the situation," which suggests that stimuli confronting a person have no fixed quality and/or meaning, and that self-aware conduct entails prior interpretation and deliberation by the individual using cultural definitions.

In this research we wanted to explore whether or not Mexican American women fit a pluralist or an assimilationist model with respect to how they perceived domestic abuse. In general the data in this paper suggest that for Mexican American women, the kind of cultural assimilation expected by Park and Allport<sup>37</sup> appears not to have occurred, at least with respect to their perceptions of domestic abuse. For example, our research demonstrates that Mexican American women are defining abuse in a more general way—one which may be consistent with their cultural ethos but inconsistent with the norms of the American mainstream. If the data presented in this paper are truly indicative of the feelings of Mexican American women, then their apparent acceptance of abuse may be placing them in dangerous situations—ones that many Anglo American women would find objectionable. However, readers should keep in mind that because the sample used in this research was relatively small the findings of this paper should not be considered as definitive. Nor do the findings of this paper allow us to generalize to larger populations or to control for other social-economic variables to determine what influence these may have on perceptions of domestic abuse. Despite this however, this study has important exploratory implications for scholars, since it provides a starting point for the investigation of spousal abuse among people that are racially and ethnically distinct.

In these writers' view, the comparative difference between Mexican American and Anglo American women in their perceptions of domestic abuse is best explained by the pluralist model. As we have already noted, Mexican Americans have been more successful than other ethnic groups in maintaining their distinctive heritage. This heritage includes a collectivist culture in which one is expected to show great concern for the entire ethnic group. In a collectivist culture males have a higher social status than females, individuals are expected to conform to tradition, and family integrity, obedience, and conformity are valued more than achievement, pleasure, and competition. In contrast, individualist cultures, in which most Anglo American women have been socialized, are not likely to see a sharp

contrast between in-groups and out-groups. In this situation, individual goals tend to take precedence over group goals, and behavior is regulated by the individual's likes and dislikes and by cost/benefit analysis. The contrast between collectivist and individualist cultures suggests that in the former, perceptions of domestic abuse are more likely to be tolerant, because these are influenced by group norms and conformity. However, in the latter perceptions of domestic abuse are less tolerant because they are determined by one's sense of personal independence from the group and personal achievements.

The differences found between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans in this study may reflect social economic status rather than culture. For example, while both samples were similar to one another with respect to age and social class, Mexican Americans were more likely to be less educated, unemployed, and Catholic—factors which are known to affect one's perceptions and attitudes toward abuse.<sup>38</sup> In other words, people in these categories, irrespective of race or ethnicity, tend to tolerate abuse to a greater degree than others not in those groups. Thus it might be the case that Mexican American women are responding to abusive behavior in the same manner that women who are of a different ethnicity but the same economic status respond to this phenomenon. Indeed, it may be that such variables as education, religion, and employment status play an even greater role than ethnicity in determining how an individual's perception of domestic abuse of women is shaped. Using this view then, one might expect that as Mexican American women attain higher levels of occupation, education, and income they will become less tolerant of domestic abuse.

Again we note that this study is exploratory and thus limits our ability to generalize to larger populations. One limitation is the small size of the sample; another was that in this study only women provided the information about abuse. Indeed, it would have been better if both sexes could have been heard from on this matter. Lastly, we propose several questions for future research. How do the attitudes toward domestic abuse of individuals that have not experienced it compare to those that have been battered? What are the attitudes about hostility toward women, and the characteristics and the perceptions of the causes and legitimacy of violence, of Anglo American men compared to Mexican American men and other minority groups of both sexes? Lastly, what are the implications for domestic abuse workers with respect to cultural variations among ethnic groups, regarding intervention in domestic abuse situations?

**NOTES**

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<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Gelles, *The Violent Home: A Study of Physical Aggression Between Husbands And Wives* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1972); William A. Stacey, *The Family Secret: Domestic Violence in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Straus et al.; Richard Teske and Mary Parker, *Spouse Abuse in Texas: A Study of Women's Attitudes and Experiences* (Texas, Criminal Justice Center Publication No. 82-T-0003, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> M. Ramirez III, *Psychology of the Americas* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983).

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<sup>11</sup>Joan W. Moore and Harry Pachon, *Hispanics in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 119-20.

<sup>12</sup>Susan E. Keefe and Amado M. Padilla, *Chicano Ethnicity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 190.

<sup>13</sup>Moore and Pachon, 122.

<sup>14</sup>Andres Oppenheimer, "The Harsh Life of Chiapas Women," *The Miami Herald* (28 March 1994): 10A.

<sup>15</sup>Oppenheimer, 10A.

<sup>16</sup>Ruth Horowitz, "Passion, Submission and Motherhood: The Negotiation of Identity by Unmarried Innercity Chicanas," *Sociological Quarterly* 22 (1981): 241-52.

<sup>17</sup>Richard T. Schaefer, *Racial and Ethnic Groups* (Glenview, CA: St. Martin's Press, 1988): 314-15.

<sup>18</sup>Schaefer, 302-14.

<sup>19</sup>Schaefer, 314.

<sup>20</sup>Hosch, 1681.

<sup>21</sup>G. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980).

<sup>22</sup>Hosch, 1682.

<sup>23</sup>Horowitz, 241-52.

<sup>24</sup>Horowitz, 245.

<sup>25</sup>Horowitz, 244.

<sup>26</sup>Abbey B. Berenson, Norma J. Stiglich, Gregg S. Willkinson, and Garland D. Anderson, "Drug Abuse and Other Risk Factors for Physical Abuse in Pregnancy among White Non-Hispanic, Black and Hispanic Women," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 164, 6 (1991):1491-99.

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<sup>36</sup>Herman Loether and Donald McTavish, *Descriptive and Inferential Statistics: An Introduction* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1976), 345-56.

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## **Frozen In Place: European American Ideologies and the Inuit**

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It has been claimed by Hugh Brody that European Americans maintain strong ideological connections between Inuit people and the Arctic environments they inhabit. I expand upon this claim, giving three primary ideological connections that tie the Inuit directly to their environments. These are termed the natural, temporal, and material connections. Textual examples are given to illustrate each type of connection. I also show how each ideological connection serves to disempower the Inuit by situating them within the confines of "nature" while empowering European American patriarchs who conceive themselves as existing "outside of" or "beyond" nature. These three connections, working together with other ideological tools, serve to subordinate the Inuit and other Arctic peoples to larger political and economic powers. In the conclusion, I suggest that these ideological connections must be examined, understood, and abandoned in order to improve the quality of life of the Inuit.

Hugh Brody, a social philosopher who has written many insightful books concerning Canada's Inuit, declares in one of his books:

The great social and intellectual distance between Whites and Eskimos is emphasized in the minds of Whites by the harshness of the Arctic and the intimate closeness of Eskimo life with the land: the harsher the environment, the closer to nature must be the people who are able to inhabit it. . . . In the minds of the Whites, far out there, on the bleak, windswept, rocky land lives the image of the real Eskimo; he was there, everywhere, in the past, and he lives on, reincarnated, in every Eskimo today.<sup>1</sup>

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Brody identifies a fundamental ideological connection between the Arctic as a physical environment and European American perceptions of the people who live in that circumpolar region.<sup>2</sup>

When European American people think of other cultures, especially those cultures we term "indigenous" or "Third-World" cultures, we are prone to situate these peoples in terms of nature, time, and natural resources. I am primarily concerned with connections between our perceptions of climate, geography, animal and plant biota, and other aspects of what we call the physical environment and our perceptions of the people that inhabit Arctic regions.

In this paper, I will explore these connections in relation to the Inuit of Canada's Arctic, the focus of this paper, but what I say is also applicable to the Dene, the Cree, the Aleut, and other indigenous groups living in the Arctic. I begin with some observations made by European Americans who have travelled in the Arctic. Then I discuss three ways that European Americans express their ideology which connects the Inuit so strongly with their physical surroundings. These three connections I term naturalistic, temporal, and materialistic. I will discuss how these various ideological connections function to oppress the Inuit people.

My task here is not to show that the Inuit, or any other group, are not "parts of nature." The simple and historically-popular beliefs that there is a separation between humanity and nature, and that different cultures conceive their relationships to nature in vastly different ways are not of concern to me in this paper. I recognize the difficulties in setting up a continuum between "nature" and "humanity" and, then, attempting to situate various peoples within that continuum.<sup>3</sup> Instead, I am examining how certain ideologies prevalent in European American society serve to oppress certain groups. Westerners have traditionally viewed ourselves as essentially separate from "nature"; "nature," as well as the people we identify as "parts of nature," has become that division of the world we control and exploit for our benefits.

It would also be wrong to credit me with disproving several wide-spread "facts." As I will point out below, some scientific facts, despite their truth-values, serve to perpetuate systems of oppression. The truth of some claim is independent of that claim's uses in perpetuating racism, sexism, classism, and any other forms of oppression. For example, the once wide-spread belief that certain "races" had intellects "inferior" to others did not justify the subordination of the "inferior" races. Likewise, evolutionary science accounts detailing the "adaptation" of Inuit to the Arctic do not justify treating the Inuit as simply "part of nature."

### **Connecting the Physical Environment with Its Dwellers**

It is not difficult to find textual evidence for the connection that Brody identifies. Consider the following quotation from an Arctic



adventure entitled *On the Edge of Nowhere*:

The country was wild enough—blizzards, and sixty-below cold all the winter months, and floods when the ice tore loose in spring, swamping the tundra with spongy muskegs so that a man might travel down the rivers, but could never make a summer portage of more than a mile or so between them. And the people matched the land.<sup>4</sup>

This final sentence, "And the people matched the land," illustrates the popular views of which Brody speaks; the Inuit are linked directly to their environment. This implies that understanding the people simply involves understanding their physical surroundings.

Most of us probably have vaguely-developed ideas concerning the Arctic as a physical environment. Ice and snow dominate our mental images of the Arctic. Indeed, ice and snow are key components of the landscape, as are rock, wind, clouds, and water. Yet what are more revealing are the adjectives and metaphors we use to describe this physical environment. Gontran de Poncins, a French scientist who travelled in the Canadian Arctic in the late 1930s, described the areas surrounding his Post as "grim, barren, inexorable, and virtually lifeless" and similar to a "detention camp."<sup>5</sup> Duncan Pryde described an area he visited as "bleak and utterly desolate, a blotchy brown flatland devoid of life, a vast panorama of emptiness, so bleak and so desolate that it possessed its own unique beauty."<sup>6</sup> Marie Herbert's preliminary description of the Arctic seeks to draw sympathy for her predicament:

A razorback ridge of featureless rock stretched on either side. No light shone on it or was reflected back. The bleak monotony of it was broken only by the scars and scratches of the cutting winds which had swept it clean. There seemed no space for man or beast on this barren rock: and this was where I had brought my baby to live for a year.<sup>7</sup>

These visitors to the Arctic capture many of our commonly held notions concerning the austerity of the Arctic environment: bleak, lifeless, desolate, featureless.

Certainly when explorers present such visions of the landscape, emphasizing the harshness and emptiness, they distance themselves from their fellow European Americans by showing that they can brave such cruel environments. But these narratives tell us more than the writers intend; they also send messages concerning the native peoples of the Arctic. Once we accept the severity of the Arctic as a fact, we

make many assumptions of the people who live there: these people are different from European Americans, they are rugged and savage, they live ascetic life-styles, bereft of comfort and security. I have identified three ways that Inuit peoples have been ideologically linked with their physical environment.

### **Naturalistic Connections**

One way to connect any type of organism to its physical environment is to employ biological information that details how that being is particularly well-suited to that specific environment. Rare plants inhabit certain areas to which their particular needs are adapted. Animals such as the polar bear and the Arctic wolf are cited as exceptionally well-adapted to their Arctic environment; their physiology has evolved so that they can live only in very cold climates. This type of explanation, an "evolutionary-adaptational" model of explanation, maintains that the organisms are inextricably connected to their environments. Such naturalizing explanations are quite prevalent when discussing indigenous peoples.

British newscaster Sam Hall, who is otherwise a staunch defender of the Inuit and their way of life, presents an evolutionary-adaptational explanation for Inuit physiology:

Another extraordinary characteristic, which developed as the Eskimos moved deeper into the polar regions, was a shortening of the arm below the elbow, and the leg below the knee. In proportion to their bodies, these extremities are stubbier than in any other race in the world. The reason is simple. In such excruciating cold the body was forced to adapt in order to survive. The shorter the distance to the extremities, the greater the chances of survival.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the Inuit are connected with their environment because that environment has shaped Inuit physiology. Evolutionary-adaptational explanations focus on physical characteristics rather than social influences. When such explanations are used, they imply that Inuit people are evolutionary products of their environment, just as are the polar bear and the Arctic wolf. Even though such explanations may be empirically justified, the evolutionary-adaptational connections that are posited for the Inuit and their Arctic environment imply more than mere biological fitness for the Inuit.

There are other ways of offering naturalistic connections between people and their environments besides the evolutionary-adaptational approach. For example, Raymond Chipeniuk connects Canadian

peoples to their physical environments using the terminology of ecology. In his article, "The Vacant Niche: An Argument for the Re-Creation of a Hunter-Gatherer Component in the Ecosystems of Northern National Parks," he claims, "Indians and Inuit and the peoples who proceeded them functioned very much as big game *predators* across most of Canada" [italics added].<sup>9</sup> Because these peoples meet certain ecological conditions, Chipeniuk concludes that "they were a *natural* component of natural ecosystems" [italics added].

One implication of positing naturalistic connections between peoples and their environments is that we can employ such explanations to link those people to nature and, thus, distance those people from us. By using the language of evolutionary biology and ecology, we imply that the Inuit are more akin to the creatures of the world who rely on adaptation to survive in their environments. European Americans, on the other hand, are no longer viewed as evolutionary products of our environments; we view ourselves as "rational beings" produced through social forces such as education and, thus, insulate ourselves from the needs of adaptation through "civilization." Thus, if we accept such explanations, we "socially-determined animals" can distance ourselves from the Inuit whom we view primarily as biological beings.

Donna Haraway, who in her studies of primatology unearths many of the Western ideologies underlying our constructions of race, argues that race "as a natural-technical object of knowledge is fundamentally a category marking political power through location in 'nature.'"<sup>10</sup> Evolutionary-adaptational explanations of Inuit physiology, such as that given by Hall, thus serve to place the Inuit within the politically-disempowered realm of "nature," thereby giving more "socially-advanced" European Americans the political power to oversee these people. These are serious political consequences of what may seem an innocent way of explaining Inuit physiology.

