



“In Ways Unacademical”: The Reception of Carleton S. Coon’s *The Origin of Races*

JOHN P. JACKSON JR.
Department of Communication
Campus Box 270
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80309-0270, USA
E-mail: John.P.Jackson@colorado.edu

Abstract. This paper examines the controversy surrounding anthropologist Carleton S. Coon’s 1962 book, *The Origin of Races*. Coon maintained that the human species was divided into five races before it had evolved into *Homo sapiens* and that the races evolved into *sapiens* at different times. Coon’s thesis was used by segregationists in the United States as proof that African Americans were “junior” to white Americans and hence unfit for full participation in American society. The paper examines the interactions among Coon, segregationist Carleton Putnam, geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, and anthropologist Sherwood Washburn. The paper concludes that Coon actively aided the segregationist cause in violation of his own standards for scientific objectivity.

Keywords: Carleton S. Coon, human evolution, human genetics, physical anthropology, Sherwood Washburn, science and politics, Theodosius Dobzhansky

Geneticist Dobzhansky’s shot
His bolt and really gone to pot.
Things which now pass above his pate
Cause him to fume and fulminate
In ways unacademical
And anything but oecumenical.
Querulous cracks with venom spattered
Tell of an ethos sadly shattered.
Carleton S. Coon, ca. 1963¹

The historical episode that forms the core of this essay is familiar to most historians of anthropology and human genetics. In 1962, University of Pennsylvania anthropologist Carleton S. Coon published *The Origin of Races* in which he argued that *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus* not once but five separate times. He wrote, “My thesis is, in essence, that at

¹ Box 71, Folder “Letters, 1962–1966” Carleton S. Coon Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. (Hereafter Coon Papers).

the beginning of our record, over half a million years ago, man was a single species, *Homo Erectus*, perhaps already divided into five geographic races or subspecies. *Homo Erectus* then evolved into *Homo Sapiens* not once but five times, as each subspecies, living in its own territory, passed a critical threshold from a more brutal to a more *sapient* state.”²

Coon maintained that these five evolutionary jumps corresponded with what he saw as modern racial divisions among humans, with the Caucasoid race evolving 200,000 years before the Congoid. Because Coon’s book offered a new and imaginative way to view human evolution its conclusions were widely debated in the scientific community.³

Historians have offered two different ways to view the reception of Coon’s book. First, it is often viewed as scientific turf battle of sorts with Coon defending an older, typological approach to physical anthropology against both cultural anthropology (which argued that race was not a “real” scientific category) and the “new physical anthropology” (which relied more on genetics than a typology of morphological characteristics to determine race). This take on the controversy surrounding *The Origin of Races* begins with the long-standing animosity between the anthropology departments of Harvard and Columbia. Coon was trained as a physical anthropologist at Harvard under Earnest A. Hooton in the 1920s. Harvard was the “intellectual antithesis to the Columbia school [led by Franz Boas], focusing on the definition and study of race instead of its demise.”⁴ Throughout Coon’s life, much of his work focused on identifying morphological characteristics as a means to classify humans, both living and dead, into clearly identifiable races. By contrast, the cultural anthropologists trained by Franz Boas at Columbia throughout the 1920s argued that race was too vague to be scientifically useful and anthropologists should scrap the concept as worthless and politically dangerous. Boas and his followers redirected anthropology away from the study of race and focus instead on culture; a concept they maintained was completely separate from race.

On the second front of the scientific battle, Coon’s attempt to classify humans into races according to their morphological characteristics was also questioned by the rise of the “new physical anthropology” which drew from the synthesis of genetics and evolutionary theory and treated races as “populations groups” that could only be identified through the genotype rather than phenotype. Seen in this light, the reception afforded *The Origin of Races* is

² Coon, *Origin of the Races*, 1963, p. 657.

³ Coon invented his own terminology for racial divisions that were taken from the geographic homes for the races. As we will see, in the subsequent debates “Caucasoid” came to be treated as the “white” race and “Congoid” as the “black” race.

⁴ Wolpoff and Caspari, 1997, p. 140.

viewed as the last gasp of an outdated scientific methodology that was soon to be supplanted.⁵

The second view found in historical treatments of this episode revolves around the misuse of *The Origin of Races* as a weapon for racial politics. Released at the height of the civil rights movement for equal rights for African Americans, segregationists immediately seized on Coon’s “proof” that African Americans were 200,000 years “less evolved” than whites to argue for continuing racial segregation in the American South. Many reviews of Coon’s book tied it to the racial politics of the day: southern newspapers often claiming the book offered support for continued racial segregation while northern reviewers attempted to distance Coon’s work from political issues. Coon never took a public stand either for or against the uses of his book. Claiming to be interested in scientific questions alone, he claimed it was his duty to explore the truth as he saw it, not to get embroiled in political questions. Viewed this way, the history of *The Origin of Races* is seen as a debate over the social consequences of scientific works and the social responsibility of scientists. The two most comprehensive historical treatments of the reception of *The Origin of Races* give us a split verdict on Coon. Journalist Pat Shipman argues that Coon was powerless to stop segregationists from abusing his work and Coon’s critics, notably anthropologists Ashley Montagu and Sherwood Washburn and geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, were guilty of unjustified “guilt-by-association” attacks on his character. “Instead of retiring with honor, as a grand old man of anthropology,” Shipman writes, “Coon went off, head high and back stiff, but disgraced in most of his colleague’s eyes.” By contrast anthropologists Milford Wolpoff and Rachel Caspari find Coon naive in thinking that he had no responsibility for his notions about race. They charge that Coon the world traveler was also Coon the upper class, New Englander who had no real idea that the “natives”, that he claimed to understand so well, were also people. Coon’s work was racist, they write, because of his “clear insensitivity to social issues, born of his

⁵ On the centrality of race in physical anthropology at Harvard see Blakey, 1987; Brace, 1982. On Boasian cultural anthropologists’ attempts to supplant the concept of race see Baker, 1998, pp. 168–187; Gilkeson, 1991; Lieberman, 1997; Smedley, 1999, pp. 292–338; Stocking, 1968, pp. 161–233; Williams, 1996. On the tension between Harvard and Columbia during the 1920s see Barkan, 1992, pp. 66–119; Silverman, 2000. On the rise of the new physical anthropology see Garn, 1962; Haraway, 1989, pp. 186–230; Shipman, 1994, pp. 173–191. On geneticists’ views on race see Provine, 1973; Provine, 1986.

For Coon’s place in anthropology generally, and physical anthropology in particular see Giles, 1999; Howells, 1989; Hunt, 1982; Schmidt, 1985. For good accounts of *The Origin of Races* see Marks, 2000; Goodman and Hammonds, 2000.

Coon developed his racial ideas in six books: Coon, 1939, 1954, 1962, 1965, 1982; Coon, Garn, and Birdsell, 1950

attitude toward anthropology that was engendered by his social class and training.”⁶

I will argue in this essay that our current understanding of this historical episode is truncated because it persists in treating the two stories as separate. There is, in fact, only one story to be told. The scientific turf war had been transformed into a battle about the public authority of anthropology long before the release of *The Origin of Races*. This political battle was begun by segregationists who had directly challenged anthropologists as to the basis of their scientific conclusions and the nature of their “control” over the scientific study of race. When Coon’s book arrived in October of 1962 anthropologists were already undergoing an intense self-examination about the nature of their discipline in relation to society. The response to Coon’s book must be understood within the contours of this larger debate about the social responsibility of scientists in American society.

I have several goals in this essay. First, I hope to outline the specific nature of the segregationist critique of cultural anthropology that was made in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In particular, I am interested in the activities of businessman-turned-segregationist-pamphleteer Carleton Putnam, perhaps the most outspoken segregationist who criticized cultural anthropology. My second aim is to trace Putnam’s relationship with Carleton Coon; a relationship I will argue is much closer than previously thought. Third, I will locate much of the criticism of *The Origin of Races* within the larger defense of the anthropological discipline against segregationist attacks. In particular I will show that criticisms of Coon offered by physical anthropologist Sherwood Washburn and geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky and, to a lesser extent, Ashley Montagu were seen as a way to defend anthropology against what was seen as a very real segregationist threat to the discipline.

Carleton Coon had spent much of his professional career fighting what he viewed as a battle with Boasian cultural anthropology over the entire concept of race. By the time *The Origin of Races* was released, Coon’s battle had become a public battle concerning the authority of science to make pronouncements regarding race and civil rights. The man who was responsible for this public battle over anthropology was segregationist writer, Carleton Putnam.

Carleton Putnam and the “Equalitarian Dogma”

The scion of an established New England family (and a cousin to Carleton Coon), Carleton Putnam was educated at Princeton and Columbia Law

⁶ Shipman, 1994, p. 211; Wolpoff and Caspari, 1997, p. 171.

School in the 1920s. In 1933, Putnam established his own airline, building it into a successful business. After World War II, Putnam merged his airline with others forming Delta Airlines. Having made his fortune, Putnam stayed on the board of Delta but increasingly turned the reins over to others and began a second career as a biographer of Theodore Roosevelt. The first of a projected four volume Roosevelt biography appeared in 1958 to positive reviews.⁷

The first volume of the biography would prove to be the last as Putnam abandoned the project to take on what he saw as a much more important one: the protection of white civilization. In September 1957, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus ordered the National Guard to prevent the integration of Central High School in Little Rock. The escalating racial crisis in Little Rock, culminating in President Eisenhower ordering the 101st Airborne Division into Little Rock to enforce the Federal Court order for integration, captured the nation's attention. The white South was enraged at the sight of Federal bayonets enforcing what they viewed as the "Second Reconstruction."

In the wake of the events following Little Rock, Putnam penned an "Open Letter to President Eisenhower" making the case for continued school segregation in the South. Putnam sent the letter to several southern newspapers who published it enthusiastically, typically with an introduction like that of the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* which editorialized that, "Unlike many of his fellow-citizens in the North, [Putnam] understands and appreciates the problems with which the South has been confronted, was a result of the staggering series of Supreme Court edicts."⁸

Putnam's letter echoed themes that had long been prevalent in the South. "Social status has to be earned," wrote Putnam, and the "Negro" simply lacked what was required to earn the white man's status, "Any man with two eyes in his head," Putnam wrote, "can observe a Negro settlement in the Congo, can study the pure-blooded African in his native habitat as he exists when left on his own resources, can compare this settlement with London or Paris, and can draw his own conclusions regarding relative levels of character and intelligence – or that combination of character and intelligence which is civilization."⁹

Putnam's letter was a great success in the South and soon a "Putnam Letters Committee" was formed to collect donations to sponsor reprinting

⁷ Biographical details of Carleton Putnam can be found in "Carleton Putnam Dies at 96; Led Delta and Wrote on Race," 16 March 1998, p. 7; "Carleton Putnam," 9 March 1998, p. C6; Newby, 1967, p. 148. On his business career see Lewis and Newton, 1979 and Putnam, 1945. The Roosevelt biography was Putnam, 1958.

⁸ "A Northerner on the Race Issue," 16 October 1958, p. 14.

⁹ "Supreme Court's 'Arrogance' Viewed by Distinguished Northerner" 16 October 1958, p. 14.

the letter in northern newspapers. Putnam's letter eventually appeared as a paid advertisement in several large newspapers such as the *New York Times*. Further contributions led to the creation of a "National Putnam Letters Committee" which printed and distributed Putnam's writings defending segregation.¹⁰

Putnam was convinced that the core problem with desegregation was the racial inferiority of the "Negro." Time and time again, Putnam claimed that the South was wasting its time with the call to defend "state's rights" and should instead focus on the true danger: race mingling. For Putnam, everything else was a side issue to the fundamental danger desegregation posed to continuation of white civilization. Putnam laid out his case clearly in a speech before the Citizens' Council of Jackson Mississippi in 1961 when he told his audience that, "The issue here is *not* equality of opportunity. The issue here is *not* the democratic way of life. The issue here is that school integration is social integration, that social integration always and everywhere, has and does lead to intermarriage in the long run and that intermarriage, under our population ratios in the South, will destroy our society."¹¹

For Putnam, the question became why the simple truth about the racial inferiority of African Americans was so widely denied? The answer seemed to be that modern anthropologists were bent on hiding the truth from the American people.

