

Rejecting Eugenics:

Franz Boas and the American Jewish Committee,
Leaders of the Jewish-American Resistance,
1906-1935

By

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A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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December 2010

Introduction

From 1906-1935, prominent communal Jewish organizations and social scientists formed a new wave of Jewish political advocacy in America to combat growing anti-Semitism and restrictive immigration policies, which advanced through new scientific racial studies. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, America emerged as the leader in eugenics studies. Corporate funding for eugenics research, anti-Semitic publicity supporting race theory, and government policies based on influential eugenics studies, formed the foundation for the American eugenics movement. Following the establishment of the Dillingham Immigration Committee in 1906, restrictionist political officials and American eugenicists solidified a formidable connection that sought to prove the genetic defects of minority groups. To protect Jewish immigrants, and defend Jewish civil and political rights in America, the Jewish-American resistance refuted eugenics studies, and prevented the implementation of stringent immigration laws, which attempted to eliminate the infiltration of “inferior races” into American society.

Communal Jewish-American organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and social scientists such as Franz Boas became the leaders of the Jewish-American resistance to racial theory in the early twentieth century. Boas, a prominent Jewish-American anthropologist, used his studies on immigrants and research pertaining to the environmental effects on human development to refute race theory. Boas not only used his research to defend Jews in the scientific community, but he became a political advocate who adamantly defended the civil liberties of immigrants and minorities in America. Boas submitted himself as an expert witness before Congressional hearings concerning immigration, and rallied thousands of

scientists to protect the freedom to question scientific theories, such as eugenics. The American Jewish Committee became the leading Jewish defense organization against the violation of Jewish civil and political rights. The AJC effectively suppressed the use of racial science in immigration laws by forming influential political connections. Additionally, the AJC inhibited the growth of anti-Semitic support of racist and restrictive government policies by enlightening the American public through research that countered eugenics studies.

The resistance further embraced its role as defenders of human rights, by extending its efforts to other minority groups, so as to ensure a well-rounded opposition towards the American eugenics movement. While the AJC did not fully invest itself in the Civil Rights Movement until after WWII, Franz Boas and Louis Marshall, the President of the AJC, cemented the impact of the Jewish resistance to eugenics by aiding the NAACP and W.E.B. Dubois in repudiating scientific theories that dehumanized African-Americans. Thus, African-American and Jewish leaders formed a resistance to eugenics that significantly impacted the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement. The AJC's repudiation of restrictive immigration policies, combined with Franz Boas' accomplishments as a scientist and social activist, and their support of the NAACP against race theory, allowed the Jewish-American resistance to effectively combat racial science in America during the early twentieth century.

Part 1: The American Eugenics Movement

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the idea of eugenics comforted many politicians, scientists, and social elites who believed in a utopian society. Eugenics became the answer for a healthy society, purified from the disease, crime, and poverty that plagued communities in Europe and America. Following the turn of the twentieth century, America embraced the idea of eugenics as the next step towards creating the perfect nation. Anti-Semitic elites, American corporations, and government legislation became the three pillars of the eugenics movement in America, and heavily contributed to race science, which propelled the movement to an unprecedented level. Many Americans wanted to preserve American society, and believed the threat to America came from the infiltration of impure races and minority groups, such as the Jews. Henry Ford became a major force for the anti-Semitic and eugenics movement. Ford and other American anti-Semites circulated the same theories that considered the Jewish people as degenerate or parasitic. Corporations such as the Carnegie Institute became primary investors in eugenics research. Finally, the American government accepted eugenics theory and research done by the Eugenics Record Office, which allowed it to implement sterilization and immigration policies aimed towards eliminating the inferior races from American society.

Eugenics began in 1863 from Sir Francis Galton's theory that two talented or healthy people should be able to produce a talented and healthy child.¹ This theory combined with Gregor Mendel's principles of heredity explained the physical and intellectual characteristics of a person. With the revolution of genetics and eugenics, scientists now saw the potential of locating harmful human characteristics and purifying them from American society. Eugenics would

¹ Field, James The Quarterly Journal of Economics Vol.26 No.1 MIT Press 1911 page 5

hopefully be the solution for poverty, alcoholism, disease, and social inferiority; all of which the government considered products of inferior social classes. In his book Nazi Nexus, Edwin Black claimed, “In the process, American eugenicists intended to subtract blacks, Indians, Hispanics, Eastern Europeans, Jews, dark-haired hillbillies, poor people, the infirm - essentially, anyone outside the gentrified genetic lines drawn up by American race theory.”² More people bought into eugenics as a solution for social weaknesses in America as politicians, scientists, doctors, and even army officials called for more funding and new research.

Eugenics influence on American government legislation grew rapidly across America with the rise of new studies that showcased promising results from theories on genetic weakness. Scientists, psychiatrists, and other doctoral occupations were eager to find tests that proved social inferiority. In 1905, American eugenicists found their opportunity to measure the mental capacity of individuals by using the Binet-Simon intelligence test. Psychiatrist Henry Goddard, who was also an avid eugenics supporter, used the eugenics theories behind intelligence testing to write one of the most influential eugenics books titled The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Hereditary of Feeble-mindedness. In his book, Henry Goddard traced the ancestry of the Kallikak family back to Martin Kallikak, a healthy Revolutionary War veteran. It was at this point in the Kallikak family tree that Martin had an affair with an inferior mate who reproduced degenerate children. From the study Goddard proved the line of succession, after the infiltration of this inferior specimen, contaminated the whole genetic line. Goddard stated the Kallikaks were “feeble-minded, and no amount of education or good environment can change a feeble-minded individual into a normal one, any more than it can change a red-haired stock into a black-haired

² Black, Edwin Nazi Nexus Washington D.C., Dialog Press 2009 page 21

stock.”³ Goddard sent a strong message to the American public concerning the dangers of reproduction by hereditarily flawed individuals. Goddard’s study soon influenced other tests that tried to explain intellectual inferiority. The general trend resulting from these tests was African-Americans scored sixty percent lower than white Americans, which allowed scientists to conclude that the genetic makeup of “Negroes” made them inferior.⁴

As more studies began to show evidence of what scientists thought was a genetic disparity between races and ethnicities, eugenics testing started to spread among different institutions. Testing on mental patients became the easiest way to begin practicing eugenics research without much controversy. In Lincoln, Illinois doctors in mental institutions wanted to test for genetically strong individuals by seeing if patients could survive drinking milk from tubercular cows. Not surprisingly many of these individuals failed their tests, which resulted in a form of passive euthanasia as forty percent of the institution’s population died.⁵ Other states like Virginia moved quickly to enact laws permitting eugenics testing to prohibit intermarriage and promote sterilization in order to neutralize the genetic threat of disease and inferiority in America. Virginia passed their Racial Integrity Act in 1924 to stop African-Americans from supposedly contaminating white blood. Walter Plecker, a racist and eugenicist, argued for the “one-drop” rule, which stated that even one drop of “Negro blood” could lead to contamination. Another eugenicist in Virginia, John Powell, stated that laws for intermarriage could not stop the “Negro problem”, but it can “delay the evil day and give time for the evolvment of an effective

³ Black, Edwin War Against the Weak New York, Four Walls Eight Windows 2003 page 77

⁴ Black, Edwin War Against the Weak page 79

⁵ Black, Edwin Nazi Nexus page 22

solution...a real and final solution.”⁶ The parallels between Powell’s words on the “Negro problem” and those words of government officials in the Third Reich concerning the “Jewish problem” are eerily terrifying.

While many states participated in the eugenics movement, California’s commitment to eugenics went unmatched. In 1925 California performed 4,636 sterilizations in which feebleminded patients underwent castration and doctors had permission to sterilize any patient who committed three offenses.⁷ California’s eugenics policies seemed to be effective, but people considered its efforts to be limited considering the amount of genetically defective people that remained. One of the most influential moments in the history of the eugenics movement in America came when legislation moved from a state to a federal level. In the case *Buck v. Bell* in 1927, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes passed the decision upholding the government’s right to sterilize people whom it believed are “unfit.” In all, 27 states passed legislation to permit eugenics testing. The legislation from the states, and federal actions to validate eugenics, also spread to fields of psychiatry, sociology, psychology, and other medical professions. Doctors and experts of different fields understood that people with genetic problems should be isolated and then prevented from spreading their genetic weaknesses. A leading ophthalmologist, Lucien Howe explained that people with eye problems “could be gradually eradicated by sequestration or by sterilization, if the transmitter of the defect preferred the latter.”⁸ With the rise of sterilization in government policy, eugenics institutions became more

⁶ Black, Edwin Nazi Nexus page 24

⁷ Black, Edwin War Against the Weak page 122

⁸ Black, Edwin War Against the Weak page 149

powerful, and support from scientists and doctors, such as Lucien Howe, fortified the eugenics movement in America.

Eugenics and race theory also gained momentum as anti-Semitic media and prejudice attitudes towards Jews and other minorities circulated throughout America. Henry Ford exemplified the influence of anti-Semitism in America and its similar attitudes towards the inferior and impure characteristics of Jews which racial theory also promoted. Ford, the richest man in America during the early twentieth century, devoted substantial time to his convictions that the Jewish conspiracy controlled the world. Ford blamed the Jews for starting WWI, and he closely followed the teachings of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. He published articles in the Dearborn Independent titled “The International Jew,” which examined the protocols and preached the basic elements of anti-Semitism. Edwin Black stated, “Devoting the national sales force and the assets of Ford Motor Company to spreading Jew hatred made Henry Ford the first to organize anti-Semitism in America. Indeed, he was the hero of the anti-Semites all over the world.”⁹ The American public praised Ford for the boom of the automotive industry, which boosted the economy and helped decrease unemployment. Unfortunately, wherever a car was sold, a pamphlet on Ford’s anti-Semitic beliefs was not far away. Ford became a household name and his success as well as his beliefs spread around the world. Anti-Semitic propaganda from American media, such as Ford’s “Dearborn Independent,” influenced the spread of anti-Semitic accusations, which reminded the public and restrictionists of the Jewish problem in America and its substantial contribution to America’s impurities.¹⁰

⁹ Black, Edwin Nazi Nexus page 8

¹⁰ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906-1966 Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America 1972 page 136

Among the leading supporters of eugenics research in America, the Carnegie Institution financed critical studies and helped to connect leaders of academia who convinced the government and the American public of the potential benefits of race theory. The Carnegie Institution, in connection with scientists from famous research programs within Ivy League schools, funded a eugenics laboratory in Cold Spring Harbor, and in 1910, created the Eugenics Record Office or ERO, to register blood lines of American families and ultimately separate the inferior and diseased genetic strains.¹¹ Under the guidance of two leading American eugenicists, Harry Laughlin and Charles Davenport, the ERO became the headquarters for the American eugenics movement in the early twentieth century. Its mission was to advance eugenics studies, enlighten the public through their publications of the *Eugenic News*, and form partnerships with hospitals, schools, and politicians to fortify the eugenics movement.¹² The ERO, with its support from the Carnegie Institution, wanted to essentially destroy the defective minority of the American population or in their words “seek to prevent in the future eugenically unfit matings...and [call] for the intelligent management of defectives.”¹³ The eugenics movement in America made great strides to eliminate the degenerate population through sterilization policies. However, its control over government immigration policies became its primary method for restricting the amalgamation of inferior races into the American population.

