

**Mr. America's Creator:  
The Race Science of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, 1896-1943**



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April 4, 2011  
Word Count: 14,785

## **Acknowledgements**

The kernel of thought which led to this year-long endeavor emerged from a discussion with Professor Samuel Roberts early in the spring of 2010. I am indebted to him for his introduction to the challenging Dr. Hrdlicka and his guidance as a second reader on this thesis.

I am similarly grateful to the History Department for its generous support through a research grant which facilitated archival research at the National Anthropological Archives in Washington. The friendly and knowledgeable staff at the NAA made my first excursion into the archives a rich and rewarding experience.

To the many history professors and classmates who have both challenged and encouraged me along my intellectual journey at Columbia, I thank you.

And finally, to Professor Mae Ngai, a brilliant educator and thesis advisor, who has made the thesis-writing adventure a defining capstone to my undergraduate education. I am exceedingly grateful for your constant encouragement and personal investment in each of our projects.

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### **Brief Chronological Overview of the Life of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka**

- **March 29, 1869** Alois Ferdinand Hrdlička (Aleš Hrdlička) born in Humpolec, Bohemia
- **September 1882** Emigrated to New York City
- **1888** Enrolled at the Eclectic Medical College of New York City.
- **1892** Graduated first in his class from the Eclectic Medical College. Enrolled in the New York Homeopathic Medical College and Hospital.
- **1894** Became research intern at the State Homeopathic Hospital for the Insane in Middletown, New York, where he began his studies in physical anthropology.
- **1895** Joined staff of the Pathological Institute of the New York State Hospitals as associate in anthropology.
- **1896** Studied anthropology under Leon Manouvrier in Paris.
- **1896-1898** Anthropometric research at New York State Hospitals
- **March-July(?) 1898** Accompanied Carl Lumholtz on his expedition to northern Mexico, sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), and visited the Tarahumara, Huichol, and Tepecan Indians
- **August 1898** Presentation on “Physical Differences between White and Colored Children” before the American Society for the Advancement of Science
- **Spring 1899** Resigned from the Pathological Institute to take charge of physical and medical anthropological research on the Hyde Expeditions of the AMNH to the southwestern United States
- **1900** Published **Anthropological Investigations on One Thousand White and Colored Children of Both Sexes the Inmates of the New York Juvenile Asylum, with Additional Notes on One Hundred Colored Children of the New York Colored Orphan Asylum**
- **August 1899 - 1902** Hyde Expeditions in southwestern Arizona, New Mexico, and northern Mexico
- **May 1, 1903** Became assistant curator in charge of the new Division of Physical Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, at the United States National Museum, Smithsonian Institution.
- **March 28, 1910** Promoted to curator in the Division of Physical Anthropology.
- **Summer 1917** Old American research at Yale University, Harvard University, and the University of Virginia and in Tennessee.
- **1925** President of the American Anthropological Association for the 1925-1926 term. **The Old Americans** published.
- **September 5, 1943** Died of heart attack

*Given the demonstrated intrinsic nature of scientific bias and function, anthropologists, if they are to understand the meaning of their own work, must seek to understand the socio-political influences and applications of their chosen perspectives and analyses. Scientists should realize that in as much as they are 'tools of society' they are also political actors. Since facts do not speak for themselves, the physical anthropologist ultimately takes responsibility for his or her views.*

-Michael L. Blakey

"Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology:  
With Special Reference to the Work of Ales Hrdlicka," 1987

## Introduction

After nearly half a century's work to establish the field of American physical anthropology, Dr. Ales Hrdlicka<sup>1</sup> died quietly in his home in Washington, D.C. on September 5, 1943. A leading public intellectual, Hrdlicka had been the director of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian Institute for forty years. He was an original proponent of the Bering Strait theory of migration, at the time a controversial position arguing that the first humans in the Americas migrated from Asia across a land bridge roughly 12,000 years ago. A survey of Hrdlicka's resume, full of similarly impressive accomplishments, glosses over the nuanced and complicated intellectual development of this Bohemian-born American physical anthropologist. This thesis explores the tension embedded in Dr. Hrdlicka's conceptual vision, a vision limited by his—and to a large extent, the nation's—obsession with the quantification of race.

Any number of questions arise in attempting to discern the intellectual course and overall meaning of the work of Ales Hrdlicka: Where do the lines blur between scientist and political actor? Does all scientific research possess socio-political influences? Hrdlicka remains a largely forgotten figure, but this thesis suggests that a reassessment of his career can be productive. Such a reassessment should be done with a mind toward greater responsibility for his views and their impact on the foundation of modern physical anthropology. I argue that Hrdlicka's trajectory offers considerable insight into the intricate web of race science and politics. His story is not a straightforward tale of an early twentieth century race scientist, but in fact, is riddled with the struggle between the evolution of his racial prejudices and the findings of his scientific research.

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<sup>1</sup> Czech pronunciation: **Ah**-lesh **Hurd**-lich-*kuh*

To merely label Hrdlicka as a race scientist who lacked any concept of the implications of his research would be an oversimplification. As the historian Elazar Barkan states: “From a historical perspective, anyone who followed social and cultural conventions on race [in the early twentieth century] could be branded a racist. This, however, would be a mistake, and would lump people of different racial convictions.”<sup>2</sup> The body of this paper posits the argument that Hrdlicka does not fit in the camp of staunch eugenicists and racial supremacists like Charles Davenport and Madison Grant, as some have claimed.<sup>3</sup> Rather, his conception of race became substantially more refined and nuanced over the course of his professional career. Though his training and intellectual background arose out of the traditions of scientific racism, Hrdlicka came to hold some rather progressive positions in contradistinction to conventional views. Notably, he concluded, circa 1900, that social deviance was the product of environment, not physical “defect,” and he opposed immigration restrictions in the 1920s. Most germane to this study remains the question of the impact of race science on Hrdlicka’s methodologies and conclusions. Does Hrdlicka’s advocacy of the new immigrants signify a revision, even an abandonment, of race science in the later years of his life?