Putnam took it upon himself to re-educate the American anthropological community about the reality and importance of race. Putnam began a long correspondence with a number of anthropologists arguing with their findings and attempting to discover why they made the absurd claims they did about racial equality. On January 5, 1959, the same day that Putnam's letter to Eisenhower appeared in the *New York Times*, Putnam composed a letter to Harvard anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn. Putnam drilled Kluckhohn with a number of questions about his book, *Mirror for Man*, in which the anthropologist argued against innate racial differences. Putnam argued that Kluckhohn claimed that "culture superseded the concept of race" but, "Nowhere do you deal with what seems to me an obvious fact, namely, that culture is, in the majority of cases, a product of race." Putnam wrote that, "I am left with the conviction that Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, with all the limitations of anthropological technique to which their generation was subject, nevertheless thought more clearly and came closer to the truth than the followers of Boas . . . I begin to suspect that anthropology in the last half-century has been

¹⁰ Putnam's letter appeared as "My Dear Mr. President," 5 January 1959, p. 19.

¹¹ Putnam, March 1963, p. 28. Emphasis in original.

drafted to serve the demi-Goddess of Equalitarianism instead of the Goddess of Truth.”¹²

Putnam was undeterred by the fact that few anthropologists answered his letters. In March 1959, soon after beginning his campaign of re-education for American anthropologists, Putnam took his position public. In a second “Open Letter”, this time to Attorney General William P. Rogers, Putnam claimed that “Two generations of Americans have been victimized by a pseudo-scientific hoax in this field [of anthropology and] that this hoax is part of an equalitarian propaganda typical of the left-wing overdrift of our times.” Like the first, Putnam’s second letter widely reprinted making Putnam into a well-known opponent of integration efforts. 1959 marked the beginning of Putnam’s public criticisms of “equalitarian” anthropologists who he believed were responsible for threats to American civilization. In the coming few years, especially in 1962 when Coon’s *Origin of Races* appeared, many in the scientific community would try to find a proper response to Putnam’s polemic attacks.¹³

Putnam’s use of the curious word, “equalitarianism” is significant, for it was the favored term for those few scientists who shared Putnam’s beliefs in the “Negro’s capacity for civilization.” Psychologist Henry E. Garrett, who had testified for the state of Virginia on behalf of segregation during the *Brown* case, anatomist Wesley Critz George, who had written extensively on behalf of segregation in his native North Carolina, and others formed the International Association for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics (IAAEE) in 1959. In the 1960s, gathered around their semi-official journal, the *Mankind Quarterly*, the IAAEE would soon begin making the scientific case for white supremacy. Carleton Putnam attended the first meeting of the IAAEE and was closely involved with its activities.¹⁴

Coon knew many of the scientists involved with the IAAEE. He and Italian sociologist, Corrado Gini, corresponded regularly about the existence of the Abominable Snowman, in which Coon apparently believed. Coon and Stanley Porteus shared an interest in the use of Porteus Maze test by anthropologists. He and geneticist R. Ruggles Gates corresponded regularly, Gates finding a

¹² Putnam to Kluckhohn, January 5, 1959, Clyde Kluckhohn Papers, HUG 4490.6, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge MA.

¹³ Putnam to Rogers, 16 March 1959, Box 919, Folder “GF 124A, School Decision-Con” Eisenhower Papers, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene KS.

¹⁴ On the formation and activities of the IAAEE see Newby, 1967; Tucker, 1994, pp. 138–179; Winston, 1998. On Putnam’s early participation see “Announcement of the First General Meeting of the International Society for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics”, Herbert Sanborn Papers, Vanderbilt University Archives, Nashville TN. I am grateful to Andrew Winston for making this document available to me.

sympathetic ear for his concerns that, “The ‘all men are equal’ propagandists are at it again.”¹⁵

Coon also knew founding IAAEE member, psychologist Frank C.J. McGurk. In 1956, while on the faculty of Villanova University, McGurk published, “A Scientist’s Report on Race Differences” in the newsmagazine, *U.S. News and World Report*. McGurk had argued that the intellectual differences between whites and blacks were genetic and immune from environmental influence and that these differences made effective school integration impossible. McGurk’s article brought a sharp rejoinder from mainstream social scientists and McGurk interpreted this criticism as persecution for his “heretical” ideas concerning race differences. A few years after the *U.S. News* article, McGurk wrote to IAAEE mainstay, Wesley C. George that, “for the past three years, Villanova has censored me stiffly. I may not write without their specific approval That is what happens when priests do not fall into line.” McGurk would become the favorite example for the IAAEE to use when they pointed to the dangers academicians face when they “tell the truth about race.” Coon was also concerned about “poor Prof. McGurk who lives near me in my winter residence in Devon, PA. He has been persecuted for his [*U.S. News*] article to such an extent that it has affected his health.”¹⁶

Given his well-publicized views on the reality of race and his scientific standing, it was natural that Coon would be courted by the IAAEE. In fact, he was invited to join twice, first in January 1960 when Garrett suggested he be on the executive board and again in October 1962 when the death of R. Ruggles Gates opened a position on the board. Coon declined both times explaining that, although he was “very glad to get your monographs and also your magazine . . . to accept membership on your board would be the kiss of death, here in the so-called land of the free and home of the brave.”¹⁷ Coon was also invited twice to contribute to a volume IAAEE writers were assembling to answer UNESCO’s 1950 *Statement on Race* because “a number

¹⁵ Gates to Coon, 17 March 1962; Box 11, Folder “A–G, 1962”; Gini to Coon 26 December 1959, Box 9, Folder “F–K, 1960”; Porteus to Coon, 29 January 1962, Box 12, Folder “L–Z, 1963”; all letters in Coon Papers.

¹⁶ McGurk to Wesley Critz George, 31 June 1959, Box 7, Folder 44, Wesley Critz George Papers. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC (hereafter George Papers). Coon to Edith Roosevelt, 21 August 1961, Box 11, Folder “N–Z, 1961” Coon Papers. See also McGurk, 21 September 1956, pp. 92–96. Responses included Klineberg et. al., 26 October 1956, pp. 74–76; Montagu, 18 October 1956, pp. 3–4, 6.

¹⁷ Coon to Robert Gayre, 6 November 1962, Box 11, Folder “A–G, 1962.” Coon’s invitations to join the board are Gayre to Coon, 13 January 1960, Box 9, Folder “E–K, 1960” and Gayre to Coon 29 October 1962, Box 11, Folder “A–G, 1962.” All letters in Coon Papers.

of academicians connected with the Association believe that the UNESCO publications present too one-sided a view of the subject.” Coon declined this offer as well, noting that he was under contract with Knopf to produce his new book on race and was reserving time for that project although he believed the list of names assembled for the IAAEE volume was a “most distinguished one.”¹⁸ So, while Coon was sympathetic to the aims of the IAAEE, he was hesitant to become directly involved with the organization. As we will see, he kept to this pattern in the coming few years.

Putnam’s main contribution to the efforts of the IAAEE would be his book *Race and Reason*, where he developed his ideas on white supremacy at some length. However, within significant segments of the anthropological community, *Race and Reason* was well known even earlier than its 1961 publication. In July 1959 Putnam began circulating drafts to “a selected list of those whom I know to be interested in the racial integration of southern schools.” The recipients included a number of anthropologists as well as political leaders. In 34 single-spaced pages, Putnam put forth his proposition that, “There is a strong clique of equalitarian anthropologists under the hypnosis of the Boas school which . . . has captured important chairs in many leading northern and western universities. This clique, aided by equalitarians in government, the press, entertainment, and other fields, has dominated public opinion in these areas and have made it almost impossible for those who disagree with it to hold jobs.”¹⁹

Among the scientists who received this material was Carleton Coon. As he did in all his mailings, Putnam asked for advice on improving his materials as well as “your opinion on the extraordinary situation I find among anthropologists, many of whom seem to be actually intimidated by the equalitarian trend. Yet this matter is no longer an academic argument. It has become a desperate issue of public policy” Coon’s response was to invite Putnam to his home to discuss the matter as well as to see some antiques that had once belonged to their mutual ancestor, Revolutionary War General Israel Putnam.²⁰

Throughout 1960, Coon and Putnam communicated frequently through telephone conversations, visits, and a voluminous correspondence. The men shared a deep suspicion of cultural anthropology, especially of Boas and

¹⁸ Donald Swan to Carleton Coon, 23 April 1960, Box 10, Folder “Si-Z, 1960”; Coon to A. James Gregor, 12 December 1961, Box 10, Folder “G-M, 1961.” Both letters in Coon Papers. The IAAEE volume eventually appeared as Kuttner, 1967.

¹⁹ Putnam to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 29 July 1959, and “Preliminary Draft, Questions from Readers” p. 7, in Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers, Box 99, Folder “GF 124-A-1, School Decision-Con (8),” Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene KS.

²⁰ Putnam to Coon, 10 October 1959; Coon to Putnam, 25 October 1959, both letters in Box 9, Folder “L-R, 1959,” Coon Papers.

his students. Putnam shared with Coon that, "Henry Garrett tells me from his experiences at Columbia when Boas was there is no question he had a Communist cell whether or not he personally was aware of it." Coon doubted that Boas was a Communist but Garrett was probably "right in saying he was just a stooge."²¹

This mutual mistrust of Boasian anthropology translated into a working relationship as Coon helped the segregationist sharpen his arguments against cultural anthropology. This was consistent with Coon's concept of the role of a professor in society. He wrote to Putnam that, "The role of the professor is a responsible one, like that of a minister, doctor, or lawyer. As he is in charge of teaching he should strive for the truth and not engage in movements nor join pressure groups. He is free to publish what he likes as long as he remains non-partisan. Anything that he has published can be quoted by anyone interested. Professors . . . should not be on anyone's side, but should give their advice, if they wish, to both or any number of sides."²² As we will see, Coon's position as he represented it to Putnam is consistent with the stance he took in the controversy surrounding *The Origin of Races* with one important exception: Coon never publicly declared that a professor could "give their advice" to one side of a social dispute. In fact, Coon never admitted his involvement with Putnam; merely claiming that Putnam was as free to quote from Coon's published work as anyone else. What Coon did not admit in subsequent debates about his book was that he had helped Putnam hone his arguments against integration.

Coon and Putnam exchanged ideas throughout 1960 as Putnam prepared his book. To offer two examples: first, Coon warned Putnam away from questionable sources. For example, Putnam's admiration for Madison Grant, Coon warned, was a mistake because of Grant's Nordicism. In his 1939 book, *Races of Europe* Coon used the term "Nordic" as a scientific term but criticized "Nordicism" which he defined as "the misuse of racial terminology for political purposes, based on the unproved assumption that Nordics are superior in mental and moral attributes to members of other races." To Putnam, Coon wrote that "To most minds [Grant] evokes fascism and racism of a Hitlerian variety and to quote him would only reduce the number of persons who would continue reading after seeing him." However, Coon thought that Lothrop Stoddard was "a bird of brighter feather" although "he was later discredited as a racist and died in obscurity," Putnam could "do worse than to mention the success and accuracy of his predictions" in *The Rising Tide of Color*. In the end, however, Coon warned Putnam away from

²¹ Putnam to Coon, 1 August 1960, Coon to Putnam 4 August 1960, both letters in Box 10, Folder "L-SI, 1960", Coon Papers.

