



Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries

Vernon J. Williams

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In this thought-provoking reexamination of the history of "racial science" Vernon J. Williams argues that all current theories of race and race relations can be understood as extensions of or reactions to the theories formulated during the first half of the twentieth century. Williams explores these theories in a carefully crafted analysis of Franz Boas and his influence upon his contemporaries, especially W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, George W. Ellis, and Robert E. Park. Historians have long recognized the monumental role Franz Boas played in eviscerating the racist worldview that prevailed in the American social sciences. Williams reconsiders the standard portrait of Boas and offers a new understanding of a man who never fully escaped the racist assumptions of 19th-century anthropology but nevertheless successfully argued that African Americans could assimilate into American society and that the chief obstacle facing them was not heredity but the prejudice of white America.

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