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Source: *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Mar., 1995), pp. 15-25

Published by: American Educational Research Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1176421>

Accessed: 03-12-2015 05:49 UTC

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The Historical Reconstruction of Knowledge About Race: Implications for Transformative Teaching

JAMES A. BANKS

I contend that knowledge reflects both the reality observed as well as the subjectivity of the knower. The attempt to clearly distinguish the objective and subjective elements of knowledge, a key feature of mainstream Anglo-American epistemology, is inconsistent with the ways that human beings know. I use a historical case study of the construction and reconstruction of race between the late 19th century and the 1940s to document the ways in which the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts in which knowers are embedded influence the knowledge they construct and reconstruct. The final part of this article discusses the implications of the historical construction of race for transformative classroom teaching.

Educational Researcher, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 15–25

Since the 1960s and 1970s, efforts to revise the curriculum in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities to reflect the ethnic, cultural, and gender realities in the United States have stimulated a heated debate about the nature of knowledge. One of the important issues in the canon debate is whether personal/cultural knowledge should be considered legitimate knowledge (Banks, 1993). Another issue is the extent to which the actuality of what occurs and how people interpret their experiences and observations can be distinguished.

A clear and sharp distinction cannot be made between the actuality of what occurs and how an individual interprets the actuality. Knowledge is both subjective and objective (Code, 1991; Ladner, 1973). The knowledge created by the knower reflects both her subjectivity and the objective phenomena perceived. Code states that the "objective/subjective dichotomy is but one of several dichotomies that have structured mainstream Anglo-American epistemology" (p. 28). The attempt to sharply distinguish these two elements of knowing, and to label objective knowledge legitimate and subjective knowledge mere interpretation, is inconsistent with how human beings know. Knowledge "is, necessarily and inescapably, the product of an intermingling of subjective and objective elements" (Code, p. 30). An actuality that takes place is subject to multiple interpretations and can be analyzed from diverse perspectives.

African American feminist scholars such as Joyce A. Ladner (1973), Elsa Barkley Brown (1991), Paula Giddings (1984), and Marimba Ani (1994) have written informative and seminal analyses of the ways in which objective and

subjective factors influence knowledge construction. These researchers describe the ways in which their socialization within African American communities enabled them to reject conceptions of African Americans as the "Other," and to construct more comprehensive, compassionate, and accurate descriptions of their communities because they were able to combine personal insights with scientific observations. Their research is made more difficult but also more deeply textured and enriched by the objective-subjective tension that arises when "insiders" study other "insiders" (Merton, 1972).

Recognizing that knowledge contains both subjective and objective elements does not mean we must abandon the quest for the construction of knowledge that is as objective as possible. One's location in the social structure is based partially on relations of race, social class, and gender; location frames that we see and view as significant. If we fail to recognize the ways in which social location produces subjectivity and influences the construction of knowledge, we are unlikely to interrogate established knowledge that contributes to the oppression of marginalized and victimized groups.

Hegemonic knowledge that promotes the interests of powerful, elite groups often obscures its value premises by masquerading as totally objective. This article describes how this process took place from the late 19th century to the 1940s by examining how race was constructed and reconstructed during this time period. To create and teach liberatory, transformative knowledge, we must not only be aware of the knowledge produced, but must also understand that the knowledge producer is located within a particular social, economic, and political context of society. Feminist scholars call this phenomenon *positionality* (Tetreault, 1993). This article focuses on positionality as a factor in the construction of knowledge about race.

I examine the ways in which knowledge about race was constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed from the turn of the century until the rise of Nazism during the 1930s and 1940s. First, I discuss the relationship between the social context and the racial theories and paradigms

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developed by intellectual leaders. Next, I describe how rigid and pernicious racial categories, stereotypes, and racist ideas were constructed in the late 19th century to justify colonization and slavery. I then describe how Franz Boas at Columbia University, Robert E. Park at the University of Chicago, and African American scholars and social scientists (e.g., W. E. B. DuBois at Atlanta University and Kelly Miller at Howard University) tried to reconstruct race during the late 19th and the early decades of the 20th century.

The efforts made by selected scholars and activists to undercut Nazism during the 1930s and 1940s are then described. Next, I consider the extent to which the efforts to reconstruct race were successful, and the differences between the reconstructions made by Boas and Park and by African American scholars. In the final part of the article, I discuss the teaching implications of my historical analysis of the construction of race.

The Social Context, Knowledge Construction, and Intellectual Leaders

The social, cultural, and political context in which the people who invented conceptions of race were situated had a cogent influence on the knowledge they constructed. Gould (1981) points out that both facts and theories are influenced by the cultural context of the knower: "Facts are not pure and unsullied bits of information; culture. . . influences what we see and how we see it. . . . The most creative theories are often imaginative visions imposed upon facts; the source of imagination is strongly cultural" (p. 22). Myrdal (as cited in Gould) also described the cultural influences on knowledge construction:

Cultural influences have set up the assumptions about the mind, the body, and the universe with which we begin; pose the questions we ask; influence the facts we seek; determine the interpretation we give these facts; and direct our reaction to these interpretations and conclusions. (p. 23)

The views of race that individuals and academic organizations articulated and described were not independently invented by them, but were deeply imbedded into the fabric of the social, economic, political, and structural institutions of the society in which these individuals were socialized. The social, economic, and cultural factors that influence the construction of ideas about race are much more cogent than the writings of individual intellectuals or the actions of specific intellectual groups and societies. The relationship between the social context of society (which includes the popular culture), the views of intellectuals, and the ideas about race that become institutionalized within a society are complex. The views of popular writers, scholars, and social scientists both reflect and help to shape those within their communities and subsocieties. Consequently, the views, theories, and thoughts of intellectuals reveal the ways in which knowledge is constructed within society.