²² Coon to Putnam, 10 July 1959, Box 10, Folder "L-SI, 1960", Coon Papers.

these popular writers and instead pointed Putnam to recent works by Garrett Hardin, Georges A Heuse, and J. Millot all of which are “little known in this country and authoritative.” All of this material was included in Putnam’s final product.²³

Second, Coon supplied Putnam with an anonymous source that the scientific community was rejecting its equalitarian ways. However, while Coon was always willing to help Putnam, he was also anxious that Putnam not identify him by name. Putnam noted that he was going to quote from various sources but asked Coon for quotations from his own writings because, “you are in *Who’s Who* and [the readers] can see your record and standing.” Coon attempted to steer Putnam away from his own work, “No one,” wrote Coon, “is more Whos Whoey than Alfred Kroeber [and] he does not believe in racial equality in intellect, and that has been in print for many years and no one has challenged him.”²⁴

Coon’s unwillingness to become directly involved was exemplified when Putnam wanted to quote from their correspondence. Coon had written to Putnam that, “The tide is turning. Heredity is coming back into fashion, but not through anthropologists. It is the zoologists, the animal behavior men, who are doing it, and the anthropologists are beginning to learn from them.” Putnam quoted this paragraph in a subsequent draft, without using Coon’s name. Coon was uncomfortable with this maneuver. He wrote, “What bothers me is the quote without identification. Anybody who tried would know who it was in a minute, by my style alone.” Coon suggested that Putnam use the following quotation from his 1954 book, *The Story of Man*. There Coon had warned against, “academic debunkers and soft-peddlers who operate inside anthropology itself. Basing their ideas on the concept of the universal brotherhood of man, certain writers, who are mostly social anthropologists, consider it immoral to study race, and produce book after book exposing it as a “myth.” Their argument is that because the study of race once gave ammunition to racial fascists, who misused it, we should pretend that races do not exist These writers are not physical anthropologists, but the public does not know the difference.”²⁵

Putnam pleaded with Coon to use the quotation from Coon’s letter for it directly dealt with the “main pivot” of the “key question” in the book: “whether the white man and the Negro are equal in their capacity to adapt to

²³ Carleton Coon, *Races of Europe* (New York: Macmillan, 1939),: 677. Coon to Putnam, 17 June 1960, Box 10, Folder “L-SI, 1960”, Coon papers. See also Putnam, *Race and Reason*, 1961, pp. 51–52.

²⁴ Putnam to Coon 1 August 1960, Coon to Putnam, 4 August 1960, both letters in Box 10, Folder “L-SI, 1960”, Coon Papers.

²⁵ Coon to Putnam, 17 June 1960, Box 10, Folder “L-SI, 1960”, Coon Papers; Carlton Coon, 1954, pp. 187–188.

Western civilization The remarks in your letter about heredity illuminate this issue.” Putnam offered to disguise the quotation and refer simply to a “distinguished scientist, younger than I am” and Coon eventually relented to the use of the quotation. Just as Coon was unwilling to publicly associate with the IAAEE, he was willing to aid Putnam in preparing *Race and Reason* but unwilling to expose himself to the controversy that Putnam’s work was sure to generate.²⁶

In March 1961 Putnam wrote to Coon that “*Race and Reason* is now off the press and on its way to the bindery.” The book sported an introduction from IAAEE stalwarts, Henry Garrett, R. Ruggles Gates, Robert Gayre, and Wesley Critz George. Again, there was very little in Putnam’s argument that had not been said before in the white South: African Americans were incapable of self-governance, civilization was racial in nature and social intermingling (such as school desegregation) would lead to racial intermarriage which would lead to the destruction of the white southern civilization. “I must ask the Northern integrationist,” Putnam demanded, “by what authority he claims the right to gamble with the white civilization of the South, against the will of its people, while he personally sits with his children in all white schools.”²⁷

The authority Putnam found was Franz Boas and the vast influence Boas and his students had in American society was “the hidden issue” that Putnam would uncover. He claimed to have learned the “facts about Franz Boas himself – his minority group background his association with Columbia in 1896 . . . the names of his students – Herskovits, Klineberg, Ashley Montagu . . .”²⁸ The “minority group background” of Boas, the fact that Boas was Jewish, was central to Putnam’s argument and indicates his admiration of Madison Grant. Like Grant, Putnam believed that the Jews who came to the US after 1880 “were not readily assimilated” and had no record for “maintaining stable, free societies” and therefore set out to prove that “*all* races were equal in adaptability to our white civilization.”²⁹

When Putnam turned to the anthropological writing produced by Boas and his students, which he claimed he had approached with “impartial mind” he was stunned, “page by page my amazement grew. Here was clever and insidious propaganda posing in the name of science, fruitless efforts at proof

²⁶ Putnam to Coon, 1 September 1960; Box 10, Folder “L-SI, 1960”, Coon Papers. The quotation was in Putnam, *Race and Reason*, 1961, p. 50.

²⁷ Carleton Putnam, *Race and Reason*, 1961, p. 37.

²⁸ Putnam, *Race and Reason*, 1961, p. 18.

²⁹ Putnam, *Race and Reason*, 1961, p. 47. The antisemitism of Putnam and others in the IAAEE who held forth against the “equalitarian conspiracy” is explored in Winston, 1998. For the ties between the IAAEE and neo-Nazi movements see Coogan, 1999, pp. 480–485; Tucker, 1994, p. 170; Winston, 1999.

of unprovable theories I went on to Herskovits and others until the pattern began to repeat itself, the slippery techniques in evading the main issues, the prolix diversions, the sound without the substance. Was it possible that a whole generation of Americans had been taken in by such writing as this?”³⁰

Alas, Putnam concluded too few scientists were willing to step forward and pronounce the truth about racial differences. Putnam claimed that he had exchanged letters with dozens of “Ivy League professors” and noted that they were “paying the immemorial price for their own deceit, they had hypnotized others so long they were now the victims of their own trance.” Putnam concluded, “Either from their silences or their comments, I had sensed the thinking of Kluckhohn and Handlin of Harvard, Murdock of Yale, Herskovits of Northwestern, [and] dozens of others.”³¹

Putnam had issued a very aggressive and very public challenge to anthropologists, and other scientists to defend their conclusions regarding the existence of race and racial differences. *Race and Reason*, and the acclaim the book garnered by those dedicated to preserve segregation, would bring integrationists to the doors of anthropologists, looking for a response to Putnam’s claims about cultural anthropology. Putnam successfully transformed Coon’s war with cultural anthropologists into a matter of public concern. Many subsequent events, including the reception given *The Origin of Races*, must be viewed as a scientific response to the charges brought by *Race and Reason*.

Reaction to *Race and Reason*

Race and Reason was enormously popular in the South. The man who would revitalize the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s, David Duke, described it as the “book that would change my life.” In his autobiography, Duke claims that as a boy he was a racial egalitarian until “*Race and Reason* made me realize another legitimate scientific viewpoint existed.”³² Duke was not the only southerner to be enamoured of the book. Carleton Putnam became a widely sought after speaker for the Citizen Councils, the white organization that sprang up in the South to resist desegregation. Governor Ross Barnett declared October 26, 1961 as “Race and Reason” day in Mississippi, Putnam gave a speech in Jackson, Mississippi that day and won praise from

³⁰ Putnam, *Race and Reason*, 1961, pp. 18–19.

³¹ Putnam, *Race and Reason*, 1961, p. 32.

³² Duke, 1998, pp. 33, 36.

Barnett and U.S. Representative John Bell Williams. Louisiana made the book required reading for all high school students.³³

Unsurprisingly, Putnam's book fared less well in the scholarly presses. Almost universally ignored, it garnered few reviews and those reviewers who did notice it often treated it as curiosity, rather than a serious book. Sociologist Louis Schneider wrote that "Mr. Putnam is unequivocally a racist," but also that "his polemic against Boas (as well as others) . . . reveals a certain sureness of touch One can only envy Putnam the precision of his knowledge." Sociologists Robert P. Stuckert and Irwin D. Rinder argued that, "Social scientists can take this work seriously only as a symptom or datum showing the state of mind of one spokesman of an embattled social movement."³⁴

The most prestigious scientist to review *Race and Reason* was Theodosius Dobzhansky. One of the world's leading geneticists, Dobzhansky had long written on the social impact of genetics on society. Writing for a popular audience immediately after World War II with his colleague, geneticist L.C. Dunn, Dobzhansky argued that scientists should abandon attempts to classify races on the basis of phenotypic features. However, Dobzhansky and Dunn rejected the notion that race was "just a myth" and maintained that race was still a useful scientific concept if understood on the genetic level. "Race" they argued, "can be defined as populations which differ in the frequencies of some gene or genes." In his writing on race, Dobzhansky would maintain that race was a viable scientific concept, if understood at the level of the genotype rather than the phenotype, and that genetic variation was necessary for the health of the species. In order to maximize the benefits of genetic variation one must maximize the opportunities available for all members of human society. In his soon to be published book, *Mankind Evolving*, Dobzhansky argued that "denial of equality of opportunity stultifies the genetic diversity with which mankind became equipped in the course of its evolutionary development. Inequality conceals and stifles some people's abilities and dissembles the lack of abilities in others. Conversely, equality permits an optimal utilization of the wealth of the gene pool of the human species."³⁵

³³ On "Race and Reason Day" see Lesseig, 1994; McMillen, 1994, pp. 165–168; Newby, 1967, pp. 165–166. Tucker 1994, pp. 157–161. The Citizen Councils dedicated an entire issue of their official journal to the events on "Race and Reason" day that included a copy of the Louisiana proclamation declaring the book required reading. See *The Citizen* 1961, 2–45. (Louisiana's resolution on p. 34).

³⁴ Schneider, 1962, pp. 149, 150; Stuckert and Rinder, 1962, p. 112.

³⁵ Dunn and Dobzhansky, 1952, p. 118; Dobzhansky, 1962, p. 285. On Dobzhansky's life and work see the collected essays in Adams (ed.) 1994. Of particular relevance for this paper is Paul, pp. 219–232. On Dobzhansky's belief in the desirability on genetic variation see Beatty, 1987.

Dobzhansky's review of *Race and Reason* was entitled “A Bogus ‘Science’ of Race Prejudice.” Noting that “writings giving vent to passions do not belong on the pages of the *Journal of Heredity* The situation changes . . . when such writings purport to be dealing with scientifically established facts, particularly facts of genetics and human biology. Silence should not be carried to point of aiding and abetting misrepresentation.” Dobzhansky critiqued the book by merely quoting large passages with a minimum of commentary. Dobzhansky concluded that the “pseudo-science” of race prejudice “fell temporarily into desuetude in most of the world,” however, “It was to be expected that the murky tide will stage a comeback, and this is what we are actually observing.”³⁶

Dobzhansky's review illuminates an important aspect of this story. It clearly establishes that Dobzhansky believed it was his responsibility to counteract what he saw as a dangerous misuse of science – this would emerge as a major point of contention between Dobzhansky and Coon the following year. But the issues were framed earlier by Putnam and *Race and Reason*: Dobzhansky believed that scientists needed to react to Putnam's work and was willing to lead by example by publicly criticizing Putnam's book.

One other aspect of Dobzhansky's review should be noted. In an addendum added as the review went to press, Dobzhansky explained that, since he wrote the review, he had received another pamphlet written by Putnam in the mail. Noting the widespread circulation of Putnam's writings, Dobzhansky urged that, “Geneticists and anthropologists may well give their immediate attention to the danger of misuse of their sciences for propagandistic ends.”³⁷

By this time, the National Putnam Letters Committee was making frequent mass mailings of segregationist pamphlets, such as that received by Dobzhansky. It is not clear which Putnam pamphlet Dobzhansky received as his review went to press. It might have been an advance selection from Wesley Critz George's soon-to-be-published *Biology of the Race Problem*. George's work was commissioned by the Governor of Alabama to provide scientific evidence for segregation. It was filled with warnings about the dangers of racial hybridization and claimed that white people and black people had very different brain structures that accounted for their differences in the capacity for civilization. Before publishing the book itself, Putnam distributed the chapter entitled “The Influence of Franz Boas” that illustrated the “influence that flows from a clever and forceful man when supported by other men trained by him.” George expanded the list of Boas's students to include Dobzhansky himself. Putnam had helped George with *The Biology*

³⁶ Dobzhansky, 1961, pp. 189–190.