From 1906 to 1924, eugenicists and restrictionist government officials fought to implement strict immigration legislation by establishing three essential immigration policies in 1906, 1917, and 1924. This legislation became their primary instrument in maintaining a

¹¹ Laughlin, Harry Eugenics Record Office Report No.1 New York, Cold Spring Harbor, 1913 page 2

¹² Laughlin, Harry Eugenics Record Office Report No.1 page 17-21

¹³ Laughlin, Harry Eugenics Record Office Report No.1 page 23

homogenous society. From 1906 to 1917 restrictionists and eugenicists, challenged by a formidable Jewish resistance, worked tirelessly to enact literacy and intelligence tests to control immigration. The 1906 Naturalization Act functioned as a first step towards restrictive immigration, which forced immigrants to have some knowledge of the English language.¹⁴ This act also created the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, which concurrently worked with other committees to better understand problems with immigration and immigrants in America. Restrictionists, such as Harry Laughlin, Senator William Dillingham of Vermont, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, and Prescott Hall, the leader of the Immigration Restriction League, pushed for strict government legislation of immigrants to keep out harmful foreign elements, which promoted genetic inferiority and social chaos. Eugenics studies from the ERO, the Dillingham Immigration Commission of 1906, and research from Harry Laughlin, and the Immigration and Naturalization Committee, built the foundation for restrictive immigration legislation.

Eugenics became the intellectual and scientific validation for strict immigration policies. As a result of the Dillingham Immigration Commission's 42 volume, three year study, on American immigrants from 1907-1910, the government issued major immigration acts in 1917, 1921, and 1924 to exclude "new" immigrants by issuing harsher quotas.¹⁵ The results of these studies presented data showing the negative effects of immigrants: increases in crime, disease, and poverty. However, these studies falsely accused immigrants by theorizing that the root of these problems came from their inferior hereditary, and not from poor social conditions, such as

¹⁴ Wright, Russell Chronology of Immigration in the United States Jefferson, North Carolina McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers 2008 page 74

¹⁵ Wright, Russell Chronology of Immigration in the United States page 78

congested urban areas with few educational opportunities. Once restrictionists established the threat of immigrants through eugenics studies, the next logical step was to determine the methodology for defining the “unfit” before they reached American soil. The Dillingham Immigration Commission and the Immigration and Naturalization Committee used the Alpha and Beta intelligence tests and the Burnett literacy test in the Immigration Act of 1917 as their primary method for restricting immigration. The Alpha and Beta tests, which resulted from eugenics studies to weed out the inferior groups, tested illiterate or poor Americans and naturalized immigrants on confusing and tricky questions about cultural elements, such as advertising campaigns and sports; many elements of culture that these people had no exposure to.¹⁶ The Immigration Act of 1917 also highlighted the successful campaign for the first literacy test passed into legislation. This act marked a defining moment in immigration restriction, since the literacy test (first introduced in 1897 by Senator Lodge) met opposition from Jewish leaders, political officials, and Presidents Taft and Wilson before being implemented after a twenty-year debate.¹⁷

Following the Dillingham Commission studies, eugenicists needed to cement their relationships with political officials to enforce restrictive immigration policies. Charles Davenport and Harry Laughlin’s relationship with President Theodore Roosevelt exemplified the bond between eugenicists and politicians during the early twentieth century. Davenport, credited by Laughlin for his scientific contributions regarding hereditary eugenics studies, functioned as a leading advocate for eugenics policy as Director of the ERO. In a correspondence with Theodore Roosevelt, Davenport relayed information concerning eugenics studies, and convinced Roosevelt

¹⁶ Black, Edwin War Against the Weak page 81

¹⁷ Wright, Russell Chronology of Immigration in the United States page 69

to understand the prospect of using eugenics for the betterment of society. In a letter on January 3rd 1913, Roosevelt stated, “Some day we will realize that the prime duty of the good citizen of the right type is to leave his blood behind him in the world, and that we have no business to perpetuate citizens of the wrong type.”¹⁸ In the letter Roosevelt reflected the exact sentiments of eugenicists and restrictionists who advocated for every citizen to prohibit degenerate people from reproducing or entering American society. Roosevelt and other politicians saw eugenics as the answer for their progressive ideology to enhance American society. Davenport made a strong impression on Roosevelt and reinforced the eugenics movement with several studies within the ERO. These close political ties strongly contributed to the rise of strict immigration policies. By the 1920’s, however, it was Harry Laughlin working for the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization as an expert eugenicist, who became the main opponent of Jewish social scientists and defense organizations in the early twentieth century.

In 1914 Laughlin produced a study titled, Report of the Committee to Study and to Report on the Best Practical Means of Cutting off the Defective Germ-Plasm in the American Population: The Scope of the Committees Work, in which he made several references to Jews’ physical inferiority, inherent genetic defects, and exposure to certain diseases. While Laughlin made several points pertaining to the low-mortality rate of Jews, he explained that Jews are prone to several diseases and deficiencies. Laughlin stated, “Especially noteworthy of mention are maladies of the nerve centers, cerebral and spinal diseases and diabetes mellitus.”¹⁹

Laughlin’s studies used for the 1924 Immigration Act (created to lower the immigration quota

¹⁸ Roosevelt, Theodore Letter to Charles Davenport 1913: Charles Davenport Papers Series 1

¹⁹ Laughlin, Harry Report of the Committee to Study and to Report on the Best Practical Means of Cutting Off the Defective Germ-Plasm in the American Population: The Scope of the Committees Work Bulletin 10 A. New York, Cold Spring Harbor, 1914 page 34

from 3 percent of the population to 2 percent) prompted continuous debates over new immigration legislation through the 1920's and leading up to World War II.²⁰ Following this study, Laughlin specifically pointed to the need for immigration control. Laughlin stated, "As a final factor the federal government must cooperate with the states to the extent of excluding from America immigrants who are potential parents and who are by nature endowed with traits of less value than the better ninety per cent of our existing breeding stock."²¹ In 1920, Laughlin stood before the House of Representatives Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, and presented his data, which would be used during multiple immigration hearings throughout the 1920's.²² From his research and political connections he became the medium between science and politics, which bridged the ideologies of eugenicists and restrictionists. Laughlin stated "If "America is to remain American," the nation will have to perfect still further and maintain more actively its rules of selective immigration based upon the principles of national origin race-quotas and high individual and family stock-standards."²³ Laughlin's studies paired with the research from Dillingham Commission provided credence for harsher immigration policies, and together, these studies highlighted Jews as a defective group. Laughlin and other eugenicists understood that immigration legislation had the potential to purify American society.

The eugenics movement blossomed in America as a result of heavy corporate funding, anti-Semitic accusations, which reiterated claims of inferiority from degenerate characteristics of

²⁰ Wright, Russell Chronology of Immigration in the United States page 79

²¹ Laughlin, Harry Report of the Committee to Study and to Report on the Best Practical Means of Cutting Off the Defective Germ-Plasm in the American Population: The Scope of the Committees Work Bulletin 10 B New York, Cold Spring Harbor, 1914 page 142

²² Wright, Russell Chronology of Immigration in the United States page 87

²³ Laughlin, Harry Immigration and Conquest New York, Committee of Immigration and Naturalization, 1939 page 62.

Jews, and the infiltration of eugenics into government policy. Corporate funding from the Carnegie Institute, and the founding of the Eugenics Record Office, helped leading eugenicists such as Charles Davenport and Harry Laughlin disseminate and advance eugenics studies. Henry Ford and other anti-Semitic leaders created a racist atmosphere, which influenced the spread of similar ideas to racial theory identifying the Jews as degenerate and harmful to American society. As a result, the influence of eugenics studies in American government policies became the crux of the American eugenics movement and their most effective method for controlling the contamination of defective blood lines. Sterilization policies had the potential to negatively impact the lives of many minorities as it displayed the government's commitment to eugenics. However, these policies mostly affected people who suffered from diseases and mental illnesses, and faced much controversy outside of eugenics laden institutions. Restrictive Immigration policies allowed eugenicists and restrictionists to control the contamination from degenerate individuals, without overly exposing the eugenics methodology used to validate their actions. For Jewish resistance leaders, comprised of social scientists and defense organizations, immigration restriction became the primary threat to the Jewish population. The eugenics studies of the Eugenic Records Office, the spread of anti-Semitism, and immigration policies of the American government became three major components of the American eugenics movement and the main opposition to Jewish-American social scientists and defense organizations.

Part 2: Franz Boas: Social Scientist and Political Activist

As one of the most accomplished anthropologists of his time, Franz Boas typified the Jewish-American resistance against racial science. While many American and European scientists waged an intellectual war against eugenics, Boas combined scientific studies with social activism to become a leading advocate for the Jewish community. As a German-born Jew, Boas became familiar with anti-Semitism in his early years. As a Jew he acknowledged the dangers of anti-Semitism, and as an anthropologist he became aware of the resilience of scientific theories. Racial theory existed as a dangerous extension of anti-Semitism in the early twentieth century, and Boas was one of only a few Jewish-American scientists who comprehended the implications of race science for American minorities. Boas knew that race science not only controlled the fate of Jews in American, but the fate of African-Americans as well. For Boas, the fight was not for any single minority group, but for mankind. His responsibility as a Jewish social scientist inspired him to participate in scientific research for the American government, and use media sources to effectively enlighten the American public about eugenics. In effect, Boas stood at the forefront of the Jewish-American resistance to racial theory during the twentieth century.

Boas' maturation into a prominent social scientist and leading activist came from his early exposure to anti-Semitism, and the objective of his research to delineate the influence of environment and social conditions on human development. In his early years, Boas studied in Germany where he experienced anti-Semitic ridicule from other students, which was quite

common for any Jew studying in Europe during the late nineteenth century.²⁴ Boas faced similar anti-Semitic pressure with his participation in the German military in 1881, and always felt at a disadvantage because of his Jewish heritage, especially when trying to choose a career.²⁵ As Boas began to discover his passion for science and research, he knew that America would be the most opportune environment for his work due to the various corporate and academic institutions that allocated funds for various scientific fields. In America, he was free to express his opinion in a “political ideal country,” which helped him to escape the anti-Semitic oppression that greatly troubled him as a student in Germany.²⁶ His early exposure to anti-Semitism as a German born Jew had a lasting impact, and pushed him to protect his own beliefs as well as the rights of Jews. However, Boas’ anthropological studies and Jewish heritage truly defined his views of race science and his responsibilities as a social scientist to defending Jews and other minorities against eugenics.