Individual intellectuals are influenced strongly by the cultures into which they are socialized. Although individual intellectuals are cogently influenced by the racial ideas within their societies, in complex societies such as the United States contradictory and competing conceptions of race, as well as about other concepts, are institutionalized

within different subsocieties. Throughout its history, the United States has been a multicultural society and has consequently been characterized by subsocieties, microcultures, and institutions that socialized individuals who had competing conceptions of race. Consequently, race in the United States has been contested and reinvented to serve divergent interests and groups. Write Omi & Winant (1986):

The meaning of race is defined and contested throughout society, in both collective action and personal practice. In the process, racial categories themselves are formed, transformed, destroyed, and re-formed. We use the term *racial formation* to refer to the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meaning. (p. 61)

When academics and public opinion leaders construct knowledge about race, they are influenced by the ideas, assumptions, and norms of the cultures and subsocieties in which they are socialized. Consequently, the ideas about race constructed by W. E. B. DuBois, an African American scholar who functioned within Black institutions, differed significantly from those constructed by Thomas Dixon, Jr., the lay historian who wrote the books (*The Clansman* and *The Leopard's Spots*) on which the popular film *The Birth of a Nation* was based (Franklin, 1989). Dixon's early socialization in North Carolina in the years immediately after the Civil War was an important factor that shaped his racist ideas epitomized in *The Birth of a Nation*. The early socialization of historian Ulrich B. Phillip in Georgia during the late 1800s strongly influenced his important study of slavery, which is very sympathetic to Southern slaveowners (Smith & Inscoe, 1993).

The Emergence of Racism in the 19th Century

Although groups within all past societies have exhibited various forms of ethnocentrism, racism has not been a universal characteristic of human societies. Historians and social scientists often state that racism was a unique by-product of Western expansion into the Americas, Australia, Africa, and Asia in the 19th century (Franklin, 1968). However, van den Berghe (1967) refutes this claim. He maintains that racism has been independently invented in various parts of the world. Nevertheless, he contends that Western racism has been the most important and cogent version invented. He writes, "Through the colonial expansion of Europe racism spread widely over the world. Apart from its geographical spread, no other brand of racism has developed such a flourishing mythology and ideology" (p. 13).

As the Christian European nations conquered and colonized native peoples in Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Americas—and especially as slavery developed in the Americas—the Europeans needed an ideology that was consistent with both their Christian beliefs and the colonization of the native peoples of these lands. Racism developed as an ideology to meet both needs. To advance civilization, the native "savages" needed to be conquered to save their souls from hell and to bring Christianity to their lands. The Western Europeans, and especially the Anglo-Saxons in the United States, began to believe that it was their "manifest destiny" to colonize and Christianize the native peoples of the Americas and other lands (Horsman, 1981). To provide a justification for the colonization

and conquering of native peoples, racism was developed into an elaborate ideology. Slavery was institutionalized in the Americas before racism was developed into an elaborate ideology indistinguishable from ethnocentrism in the 19th century (van den Berghe, 1967). The Western version of racism emerged as an ideology to justify the conquering and colonization of native peoples in the Americas, Africa, Australia, and Asia after these practices were institutionalized.

Prior to the development of colonization and before the mid-19th century, a theory of the unity of humans had been developed in Europe and was highly influential (Horsman, 1981). This Enlightenment view held that "mankind was of one species, and that mankind in general was capable of indefinite improvement" (p. 98). However, by the 1840s race theorists in the United States and Europe had constructed and were defending theories of race that indicated there were innate differences among the races of humankind. Writes Horsman, "Scientists, by mid-century, had provided an abundance of 'proofs' by which English and American Anglo-Saxons could explain their power, progress, governmental stability, and freedom" (p. 43). Dr. Charles Caldwell constructed one of the first theories that challenged the unity of humans theory. In his book *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* (1830), Caldwell argued that the Caucasian race was unquestionably innately superior to all others, and that nature had endowed other races with less mental strength (Horsman, 1981). Caldwell's view, as well as those of other nativists and racists, became widespread and institutionalized during the 19th century (Gould, 1981; Horsman, 1981).

The science of phrenology, which involved studying the shape of the human skull to make inferences about mental and behavioral characteristics (Chernow & Vallasi, 1993), became a major weapon in the scientific quest to prove that some races were inferior to others. The phrenologists gained substantial influence during the 1820s and 1830s in part because of their use of scientific methods and assumptions to establish the superiority of some races. Horsman (1981) notes that the phrenologists "found in skulls and heads what they wanted to find: a physical confirmation of supposedly observed cultural traits." (p. 145)

The Construction of Knowledge About Race in the 1800s

As constructed in the mid to late 1800s, race was conceptualized in a way that designated specific groups with clearly defined, biologically inherited physical and behavioral characteristics (Gould, 1981; Higham, 1972; Horsman, 1981). Some groups were defined as inherently superior to others. An important assumption that undergirded conceptions of race in the 19th century was that the environment or experiences of individuals or groups could do little to change their inherited racial characteristics. Consequently, the best way to ensure the survival and growth of Western civilization was to prevent racial mixture, and to make sure that the superior races of humankind remained as pure as possible and were given the opportunities and resources needed to actualize their superior potential.