³⁷ Dobzhansky, 1961, p. 190.

of the *Race Problem* and had sent it to three people for pre-publication reading: IAAEE executive secretary Donald Swan, Wyckliffe Draper (the reclusive millionaire who underwrote the Pioneer Fund) and Carleton Coon.³⁸

Another possibility for the pamphlet received by Dobzhansky was entitled “Evolution and Race: New Evidence” which was Carleton Putnam’s report on the second edition of Carleton Coon’s *The Story of Man*. Putnam pulled select quotations from Coon’s book that foreshadowed the arguments Coon would be making in his yet-to-released *The Origin of Races*. According to Putnam, this new evidence uncovered by Coon shows that “the Negro is 200,000 years behind the White race on the ladder of evolution.” In the cover letter over this material, Putnam invoked Coon’s prestige in the scientific community, “When . . . the president of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard and a native of New England, states that recent discoveries indicate that the Negro is 200,000 years behind the White race on the ladder of evolution, this ends the integration argument.”³⁹ Long before its appearance in October 1962, then, the central argument of Coon’s book would be linked to the segregationist cause. By the end of 1961, many in the scientific community had noticed Putnam’s activities, and the activities of his IAAEE colleagues, and many agreed with Dobzhansky that scientists should take action.

Resolutions on Race

Even if they had not received any of Putnam’s materials, the well-read scientist was probably aware of the segregationist attack on Boasian anthropology. Henry Garrett had published a notorious essay, “The Equalitarian Dogma,” in the pages of the prestigious journal *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* calling the work of Boas and his followers “the most potent assault upon native racial differences” yet made although the conclusions of cultural anthropologists “are often subjective and unconvincing.” Garrett’s piece brought a spirited response from Melville Herskovits, who may have noticed the similarity between Garrett’s thesis and Carleton Putnam’s letters. The subsequent debate on Garrett’s thesis spilled over into several issues

³⁸ “The Influence of Franz Boas” in White House Name File, B2256, John F. Kennedy Papers, Box 2256, Boston MA. Hereafter Kennedy Papers. This was eventually published as George, 1962. On the origins of George’s work see Newby, 1967, pp. 104–117; Tucker, 1994; pp. 162–168. On Coon vetting the work before publications see Putnam to George, 21 May 1962, Box 9, Folder 61, George Papers.

³⁹ Carleton Putnam, “Evolution and Race,” 1962 p. 7; Putnam to Lee C. White, 2 June 1962, White House Name File, Box 2256, Kennedy Papers.

of the journal. Letters both supported and criticized editor Dwight Ingle's decision to publish Garrett's polemic. Ingle asked Coon to participate in the ongoing debate. Coon wrote that he admired Ingle's "courage in publishing Garrett's currently unpopular thesis" and that "my instinct is to rush to your defense and say what I think, after which I'll be bombarded and lambasted . . . , but I would rather trigger off the holocaust in a book of my own rather than in a letter or article."⁴⁰

While Coon would avoid "the holocaust" until his book was published, many in the anthropological community were going to take action. In November 1961 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, president Gordon Willey made the following statement: "The concern which I wish to lay before you is I think a grave one It arises from recent press statement and certain publications on race and racial differences as a basis for social and political action. Many of you have seen such statements. Some of you have called these to our attention. The Board deliberated this matter which concerns use of the name "anthropology" and "anthropological science" in a way we believe to be false and misrepresentative of our profession by persons who are not recognized by the American Anthropological Association as professional anthropologists."

Willey called for the following resolution which was subsequently passed by a vote of 192–0: "The American Anthropological Association repudiates statements now appearing in the United States that Negroes are biologically and in innate mental ability inferior to whites, and reaffirms the fact that there is no scientifically established evidence to justify the exclusion of any race from the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. The basic principles of equality of opportunity and equality before the law are compatible with all that is known about human biology. All races possess the abilities needed to participate fully in the democratic way of life and in modern technological civilization."⁴¹

The AAA resolution was the first official attempt by anthropologists to respond to Carleton Putnam. Like all responses to his work, it did not escape

⁴⁰ Henry E. Garrett, 1961, p. 481; Coon to Ingle, 6 November 1961 and Coon to Ingle, 11 December 1961, both letters in Box 10, Folder "G–M, 1961" Coon Papers. Tucker, 1994 provides valuable insight into Ingle's racial beliefs and his decision to publish Garrett's piece see pp. 155–157. On the response to Garrett's piece see Herskovits, 1961. I should note that Putnam claimed to have sent several letters to Herskovits, no letters remain in Herskovits's papers at Northwestern University in Evanston IL, or at the Schomberg center in New York City.

⁴¹ Press Release on the 60th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Box E7, Folder "AAA, 1962, #2" Margaret Mead Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington DC. Hereafter Mead Papers.

Putnam's attention. His response was a press conference called two weeks later where he warned "that organizations like the American Anthropological Association and certain groups of social psychologists were riddled with politically motivated propagandists and that truth oriented scientists were . . . persecuted." Concluded Putnam, "The integrity of our civilization in the Southern United States . . . is at stake . . . and the disease of equalitarianism must be cured where it started – in the scientific cloister." The AAA resolution and Putnam's response were both reported in *Science* bringing the issues to the larger scientific community.⁴²

Putnam also fired off a letter to AAA president Willey. "I am informed" Putnam charged, "that the total attendance at the Philadelphia meeting was 1500. In view of the climate of suppression and persecution existing in this field, I write to inquire whether it would be fair to say that the actual vote was 1308 to 192 against the resolution." Putnam's letter was not answered by Willey, the outgoing president of AAA, but by the incoming president, Sherwood Washburn. "After reading your book," wrote Washburn to Putnam, "I believe you greatly exaggerate the role of Boas in American anthropology and social science." Noting that sociologists and psychologists reached the same conclusions as did anthropologists regarding racial differences Washburn concluded, "If there had been no anthropologists at all, the findings . . . would be the same." In response, Putnam noted that, "You cannot deceive a child of ten with that sort of nonsense, so I wonder what your motives are. It is not sociologists, nor cultural anthropologists, who are best qualified to speak on this subject, but physical anthropologists and geneticists." Putnam held forth against the "equalitarians" who were "hiding behind smoke screens of ballots or other similar evasions." The two most outspoken critics of Coon's *Origins of Races*, Washburn and Dobzhansky, were engaged with Carleton Putnam a year before the release of Coon's book. As we will see, Coon would paint his critics as sentimental and unscientific writers who were introducing civil matters into what should have been a scientific debate. But Coon's position was untenable, given that Putnam had already transformed the scientific debate into a political matter and had belligerently pushed the debate onto scientific societies and their leaders.⁴³

The AAA resolution on race was only one of two that the scientific community passed in response to Putnam. In May 1962 the American Asso-

⁴² Press Conference, Friday December 1, Box 8, Folder 58, George Papers. "Science and the News," 8 December 1961, pp. 1868–1869.

⁴³ Putnam to Willey, 24 November 1961, Box 11, Folder, "N–Z, 1961" Coon Papers; Washburn to Putnam, 5 December 1961, Putnam to Washburn, 12 December 1961, both letters in Box 8, Folder 58, George Papers.

ciation of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA), obviously concerned that *Race and Reason* was being used as a text in Louisiana classrooms, passed the following resolution: “We, the members of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists professionally concerned with differences in man, deplore the misuse of science to advocate racism. We condemn such writings as *Race and Reason* that urge the denial of basic rights to human beings. We sympathize with those of our fellow teachers who have been forced by misguided officials to teach race concepts that have no scientific foundation, and we affirm, as we have in the past, that there is nothing in science that justifies the denial of opportunities or rights to any group by virtue of race.”⁴⁴

Stanley Garn, one of Coon’s co-authors on a 1950 book on race, introduced the resolution. Carleton Coon was the presiding officer for the meeting where this resolution was offered. Twenty years later, in his autobiography, Coon recollected that when he asked how many of the assembled anthropologists had read Putnam’s book; only one raised his hand. Coon claimed that, “There they were, some of them old and trusted friends, apparently as brainwashed as Pavlov’s puppies, or as most of the social anthropologists. As Khrushchev had boasted, beating his shoe upon a table in the United Nations, the Communists did not need to fight us. They could rot us from within. I could see it all in a horrid dream. I told my fellow members that I would no longer preside over such a craven lot, and resigned from the presidency.”⁴⁵

Coon’s account of the AAPA proceedings contain all themes made familiar by Putnam: the notion that social or cultural anthropology was a “brainwashing” conspiracy, that left-wing politics, not objective scientific interest, drove scientific resolutions proclaiming the equality of the races, and the ever-present threat of Communists figure in both men’s responses. The parallels are not accidental, as the men had remained in contact. Coon wrote to Putnam that when he wrote about the AAPA meeting’s “show of hands” Putnam should “make it clear that it is NOT from me.”⁴⁶

When the AAPA resolution became publicized, Coon decried the motion as it interfered with “freedom of the press” and claimed that “scientists should keep out of the integration issue.”⁴⁷ What was hidden by Coon’s public stand, however, was that he had already involved himself in the integration issue through his involvement with Putnam. Moreover, Coon’s failure to mention that the AAPA resolution was prompted by the use of *Race and Reason* being used as a text in high school classrooms makes it appear that physical anthro-

⁴⁴ *Proceedings*, 1963, p 402.

⁴⁵ Coon, 1981, p. 335.

⁴⁶ Coon to Putnam, 22 January 1963, Box 10, Folder 18, George Papers.

⁴⁷ Coon to Goldman, 6 November 1962, Box 11, Folder “A–G, 1962” Coon Papers.

pologists were eager to make scientific pronouncements about civil affairs rather than *responding* to the appropriation of science by the segregationist Louisiana legislature.

The resolutions, however, had only spurred Putnam onto further attacks. A few weeks after his press conference Putnam mailed a pamphlet to the entire membership of the AAA. This was a copy of a speech he had given in New Orleans in which he attacked the organization because they were “social and cultural, rather than, physical anthropologists.” Putnam had asked Coon if he could use Coon’s name when requesting the addresses of the AAA membership in order to make this mass mailing.⁴⁸

By this time, anthropologists noticed Putnam’s ability to keep abreast of their activities – it was obvious that Putnam was getting information from someone and suspicions were high that it was probably Coon. Physical anthropologist, Gabriel Lasker recalled later that, “it was clear that [Putnam] must have had help from someone who was in on all the rumors that went around physical anthropologists It must have been Coon, because he was given to broad offhand statements and, if phoned in the middle of the night might have said those things.”⁴⁹

Anthropologists were not the only ones noticing the work of Putnam and his associates. In the weeks that followed the announcement of the AAA resolution on race, the Southern Education Reporting Service, a news service dedicated to impartial reporting about school integration in the South, asked the AAA to make “an objective, factual statement of the Boas Theory” which was “under attack by Wesley C. George.” As AAA Executive Secretary, Steve Boggs, noted it was now incumbent upon the AAA to “draw up a fuller, scientific statement” for “if we do not come up with something good for them, they will be hurt and so will we.” During the first months of 1962, it fell to Washburn, as AAA president organize a committee to issue “a long statement on race” which he hoped to have ready for the next AAA meeting.⁵⁰

Drafting such a statement was not an easy task, however, as the minutes a summer meeting of the governing board indicated. The question of the day was: what to do about Carleton Putnam? On suggestion was a detailed “review of Putnam’s book emphasizing his lack of qualifications

⁴⁸ Putnam, *The Road to Reversal*, 1962, p. 9. Putnam to Coon, 25 February 1962, Box 11, Folder “O–Z, 1962”, Coon Papers.