In the late nineteenth century, social scientists became familiar with Darwin’s evolutionary theories, Galton’s theories of inherent traits, and Mendel’s discovery of human genetics. The acceptance of genetic inheritance theories, made the extent to which biological inherited traits defined physical and intellectual characteristics controversial and highly debated. American eugenicists such as Harry Laughlin and Charles Davenport fought to purify the American race by using eugenics studies to prove that hereditary solely dictated physical and mental traits. In contrast, Franz Boas rejected the idea that certain ethnic groups are biological carriers for inferior genetic traits. Boas knew that the combination of ethnology and

²⁴ Hyatt, Marshall Franz Boas Social Activist New York, Greenwood Press, 1990 page 5

²⁵ Hyatt, Marshall Franz Boas Social Activist page 27

²⁶ Hyatt, Marshall Franz Boas Social Activist page 12

anthropology could show how the history of different groups, their migration patterns, and interaction with other cultures heavily influenced their development.²⁷ While he did accept Mendelian genetic inheritance, Boas knew that environmental conditions greatly contributed to an individual's physical and intellectual characteristics. Boas became a formidable opponent for American eugenicists as his studies of various ethnic groups proved the impact of historical and social phenomena on human development, and he cemented his legacy as a true reformer of anthropology with his book Mind of Primitive Man. In his book, Boas explained the influence of environmental and social conditions on human development, which refuted race theory and its poor attempt to use eugenics to prove the inferiority of non-white races. While race prejudice and baseless scientific theories tormented Boas as an anthropologist, as a moral person who believed in the good-will of a democratic and free-thinking society, he became enraged by the short-sightedness of the scientific and political officials who showed little support for scientific inquiry.

Still worse [than racial prejudice] is the subjection of science to ignorant prejudice in countries controlled by dictators. Such control has extended particularly to books dealing with the subject matter of race and culture. Since nothing is permitted to be printed that runs counter to the ignorant whims and prejudices of the governing clique, there can be no trustworthy science...The suppression of intellectual freedom rings the death knell of science.²⁸

Boas published these words in 1938 to preface his 1911 edition of Mind of Primitive Man, and his sentiments clearly reflect his scornful attitude towards the governing powers that disillusioned the American public by suppressing revolutionary scientific theories. In his words, the suppression of scientific thought meant the death of science. For Jews and other minorities,

²⁷ Hyatt, Marshall Franz Boas Social Activist page 19

²⁸ Boas, Franz Mind of Primitive Man New York, The Macmillan company, 1938 page vi

the stagnation of scientific questioning of eugenics and race theory may have led to their extermination from the American population. From his analysis of race in Mind of Primitive Man, and his studies on various populations, Boas proved himself as an opponent of race theory within the scientific community using environmentalist theories, which disproved eugenics arguments.

Though prominent European Jewish social scientists participated in research that defended Jewish communities from being labeled as weak or inferior, Boas distinctively set himself apart from other early twentieth-century Jewish-American scientists with his research pertaining to environmental effects on humans, his use of his research to refute eugenics, and his participation in government studies, in which he argued against restrictive immigration in America. European Jewish social scientists such as Joseph Jacobs and Arthur Ruppin, extensively studied Jews in various communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and formulated similar conclusions to Boas, which demonstrated the role of environment effects on social and physical conditions of Jews. However, the belief in the superiority or necessary purity of Jewish blood by Ruppin and Jacobs highlighted a substantial difference between their motives and Boas'.

Joseph Jacobs, born in Australia in 1854, immigrated to Great Britain to study in Cambridge in 1872, where he became an avid supporter of European Jewry, their humanity, and their history. Jacobs vis-a-vis Boas also fought against anti-Semitism, studied Jewish physical characteristics such as their cephalic index, and championed the rights of Jewish immigrants. Jacobs believed that the history of the Jews as a subordinate and separate entity of European states greatly contributed to the poor social conditions of numerous Jewish communities, which

also defined stereotypes surrounding Jewish greed.²⁹ From his research on Jewish historical social circumstances, he concluded that Jews not only showed resilience towards poor political and civil conditions, but in fact displayed their superiority as result of their ability to maintain various professions across the European continent.³⁰ Jacobs' research mainly addressed anti-Semitic accusations of degenerate Jewish blood. He not only believed in Jewish superiority, but also advocated Jewish racial purity.³¹

Arthur Ruppin, and his assistant Alfred Nossig, also dismissed the notion of inferior Jewish biological determinism with their historical and anthropological research pertaining to the effects of poor environmental conditions on the Jews' mental and physical conditions. Using social science to defend European Jews became a relatively new idea during the early twentieth century. However, the idea that "Jewish degeneration" is a product of poor social conditions and oppressive governments dates back to Wilhelm Christian Dohm's argument of Jewish regeneration through assimilation in 1781.³² Ruppin and Nossig did not believe in Jewish assimilation, and they founded the German Bureau of Jewish Statistics in 1904, with the intention of using social science to support Zionist ideas. Ruppin's dedication to Zionism was a product of anti-Semitic views and his desire to better understand the historical and contemporary conditions of European Jews.³³ In the second edition of his book titled *The Jews of Today*, printed in 1911, Ruppin depicted his aversion towards assimilation of Jews, which resulted from

²⁹ Efron, John Defenders of Race London, Yale University Press 1994 Page 67

³⁰ Efron, John Defenders of Race page 75

³¹ Efron, John Defenders of Race page 82

³² Hart, Mitchell Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity California, Stanford University Press, 2000 page 99

³³ Ruppin, Arthur Memoirs, Diaries, and Letters London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1971 page 64-65

his fear of the deteriorating Jewish identity.³⁴ Ruppin's intentions were honest, and his studies to reinforce a Zionist agenda only intended to protect Jews from suffering. However, his research paired with his political motives also represented an ideological chasm within Jewish leadership; the clash between assimilationists' acceptance of racial intermixture and Zionists' beliefs in racial purity. These two groups often disagreed within the debate of the "Jewish Question." Zionists, like Ruppin, embraced eugenics to show that Jews should be categorized as a separate people, who also needed to ensure a pure biological evolution without "contamination" from other races. For example, in his book titled *Die Juden der Gegenwart*, written in 1904, Ruppin argued against intermarriage, which he claimed was a product of assimilation.³⁵ However, leaders of the Jewish resistance to the American eugenics movement, such as Louis Marshall of the AJC and Franz Boas, did not see separation as the answer. Their greatest threat from eugenics in America resulted from the increase in restrictive immigration policies due to the influence of eugenics studies that identified "new" immigrants as degenerate, who were capable of introducing genetic maladies into American society. With the growing influence of eugenics in government legislation, and the rise of anti-Semitism, Boas' adversaries became the scientists and government officials who lauded race theory, and not scientific research institutions who funded their massive projects.

The opponents of Jews and "lesser" minorities existed in many different spheres of American society. Corporations, elites, and government officials contributed to a growing anti-Semitism that used race science to enhance their theories. The Carnegie Institution and Rockefeller Foundation donated massive sums of money to American and German eugenics

³⁴ Ruppin, Arthur Memoirs, Diaries, and Letters page 77

³⁵ Hart, Mitchell Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity page 82

organizations, but social scientists acknowledged that these organizations wanted to advance scientific research. In fact, social scientists lauded these organizations for their investments in all scientific fields. Boas recognized the ability of these organizations to build the institutions of science in America to an unprecedented level. Throughout his career Boas turned to the Carnegie Foundation and the Smithsonian Institution for grants. In a letter to Alexander Graham Bell in 1906, Boas stated, “The conditions of science in America is such that we still need the stimulating influence of an institution which stands ready to take up new and untried lines of work.”³⁶ In his letter Boas praised the Smithsonian and the Carnegie Institution for their dedication to science even though these organizations ironically funded the same research for eugenics that supported racial theory. Instead, Boas focused his energy on refuting government immigration policies to combat racial theory.

In the early twentieth century Boas took a strong stance against immigration policies that supported nativism. During this time Americans rejected the chaos and poor social conditions of European nations and immigrants. Oscar Handlin, a famous historian, wrote in 1970 his introduction to the official American government Reports of the Immigration Commission from 1910, in which he clearly explained that Americans who feared foreign elements, proposed restrictive immigration as the answer. “Furthermore, it was argued that the ‘old immigrants,’ who came to the United States before 1880, were drawn from the superior stock of northern and western Europe, while those who came after that date were drawn from the inferior breeds of southern and eastern Europe.”³⁷ Handlin acknowledged that these reports supported eugenics,

³⁶ Boas, Franz Professional Correspondence: Boas to Bell March 22nd 1906 Wilmington, Del., Scholarly Resources 1972 Reel 7

³⁷ Handlin, Oscar Reports of the Immigration Commission Vol. 1: Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission New York, Arno & New York Times, 1970 Introduction page 3

which promulgated the fear that immigrants and their “inferior breeds” threatened American society. Handlin noted that Prescott Halls’ literacy tests and Harry Laughlin’s (to whom Handlin refers as the “expert genetics agent”) reports on immigration used eugenics to support restrictive government policies, which aimed to keep “inferior races” out of American society. Handlin also stated that President Roosevelt and other officials created the commission with the intent of finding evidence to restrict immigration.³⁸ Ironically selected by the commission for his accomplishments in the field of anthropology and social science, Boas submitted studies disproving racial theory, and constructed an argument supporting the amalgamation of immigrants to American society.

Boas’ study in 1906 for the Dillingham Commission, entitled Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants, measured the physical characteristics of American immigrants who varied in their time spent in America, and contrasted these results with data of subjects from their national origin. In his conclusions Boas wrote “Among the east European Hebrews the American environment, even in the congested parts of the city, has brought about a general more favorable development of the body, which is expressed in the increased height of the body, (stature) and weight of the children.”³⁹ Boas’ studies showed that Jews and other immigrants displayed promising physical changes after adapting to a healthier environment. Boas measured weight, height, and cephalic index of children to show the direct effects of environment on human development, and how different races had the capacity to adapt and produce healthier children in an American climate. Furthermore, he explained that studies which showed evidence of changing

³⁸ Handlin, Oscar Reports of the Immigration Commission Vol. 1: Introduction page 9

³⁹ Boaz, Franz Reports of the Immigration Commission Vol. 38: Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants Washington, Government Printing Office, 1911 page 62

cephalic index of immigrants in American society, “compelled [him] to conclude that when features of the body change, the whole bodily and mental make-up of the immigrants may change.”⁴⁰ Boas explained that the immigrant’s physical and mental characteristics changed as a result of the American environment, thus contradicting the eugenics argument that only heredity influences physical and mental traits.

Unfortunately, Oscar Handlin explained Boas’ study, which countered the depiction of immigrants as menaces to society, would never be given full merit by the committee due to its opposition to the restrictionist view.

The commission was certainly surprised with these results. It perforce quoted them- but cautiously, and with the reservation that a good deal more study was needed before they could be accepted. The commission, however did not allow these findings to influence the materials in the “Dictionary of Races” or to stand in the way of its allusion to the fixed nature of the temperaments of the races it discussed through the body of the report.⁴¹

Due to the preconceived notion that new immigrants negatively affected the American public, Boas’ revolutionary research could not compete with other studies which showed relationships between the increasing number of immigrants and rising crime rates or higher rates of insanity. These studies, as Handlin pointed out later, submitted faulty statistics and only covered immigrants in major cities where crime was expected to be higher than in less densely populated areas.⁴² The Dillingham Commission’s results helped Harry Laughlin and the eugenics movement to formulate new reports in 1921, aimed at intensifying strict policy towards immigration. Though these illegitimate studies overwhelmingly contradicted Boas’ work, his

⁴⁰ Boas, Franz Reports of the Immigration Commission Vol. 38 page 5

⁴¹ Handlin, Oscar Reports of the Immigration Commission Vol. 1: Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission Introduction page 38-39

⁴² Handlin, Oscar Reports of the Immigration Commission Vol. 1: Introduction page 32

study marked a significant transition from the use of science in supporting racial inferiority to proving racial equality.⁴³ The commission's overshadowing of Boas' study did not stop him from transforming from a defender of Jewish biology to a political advocate for the Jews against racial theory.

