

Book Review

Darnell, Regna. *The History of Anthropology: A Critical Window on the Discipline in North America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021, 394 pages.

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Regna Darnell's *The History of Anthropology* consists of seventeen chapters written over five decades. While some of the chapters reproduce papers read at conferences, others are based on the author's MA thesis and PhD dissertation. The volume examines the institutional context of the professionalization of anthropology as an academic discipline in America, the role of Franz Boas and his students in this multifaceted process, and anthropology's connections with the allied disciplines of linguistics and folklore studies. Darnell's position differs from the history of anthropology of George W. Stocking, Jr. in three ways: First, she sees the history of anthropology as an anthropological problem, an integral part of anthropology's study of human cultures across time and space, and studies it ethnographically. Second, unlike historians of science, she considers "the process of overlap and negotiation by which things change, often accumulating imperceptibly until they flip into a new paradigm" (xxv). Finally, she maintains that paradigms not only replace each other but can also coexist, fading in and out of each other.

In Chapter One, Darnell revisits her reading of the life and times of Edward Sapir, the American Jewish anthropologist and linguist best known for his work on Native American languages. She recalls being fascinated by Sapir's intellectual diversity, his interdisciplinary approach, and his ability to bring outliers into broader conversations. She also expresses her disappointment with reviewers for talking a lot about Sapir while ignoring the strategy of biography as a genre or product, and the lack of interest in attempting another biography of Sapir.

There was no single moment when American anthropology became professional, Darnell argues in Chapter Two. Rather, there were two periods during which the disciplinary boundaries of American anthropology were

solidified, institutions for anthropological research were established, and a community of self-conscious anthropologists emerged. The first paradigm of professional American anthropology crystallized around the Bureau of American Ethnology (hereafter BAE), while the second crystallized around Franz Boas and his students.

Chapter Three analyzes how professional rivalries and personal equations gave rise to a mutually beneficial relationship between folklore studies and anthropology. The American Folklore Society was not originally intended to be an anthropological organization. Its purpose was to study all the cultures and traditions that had contributed to the formation of the American way of life. William Wells Newell redefined its scope to include anthropology in order to strengthen its position within the developing discipline of folklore studies, improve the output of the *Journal of American Folklore*, and professionalize his fellow folklorists. He even extended his support to Boas' plan to remake anthropology into an academic discipline, which faced strong opposition within the American Anthropological Association from the BAE and the Anthropological Society of Washington. Boas, on the other hand, found an alternative outlet for publication and recognition for his students in the American Folklore Society.

Chapter Four traces the emergence of academic anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. The first professional anthropological activity in Philadelphia developed in a museum associated with the University of Pennsylvania. It remained the primary site for anthropological research until the first decade of the twentieth century, when American anthropology began to move away from material culture and the training of museum archaeologists towards ethnographic fieldwork and the training of cultural anthropologists. This was a general trend within American anthropology during this period, as it became increasingly associated with the universities under the influence of Boas.

Darnell describes the various institutions that hold anthropologists' personal papers in Chapter Five. Anthropologists' field notes are crucial documents for readers to assess the validity and reliability of ethnographic writings based on them, to understand the context of research and theory, and to trace the intellectual and professional development of anthropology. She points to the need for the development of computerized databases and finding aids to locate such documents in archives, and discusses the steps that all anthropologists should take to ensure that their personal papers are properly archived.

In Chapter Six, Darnell reflects on her experience of leading the project to publish the Franz Boas Papers, over forty thousand documents held at the American Philosophical Society. The archive includes professional papers and personal correspondence. The project has stimulated several other research and documentation agendas. An independent donor has extended support for the digitization of the Boas Papers. The Mellon Foundation has offered two grants to reconnect materials on endangered Native American languages with their communities of origin. Meanwhile, a team of indigenous scholars has begun interpreting the documents collected by Boas and his students and comparing them with the knowledge held in contemporary oral traditions to revitalize languages and cultures. Another research team, based at Humboldt University, plans to collect and digitize Boas' documents in Germany, with extensive commentary. Taken together, these efforts will contribute to the advancement of the "useful knowledge" that Benjamin Franklin envisioned when he founded the American Philosophical Society.

Boas' outspoken commentary on Nazi racism in Europe and his longstanding commitment to the emancipatory struggles of African Americans, Native Americans, and other minority groups made him one of America's foremost public intellectuals during the interwar period. In the post-war years, however, his reputation suffered considerably in a rapidly changing academic and political climate. The study of American Indians was increasingly marginalized as the Cold War era generated government support for research on a global scale in defence of American hegemony. Many of the new generation of anthropologists dismissed Boas as a mere antiquarian, arguing that Boas set American anthropology back half a century because he was not a theorist.

Darnell refutes this misconception in Chapter Seven. The collection of native texts was fundamental to the practice of Boasian anthropology and linguistics because texts allowed members of so-called primitive cultures to speak in their own words. Boas' student Sapir regarded texts as sacrosanct. He went beyond his mentor in exploring the connection between textual collections from which grammatical and ethnological information could be extracted.

Darnell examines the textual tradition in search of links between Sapir's early Boasian career in linguistics and ethnology and his later theoretical work on the interrelationship between language, personality, and culture in Chapter Eight. In doing so, Darnell challenges the current view that linguistic and cultural theories are far removed from each other. Sapir was interested in

philology, linguistics, ethnology, folklore, poetry, literary criticism, music, mathematics, psychology, and psychiatry. The question often arises, therefore, as to what, if anything is the “real” Sapir.

Darnell suggests that all these interests were interrelated and developed during the decade from 1915 to 1925, in Chapter Nine, which transformed Sapir from a competent Boasian anthropologist into a mature interdisciplinary theorist. The whole of Sapir, therefore, emerges best when he is considered from a biographical perspective.