Immersed in the race science of the day, Hrdlicka began his anthropological career with his "Anthropological Investigations on One Thousand White and Colored Children of Both Sexes the Inmates of the New York Juvenile Asylum, with Additional Notes on One Hundred Colored Children of the New York Colored Orphan Asylum," first published in 1898. Hrdlicka meticulously collected comparative “racial” data on the physical measurements of these children

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<sup>2</sup> Elazar Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism : Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66.

in an effort to conclusively determine whether or not this class of social outcasts were physically “abnormal,” or thoroughly “degenerate”—beyond remediation.

To understand the foundations of Hrdlicka’s research, an understanding of the basic fallacy of anthropometric “race” theory, and of race science in general, is required. The scientists studying craniometry and anthropometry in the mid to late nineteenth century, in both the United States and Europe, “concentrated on the great ‘primary’ groupings of *Homo sapiens* and used physiological characteristics such as skin color, stature, head shape, and so on, to distinguish them one from the other. Quite commonly this school associated physical with cultural differences and displayed, in doing so, a feeling of white superiority over the colored races.”<sup>4</sup> The biological superiority of the white races endured well into the twentieth century as an unquestionable truth. As Nancy Stepan explains: “The scientists’ deepest commitment seems to have been to the notion that the social and cultural differences observed between people should be understood as realities of nature. To a large extent, the history of racial science is a history of a series of accommodations of the sciences to the demands of deeply held convictions about the ‘naturalness of the inequalities between human races.’”<sup>5</sup> For Hrdlicka, to prove white superiority was never an explicit goal of his research. He assumed this premise as a given, and instead, evaluated the theories of his contemporaries in the context of the rapidly fluctuating demographics of the first decades of the twentieth century.

In only studying society’s outcasts in his earliest work, Hrdlicka’s conclusions could not be extended to the degree he had originally intended. He realized in the early 1900s that he

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<sup>4</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land : Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 134.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science : Great Britain, 1800-1960*, St. Anthony's/Macmillan Series (London: Macmillan, in association with St. Anthony's College, Oxford, 1982), xx-xxi.



needed to assemble comparative data of “normal” subjects, against which he could “compare” the “abnormals.” Still later, in the 1910s, his scientific mission refocused somewhat on the designation of an “uncontaminated” American stock. His research began in earnest in 1910, concurrently with the work of the Dillingham Commission whose 1911 report purported that Southern and Eastern European immigration “severely challenged the country’s absorptive capacity and entailed unacceptable social and political costs.”<sup>6</sup> Hrdlicka likewise began his own fifteen year study to answer the same principal question as the Dillingham Commission—were immigrants good or bad for America?—but with a different methodology. The product of this endeavor, The Old Americans: A Physiological Profile, would influence the rest of Hrdlicka’s career and serves as an ideal bookend to analyze the development of his racial conceptions.

The historiography concerning Hrdlicka’s life and work is thin at best. No comprehensive inquiry into Hrdlicka’s career through the analytical lens of race science yet exists. Much of the limited historical writing on Hrdlicka’s extensive career instead highlight his international research, the massive collections of specimens he accumulated, and his role in the establishment of physical anthropology as a distinct American anthropological discipline. Because many of his initial reports lack extensive conclusions and deductions, an overall gap between his research and their broader implications persists. In his National Academy of Sciences biography, Hrdlicka is quoted as saying, “The accounts to be given are intended to be fairly impersonal. There will be no theory to defend, no side to be taken in any controversy, though there may be suggestions where justified by the general acquaintance with the field and perhaps by the better perspective

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<sup>6</sup> Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design : Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Russell Sage Foundation; Harvard University Press, 2006), 232.

of one who is not involved in any individual finds or opinions.”<sup>7</sup> For the forty years following his death, this statement seems to be taken at face value, ignoring the fact that science, like any other discipline, is not impersonal.

In a 1979 PhD dissertation, anthropological historian Frank Spencer biographically detailed much of Hrdlicka’s career. Spencer’s account passes year by year through Hrdlicka’s life, but “gives little attention to the socially significant racist, classist, and sexist aspects of his work...” as the biological anthropologist, Michael Blakey, critiques.<sup>8</sup> Forty years after Spencer’s dissertation, Blakey himself posited, for what appears to be the first time, the inherent socio-political bias of Hrdlicka and the fields of anthropology in general. Blakey argues, without clear support, that Hrdlicka employed crafty experimental methods in anthropometric studies in order to manipulate his data to support the conclusions he desired. The 1897-8 study on child orphans does not garner attention in Blakey’s critique.

Because of Hrdlicka’s primary role as an anthropologist, it is critical to extend beyond works of history to pursue an understanding of the methodologies used in the field of physical anthropology. Examining his studies requires a grounding in the changes and currents in the field during Hrdlicka’s lifetime, most obviously because he was a significant factor in that change. Lee D. Baker provides such a framework in *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*. Baker’s work serves as an essential element in understanding the historiography surrounding Hrdlicka’s work. He seeks to understand the “linkages between

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<sup>7</sup> Adolph H. Schultz, "Biographical Memoir of Ales Hrdlicka, 1869-1943," *National Academy of Sciences, Biographical Memoirs* 23(1944): 312.