Boas distinguished himself from other early twentieth century Jewish social scientists by transcending his intellectual role to become a leading activist. His desire to take an active approach to publicly defending Jews and other minorities from race science resulted from the growing xenophobia and racism following WWI, which fueled restrictionists' and eugenicists' efforts to create a pure society with "one hundred percent Americanism."⁴⁴ Boas felt the dangers of race theory in post-war America with the publication of Madison Grant's "The Passing of the Great Race." Grant, a staunch eugenicist, wrote about the decline of the great Aryan race in America as a result of weak immigration policies that allowed lesser races to infiltrate American society.⁴⁵ Boas argued that eugenicists relied too much upon hereditary traits to determine the characteristics of race, and with the help of New York Congressman Emanuel Celler, he became a defendant and political advocate for the Jews against congress' attempt to enact new immigration policies. In a letter to Boas on February 11th 1924, Emanuel Celler explained the impact of Madison Grants book and asked Boas for a statement to present in defense of the immigrant.

I understand that you [Boas] were the anthropological expert of the Congressional Immigration Commission. In the debates on the Johnson-Immigration Bill, I intend to play some part. Madison Grant had immeasurably influenced the members of the

⁴³ Hyatt, Marshall [Franz Boas Social Activist](#) page 112

⁴⁴ Hyatt, Marshall [Franz Boas Social Activist](#) page 134

⁴⁵ Hyatt, Marshall [Franz Boas Social Activist](#) page 135

immigration Committee who signed the majority report. This book [The Passing of a Great Race] is a mass of dogmatic statements and there seems to be no authorities for most of his presumed premises. I should like to have an expression of opinion from you concerning this book, as well as some statement from you concerning this alleged Nordic Superiority.⁴⁶

Boas responded to Cellar's letter by pointing him to several articles that he wrote in scientific journals which repudiated Grant's ideology. In his letter on February 13th, 1924, Boas explained the fallacies in the superior race argument used by eugenicists such as Grant, in that it doesn't consider the differences between individuals within a race and the influence of various social conditions.⁴⁷

As a political advocate for Jews and other minorities against race theory, Boas not only defended Jews in a legal setting, but he also became heavily involved in the public arena. As Hitler and the Third Reich gained American support for their use of eugenics to purify the German race, Boas used popular media sources and collected petitions from scientists to defend Jews and other minorities against race science. In 1939, The New York Times published an article titled, "Minute Men of Science," which lauded Boas for his petition against oppressive governments attempts to restrict scientific theories that challenged government policy. Boas rallied over 1,000 scientists in twenty-six different cities to condemn the intentions of Russian and German government to restrict scientific inquiries.

The movement which has been started so auspiciously in this country by Professor Fran Boas would not be completely effective if it remained purely national in character. It is the chief pride and glory of science that it accepts men of all creeds and races, that it promulgates its discoveries for the benefit of mankind and not of any particular nation.

⁴⁶ Cellar To Boas Feb 11th 1924 Reel 24

⁴⁷ Boas to Cellar February 13th 1924

We need, then, a world association of scientists to make the indispensability of science felt and to break down the barriers deliberately directed to exclude foreign ideas.⁴⁸

America's immigration policies and Germany's implementation of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, showed the immense influence of eugenics in government policy. Boas wanted to remind government officials and the general public of people's freedom and authority to challenge science and government policies. Without revision very little progress would ever be made.

Boas' public refutation of eugenics in government legislation, his publishing of The Mind of Primitive Man and other articles that preached the importance of environmental and social factors for the development of humans, and his research on Jewish immigrants, repudiated eugenics studies that sought to label the Jews as an inferior people in America. Boas challenged anti-Semitism and the new wave of discrimination that resulted from eugenics. Anthropology became his outlet for studying his theories of environment and the development of man. Using his anthropological background and his research on different ethnic groups, Boas argued against eugenicists such as Madison Grant and Harry Laughlin who committed themselves to purifying America from the "unfit." As a prominent Jewish social scientist, Boas became a leading figure in the Jewish resistance against American eugenics with his participation in the Dillingham Commission's studies of immigrants. As eugenicists attempted to integrate their studies into immigration policies, Boas used his research to prove the ability of the immigrant to live and contribute to American society. Finally, Boas should not only be recognized for his academic contributions, but for his role as an advocate and activist for Jews and other minority groups that suffered from racial theory. His organization of petitions by thousands of scientists against American, German, and Russian government and their attempts to use race science in their

⁴⁸ New York Times "Minute Men of Science" New York, NY, Feb. 12 1939 p.80

policies demonstrated Boas' commitment as an opponent of race science. From his studies as a social scientist and public activist as an advocate for the "inferior" races in America, Franz Boas personified the Jewish resistance against eugenics studies in America in the early twentieth century.

Part 3 The AJC: The Jewish Defense Organization

After its establishment in 1906, the American Jewish Committee, or AJC, became a leading Jewish defense organization, which used its vast network of political connections and influential media sources to combat race science in the early twentieth century. Originally created to protect Jews from persecution, the committee countered anti-Semitism and race science to prevent violations of Jewish civil rights in America. The establishment of the Bureau of Statistics by the AJC allowed the Committee to refute race theory and disseminate novel research to the public through the American Jewish Yearbook. Enlightening the American public with new studies that countered eugenics and its attack on Jews became a primary goal of the AJC. However, using political connections and directly speaking with higher government officials to advocate for Jewish rights became the most effective method for defeating race science in America.

The nineteenth and early twentieth century spawned a transition from individual Jewish intercession and advocacy into political representation and leadership from communal organizations. The Alliance Israelite Universelle founded in 1860, and the Centralverein founded in 1893, two powerful European Jewish organizations, set the precedent for establishing communal organizations with the intent of advocating for Jewish rights by using various forms of public and private diplomacy. These organizations practiced traditional methods of intercession, or *shtadlan*, by channeling influential political leaders through close social networks. While these meetings constituted the use of “close door politics,” or private diplomacy, these organizations revolutionized the methods of Jewish politics with their use of

public diplomacy. European organizations exposed the struggles of Jews by means of the media. Organizations reached out to various media sources to gain popular support in their efforts to help poorly represented Jewish defendants, counter unjust accusations, and repress growing anti-Semitism. The use of public diplomacy informed local and international communities about critical court rulings involving Jewish individuals, which pressured authorities to deliver a swift and just verdict. The combination of public and private diplomacy allowed European Jewish organizations to generate greater political influence through their use of vast social networks and gain support with greater media attention.

After the persecution of Jews and other minorities in Tsarist Russia during the 1905 revolutions, American Jewry began to realize their need for communal representation. The AJC, implemented as a powerful Jewish defense organization, paralleled many facets of European organizations.

The founders of the AJC emulated the Jewries of Europe. The Alliance Israelite Universelle, universalist in theory but in reality limited to French Jewish concerns, the Anglo-Jewish Association and Board of Deputies of British Jews, and the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden offered paradigms of how other Western Jews guarded the interests of native and foreign Jews. Before 1906 no single group had succeeded in uniting or mobilizing the American Jewish community.⁴⁹

Naomi Cohen, in her book titled “Not Free To Desist,” explained that as a Jewish communal organization, the AJC reflected certain aspects of European organizations. Leadership, for example, in these organizations consisted of Jewish men who had a passion for helping their communities, and either used their expertise in certain fields or close social circles to help benefit their organizations. For the AJC, Naomi Cohen stated, “the delegates constituted a young group: over half were under fifty. Predominantly lawyers, rabbis, and businessmen, most had achieved

⁴⁹ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 5

fame in Jewish philanthropic endeavors.”⁵⁰ The AJC also focused on political connections and media exposure as their primary tools for advocating for Jewish rights. While other American groups such as B’nai B’rith also fought to protect Jewish interests, the AJC became the leading defense organization for the Jewish-American community against racial science in the early twentieth century.

The AJC, adopting similar methods of European organizations, primarily used their political networks and media influence to suppress anti-Semitism and refute race science. The Centralverein aimed to “arm the individual Jew with ammunition that will enable truth; it wants to enlighten the public, both friends and enemies, through all available public media, about the nature of Judaism, about the thinking and feeling of Jews who live in the German Reich.”⁵¹ The Bureau of Statistics, founded in Germany in 1904, defended Jews against race science by disseminating important anthropological and environmental studies to the German public.⁵² The AJC mirrored the German Bureau of Statistics’ desire to enlighten the American public through their own research. The AJC enlisted Joseph Jacobs, an accomplished social scientist, to head their scientific department, who boasted a very similar resume to the great social scientist and leader of the Bureau of Statistics, Arthur Ruppin. Jacobs and the AJC created the American Bureau of Statistics, and made several visits to Germany to learn about the organization methods and model of the German Bureau of Statistics.⁵³ The AJC showed signs of influence from European organizations and prominent social scientists, but they defended Jewish-Americans and

⁵⁰ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 9

⁵¹ Reinharz, Jehuda Fatherland or Promised Land Michigan, University of Michigan Press 1975 page 47

⁵² Hart, Mitchell Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity page 57

⁵³ Hart, Mitchell Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity page 69

immigrants while cognizant that Jews should have every opportunity to live and prosper in America. As a result, the AJC did not invest in promoting a Zionist agenda, nor did they attempt to define the Jews as a separate race. In fact, in 1902 Jewish-American leaders such as Simon Wolf, and Julian Mack of the AJC, objected to racial classifications by immigration committees. However, the divide between Zionists and assimilationists in American Jewry allowed restrictionists to continue their use of these classifications.⁵⁴ AJC officials sought to eliminate any evidence distinguishing Jews from Americans. Their goal became to fight these racial classifications, many of which included negative categorizations produced from eugenics.

Enlightening the American public and disseminating new studies that countered the racial theory of eugenicists became a major function of the AJC. The committee understood the extent to which eugenics and race science was spreading throughout the international community. The AJC assigned staff to search through scientific periodicals from abroad, research new studies that pertained to race classification, and communicate with other Jewish defense organizations to discern race science.⁵⁵ The implementation of a branch specifically designed for scientific research, called the Bureau of Jewish Social Research and Statistics, became the AJC's main channel for collecting valuable research and scientific articles. The Bureau published several articles regarding eugenics conferences, held in New York by the ERO and Charles Davenport, and explained these meetings urged for stricter immigration and sustained claims of racial inferiority, which became the "stock in trade of the propaganda of the anti-Semites."⁵⁶ The AJC interceded on behalf of the Jewish community, and delivered studies on international Jewish

⁵⁴ Goldstein, Judith The Politics of Ethnic Pressure New York, Garland Publishing, 1990 pages 195-197

⁵⁵ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 33

⁵⁶ American Jewish Committee The American Jewish Yearbook vol.24 Philadelphia AJC page 53

problems and economic conditions for immigrants through their publications in the American Jewish Yearbook.⁵⁷

The Committee also defended Jews from public anti-Semitic accusations that contributed to a prejudice and racially charged American atmosphere, which perpetuated eugenics research. The AJC became the main opponent against Henry Ford, whose combination of popularity as a social elite and his virulent anti-Semitic beliefs posed a great threat to Jews. President Louis Marshall of the AJC became Ford's main adversary. Marshall made a public statement refuting Ford's charges against the Jews as corrupt people, and issued a direct letter to Ford asking for his apology. Ford did in fact retract his accusations against Jews after Marshall's statements, but Marshall made sure to completely dispel Ford's anti-Semitic statements in his next letter on July 5th, 1927.