⁴⁹ Lasker, 1999, p. 148. Pat Shipman noted that when she interviewed them in the 1990s five anthropologists brought up the relationship between Coon and Putnam. Shipman, 1994, p. 285.

⁵⁰ Boggs to Margaret Mead, 22 December 1961, Box E23, Folder “AAAS, 1962, #3;” Washburn to Mead, 28 February 1962, Box E7, Folder “AAA, 1962, #2;” All letters in Mead Papers.

and suggesting that students taught from his book might face difficulty in gaining admission to college” But Washburn argued that “it was preferable to clarify the general racial issue, rather than attack Putnam or his followers.” Unfortunately Washburn believed that “there was no one person today who could make a comprehensive and accurate statement of the biological concept [of race].” The race concept, Washburn believed, was in a state of flux and, while race was still useful as a biological concept, “it is not relevant to what the racists talk about.” According to the minutes of the meeting, Washburn was asked if he would “consider airing the whole topic in his Presidential Address. Washburn immediately agreed to do so.”⁵¹

By May the governing Board of the AAA had decided on two pronged attack: first, they would approach the AAAS to appoint a small commission, headed by one physical and one cultural anthropologist, to draft a position on race. The second prong would be Washburn’s Presidential address that fall.⁵²

However, events soon overtook the AAA. On Monday, October 15, 1962, Carleton Coon’s *The Origin of Races* would appear. As Boggs wrote to Mead, “You know what it contains . . . We *could* have a new political issue on our hands by Monday.” The day of the release, Boggs was worried. “The book will certainly have come to everyone’s attention by the time of the Council meeting.” He wrote to Mead, “there is a good chance that we will have a movement from the floor to do something drastic, aimed specifically at Coon. The resolution passed last year will not serve as an answer. We cannot refer to what the AAAS may do. Neither can we possibly pass any censure of Coon’s views and ever claim to be a body representing scientists.”⁵³

Just as *The Origin of Races* was released, anthropologists were attempting to deal with the place of their science in American political culture. Carleton Putnam and others were waging a very public campaign against anthropology charging that anthropologists were responsible for “brainwashing” the American public into thinking that all races were equal. Moreover, Putnam sounded much like Carleton Coon trumpeting the virtues of physical over cultural anthropology in matters racial. He issued segregationist tracts that were dedicated to linking Coon’s research to the segregationist cause and

⁵¹ Minutes of Board Meeting, Box E23, Folder “AAAS, 1962, #3”, Mead Papers.

⁵² Boggs to Mead, 8 May 1962, Box E7, Folder “AAA, 1962 #2,” Mead Papers. The AAAS committee report was reported in “Science and the Race Problem,” 1 November 1963, pp. 558–561. The AAAS Committee report focused exclusively on Putnam and George without mentioning Coon’s work, hence it is beyond the scope of this essay.

⁵³ Boggs to Mead, 11 October 1962, Box E24, Folder, “AAA Commission on Science in Promotion of Human Welfare”; Boggs to Mead, B E7, Folder “AAA, 1962, #2” Both letters in Mead Papers.

these tracts would show up in the mailbox of any anthropologist of repute. In October 1962 this is the light by which many read *The Origin of Races*.

Dobzhansky on *The Origin of Races*

Ten days before the official release of *The Origin of Races* the Charleston *News and Courier*, edited by T.R. Waring who had written the preface to *Race and Reason*, editorialized that Coon's new book showed that "the Negro race is junior to the white race in the evolutionary calendar." The *News and Courier* claimed that Coon had documented "obvious physical differences among the races that make total integration impractical, unsound, and immoral." An acquaintance of Coon sent him the editorial, asking his opinion. His response would serve as a model for every subsequent inquiry into the use segregationists had for his book. Coon noted that he had been barraged with queries about his book, when all he really wanted to do was be left alone to write his next book. "I have no personal involvement in the tragic events of the South," Coon replied, "Were I to make a public statement of any kind my life would become even less tolerable. All I ask is that before people quote me pro or con on any national issue they read what I have said, carefully and in full, and then draw their own conclusions."⁵⁴ Coon would maintain this "neutral" stance as his book became a political rallying point for segregationists everywhere. How well it served to shield him from the public criticism he professed to dislike is questionable. Moreover, few reviewers of his book found it possible, as Coon did, to let the segregationists claim Coon's book as their own, indeed many rushed to defend Coon.

Even viewed in strictly scientific terms, Coon's thesis would have been controversial as it cut against most thinking about human evolution. Nonetheless, Coon's painstaking analysis of the existing fossil evidence and his ability to create a coherent story from that evidence won widespread admiration from reviewers. Ernst Mayr, while noting that Coon's "conclusions throughout are based on inference rather than being established by incontrovertible proof" admitted that, "the basic framework of Coon's thesis is as well, or better, substantiated than various possible alternatives."⁵⁵

Mayr's review was unusual in that it was one of the very few that contained no reference to the social implications of Coon's work. Margaret Mead perceptively noted the dilemma faced by reviewers of the book, "This repeated appeal to Coon, in a propagandistic literature that attacks both the

⁵⁴ "A Plea for Moderation," 5 October 1962, p. 8-A. Coon to Childs, 16 October 1962, Box 9, Folder 64, George Papers.

⁵⁵ Ernst Mayr, 19 October 1962, p. 421.

integrity of anthropologists and the capabilities of all members of the human race . . . [means that] the reviews and discussion of *The Origins of Races* have been compromised, not only by the legitimate doubts of biologists about the sufficiency of Coon's data and the adequacy of his theory, but also by the fact that his book has been made the symbolic target for direct and indirect repudiations of the segregationist argument itself."⁵⁶

The result is that, favorable or unfavorable, nearly every review felt it necessary to discuss the social implications as well as the scientific implications of the book under review. Coon's former co-author, Joseph Birdsell, noted the problem faced by the scientific reviewers of Coon's new book, "The volume is difficult to review with complete fairness since the reviewer is obliged to deal evenhandedly both with the author and with some 2 billion nonwhites who certainly will suffer social and, consequently physical disabilities as a result of the construction which Coon places upon the Pleistocene evidences of human evolution." In a favorable review, George Gaylord Simpson, note that "Coon does not say that Congoids, now *Homo Sapiens* like everyone else, are biologically inferior in any way and it has nothing whatever to do with political and social equality of the races." Harvard's William W. Howells noted that the book had "already been pounced on with delight by the present cohort of racists and segregationists." The less forgiving John Maddocks in the *New York Review of Books* wrote that "Professor Coon may become kind of a Herman Kahn of anthropology, remembered for a great thick book distinguished mostly by its tactlessness . . . The uses that would be made of it were, after all, entirely predictable."⁵⁷

In the last few months of 1962 and the first few months of 1963, many in the scientific community were concerned about the appropriation of Coon's book for segregationist ends. In December 1962 Cornell anthropologist Morris Oppler wrote that "in July of this year this reviewer and many of his friends received a leaflet from a 'Committee' which has been encouraged resistance to the integration of the South" that relied on Coon's previous work. Given the present volume, Oppler claimed that "it is easy to see why Coon's theories should make him the darling of segregationist 'Committee' and racists everywhere. He holds that common human ancestry is very remote and that the present racial lines have been distinct and adaptive for half a million years." In November 1962, writing to a concerned reader, Margaret Mead explained the anthropologists' current predicament, "The use that is being made of Carleton Coon's book by racists is very disturbing to all of us,"

⁵⁶ Margaret Mead, 22 June 1963, p. 41.

⁵⁷ Joseph Birdsell, 1963 p. 178; Simpson, 1963, pp. 271-272; Howells, 9 December 1962, p. 3. John Maddocks, "Anglo-Saxon Attitudes" *New York Review of Books*, 1963.

wrote Mead, "In dealing with this new development, especially the campaign waged by Putnam, author of *Race and Reason*, in which he makes heavy use of Coon's speculations, we have tried to steer a course between adding to the publicity by attacking the racists, and yet making quite clear where anthropologists stand."⁵⁸

Theodosius Dobzhansky's review of Coon came to exemplify the controversy that surrounded the book. Dobzhansky's standing was equal to Coon's and the particularly vituperative exchange between the men came to exemplify the debates surrounding Coon's book. In his autobiography, Coon claims that Dobzhansky "would give me no peace, not even a truce" and that Dobzhansky went as far as physically avoiding Coon at academic conferences.⁵⁹ There was a genuine scientific dispute between the Coon and Dobzhansky. Much of the technical debate between two men would center on the role of peripheral gene flow between different races. Coon would argue that small exchanges of genetic material between *sapiens* and *erectus* could account for pulling different groups of *erectus* through the *sapiens* threshold, hence making the possibility that *erectus* evolved five separate times into *sapiens* a likely scenario. Dobzhansky argued that, in order for Coon's hypothesis to make sense, the races of *erectus* would have to be genetically isolated from each other while the genetic isolation would disappear to allow what was essentially interspecies breeding. For Dobzhansky, such a scenario was impossible in practice, unless Coon maintained that geographical and social barriers that allowed for *erectus* to evolve into races somehow disappeared to allow the exchange of genetic material when *erectus* evolved into *sapiens*. But the acrimony between the two men did not start because of a disagreement as to the amount of genetic material needed for transforming one species into another or how that material was exchanged. Rather it involved their fundamental view of the scientist's social responsibility.

The bitter dispute between Coon and Dobzhansky began when Dobzhansky was commissioned to write a review of *The Origin of Races* for the literary journal, *The Saturday Review*. In six-double spaced pages, Dobzhansky outlined his scientific disagreement with Coon's findings. For Dobzhansky, it was a genetic impossibility for *erectus* to transmute itself into *sapiens* by "parallel but independent development." Dobzhansky argued this

⁵⁸ Morris E. Opler, 9 December 1962, p. 22. Mead to Mrs. D.E. Andrews, 21 November 1962, Box E24, Folder "AAAS, 1962 #4", Mead Papers.

⁵⁹ Coon, *Adventures and Discoveries*, 1981, pp. 355–356. Coon's account of the events surrounding the reception of his book should not be accepted without question. In several instances, Coon's contemporaneous letters contradict the account he gives in his autobiography. This caveat should also extend to Pat Shipman's treatment of these events in *The Evolution of Racism* that relies heavily on Coon's autobiography as source material.

could not happen without some “mystical inner drives that propels evolution.” Evolution simply does not work this way, according to Dobzhansky, even granting that race was a real biological entity, “it is the whole species that evolves.”

As befitting the audience for *Saturday Review*, who probably were not interested in a technical scientific debate, Dobzhansky did not dwell on the scientific aspects of Coon’s work but on the scientist’s responsibility in society. The main point of Dobzhansky’s critique was found in its first line, “Scientists living in ivory towers are now quaint relics of a bygone age. Nowadays, men of science must take note of outsiders peering at them and their work; more than ever before, their work and their writings are made of use of . . .” Recalling the title of his review of *Race and Reason*, Dobzhansky argued that “race prejudice has time and again sought to shore itself with bogus ‘science.’ It appears that about 100,000 copies of a racist tract claiming to be ‘scientific’ have recently been distributed in this country.” This was relevant for Coon’s work, Dobzhansky argued, because Coon wrote bluntly and overstated his case, getting himself into “semantic mischief” because by arguing that “Congoids” evolved so much later than “Cacasoids the implication that they are also socially and culturally inferior can easily be read into the text.” Dobzhansky concluded his review noting that *The Origin of Races* is the first of two books on the subject Coon was planning. Dobzhansky hoped in the second volume Coon would “clear up ambiguities and inconsistencies of the present volume, which unfortunately, lend themselves to such grievous misuse for the purpose of racist propaganda.”⁶⁰

As a matter of professional courtesy, Dobzhansky sent a pre-publication copy of his review to Coon with an apologetic cover letter that “it grieves me tremendously that I have to contradict your way of describing your findings. For I feel that it is indeed the unfortunate language which you are using that creates a semantic predicament of a dangerous sort.” Coon was not appeased. In response, Coon wrote that, “it is incomprehensible to me that a man of your integrity and stature should misrepresent what I said so utterly, turn what was supposed to be a review into an anti-racist tract, and accuse me of “mischievously” furnishing ammunition to racists.” In a subsequent exchange of letters in the last week of October 1962, Coon wrote that “you accused me of ‘mischievously’ altering my style so as to provide easy quotes for political people. This is libel.” Dobzhansky denied that he made such a claim, noting only that he argued that Coon got himself into “semantic mischief” with his style. If Coon doubted that his work was easily appropriated by racists, Coon should “see the letter of

⁶⁰ Dobzhansky review, Box 72, Folder “Dobzhansky Review”, Coon Papers.