Another implication of the use of evolutionary-adaptational explanation is that the explanation essentializes the people whom it seeks to explain. All dwellers of the Arctic share an evolutionarily-determined essence because they share an evolutionary history. We know that when a biologist tells us that the Arctic wolf is suited to living in the Arctic, it cannot dwell in warmer climates. Similarly, when we say that the Inuit are particularly suited to life in the Arctic, we imply that they are not suited to live elsewhere. In other words, we place them in an evolutionarily-determined niche from which they cannot easily remove themselves. Whereas European Americans' biology does not specify particular environments we must inhabit, in our ideology the Inuit are restricted to the Arctic.

The Inuit are also restricted in what they can do in that Arctic environment. Westerners expect the Inuit to be doing what is necessary for survival: hunting, fishing, building snow houses, making and wearing

caribou-hide clothing. To do otherwise is to step outside of the biological role the evolutionary-adaptational explanations demand. Thus, the acceptance of evolutionary-adaptational explanations entails ideological limits on what European Americans will view as "real Inuit" practices. These limits are expressed when Westerners insist that the Inuit should not use rifles and snowmobiles, watch TV, or move into the 20th Century.

### **Temporal Connections**

One need go no further than the dust jacket of de Poncins' *Kabloona* to find reference to the connection between the Inuit and their environment. The summary reads, "A white man, journeying alone among the Eskimos [*sic*] describes their lives, customs and amazing social code in a series of powerful and unforgettable sketches of a people whose civilization is a throwback to the ice age."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the term "ice age" refers to the physical environment, occupied by ice, as well as the people who inhabit that land of ice and serves as a bridge between environment and denizens. Duncan Pryde, in *Nunaga*, similarly employs the term "stone age" to connect Inuit people with their environment: "Its native inhabitants were nomadic Eskimos, barely out of the Stone Age." The dust jacket to *Nunaga* claims that "Pryde tells of his discovery of a remote and primitive way of life."

Terms such as "ice age," "stone age," "remote," and "primitive" serve to distance the Inuit from European American civilization.<sup>12</sup> This remoteness can be measured both spatially and temporally. The spatial remoteness of the Arctic is consistently emphasized in narratives of the Arctic. One-hundred years ago, the Arctic was certainly out of reach of most people on this planet. But in our day, European Americans have access to the Arctic via airplane. Flights are expensive and infrequent yet, given the advanced state of our travel technologies, the spatial remoteness of the Arctic can be easily overcome.

Temporal remoteness cannot be overcome in the same way. We have vehicles to traverse great expanses of the Earth; we do not have the ability to cross time. Thus, when the Inuit are perceived as "primitive," when their society exists in the "ice" or "stone age," we place an unnavigable temporal boundary between us and them. These temporal boundaries are primarily a marker to emphasize our superiority over the Inuit. We coin terms such as "stone age" to refer to specific types of people existing in a pre-agricultural stage of development. Once these terms become accepted parts of our language, we can extend their uses to include employing them as temporal barriers.

Johannes Fabian examines this temporal distancing in his *Time and the Other*. By placing a people within a different time through the use of language, situating them in a distant past such as that evoked by

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the term "ice age," we deny their status as contemporaries in our "modern" world. Fabian focusses on anthropological work but his conclusions are equally applicable to the travel narratives given above. Temporal distancing, or the "denial of coevalness," Fabian's preferred term, is one of the few tools Westerners still have for making contemporary indigenous peoples our "Other". He writes:

The distance between the West and the Rest on which all classical anthropological theories have been predicated is by now being disputed in regard to almost every conceivable aspect (moral, aesthetic, intellectual, political). Little more than technology and sheer economic exploitation seem to be left over for the purposes of "explaining" Western superiority. It has become foreseeable that even those prerogatives may either disappear or no longer be claimed. There remains "only" the all-pervading denial of coevalness which ultimately is expressive of a cosmological myth of frightening magnitude and persistence.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, terms such as "ice age" and "primitive" not only connect the Inuit people with their environment; they are also one of the few ideological tools remaining to distance European Americans from the Inuit. This ideology gives the Inuit a status as less-developed humans who need our stewardship to survive in the 20th Century.

### **Materialism Connection**

Another physical characteristic of the Arctic that has influenced Western ideology concerning the Inuit involves the material goods that we find of value; I term this the "materialism" connection. Consider the following claim:

Once European visitors had arrived, their preconceptions and expectations led them to emphasize some elements of the landscape. . . . These were the natural products that could be shipped to Europe and sold for a profit in order to provide a steady income for colonial settlements.<sup>14</sup>

This quotation, from William Cronon's history of New England, is equally applicable to European American colonialism in the Arctic. The abundance of marine and fur-bearing mammals such as whales, seals, and Arctic fox in Arctic regions motivated some Europeans to exploit these resources. Naturally, the Inuit were (and are) used as factotums for the collection of these "resources." These "original" perceptions of the Arctic as a cache

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for furs, whale oil, ivory, etc., persist in our contemporary perceptions of the Arctic. We learn more of the Inuit through the goods we have acquired from them than through direct interaction with the Arctic or the Inuit. For example, the European outcry against the killing of seals was possible due to our familiarity with furs exported from the Arctic and sub-Arctic; meanwhile, few European Americans are aware of the economic catastrophes that struck the Inuit once European Americans began a fur boycott.<sup>15</sup>

Ideologically, the Inuit become laboring bodies for European Americans: trappers, sealers, hunters, guides, stone-carvers, or whatever we want them to be. Neither trapping nor stone-carving were major activities of the Inuit prior to their exposure to Europeans. It is interesting to note that the market in Inuit soapstone carvings has become lucrative primarily because European Americans have created a market for these art pieces. European American interests strongly determine what Inuit carvers can sell. Art critic Guy Brett notes that when "the Inuit (Eskimo) craft-producing co-operatives began to be set up in northern Canada after the Second World War to aid the ailing Inuit economy, . . . everything produced had to meet a definite requirement which was somehow neither traditional nor modern but 'primitive.'"<sup>16</sup> The works that earn the greatest amounts of money for carvers are carvings that depict the Inuit connections to the animals and the environment of the Arctic, works that reiterate the connections between Inuit people and their physical surroundings. Brett relates the story of a soapstone carving of Elvis's head which was slated for demolition until some civil servant rescued it from the sledge-hammer; this bust simply did not fit in with European American perceptions of the Inuit.

One result of European Americans viewing the Arctic as a bed of resources and the Inuit as the people who deliver these resources is that we lose the ability to see Inuit individuals as anything other than laborers. Thus, we may ignore the existence of Inuit politicians, storytellers, poets, actors, and guitarists. We do not understand their values and their desires. We become blind to ways that Inuit do not relate to the resources we crave, blind to who they are to themselves.

### **The Consequences of European American Ideology**

We maintain our ideology that Inuit people are intimately tied to their environment for many reasons. I have already argued that temporal and naturalistic connections help us to distance the Inuit people from us ideologically. Our materialism, our need to gather resources from the Arctic, leads us to pigeonhole the Inuit in economic roles that are intimately linked with their environment.

The practical consequence of these ideologies is that we are able to rationalize our actions against these people. By maintaining a

belief that the Inuit are dwellers in the ice age, we temporally dislocate them and, thus, situate ourselves in a position of power. We are the holders of knowledge, be it used for scientific, military, political or economic purposes, and we can use that knowledge for the "betterment" of the Inuit, as well as ourselves. Thus, we build schools where Inuit children can learn English and Western ways. We set up political bodies to govern the regions where Inuit live. We distribute welfare to those whom we see as deserving it. At the same time, we exploit the natural resources we desire and use the Arctic for our own purposes.

All these activities take power from the Inuit, a people who got along quite well without us for thousands of years. The Inuit are now in a precarious position; they require Western goods to survive and they need to have income to do this, yet the European American markets determine what goods are marketable. Thus, the Inuit are economically dependent upon us.

They must also appeal to the Canadian government in order to regain governance of the lands they occupy and to insure that their children are educated in Inuit culture. Acculturation, a product of education in the English-speaking schools, is destroying their traditional ways of life. Children are sent to distant settlements for their education, residing in boarding schools where they are isolated from their families. The Inuit people have been fighting the government for decades, trying to get Inuktitut, their native language, taught in these schools.

There are some signs that European American ideologies are changing. Major steps toward Inuit autonomy are currently being taken. The Nunavut agreement, which divides the Northwest Territories into two provinces, one being the 136,000 square mile Nunavut which will be governed by the occupants of the territory, the majority being Inuit, is one step toward the Inuit attaining this autonomy.<sup>17</sup> The Inuit also have their own representation in the Canadian parliament. Inuktitut is being taught in some schools. Most of these steps are the direct results of Inuit organizations rallying to be heard and represented. But much more can be achieved once European Americans abandon our patriarchal notions concerning these denizens of the Arctic.

## **Conclusion**

European Americans have a remarkable history of ransacking the world for resources. We see crude oil deposits because we desire oil. We see stone carvings because they tease our aesthetic senses. But we ignore that which is not to our economic advantage. Thus, we remain ignorant of Inuit social structure, of Inuit belief-systems, of Inuit language, and of Inuit knowledge. We ignore these aspects of Inuit culture because we do not need them, despite their importance in giving us a more complete understanding of that culture.

In the face of much counter-evidence, we maintain our ideologies concerning the intimate connections between the Inuit and the Arctic. Even though the Inuit live in houses with oil heat and traverse the tundra on skidoos, we still want to view them as primitive people, trapped in some romantic past like insects in amber.

However, we must realize that the Inuit are our contemporaries, more akin to us than foreign. We must then realize that we have acted inhumanely toward our Inuit brothers and sisters. Johannes Fabian writes, "It takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West (and to anthropology) if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by Time of its Other."<sup>18</sup> I have offered a diagnosis of how some of our ideologies function to make the Inuit our "Others." We must now use our imaginations to abandon these ideologies and begin to see the Inuit as our contemporaries. Only then can we begin to address the issues that will allow these people to continue their lives in the Arctic.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Brody, *The People's Land: Eskimos and Whites in the Eastern Arctic* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1975), 81.

<sup>2</sup> I choose the term "European American" because Europeans and North Americans have had the greatest impact upon colonization in the Canadian Arctic. I will also use the term "we" throughout this paper. I use "we" to refer to those responsible for the ideologies I discuss, a group of which most of us are members; it is not my intention to exclude those amongst us that are not of Euro-American descent yet have participated in the perpetuation of these ideologies.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the natural/unnatural or natural/human dichotomy is a problem for anyone who employs it. Other theorists, most notably Murray Bookchin, solve this problem by viewing the human relation to "nature" is a dialectical relationship. See Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> James Huntington, *On the Edge of Nowhere* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1966), 3.



<sup>5</sup> Gontran de Poncins, *Kabloona* (Garden City, NJ: Garden City Publishing, 1943), 30.

<sup>6</sup> Duncan Pryde, *Nunaga: Ten Years of Eskimo Life* (New York: Walker and Company, 1971), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Marie Herbert, *The Snow People* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1973), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Sam Hall, *The Fourth World: The Heritage of the Arctic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Chipeniuk, "The Vacant Niche: An Argument for the Re-Creation of a Hunter-Gatherer Component in the Ecosystems of Northern National Parks," *Environments* 20:1 (1989): 50-59.

<sup>10</sup> Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 153.

<sup>11</sup> As one reviewer noted, it is not fair to credit de Poncins with the remarks made on the dust-jacket of his book. Despite the difficulty in determining who is responsible for this blurb, it is important to recognize that such "authorless" writings are influential in creating and perpetuating cultural stereotypes. It is likely that the cover is more likely to be read than other parts of the book. Furthermore, advertising of the text is also likely to make some of the same references.

<sup>12</sup> One reviewer of this article noted that the meanings of "Stone Age" and "Ice Age" that I assume "do not reflect modern archaeology and social anthropology." I would hope not. The common meanings of these terms, the ones used outside of exclusive academic circles, the meanings I am referring to in this article, are the ones in operation in oppressive ideologies. And these common or "received" views are informed by historic works in anthropology. One must remember that it takes considerable time for academic trends to supplant prevalent beliefs in society.

<sup>13</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 35.

<sup>14</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 20.

<sup>15</sup> See "Anti-Sealing Lobby Severely Hurting Inuit Hunters," *Native Perspective* 2:7 (1977): 8.

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<sup>16</sup> Guy Brett, "Unofficial Versions," in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. S. Hiller (New York: Routledge, 1991), 122.

<sup>17</sup> For a good presentation of Nunavut see Jim Bell, "Nunavut: The Quiet Revolution," *Arctic Circle* (January/February 1992): 12-21.

<sup>18</sup> Fabian, 35.

## **Racism and AIDS: African Origin Theories of HIV-1**

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The AIDS epidemic, first discovered in the United States in 1981, has caused a great deal of speculation with regard to the origins of both the HIV-1 retrovirus and the early pathways for the epidemic itself. The African origins theory is the most widely accepted origin theory for HIV-1 in the West. This theory is based upon six assertions, all of which either lack evidence or, when evidence has been present, these assertions have been contradicted. The African origins theory is unsubstantiated. The African origins theory is based not upon scientific logic but rather upon victim-blaming, the attempt to define "the other" as the cause of disease, and racism.

From where did Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and the HIV-1 virus come? What are the ultimate origins of this retrovirus and the illness it causes? What are the hidden arguments behind the search for the origins of both HIV-1 and the AIDS epidemic? We will examine these questions in the following essay.

AIDS was first discovered in the Spring of 1981, although it was encountered clinically by medical practitioners much earlier than this date. From the earliest encounters with the AIDS syndrome, and with what would later be known as the HIV-1 retrovirus, assumptions were made as to the origins of the disease and the pathways which the illness had taken and was taking. Thus, early in the epidemic the syndrome of illnesses associated with the immune suppression caused by the HIV-1 retrovirus was known as GRID, Gay Related Immune Deficiency. This designation, although certainly not the first for the syndrome, helped give it a lasting association with gays in the North American mind.<sup>1</sup>

It was a simple step from this name to the lifestyle interpretations and the epidemiological investigations which were to follow. These were to include the infamous "popper" (amyl nitrate) investigations and association,<sup>2</sup> which was to divert attention from the viral cause of AIDS

for some time and to provide a wall behind which the blood products industry would hide in order to continue their large profits without interruption by the danger of a blood borne and transmittable cause for the AIDS illness.<sup>3</sup> The result was literally thousands of hemophiliacs infected with the HIV-1 virus from use of viral infected blood products (Factor VIII). Assumptions concerning origins and pathways, assumptions concerning who is at risk for HIV-1 infection, when placed into policy and practice in a social context, can be costly not only in terms of dollars but also in terms of lives.