We could not at first credit the information that the Dearborn Independent had permitted itself to be made the vehicle for disseminating exploded falsehoods and the vilest concoctions of vicious minds, invented by adventurers who had barely found asylum here when they attempted to introduce the exotic growths of anti-Semitism...So far as my influence can further that end, it will be exerted, simply because there flows in my veins the blood of ancestors who were inured to suffering and nevertheless remained steadfast in their trust in God.⁵⁸

Marshall condemned Ford for his actions, and his promises to end such a cruel influence represented Marshall's fierce attitude as a leader, and his dedication to defending Jews against anti-Semitism.

Similar to Franz Boas, the AJC's attack on the American government's restrictive immigration policies became the AJC's greatest method for defending Jewish rights against racial theory in America. The AJC voiced its displeasure with immigration policies through

⁵⁷ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 34

⁵⁸ Ford, Henry Statement By Henry Ford: with letters from Louis Marshall New York, AJC, 1927

closed door meetings with other Jewish organizations, and published articles in the American Jewish Yearbook to increase public support within Jewish communities. Top officials such as Louis Marshal, Cyrus Adler, and Oscar Strauss formed connections with higher political authorities and corresponded with influential government officials over immigration policies, which proved to be their strongest asset in their fight against eugenics laden government policy. “When top administration action appeared particularly desirable, the Committee usually found somebody with direct access to the chief executive-- Oscar Straus to President Roosevelt and Taft, Lewis Strauss to President Hoover.”⁵⁹ The AJC relied heavily upon these connections to advocate for Jews against the Immigration Restriction League, which used eugenics and studies from the Dillingham Commission to strengthen their arguments against Jews and other supposedly inferior groups. In 1906 the Dillingham Commission petitioned for restrictive immigration, which became vital after a series of economic and social studies, and aside from Franz Boas’ research on the ability of immigrants to adapt to the American environment, formulated the relationship that more immigration would strangle the economy and corrupt social stability.⁶⁰

Louis Marshall, one of the founders of the AJC and the committee’s president from 1916-1929, became one of the leading advocates in the AJC for the defense of Jews against restrictive immigration policies and literacy testing. An accomplished lawyer and a convincing speaker, Marshall displayed his diligence and passion for the Jewish community through his correspondence with higher authorities, which made him such a successful representative of the

⁵⁹ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 32

⁶⁰ American Jewish Committee American Jewish Yearbook vol.18 Philadelphia, American Jewish Committee page341

AJC and the Jewish community. While Marshall embodied the ideal qualities of a Jewish leader, it was his knowledge of social science as the foundation for American immigration policy, and his connections with influential government officials, which contributed to his success as a Jewish advocate and racial defender.

Many social scientists thought some such classification of humans an essential prerequisite to valid generalizations; and the success of plant and animal breeding based upon the rules of genetics led substantial numbers to wonder why the same rules should not hold for men also. By the period of World War I the belief was widespread that humanity was divided into fixed races endowed with heritable and immutable traits. The Jews were one such race, different from the Anglo-Saxon race which had created America; that accounted for the failure of assimilation in their case.⁶¹

Marshall clearly understood the eugenics motives of immigration restriction and the fear of Jewish assimilation. With the creation of the Dillingham Commission in 1906, the government had already secured their belief in race science, which meant the war with eugenics transcended from the laboratory to the political office. Therefore, Marshall contacted senators, governors, and even the President to intercede on behalf of the Jewish community. From 1906-1917 Marshall and the AJC repudiated new provisions and restrictions created by political officials and restrictionists. Specifically, the AJC worked ardently to eliminate vitality clauses and literacy tests, which could severely impede Jewish immigration. In a period of growing anti-Semitism and race prejudice, European Jews, and specifically Jews from Russia, needed to escape religious and political persecution.

In a letter to Carrol S. Page, the Governor of Vermont, on January 28th 1907, Marshall outlined his concerns for the Immigration Bill that passed as a result of the Dillingham

⁶¹ Reznikoff, Charles Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty; selected papers and addresses vol.1 Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America 1957 page 110

Commission, and he refuted three main points which gave immigration officials authority to unfairly disqualify immigrants. These clauses included the right to deny admission due to educational qualifications, the “low-vitality” clause, which allowed inspectors to deem immigrants “unfit” by their physical appearance, and finally a clause that permitted inspectors to screen immigrants abroad before even coming to America. Marshall stated his discontent with these three particular clauses, but in his correspondence with governor Page he displayed a logical argument explaining how each clause unreasonably restricted immigrants. For example, Marshall refuted the education qualification clause and the literacy test when he stated, “I can see no good reason for such a qualification. An educated immigrant is not ordinarily the most beneficial. The ranks of the anarchists and of the violent socialists are recruited from the educated classes, frequently from among those who read and write several languages.”⁶² Marshall noted that illiterate immigrants could have an equal if not more beneficial impact than those that are educated. Furthermore, Marshall cited his father as a fine American citizen who could barely read and write before immigrating to America.

In letters to President Taft and President Wilson, Marshall advocated for the Jewish immigrant on behalf of the AJC. In his correspondence with President Taft on October 23rd 1912, Marshall explained he favored immigration policies which prevented diseased or criminal persons from entering the country. However, he again explained how flawed literacy tests and other restrictive policies rejected immigrants “with a sound mind and body,” who can also produce healthy educated American children.⁶³ Furthermore, Marshall defended the unwanted immigrant who could greatly contribute to a growing labor market. He stated that immigrants

⁶² Reznikoff, Charles Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty page 113

⁶³ Reznikoff, Charles Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty page 120

have the ability to adapt to their environment and exist as good hard-working American citizens, and to support this point he included a statement from Charles Nagel, the secretary of commerce, who on January 18th, 1911 stated, “I am on record as being unqualifiedly opposed to the literacy test. I care more for the sound body and the sound mind and the straight look out of the eye and the ability and willingness to work as a test, than for any other test that can be given.”⁶⁴

Including statements by government officials such as Nagel, as well as using previous remarks from past presidents, such as Grover Cleveland, who shot down the idea of literacy tests and vetoed similar policies on restrictive immigration, allowed Marshall to effectively refute the restrictive immigration laws. In letters to restrictionist Senator Henry Lodge and Senator James Reed, Senator Dillingham of the Dillingham Immigration Commission, and President Wilson, Marshall structured convincing arguments and supported himself with powerful statements from prominent government officials.

The report of the Commission was a signal for the introduction of various restrictive measures, each one more drastic than the other. Two of these bills were actually passed by Congress, but both were vetoed, one by President Taft, and the other by President Wilson. In both instances the President of the Committee [Louis Marshall] presented arguments to the President of the United States urging that he take action to prevent these bills from being placed on the statute books...⁶⁵

This excerpt from the American Jewish Yearbook noted how Marshall’s letters to influential senators, his advocacy for Jews before committees of the Immigration Commission, and his correspondence with Presidents Taft and Wilson, played a crucial role in defending Jews from eugenics laden immigration policies.

⁶⁴ Reznikoff, Charles Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty page 120

⁶⁵ Reznikoff, Charles Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty page 109

Though the 1917 Immigration Act showcased a victory for restrictionists after enacting the first literacy test in 20 years, Marshall and the AJC helped delay this process, which in turn, allowed thousands of Jewish immigrants to settle in America from 1906-1917. In fact, from 1900-1919 approximately 14.5 million people immigrated to the U.S., which was approximately a 60 percent increase in immigration from the 8.9 million people who immigrated to America from 1880-1899.⁶⁶ During these years Jewish immigrants continued to enter the U.S. as a result of restrictionists' inability to pass immigration legislation. The increase of immigrants in this time period, however, influenced the creation of the 1924 Immigration Act, which restricted immigration with specific quotas. In a letter to President Coolidge on May 22nd 1924, Marshall expressed his aversion towards immigration restrictions as he continued to advocate against the labeling of immigrants as degenerate people.

To add insult to injury, the effort has been made to justify this class legislation by charging that those who are sought to be excluded are inferior types and not assimilable...Their children, educated in our public schools, are as American in their outlook as are those of the immigrants on earlier periods...It is said that they speak foreign languages, but in those languages they are taught to love our government, and to a very great extent they are acquiring the use of English language as completely as most Americans would acquire foreign languages were they to migrate to other countries.⁶⁷

In his letter to President Coolidge, Marshall cited the value of immigrants and again refuted the use of literacy tests to determine if immigrants are mentally inferior. Marshall explained that “new” immigrants are able to receive a good education and contribute to American society, just as “old” immigrants had done since coming to America in the late nineteenth century. Marshall stressed the difficulty Americans would have learning a new language, which is why the literacy

⁶⁶ United States. Department of Homeland Security. Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2009. Washington, D.C.: Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2010. page 5

⁶⁷ Reznikoff, Charles Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty pages 210-211

test is a poor measurement of an immigrants mental and intellectual abilities. Though immigration began to decline after the 1924 Immigration Act and through the years leading up to WWII, Marshall and the AJC still exercised their political influence as they opposed restrictive immigration and delayed the passing of legislation. While facilitating Jewish immigration through political advocacy, the AJC also aided immigrants in settling into communities upon their entrance to America.

Aside from Marshall's advocacy for Jewish immigrants against eugenics government policies, the AJC also distributed funds to Jewish immigrants to deter the formation of Jewish ghettos. The AJC relied on their political connections to battle restrictionists and immigration policies, however, the committee needed to address the congested Jewish communities in urban areas, which their opponents highlighted to prove that immigrants only created horrendous social conditions filled with poverty and crime. To help alleviate the congested conditions of Jewish communities the AJC promoted the Galveston Plan in 1907 to bring immigrants from the East coast to the ports of Galveston and New Orleans.⁶⁸ In response to Prescott Hall's claims that the attempt to distribute Jews across America was a bluff of the Jews to prevent proper immigration legislation, former President Cyrus Sulzberger spoke on behalf of the AJC in front of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1910. Sulzberger emphasized how reception committee's helped these immigrants to settle and find work, and that 85% of the dispersed Jewish immigrants practice "gainful occupations."⁶⁹ By 1924 the committee had raised five hundred thousand dollars and joined together with other Jewish organizations to help

⁶⁸ Cohen, Naomi [Not Free to Desist](#) page 45

⁶⁹ Cohen, Naomi [Not Free to Desist](#) page 46

immigrants.⁷⁰ The AJC used this money to continue their efforts to help stranded Jewish refugees and settle them into good social conditions.