<sup>8</sup> Michael L. Blakey, "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology : With Special Reference to the Work of Ales Hrdlicka," *Critique of Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (1987): 8.

the shifting discourse on race within anthropology and the racial constructs undergoing transformation in the United States.”<sup>9</sup> A common thread arises in his use of various Supreme Court decisions to highlight the intersection between anthropology, political ideology, and popular culture. Most pertinent to the scope of this paper, he explicitly cites the role of Hrdlicka in the eugenics movement and his association with one of the movement’s most ardent leaders, Charles Davenport. Still, Baker falls into the trap of Blakey, using out-of-context quotations from Hrdlicka to simplify the complex ideology which evolved during Hrdlicka’s fifty-year career.

While fellow anthropologists have positioned Hrdlicka alongside Charles Davenport at one extreme and as a comrade of Franz Boas at the other, the conflict between Hrdlicka’s rigorous scientific methods and his accommodation of antiquated race theories resists any straightforward characterization. Considering such problematics, this thesis is not a holistic biographic endeavor, but rather, seeks to understand the intellectual trajectory of this race scientist through a careful analysis of two of his most defining studies: the 1897-8 New York Juvenile Asylum study and *The Old Americans*, first published in 1925 at the conclusion of his search for the quintessential American stock. The first chapter will highlight the most influential years and experiences of Hrdlicka’s early life alongside his intellectual foundations. The second chapter will examine in detail his 1897-8 study at the New York Juvenile Asylum. The third chapter will analyze Hrdlicka’s research on the Old Americans and the American future. A careful evaluation of the career of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka provides a lens to better understand the dynamic interchange between science, politics, and culture in American society from the late 1890s to the early 1940s.

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<sup>9</sup> Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro : Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2.

## Chapter 1: A Veering Path of Emergence



<sup>10</sup> Hrdlicka's story of humble beginnings, pivotal professional interactions, and abundant ambition illuminates a lifelong friction between his identity as an immigrant and an American, as a scientist and a political actor. How did the child of middle-class Bohemian immigrants come to attain multiple American graduate degrees and lead the first department for physical anthropology at the National Museum?

### **“The Dethronement of His Diamond”**

The thorough education of his earliest years and his fervent interest in the natural sciences continued to drive Hrdlicka throughout his life to be a scholar of the highest caliber. By the age of twenty-five, the goal of understanding the relationship between the “normal” and the “abnormal,” both physically and psychically emerged in Hrdlicka's writings.

Hrdlicka's budding interest in the matters of the natural world suggested the making of a cautious and skeptical scientist. More specifically, before leaving Bohemia for New York, Hrdlicka rambled through the countryside in search of specimens for his nascent collections, finding a rock thought to be a diamond. Hrdlicka described this dismaying experience in his own words in the preface to his memoir, *My Journeys*: “Then a bit exultingly, a bit afraid, I brought my treasure to our Professor. Luckily we were then nearly alone in the room. And then the

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<sup>10</sup> Alena Škodová, "Ales Hrdlicka," (June 26, 2002), [http://www.radio.cz/en/section/czechs/ales-hrdlicka-/pictures/osobnosti/hrdlicka\\_ales.jpg#pic](http://www.radio.cz/en/section/czechs/ales-hrdlicka-/pictures/osobnosti/hrdlicka_ales.jpg#pic). Accessed March 4, 2011.

‘diamond’ was dethroned. Dethroned to a chunk of quartz glass slag. Of course the Professor knew not what he was doing to me. I told my friends myself, so they could not tease me.”<sup>11</sup> His biographer, Frank Spencer, states: “It is tempting to conjecture that Hrdlicka’s later theoretical conservatism, that is an unwillingness to draw hasty conclusions from data, however suggestive, was not so much a facet of his rigid adherence to scientific method as perhaps an unwillingness to relive the emotional trauma embodied in the dethronement of his diamond.”<sup>12</sup> Regardless of the veracity of this hypothesis, Hrdlicka was eventually encouraged by his family physician to seek out a medical education, a decision that would lead him to the attainment of several medical degrees and ultimately, to anthropology.<sup>13</sup>

Hrdlicka soon developed an interest in anthropometry, the measurement and proportions of the human body and their applications in the comparison of human variation, and its relation to the study of the insane. In the fall of 1894, after joining the staff as a junior physician at the State Homeopathic Hospital for the Insane in Middletown, New York, he explored the work of French and Italian medico-anthropologists, wrestling with the notion that the socially inferior classes manifested physical symptoms of their inferiority<sup>14</sup> Fixed on discerning the link between physical characteristics and mental disease, Hrdlicka asserted: “The crystallized object of this class of scientist is to establish, on the principles of heredity and related natural laws, the facts

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<sup>11</sup> Ales Hrdlicka, "My Journeys," in *Ales Hrdlicka Papers* (Washington, D.C. : Smithsonian Institution: National Anthropological Archives, 1931), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Spencer, "Ales Hrdlicka, M.D., 1869-1943: A Chronicle of the Life and Work of an American Physical Anthropologist (Volumes I and II)" (Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1979), 28.

<sup>13</sup> Hrdlicka, "My Journeys," 5.