Thus, from the earliest days in this epidemic, there has been a continuous and often growing debate concerning the origins of the retrovirus and the consequent risk to individual groups from its infection. This continuing debate may be divided into two questions which are often conflated and confused during the discussion.

The first question is truly a question of origins and a question of history. From where did the HIV-1 virus, the viral causative agent of the AIDS syndrome, originate? Where did this retrovirus come from? Since the AIDS syndrome appears to be of recent emergence, when and where did the causative agent evolve? It seems, especially since this is an epidemic which arose in the 1970s or 1980s, that this question should be capable of being answered. It should not be necessary to look into the incompletely recorded past, as it is with the sexually transmitted disease of syphilis, for instance, to understand the origins of AIDS.<sup>4</sup> Was it, as in the classic Small Pox viral origins, an animal crossover? If this is the case, how long did the retrovirus exist in the animal populations and from what animal did it cross over? If it is not an animal crossover, did HIV-1 evolve in the human population? Syphilis, for instance, is often thought to have been a developmental result of a previous human disease which was not sexually transmitted (Yaws). It should be recognized that, while these are scientific questions, they contain explosive emotional, social, and political overtones. These questions cannot be asked without a certain tension occurring and without larger implications being included in any answer.

There is a second and related series of questions. These second questions are often associated and confused with the first; they concern both the present and the past spread of HIV-1 infection. They ask the following: What are the pathways of the AIDS virus, the HIV-1 retrovirus? What human populations have been differentially struck by this virus and the consequent AIDS illness? What are the characteristics of these populations which have made them particularly susceptible to this differential impact? What has made AIDS appear the way it has epidemiologically? These are not questions of ultimate origins but of the intermediate pathways of the epidemic. They may be viewed as closely related to the first question of ultimate origins but are one step removed from such a first, and historical, question.

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It must be understood that these questions also have great emotion attached to them, and nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the AIDS epidemic. Original groups who suffer from the infection, particularly if the epidemic is a sexually transmitted disease, can be stigmatized and victim-blamed. Again, the long standing debate concerning the origins, European or North American, of the syphilis bacillus are an example of this. The emotional content of epidemic origins can, and is, assigned to early infected groups, such as has been so clearly the case with gay males in the United States. Thus, a debate concerning the early pathways of a sexually transmitted epidemic is not purely a scientific question, just as the ultimate origins of the retrovirus itself is not a purely scientific question.

Why ask these questions at all if there is such a stigma potential? In fact, if one can discover the immediate precursor virus to an infectious and deadly virus, there are possibilities that this earlier ancestor may not be virulent or deadly to humans. It may be possible to use the ancestor as a basis for a vaccine and the foundation for prevention of the subsequently evolved virus. This is the scientific justification for the search for origins. It is, ultimately, founded upon the historic model of Jenner's vaccine, derived from Cow Pox, the ancestral virus to Small Pox which was not virulent to humans. Cow Pox was used to provide the basis for a vaccine for Small Pox. We have seen Small Pox eradicated due to the widespread campaign to use this vaccine in the farther corners of the world. If this model were applicable to the HIV-1 virus, it certainly would justify the search for origins.

This, then, is the scientific justification for the search concerning the origins of the HIV-1 virus. Certainly, the search for the earliest human population which became infected with HIV-1, and developed AIDS as a consequence, is also capable of such a scientific justification. Finding this early history of the epidemic would also open the possibility of discovering an early precursor and developing a vaccine.

During the course of the following essay, we will examine the African origin theory of HIV-1. Thus, we will be looking at the answers that have been given to the initial question mentioned above, the question of the ultimate origins of the HIV-1 virus. In this essay, we need to look at the scientific justifications for these theories but, as I will argue more extensively in the latter sections, we need to look at the hidden content of these theories. What is it that they are saying between the lines of their arguments and theories? Is logic and science the sole basis for their approach, or, rather, are there hidden assumptions and hidden political agendas contained within these scientific pursuits? Needless to say, I will argue at length that there are, as Sylvia Tesh has termed them in her brilliant book, hidden arguments behind all these investigations.<sup>5</sup> These hidden arguments are very significant and important, at least as significant as the arguments which are visible.

### **Ultimate Origins Theories for the HIV-1 Virus**

Even before the pathogenic causative agent of AIDS was isolated and identified, with a test developed for its presence in 1985, theories for the origins of the as yet unidentified HIV-1 retrovirus were advanced. Perhaps none have been as widespread or as enduring as the theory that the HIV-1 virus originated in central Africa. One cannot work in the field of AIDS research and have one's work known by the public without being questioned frequently concerning the African origins theory of the AIDS virus. It is one of the earliest topics brought up in any conversation concerning AIDS and the AIDS epidemic. When students in a large introductory sociology course were tested as to their knowledge of AIDS at the University of Utah, for instance, seventy-nine percent responded that the HIV-1 virus originated on the African continent when given a choice of all continents and a last choice of "unknown". This is the theory most widespread and most accepted among educated, and I suspect, uneducated, North Americans. It appears early in the epidemic in both the popular press and in scientific and popular scientific works by "experts".

This theory took some time to develop, partly because it was not until 1983 that the AIDS syndrome was clearly identified as existing in Africa. This occurred as a result of a number of wealthy Africans traveling to Europe for medical treatment for intractable illnesses for which they had sought treatment, unsuccessfully, in Africa. The intractable illnesses were, in fact, opportunistic diseases, characteristic of AIDS, and the syndrome was soon recognized in these patients from the African continent. Theoretical speculation did not take long concerning the origins of AIDS. In April 1983, in a letter to the famous British medical journal, *The Lancet*, Jane Teas of the Harvard School of Public Health advanced the theory that the African swine flu virus might be the precursor to the AIDS virus. This was, of course, before the retrovirus causing AIDS had even been identified and a test developed for its presence! Teas also made the Haitian connection for the origins of the AIDS epidemic at the same time:

Closely paralleling the onset of the first cases of AIDS in 1978 in Haiti was the first confirmed appearance of the African swine fever virus (ASFV) also in Haiti, in 1979...In 1976, ASFV was confirmed in Cuba and all pigs were killed. The island remained disease-free until 1980, when the virus reappeared, coincident with the arrival of Haitian refugees...When an infected pig was killed and eaten either as (uncooked or uncooked) meat. One of the people eating the meat who was both

immunocompromised and homosexual would be the pivotal point, allowing for the disease to spread amongst the vacationing 'gay' tourists in Haiti.<sup>6</sup>

The Haitian connection was suggested initially in the epidemic by the discovery of thirty-four cases of AIDS among Haitian immigrants to the United States in 1981, practically coincident with the discovery of AIDS in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Needless to say, complaints flooded into the journal as a result of this ingenious letter and its creative theory. It was widely speculative, totally without any epidemiological support, and, in later investigation by researchers from Belgium and Holland, proved completely unfounded. The Haitian connection so made in a mere unresearched letter, in association with the above mentioned thirty-four cases among Haitian immigrants to the United States, was sufficient for the Centers for Disease Control, and the public, to designate Haitians as a high risk group, however. In fact, in retrospect, we know that the African swine virus is not a retrovirus at all, and therefore unrelated to the AIDS virus which is, of course, a retrovirus. Because they are fundamentally of differing families of viruses, African swine virus could not have been the precursor for HIV-1 but the die had been cast. In subsequent research on Haitians with AIDS, it was further determined that all of these Haitians were involved with the tourist trade with North America. None of the individuals who were early cases of Haitian AIDS had ever even met an African. It appeared that AIDS came to Haiti from North America, rather than the reverse.<sup>8</sup> However, Africa and Haiti had been selected as the focus of speculation concerning the origins of the AIDS epidemic and the viral causative agent. The future would hold many such unsubstantiated theories concerning the African origins of the virus and the epidemic.

Early investigations by researchers in Africa in 1985, using the recently developed enzyme linked immunosorbent assay test (ELISA test), which detects the body's immune system reaction to the HIV-1 virus, seemed to show very high rates of HIV-1 viral infection in many areas of central, eastern, and southern Africa.<sup>9</sup> Particularly, high prevalence rates were detected in several African cities and, subsequently, HIV-1 infection was detected in rural areas also. Such high rates of infection, it was argued, must prove that the disease had been present in Africa for some time in order to spread so extensively and reach such high prevalence rates. Certainly, it was asserted, to have been so widespread in 1985, HIV-1 and AIDS must have been in Africa for at least a decade or more. Also, testing of early blood samples and stored blood samples from the late 1950s seemed to indicate a very early date for the presence of HIV-1 on the continent of Africa, at least as early as 1959. A pregnant woman was found to be HIV-1 positive in Kinshasa, Zaire, in 1970. A study of the sera saved from several

"remote" tribes in Zimbabwe, Liberia, and Kenya in the late 1960s and early 1970s "confirmed the presence of HIV-1 in two specimens from the Mano tribe of Liberia".<sup>10</sup> It is often asserted that these are the earliest evidence of AIDS and HIV-1, certainly earlier than in North America. As Shannon, Pyle, and Bashshur assert:

With the notable exception of KS and other mysterious symptoms found in the frozen tissue of a 16-year-old black American male who died in 1969, no serum samples stored in the United States prior to the 1970s have been found to be seropositive. On the basis of serological studies there is some indication that HIV infection may have emerged earlier in Africa than in the United States. However, the rapidly rising incidence of cases in Africa also suggests a new epidemic of infection perhaps as recent as 40 to 50 years ago.<sup>11</sup>

If these arguments are true, then the next question to ask is: Where and how exactly did HIV-1 originate on the African continent?

There are many creative and very imaginative responses which have been made to this question. Let me try to outline the basic African origins theory as developed in the popular and scientific press from 1983 onward.

The African origins theory usually starts with monkeys, particularly, green monkeys in equatorial Africa. These green monkeys are infected with a simian immuno-virus known, appropriately enough, as simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV). This retrovirus does not cause any immune deficiencies in this African equatorial green monkey, but when injected into other species of monkeys it causes an AIDS-like illness. It is this retrovirus which is most often cited as the precursor for HIV-1 in humans. How did the crossover from monkey to human occur? This, as one might expect, is where real theoretical creativity occurs.

It is generally speculated that the crossover from monkey to humans occurred due to some sort of cultural/sexual practice in the equatorial regions of Africa. In its most lurid presentation, this crossover occurs because of voodoo or shamanistic sexual practices, such as the injection of monkey blood from the green monkey to enhance sexual performance, pleasure, and excitement by some groups of Africans.<sup>12</sup> In other versions in the popular media and in oral mythology in North America, the green monkey is consumed uncooked by Africans and this provides a crossover route very similar to the route posited earlier for ASFV by Teas. Another variant for the crossover event posits a monkey bite as the crossover pathway.<sup>13</sup> Certainly there is room for many creative theories here, especially since it is clear that such a crossover event is impossible to document or prove; it thereby becomes a



subject of speculation and mythology rather than an actual event. At any rate, whatever the crossover methodology, the green monkey retrovirus is seen as the ultimate precursor to the HIV-1 virus and AIDS. According to this theory, the retrovirus, famous for its fluidity in terms of its chemical/genetic structure,<sup>14</sup> must have mutated during one of the contacts in Africa with humans and became the HIV-1 infectious agent for the AIDS epidemic.

The story has variants from here, just as there are variants in the crossover path. In some versions, the retrovirus, having once crossed over and mutated, lay dormant for various periods of time before breaking out into the general population in Africa due to social disruption such as warfare, massive migration, or agricultural/ecological disruption. Once it broke out from its endemic rural enclave, however, its movement into the general African population is evident, according to the prevalence studies on the continent conducted from 1983 onward. From the African continent it spread to the world, eventually striking North America.

This certainly sounds like a brilliant thesis, and it is asserted that it fits many of the facts and much of the historic evidence from the development of the AIDS epidemic. The basic outline presented above has been advanced by numerous popular journals as well as some "authorities" in the field of scientific research and virology, such as Robert Gallo.<sup>15</sup> Let us look closer, however, at the basic assertions of this theory. The fundamental assertions are:

1. HIV-1 and/or AIDS appeared first on the African continent, probably in the 1950s.
2. The evidence for #1 above is present in stored African blood samples and HIV-1 prevalence studies from rural and urban Africa.
3. There is evidence that HIV-1 infection and AIDS have been present for some time on the African continent, perhaps in a rural area remote from contact with the rest of Africa.
4. The precursor retrovirus, the green monkey SIV, is closely related to the HIV-1 virus. Genetic research demonstrates this close relationship and demonstrates the mutation or descent of the SIV green monkey virus into HIV-1.
5. There must be some crossover method or event which allowed this SIV retrovirus to make the leap from animal, presumably the green monkey, to human beings, where it became HIV-1.
6. The high prevalence rates of HIV-1 infection and AIDS provide evidence for the earlier spread of HIV-1 infection and AIDS in

the African context.

Not all of these six assertions must be true for the African origins theory to stand, but some of them must be verified. For instance, certainly the earliest appearance of HIV-1 on the continent of Africa must be true if it originated there (#1, #2, #3, and #5). If the crossover theory from the green monkey (#5) is correct, then the genetic relationship between HIV-1 and the green monkey SIV must be true (#4). If this hypothesis is not true, then there must be some early relative of the HIV-1 virus on the continent. Perhaps some other SIV?

Are these six assertions true and verified by the scientific literature? No. In fact, not a single one of these assertions has clear support or evidence in the scientific literature. Most of the six assertions have been directly contradicted by research in the past five years. Let us take the above statements one by one and examine them, beginning with the assertion that the earliest cases of AIDS were in Africa.