Garrett and George in the *New York Times*.”⁶¹ Henry Garrett and Wesley C. George, by now very familiar to the scientific community as outspoken white supremacists, had published a letter in the *New York Times* on October 24, 1962, in the middle of Coon’s and Dobzhansky’s exchange of letters. In the letter, they repeated their often-heard complaints about the “cult” of Boas and its “socialistic ideology”, but also calling forth a paragraph in the introduction to Coon’s new book where he wrote, “It is a fair inference . . . that the subspecies which crossed the evolutionary threshold into the category of *Homo sapiens* the earliest have evolved the most.” Two Columbia anthropologists would answer Garrett and George’s letter charging them with misrepresenting Coon’s book and arguing that “its misuse for political ends is only to be deplored.” Coon himself had drafted, but apparently never sent, a letter to the *Times* in response to Garrett and George. In this letter, Coon directed no animus toward the segregationists who had appropriated his work, but rather that he felt “discouraged that a work of substance which took me five years to write and which covers the racial history of all mankind should be dismissed as a mere prop for domestic, partisan argument.” This claim is particularly interesting when viewed in relationship with Coon’s dispute with Dobzhansky, which was, after all, beginning that very week. Coon criticized, not Garrett and George, but Dobzhansky, who was guilty of “dismissing” Coon’s work because it was being used by Garrett and George.⁶²

Coon’s response to Dobzhansky was extreme perhaps because Dobzhansky did more than merely decry the uses to which Coon’s work had been put. Nearly every reviewer had commented that Coon’s work had been misused by the segregationists. Dobzhansky went one step further and argued that Coon had a responsibility to speak out against this misuse and this is what apparently raised Coon’s ire. Writing to his editor at Knopf, Harold Strauss, Coon noted that “I have felt for sometime that Dobzhansky has passed his peak. I was also dimly aware that he, simpleton that he is, was well under

⁶¹ Dobzhansky to Coon, 17 October 1961; Coon to Dobzhansky, 20 October 1962; Coon to Dobzhansky, 29 October 1962; Dobzhansky to Coon, 29 October 1962; all letters in Box 72, Folder “Dobzhansky Review,” Coon Papers. To the last, Coon believed that Dobzhansky’s review was defamatory. See his *Adventures and Discoveries*, p. 353.

⁶² Garrett and George, 24 October 1962, p. 38. Barbara J. Price and Edith R. Sanders, 30 October 1962, p. 34; Coon to *New York Times*, 29 October 1962, Box 71, Folder “Letter to the Editor, NYT,” Coon Papers. Unknown to the disputants at the time, the Garrett and George letter was actually written by Carleton Putnam and Garrett and submitted over the signature of Garrett and George. Putnam sent a draft of the letter to Garrett and George. George was informed to “do nothing yourself” and that Garrett would be sending the final draft. See the copy of the letter, Box 9, Folder 64, George Papers.

the hairy thumb of Ashley Montagu, and now I am pretty sure of it." The invocation of Montagu is significant here. Coon recast the dispute with the geneticist Dobzhansky as another aspect of the attack cultural anthropologists were waging against the use of the race concept. Although in his writings on race as well as his review of Coon, Dobzhansky rejected Montagu's claim that race was a "myth," apparently his view that scientists should take an active stance against racism tainted him in Coon's eyes.

For reasons that are not entirely clear, *Saturday Review* declined to print Dobzhansky's review.⁶³ By January 1963, Sol Tax, editor of *Current Anthropology* had agreed to publish Dobzhansky's review with a response from Coon. Now writing for a strictly scientific audience, Dobzhansky emphasized his scientific differences with Coon; his social critique of Coon's irresponsible use of language remained though it was de-emphasized. Coon saw Dobzhansky's revised review as a victory of sorts since it focused more on the scientific questions. However, Ashley Montagu now joined the fray with a sarcastic review of Coon. As editor Tax explained Montagu was "not always impersonal." Coon urged that Montagu's review not be revised for tone "to show the world what kind of creature Montagu is. I certainly hope that you will not give him the chance to crawl and tone down now that Dobzhansky, whom Montagu has exploited for years, has turned in the job he has."⁶⁴

The exchange between Coon, Montagu, and Dobzhansky would eventually appear in the October 1963 issue of *Current Anthropology*. Before it appeared, however, Coon took further steps against Dobzhansky. In February 1963, *Science* reported the remarks of Dobzhansky at the previous meeting of the AAAS. In a brief paragraph, Dobzhansky repeated his charge that scient-

⁶³ Coon claims in his autobiography that the journal decided not to publish it after he contacted them. Coon, *Adventures and Discoveries*, 1981, p. 353. But his contemporaneous letters do not necessarily support this interpretation, see Coon to Harold Strauss, 25 October 1962, Box 72, Folder "Dobzhansky Review" Coon Papers. There is no evidence to claim, as Pat Shipman has, that the *Saturday Review* had declined to publish the review because Dobzhansky's comments were "so highly critical, even scathing" (p. 207). Dobzhansky's tone in the original review (which Shipman apparently had not read) was relatively mild. A far more likely explanation, offered by Margaret Mead, was that Dobzhansky had unknowingly violated the protocols for a literary journal. Mead argued that unlike scientific reviewers, literary reviewers should not share prepublication copies of their reviews with the authors of the books under review. See Mead to editor of *Science*, Box 72, Folder "Reviews of *Origin of Races*" Coon Papers.

⁶⁴ Tax to Coon, 15 January 1963; Coon to Tax, 20 January 1963, both letters in Box 72, Folder "Dobzhansky Review," Coon Papers. Dobzhansky's revised review also appeared in *Scientific American*, 1963.

ists “can no longer live in ivory towers” and “it is naïve and irresponsible for them to pretend they can.”⁶⁵

Coon, once again, was livid. He fired off a letter to *Science*, complaining about Dobzhansky’s brief remarks. But Coon also sent a lengthy letter to Dobzhansky “on the advice of an eminent jurist whom I consulted on this matter” in order to get Dobzhansky to “end your campaign of defamation.” Coon pointed to the other denunciations of his work, claiming that at the AAAS meeting Dobzhansky had “denounced me once more, without my knowledge.” Coon claimed that the other critics of his work had taken their cue from Dobzhansky, “You are a man of great influence and many social anthropologists take your word as gospel. You have started an avalanche which you cannot stem but at least you can stop pushing it along.” Coon also sent a copy of the letter to the president of Rockefeller University, Dobzhansky’s home institution, calling on Detlev Bronk to get Dobzhansky to silence “his repeated accusation that I have slanted my writing to be quoted by racists.” Dobzhansky sent a terse reply to Coon and repeated that he did not accuse Coon of “slanting” his style to be quoted by racists.⁶⁶

By April, Coon’s letter had an unexpected consequence when Columbia anthropologist Morton Fried publicized it in the anthropological community. Fried had long taken a public stand against Putnam and what he saw as a misuse of anthropological science. As most scientists who spoke out against racism did, Fried found himself on the receiving end of Putnam’s wrath. The previous year, Putnam had written to Fried that “Your gang has had it pretty much as you wanted from the old Boas years. You’ve warped the minds of two generations of American youth But your game’s about up Fried. The American people are awakening to the laughable nonsense you’ve taught them.”⁶⁷

In April 1963 Fried sent a letter out to 84 anthropologists. Fried explained the events surrounding Dobzhansky’s review and Coon’s threat of “a slander suit.” “Dobzhansky continues to receive mail,” Fried explained, “from Carleton Coon and Carleton Putnam. The former still complains that Dobzhansky is persecuting him and the latter asserts that Dobzhansky knows nothing about human genetics.” Fried called for anthropologists to stand together against the racists who were “gaining ground through sophisticated use of science-like arguments.” According to Fried, many anthropologists refused to get involved because they felt that “this problem is old hat and

⁶⁵ *Science*, 15 February 1963, p. 638.

⁶⁶ Coon to Dobzhansky, 25 February 1963; Coon to Bronk, 25 February 1963; Dobzhansky to Coon, 28 February 1963; all letters in Box 72, Folder “Dobzhansky Review,” Coon Papers. Coon’s letter to *Science* was Coon, 12 April 1963, p. 208.

⁶⁷ Putnam to Fried, 13 March 1962, Box 9, Folder 60, George Papers. Of Fried’s public stand against Putnam see Fried’s letter to the *New York Times*, 10 October 1962, p. 46.

that it does not require our efforts. While this is probably true scientifically, it is certainly not true in terms of race as a social issue." Unity was key, Fried argued, because "the Putnamites and their ilk will spill their filth on anybody and any institution that becomes involved, but the more people and the more places the weaker and sillier will be his position."⁶⁸

Coon received copies of the letter through Conrad Arensberg, the chair of the Columbia department of anthropology and Anthony Wallace, chair of the anthropology department at the University of Pennsylvania. Both men advised Coon to forget the matter because, as Arensberg noted, Fried's "polemic is against Putnam, as you'll see, not you." Nonetheless, Coon claimed in his autobiography that he called Arensberg who then summoned Fried and Margaret Mead to his office for a dressing down for their "conspiratorial" actions. Coon also called Columbia president, Lawrence H. Chamberlain and demanded some sort of action. Chamberlain explained that Fried "wrote as an individual" and that the letter contained no "charges or intimations inimical to your interests."⁶⁹

Coon's responses to his critics did little to distance him from the public controversy over the role of anthropology in the segregation issue. His threatened legal action and his attempts to apply administrative pressure to his critics could hardly be viewed sympathetically by his scientific colleagues. Coon's steadfast refusal to disavow Putnam's use of his book suggested that Coon was sympathetic to Putnam's aims. Coon seemed unable to distinguish an attack on Putnam from an attack on Coon. In the case of Fried's letter, for example, even Coon's allies advised him that the matter was directed at Putnam and did not directly concern him. Therefore, Coon's response to the letter could easily have been interpreted as a defense of Putnam. Indeed, given what we now know about Coon's close association with Putnam it may have been such a defense.

Given the extensive "behind the scenes" maneuvering, there was little new information in actual reviews by Dobzhansky and Montagu that appeared in October 1963. As was to be expected, Montagu and Coon exchanged pointed remarks on matters that were far from central to the main scientific disputes. Coon maintained that "irresponsible and doctrinaire effusions, such as the one printed here . . . do much to spread a poor impression among exact scientists of the competence and responsibility and dignity of anthropologists."⁷⁰ Coon's

⁶⁸ Fried to Colleagues, 5 April 1963, Box G1, Folder "1963, Fl-Fn," Mead Papers.

⁶⁹ "Connie" to Coon, undated.; Chamberlain to Coon 15 May 1963, Wallace to Coon, 16 May 1963; all letters in Box 71, Folder "Letters, 1962-1966" Coon Papers. On Coon's call to Arensberg see Coon, 1981, p. 354.

⁷⁰ Coon, "Comments," 1963; p. 363. See also Dobzhansky "Possibility that *Homo Sapiens* Evolved Independently 5 Times is Vanishingly Small," 1963, pp. 360, 364-366; Montagu, 1963, pp. 361-363.

claim that it was Dobzhansky and Montagu, rather than Putnam and George, who were tarnishing the image of anthropology must have been frustrating for many scientists who were looking for ways to respond to the segregationists. Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than Coon's response to Sherwood Washburn's 1962 AAA Presidential Address.