In considering race in the 19th century, it is important to realize that although groups of color, such as Africans and Native Americans, were considered to be at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, Whites were not considered one race. Scientific racists, nativists, and propagandists of the late

19th and early 20th centuries considered some White races superior to others. The conception of Whites as one racial group is a rather recent phenomenon (Alba, 1990).

Late 19th and early 20th century nativists made important and invidious distinctions between various White "races." These distinctions grew sharper as thousands of Southern and Eastern European immigrants entered the United States near the turn of the century. About 15 million immigrants arrived in the United States between 1890 and 1914, most of whom were from Southern and Eastern Europe (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). Nativists and scientific racists were deeply concerned about the negative influences these predominantly non-Anglo-Saxon, Catholic immigrants would have on the development of civilization and democracy in the United States (Higham, 1972). They were also concerned about the negative effects these immigrants would have, through interracial marriage, on the development of the Anglo-Saxon race.

As the number of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe grew, and nativism in the United States increased, they became known as the "new" immigrants. They were distinguished from the "old" immigrants, who were largely from northern and western European nations. A myth developed and grew that the old and new immigrants were distinct in many important ways. The Dillingham Commission (U.S. Senate, 1911), in its 41 volume report, reinforced the popular belief that the old and the new immigrants were significantly different. Influential books by William Z. Ripley (1899) and Madison Grant (1916) not only warned about the ominous results from "racial" mixture, but also codified the distinctions among the various European races, which Ripley labeled the *Teutonic*, the *Alpine*, and the *Mediterranean*.

Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) was greatly influenced by the work of Ripley (1899). Grant had an intense hatred of Jews and the other new immigrants, and feared miscegenation. He warned in his book that the great Nordic race of America, "the white man par excellence" (p. 150), was in great danger of disappearing because of racial mixture with inferior Whites, such as the Alpines, who are peasants, and the Mediterraneans, who possess fewer ideal characteristics than the Teutonic race. Grant described the great Nordic race:

It is everywhere characterized by certain unique specializations, namely, blondness, wavy hair, blue eyes, fair skin, high, narrow and straight nose, which are associated with great stature, and a long skull, as well as with abundant head and body hair (p. 150).

Efforts Within Minority Communities to Reconstruct Knowledge About Race: The Work of Franz Boas

Because they were socialized in ethnic communities on the margins of society and were not part of the mainstream, ethnic minorities such as Jewish Americans and African Americans often constructed ideas about race that conflicted with those institutionalized within mainstream society. Minority intellectuals, because they were outsiders with racial views that challenged those held by most insiders, "infused greater egalitarianism into scientific discourse" (Barkan, 1992, p. i). Their ideas grew out of their unique socialization, experiences with racism and anti-Semitism, and their ability to see the underdeveloped and unrecognized talents and gifts within their communities.

Jewish American and African American social scientists and activists constructed images and representations of themselves that were liberatory and oppositional to those created by powerful and hegemonic groups. Franz Boas, a German-Jewish immigrant scholar who was a victim of anti-Semitism in his native Germany and in the United States, played a leading role in constructing a new racial paradigm that seriously challenged the institutionalized one (Herskovits, 1953; Hyatt, 1990). Boas bore dueling scars that resulted from fights triggered by anti-Semitic insults throughout his long life (Stocking, 1964).

When Franz Boas arrived in the United States in 1884, the conception of race that had been constructed in both his native Germany and in the United States codified sharp distinctions among the races and held that some races were innately superior to others. From about 1894 until his death on December 21, 1942, Boas—and some of the influential anthropologists that he trained at Columbia University—tried to reinvent race and to deconstruct the notion that some races were superior to others.

Boas, who was a product of his times and cultures, did not believe in racial equality. He was not able to totally transcend some of the tenacious and pernicious assumptions and beliefs about race that were institutionalized and pervasive within Western society. However, to a significant extent he transcended the predominant racial biases and assumptions of his times and challenged the dominant racial paradigms that were institutionalized within both the scholarly and popular communities.

Boas challenged the dominant paradigm about race, which stated that some races were inferior to others and that the environment could have little influence on heredity. Craniometry, the science of measuring skulls, was the major method used to establish the relationship between race and intelligence. Boas did not try to deconstruct craniometry as a methodology or as a scientific practice. Rather, he tried to reconstruct race by using craniometry to marshal new findings and to interpret his findings differently. In 1907, he studied 18,000 immigrants and concluded that “the head forms of children born in the United States differed significantly from those of their parents” (Stocking, 1964, p. 84). Boas’s findings about head forms challenged the established beliefs of the day, which held that head forms were not susceptible to environmental influences. Although Boas challenged the dominant paradigms about inferior and superior races, he accepted some of the important assumptions and findings of craniometry (Boas, 1928/1962).

Although he accepted many of the prevailing research methodologies, assumptions, and findings of his time, Boas (1928/1962) challenged the existing paradigms about race by reinterpreting these findings as well as by deriving new findings. Among Boas’s most significant contributions to the reconstruction of race were his reinterpretations of the meanings of the craniological findings about race. Boas strongly contested the notion that there were pure racial types, that the form and size of the body were entirely shaped by heredity, and that superior intelligence is always related to brain size. He also introduced into his writings the important principle that the differences within a population are likely to exceed those between different population groups.