From the AJC's establishment in 1906 and through the years before WWII, Louis Marshall and the AJC directed their efforts towards suppressing anti-Semitism and preventing restrictionists and eugenicists from developing strict immigration policies. While the AJC and Franz Boas used similar methods, and held similar functions as leaders of the Jewish-American resistance to eugenics in the early twentieth century, the two defenders of Jewish-Americans only had minimal contact before racist propaganda and knowledge of the atrocities surfaced from the Third Reich in the 1930's. In 1933 Boas and secretary Cyrus Adler of the AJC began to discuss how to combat anti-Semitism by "attacking the fundamental biological misconceptions [of Jews]."⁷¹ Boas and Adler agreed to contribute money in order to fund a project in which the AJC and Boas would research anti-Semitic propaganda and refute the supposedly scientific theories supporting this racist ideology.⁷² Boas also wanted to create a syllabus to distribute to school teachers and inform students of race prejudice.⁷³ By 1934, another official of the AJC, Sidney Wallach, corresponded with Boas regularly to ensure the funding and advancement of research surrounding the scientific aspects of Aryan and Non-Aryan races. During this time, more studies defining Nordic superiority appeared as a result of American and German scientists trying to push for a better understanding of the benefits of "racial hygiene" and race segregation. The AJC and Boas completed a pamphlet in 1935 titled, "Aryan and Non-Aryans," which they circulated

⁷⁰ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 142

⁷¹ Boas to Adler November 24th 1933 Reel 36

⁷² Adler to Boas December 12th 1933 Reel 36

⁷³ Boas to Adler December 14th 1933 Reel 36

to various schools, colleges, and media to refute the advancing beliefs of racial theories.⁷⁴ Before the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, Boas and the AJC also formed an international race conference to demonstrate scientifically the myth behind Aryan supremacy.⁷⁵ Though Boas and the AJC could not prevent the revitalized movement of eugenics within Nazi Germany, they continued to defend Jewish rights with international conferences and combat anti-Semitic propaganda which fueled Nazism.

The American Jewish Committee became a leading defense organization and a major component of the Jewish resistance to eugenics in the early twentieth century. The Committee used similar methods of other European defense organizations, such as the Centralverein and the Bureau of Jewish Statistics, to disseminate critical studies through media, and use political connections to advocate for Jewish rights. The AJC also protected Jews from the harmful accusations of Henry Ford and his anti-Semitic articles, which supported eugenics and its inferior labeling of Jews. However, the AJC's attack on immigration policies became their most effective method for resisting race theory. Louis Marshall advocated for Jewish immigrants, and sent detailed and structured arguments to political officials in which he refuted new immigration policies created by restrictionists and backed by eugenics theory. Finally, the AJC worked with other organizations to raise funds to disperse Jewish immigrants from congested ghettos. The AJC's efforts to suppress anti-Semitism, protect the Jewish immigrant, and enlighten the American public with studies refuting race theory clearly displayed the AJC as a leading defense organization for Jewish-Americans. Though the AJC and Franz Boas took great strides in protecting Jewish civil and political liberties in America, their progress in preventing eugenics

⁷⁴ Boas to Wallach February 7th 1935 Reel 37

⁷⁵ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 181

from advancing also depended on the strength of other minority groups. It became imperative for Boas and Louis Marshall to aid the African-American defense against racial theory in their quest to attain civil rights.

Part Four: The Unfit Fight Back

The impact of Franz Boas and Louis Marshall on the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement further portrayed the significance of the Jewish-American resistance in the early twentieth century. As two of the primary forces against the powerful network of the American eugenics movement, Franz Boas and Louis Marshall worked tirelessly within the Jewish community to expose the significant dangers of race theory. However, some of their greatest achievements in refuting race science resulted from their work with African-American leaders, such as W.E.B. Dubois and the NAACP. The subjugation of the eugenics movement hinged upon the success between all minorities in America. Preventing civil and political persecution against one minority group was surely not enough. Boas and Marshall believed that the resistance to eugenics encompassed everyone despite their race, nationality, or ethnicity. For this reason, the Jewish-American resistance to eugenics in the early twentieth century became a fight for African-American minority rights as well. Defeating the Eugenics Record Office and their political supporters, who advocated sterilization and immigration legislation, would be no easy feat for Boas and Marshall. Thus, they worked concurrently with the NAACP and Dubois to strengthen their arsenal of public support and scientific collaboration. Their dedication to helping the African-American cause showed the versatility of the Jewish-American resistance to eugenics, and its commitment to eliminating any prospect of growth from the American eugenics movement.

For the African-American defense against eugenics in America, the NAACP and W.E.B. paralleled the leadership and function of the AJC and Boas as primary figures for the Jewish-American defense. Dubois, a savvy anthropologist who so desperately believed in the errors of

race theory in his time, confidently advocated for African-American equality. The juxtaposition of W.E.B. DuBois and Franz Boas reveals their similarities as brilliant anthropologists who emerged as leaders against eugenics. Both men demonstrated timely leadership, a respect for humanity, and upheld the rationale of scientific inquiry. Like Boas, DuBois was exposed to some of the harsh realities of racism, and as an African-American boy growing up amidst a dominant white population, a shade of racism always existed. In Great Barrington, Massachusetts education and democracy helped him to tolerate Irish boys who shouted racist remarks.⁷⁶ Like Boas, DuBois' greater understanding of race segregation coincided with his decision to leave home to attend an institution of higher learning. While Boas first faced anti-Semitic hazing from other students at his university, DuBois went to Fisk University in Tennessee prepared to face the segregated south. At Fisk University his goal became very clear, "I was determined to make a scientific conquest of my environment, which would render the emancipation of the Negro race easier and quicker."⁷⁷ In his journey to achieve civil and political equality, DuBois transcended his role as an anthropologist and became a great leader who diligently worked to augment an African-American resistance with the help of other social scientists and political leaders.

To protect African-Americans from "Jim Crow" laws and segregation stemming from eugenics, DuBois used the same combination of scientific study and social activism that Boas and the AJC had done to defend Jewish liberties in America. In publishing 2,172 pages during his time at Atlanta University, which created the first *Encyclopedia on American Negro Problems*, DuBois sought to turn the vague idea of the "Negro Problem" into a set of studies analyzing environmental effects on social and physical characteristics of African-Americans and their

⁷⁶ DuBois, W.E.B. The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois International Publishers Co, Inc. 1968 page 92

⁷⁷ DuBois, W.E.B. The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois page 125

communities.⁷⁸ While his studies received much praise, Dubois insisted on advancing his efforts to defend African-Americans by creating the Niagara Movement, and contributing to the first African-American defense organization in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP. The goal of the Niagara Movement for Dubois was to promote African-American freedom of speech, suffrage, and to establish a brotherhood that ignored distinctions of race and color.⁷⁹ The movement merged with the NAACP, and Dubois inherited command of the Publications and Research department. The research department and Dubois' new publication, *The Crisis*, disseminated novel scientific research and countered racial propaganda in the same way that the AJC used the American Jewish Yearbook. The department of research worked with the committee for legal affairs, which comprised an effective civil and political defense for African-Americans. Dubois' determination and perseverance to achieve equality showed lasting results through the development of the NAACP and *The Crisis*. Throughout this process, Dubois and the NAACP continually acknowledged and gratefully accepted the philanthropic, scientific, and legal council of Franz Boas and Louis Marshall in helping African-Americans make critical strides toward defeating race theory in America.

As a leading anthropologist who relied on the use of scientific data to disprove inferior labeling of "lesser races" from eugenicists, Franz Boas dedicated himself to helping African-Americans shed light on what Americans referred to as the "Negro problem." Boas relied on a multi-variable attack on eugenics to aid African-Americans. He not only used his extensive research on African-American mental and physical characteristics, but he also presented influential lectures, composed insightful propaganda, and aided the political engine, the NAACP.

⁷⁸ Dubois, W.E.B. The Autobiography of W.E.B. Dubois pages 216-217

⁷⁹ Dubois, W.E.B. The Autobiography of W.E.B. Dubois page 249

Subsequently, Boas' assistance to the African-American resistance to race theory combined the efforts of two groups in America that fought to end the civil unrest caused by eugenics. In this relationship Boas once again proved his versatility as a scientist who relentlessly fought for his beliefs by challenging opponents in both the scientific and political arena.

Collecting scientific evidence to disprove theories that defined African-Americans as an inferior people became a primary objective in Boas' research. He challenged contemporary social scientific ideology by questioning the allegedly innate hereditary characteristics of African-Americans that predetermined their intellectual capacity and physical composition. Social scientists who sought to prove the inferiority of African-Americans used similar evidence from their arguments to support their claims for the supposedly menial Jewish population. Eugenicians such as Harry Laughlin pointed to the diseases and frail physical structure of Jews in various origins. Similarly, the so-called "brute" physical traits of African-Americans and their smaller cephalic index sufficiently proved their degenerate qualities. Not only did eugenicians consider the black community to be physically degenerate, but their mental characteristics became the main cause for concern. Proving African-American inferiority by attacking their mental and physical characteristics mirrored eugenicians studies which depicted Jews as physically and intellectually challenged, emphasizing their physically frail features and their small cephalic index.

Social scientists and authors who supported eugenics often used general physical features and mental characteristics of African-Americans to affirm their degenerate biological composition. Boas, in his book Mind of the Primitive Man used Carl Gustav Carus, a German Physiologist, as one example of how some scientists viewed "darker races" as inferior. He

explained in his historical review of race theory that Carus believed, “the size of the brain of the day race [caucasians] is great, of the night race [African-Americans] small, and those of the dawn and dusk races intermediate. He [Carus] also interprets the facial form of the Negro as being similar to that of animals.”⁸⁰ Carus used two primary physical characteristics of “darker races”, which became a familiar argument for most social scientists, to support beliefs in a spectrum of racial types. He referred to the common conviction that an oddly-shaped or smaller head inevitably proved the inherent degenerate mental capacity of “Negroes”. Carus then simply explained that the brute physical nature of “darker races” reflected their inferior intellect. This simple statement of different “brute” features of African-Americans became a fixture in circles of racial prejudice in America. In Mind of Primitive Man, Boas used arguments from Otto Klineberg, a prominent twentieth century social scientist, who refuted eugenic-based intelligence testing by proving the development of minorities’ mental capacity in new environments. This evidence countered the negative view of immigrants and minorities in urban areas, which existed as a focal point in restrictionists’ and eugenicists’ arguments supporting racial inferiority.

Tests of intelligence, emotions, personality are expressions of both innate characteristics and experience based on social life of the groups to which the subject belongs. This is expressed clearly in Klineberg’s tests of the intelligence of Negro children in a number of American cities. New arrivals from rural districts who were not adjusted to city life gave very poor results. Those who had lived in the city for a number of years showed that they became adjusted to the demand of city life and of the city-planned tests. The intelligence test showed a constant improvement.⁸¹

Boas pointed to the fact that African-American children, who adapted to a new environment, raised their scores on intelligence tests from Klineberg’s studies. Boas stated that experience and culture are major factors of a person’s personality and intellect. These claims refuted eugenics

⁸⁰ Boas, Franz Mind of Primitive Man page 21

⁸¹ Boas, Franz Mind of Primitive Man page 123

studies by using research done on the adaptations of Jews and African-Americans to American society. He understood that race theory affected all non-whites in America, not just Jewish immigrants or other European immigrants.