<sup>14</sup> For further information on the French and Italian medico-anthropologists, and specifically, Cesare Lombroso, see: Frank Spencer, "Ales Hrdlicka, M.D., 1869-1943: A Chronicle of the Life and Work of an American Physical Anthropologist (Volumes I and II)", 86.

that certain psychical abnormalities are in very close and more or less steady relations with certain physical abnormalities...and to contribute to the search of fact in this branch as much as lies in my power was my hope and the main cause of this work.”<sup>15</sup> Though leaving the remunerative benefits of private medical practice, he relished the opportunity for individual research: “But soon, due principally to French readings, the investigations began to lean towards the comparative-human, towards studies on groups, towards the anthropological. Before the year was over [I] obtained books and anthropometric instruments from Paris and began systematically to measure and examine the twelve hundred inmates of the Hospital.”<sup>16</sup>

### **An Ambitious Talent**

Even though Hrdlicka quickly outpaced Middletown’s limited resources, the hospital offered him the first opportunity to pursue his ambitious research interests. The superintendent at Middletown “...saw in [Hrdlicka] an admirable catalyst to stimulate [research] activity at Middletown.” In numerous letters, Hrdlicka recounted the struggles of his employment at the Hospital to his future wife, Marie Strickler as early as 1894. Hrdlicka repeatedly complained of a lack of resources available for his research endeavors: ““Without a place, without instruments, all that could be registered was what the eye, unaided, could see, and that is insufficient; I may just as well have amassed two thousand cases instead of a score, they would be just as unfitted for drawing any specific conclusions...”<sup>17</sup> Despite the subpar facilities at Middletown, Hrdlicka’s reputation as a physician-scientist grew, and he was extended an invitation to lead the

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<sup>15</sup> Ales Hrdlicka, "Contribution to the General Pathology of the Insane (Physical Examinations and Measurements)," *24th Annual Report, Middletown State Homoeopathic Hospital* (1895): 162.

<sup>16</sup> Hrdlicka, "My Journeys," 7.

<sup>17</sup> Spencer, "Ales Hrdlicka, M.D., 1869-1943: A Chronicle of the Life and Work of an American Physical Anthropologist (Volumes I and II)", 85.

anthropological research at the newly founded New York State Pathological Institute. However, before beginning this new position, Hrdlicka decided to travel to the intellectual center of the blossoming discipline of physical anthropology: Paris.

Only in the years following Hrdlicka's brief training in Paris in 1896 would his decision to study at P. Paul Broca's Anthropological Institute take on its full significance. Upon his arrival and enrollment at the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie and the Ecole de Medecine, Hrdlicka confidently claimed to already possess superior measuring techniques before entering the classroom of Leon Manouvrier, who would become his lifelong mentor.<sup>18</sup> From the outset however, Hrdlicka started to "consciously emulate Manouvrier's philosophy of science."<sup>19</sup> Meeting with Manouvrier daily and studying under his tutelage, Hrdlicka encountered a formidable alternative to Lombroso's "born criminal" thesis. His teacher "...forcefully rejected all notions of innate superior and inferior beings, and championed the plasticity of human nature and the dynamic influence that the social environment exercised upon the individual organism."<sup>20</sup> Such a position directly influenced Hrdlicka's conceptions of environmentalism and his research on the orphans in New York's asylums. The precise notion of the "plasticity of human nature" will appear in Hrdlicka's future writings. But, his intellectual transformation would be a more protracted process than that of Manouvrier.

### **From Normal to Abnormal**

Returning to New York City in 1896, an intellectual nucleus of American scientific racism, Hrdlicka's relationship with Manouvrier held considerable import for the studies he then

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 117.

pursued at the New York State Pathological Institute, including his earliest work on anthropological comparisons between the “normal” and the “abnormal.” According to Spencer, “As Broca’s student, Manouvrier was acutely aware of his former teacher’s complicity in providing the theoretical and technical mainstay of the ‘scientific racism’ he so utterly detested, and was guided by a deep sense of moral responsibility to rectify the error and confusion that had arisen in biological anthropology since Broca’s death, and to establish the discipline as a rational and remedial science...”<sup>21</sup> Manouvrier imparted some degree of his opposition to the persistent misuse of anthropology in support of scientific racism to his own student, Hrdlicka. Utilizing the resources he possessed at the Institute, Hrdlicka’s comparative investigations into the “normal” and “abnormal”—racially, physically, mentally, and socially—would maintain the most “objective” and “rational” standards possible.

Political and administrative issues troubled the new Pathological Institute, conditions that eventually led to Hrdlicka’s resignation in 1899. Such afflictions did not dissuade the young Hrdlicka from laying out a grand plan for his anthropology department in the 1896-7 volumes of *Contributions from the Pathological Institute of the New York State Hospitals*. In order to understand the etiology of the “abnormal,” he argued the normal must be thoroughly understood. This principle shaped Hrdlicka’s overall program: “The object of the Department of Anthropology of the Pathological Institute will be, above all, to establish a solid normal standard of the American people, or, at least, such a standard, if this be possible, of the native population of the State of New York; and at the same time to examine all those classes of the population which by their manifestations amply demonstrate that they are abnormal—such as the insane, the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 119.



criminal, the epileptics, the idiots, etc.”<sup>22</sup> Hrdlicka understood that to establish such a standard for comparison, the subject population must be quite extensive, on the order of 40,000 individuals: “Nothing definite and authentic could ever be established on any considerable smaller number of facts...”<sup>23</sup> It was clear that Hrdlicka envisioned that the scale of the project would serve both to firmly solidify his career in the field of physical anthropology and draw esteem to his position at the Institute.