Frequently, when unusual cases occur, unexplained in causation and unusual in clinical course, they are documented, reported, and written up. This material is then sent to various medical journals, there to remain for posterity's reference and possible use. In a very important article, appearing in the *Review of Infectious Diseases* in 1987, David Huminer, Joseph Rosenfeld, and Silvio D. Pitlik retrospectively examined these anomalous cases in medical literature published from 1950 through 1978, looking for reports of illnesses which would fit the clinical definition of AIDS.<sup>16</sup> It needs to be noted that, even without sophisticated laboratory confirmation, the clinical criteria correctly delineate AIDS in most cases. In fact, in Africa, where laboratory confirmation is both too expensive and too difficult to obtain, the clinical definition of AIDS is quite valid and reliable. What did these three researchers find in their retrospective study of the medical literature? They found nineteen cases of illness which fit the clinical definition of AIDS over the course of this twenty-eight year period. The first such case occurs in 1952 and was reported in 1953.<sup>17</sup> From where was the first case reported? From the United States. As Huminer et al. state:

Eight of 19 cases were reported from the United States. Two reports each came from Canada, the United Kingdom, and West Germany. Isolated cases were reported from Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Uganda, and Israel.<sup>18</sup>

Almost half of these cases occur in the United States and the rest occur in various other western countries, with the exception of Israel and Uganda. The case in Israel first appears in 1969. The first appearance of an AIDS case in Africa occurs in Uganda in 1973. This is more than two decades after the first appearance of AIDS in the United States.

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This study is the best available on early cases of AIDS, and it is hardly proof of the earliest appearance of AIDS on the African continent. In fact, it proves nothing of the sort. It should be noted that this study also refutes such origins theories for HIV-1 as the famous CIA theory which posits a CIA creation of the HIV-1 virus. The creation of this virus by anyone is out of the question since techniques for gene section splicing and DNA recombinant work were developed decades later than 1952, which is the earliest appearance of AIDS.

There are a number of complexities in the cases reported by Huminer, et al., however. First, all of the laboratory data are not present, and this is especially true of immunosystem data for these patients. In most cases there are no tissue samples saved and the presence of HIV-1 cannot be verified irrefutably. Tissue samples are present from a mysterious case in St. Louis in 1968. This case, resulting in the death of a young Black man in that city, was definitively determined to be AIDS because of the presence of HIV-1. This still predates the first appearance of an African case by four years, according to Huminer, et al. It should be asserted again at this point, however, that a clinical case definition of AIDS, such as used in this study, has been found to be highly valid and reliable when diagnosing AIDS in the absence of laboratory facilities.

A number of those who suffered from these early cases had traveled extensively. It is interesting to note that the article specifically mentions travel to Africa, although many of these individuals clearly traveled to a number of other areas of the world. Any conclusions concerning the geographic origins of the AIDS from which they suffered is wildly speculative and unsupported.

Another complication, which may be introduced into this data, is the level of surveillance in the medical delivery system in the various areas of the world. In other words, if the United States system is much more extensive and complete, the AIDS syndrome may simply trip the surveillance wire earlier on the North American continent. This may account for the earlier cases in the United States. The difficulty with this assumption is that numerous physicians, operating in the African context, have stated that AIDS-like illnesses were not present in any detectable numbers previous to about 1979.<sup>19</sup> Often not reported in the scientific or popular media are the results of HIV-1 blood tests of African blood which have been done and have *not* supported the African origins thesis. Work done in the mid-1980s, which used three different screening tests for the presence of anti-bodies to HIV-1 in blood from male and female children and adults from Uganda, found no evidence of HIV-1 infection in any of the blood. This triple level test is much more reliable than the single tests often used in other reports and strongly supports the absence, in any significant numbers, of HIV-1 in Uganda before 1975.<sup>20</sup>

It should be noted that Uganda, of all African countries, had, during the 50s, 60s and 70s, a quite sophisticated system of medical reporting. This country is one of the few countries in the world, and certainly in the Third World, to produce a complete disease atlas of its territory in the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> Uganda, of all countries in the Third World, is the most sophisticated in medical surveillance terms. The western assumption of primitiveness and lack of surveillance is not justified.

The fact still remains that, in terms of the medical literature, there is no proof of the early existence of AIDS in Africa. Existing evidence, in fact, points to the earlier existence of AIDS, and possibly HIV-1, on other continents, in other areas, and in the West and the United States. What about the early blood tests which confirmed numerous cases of HIV-1 infection on the African continent?

The early blood tests mentioned in item #2 above were contaminated with large numbers of systematic false positives. The ELISA test does not function reliably in the African context because the test is confounded by both stored blood (in any context) and blood which contains malaria antibodies.<sup>22</sup> The early blood tests which showed high rates of HIV-1 infection in cities and residual rates in rural areas where essentially meaningless since they were performed on both stored blood and blood endemically infected with malaria. Particularly the residual levels, often referred to as endemic and mentioned in #3 above, in the rural areas, are well within the false positive range of the ELISA test. In other words, the endemic rural areas of HIV-1 infection in Africa have no validly documented infection levels at all. The evidence for #2 and #3 above is, from a scientific standpoint, universally recognized as unreliable and, in fact, nonexistent.

The idea that somehow this endemic infection, present in sheltered and isolated enclaves of rural Africa, broke out into the larger community on the continent during the 1960s or 1970s, is also ridiculous on its face. There are really no such isolated areas on the continent and have not been for many decades. The world is a much more integrated and interacting place than this model would have us believe, and includes, of course, Africa and its rural communities.

The assertion of the genetic relationship of HIV-1 retrovirus to the African equatorial green monkey simian immunovirus (SIV) is without doubt one of the major assertions of the African origins thesis (#4 above). The mutation of SIV into HIV-1 has been the theoretical animal crossover for the African origins theory for almost a decade. Of all facts in the AIDS oral mythology of North America, none is so widely asserted as the relationship of the green monkey virus to HIV-1. Are HIV-1 and the green monkey SIV closely related? Is the green monkey SIV the precursor virus to HIV-1, thus proving the origins of HIV-1 itself? The answer is clearly and emphatically no.<sup>23</sup>

It is, and has been, clear for almost five years that HIV-1 and SIVs are not closely related. They have some similarity; they are both retroviruses. HIV-1 and SIVs share some genetic similarity, it is true. But neither one is the descendant of the other, and that has been clear for some time.<sup>24</sup> Further, HIV-2, which is present in western Africa and causes a modified form of AIDS which is less virulent, has only about seventy-five percent genetic similarity to SIVs of the green monkey. HIV-1 also has been compared to SIVs, particularly in the green monkey, and it shares only about forty percent similarity with the closest SIV. It appears that HIV-2 is not directly related by descent to HIV-1 either, and the relationship of either HIV-1 or HIV-2 to SIVs is complex and not readily apparent.<sup>25</sup> One should note that chimpanzees and humans share a great deal more genetic similarity than this; in fact, chimpanzees and humans share well over ninety percent genetic similarity, and yet they are neither descendants, one of the other, although it is theorized that they do descend from a common ancestor.

Credible researchers are willing to admit that we do not know enough about retroviruses in Africa to make any valid statements concerning their relationships, one to another, nor to make statements concerning their relationships to HIV or its descent.<sup>26</sup> Some research indicates that the origins of SIV among green monkeys in Africa may be very ancient and these retroviruses may have co-evolved with the monkeys as long ago as 10,000 years.<sup>27</sup> These conclusions, if true, make the origins of HIV-1 much more complex and distant than at first supposed.

The geography of this infection is incorrect for an SIV crossover, also. If HIV-2 is the most closely related to SIVs, then why is the HIV-2 virus concentrated in western Africa rather than eastern Africa? Eastern African is where both the green monkey is resident and where HIV-1 has its highest prevalences. The geography of these distributions is wrong for an animal crossover from the green monkey to humans for HIV-1. As one text admits: "The situation may be much more complex and speculative than currently described."<sup>28</sup> This complexity is sometimes introduced, however, in the scientific literature in order to attempt to save the SIV to HIV-1 descent and the African origins thesis.

In order to attempt to save the HIV-1 descent from some monkey virus, the animal crossover theory and the African origins theory for HIV-1, the scientific literature has begun speculation concerning a mutual exchange amongst a number of SIV retrovirus, all infecting a host at the same moment and mixing their genetic materials in a sort of wild orgy of DNA splicing. It is posited that a number of SIVs may have infected, benignly it is admitted, a human host all at the same time, then exchanged their genetic materials in some complex way, thus creating the resulting HIV-1 in that particular host. This multiple combined and

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mutated virus then is transmitted and is the HIV-1 virus. Or is it the HIV-2 virus? The speculation on this matter, it is admitted in the scientific literature, is completely unsupported by any foundation of research or evidence. Given the complexity of the interchange, it is unlikely that this particular event will ever be documented let alone scientifically proved or established. The scientific literature has moved into the realm of mythology, the mythological great exchange or the massive DNA splicing orgy, if you please, as the event which must have occurred. This mythological creation, this theoretical crossover event, exists in order to save the African origins thesis and the green monkey crossover. This theory of HIV-1 origins is pure and unadulterated speculation—flight of fancy. It is interesting that recent popular articles have asserted that science has now determined that HIV-2 and, ultimately, HIV-1, are definitively related to SIVs in Africa.<sup>29</sup>

Almost all reports and research on the ancestry of the HIV-1 and HIV-2 virus concentrate on the African connection. There are numerous retroviruses in the world today, not the least of which are feline retroviruses, equine retroviruses, and bovine retroviruses, all of which occur in the West with considerable frequency. All of these occur in animals which are in close association with humans in the West. None of these retroviruses have been investigated to near the extent that SIVs in Africa have been investigated. It seems to be a case of looking determinedly for the answer in one place, sure that it must be found there and not elsewhere. Perhaps Richard and Rosalind Chirimuuta have stated the underlying factors most effectively:

Because scientists found it so difficult to imagine that white people could infect Africans with AIDS and not the reverse, such a possibility has never been seriously investigated.<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, the evidence has very definitely *not* been found for the animal crossover theory of the origins of HIV-1, despite the popularity of this theory in the Western press and in the AIDS mythology of North America. Thus, the hypothesis in #4 above is completely unproven.

The assertion in #5, that some crossover event has allowed HIV-1 to move into the human population, has been the source of some of the most shameful anthropological research to be conducted in this century. One can find many assertions, particularly again in the popular press, that monkey blood is used for many purposes on the African continent. It is interesting to note that none of these practices have been well documented in the scholarly literature by reputable researchers. The "crossover" event has been the focal point for virulent Western racism with regard to African cultural practices for over a decade. Needless to say, there is no well-researched or documented example

of this crossover event, nor could there be since there is no evidence for a precursor retrovirus on the African continent in the first place. Thus, the hypothesis in #5 above is wild speculation and totally unsubstantiated.

Finally, we may examine the sixth assertion above. This assertion advances the present high prevalence rates of HIV-1 and AIDS on the African continent as evidence for the longstanding existence of the virus in the African context. It must be admitted that, when allowances were made and interpretative practices were adjusted to the African context for HIV-1 testing, there remains at present a relatively high prevalence rate of HIV-1 infection in Africa. This high infection rate is concentrated in the "AIDS Belt" in central, southern, and eastern Africa, with some of the highest infection rates for HIV-1 in Uganda and surrounding areas. Certainly Zaire also has alarmingly high infection rates with HIV-1. It has been argued that these infection rates, much higher than anywhere in the West in "pattern 1" AIDS, are evidence of the longer existence of AIDS and HIV-1 on the African context. Does the higher prevalence rates in Africa constitute proof of a longer existence for HIV-1 on the African continent? No.

There are many reasons why the HIV-1 virus may have spread into the African population more extensively than in the population in Western countries. Not the least of these reasons may be a migrant labor system which provides not only a means of contracting sexually transmitted diseases at high prevalences in African populations, but also provides a ready and extremely efficient amplification/transmission system for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).<sup>31</sup> It has never been asserted that syphilis or gonorrhea originated on the African continent. Yet very high rates of syphilis and gonorrhea, in fact a rampant epidemic of these diseases, occurred in the very same areas of Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. The social factors, such as a migrant labor system, which helped create these extremely high rates of STDs in previous decades, are still operative in the AIDS epidemic. It has further been asserted that long standing cultural practices with regard to sexuality<sup>32</sup> as well as military selection during the recent Civil War and unrest in eastern Africa and Uganda<sup>33</sup> have both, in the past decade, accelerated the spread of HIV-1 in the African context. If any or all of these means of amplifying the transmission and spread of STDs are operating, and I would assert that some, at least are operating, then the high prevalence rates of HIV-1 in eastern, central, and southern Africa are proof of a social structure spreading STDs, not of a biological origin of the retroviral cause of AIDS. Is the sixth assertion above proven? No.

In a recent *Scientific American* article by the two epidemiologists, Roy M. Anderson and Robert M. May, it is interesting to see how the African origins of the AIDS epidemic is supported.<sup>34</sup> They assert that the high levels of infection with HIV-1 in Africa are proof of the African origins of the epidemic and, in fact, assert that crossover thesis for the

virus itself. As Anderson and May state

The AIDS virus almost certainly evolved in Africa...In the worst-afflicted urban centers in Africa, 20 to 30 percent of pregnant women are infected with HIV. This level of infection has sometimes been attributed to socioeconomic conditions. It is more likely that this high rate of infection is a consequence of the length of time over which the virus has been spreading in these areas: the epidemic is simply further advanced.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, where the African epidemic is concerned, the high levels of infection have a biological, not a social origin. The reason for these high levels, according to May and Anderson, is that the disease is biologically further advanced in the epidemic cycle. How then do we explain its high levels in some areas and among some populations in the developed world? As Anderson and May state:

The epidemic developed quickly in the early 1980s among intravenous drug users and male homosexuals in the U.S. and Western Europe. This rapid advance undoubtedly resulted from the introduction of the virus into communities having behavior patterns ideally suited to viral spread: drug injection and frequent intercourse with many different sexual partners.<sup>36</sup>

What is happening here? The simple answer is that, in terms of their treatment of Africa and the United States, when faced with high rates of infection, Anderson and May shift their means of explanation depending upon which continent they are addressing. When it comes to Africa, there is a biological explanation which supports the African origins thesis; when they are explaining the high infection rate phenomena in the United States and Western Europe, they move to a social/behavioral explanation. Why not a social or behavioral explanation for the high rates of infection and AIDS in Africa? It would undermine their presumption of an African origins for the HIV-1 virus.

Anderson and May never mention that the earliest cases of AIDS are found in the West over two decades before they are seen in Africa. They must be aware of this, however, because they go to some length to try to explain why there is no evidence of early cases of AIDS in Africa. How do they explain this?