Sherwood Washburn and the Anti-Defamation League

In November 1962, Sherwood Washburn delivered his Presidential address to the American Anthropological Association. It was intended to be a summary of the most current thinking regarding race in order to provide a method to counter Putnam's invocation of science to support racial segregation.

Like Coon, Washburn had been trained as a physical anthropologist under Earnest Hooton. Unlike Coon, however, Washburn had gone to great pains to distance himself from his training. In his address Washburn took aim at the sort of anthropology Coon exemplified by belittling his own, and by extension Coon's, training, "If we look back at the time when I was educated, races were regarded as types. We were taught to go to a population and divide it into a series of types and to re-create history out of this artificial arrangement This kind of anthropology is still alive, amazingly Genetics shows us that typology must be completely removed from our thinking if we are to progress."⁷¹

Washburn claimed that physical anthropologists were so concerned with the subdivisions of humankind that they forgot that evolution works on a species level, not on the level of races. Washburn explained that modern scientific thinking on race must draw from genetics to explain local variations in the species. According to Washburn, the use of genetics in anthropology "affirms the relation of culture and biology in a far firmer and more important way than ever in our history before. Selection is for reproductive success, and in man reproductive success is primarily determined by the social system and by culture."⁷²

In the final portion of his address, Washburn argued against racism as "a relic supported by no phase of modern science." Recounting the toll discrimination took on "education, medical care, and economic progress" Washburn proclaimed that "A ghetto of hatred kills more surely than a concentration camp, because it kills by accepted custom, and kills every day in the year."⁷³

⁷¹ Washburn, 1963, p. 522–523.

⁷² Washburn, 1963, p. 522.

⁷³ Washburn, 1963, pp. 532, 531.

Coon was not too disturbed by Washburn's remarks. Although he had not attended the AAA address, he was convinced that the version printed in the *American Anthropologist* was, as he wrote to Putnam, “a much watered down version” containing “nothing that I needed to answer.”⁷⁴ However, the AAA had planned Washburn's address to be used by public agencies seeking as an authoritative statement on race. When it was used in this way, reprinted as an answer to Putnam, Coon's attitude toward what Washburn had to say about race would change.

In the summer of 1963, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith issued a pamphlet, *Race and Intelligence: An Evaluation*, designed to be an answer to Carleton Putnam, Henry Garrett, and Wesley C. George. Washburn was one of four scientists asked a series of questions about the segregationists' charge of a scientific cover-up regarding the worth of the races. In the ensuing “question and answer” section of the pamphlet, Washburn and the others responded to a series of questions concerned with the relationship between race and IQ levels. The short pamphlet concluded with reprinting Washburn's Presidential address to the AAA. *The Origin of Races* was mentioned only twice: once in Washburn's address and once when the editor of the volume noted that “Dr. George leans rather heavily” on Coon's book.⁷⁵

Putnam immediately sprung into action, writing off to Harry Weyher, attorney for Wyckliffe Draper, and suggesting a “symposium of replies from Garrett, George, Coon, and myself, all of whom are attacked” in the ADL booklet. Putnam noted that “if Coon did not care to write anything specifically for the symposium he might be willing to apply material he has already written and published elsewhere in answer to Dobzhansky and Washburn.”⁷⁶

Like Putnam, Coon also took action when confronted with the ADL booklet. Immediately after hearing its existence, he fired off a letter to the ADL about the work. Harry Schwarzschild, ADL Director of Publications, forwarded Coon's letter to Washburn and Princeton anthropologist Melvin Tumin, the volume's editor. But Schwarzschild also noted that Coon “could not have been unaware of the (perhaps unintended or even unsanctioned) uses that would be made of your theses” by those who believed in the “essential bestiality of the American Negro” and wondered why Coon did not “disclaim it in your book or at least to disavow it firmly in the public debate that ensued after its publication.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Coon to Putnam, 14 September 1963, Box 11, Folder “Unsorted, 1962–1964,” Coon Papers.

⁷⁵ Tumin, 1963, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Putnam to Weyher, 31 August 1963, Box 10, Folder 75, George Papers.

⁷⁷ Shwarzschild to Coon, 24 September 1963, Box 71, Folder “B'nai B'rith,” Coon Papers.

In his reply to Coon, Tumin took issue with Coon's charge that he and the ADL had "dragged" Coon into the "civil rights controversy," rather it was "a group of Southern racists about whose plaudits of your work and misuses of it you must certainly have been aware." Tumin argued that, "If you had chosen to speak out openly about their misconstructions of your work, this might have put an end to it all. However, in the face of your silence . . . it was quite reasonable to infer either that you approved of what they were doing or that you did not care." Tumin urged Coon that he "inform such gentlemen as Carleton Putnam and Wesley Critz George . . . regarding your own views of the legitimacy of their use of your book." Coon replied that he did not "approve of the concept that I have to approve or disapprove of anything" regarding the use of his book. Moreover, Coon wrote that he did "not like to be told what to do or say, particularly in the face of pressure or intimidation."⁷⁸

Of course, Coon was well aware of Putnam's use of his book, indeed, he had guided Putnam in how to build a careful argument against cultural anthropology. But, as before, Coon declined to join Putnam in public. He helped Putnam with technical questions about the relationship of brain size to intelligence but would not write any specific response for Putnam's response to the ADL. Coon also toyed with the idea of bringing a defamation suit against the ADL for their booklet.⁷⁹

The final answer to the ADL was written by Garrett, George, and Putnam, published by Putnam's National Letters Committee, funded by Draper, and distributed by the IAAEE. Although he was pleased with their final effort, Garrett expressed little hope that it would convince anyone in the scientific community, rather he believed that "the rank-and-file intelligent white is our best bet for reversing the tide The ordinary white man who is called to eat and live with the Bantu is the one who balks: he knows personally what 'integration' means."⁸⁰

The ADL pamphlet, and the IAAEE response, would signal the de-escalation of the political battle over desegregation. In the year of this dispute, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the death knell for legalized segregation. Putnam, Garrett, and George had lost the war to maintain

⁷⁸ Tumin to Coon, 30 September 1963; Coon to Tumin, 4 October 1963; both letters in Box 71, Folder "B'nai B'rith," Coon Papers.

⁷⁹ On Coon's assistance and threatened lawsuit see Coon to Putnam, 14 September 1963, Box 11, Folder "Unsorted, 1962-1964," Coon Papers.

⁸⁰ Garrett to George, 12 November 1964, Box 11, Folder 84, George Papers. The reply was Garrett, George, and Putnam, 1964. On the publication, funding, and distribution see Garrett to George, 24 September 1963, Box 10, Folder 76, George Papers.

legalized segregation in the South and they were, perhaps, weary from the fight.

The Close of the Controversy

In 1967 Carleton Putnam published, *Race and Reality*, the second and final book in his battle against the anthropological community. The book contained the now well-rehearsed tirades against Boasian anthropology. Once again, Theodosius Dobzhansky reviewed Putnam for the *Journal of Heredity*. Dobzhansky asked why it was that “the vast majority of scientifically informed people the world over have rejected racist arguments” like those of Putnam. “Why,” asked Dobzhansky, “is almost everybody except Putnam and his followers so blind?” Dobzhansky argued that Putnam’s “explanation is so ridiculous that one wonders if even many racists can believe it: a conspiracy hatched by Franz Boas and his students!” Dobzhansky noted that Putnam was not always careful about who was in the conspiracy and why. “This reviewer,” he noted, “is undeservedly honored by being listed among students of Boas, is alleged to be now retired, and is justly accused of having been born in Russia.”⁸¹

Dobzhansky argued that more serious example of Putnam’s twisting of facts was his use of Coon’s work as a defense of segregation. Dobzhansky repeated his scientific criticism of Coon’s work and wrote that “Regrettably, Dr. Coon has not seen fit to state whether he approves or disapproves of his scientific hypothesis being used by Mr. Putnam for the latter’s very unscientific ends It is a duty of a scientist to prevent misuse and prostitution of his findings.”⁸²

Putnam sent a copy of Dobzhansky’s review to Coon who told him that “It is clear [Dobzhansky] does not understand the mechanisms of evolution,” but that the journal “is read by a small number of specialists I can’t see that his review is of any great importance.” Despite his soothing tone to Putnam, however, Coon sent a heated letter off to the journal that disagreed with Dobzhansky about the duty of scientists. Coon claimed he had no duty to prevent the misuse of his findings, “it is the duty of a scientist to do his work conscientiously and to the best of his ability. . . . and to reject publicly only the writings of those persons who, influenced by one cause or another,

⁸¹ Dobzhansky, 1968, pp. 102, 103. Putnam’s second book on race was Putnam, 1967.

⁸² Dobzhansky, 1968, p 104.

have misquoted him.” Concluded Coon, “Had Mr. Putnam misquoted me I would have said so long ago.”⁸³

Conclusion

The exchange in *Journal of Heredity* was the last public dispute among Coon, Dobzhansky, and Putnam. *Race and Reality* was Putnam’s last broadside against anthropology. Putnam saw that he had lost the battle to preserve “white civilization” in the South. Though he would live another thirty years, Putnam never spoke out publicly on racial issues again. Although anthropology would continue to be embroiled in racial questions, it no longer had to defend itself against Putnam’s charges that it had misled the American people about racial differences.⁸⁴

Coon never forgot the “pontifications of that stuffed jackass Dobzhansky.” For Coon, Dobzhansky’s criticisms were only part of the ongoing feud cultural anthropologists had with his work and were political, not scientific, in nature. “I don’t think that there is any question,” he wrote to a friend, “about the socio-political influence of the Boasine school at Columbia or its source. They have been trying to suppress me ever since Boas tried to suppress my *Races of Europe* in the 1930s.” The criticisms of *The Origin of Races* came from “the doctrinaires The social anthropologists, almost to a man, fell in line behind the Boas dogma.” For Coon, then, the reception afforded his work was merely another chapter in a long war with his chief scientific rival, the Columbia school of anthropology.⁸⁵

What Coon seemed not to understand, however, is the extent that his war with cultural anthropology had been transformed into a political battle for scientific authority. Carleton Putnam and his associates had adopted Coon’s rhetoric and proclaimed cultural anthropology as responsible for “brainwashing” the American public about race. Far from being a curious sidebar to the reception of *The Origin of the Races*, Putnam is central to the story. Anthropologists did not suddenly develop a social conscience in the early

⁸³ Coon to Putnam, 3 October 1968, Box 72, Folder “Dobzhansky Review,” Coon Papers. Coon, 1968, p. 275.

⁸⁴ Though Roger Pearson, the current editor of *Mankind Quarterly*, and those few scientists who maintain Putnam’s white supremacist views are still leveling the charge. See Pearson, 1991. Philippe Rushton explicitly evokes Henry Garrett when making the charge, see Rushton 1994; Rushton 1996. Also see Whitney 1997; Whitney 1998. For an analysis of these charges see Winston 1996.

⁸⁵ Coon to Winner, 28 February 1963, Box 72, Folder “Dobzhansky Review;” Coon to Noble, Box 71, Folder “Operation Pollyanna;” Coon to Gordon, 1 August 1969, Box 71, Folder “Letters, 1962–1966” all letters in Coon Papers. On Boas’s “suppression” of Coon’s *Races of Europe* see Coon, 1981, pp. 137–138.

1960s and unjustifiably criticize Coon for not following their path. Rather, Putnam had forced them to explain the role their science should play in society.

The scientific community, exemplified in this essay by Theodosius Dobzhansky and Sherwood Washburn, recognized that they could not avoid the social implications of their science. Putnam had issued a direct challenge to their scientific authority both in his public writings and his private letters. Concerned citizens and official agencies (such as the Southern Educational Reporting Service) were coming to them asking for a response to Putnam's charges. Throughout the early 1960s, anthropologists were attempting to come to grips with an appropriate response to this situation.