In an article published in *Crisis* in 1910, the official jour-

nal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People edited by W. E. B. DuBois, Boas described the complex and highly developed cultures and civilizations of Africa to refute claims of Negro inferiority; argued that the mulatto population among Negroes was quite extensive; and refuted claims that mulattos were inferior to either pure race. Accepting the conventions of his day, Boas referred to the problems facing African Americans as “the Negro problem.”

Challenges to Racial Theories from the Mainstream

As Boas and his Columbia University students and colleagues in anthropology were working to reinvent notions about race, Robert E. Park and his colleagues and students at the University of Chicago sociology department were

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conducting empirical studies about racial groups and revising ideas about race (Bulmer, 1984). The racial theories developed at Chicago by Park and his associates and students were more liberal than those within the mainstream and popular culture but did not challenge mainstream theories as much as the paradigms developed by Boas and African American scholars. Part of the explanation for these differences may result from the fact that the Chicago theories were grounded in mainstream Midwest society, whereas those developed by Boas and African American scholars emerged from the margins or “outside” of mainstream society. After 1918, Park became the dominant figure in sociology at Chicago. Before he came to Chicago Park had worked as a city journalist and had served as a secretary for Booker T. Washington. He brought his keen interest in cities, urban problems, and African Americans to Chicago.

Park set forth his views on race in the influential *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (with Ernest Burgess, 1921/1937), a required textbook used at Chicago from 1921 (when it was first published) until at least the early 1950s. In the text treatment, which is reprinted from an article that Park published in 1918, Park states that different racial groups have distinctive characteristics that are inherited biologically. He believed that racial characteristics were a product of both biological inheritance and environment. However, Park maintained that inherent biological characteristics were an important cause of racial differences. He wrote:

The temperament of the Negro, as I conceive it, consists in a few elementary but distinctive characteristics, determined by physical organizations and transmitted biologically. These characteristics manifest themselves in a genial, sunny, and social disposition, in an interest and attachment to external, physical things rather than to subjective states and objects of introspection, in a disposition for expression rather than enterprise and action. (p. 139)

Park also stated that the Negro was interested in expression rather than action, and that he was

neither an intellectual nor an 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. *He is, so to speak, the lady among the races.* [second italics added] (p. 139)

African Americans and the Construction of Knowledge About Race

Most scholars and activists of color argued that human racial groups were innately equal, and that environmental conditions were the cause of any significant differences that were observed in their behavioral, psychological, and cultural characteristics (DuBois, 1921/1975; Miller, 1908; Woodson, 1933). Scholars and activists of color endorsed enlightenment views, which held that all human beings had equal innate potential.

Black nationalists leaders such as Marcus Garvey went further than proclaiming the equality of the races and argued that African Americans should “glorify in their distinctive color, their proud past, and their bright future” (Cronin, 1982, p. 255). Garvey blended racial pride and Black nationalism to create a cogent ideology and social movement that strongly appealed to the African American masses. Thousands of them joined his movement (Cronin, 1955/1969). He was one of the significant progenitors of today’s Afrocentric movement.

African American scholars constructed ideas about race and images of their own groups not only to counteract those invented by others, but also because they believed that accurate information about race and ethnic groups would be antidotes to racist ideologies and misconceptions (Franklin, 1989). They did not challenge “race” as a construction, only particular conceptions of race (C. A. Cortés, personal communication, March 12, 1994). African American “race men” such as Kelly Miller, W. E. B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson (Goggin, 1993), and Charles H. Wesley believed that accurate information about race and people of color would help to undercut pernicious misconceptions about race and thus help to reduce racism and discrimination (Meier & Rudwick, 1986). It was because of their faith in the power of objective knowledge [which was also shared by anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict] that they devoted so much of their time and energy to constructing new paradigms and data about race and culture.

One important institution within the Black community that codified and reflected its dominant racial attitudes, concepts, and paradigms was the American Negro Academy, founded in 1896 “to aid, by publications, *the vindication of the race from vicious assaults*, in all lines of learning and truth” [italics added] (Moss, 1981, p. 24). The academy

was founded at a time when nativism, racism, and anti-Black feelings were rampant and extreme throughout the nation. More than 2,500 people were lynched in the United States between 1884 and 1900, most of whom were African Americans (Franklin, 1967). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision was handed down by the Supreme Court in 1896. It legalized apartheid throughout the South. Historian Rayford Logan called this period in African American history the “nadir,” the lowest point (Janken, 1993).

African American Race Reconstructionists

African American scholars and leaders continued to “vindicate the race from vicious assaults” (Moss, 1981, p. 24), to reconstruct conceptions of race, and to construct oppositional representations throughout the late 19th century and the early and middle decades of the 20th century. They rejected the concept of race that had been constructed by writers such as Grant and Ripley and reinvented conceptions of race in a way that emphasized the extent to which racial characteristics were malleable and subject to environmental influences. They also interrogated and demystified the ideas about the superiority of the Aryans race that were widespread during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Gould, 1981; Horsman, 1981). Another strategy of the African American vindicationists was to document the high level of civilizations in ancient Africa, including Egypt, and to describe the extent to which African civilizations had influenced those of Europe (DuBois, 1915/1975).

The members of the American Negro Academy

considered themselves to be the inheritors of the “vindicationist” tradition, within which most educated black men and women had spoken and written during the previous two centuries against apologists for slavery who attempted to justify the “peculiar institution” with the argument that Negroes were an inferior animal-like breed of mankind unfit to be treated as equals by other people (Drake, 1987, p. xvii).