The human virus could have been slowly spreading in parts of Africa for 100 to 200 years, possibly even longer. It could be that in these much earlier times, the complex beginnings of the epidemic (as localized flickerings



in rural areas) could not be detected against a high background noise of infection and disease. Or it may be that ancestral forms of HIV in humans did not lead to AIDS.<sup>37</sup>

The authors of this article try to advance the trip wire argument combined with an argument concerning ancestral forms. Do we have any evidence of this ancestral form or its development? No. Might the same argument be made for the presence of such an infectious but non-disease causing HIV in North America? Yes, but Anderson and May do not make the same arguments for North America that they make for Africa, despite the evidence of earlier cases in North America. They are desperately trying to support an African origins thesis, no matter what, and if this requires shifting arguments and the refusal to apply the same standards of discussion to both continents, well then, so be it.

What remains, then, of the African origins theory of the HIV-1 virus? Little, if anything. After almost a decade of research, all we have are a few totally unsupported assertions, a number of unscientifically founded speculations, and considerable contrary proof. The essential hypotheses upon which any African origins theory must be based are simply unproven and in some cases, directly contradicted, by the evidence. The theory is still advanced in popular media and in scientific and popular/scientific forums, however.

In June of 1988, a letter appeared in the *Lancet*, concerning an early case (beginning about 1966) of AIDS in a Norwegian sailor and his family.<sup>38</sup> The authors were all physicians from various respected departments in Norway. The letter cited the Huminer, et al. article concerning AIDS in the pre-AIDS era and discussed this early Norwegian case of AIDS which killed the Norwegian sailor and much of his family. The letter specifically mentions that this sailor traveled to Africa, although it also admits that he traveled to a number of other areas in the world and contracted STDs at least twice, presumably from any one of these areas. The article makes a major point of asserting "proof" of the first case of AIDS in Europe, ignoring cases in the Huminer, et al. article it cites that precede this "first" European case by almost a decade.

In fact, in a 1989 postscript to their book denouncing the African origins theory (which was first published in 1987), Richard and Rosalind Chirimuuta state:

In the two years since the book's first publication, it has been gratifying to find that much of the evidence for an African origin for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) has not stood the test of time. Most importantly, the African green monkey is generally now no longer thought to harbor a precursor to HIV that

crossed the species barrier, and other animal viruses, particularly retroviruses in sheep and cattle, are under consideration...

Although the scientific evidence for an African origin has been found wanting, the scientists are only reluctantly abandoning their favorite hypothesis and are considering the alternatives with little enthusiasm.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, the Chirimuutas are too optimistic. The popular and scientific literature has not abandoned the African origins thesis, and had only abandoned it temporarily by 1989 in the face of mounting contradictory evidence. The question becomes, then, why is this the theory which is promulgated in the popular Western media? Why is this mythology the theory which is prominently accepted by "educated" Westerners? The basis for the acceptance of the African origins theory of HIV-1 in the West **must** be based not on a scientific rationality but on other reasons. What are those reasons?

### Conclusions

The African origins theory of HIV-1 is based upon a number of hidden justifications, all of which are not "rational" in the scientific sense. The first justification is the tendency to victim-blame for such a serious sexually transmitted disease. It is a commonly observed tendency in many societies to blame the victim of a disease for the disease itself. This tendency is nowhere more prevalent than in sexually transmitted diseases, where it can be seen most clearly in the practice of separating "innocent" victims from "guilty" victims.<sup>40</sup>

There is a further justification. That justification, or hidden argument to use Tesh's terminology, is based upon the desire of individuals in the west to see the HIV-1 infection and AIDS as affecting others, even to the point of originating with others. It has commonly been observed that most diseases are named for a region other than the one assigning the name. Thus, flu viruses are usually named by North American researchers for Asian locations. STDs are often called by the French diseases of the Germans, and by the Germans, diseases of the French, and so on. This is also the case with AIDS. As Susan Sontag has observed

One feature of the usual script for plague: the disease invariably comes from somewhere else...But what may seem like a joke about the inevitability of chauvinism reveals a more important truth: that there is a link between imagining disease and imagining foreignness. It lies perhaps in the very concept of wrong, which is archaically identical with the non-us, the alien. A polluting

person is always wrong, as Mary Douglas has observed. The inverse is also true: a person judged to be wrong is regarded as, at least potentially, a source of pollution.<sup>41</sup>

This tendency, long observed in many contexts, is also exacerbated by the combination of racism and fear of the Third World. In the first instance, Africa can be portrayed as the "dark" continent. A continent of unhealthy practices and people, of sexual license, and disease. All of the stereotypical responses of Westerners to racially "colored" people can be used, subconsciously and consciously, to support these hidden assumptions. Again, Sontag has stated it well

Thus, illustrating the classic script for plague, AIDS is thought to have started in the "dark continent," then spread to Haiti, then to the United States and to Europe, then...It is understood as a tropical disease: another infestation from the so-called Third World, which is, after all where most people in the world live, as well as a scourge of the tristes tropiques. Africans who detect racist stereotypes in much of the speculation about the geographical origin liminal connection made to notions about a primitive past and the many hypotheses that have been fielded about possible transmission from animals (a disease of green monkeys? African swine fever?) cannot help but activate a familiar set of stereotypes about animality, sexual license, and blacks.<sup>42</sup>

In this conception, we can explain the longevity of the African origins myth not by its scientific basis, since this basis is and has been for some time largely non-existent, but by the hidden reasons or arguments for this origin of the HIV-1 virus. The African origins of the virus fulfills the social need, in a highly conservative era, to victim-blame in STDs as well as to see others as the source of the illness. Further, the other is conceptualized not only as another race but also as the Third World in an era when United States military might is "downsized", made highly mobile, and turned from its former task of combating the Soviet Union to defeating dangerous uprisings and insurgencies in this very area called the Third World. The Fall of 1992 was the 500th anniversary of the Columbian establishment of the division between First and Third worlds, and it is this split, this division, which is expressed in the persistent existence, despite lack of scientific support, of the African origins theory for the HIV-1 virus.

In the face of the myth creating potential surrounding the AIDS epidemic, social and natural scientists can only ask that hidden assumptions be made apparent. Those interested can ask for research, if not

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with fewer biases, at least with explicit ones. Perhaps it is time to investigate, for instance, the possibility of an origin for HIV-1 and the AIDS epidemic in some other location than Africa and the Third World. Perhaps it is time to investigate other possibilities for an animal cross-over, including those possibilities in the First World as well as the Third. In fact, it is time to investigate the distinct possibility that this disease began in the First World. Hopefully, this will not be accompanied by the same sort of victim-blaming ideology that we have seen so apparent in the investigation of Third World origins for the AIDS epidemic and HIV-1.

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## **A History of Race Relations Social Science**

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This essay argues that the inclusion of white women, African Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians into historiography is a fairly recent development; and that the aforementioned development, which did not begin until the 1960s, has resulted in rigorous investigation into the racial thought of Franz Uri Boas, Robert Ezra Park, and Gunnar Myrdal and a hot debate in reference to their significance and influence on today's social sciences. Furthermore, the integration of African American history into the historiography of race relations social science has given impetus to the movement towards making American intellectual history more inclusive.

The purposes of this essay are twofold: first, it seeks to articulate the current scholarly debates centered around the purpose of the writings of Franz Uri Boas, Robert Ezra Park, and Gunnar Myrdal and their contributions to an understanding of Black-white relations in the United States; and second, it examines and analyzes the integration of African American history into the subfield of race relations social science. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate that during the past two decades the race relations social science has been telling Americans more about themselves on the historical issue of race—most of which they are reluctant to hear—than any other subfield in recent American intellectual history.

-I-

For more than five decades historically minded anthropologists and intellectual historians have celebrated the decisive role that Franz Uri Boas played in undermining the racist worldview that prevailed in the social sciences during the years before 1930.<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly little of this literature—especially when one considers the amount of data which is readily accessible—deals with Boas's specific treatment of

African Americans. Most of these scholars were content to assume—and they assumed erroneously—that Boas treated African Americans much like the “primitives” he studied—that is, with a great deal of affection. This section of this essay, which surveys the small body of literature that comments on Boas’s attitudes toward African Americans, suggests that this literature has ignored what I term “the Boasian paradox”—that is, the contradiction between the inferences based on his physical anthropology and his liberal values. This contradiction, I have argued in previous articles, should not be surprising—especially when one considers Boas’s life and career, ethnicity, the historical context, and the controversies surrounding issues concerning the condition and destiny of Africans.<sup>2</sup> Indeed Boas, like most scholars—albeit to lesser extent—was a prisoner of his times.

In an article that was published in *Isis* in 1973, the historian, Edward H. Beardsley, examined and analyzed the historical treatment of Boas during the previous thirty years by students and colleagues of the patriarch of modern American anthropology. Unlike those anthropologists, who believed Boas’s revulsion against antiblack racism was fundamentally motivated by his liberal values, which was directly related to his ethnic status as a German-born Jew in America, Beardsley argued that the “most basic and fundamental explanation” was “his commitment to scientific objectivity and reliability...” Although Beardsley admits that Boas was “from a Jewish background and a foe of anti-Semitism since his youth,” he points out nevertheless that, “Boas did not become actively and publicly involved on that issue until the 1920s, when Nazi racists made a major effort to enlist science in support of their views.” Furthermore, he noted: “Boas also never involved himself with the Indian’s plight as he did with the Negro’s or Jew’s”—primarily because “the idea of Indian inferiority was never a major tenet of scientific racism.”<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, Beardsley vociferously argued that, “Boas was an activist for what were essentially professional reasons.”<sup>4</sup>

Four years later, Hasia R. Diner in a book entitled, *In the Almost Promised Land: Jews and Blacks, 1915-35*, challenged both the Boasian anthropologists and Beardsley, when she argued that there was truth in both of their contentions. Boas wrote for, Diner stated cogently, “social as well as for scientific reasons. He was deeply concerned with the real human suffering created by racist thinking and eagerly shared his findings with the NAACP.” Nevertheless, it is Diner’s thesis that the fundamental reason Boas wrote about African Americans stemmed from his ethnic status as a liberal, German-born Jew in America who believed Blacks and Jews had a common bond of suffering. Yet she admitted that Boas was not naive about his own group’s self-interest in discrediting anti-black racism. “The same principles which Boas and his students used to discredit antiblack thinking,” Diner concluded, “could be employed as effective weapons to combat anti-Jewish sentiment.”<sup>5</sup>

The idea that the fundamental reason behind Boas's skeptical stance towards antiblack racism stemmed from his desire to protect his own group was extended by Marshall Hyatt in his timely biography of Boas, entitled *Franz Boas—Social Activist: The Dynamics of Ethnicity*, published in 1990. Hyatt, in reference to Boas's address as vice president of Section H of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Brooklyn, New York, in 1894, believes "that Boas used blacks as a surrogate to avoid charges of scientific bias." He has written:

The timing of the polemic against prejudice is instructive. Having recently tangled with Washington, the center of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant-controlled anthropological study, over the museum appointment, Boas was still licking his wounds.... Boas conceivably read the incident in ethnic terms. Given his heightened sensitivity to persecution, which colored much of his life in Germany, and the dominant influence of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants in anthropology, this is not surprising. Accordingly, he began his assault on prejudice soon after his disappointment over the Columbian Museum job. However, rather than call attention to his own plight and risk accusations of subjectivity, Boas chose another aspect, that directed against Afro-Americans, at which to vent his distress. This camouflage became part of Boas's *raison d'être* for attacking all forms of human prejudice.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, "it was in the area of race," Hyatt concludes, "that Boas had his greatest impact on America and on future intellectual thought."<sup>7</sup> Yet, ironically, nowhere is the relationship between Boas and Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, R. R. Wright, Sr., George Washington Ellis, Carter G. Woodson, Alain LeRoy Locke, Charles S. Johnson, George E. Haynes, Abram Harris, Monroe N. Work, and Charles H. Thompson explored. Investigation into Boas's correspondence with these major African American intellectuals would have qualified somewhat Hyatt's argument that Boas's indictment of the plight of Afro-Americans was mere camouflage for attacking anti-Semitism.

Another recent work, Carl N. Degler's *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*, concurs in Hyatt's argument that Boas was a progressive on the issue of the equipotentiality of African Americans. Arguing "that Boas did not arrive at" his position on African Americans "from a disinterested, scientific inquiry", but, rather, his ideas "derived from an ideological commitment that began in his early life and academic experiences in

Europe and continued in America,” Degler discounts Boas’s equivocal and racist statements.<sup>8</sup> Degler argued in 1991 that: “Nowhere does Boas’s commitment to the ideology of equal opportunity and the recognition of the worth of oppressed or ignored people become more evident than in his relation to Afro-Americans, a people whose life patterns had long been allegedly ‘accounted for’ by race.” Degler uses as evidence for his position Boas’s attempt to raise money from Andrew Carnegie “to support a new Museum on the Negro and the African Past,” Boas’s 1906 address at the commencement of Atlanta University on the African past that had such a profound impact on the thought of W.E.B. DuBois, and his discussion of the ramification of white-Black intermarriage.<sup>9</sup> Although such arguments seem compelling, it should be noted that Degler, unlike Hyatt, ignores Boas’s racist physical anthropology that was in tension with his liberal ideology. Nevertheless, both Hyatt and Degler fail to demonstrate how that tension was exacerbated by the increasing migration of Blacks from Southeastern states to New York, bringing what was thought to be a peculiar Southern problem to the doorsteps of anthropologists in the urban-industrial North. In short, until the investigation of social structural changes on Boas’s thought are brought to bear, there will be little understanding of the complexity of the paradoxes of this transitional figure’s thought.

It should be noted that the denial of an existence of a paradox in Boas’s thought on African Americans is present in Elazar Barkan’s *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars*. Arguing (erroneously) that Boas was a racial egalitarian whose “political beliefs” were more salient than “scientific commitments,” Barkan constructed a nonsensical argument when he wrote in 1992: “Boas was no racist, but he did reflect the values of his society.”<sup>10</sup> Further investigation into Boas’s writings on African Americans would have revealed the tension in Boas’s writing between his life-long belief in inherent racial differences and his commitment to cultural explanations of human behavior, the tension between his political beliefs and scientific commitments, and that between the science of physical anthropology and his liberal values. Put another way, although Boas certainly believed that African Americans had a defective ancestry as a result of their smaller cranial cavities, which he believed were serially inferior to Euro-Americans, he did not think that it should be used as an excuse for excluding them from partaking as much as their capacity allowed in the community or nation-state as individuals. Indeed, as I will argue in the second chapter, Boas—albeit to a lesser extent than most scholars of the period—was a prisoner of his times.

engaged in two major debates in reference to Robert E. Park's theories. The first debate centers on whether Park was a proponent of racial determinism; while the second centers around whether Park was an advocate of assimilation. Since Park was not a systematic thinker, these debates have been marred by the subjective valuations of the various adversaries.