The tangible outcomes of the project for “science” in general were equally extensive: “Among the more remote results, there will be the collections and the array of important data gathered with such thoroughness and in such extent and numbers that they not only will exceed anything done along these lines before but may stay unique for long years to come...And there is no doubt but that our whole present systems of alienation, criminality, et sim., shall gain by these studies both in scientific prestige and elevation.”<sup>24</sup> With a better understanding of any physical differences that may exist between those designated “abnormal” by society and the “normal,” a more rational, scientific treatment course for the so-called “degenerates of society” could be implemented. The goals explained by Hrdlicka here and his intellectual foundations in the philosophy of Manouvrier appear largely inconsistent with the portrait of Hrdlicka described by Blakey: “Hrdlicka’s anthropology would rise from and support the premise that social differences between human groups were attributable to racial characteristics that reflected the extent of their evolution...Hrdlicka put cranial comparisons forward to explain the social and

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<sup>22</sup>Alois F. Hrdlicka, "Department of Anthropology; Outline of Its Scope and Exposition of the Preliminary Work," in *Contributions from the Pathological Institute of the New York State Hospitals*, ed. Ira Van Gieson (Utica, New York: State hospitals press, 1896-1897), 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

economic disadvantages of blacks during segregation and of Southern and Eastern European immigrants.”<sup>25</sup> Such an express eugenics-shadowed premise does not thus far appear in the writings of Hrdlicka. His concern over the rising immigration rates for Southern and Eastern European immigrants plays no role in the early years of his research. At this point, Hrdlicka appears to be wholly preoccupied in determining whether any differences between the “classes” even exist.

Despite Hrdlicka’s unprecedented anthropometric studies on living subjects at the various State facilities, his work suffered from a lack of funding and institutional support. His naively grandiose plans for the anthropology department at the Pathological Institute were increasingly stymied, not simply by bureaucratic contingencies. As Hrdlicka describes in *My Journeys*: “... [T]here came an unexpected crash. As the gathering records were begun to be analyzed and prepared for publication, there came the shocking realization that there were no corresponding data on the normal population that could and would have to be used as standards.”<sup>26</sup> His masses of data would be of little use in his comparative analyses.

Concurrently with his proposal for the massive anthropometric study at the New York State Hospitals, a marked adjustment began to develop in his intellectual interests by late 1897: “from strictly medico-anthropometry to more overt anthropological themes.”<sup>27</sup> He formed a relationship with Dr. George Huntington at Columbia’s College of Physician and Surgeons. Huntington’s osteological collections served as an alternative avenue for collecting his “normal

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<sup>25</sup> Blakey, "Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology : With Special Reference to the Work of Ales Hrdlicka," 10.

<sup>26</sup> Hrdlicka, "My Journeys," 10.

<sup>27</sup> Spencer, "Ales Hrdlicka, M.D., 1869-1943: A Chronicle of the Life and Work of an American Physical Anthropologist (Volumes I and II)", 126.

data.”<sup>28</sup> Seemingly obsessed with developing this normative set of information on the American body, Hrdlicka compared the pituitary fossa of black and white skeletons. He hypothesized that it “...might prove to be of ‘some anthropologic value in the differentiation of races’” and even observed differences between white and black samples but “sample size was limited and thus [he] prudently shied away from drawing a definite conclusion as to the anthropological significance of this finding.”<sup>29</sup> This material became Hrdlicka’s principle standard for his comparative research until his later work on the “Old Americans.” And so, Hrdlicka shifted his efforts to his work on Huntington’s collections, his only source of “normals” at this time. His high-flown project on the entire population of the New York State hospitals came to an end, with the only salvageable material for publication to be gathered from his 1897-8 investigations at the New York Juvenile Asylum. The rather circuitous route from Bohemia to New York, from medicine to anthropometry, molded Hrdlicka into a scientist focused on the quantification of normality and race at the dawn of the twentieth century.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

## Chapter 2: Finding the “Normal”



FIG. 12.—A characteristic negro ear: small size, overhanging, compressed helix.

<sup>30</sup> The young Hrdlicka remained at the Pathological Institute from the fall of 1896 until his resignation in the spring of 1899. In less than two years, Hrdlicka collected data on more than 11,000 subjects, from: “the abnormals and defectives in the different State institutions.”<sup>31</sup>

Though his protocol would eventually lead to his collaboration with twenty-two other scientists and assistants throughout the state hospital system, Hrdlicka personally carried out the study of 1,400 child orphans at the New York Juvenile Asylum, including an African-American sample group of 300 children from the Colored Orphans Asylum.<sup>32</sup> Hrdlicka’s work with this population represents his earliest systematic efforts to quantify racial differences. However, the conclusions he eventually reached and publicized would not belong to the outdated school of craniometricians like Samuel Morton. His findings, generated out of anthropometric race

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<sup>30</sup> Aleš Hrdlicka, *Anthropological Investigations on One Thousand White and Colored Children of Both Sexes the Inmates of the New York Juvenile Asylum, with Additional Notes on One Hundred Colored Children of the New York Colored Orphan Asylum* (New York ; Albany: Wynkoop, Hallenbeck, Crawford Co., printers, 1900), 60a.

<sup>31</sup> Hrdlicka, "My Journeys," 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ales Hrdlicka, "Physical Differences between White and Colored Children," *American Anthropologist* 11, no. 11 (1898): 347.

science, actually led him to an environmentalist, and not a racist, explanation of social “abnormality”—a position that brought its own set of contradictions and quandaries for Hrdlicka.

### **Scratching the Surface**

Completing his measurements and evaluations on the orphan population in the fall of 1898, his first publication regarding this study appeared in the November 1898 issue of *The American Anthropologist*.<sup>33</sup> Hrdlicka revealed his initial findings in a brief four page write-up, curiously leaving a more extensive discussion of the motivations for and the outcomes of the study to be published in 1900.