Yet, anthropologists were constrained by what they could accomplish as scientists. While they had an evolving sensibility about their social responsibility, they were unsure what actions they could take, *as scientists*, to remedy the situation. The scientific resolution was seen as one possible response. These resolutions, it should be noted, were reactive devices. For example, it was only *after* the state of Louisiana required science students to read *Race and Reason* that the American Association of Physical Anthropologists could justify issuing its statement condemning the book.

Direct responses to Putnam were debated and often rejected. It was felt that scientists should not dignify the polemicist by engaging him. Therefore, the scientific community needed to find a way to attack Putnam within the accepted discourse of scientist. A review of *The Origin of Races*, clearly a scientific work, provided an acceptable scientific forum that could be used to condemn Putnam because Putnam relied so heavily on Coon's work.

Finally, what of Carleton Coon himself? Coon's continued public claim that his critics were attempting to politicize his work was disingenuous at best. Putnam, with Coon's blessing and assistance, had transformed Coon's work into a political weapon. Moreover, despite Coon and Putnam's continued claims that the Boasians had stifled open debate about the races, it was Coon who called for administrative action against his critics, who threatened Dobzhansky with a libel suit and considered a second suit against the ADL. Coon repeatedly and publicly proclaimed that the duty of a scientist was merely to report the truth regardless of the consequences but his actions violated his own standards for honesty and objectivity.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the financial support of the National Science Foundation (Award number: SES-9907034) as well as John Beatty, Michele H. Jackson, Susan D. Jones, Andrew S. Winston, and Kevin Yelvington.

References

- Carleton Putnam. 9 March 1998. *Washington Post*, sec. C, p. 6.
- Carleton Putnam Dies at 96: Led Delta and Wrote on Race. 16 March 1998. *New York Times*, p. 7.
1961. *The Citizen*. Vol. 6.
1958. "A Northerner on the Race Issue." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, p. 14.
1962. "A Plea for Moderation." *Charleston News and Courier*, sec. A, p. 8.
1963. "Proceedings of the Thirty-first Annual Meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 21: 399–403.
1961. "Science and the News." *Science* 134: 1868–1869.
1963. "Science and the Race Problem." *Science* 142: 558–561.
1958. "Supreme Court's 'Arrogance' Viewed by Distinguished Northerner." *Richmond Times Dispatch*, p. 14.
- Baker, L.D. 1998. *From Savage to Negro*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barkan, E. 1992. *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beatty, J. 1987. "Weighing the Risks: Stalemate in the Classical/Balance Controversy." *Journal of the History of Biology* 20: 289–319.
- Birdsell, J. 1963. "The Origin of Races." *Quarterly Review of Biology* 28: 178–185.
- Blakey, M.L. 1987. "Skull Doctors: Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology." *Critique of Anthropology* 7: 7–35.
- Brace, C.L. 1982. "The Roots of the Race Concept in American Physical Anthropology." In: *A History of American Physical Anthropology, 1930–1980*, ed. Frank Spencer, pp. 11–29. New York: Academic Press.
- Coogan, K. 1999. *Dreamer of the Day: Francis Parker Yockey and the Postwar Fascist International*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Coon, C.S. 1981. *Adventures and Discoveries*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall Press.
- 1968. "Comment on Bogus Science." *Journal of Heredity* 59: 275.
- 1963. "Comments." *Current Anthropology* 4: 363.
- 1963. "Letter to the Editor." *Science* 140: 208.
- 1965. *Living Races of Man*. New York: Knopf.
- 1962. *The Origin of Races*. New York: Knopf.
- 1939. *The Races of Europe*. New York: Macmillan.
- 1982. *Racial Adaptations*. Chicago: Nelson Hall.
- 1954. *The Story of Man*. New York: Knopf.
- Coon, C.S., Garn, S. and Birdsell, J. 1950. *Races: A Study in the Problem of Race Formation in Man*. Springfield IL: C.C. Thomas.
- Dobzhansky, T. 1961. "A Bogus 'Science' of Race Prejudice." *Journal of Heredity* 52: 189–190.
- 1963. "A Debatable Account of the Origin of Races." *Scientific American* 208: 169–172.
- 1962. *Mankind Evolving: The Evolution of the Human Species*. New Haven CN: Yale University Press.
- 1968. "More Bogus 'Science' of Race Prejudice." *Journal of Heredity* 59: 102–104.
- 1963. "Possibility that Homo Sapiens Evolved Independently 5 Times is Vanishingly Small." *Current Anthropology* 4: 360, 364–366.
- Duke, D. 1998. *My Awakening: A Path to Racial Understanding*. Covington LA: Free Speech Press.

- Dunn, L.C. and Dobzhansky, T. 1952. *Heredity, Race, and Society*. New York: New American Library.
- Fried, M. 10 October 1962. "Letter to the Editor." *New York Times*, p. 46.
- Garn, S.M. 1962. "The Newer Physical Anthropology." *American Anthropologist* 64: 917–918.
- Garrett, H.E. 1961. "The Equalitarian Dogma." *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 4: 480–484.
- Garrett, H.E. and George, W.C. 24 October 1962. "Letter to the Editor." *New York Times*, p. 34.
- Garrett, H.E., George, W.C. and Putnam, C. 1964. *Race: A Reply to Race and Intelligence: A Scientific Evaluation by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith*. Washington DC: National Putnam Letters Committee.
- George, W.C. 1962. *Biology of the Race Problem*. Washington DC: National Putnam Letters Committee.
- Giles, E. 1999. "Coon, Carleton Stevens." In: *American National Biography*, pp. 429–431. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gilkeson, J.S. Jr. 1991. "The Domestication of 'Culture' in Interwar America, 1919–1941." In: *The Estate of Social Knowledge*, eds. J. Brown, and D.K. van Keuren, pp. 153–174. Baltimore MA: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Goodman, A. and Hammonds, E. 2000. "Reconciling Race and Human Adaptability: Carleton Coon and the Persistence of Race in Scientific Discourse." *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 84: 28–44.
- Haraway, D. 1989. *Primate Visions*. London: Routledge.
- Herskovits, M.J. 1961. "Rear-Guard Action." *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 5: 122–128.
- Howells, W.W. 1989. "Carleton Stevens Coon." *Biographical Memoirs* 58: 109–130.
- 9 December 1962. "Our Family Tree." *New York Times*, sec. 7, p. 3.
- Hunt, E.E. Jr. 1982. "Carleton Stevens Coon: 1904–1981." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 58: 239–241.
- Klineberg, O. et. al. 1956. "Does Race Really Make a Difference in Intelligence?" *U.S. News and World Report* 41: 74–76.
- Kuttner, R.E. (ed.). 1967. *Race and Modern Science*. New York: Social Science Press.
- Lasker, G.W. 1999. *Happenings and Hearsay: Experiences of a Biological Anthropologist*. Detroit MI: Savoyard .
- Leacock, E. 1963. "Report on Section H." *Science* 139: 638.
- Lesseig, C.T. 1994. "Roast Beef and Racial Integrity: Mississippi's 'Race and Reason Day,' October 26, 1962 [sic]." *Journal of Mississippi History* 56: 1–25.
- Lewis, W.D., and Newton, W.P. 1979. *Delta: The History of an Airline*. Athens GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Lieberman, L. 1997. "Gender and the Deconstruction of the Race Concept." *American Anthropologist* 99: 545–558.
- Marks, J. 2000. "Human Biodiversity as a Central Theme of Biological Anthropology: Then and Now." *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 84: 1–10.
- Mayr, E. 1962. "Origin of the Human Races." *Science* 138: 420–422.
- McGurk, F.C.J. 1956. "A Scientist's Report on Race Differences." *U.S. News and World Report* 41: 92–96.
- McMillen, N.R. 1994. *The Citizen's Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954–1964*. Second ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Mead, M. 1963. "Clocking the Timetable of Man." *Saturday Review* 46: 41.

- Montagu, A. 1956. "Negro Educational Capacity – A Scientist's View." *Harvard Law School Record*, pp. 3–4, 6.
- . 1963. "What is Remarkable About Varieties of Man is Likeness, not Differences." *Current Anthropology* 4: 361–363.
- Newby, I.A. 1967. *Challenge to the Court: Social Scientists and the Defense of Segregation, 1954–1966*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Opler, M.E. 9 December 1962. "Did the Races Come from Different Ancestors?" *New York Herald Tribune*, p. 22.
- Paul, D.B. 1994. "Dobzhansky in the Nature Nurture Debate." In: *The Evolutions of Theodosius Dobzhansky*, ed. Mark B. Adams. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pearson, R. 1991. *Race, Intelligence and Bias in Academe*. Washington DC: Scott-Townsend.
- Price, B.J. and Sanders, Edith R. 30 October 1962. "Letter to the Editor." *New York Times*, p. 34.
- Putnam, C. 1962. "Evolution and Race: New Evidence." *The Citizen* 6: 7–10.
- . 1945. *High Journey: A Decade in the Pilgrimage of an Air Line Pioneer*. New York: Scribners.
- . 5 January 1958. "My Dear Mr. President." *New York Times*, p. 19.
- . 1967. *Race and Reality*. Washington DC: Public Affairs Press.
- . 1961. *Race and Reason: A Yankee View*. Washington DC: Public Affairs Press.
- . 1962. *The Road to Reversal*. Washington DC: National Putnam Letters Committee.
- . 1958. *Theodore Roosevelt: The Formative Years, 1858–1886*. New York: Scribners.
- . 1961. "This is the Problem." *The Citizen* 6: 12–33.
- Rushton, J.P. 1994. "The Equalitarian Dogma Revisited." *Intelligence* 19: 263–280.
- . 1996. "Political Correctness and the Study of Racial Differences." *Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness* 5: 213–229.
- Schmidt, N.J. 1985. "Carleton Coon: A Pioneer in Anthropological Literary Genres." *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* 10: 40–45.
- Schneider, L. 1962. "Race, Reason, and Rubbish Again." *Phylon* 23: 149–155.
- Shipman, P. 1994. *The Evolution of Racism*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Silverman, R. 2000. "The Blood Group 'Fad' in Post-War Racial Anthropology." *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 84: 11–27.
- Simpson, G.G. 1963. "The Origin of Races." *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 6: 268–272.
- Smedley, A. 1999. *Race in North America*. Second ed. Boulder CO: Westview.
- Stocking, G.W. 1968. *Race, Culture and Evolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stuckert, R.P. and Rinder, I.D. 1962. "The Negro in the Social Science Literature." *Phylon* 23: 111–127.
- Tucker, W.H. 1994. *The Science and Politics of Racial Research*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Tumin, Melvin, (ed.). 1963. *Race and Intelligence: An Evaluation*. New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.
- Washburn, S. 1963. "The Study of Race." *American Anthropologist* 65: 521–531.
- Whitney, G. 1998. "Introduction." In: *My Awakening: A Path to Racial Understanding*, ed. David Duke. Covington LA: Free Speech Press.
- . 1997. "Raymond B. Cattell and the Fourth Inquisition." *Mankind Quarterly* 38: 99–125.
- Williams, Vernon J. 1996. *Rethinking Race*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.
- Winston, A.S. 1996. "Context of Correctness: A Comment on Rushton." *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 5: 231–250.

- “Saving Civilization: Herbert Sanborn, the ‘International Jewish Conspiracy’ and the Psychology of Race.” In: *Cheiron: Proceedings of the Thirty-first Annual Meeting* June 10–13, 1999.
- 1998. “Science in the Service of the Far Right: Henry E. Garrett, the IAAEE and the Liberty Lobby.” *Journal of Social Issues* 54: 179-210.
- Wolpoff, M. and Caspari, R. 1997. *Race and Human Evolution: A Fatal Attraction*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