Although there exists a consensus among scholars that Park was one of the first social scientists to subordinate racial determinist explanations of human behavior to social and/or cultural ones, it should be noted that in 1918 Park penned the concept of "racial temperaments," which reads as follows: "Everywhere and always the Negro has been interested rather in expression than in action; interested in life itself than in its reconstruction or reformation. The Negro is, by natural disposition, neither an intellectual nor idealist like the Jew, nor a brooding introspective like the East Indian, nor a pioneer and frontiersman like the Anglo-Saxon. He is primarily an artist, loving life for its own sake. His metier is expression rather than action. The Negro is, so to speak, the lady among the races."<sup>11</sup>

The late Ralph Ellison, and the sociologist, John H. Stanfield, II, have branded Park's concept of "racial temperaments" as racist. Stanfield, for example, argued persuasively in 1985 that, "biological determinism was apparent in his [Park's] concept of 'racial temperaments,' which he believed was the factor behind the so-called cultural uniqueness among blacks."<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, scholars such as Morris Janowitz, César Graña, and, most recently, Barbara Ballis Lal, have sought to excuse or justify Park's usage of the concept of "racial temperament." In 1990, in her *The Romance of Culture in an Urban Civilization: Robert E. Park on Race and Ethnic Relations in the Cities*, Barbara Ballis Lal sought to counter the arguments of Ellison and Stanfield. "Park," Lal declared unequivocally, "rejected Social Darwinism, all its implications regarding the biological basis of cultural differences and its belief that racial stratification reflected a 'national order' of selection and fitness." Furthermore, Lal believes Park's "emphasis upon race relations, rather than the alleged hereditary attributes of races,... suggests that the influence he accorded to racial temperaments was very limited."<sup>13</sup>

In 1992, Stanford M. Lyman, who has treated the concept in "relation to his larger discussion of assimilation and the problems attending the modern civilizational process," attempted to resolve the debate and has stated: "...what Park seems to have been doing in his invocation of a racial temperament is attempting to respecify, in as exact a way his knowledge and observation would allow, precisely what amount of the Negro's character and personality was biological in origin, what amount a survival of African culture, and what amount a product of acculturation in America. Furthermore, Park sought to get at the effects that the internalization of this tripartite and emergent compound of constitutional elements, cultural survivals, acculturative adaptations would have

on the incorporation of African Americans into an ever modernizing United State of America.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Lyman admits that, “in the end, the precise weight that should be assigned, respectively to hereditary and acculturative factors eluded Park.”<sup>15</sup>

My reading of Park suggests, however, that at that juncture in his career he believed that there was a fundamental hereditary basis for the African Americans’ racial temperament, and that the temperament was an obstacle to assimilation. Like Franz Boas, Park was a transitional figure, caught between racial deterministic thought and the trend towards initiating a cultural and social determinism, whose thought on the character and capabilities of African Americans and the nature of prejudice was uneven. Peter Kivisto, in reference to deficiencies in Professor Lal’s work has summed up the matter quite aptly when he wrote in 1992: “Indicative of the fact that the break [Park’s] was not entirely ambiguous was his occasional relapse to the language of instincts as well as his unfortunate characterization of African Americans as ‘the lady among races’.”<sup>16</sup>

-III-

The second debate surrounding Park’s theories centers on whether he was an advocate of assimilation. It should be noted that historians and historically minded social scientists of American race relations virtually ignored Park’s concept of a biracial organization of society—despite the fact that the concept was central to his explanation of Black-white relations for over twenty five years. Perhaps most post-Myrdalian scholars of race relations concurred in E. Franklin Frazier’s criticism of the concept which he stated in 1947. The theory of a biracial organization of society, Frazier argued persuasively, was a “static theory of race relations. His theory not only contained the fatalism inherent in Sumner’s concept of mores. His theory was originally based upon the assumption that the races could not mix and mingle freely.”<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, in 1981 R. Fred Wacker published a small volume that argued Park’s biracial theory of white-Black relations was his *true* theory of white-Black relations. Seeking to educate the revisionists of the 1960s who believed social scientists such as Park “thought that all groups would shed their distinctive cultures and become WASPs,” Wacker declared unequivocally: “My study of the ideas and attitudes of Robert Park leads me to conclude that he did not believe all minority groups in America would be assimilated.” In reference to Park’s theory of a “biracial organization,” Wacker argues that Park “did not predict the outcome of conflict and competition.”<sup>18</sup> Wacker believes Park was a pluralist. He presents an argument which states that Park, like Horace Kallen, was focusing on “groups and group needs” and thereby rejecting “the individualistic perspective of most social scientists.” Furthermore,

Wacker states unequivocally that Park saw “the rise and revitalization of ethnic and racial consciousness as a natural response to prejudice and domination.” In other words, for Park “racial consciousness was part of a movement toward mental health”.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Wacker, the historically-minded sociologist, John H. Stanfield, II, has made a compelling case for the validity of the traditional labeling of Park as an assimilationist. Taking Wacker’s view of Park as an advocate of the intrinsic worth of Black consciousness to task, Stanfield in *Philanthropy and Jim Crow in American Social Science*, in 1985, stated persuasively that: “Since Park presumed the assimilation of physically dissimilar groups was problematic yet inevitable, it followed that segregated black communities were necessarily temporary, and, therefore, that race consciousness was also temporary.” Stanfield is critical of Park’s view of race consciousness as a temporary response to oppression—insofar as Park “did not consider the normality of race consciousness, in dominant as well as in subordinate populations. Since Park did not consider race consciousness as a form of enculturation in a racially stratified society,” Stanfield concludes that Park not only “ushered into sociological literature an a-cultural and an a-sociological conception of race consciousness” and, “set the stage for succeeding generations of sociologists to view black race consciousness negatively as a product of antagonistic relations with whites, which materialized through conscious white racism and the formation of ghettos.”<sup>20</sup>

Stanfield’s criticisms of Park, as he clearly recognizes, are ahistorical and thus leave unanswered the question of whether Park deserves a place among the pantheon of key figures in the discussion of condition and destiny of African Americans. A work which avoids the debunking that characterizes Stanfield’s work is the revised edition of John Higham’s *Send These to Me*. In a monumental essay, entitled “Ethnic Pluralism in American Thought,” the distinguished social and intellectual has restored Park to his rightful historical place in the history of race relations experts. Reconciling the debate between Wacker and Stanfield, Higham has demonstrated that Robert Ezra Park made two modifications in the “classic American ideal of assimilation”: First, Park extended the ideal “to include Negroes, as well as immigrants; second, he gave it [the concept of assimilation] an international and fully interracial formulation; he also incorporated within it a quasi-pluralistic appreciation.” In short, “Park interpreted the problems of a multiethnic society,” Higham correctly concludes, “in a way that took account of pluralist as well as assimilationist claims.” Park’s broad international vision, Higham points out, was not applied by his successors. Ignoring the Boasian Melville J. Herskovits’s emphasis on African retentions in the African American population, and relying instead on E. Franklin Frazier’s judgments, Higham argues that Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* represented the renationalization of Park’s

international “melting pot.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1987 Stow Persons qualified the arguments of Stanfield and Higham and suggested that Park struggled with “the problem of assimilation as well as his growing doubts about its inevitability...” Towards the end of his life, Persons noted that Park believed that, “the potentialities of a rational and humane order could be realized only if people become thoroughly familiar with one another’s characteristics and problems.... Park knew that any such achievement was remote.”<sup>22</sup> More recently, sociologists, such as James B. McKee and Stanford M. Lyman have also noted Park’s doubts about inevitability of assimilation in the near future in one of his last papers in 1943. McKee has stressed the idea that “Park gave to his fellow sociologists an image of a racial future marked by militant action, conflict, and possible violence, instead of one of gradual, peaceful change leading to increased tolerance and social acceptance.”<sup>23</sup> For Lyman, Park’s later works indicated that, the struggle [between races] was “inevitable even if its outcome was less certain.”<sup>24</sup>

Most scholars involved in the discourse on Robert Ezra Park, in short, treat his thought as if it were static. In my research on Park’s theories I have found that they evolved during his long lifetime. During the years between 1905 and 1913, he both contributed to Booker T. Washington’s myths in reference to race and race relations, while also recontextualizing and universalizing scientific racist data concerning the socioeconomic status of Blacks. Later, during his tenure at the University of Chicago, from 1913 until 1932, Park occasionally relapsed into reversals and transvaluations; but, perceiving the influences of Franz Boas and the Great Migration, continued to recontextualize his analyses of race, prejudice, and race relations. Finally, during the years 1937 to 1943, due to the obvious impact of the evidence of Black progress and his travels abroad, Park adopted an “alternative ideology”—defined by Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman as a “radically different world view, with different perceptions of reality goals and points of reference.”<sup>25</sup> The hows and whys of Park’s transition from the perspective of African Americans as a homogeneous race to a perspective in which one’s racial status and class are supposed to be increasingly confused, will enable us, in short, to understand why current debates on these issues assume such volatility.

-IV-

What Higham calls “the ideational approach to social issues” began to dominate the social sciences with the publication of Myrdal’s work in 1944. The how and whys of this occurrence are the subject of Walter A. Jackson’s *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-87* (1991). Arguing that “An



*American Dilemma* ... emerged from a complex process of interaction between this politically minded intellectual and a foundation, a community of American social scientists, broaden currents of social, of political social, and economic change," Jackson traces Myrdal's life from his youth in Dalarna, Sweden, to his death in 1987. It is Jackson's argument that Myrdal's commitment to social engineering and moral reform grew out of the egalitarianism and moral values of his childhood and his fascination with the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Jackson notes, however, that "there remained in his thought a tension between his commitment to equality and his infatuation with an elitist conception of social engineering." In short, when Myrdal arrived in the United States in 1938, he "brought a conception of social science as a process of moral inquiry and a belief that social engineering" was the primary goal of the social sciences.<sup>26</sup>

The Carnegie Corporation, which chose Myrdal to conduct *An American Dilemma*, took the initiative of race relations research away from the American social scientists who were writing for small audiences, and placed it in the hands of a "pragmatic problem solver who promised to come up with a fresh approach in a book aimed at a broad audience of educated Americans."<sup>27</sup> Through the cooption of centrist, liberal, and radical social scientists, Myrdal created a consensus behind a liberal analysis of race relations in America.

During his travels in the South and the Northern urban ghettos, Myrdal witnessed a degree of poverty and suffering among Blacks that he had not seen before. Yet he also heard many white Americans profess a desire to do something about those conditions. Furthermore, the moral earnestness and optimism that Myrdal thought he saw in most white Americans was lacking in most Europeans. This led Myrdal to challenge white Americans to live up to their ideals. Encouraged by the New Deal, Myrdal predicted erroneously the reconciliation between American ideals and practice. Ignoring the work of African American scholars such as DuBois, Woodson, Charles S. Johnson and white scholars such as Herskovits, who had made the case for the strength of Black culture, Myrdal adopted Frazier's and Bunche's position that African American culture was pathological.

*An American Dilemma* captured the attention of many white Americans on the issue of race relations and educated them on the problem of racial discrimination. Furthermore, the work influenced political leaders, judges, and civil rights activists, and although Myrdal's ideas were durable for twenty years, Jackson points out correctly that he offered "few guidelines for the next phase of the black struggle from the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act."<sup>28</sup>

I have a serious reservation about Jackson's splendid work. By emphasizing the importance of African American culture, he seems to suggest that a monolithic culture determines the behavior of its members. It should be noted, however, that a monolithic African

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American culture does not exist and perhaps never existed. Divided by regional, religious, occupational and class lines, the existence of African American cultures perhaps explains why at this historical juncture, as Harold Cruse pointed out in the 1960s, it is necessary to create a cultural nationalism that would unify the African American groups. Despite Jackson's call for giving attention to African American culture, Myrdal was certainly correct on some issues. As the last twelve years bear out that Black standards such as family, incomes, nutrition, housing, health, and education—as Myrdal correctly pointed out—were dependent upon opportunities in employment. For most Blacks, the opportunities in employment in the new service economy are severely limited, due primarily to both historical deprivation and present-day discrimination. Given the persistence of racism—albeit uneven—in the United States, it seems nothing short of both a *redistribution* of wealth and an accompanying *revitalization* of the African American cultures, can resolve satisfactorily the historical contradiction between ideals and practices.

-V-

It should be noted that scholars in the history of social science of race relations have drawn on the field of African American history in an attempt to create truly ecumenical myths. This interest in the pioneering students of race and race relations has resulted in the resurrection of an early African American sociologist who was involved in debates at the turn of the century: Monroe Nathan Work. He is the subject of Linda O. McMurray's *Recorder of the Black Experience*. Work's contributions to scholarship and Black uplift were substantial. His biennial, *The Negro Year Book, A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America*, and his early scholarly and popular articles expressed "his desire to eliminate outmoded white prejudice and to inspire black confidence." Work was also an activist. He established a National Negro Health Week, and published the *Tuskegee Lynching Report*, which contained statistics that were distributed to hundreds of newspapers. Furthermore, he actively sought to increase the number of Black registered voters in Macon County. For McMurray, however, Work's historical significance does not stem from his activism or his scholarship. Rather she views him as important because of the insights "his life provides into the age in which he lived". Indeed, Work was representative of Afro-American scholars who were "forced to become 'race men' in the face of the failures of white scholarship." For Southern Blacks, McMurray thinks persons such as Work "are part of the rock from which the civil rights movement was hewn".<sup>29</sup>

Although *Recorder of the Black Experience* is a significant work, I disagree with McMurray's assessment of Work's scholarship. While it is true that his scholarly articles were concise and seemed "almost devoid of interpretation," it should be remembered that within

the context of turn of the century sociology, his works were supposed to be “scientific” attempts to undermine racism. Like DuBois, R. R. Wright, Jr., George E. Haynes, and Kelly Miller, Work believed it was a necessity that his discipline shed its ties to moral philosophy and present an “objective” picture of society. Of course recent students of the sociology of knowledge have shown that values impinge on all aspects of the social scientific enterprise. Still, Work’s insistence on attempting to write scientific sociology was a necessary attack on those white scholars and commentators who approached the study of Blacks as if the issues were clear cut—as if detailed statistical studies were not prerequisite for their broad conclusions.