Hrdlicka’s study of the “Physical Differences Between White and Colored Children” provided little theoretical insight into the purpose of his anthropometric preoccupation beyond the sheer aggregation of raw data. His research design directly emerged from the theoretical framework of European researchers who purported the bodily existence of the “criminal” or “degenerate” type, that is, the physical manifestation of moral and social inferiority. Hrdlicka focused on measurements alone: “Such a number of subjects gave me sufficient opportunity to satisfy myself that certain well-defined physical differences do exist between the white and the colored children of the same sex and age...”<sup>34</sup> As was the general practice of his peer researchers, Hrdlicka gave no description of his subjects’ histories, no rationale for examining such physical differences as height, weight, head size and shape, hair textures, and facial features beyond a straightforward comparison between black and white orphans. Summarizing his physical findings, he used categories such as “pure American colored child” in contrast with “the

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<sup>33</sup> This piece was actually presented before the American Association for the Advancement of Science at their conference in Boston in August 1898.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

normal white American child” and those children of the “yellow race” but neglected to provide any accompanying definitions for his assignation of such labels.<sup>35</sup>

Operating under the assumption of white physical superiority without explicitly stating such a premise, his most telling remarks on these differing “classes” of children appear in his final comments of the piece. Describing the thighs of his black subjects, Hrdlicka noted a “remarkable difference from those of the white” patients: “They appear not unlike the thighs of a frog, being most prominent in the middle.”<sup>36</sup> Hrdlicka employed no animal comparisons when describing any physical feature of the white children.

Taken at face value, a comment comparing a black child to a frog seems relatively benign considering the many bestial references made by other race scientists to refer to African-Americans. Still, his tainted lens showed itself even more prominently in his discussion of the differences between white and black girls. Hrdlicka asserted that “[a]mong white children girls can be seen to show decided feminine characters—that is, feminine shoulders and thorax, waist distinctly narrowed...” Juxtaposed to this description, he identified colored girls before puberty as “*shaped more like a boy than is the white girl.*”<sup>37</sup> Not only did blacks exist in a continuum of sorts with animals, but the traditional designation of feminine and masculine did not necessarily apply to this race either. In his frame of reference, the arbitrary characteristics of a cinched waist and supple thighs that Hrdlicka used to designate “femininity” could uniquely be applied to white female children. Concluding only with “Such are, in abstract, the principle differences

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Hrdlicka’s emphasis.

between white and colored children. A detailed study will follow promptly.” Hrdlicka offered no further analysis based on his stilted comments.

It remains unclear why Hrdlicka rushed to present his preliminary report at the immediate conclusion of the study in light of the dearth of analysis. Two years later, however, Hrdlicka published his eighty-six page “detailed study,” a piece still sorely lacking in more extensive conclusions and explanation.

### **The Expanded Version**

Circulating his work beyond the Association for the Advancement of Science, Hrdlicka printed his research under the title: “Anthropological Investigations on One Thousand White and Colored Children of Both Sexes: The Inmates of the New York Juvenile Asylum; With Additional Notes on One Hundred Colored Children of the New York Colored Orphan Asylum.” Though Hrdlicka wrote in his characteristically minimalist fashion, the published work offers critical insight into the unending struggle between hard clinical data and his traditionalist foundations.

Curiously, only 100 black orphans remained in this final report from his initial presentation which included some 300 colored subjects. Because a fire destroyed Hrdlicka’s research notes and files associated with his New York Juvenile Asylum study, the reasons for the omission remains a mystery. Considering his ambition for the largest and most scientifically rigorous sample set possible, one wonders whether he discovered contamination in the data for this demographic, or did Hrdlicka simply omit data that did not follow his conclusions? We cannot know.

From the outset of the document, Hrdlicka situated himself in the larger debate over genetic versus environmental determinism, and placed himself firmly in the latter camp. As he expounded upon the beneficial nature of the work done at the New York Juvenile Asylum, Hrdlicka pronounced, “The child, who has been many times well compared with a young tree, which you can bend in any direction, can be corrected of bad habits and taught good ones, and can in addition be physically much improved in a comparatively short time. But the child will lose these advantages as it has acquired them if it comes into circumstances which favor their loss.”<sup>38</sup> Based on his observations and interactions with the children, Hrdlicka firmly believed in this optimistic, restorative potential built into the human form. Nonetheless, his reflections on the overall improvement possibilities for children in the asylum system mark a noticeable shift from his earlier language strictly comparing the physical differences between white and colored children. The modification in focus would seem to originate from a wholly divergent investigative framework.

In the first pages of Hrdlicka’s report, he detailed “The Nature of the Investigations,” offering both the methodological foundations of the study and the goals under which he apparently commenced this particular avenue of his research at the Pathological Institute. Hrdlicka selected twelve different physical features to measure, including forehead width, depth of chest, and arm expanse, in order to show the quantifiable changes in a child’s “evolution.”<sup>39</sup> He explicitly delineated the purpose of his work: “The principal aim of these investigations, briefly expressed is to learn as much as possible about the physical state of the children who are

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<sup>38</sup> Hrdlicka, *Anthropological Investigations on One Thousand White and Colored Children of Both Sexes the Inmates of the New York Juvenile Asylum, with Additional Notes on One Hundred Colored Children of the New York Colored Orphan Asylum*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



being admitted and kept in juvenile asylums...and thus expected to result in an addition to our knowledge of the normal child, and of several classes of children who are, morally or otherwise, abnormal.”<sup>40</sup>

At the start of his investigations, Hrdlicka believed he could scientifically prove or disprove the damaging relationship between physical degeneracy and immorality. At one point he explained that these children were sent to the asylum due to poverty or criminal behavior and were therefore abnormal sociologically. Hence, “...it is important to learn how far their physical characteristics correspond to their moral character. It is self-evident that if either or both of the two classes of children were found to correspond physically to their social or moral state, that is, if they were physically inferior to other children of the same sex and similar age, then these subjects would have to be considered as generally handicapped in the struggle of life.” The corollary of the supposition would follow that if these children physically presented within the “normal” range of “physical strength and constitution,” the future of these classes could possibly include total restoration.<sup>41</sup>

Using the most modern techniques in the practice of anthropometry, Hrdlicka took pride in explaining the meticulous details involved in the “execution of the work.”<sup>42</sup> He stringently trained his assistant using “modern and well-tested instruments” until the error in the measurements diminished to an acceptable range. Hrdlicka also stressed the importance of the compliance of his subjects: “The children without a single exception on the part of the boys and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 7.

with a very few exceptions on the part of the girls were happy to submit to the examinations,<sup>43</sup> as though his position of authority over the children had no bearing on their cooperation.