While Boas' studies fell under much scrutiny from restrictionist officials and racist anthropologists, he continued to enlighten the American public through scientific journals and social media. *The Crisis*, the central organ of the NAACP, and the journal of *Science* of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, functioned as two primary publications which Boas used to disseminate his views on African-American mental and biological equality. Studying various cultures, including indigenous African tribes, and recognizing the parallels between the Jewish and African-American struggle against racism, allowed Boas to support his beliefs and commitment to defending African-Americans against race theory in America. In 1909, his article for the American Association for the Advancement of Science titled, "Race Problems In America," Boas used his knowledge of African society to refute the eugenicist view of the inferior "Negro". Boas claimed the notion of African inferiority is contradicted by the success of African society. "This view is supported by the remarkable development of industry, political organization, and philosophic opinion, as well as by the frequent occurrence of men of great will-power and wisdom among the negroes in Africa."⁸² Boas tried to demonstrate that Americans suffered from a superiority complex, which deemed their society as complex, intricate, and derived from an intelligent and intellectually sound population. He explained the white race felt compelled to highlight their aptitude for civilization, in which inventions,

⁸² Boas, Franz "The Problem of the American Negro" *Science: New Series*, Vol.29, no. 752 American Association for the Advancement of Science, May 28 1909 p.848

scientific knowledge, and social institutions all reflect the superior form of mind and body.⁸³

However, Boas argued that societies which may seem primitive are in fact highly advanced and practical for their environment and cultural practices.

Anthropologists, political officials, and various organizations coveted Boas' studies of race, culture, and research pertaining to physical and health measurements of different populations. Dubois himself, a man honored for his anthropological expertise and defense of African-Americans, turned to Boas for insight and support concerning research and theories surrounding African-Americans.⁸⁴ Dubois diligently worked to organize a conference for the study of the "Negro" health and physique at Atlanta University on May 29, 1906. Dubois not only asked Boas for his latest anthropological works, but also invited Boas to speak at the university's commencement on May 31st 1906. Boas accepted the opportunity to convey his research, however he used this speech to deliver to Atlanta University's students, faculty, and local scientists a profound reminder of the equality of African-Americans and their concurrent struggle with Jews in defeating eugenics.

In his speech Boas delivered inspirational words reminding his audience of the power of the individual in determining his or her own greatness. "Our gifts, our wishes and our ideals are not alone determined by the demands of the civilization in which we live, but each of us has his own individuality which makes him more or less fit to adapt himself to the demands of life."⁸⁵

Boas' speech reflected his abilities as a social activist to induce confidence in his followers, help them seek their potential, and not be constrained by society or scientific theory. He spoke about

⁸³ Boas, Franz Mind of Primitive Man p. 4

⁸⁴ W.E.B. Dubois to Boas October 11th 1905 Reel 6

⁸⁵ Boas, Franz "Commencement Address at Atlanta University, May 31, 1906," Atlanta University Leaflet, No. 19

the great history of Africa, and the bright future of his audience, as leaders of their race. He sympathized with their plight, but also indicated their circumstance, in which separation and inferiority is the result of distinction in body form, is similar to the dilemma of Jews in Europe and America. “Even now lingers the consciousness of the old, sharper divisions which the ages have not been able to efface, and which is strong enough to find--not only here and there--expression as antipathy to the Jewish type...I have dwelt on this example somewhat fully, because it illustrates the conditions that characterize your own position.”⁸⁶ Boas’ speech proved his commitment to helping African-Americans relinquish the misconception of their race in the eyes of the American public. However, his involvement with the NAACP and his support of Dubois’ publication, *The Crisis*, solidified his legacy as a Jewish social activist who became determined to defend the civil and political rights of anyone who suffered from racial prejudice. Boas now sought to counter the eugenicist and restrictionist opposition, which used the “Jewish problem” and the “Negro problem” to enhance their racist arguments.

As Boas enhanced his position as a champion of equality and civil rights, officials such as Oswald Garrison Villard and Mary Ovington of the NAACP, relied on his scientific input and his social activism to construct the first and second annual conferences for the NAACP following its establishment in 1909. During the first years of the NAACP, Boas functioned as a key figure in refuting eugenics and social segregation which barred African-Americans from attaining their civil rights. He also aided the political agenda of the NAACP by discussing strategies to improve the African-American community’s position in America during the first National Negro Conference in 1909.⁸⁷ In March 1910, Oswald Garrison Villard, an official for the National

⁸⁶ Boas, Franz “Commencement Address at Atlanta University, May 31, 1906”

⁸⁷ Hyatt, Marshall [Franz Boas Social Activist](#) page 97

Negro Committee and sub-committee on plans and organization, invited Boas to speak at the second Annual Negro Conference. In a letter to Boas on March 16th 1910, Villard explained that the general subject of the conference was disenfranchisement of African-Americans, but that the NAACP also wanted to focus on scientific matters surrounding the “Negro Problem.”⁸⁸ During the first and the second annual conferences, Boas presented scientific evidence favoring black equality and intermarriage. The scientific principles Boas continually advocated now became part of the foundation of the NAACP. The annual conferences of the NAACP continued to address matters surrounding eugenics throughout their first meetings. Speeches by Oscar T. Crosby of Warrington Virginia in 1910, and Jacques Loeb in 1914, a prominent scientist of modern biology, addressed eugenics and African-American inferiority. Mr. Crosby and Dr. Loeb agreed there was no suitable evidence to support racial inferiority through hereditary.⁸⁹ However, Mr. Crosby went so far as to ask his audience to forget Professor Boas’ scientific evaluation of physical characteristics of African-Americans, and to believe that aspects of the “black race” are superior to the “white race.”⁹⁰ His speech did not directly attack Boas, but instead, Mr. Crosby wanted to infuse his audience with the same confidence and self-esteem that Boas evoked during his speech at Atlanta University in 1906. These speeches, as well as Boas’ participation in the first annual conferences of the NAACP, displayed the relevance of eugenics in the first years of the African-American defense organization.

Due to Boas’ support for African-American equality and his contributions to the NAACP, any contribution from Boas to Dubois’ publication *The Crisis* would provide a significant

⁸⁸ Villard to Boas March 16th 1910 Reel 11

⁸⁹ Boehm, Randolph Papers of the NAACP Part 1: Annual Conference Speeches. Frederick, MD, University Publications of America, 1982 Reel 8 Slide 0378

⁹⁰ Boehm, Randolph Papers of the NAACP Part 1: Annual Conference Speeches Reel 8 Slide 0108

scientific stamp of approval. Dubois knew that Boas' research and his arguments, based on his anthropological evidence, went unmatched when seeking to prove the abilities of African-Americans. His speech from the second Annual Negro Conference delivered a compelling piece for readers of *The Crisis* to reveal the truth behind the scientific and anthropological inquiries concerning "Negro" and "Mulatto" inferiority. Thus, in 1910 Dubois and the NAACP reprinted the speech in a 1910 edition of *The Crisis*. In the article, "The Real Race Problem," Boas presented an overview of three primary arguments used to assert the inferiority of African-Americans; brain size, poor development of children, and a stunted growth in the African civilization. Boas repudiated the idea of "Negro" inadequacy by accentuating the number of physical and mental variations within each race, and he stressed the ability of subjects in healthier environments to experience a stronger rate of development.⁹¹ The purpose of the article was not to overload the reader with statistics and data, but to educate the typical reader of *The Crisis* by helping them grasp simple explanations for why inferiority of the "darker races" could not be justified by these commonly used points. Boas' research and his contributions to *The Crisis* had a substantial impact on the African-American defense against eugenics, and he continued to assist Dubois and other African-American leaders by attending NAACP meetings about race and the "Negro Problem". Officials such as Dubois would continually correspond with Boas and seek his advice on anthropology and social science.⁹²

The NAACP realized the potential efficacy of eugenics in impeding the progress of the defense organization and preventing it from obtaining equality for African-Americans. Boas' research and his opposition to eugenics inspired leaders of the NAACP, and provided a new

⁹¹ Boas, Franz "The Real Race Problem" *The Crisis* December NAACP, 1910 Vol. 1 No. 2 page 22

⁹² W.E.B. Dubois to Boas February 13th 1929 Reel 30

sense of splendor and cachet for the African-American community. During years of racial tension and questions around genetic inferiority, the NAACP found success as a racial defense organization with assistance from Jewish leaders such as Franz Boas. Louis Marshall of the AJC also functioned as a primary supporter of the NAACP, and similar to Boas, he acted on the realization that Jews and African-Americans experienced the same obstacle in overcoming government restrictions supported by eugenics and illegitimate social theories. The scientific and social defense that Boas contributed, paired with the legal and political aid from Louis Marshall, covered the array of functions of the NAACP in defeating eugenics in America, and in constructing the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement.

In defense of African-Americans, Louis Marshall contributed to the fight against eugenics by helping the NAACP in delicate legal cases. Though the AJC officially did not offer overwhelming support to African-Americans in the pre-WWII era, Marshall's allegiance to the AJC and his philanthropic and legal aid as an official of the NAACP bridged an important relationship between the Jewish and African-American community. The reason why the AJC was not heavily involved with the early development of the NAACP might be due to its commitment to its own issues. However, the AJC may have also been concerned with forming any relationships or allegiances that could compromise its social and political progress.⁹³ Regardless, Marshall saw the same parallels between the African-American struggle for civil liberties in American which Boas highlighted in his studies of race. His work with the NAACP and his commitment to giving African-Americans the civil justice they deserved earned him the position of legal advisor for the NAACP. While Jews suffered from immigration restriction on entering

⁹³ Goldstein, Judith The Politics of Ethnic Pressure page 250

America, African-Americans desperately tried to sustain the few rights they had inside this nation of equality. As a man who cared deeply for minorities who suffered at the hands of government, Marshall used political, legal, and financial resources to help the NAACP. In a letter to Rev. Dr. Moses P. Jacobsen on September 24th 1906, Marshall stated:

By way of supplement to my recent letter to you, I call your attention to the almost insuperable difficulty which stands in the way of our government's intervening on behalf of the oppressed and tortured Jews of Russia, by such occurrences as are now being witnessed in Atlanta, and which almost daily occur in various parts of the United States, of wholesale massacres of Negroes by American citizens largely based on race prejudice and indicative of total disregard of the teachings of civilization and of the everlasting principles of law and justice.⁹⁴

Marshall criticized the U.S. government of hypocrisy in accusing Russia of throwing out innocent Jewish citizens while ignoring injustices towards African-American's civil liberties. Marshall did not shy away from expressing his frustration with government rulings and the public's degradation of innocent minorities. Those who were close to him, such as Cyrus Adler of the AJC, knew of his passion for supporting oppressed minorities in America, especially because they suffered trials and tribulations similar to Jews.⁹⁵ His ability to see beyond the problems of his own community, and reach out to other people who dealt with similar hardships from racial prejudice made Marshall into a hero. Marshall, like Boas, refused to challenge his opponents to only one duel. Instead, Marshall defended African-Americans in several debates and trials from eugenicists, prosecutors, and government officials who used eugenics to strengthen their arguments.