The exasperation of scholars like McMurray with Black scholars’ empiricism perhaps could not have been avoided in 1985. As a consequence, scholars of the history and race relations social science should be deeply indebted to Jeffrey C. Stewart for uncovering and meticulously reconstructing in 1992 a series of extant lectures by the philosopher better known for his later contributions to the Harlem Renaissance than his social scientific theorizing: Alain LeRoy Locke. Entitled *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race*, the book is an invaluable source on the thought of an African American intellectual on the subject of the nature of race relations during the Progressive Era and on its relationship to ethnic and class relations as well. Unlike the empiricist Work, Locke was a theoretician. So fecund are these lectures with insights and hypotheses which deserve further investigation and analysis that it would require a work of equal length to do justice to this collection of lectures. As a consequence, I will focus only on Locke’s treatment of race prejudice and race relations.

Problematical for most recent scholars, and an indicator that he was indeed a prisoner of his times, is Locke’s analysis of racial prejudice. Believing that since ancient times racial prejudice had been “automatic and instinctive,” it is not surprising that Locke held what the Swedish political economist Gunnar Myrdal called a “laissez-faire, do-nothing” approach in reference to the potency of the law in changing race relations in establishing a *modus vivendi* between conflicting racial groups. (It should be noted that Locke’s works were influenced significantly by the theories of Robert Ezra Park.) “It would seem,” Locke remarked, “that in the majority of instances, almost as there is any recognition or sense of a difference, the law springs up to help confirm it and perpetuate [the difference]”. Written in the period when the Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* had legitimized Jim Crow, Locke concluded on a fatalistic note that: “One of the saddest phenomena with which the study of society can concern us is the way in which every legal, every customary, prescription accentuates and perpetuates differences [and] handicaps which would perhaps pass off as temporary accidents if they did not have the sanction and the perpetuation of the legal or the customary

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forms. [This is the] *stereotype function of the law*.<sup>30</sup> In reference to the relationship of race relations to class relations, Locke argued: "Race issues are only very virulent forms of class issues, because as they can be broken up into class issues they become possible of solution in society."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, he perceived a similarity between race relations and ethnic relations. For Locke, the relations that existed between dominant and minority groups in Europe, which were separated not by skin color but rather by speech dialects, customs, and religious faith, were the basis for group domination and exploitation. It should be noted that those of us with historical hindsight might disagree with Locke's enjoining on race and ethnicity, but there is no doubt that his views which were brought forth in 1916 are worthy of serious consideration.

In short, the contributions of McMurray and Stewart are the types of booklength studies that African American history can bequeath to the subfield of the history of race relations social science. What is needed at this juncture are new interpretations of W.E.B. DuBois's Atlanta University publications and of Alain LeRoy Locke's forays into sociology and anthropology before the 1920s; and studies of George Edmund Haynes, Richard R. Wright, Jr., and Kelly Miller as pioneers in the early period of professional sociology. It should be noted also that the period from 1920 until 1930 is also *terra incognita* in reference to African American participation in the newly emerging social sciences. "By the early 1920s," Stanfield wrote in 1985, "there was a noticeable void in the production of quality scholarship on the black experience relating to that done between the 1890s and 1910."<sup>32</sup> It should be noted, however, that popular publications such as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* contained discursive articles that were products of scholars. Rather than simply dismiss the 1920s as a "void," scholars in the future should pay attention to the popular works of African American psychologists, such as Howard H. Long, Joseph St. Clair Price, and Horace Mann Bond—especially their relationship to the skeptical stance taken by Boas and his students *vis-a-vis* the mental testers who were in the heyday of their influence on the general public.

Unlike the 1920s, the social scientific studies of African Americans published during the 1930s and 1940s have been subject to close scrutiny by scholars (such as Stanfield, Persons, Jackson, McKee, and myself). The work of E. Franklin Frazier on the African American family which has had public policy implications, is a center of heated debate. In his timely biography, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered*, Anthony M. Platt, a professor of social work at California State University at Sacramento, has attempted to challenge two contradictory myths which have been created by intellectuals since the distinguished American scholar's death in 1962. The first tale, which according to Platt, is told mainly by progressives, "derives from his posthumous association with *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*." The progressives accept "at

face value the derisive nomination of Frazier as father of the Moynihan Report." The second tale, told mainly by respected academicians, raises Frazier to "sainthood." Its narrators "return to Frazier's graduate training in Chicago but, unlike his detractors commemorate him as a loyal and capable disciple of Robert Park and other white academics who were generous enough to recruit Afro-American students despite the prevalence of racism in academia."<sup>33</sup> Platt draws on numerous archival sources; memories and files of Frazier's colleagues, acquaintances, and friends and the heretofore undisclosed FBI and Department of State files on Frazier to reveal the complexity of and contradictions in the sociologist's life and work. Platt invites his readers to consider Frazier "as somebody who tried ... 'to provide answers to important questions' about the persistence of racism and social inequality."<sup>34</sup>

Although Platt's work will not be considered the definitive biography of Frazier, it is nevertheless a work with numerous strengths. Platt is adept in depicting some of the contradictions that characterize the "Enfant Terrible's" life. For example, he points out that when Frazier turned thirty-four, both of his parents and his sister were dead; Frazier had cut himself off from his brother; and Frazier's wife had "found out that she could not bear children." "E. Franklin" Platt concludes, "who devoted many years to studying the Afro-American family spent his own adult life outside the conventions of a traditional or extended nuclear family. Perhaps his father's emphasis on the importance of being a self-made man also stamped Edward with the character of a loner, a person who valued independence almost to the point of isolation."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Frazier, who challenged Melville J. Herskovits' theme that West African customs "played a decisive role in the development of Afro-American culture" "claimed that he was of Ibo descent and he was very proud of it."<sup>36</sup>

Despite its flashes of brilliance, Platt's book will undoubtedly produce controversy. First, by anchoring Frazier's political ideology in the period between 1922 and 1927, when Frazier was director of the Atlanta School of Social Work, Platt turns Frazier into a "militant race man." I generally associate the phrase "race man" with persons such as Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammed, and the middle period of Malcolm X's life, not with reflective, integrationists like Frazier. Second, Platt's attempt to disconnect Frazier from what Chares Valentine labels the "pejorative tradition" in the culture of poverty debate is unconvincing. It is my contention that Frazier cannot be viewed as a post-modern man. The product of the Victorian Age and born into a family with a father who was a strong male role model, Frazier should not be viewed as a progressive on the issue of the extended nuclear family. Furthermore, Platt does not seem to comprehend the vicissitudes of the decade in which Frazier's studies of Afro-American families were written.

The 1930s were years of extreme hardship for a vast major-

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ity of the Black population, as well as for a large proportion of the white population. Historical deprivation, compounded by racism, however, made the economic vulnerability of Blacks especially chronic. As a member of the elite concerned with social problems emanating from the economic crises, Frazier sought a solution to those problems. He wanted to assist the vast majority of Blacks in persevering the economic crisis in order that they could eventually escape poverty. Although he was naive in believing that the escape from poverty was only possible through the establishment of strong patriarchal families, this should not detract attention from the desperate plight of Black intellectuals during this period. Like most of them, Frazier placed the onus of the responsibility for bringing about concrete change on Blacks themselves.

The history of the social science of race relations has accomplished at least one goal: It has raised the issue of race in general to a level of primary concern on the agenda in the field of intellectual history. And although this subfield is dominated by historians and historically minded social scientists who have a bias, that is, persons who ignore that scholars such as Boas, Park, and Myrdal cannot be dismissed solely as either prisoners of their times or harbingers of the future—they have at least revealed the complexity of the problems with which these social scientists were confronted and the profundity of their paradoxes. Furthermore, although the history of the social science of race relations has a long way to go towards integrating the numerous historically significant African American social scientists into their new field, it is important to remember that the work has begun. If this trend continues, the subfield will soon reach its goal of creating truly ecumenical “mythistory.”

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Melvin J. Herskovits, *Franz Boas: The Science of Man in the Making* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953); Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963); Idus A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1909-30* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1966); George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Leonard Lieberman, “The Debate Over Race: A Study in the Sociology of Knowledge,” *Phylon* 29 (1968); Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968); Edward H. Beardsley, “The American Scientist as Social Activist: Franz Boas, Burt G. Wilder and the Fight for Racial Justice,

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1900-15," *Isis* 79 (1973); Hasia R. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-35* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977); Hamilton Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution: American Scientists and the Hereditary-Environmentalist Controversy, 1900-41* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978); Vernon J. Williams, Jr., *From a Caste to a Minority: Changing Attitudes of American Sociologists Toward Afro-Americans, 1896-1945* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1989); Marshall Hyatt, *Franz Boas—Social Activist: The Dynamics of Ethnicity* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Vernon J. Williams, Jr., "Franz Boas' Changing Attitudes Towards Afro-Americans, 1884-1925," *The Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution: Reflections on the Black Experience*, edited by Earl S. Davis (New York: New York University Institute of Afro-American Affairs, 1988): 81-94; "Franz Boas' Paradox," *The Griot: The Journal of Black Heritage*, 10 (1991): 9-17; "The Boasian Paradox, 1894-1915," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 16 (1992): 69-85; "Franz U. Boas and the Conflict Between Science and Values, 1894-1915," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, 92 (1993): 7-16. See the second essay in this book also.

<sup>3</sup> Edward H. Beardsley, "The American Scientist as Social Activist: Franz Boas, Burt G. Wilder, and the Cause of Racial Justice, 1900-15," *Isis*, (March 1973): 55.

<sup>4</sup> Beardsley, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: Jews and Blacks, 1915-35* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 142-147.

<sup>6</sup> Marshall Hyatt, *Franz Boas Social Activist—The Dynamics of Ethnicity* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 33-34.

<sup>7</sup> Hyatt, 155.

<sup>8</sup> Carl N. Delger, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 82.

<sup>9</sup> Degler, 75-80.

<sup>10</sup> Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 86.

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## **Writing the Oral Tradition: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller***

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Scholars of oral traditions hold differing views regarding the viability of transcribing the oral to the written. This paper demonstrates that Leslie Marmon Silko is transcribing, and thus preserving, oral culture of the Native American in her book *Storyteller*. Through a close reading of the poem "Aunt Susie had certain phrases," Silko's attempts to convert the oral to the printed word without losing the nuances and vitality of the spoken word are analyzed. The analysis reveals that the required elements of a traditional oral performance (i.e., opening and closing narrative frames, verbal asides, repetition, emphasis on ritual and traditions) are successfully converted by Silko to the written word through the use of contemporary poetic conventions.

The eminent scholar on orality, Walter Ong, writes that "oral performance had been held in high esteem and cultivated with great skill" by early cultures, but finds that once writing systems were developed, the oral tradition began to "diminish."<sup>1</sup> Eric Havelock agrees, claiming that orality "ceases to be what it originally was" once it is written down.<sup>2</sup> Elaine Jahner concurs, stating that attempts "to adapt oral ... to the written mode" are "limited."<sup>3</sup> Paul Zolbrod also finds that "translating an oral literature into written English is ... problematic."<sup>4</sup> However, in the book *Storyteller*, Leslie Marmon captures the oral culture of the Native American in written form.

The oral performance of stories and songs is a cultural method through which a community regulates the behavior of its members, "structure[s] a world that is intelligible to a people, imbues their activities with shared principles, and affirms their commonality in a particular, and common, sense."<sup>5</sup> Among Native Americans, however, the oral tradition is more than just a cultural barometer. Native scholar Paula Gunn Allen states that "the oral tradition is more than a record of a people's culture.

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It is the creative source of their collective and individual selves."<sup>6</sup> Michael Dorris agrees, claiming that "the oral-literary tradition is a cornerstone of every tribal society. It is the vehicle through which wisdom is passed from one generation to the next and by which sense is made of a confusing world."<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Pamela Cook Miller states that "to insure the future survival of the tribe and the continuance of its customs," the oral tradition provides the important knowledge needed by the young.<sup>8</sup> The role of orality to the Native American is one of survival, not just an artistic activity.

When studying American Indian oral performance, however, one must keep in mind the differences between Western and Indian literature. Allen claims that,

... traditional American Indian literature is not similar to western literature because the basic assumption about the universe and, therefore, the basic reality experienced by tribal peoples and by Western peoples are not the same, even at the level of folklore.<sup>9</sup>

She adds that, unlike Western people, Indians "do not content themselves with simple preachment of truth" nor do they use literature for "pure self-expression."<sup>10</sup> The purpose, then, of Indian literature is

... to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of the majesty and reverent mystery of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths that give humanity its greatest significance and dignity.<sup>11</sup>

It must also be understood that Native Americans do not have canonical literary conventions that are familiar to the student of Western literature. Native Americans are more concerned with the content and context of the story than defining it by a literary genre. As Allen states, "literacy as understood by modern America is not particularly useful to tribal peoples who were once able to survive and prosper without it."<sup>12</sup> Modes of storytelling intertwine in the tribal culture because it has no specific genre. Janet Larsen McHughes points out that "while we make a generic distinction between prose and poetry, many cultures do not."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Zolbrod makes no distinction with regard to tribal literature, generally referring to it as poetry when he points out that "we heirs of Europe think that poetry is the exclusive province of writers and the printed word" while, actually, poetry "fares better in oral cultures like the Native Americans' than in print-driven ones like ours."<sup>14</sup> McHughes adds that many poetic devices are found in oral prose, including a decided

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rhythm, heightened (versus everyday) language, metaphorical expression, structural repetitiveness, musical accompaniment, and compression of expression.<sup>15</sup>

Aside from a literary genre which may or may not be ascribed to tribal literature, Arthur Amiotte asks an important question,

Can what was originally communicated through the oral tradition be converted to the printed word, without losing the nuances and vitality of the spoken word, in light of the gradual passing of the older generation?<sup>16</sup>

Miller argues for the need of recording oral traditions,<sup>17</sup> but finds that written versions are often "terse, unbalanced, and without magic"<sup>18</sup> and that many "elements of oral style are deleted when the stories are printed."<sup>19</sup> Joan Winter elaborates by claiming that with the printed word "only fragments of the 'mythic cycle' ... are realized."<sup>20</sup> Further, Winter finds that the "significance of the 'oral event'" can be easily dismissed because "the printed page ... can be aborted at any time" while that cannot be done with an oral performance.<sup>21</sup> McHughes disagrees with these critics and scholars, however, due to her contention that "it is difficult to separate oral and written poetry ... because the two forms intersect."<sup>22</sup> This introduces Allen's theory of Native American intertextuality, which is basically a reiteration of the lack of genre discussed earlier, combined with the fact that tribal oral and written literature cannot be so easily separated because they are both entrenched in a common cultural tradition.<sup>23</sup>

Leslie Marmon Silko's book *Storyteller* is an excellent example of this intersection, or intertextuality, of Native American oral and written literature. Frank Magill states that with regard to *Storyteller*, "it is damaging to the book's unity to separate the poetry from the prose, the short stories from the myths, tales 'spoken' from those 'written'."<sup>24</sup> Magill also finds that Silko's stories "are most fundamentally about the oral tradition that constitutes the people's means of achieving identity."<sup>25</sup> With this collection, Silko answers Amiotte's question in the affirmative, for in *Storyteller*, she attempts to convert the oral to the printed word without losing the nuances and vitality of the spoken word.