Hrdlicka arranged his observations according to the questionably even-handed categories previously addressed. Most specifically, he divided his records in the following manner<sup>44</sup>:

- Part I. General data on the total of subjects.—The children in this group are separated only according to sex and color.
- Part II. Detailed study.—Children in this group are separated according to their color, sexes and ages.
- Part III. Physical differences between white and colored children of both sexes and different ages.
- Part IV. Children of different nationalities.—Subjects divided according to their sexes and ages.
- Part V. Children without any physical defects, with their family and individual histories.
- Part VI. Children with five or more physical abnormalities.
- Part VII. Vicious and criminal children.
- Part VIII. Children whose parents were intemperate, prostitute or criminal.
- Part IX. Children both of whose parents are dead.
- Part X. Children one or both of whose parents died of consumption.

In creating this system for the division of his subjects, Hrdlicka's preoccupation with presenting wholly empirical research falters to a degree in several groupings. His categorizations based on race, ethnicity, or physical defects rest in the precisely quantifiable, or at least visual, whereas the demarcation of the "vicious" rests in the interpretive. Hrdlicka applied terms for the "vicious and criminal children" and for those with parents employed in immoral trades in order to reveal something to the broader public: physical environments that resulted in disease and death for parents also resulted in bodily deterioration for their offspring. These socially determined outcasts would either be redeemed by their physical comparability with the normal children, or they would be condemned to a life in the gutters.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Throughout the body of his observations, Hrdlicka offered a number of significant deductions on the physical characteristics of his orphans which looked beyond racial typology. As he intimated in the introduction, Hrdlicka assigned the root of inferiority, both physical and mental, to environmental circumstances: "...[A] really inferior child, that is an inherently vicious, or an imbecile child, or a child who could not be much improved by better food and better hygienic surroundings, is a very rare exception."<sup>45</sup> Hrdlicka implied that the living conditions of state asylums, when compared to the orphans' living arrangements before entering the institution, clearly held the key to the children's remediation. He went on to better articulate the lack of genuinely permanent defects in the children by saying: "*As a matter of fact there are very few abnormalities which we can observe in man that may be positively said to render the individual generally either decidedly inferior or markedly superior to his fellow beings. No single physical abnormality (and but a rare combination of abnormalities) suffices of itself to stamp any individual as a human degenerate.*"<sup>46</sup> Hrdlicka left the definition of "abnormality" to be inferred by the reader: the abnormal could be described as simply an observed trait outside of the "typical form of health." He supplied no data as to the nature of this so very discretionary norm. He could not quantify the normal, because no such data existed. His judgements appear to be made on the basis of his personal scientific observations as a practicing physician, a quality he so previously detested as a weakness in any analysis. As a doctor and researcher sanctioned by the state, Hrdlicka had the ability to define the normal and abnormal according to his own inclinations, resulting in rather circular elucidations.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 13. Hrdlicka's emphasis.

His observations comparing the colored children and the white children present the most unanticipated results, given his earlier remarks in the *American Anthropologist*. While the wider public of 1898 white America would largely defend the biological supremacy of whites, Hrdlicka posited: “As to the somewhat greater apparent inferiority of the colored boys, I am afraid that the number of these examined is too small to allow us to form any definite conclusions. It has been always my experience, in examinations outside of the Juvenile Asylum, to find the negroes in the average physically superior to the whites and possessing less of abnormalities...”<sup>47</sup> While this assertion does not signal an epiphany in the mind of the race scientist, Hrdlicka’s complex worldview emerges further into view with this comment. The assumed mental inferiority of blacks could not be tied to any physical malformations. However, he fell back on the lack of a sufficiently large sample size to limit the implication of his findings for the general public. If Hrdlicka would have included his mysteriously eliminated records for the 200 other colored children, would “definite conclusions” have been drawn? In all likelihood the answer to that question would still be “no.” The scale required to satisfy Hrdlicka’s own methodological requirements was simply not available within the Colored Orphans Asylum.

Beyond these larger impressions, Hrdlicka did include more in-depth commentary on the reality of black physical superiority, a conclusion that did not imply any social equality. Based on his examinations of younger orphans, Hrdlicka noted:

*The white and colored children differ in their abnormalities very remarkably. The white children of both sexes possess on an average a decidedly larger proportion of inborn abnormalities. On the other hand, the negro children acquire in early life a larger percentage of irregularities than the white children. These facts signify that while the white children are more likely to be begotten with physical deficiencies, yet later in life they will not undergo so many pathological processes which give rise to physical*

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 15.