Educated African Americans in the late 19th century, like many during the 1960s and 1970s (Ladner, 1973), considered the vindication of the race against “vicious assaults” an obligation that resulted from their fortunate status. Obtaining an education was not just an individual attainment but also involved help from family and community. Education was a group achievement that incurred a group obligation. Consequently, an educated person had an obligation not just to herself or himself but to the community and the race. The purpose of knowledge was not just to build theory; knowledge should be used to improve the race and to make society more just.

The lives of many African American scholar-activists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries exemplified a commitment to create knowledge to vindicate the race, to create more positive and realistic representations of the race, and to use knowledge to improve society. They failed, however, to challenge the idea of race itself.

Kelly Miller. One of the most prolific African American authors during the early 20th century was Kelly Miller (Logan & Winston, 1982). Miller, who was born in 1863, was a mathematician who became interested in sociology because of its potential for contributing to the understanding of the race problem in the United States. Two collections of Miller’s essays on the race question are *Race*

Adjustment: Essays on the Negro in America (1908) and *Out of the House of Bondage* (1914). A major intent of Miller's essays was to refute the claim by William Z. Ripley (1899) and the writers he influenced that some races were innately inferior to others. Miller argued that the more advanced situation of the White race was due to environment and that when other races, such as Negroes, were given opportunities similar to those of Whites, they would experience an equal level of development. Miller (1914) stated that the positions of races historically have varied with conditions. Miller (1908) also urged social action that would substantially improve the condition of the Negro. He believed that racial self-respect impelled the Negro into some form of protest.

W. E. B. DuBois. In a prodigious, scholarly activist career that lasted from the late 19th century until the March on Washington in 1963, W. E. B. DuBois authored hundreds of publications that contributed greatly to a reconstruction of ideas about race and to the creation of oppositional and more realistic representations of African Americans. His empirical studies and other scholarly publications were transformative. They challenged dominant, institutionalized, and hegemonic perspectives and concepts about African Americans, other groups of color, and women.

DuBois rejected the notion that the Aryan race was superior to others and that there were higher and lower races. He believed that because the darker races of humankind were the majority in the world, the world's future was tied to their destiny. DuBois seriously challenged the institutionalized conceptions of race that canonized negative characteristics of African Americans by producing seminal empirical studies that provided new evidence to which he gave novel interpretations.

Near the turn of the century, the problems within African American urban communities—such as crime and poverty—were often used as evidence to support the assertion that they were an inferior race. DuBois, as well as historians and social scientists such as Kelly Miller, Carter G. Woodson, Horace Mann Bond (Urban, 1992), and E. Franklin Frazier (Platt, 1991), produced empirical studies that documented the extent to which social conditions, such as racism and discrimination, contributed to the wretched conditions of most African Americans who lived in the nation's cities. The section on "Color Prejudice" in DuBois's seminal study *The Philadelphia Negro* (DuBois, 1899/1975), vividly describes the depth and extent of the racism and discrimination that African Americans experienced in Philadelphia in 1896 and 1897. By quoting some of the hundreds of Black Philadelphians he interviewed, DuBois documents discrimination, with anguished voices, in housing, jobs, and public accommodations. African American social scientists such as DuBois, Bond, and Frazier tried to reconstruct race by using empirical evidence to undercut some of its basic assumptions and tenets. *The Philadelphia Negro* exemplifies this transformative research genre at its best.

The World War II Period, the Rise of Nazism, and the Reconstruction of Race

Ideas about inferior and superior races were still institutionalized and widespread throughout the Western world when Hitler began his triumphant and destructive march through Europe. However, social scientists, alarmed by the

pernicious influence of Nazism, acted to construct and popularize ideas about race that were consistent with a democratic society. The racial paradigms within mainstream social science were becoming increasingly more liberal and democratic.

As the Nazis spread their pernicious ideas throughout Germany and the rest of the Western world during the 1930s and 1940s, Franz Boas—as well as other influential social scientists—felt compelled to try to halt the influence of Nazism (Caffrey, 1989). His actions to fight anti-Semitism included becoming a founding member of the Lessing League (a New York organization that fought anti-Semitism), and working to facilitate the issuing of popular and widely read publications that would undercut and expose the pseudo-scientific theory on which Nazism was based.

During his 5 decades at Columbia University Boas was able to help establish anthropology as a respected academic discipline, to make the department at Columbia the ranking one in the United States, and to train the nation's most distinguished anthropologists. Ruth Benedict, one of Boas's star students of *Patterns of Culture* fame (1934/1959), was persuaded by her publisher and Boas to write a popular book and to participate in other ways to undercut Nazism and racism by popularizing and widely disseminating accurate information about race. In 1940 she published *Race: Science and Politics* (1940/1943), a book designed for the educated public that attempted to undercut pervasive myths about race by explaining how scientific findings refuted them. Benedict also joined the Commission on Intercultural Education in 1936, a commission of the Progressive Education Association.