Silko says that she sees *Storyteller*

as a statement about storytelling and the relationship of the people, my family and my background to the storytelling - a personal statement done in the style of the storytelling tradition, i.e., using stories themselves to explain the dimensions of the process.<sup>26</sup>

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In this collection, Silko purposely sets out to put into written word the tradition of oral storytelling with which she was raised and which continues to have a strong influence on her as a Native American woman and author.

Silko grew up on the Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico where she spent most of her time as a young child with her Aunt Susie who, as Silko tells us in *Storyteller*, was a highly educated woman, a teacher, having graduated from college. But even though Aunt Susie "had come to believe very much in books and in schooling," Silko says "she was of a generation, the last generation here at Laguna, that passed down an entire culture by word of mouth."<sup>27</sup> Of the stories told to her by her aunt, Silko says "I remember only a small part," but *Storyteller* "is what I remember."<sup>28</sup> Because of her combined love of traditional stories and the printed word, Silko is able to merge the two disparate literary processes into a printed representation of a new way of storytelling.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the entire book; therefore, in order to demonstrate Silko's ability in transcribing the oral tradition to the printed word only one poem will receive a close reading. This poem is untitled in the text, but in the index Silko entitles it "Aunt Susie had certain phrases." It is an appropriate example of Silko's representation of writing the oral tradition because it contains the elements of a traditional oral performance and, yet, through the use of poetic techniques, the elements are captured in written form.

"This is the way Aunt Susie told a story," Silko states in the first line of the poem. One necessary element of an oral performance, according to Miller, is an opening and closing narrative frame,<sup>29</sup> and Amiotte explains that "Native storytellers often preface a narration" with what could be translated in English to "phrases like 'once upon a time' or 'long, long ago'."<sup>30</sup> Silko begins her tale with a preface, or opening narrative, that lets the audience know that a tale is about to be told: "This is the way I remember / she told this one story / about the little girl who ran away." Silko also ends the tale with the required closing narrative frame: "Aunt Susie always spoke the words of the mother to her daughter / with great tenderness, with great feeling / as if Aunt Susie were the mother / addressing her little child." Just as an oral storyteller ends a tale with words to the effect that the story is now finished in order to bring her audience back to the present, Silko brings her readers back to the present by reminding them that what they have just read is one of Aunt Susie's stories. [Due to the fact that this poem is the transcription of a story told to Silko by her Aunt Susie, when referring to the storyteller, she will be called "Aunt Susie."] Aunt Susie also provides a narrative frame to her tale, which Silko retains in her written version. Aunt Susie's story begins, "the scene is laid partly in old Acoma, and Laguna," and ends with the answer to the question which most likely posed the reason for the tale:

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And today they say that acoma has more beautiful butterflies - /  
red ones, white ones, blue ones, yellow ones /  
They came /  
from this little girl's clothing.

This etiological ending is common to oral tales which, in addition to being told to explain a particular situation or answer a specific question (in this case, why a little girl ran away), also provide other traditional information (why there are beautiful butterflies in Acoma).

In addition to the narrative frame, Silko also incorporates the element of a storyteller's verbal asides to her audience which are used to explain certain terms or actions so that the meaning of the story will be understood more fully. Since the oral tradition exists etilogically as "answers to questions" and "as the reason why a certain condition occurs,"<sup>31</sup> these asides are important aspects of keeping the culture alive. In this story of the little girl who ran away, the word "yashtoah" plays an important role. With the first use of this word, Aunt Susie supplies an aside, which Silko emphasizes, as she does all of Aunt Susie's asides, by the use of italics. Explaining this Keres word to her audience, Aunt Susie says,

*Yashtoah is the hardened crust on corn meal mush /  
that curls up. /  
The very name yashtoah means /  
it's sort of curled-up, you know, dried, /  
just as mush dries on top.*

With this explanation the audience understands exactly what yashtoah is and thus understands the little girl's desire for such a delicacy. A Native American audience, however, would also understand that corn is a revered crop among the tribes. Since Aunt Susie saw no need to elaborate on this issue, neither does Silko; she does not interject more narrative than her storyteller provides. To do so would be moving away from the oral tradition, and would, thus, risk losing the rhythm and authenticity of the oral performance.

Additional asides by Aunt Susie are incorporated throughout the poem. Waithea, the little girl, goes hunting for wood so that her mother can make the yashtoah. Waithea finds wood, "some curled, some crooked in shape, / that she was to pick up and take home." Aunt Susie picks up some wood and says to her audience, "She found just such wood as these." The use of examples when telling a story that is also teaching the necessities of every day living are important aspects of storytelling. Certain types of wood were best used in cooking, and with this tale Aunt Susie is able to teach this lesson. When Waithea returns home with the wood, another cultural tradition lost in the modern world is explained.

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"First she called her mother / as she got home. / She said / 'Nayah, deeni! / Mother, upstairs." In an aside, Aunt Susie explains,

The pueblo people always called "upstairs" /  
because long ago their homes were two, three stories  
high /  
and that was their entrance /  
from the top.

When the wood turns out to be snakes and her mother scolds her, Waithea decides to run away: "I'm going to Kawaik." Aunt Susie interjects a brief "That means the 'west lake'" before beginning the part of the tale where Waithea meets a very old man who, upon learning she is running away, tries to catch her. The old man is hindered by the wood he carries "strapped to his back / and tied with yucca thongs." Aunt Susie explains, "That's the way they did / in those days, with a strap / across their forehead."

The old man, unable to catch Waithea and concerned for her welfare, goes to find her mother, who is making the yashtoah. Aunt Susie interrupts the tale to comment,

Corn mush curled at the top. /  
She must have found enough wood /  
to boil the corn meal /  
to make the yashtoah.

This backtracking to an earlier part of the story suggests orality, as a storyteller revises the story in the process of telling. Ad hoc editing of a story is part of the teller's style, and is what keeps a story fresh and a tradition thriving.

As the tale/poem proceeds, the mother begins to gather possessions which might entice Waithea home and goes in search of her daughter. Aunt Susie explains of the route taken by the mother, "there used to be a trail there, you know, it is gone now, but / it was accessible in those days." The breaking away from the story with such an aside reminds the readers that a storyteller is speaking and that the readers are the audience for this story, just as if they were an audience at an oral telling of the tale. Also, this aside reminds the audience that they are not of the same generation or level of enculturation as the storyteller. Aunt Susie then elaborates on another cultural tradition when Waithea ties a feather in her hair just before jumping in the lake: "In death they put this feather / on the dead in the hair." This behavior by Waithea is significant due to the fact that the traditional funeral rituals include tying a feather in the deceased's hair. With these asides, Aunt Susie manages to slow down the tale by elaborating on cultural traditions and thus imparting



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necessary knowledge to her audience, which is a technique of oral storytelling. By keeping these asides as part of her poem, Silko retains the conventions of the oral tradition. By setting them apart with a different typescript, Silko also retains a sense of two voices—story-teller/interpreter—of an actual performance.

Repetition is also a major component of the oral tradition. Repetition may be of stanzas, phrases, words, or single syllables. Miller finds fault with printed narratives because this repetition is often deleted.<sup>32</sup> In this poem, however, Silko retains the style of repetition used by Aunt Susie in the telling of the tale. When yashtoah is introduced, it is repeated six times within the next seventeen lines. Additionally, Waithea is told to "pick up some pieces of wood / bring them home." Within a few lines the repetition "there were pieces of wood ... that she was to pick up and take home" occurs. Once home, Waithea tells her mother, "I have brought the wood / you wanted me to bring." Another series of repetitions occur when Waithea returns home and lays out her sticks of wood, "Here they were snakes / instead of sticks of wood." Waithea's mother says, "You have brought snakes instead," so Waithea returns the wood because "they were snakes instead." Once the Kawaik, or lake, is introduced, the words Kawaik or lake are repeated five times in as many lines.

Throughout the poem, yashtoah, wood, and the lake are constantly repeated. These things hold significant meaning within the tribal culture and warrant repetition so that the listeners will remember their importance. The same can be said for the feather Waithea carries. As mentioned earlier, a feather is used in traditional funeral rituals. The fact that Waithea "carried a little feather" is repeated: "She carried a feather the little girl did." Thus, without having to state to her audience that Waithea would die by the end of the story, Aunt Susie's repetition of this feather being carried by Waithea tells her listeners what will happen. Another cultural funeral tradition is emphasized without stating its importance just by repetition of the act. The mother took Waithea's personal possessions

and scattered them out. /  
She scattered them to the east /  
  to the west /  
to the north and to the south -  
in all directions.

This repetition of scattering possessions "in all directions" emphasizes the ritual of disposing of the dead's personal possessions and of the cultural respect for all four directions of the universe. Ritual and time-honored traditions must, according to Amiotte, be emphasized in oral performances so that the listener can incorporate them into her own life.<sup>33</sup> Allen agrees, stating the oral "stories are woven of elements that

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illuminate the ritual tradition of the storyteller's people."<sup>34</sup> In the oral tradition, this emphasis on ritual and tradition is accomplished through repetition. Silko accomplishes this in the written form by transcribing the oral performance as it was given, including repetitions that, as Miller claims, most writers leave out of the written text.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, a successful performance of the oral storyteller "resides not only in the tale but in the manner of telling, in rhythms, tonalities, and inflections; in emphasis and proportion; in the teller's voice."<sup>36</sup> Critics who do not believe the oral can be written argue that rhythms, tonalities, and inflections of the teller cannot be transcribed. However, it is possible through poetic devices to suggest them, as Silko does in this poem. In addition to Aunt Susie's asides and the use of repetition, Silko uses varying line lengths and stanzaic structure to make her poem reflect the narrative style of the oral storyteller.

At first glance it may appear there is no discernable stanzaic structure to this poem. A closer reading, however, shows that stanzaic breaks which are very important to the orality of the poem do exist. The first stanzaic break occurs between Silko's opening narrative frame and Aunt Susie's tale. This break indicates to the reader that the poet is now moving into the tale as Aunt Susie told it. The second stanzaic break takes place near the end of the tale and is part of Aunt Susie's oral method. This major pause in the tale is a technique used to evoke suspense, for although the climax has occurred (before the break Waithea has "jumped / into the lake"), it provides the reader with a clue that there is more to this tale. After the break, we learn that Waithea has drowned and that her grieving mother performs the traditional ritual of disposal of the dead's personal possessions. This break emphasizes this ritual by setting it apart from the rest of the tale. The final stanzaic break occurs as Aunt Susie's tale ends and the voice of Silko returns to the poem, providing the closing narrative frame.

It is through varying line lengths that Silko ultimately transcribes the oral tale into a written poem. Silko says in her opening narrative frame, "I write when I still hear / her voice as she tells the story." The lines break not semantically, but where Aunt Susie uses inflections or different tones in her telling of the tale. The visible breaks force the reader to also pause and change the inflection of the words. For example, a reader sees the following two sentences:

He tried to catch her but she was very light and skipped  
along. And everytime he would try to grab her she would  
skip faster away from him.

As semantic sentences, these lines do not provide the reader with the breathlessness of an old man trying to chase a young girl, which an oral storyteller is able to provide by pauses and breaths. However,

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by varying the lines at the teller's pace, Silko is able to provide the sense of the chase just as the oral performer does:

He tried to catch her /  
but she was very light /  
and skipped along. /  
And everytime he would try /  
to grab her /  
she would skip faster /  
away from him.

The same can be seen in the following semantic sentence:

Just as her mother was about to reach her she jumped  
into the lake.

The impact of this action in the tale is much more pronounced by an oral teller's pauses used to heighten the action. This heightened telling of such a sentence is emphasized by Silko in the line breaks:

Just as her mother was about /  
to reach her /  
she jumped /  
into the lake.

With these breaks, Silko provides the suspenseful pauses used by an oral storyteller to provide the breathless rendering of the climax of the tale.

Similarly, the importance of the ritual of disposing of the dead's personal possessions does not carry the same impact when stated in prose:

She stood on the edge of the high mesa and scattered  
them in all directions.

The oral storyteller emphasizes the importance of this ritual with breaths, voice inflections, and repetitions. Silko emphasizes the ritual by line placement and repetition:

She stood on the edge /  
of the high mesa /  
and scattered them out. /  
She scattered them to the east  
to the west /  
to the north and to the south - /  
in all directions.

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The line breaks provide the reader with the feeling of movement as the mother performs her ritual, pausing and turning to scatter the possessions of her deceased child.

In her closing narrative frame, Silko also provides the reader with directions as to how the tale was told orally. She tells the reader that Aunt Susie "spoke the words of the mother to her daughter / with great tenderness, with great feeling" and that when speaking the old man's words "there was something mournful / in her voice." However, at the end of the tale Aunt Susie's "voice would change and I would hear the excitement and wonder / and the story wasn't sad any longer." With this commentary, Silko aids the reader into an enriched rereading of the poem. And the poem is meant to be reread, just as the oral stories were told again and again. With each telling of an oral tale, new nuances of meaning emerge to the listener. Similarly, with each reading of the poem, new subtleties of language and cultural representation will emerge for the reader.

A traditional storyteller "hold the listeners' attention so that they can experience a sense of belonging to a sturdy and strong tradition."<sup>37</sup> As a poet drawing on her cultural traditions and performance practices, Silko develops a written strategy for holding readers' attention. By incorporating conventions of oral performance in her collection *Storyteller*, she preserves and protects the value of the oral tradition by transcribing it to the printed page. Because she has written down what her Aunt Susie told her, an important part of the Native American heritage is preserved for future generations. The stories, and thus the tribal culture, will continue to thrive; only the mode of storytelling will change.

### NOTES

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