In Chapter Ten, Darnell probes the old debate about whether or not Indo-European techniques, with their evolutionary overtones, are applicable to the study of unwritten American Indian languages. She also points out what American Indian linguistics has to contribute to general linguistics.

Chapter Eleven explores the formation of the “first Yale school” in linguistics, which developed around Sapir and the advanced graduate students he brought with him from Chicago. Sapir always encouraged his students to work in the intersections of ethnology and linguistics. He emphasized the symbolic nature of culture and qualitative ethnological fieldwork. However, revisions to his program began during his sabbatical and illness in 1937 and 1938. Later, George Murdock dramatically reconfigured Yale’s anthropology program, with archaeology rather than linguistics as its secondary focus, believing that the jobs were in archaeology rather than linguistics. Sapir and Murdock had very different ideas about ethnology, although they agreed that the core of any anthropology program was necessarily ethnology. While Sapir encouraged intensive study of particular societies in order to arrive at the “native point of view,” Murdock envisioned a worldwide comparative database to support quantitative, scientific generalizations. Murdock’s expansion of Yale ethnology beyond the boundaries of indigenous North America was facilitated by the Second World War. Yale anthropologists were active in government service, demonstrating the usefulness of their knowledge in the practical political arena. But the legacies of Sapir’s program persisted in the Yale ethnosciences and linguistic anthropology of the 1960s and remain an available option in Americanist anthropology in the new millennium.

Chapter Twelve provides an overview of Ruth Benedict’s intellectual trajectory. According to Darnell, Benedict best illustrates the alleged shift from Boas’ notion of history to that of the “indigenous point of view.” In *Patterns of Culture*, Benedict argued that each culture selects from an “arc of cultural

possibilities,” dominant ideas that make it intelligible both to itself and to the analyst. In her later works, moving beyond the culture-specific study of the small-scale societies of the American Southwest to the cross-cultural study of modern nation-states, Benedict emphasized how anthropology could be applied to modern ethical problems of international conflict, especially anti-Semitism, Nazi imperialism, and the Holocaust. Her leadership in policy-oriented interdisciplinary research on cross-cultural diversity during and after the Second World War became highly influential in the public sphere.

Returning Benjamin Lee Whorf to center stage, Chapter Thirteen examines how his ideas are grounded in the general approach of Boasian anthropology to the study of the indigenous languages and cultures of North America. The role of Whorf in contemporary ethnolinguistics is an unusually complex one from the standpoint of the histories of anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and philosophy. He has been thoroughly misinterpreted as unscientific because his institutional credentials were not in anthropology or linguistics. Darnell refutes a number of stereotypes about Whorf’s position in the group around Edward Sapir at Yale in the 1930s and locates his formulation of “the linguistic relativity principle” within a larger body of his own linguistic work and that of his contemporaries.

Chapter Fourteen offers a case study of the formative years of Mary R. Haas, who studied comparative philology at the University of Chicago under Edward Sapir, whom she followed to Yale. She completed her PhD in linguistics at Yale University in 1935. Her dissertation was *A Grammar of the Tunica Language*. She worked with the last native speaker of Tunica. Later she pursued fieldwork in many other languages. The chapter discusses the ways in which the first Yale school of linguistics around Sapir differed from the linguistics of the group around Boas at Columbia.

Chapter Fifteen focuses on the role and influence of Stanley Newman, another graduate student who followed Edward Sapir from Chicago to Yale in 1931 to become a key member of the research group that formed around him there. Newman was the only student of Edward Sapir to conduct research in two major areas of Sapir’s interest—American Indian linguistics, and culture and personality. The two collaborated closely in what was then called linguistic psychology. These joint ventures had an enduring impact on Newman’s thinking.

Franz Boas and his students identified themselves as a group within the discipline at an early period and were so perceived by the older establishment centred in the BAE around the turn of the century. But each of Boas' students had a slightly different theoretical focus: Sapir worked with language, Clark Wissler was primarily museum-based, Lowie studied social organization, and Alfred Kroeber concentrated on California ethnology. Theoretical synthesis of the collective approach began to appear only around 1920, a time by when Boas had already completed his major works. Darnell interrogates the emergence of Boasian anthropology, the focus of which was on extensive fieldwork in particular cultures, in Chapter Sixteen. She further argues that the main concern of this new paradigm is best exemplified in Alfred Irving Hallowell's dissertation on bear ceremonialism in the northern hemisphere, which is the last of the major distributional studies of that era and presents an explicit defence of the Boasian strategy for cross-cultural comparison. Although Hallowell was a student of Frank Speck, while doing his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, he used to regularly travel to Columbia University to attend Boas' weekly seminars.

Boas was unique among the early physical anthropologists in insisting that racial types were arbitrary. He played a crucial role in influencing public opinion on questions of race and the social implications of research in physical anthropology. The final chapter of the book scrutinizes Boas' early works in order to place his total contribution in accurate historical perspective. In doing so, it evaluates Boas' contribution to physical anthropology while highlighting that there is little continuity from Boas to modern physical anthropology.

Written on the basis of a rich corpus of institutional records and private papers, the book offers a critical re-examination of the trajectory of one of the four major national traditions of anthropology. It provides new insights into the role of extra-academic bodies like museums, learned societies, and government research institutes in the rise of anthropology as an academic discipline in America and re-examines the works of Alfred Irving Hallowell, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Edward Sapir, Leslie Spier, Mary R. Haas, Stanley Newman, and William Wells Newell. It is a significant contribution to the history of anthropology and the history of science in general. Intellectual historians might also find the volume interesting since it shows how ideas arise and grow over time in the career of one scholar.