One of the most influential studies of this period was *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, written by the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal (1944), with the assistance of Richard Sterner and Arnold Rose, two American social scientists. This important study, which drew heavily upon the work of many African American social scientists such as Ralph Bunche and E. Franklin Frazier (and involved the participation of some of them) conceptualized the race problem in the United States as a moral dilemma. This dilemma resulted from the fact that most White Americans had internalized American democratic ideals (i.e., the American Creed), and yet violated these ideals in their daily life by practicing racism and discrimination. Myrdal was optimistic because he believed that in their attempt to resolve their dilemma, White Americans would try to actualize human and civil rights. Myrdal (1944) makes a strong argument, and presents supporting evidence, to support his argument for the equal potential of the races and the power of environmental influences.

Knowledge About Race Is Reconstructed in Mainstream Social Science Discourse

By the late 19th century, rigid and racist ideas about the inherited characteristics of different racial groups were codified in established social science in the United States. Not only were groups of color such as American Indians and African Americans regarded as inherently inferior, the various White ethnic groups were perceived as different races, some inferior to others. Although many American leaders had inculcated Enlightenment ideas about the equality of humans during the Revolutionary period, these ideas

faded as slavery became institutionalized and an ideology was needed to justify the enslavement of Africans in the United States.

Near the turn of the century, most academics legitimized and justified the dominant ideas and conceptions of race that were institutionalized in the colleges and universities and in the public imagination. Influential academics who legitimated racist ideas included the historian Ulrich B. Phillips (1918/1966), and sociologists George Fitzhugh (1854/1965) and Howard W. Odum (1910). Most academics reinforced dominant ideas about race during this period because they were socialized within institutions that benefited from the institutionalized conceptions. At the turn of the century, African Americans were only a few decades out of slavery. Consequently, they did, in fact, have low levels of education, high levels of poverty, and other characteristics that indicated low social, economic, and political status. The ways in which scholars interpreted these objective facts were influenced by their own positions within the social, economic, and political order. The ideas about race constructed by scholars were influenced by both the objective conditions they observed as well as by their own personal and cultural perspectives and experiences.

The mainstream academics who challenged the institutionalized ideas about race in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were lonely voices in the crowd. Franz Boas's experiences with anti-Semitism, his work with Eskimos, and his functioning in the liberal Jewish intellectual community in New York City may partially explain why he stood out from the crowd and seriously challenged the institutionalized conceptions of race when he arrived in the United States in 1884.

It is significant that Boas's ideas about race were in many ways more enlightened and consistent with today's theories than were those of Robert E. Park. Park's experiences among African Americans probably enabled him to have more enlightened views about race than many of his White colleagues. However, his upper-middle-class White background and socialization in the U.S. Midwest may explain in part why he was less able than Boas to transcend the predominant racial ideas and assumptions of his time.

Differences Between White and African American Race Constructors

The ideas of early African American scholars and social scientists differed significantly from those of Boas and Park, their contemporaries. These scholars completely rejected the notion of inherent racial differences and argued that the races were inherently equal and that environmental factors prevented people of color from being equal to Whites. The ideas and concepts about race that were constructed by African American scholars such as DuBois, Miller, and Woodson are highly consistent with today's social science race theories. African American social scientists were able to transcend the dominant ideologies and concepts about race institutionalized during their time.

Code's (1991) ideas about the interaction of the objective and the subjective in the formation of knowledge help to explain why African American social scientists, unlike Boas and Park, were able to completely transcend the dominant ideas about race during their time. The personal, family, and community experiences of these individuals

within the Black world enabled them to see the possibilities for African Americans. They also believed that they were equal in ability to Whites and could, by extension, envision the intellectual and social potential of other African Americans. Because African American scholars were victimized by institutionalized racism and discrimination, they constructed ideas about race that would help to liberate themselves, as well as their communities, from institutionalized discrimination and oppression.

The Genetic Explanation of Racial Differences Loses Ground

The work by scholars such as Boas, DuBois, Woodson, and Miller had some significant effects on changing the ways in which the academic world defined and conceptualized race. When Nazism reached its height in the 1930s and 1940s, important changes had taken place in the academic, if not in the public, conception of race. Mainstream scholars writing in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Ruth Benedict and Gunnar Myrdal, exemplified the emerging conception of race that was becoming institutionalized within academic discourse. Certainly there was much racist and anti-egalitarian academic writing during this period, such as the work on the nature of Black-White intelligence (Shuey, 1958). A number of psychologists during the 1930s and 1940s argued that intelligence tests indicated that Blacks were intellectually inferior to Whites.

Nevertheless, the dominant trend in the race literature among academics during the intergroup education period of the 1940s and 1950s and in subsequent years was toward the equality of the races. Although Darwinism and biological explanations of behavior became less legitimate and respected in academic discourse after the 1940s and 1950s, they remained a muted but tenacious paradigm within the academic community (Degler, 1991). The historic genetic paradigm was consequently an important foundation for genetic explanations that were exhumed in the 1960s, 1970s, and in 1994 (Shuey, 1958; Shockley, 1972; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994).

The Bell Curve Legitimizes the Genetic Explanation of Cognitive Ability

The recent publication and public reception of *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) marks the renewed legitimacy and popularity of the genetic explanation of intelligence and for the argument that African Americans are genetically inferior to Whites. This book was on the *New York Times'* best-seller list for a number of weeks and received major attention in the popular press. It was the subject of an entire issue of *The New Republic* (October 31, 1994) and of major stories in *The New York Times Book Review* (Browne, 1994), *The New York Times Magazine* (DeParle, 1994), *The New York Review of Books* (Lane, 1994), *The New Yorker* (Gould, 1994), *The Nation* (Reed, 1994), as well as in many other mass circulation publications.