⁹⁴ Reznikoff, Charles Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty page 422

⁹⁵ Adler, Cyrus American Jewish Yearbook: Special Articles, Louis Marshall American Jewish Committee, Philadelphia Vol 32. page 30 1930

Marshall's involvement in crucial court cases revolving around segregation and equality, and his work as a legal advisor to the Eugenics Record Office became his primary defense of the black community against eugenics. As one of the most successful lawyers of his time, Marshall continuously fought the injustices of eugenicists and government officials who promoted ideas of the inferiority and degenerate characteristics of African-Americans. He used his role as a legal advisor of the ERO, to inhibit the growth of the eugenics movement's political ascension by pointing to the unconstitutional use of sterilization laws. In a letter to Judge Warren W. Foster of the Court of General Sessions of New York City, Marshall stated, "The decapitation of the hand of the kleptomaniac, the branding of one who has committed the crime of burglary or the amputation of the sexual organs of one guilty adultery would be doubtless, in this age, be deemed cruel and in-human punishment."⁹⁶ It was imperative for Marshall to explain that though states had already passed legislation regarding sterilization, these measures for helping eugenics move from principal to method, could not be justified. Though the ERO's proceedings to analyze sterilization laws in the U.S. did not directly deal with degeneration due to race, Louis Marshall's counter to the legality of sterilization and the use of eugenics in America prohibited the further advancement of such laws, which potentially affected any minority deemed inferior. However, to stop eugenics from deciding critical court cases on African-American civil rights, Marshall also provided ample legal aid to the NAACP in several cases.

Marshall defended African-Americans from court cases which opposed transfers of property and cases violating voting rights due to arguments of inequality and inferiority. The case, *Corrigan v. Buckley* in 1924, exemplified Marshall's contribution to the NAACP as an

⁹⁶ Laughlin, Harry Eugenics Record Office Bulletin No. 10 B: The Legal, Legislative and Administrative Aspects of Sterilization ERO, Cold Spring Harbor Long Island, New York, February 1914 Page 74

outstanding legal advisor. In the case, Irene Corrigan sold her home to a black man, which circumvented a restrictive covenant amongst home owners in the District of Columbia not to sell homes to persons of “negro blood.”⁹⁷ Though the court upheld the previous court order, which affirmed Corrigan’s obligation to not sell her house to any “Negro person,” Marshall refuted the idea of prohibiting any person from purchasing property because of his racial or blood type. He also condemned the court for reaching a verdict which shattered the ideas of equality, democracy, and the American way of life.⁹⁸ In cases involving voting rights, such as Nixon v. Herndon in 1927, Marshall continued to aid the NAACP legal committee in defending African-American rights in court cases that rejected their civil rights due to their race. In the case, Marshall won voting rights for Dr. Nixon who was denied his right to vote in the Democratic Party primary because he was black. Though the Texas legislature passed a new primary law to counter the courts’ decision, Marshall again helped the NAACP legal committee defend Nixon. The case marked another significant victory in the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement.⁹⁹

The court case Goode v. Bell, Johnson, and Riera in 1928, also highlighted the subtle influence of eugenics in court cases handled by Marshall and the NAACP legal committee. The case involved an African-American man, H.D. Goode, whose right to vote in the Democratic primary was denied in Florida by the three defendants. Marshall’s agenda for these cases primarily sought to show racism and prejudice from the defendant toward the plaintiff. However, Marshall and other attorneys needed to first defend the clients’ image against any plausible accusation from the plaintiff attempting to define the defendant as an inferior or lesser specimen.

⁹⁷ Diner, Hasia In the Almost Promised Land Greenwood Press, Inc. Westport, connecticut, 1977 page 130

⁹⁸ Diner, Hasia In the Almost Promised Land page 131

⁹⁹ Diner, Hasia In the Almost Promised Land page 131

In the defense of African-American voting rights, Marshall prefaced his arguments by always qualifying the plaintiff as a person deserving equality. The NAACP legal advisory council to Mr. Goode, and his attorney F.W. Marsh, needed to show the court that their clients discrimination was a product of race prejudice, and that elements which could be used to categorize the plaintiff as a “lesser” entity - i.e. one that is not intelligent or has committed a crime- did not apply.¹⁰⁰ These arguments hinted at the undertones of eugenics, and the method of disproving someones humanity in an attempt to diminish their constitutional rights.

Aside from protecting African-Americans from racial discrimination, or from the misconception that their inherent biology gave reason to prohibit the use of their rights as citizens, Marshall also explained his distaste for segregation. Marshall frequently wrote to NAACP officials, such as James Weldon Johnson, and in several letters he discussed his displeasure with the American government’s fear of African-Americans due to the prospect of their inter-marriage and inter-breeding in America. In a letter to Weldon Johnson on June 10th 1929, Marshall expressed his disdain for legislation and communities that upheld segregation to restrict intermarriage through the Atlanta segregation ordinance. “The absurdity and cowardice of that enactment is evident from the hypocritical phraseology by virtue of which separate residential areas are set apart for “those persons who are forbidden to intermarry.” Taken literally that would prevent parents, and children, brothers, and sisters, and others within the Levitical degrees, not only from living in the same house but on the same block, or probably on the same street or in the same ward.”¹⁰¹ Marshall knew the intentions of this ordinance was purely directed

¹⁰⁰ Boehm, Randolph Papers of the NAACP, Part 1: Meetings of the Board of Directors, Records of Annual conferences, etc. 1909-1950 Frederick, MD, University Publications of America, 1982 Reel 19 of Microfilm slide 405-408

¹⁰¹ Boehm, Randolph Papers of the NAACP Part 1 Reel 19 slide 412

at race segregation. However, he found this flawed, poorly written ordinance, truly reflected the equally poor reasoning of those who supported segregation, based on the social and biological theories which propelled the fear of African-American inter-breeding. Until his death in 1929, Marshall continued to aid the NAACP efforts against prejudice and segregation. He truly believed in democracy and equality, in which no one should be excluded due to race or biology.

After his death, the NAACP praised Marshall's legal and philanthropic contributions to the African-American community. African-American editors across the country lauded Marshall's efforts.

The Sudden death abroad of Louis Marshall, the great lawyer, philanthropist, and champion of human rights, deprives the Negro group of one of its best white friends

- Editor Pittsburgh Courier

In the death of Louis Marshall, the people of the United States and the lovers of right and justice everywhere lost a friend...And while it is true that Mr. Marshall was a Jew and a leader among his race, yet he found a fruitful field in the causes of right and justice in his work among Negroes.¹⁰²

- Editor St. Louis Argus

Though the AJC did not actively work with NAACP before WWII, Marshall's death brought these two defense organizations closer together. The AJC and NAACP officials held a joint service at the Temple Emanu-El of New York City on November 10th 1929 to commemorate their fallen leader. While Jews and African-Americans faced the oppression of eugenics through different legal matters, ultimately their resistance, under two great leaders in Louis Marshall and Franz Boas, united their efforts, and displayed their similarities as two minority groups who persevered against imposing government and scientific forces.

¹⁰² Boehm, Randolph Papers of the NAACP Part 1 Reel 19 slide 419

The NAACP and W.E.B. Dubois expressed their gratitude for the contributions of Franz Boas and Louis Marshall to the Civil Rights Movement. Their efforts clearly demonstrated their opposition to eugenics and their desire to help minorities find justice in American society. Boas cemented his legacy in the early Civil Rights Movement as an opponent to labeling African-Americans as physically and mentally inferior. He became highly active in working with W.E.B. Dubois to research the “Negro race,” and disprove eugenicist’s theories on degenerate minorities. Boas and Dubois used their anthropological research to defend African-Americans, and disseminated their opinions and research through the NAACP publication, *The Crisis*. Boas believed in the NAACP’s political efforts, and attended its first annual race conferences to formulate strategies and inspire efforts to combat racism and its extension from social science. Louis Marshall also strongly believed in the NAACP’s abilities. Like Boas, Marshall saw the parallels between the Jewish and African-American situations in America during the early twentieth century. Though the AJC expanded its efforts to aid the Civil Rights Movement after WWII, Marshall planted the seeds for a strong Jewish and African-American alliance during his time as an official of both the AJC and NAACP. His work as a consultant for the ERO and his defense of African-Americans as a legal advisor for the NAACP demonstrated his commitment to blocking the influence of the American eugenics movement on U.S. legislation.

Part 5: Conclusion

Though the American eugenics movement appeared to be indelible through its combination of racial theory and government support, the Jewish resistance comprised of social scientists such as Franz Boas and defense organizations like the AJC, effectively countered scientific studies, refuted anti-Semitic propaganda, and limited the spread of eugenics based immigration policies. The overwhelming power of the American eugenics movement, coupled with atrocities of WWII, shaded the accomplishments of Jewish leaders against eugenics in early twentieth century America. Restrictive immigration legislation passed laws based on eugenics research, and many minorities fell victim to sterilization, and never received political or civil justice. However, the Jewish-American resistance to eugenics also prolonged the fight against eugenics, and continued to combat the restrictive immigration legislation that eventually passed. This effort doubtlessly saved many lives from eugenics research, and supported thousands of immigrants who used their window between immigration laws to create new lives for themselves in America. Furthermore, the impact on the NAACP showed the positive influence of Jewish defense organizations and social scientists on the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement, and exemplified the determination of the Jewish resistance to eugenics. Louis Marshall's legal defense and Franz Boas' scientific apologia instilled confidence in African-American leaders, such as W.E.B. Dubois and other officials of the NAACP, and aided them in a time of civil and political injustices. The culmination of the efforts of Franz Boas and the AJC, in helping Jews, African-Americans, and immigrants from various countries, ultimately displayed their belief in humanity and democracy.

Though Boas and the AJC were successful in their efforts against race science in America, internationally they could not achieve this same feat. The AJC recognized the threat of Nazism and its commitment to race science. The Committee wanted to help German Jewish movements against Nazism and the Third Reich, however organizations such as the Centralverein felt that the AJC should not interfere with German politics since the CV believed it was more than capable of handling Hitler and his propaganda.¹⁰³ The AJC continued to rely on the same methods it used before to successfully combat race theory in America. The Committee enlightened the American public with anti-Nazi statements, sent funds to European Jewish defense organizations, and used its political connections to denounce Hitler.¹⁰⁴ The implementation of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 marked the victory of race science and eugenics in Germany. However, the AJC continued its fight against race science by enlisting the help of Franz Boas as an American delegate for an international conference on race.¹⁰⁵

The continuous efforts of Franz Boas and the American Jewish Committee to defeat race science abroad exemplified the strength of the Jewish-American resistance towards eugenics during the early twentieth century. The American eugenics movements featured a number of powerful eugenicists, restrictionist government officials, and anti-Semitic elites, who greatly contributed to the success of German race science. However, the Jewish resistance, comprised of dedicated social scientists such as Franz Boas, and powerful defense organizations like the American Jewish Committee, successfully combatted the spread of anti-Semitic media, racist scientific theories, and strict immigration policies. Without the Jewish resistance to eugenics in

¹⁰³ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 156

¹⁰⁴ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 159

¹⁰⁵ Cohen, Naomi Not Free to Desist page 181

the early twentieth century, the extent to which the American eugenics movement may have succeeded in implementing their solution to purify the American race will never be known.

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*note: Each letter from the correspondence of Franz Boas is listed individually because slide numbers were not listed on the microfilm. NAACP microfilm slide numbers are listed within footnotes.

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