The Bell Curve is the most recent of a long list of publications that have historically defended and constructed the genetic paradigm and argued that some racial groups are genetically inferior to others. However, what distinguishes *The Bell Curve* from most earlier publications (e.g., Jensen, 1969) is the authors' argument that low-income people, including poor Whites, have less cognitive ability than the middle and upper classes. The Herrnstein and Murray hy-

pothesis was first presented by Herrnstein in an article and a book published in 1971 (Herrnstein, 1971a; 1971b). Their theory is unique because it is one of the first theories about race since the turn of the century that makes a genetic distinction among groups of Whites. Ripley (1899) and Grant (1916) made distinctions among Whites based on ethnicity; the Herrnstein and Murray distinction is based on social class. In their theory, low-income Whites and African Americans share inferior genetic characteristics.

The major argument of *The Bell Curve* is consistent with the current social and political context. The book was published at a time when the nation is seriously rethinking its commitment to low-income groups and when the gap between the rich and the poor is growing sharply. A basic thesis of *The Bell Curve* is that people are poor because of their genetic characteristics, not because of the lack of social and economic opportunities in U.S. society. The top 20% of households in the United States received 11 times more income than the bottom 20% in 1992 ("Inequality," 1994). Poverty in the United States is also widespread and increasing. In 1991, approximately 24 million Whites, 10 million African Americans, and over 6 million Hispanics were living below the poverty level (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993, p. 475). Like the race theories that were constructed near the turn of the century, *The Bell Curve* reinforces some of the major societal sentiments of the times, such as the calls for the closing of the nation's borders to foreigners, and the radical reform of welfare and other programs targeted for low-income population groups. Writes Stephen Jay Gould:

When a book garners as much attention as *The Bell Curve*, we wish to know the causes. One might suspect the content itself—a startlingly new idea, or an old suspicion newly verified by persuasive data—but the reason might also be social acceptability, or even just plain hype. *The Bell Curve*, with its claims and supposed documentation that race and class differences are largely caused by genetic factors and are therefore essentially immutable, contains no new arguments and presents no compelling data to support its anachronistic social Darwinism, so I can only conclude that its success in winning attention must reflect the depressing temper of our time—a historical moment of unprecedented ungenerosity, when a mood for slashing social programs can be powerfully abetted by an argument that beneficiaries cannot be helped, owing to inborn cognitive limits expressed as low I.Q. scores. (1994, p. 139)

Transformative Teaching

Race is a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups, to create ideas about the "Other," to formulate their identities, and to defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities within society. These ideas about race, which are discussed in the previous parts of this article, can be used to integrate the school, college, and university curricula with multicultural content and to teach students the ways in which knowledge is invented and reinvented through time. They can also be used to help transform the curriculum in United States history courses and units.

In the previous sections of this article, I focus on African Americans as a case study to illustrate how knowledge about race has been constructed and reconstructed through time. The concepts, ideologies, arguments, and methods

used to construct racial concepts about African Americans were in most ways identical to those used to construct racial concepts and ideologies about American Indians, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and other groups of color. It is important for teachers to help students recognize the connections among the ways in which racial knowledge, concepts, and ideologies were constructed about the various groups of color. To emphasize the importance of these interconnections, the teaching examples below focus on American Indians.

Racializing the other. Transformation is the process of changing the "nature, function, or condition" of a phenomenon (Morris, 1971, p. 1,363). When teaching is transformed, the content of the curriculum, pedagogy, and the ways in which students learn are substantially modified. Research on classrooms and curriculum indicate that teaching at the upper and high school grades in most academic subjects is characterized largely by teacher talk, the mastery of low-level facts by students, and passive student learning (Goodlad, 1984; Shaver, Davis, & Helburn, 1979).

Transformative teaching and learning is characterized by a curriculum organized around powerful ideas, highly interactive teaching strategies, active student involvement, and activities that require students to participate in personal, social, and civic action to make their classrooms, schools, and communities more democratic and just. In their book *The Feminist Classroom*, Maher and Tetreault (1994) describe how college professors at six colleges and universities transformed their classrooms by integrating their curricula with multicultural content and engaging students in the process of knowledge construction.

One of the first steps in the construction of racial categories is the delineation of out-groups as the "Other." As Morrison (1992) and Todorov (1982) have pointed out, the Other often becomes essential for the in-group to create its own identity. Morrison describes how the presence of African Americans was necessary for Whiteness to be defined. She writes:

It is no accident and no mistake that immigrant populations. . . understood their "Americanness" as an opposition to the resident black population. Race, in fact, now functions as a metaphor so necessary to the construction of Americanness that it rivals the old pseudo-scientific and class-informed racisms whose dynamics we are more used to deciphering. . . Deep within the word "American" is its association with race. (p. 47)

Writes Todorov, "It is in fact the conquest of America that heralds and establishes our present identity" (p. 5).

Constructing racial categories and stigmatizing out-groups have not only served as a source of self-identification for powerful and mainstream groups but may have also contributed to the development of some of their important ideas about freedom and democracy. In his study of the development of freedom in Western societies, Patterson (1991) concludes that slavery gave birth not only to group definition and group solidarity to the enslaving groups but also to freedom. In other words, freedom developed as an antidote to slavery.

Students can examine the ways in which ideas about the Other and racial categories were constructed when studying key events in the development of American history. A careful reading of Columbus's description of the Taino In-

dians when he arrived in the Caribbean will reveal how on his initial encounter with the Tainos Columbus began to conceptualize them as the Other, thus forming the basis for Indians to be perceived as a different and inferior race from Western Europeans. Columbus wrote about the Tainos in his diary (Jane, 1960):

It seemed to me that they were a people very deficient in everything. They all go naked as their mothers bore them, and the women also. . . . They should be good servants and of quick intelligence, since I see that they very soon say all that is said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, for it appeared to me that they had no creed. Our Lord willing, at the time of my departure I will bring back six of them to Your Highness, that they may learn to talk. (pp. 23–24)

When discussing this and other excerpts from Columbus's diary, students can examine how Columbus per-

An examination of the historical development of race can help students understand how the subjective characteristics of the knower, as well as the objective reality, influence the knowledge the knower constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs.

ceived the Tainos, why and how he used European ideas and concepts to determine whether they could become good servants, why they could not "talk," and the meaning of his taking six of them back to Europe. Writes Todorov (1982):

Physically naked, the Indians are also, to Columbus's eyes, deprived of all cultural property: they are characterized, in a sense, by the absence of customs, rites, religion. (p. 35)

In general, this project [Columbus' project] of assimilation is identified with the desire to convert the Indians, to propagate the Gospel. We know that this intention is fundamental to Columbus's initial project. (p. 43)

Students can also examine the ways in which ideas and concepts about Indians have both changed and remained constant through time. The ideas that Columbus constructed about the Tainos can be compared and contrasted with those that Cortes and the Spanish conquistadors invented about the Aztecs. The Aztecs were defined by Cortes and his men as the Other in part because they engaged in human sacrifice in religious ceremonies, spoke a

different language (Nahuatl), and had non-European gods. The conquistadors' project was to destroy the Aztec culture through either extermination or assimilation. The racial ideas the Spaniards invented about the Aztecs codified the major goals of their project in the Americas, which was to conquer the land and to Christianize the natives.

A study of the Westward movement in U.S. history will provide students with rich opportunities to continue their examination of the changing conceptions of racial ideas about Native Americans. In the seminal paper he presented at the meeting of the American Historical Association in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner stated ideas about the Indians that deeply penetrated American popular and scholarly culture (Turner, 1989). Turner described the Western frontier as "the meeting between savagery and civilization" (p. 3). He described the Indians' homelands as the "western wilderness" (p. 5) and described how the European "settlers" brought civilization to the savage west:

The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read from west to east we find the record of social evolution. It begins with the Indian and the hunter; it goes on to tell the disintegration of savagery by the entrance of the trader, the path-finder of civilization. (pp. 6–7)

In Turner's racial schema, the Indians are the Other: savages who live in an empty wilderness. The European settlers will bring civilization to the savage West and in the process create a unique form of American democracy. Contemporary films such as *Little Big Man* and *Dances With Wolves* can be used to extend students' study of continuity and change in the racial image of American Indians. Most of the contemporary films about American Indians, which reflect in many ways how the racial image of the Indian has become more liberalized since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, maintain some of the older conceptions of Indians as people who live in the wilderness. Most films about Indians are set in a restricted time period in the past (Churchill, 1992). Few deal with Indians in contemporary American society; most films depict Native Americans as Plains Indians in the West for a period that does not exceed 50 years.

The Changing Conceptions of Race. One of the most important teaching implications of this examination of the changing conceptions of race is that students need to understand the extent to which knowledge about race, and even the very idea of race (as well as about other social phenomena) is a social construction that reflects both the objective reality as well as the subjectivity of the knower. Students should examine the ways in which the construction of race reflects the social context, the historical times, and the economic structure of society. *Students should also understand that the concept of race is still in the process of change and reconstruction.* I have illustrated how these understandings can be taught by having students examine the changing racial image of the American Indian in U.S. society.

A study of race, as well as other social science concepts, can help students to understand how the social context in which the knower is embedded influences the knowledge that she or he produces. The European experience and socialization of Columbus and Cortes strongly influenced

how they viewed and conceptualized the Indians as the Other without culture or religion.

The Western empirical tradition has dichotomized the personal characteristics of the knower from the objective reality. An examination of the historical development of race can help students understand how the subjective characteristics of the knower, as well as the objective reality, influence the knowledge the knower constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs. Students can examine how this process has worked in the construction of knowledge about race, as well as examine how their own personal and family experiences influence their conceptions of ideas such as race, affirmative action, and equal rights. They can carefully examine how they construct and reconstruct ideas, concepts, and interpretations.

Students who have a keen understanding of how knowledge is constructed, how it reflects both subjectivity and objectivity, and how it relates to power, will have important skills needed to participate in the construction of knowledge that will help the nation to actualize its democratic ideals (Banks & Banks, 1995). Students with these skills will also be able to interrogate the assumptions of knowers, and consequently will be less likely to be victimized by knowledge that protects hegemony and inequality. Students must not only be able to interrogate and reconstruct knowledge, but must also be able to produce knowledge themselves if they are to be effective citizens in the multicultural world of the 21st century.

Note

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 4–9, 1994. I gratefully acknowledge comments by these colleagues on earlier drafts of this paper that enabled me to strengthen it: Cherry A. McGee Banks, Carlos E. Cortés, Robert E. Floden, Joyce E. King, Christine E. Sleeter, and four anonymous reviewers.

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Received May 19, 1994
 Revision received October 14, 1994
 Accepted December 27, 1994

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