*abnormalities, as will the negro children. Rachitis<sup>48</sup> seems to be particularly more frequent in the colored.*<sup>49</sup>

In other words, congenital “defects” appeared at a greater rate in the white population than in the black. But, the living conditions, most significantly the higher rates of poverty, among the African-American community resulted in acquired deficiencies and disease for their children (Hence, Hrdlicka’s indirect reference to malnutrition with “rachitis”). His association between height differences and malnourishment were not confined by race; he similarly noted the negative growth rates in the lower extremities among impoverished white orphans as well.<sup>50</sup> In explaining his conclusions, Hrdlicka cast aside the “valuable indications of the physical differences between the two classes of children” to assert an overall trend among white and black orphans: “There is good reason to believe that the majority of the inmates of the institution owe their slight physical inferiority only to malnutrition and neglect and not to inherent physical inferiority. These subjects cannot be excluded from the general average class of children.”<sup>51</sup> As he continued with his report comparing the sex-based attributes of the black and white orphans, Hrdlicka repeated verbatim his previous description of the frog-like thighs of black children and the lack of femininity among young black girls.<sup>52</sup> Pandering to the conservative craniometricians and race scientists of the late nineteenth century who built their career upon the authenticity of

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<sup>48</sup> According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, rachitis, or rickets, is “a disease of children caused by vitamin D deficiency, characterized by imperfect calcification, softening, and distortion of the bones typically resulting in bow legs.”

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-7. Hrdlicka’s emphasis.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

the biological inferiority of blacks, Hrdlicka negated the potential in his study for a realignment in the field, away from this spurious scientific “fact.”

After presenting copious data and accompanying observations, Hrdlicka ended with a single paragraph on the last page of the report, reiterating his earlier hedge on the import of his study.<sup>53</sup> Even his most straightforward statements resist any full conclusions and thorough analysis: “That there should be found among the children who have no physical abnormalities a certain percentage with inferior abilities and with a persistent bad behavior, shows that the mental system cannot be looked at as a mere reflection of the state of the body, or the reverse; the brain can apparently have properties which are not perceptible in the external parts of the individual.”<sup>54</sup> He neglected to point out the fallibility in previous research and theory among his colleagues supporting the existence of a “criminal” type. Specifically, Hrdlicka did not publicly repudiate the notion—put forth as recently as 1895 at a conference of the Association of Assistant Physicians of Hospitals of the Insane—“that ‘Lunatics and Criminals’ were a class of individuals possessing specific physical signs of a constitutional inferiority which tended to become more marked in their offspring.”<sup>55</sup> Seemingly unwilling to infringe on the intellectual heritage from which his study unfolded, Hrdlicka allowed his research findings’ utter rejection of the physical/mental connection to rest on its own.

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<sup>53</sup> See for example, Hrdlicka’s assertion on page six of his introduction: “The majority of the following data, however, should not be looked upon as definite conclusions on the particular subject which they may concern. They are really but indications of what can be expected from prolonged studies in the same direction.”

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>55</sup> Spencer, “Ales Hrdlicka, M.D., 1869-1943: A Chronicle of the Life and Work of an American Physical Anthropologist (Volumes I and II)”, 86.

And later, his final statement on the entire matter at hand remains disappointingly underdeveloped: “It seems to me that the most proper way to conclude this study will be not by any generalizations, but with a wish for the extension of similar investigations...*provided, of course, that they can secure the services of the proper, able and unprejudiced, investigators.*”<sup>56</sup> Hrdlicka conclusively overturned the notion of a “degenerate” physical type. Besides collecting a large amount of quantitative data on the physical form, an arena of science just coming into its own, Hrdlicka could even make a connection between the deplorable living conditions of the lower classes and manifest physical ramifications, the fodder needed to cry out against the rampant socioeconomic inequality in turn-of-the-twentieth century New York City. But, he stops short. Perhaps too young and insecure in his career path to risk such controversy, Hrdlicka stops short of encouraging any serious reconsiderations in European and American scientific and sociopolitical attitudes toward the racial differences between whites and blacks. Hrdlicka cannot see, or *chooses* not to see, the immediate institutional racism hindering his scientific labors from precipitating a paradigm shift.

### **Reaching the Public**

At the same time that he published his research findings on the orphans in November 1898, the walls of Fayerweather Hall at Columbia University echoed with the fervent concerns of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka about the “negro problem” during a meeting of the Anthropological Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Those present included Franz Boas, acclaimed anthropologist who in posterity would become the most recognizable figure in early twentieth century anthropology. Though Boas did comment on “The Future of the Negro”

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<sup>56</sup> Hrdlicka, *Anthropological Investigations on One Thousand White and Colored Children of Both Sexes the Inmates of the New York Juvenile Asylum, with Additional Notes on One Hundred Colored Children of the New York Colored Orphan Asylum*, 81.

at this meeting, Hrdlicka articulated the most contentious claims of the event. As the *New York Times* stated, the “problem is discussed from an Anthropological Standpoint.”<sup>57</sup> Hrdlicka suggested: “In certain regions of the country the negro interfered with the white man, morally, industrially, and politically, and as time passed their conditions did not materially improve.”<sup>58</sup> His comments appear to purposefully shy away from identifying any specific location or nature of black interference with whites. Despite confusing language, Hrdlicka seems to be referencing the heavy concentration of the African-American community in the South and the ensuing racial tensions of the Post-Reconstruction era. From these brief remarks, it would appear that Hrdlicka’s worry originated not necessarily with the individual plight of blacks, but with their impact upon the whites forced to interact with such a degrading cohort on a regular basis. He does not mention the physical interference of blacks with whites through miscegenation, but highlights the faster rate of reproduction of blacks over whites, a common worry of the period. Hrdlicka goes on to point out that the “negro problem” has only garnered the attention of the non-scientific community, namely the politicians and theologians, who struggle to remedy the situation with inaccurate data.

Hrdlicka included some remnants of his remarks on the study of black and white orphans, saying, “The negro is not naturally inferior, physically, to the white man, but rather the reverse.”<sup>59</sup> Though he does not explicitly expound upon his point, Hrdlicka implied that this physical advantage had done nothing to improve the mental state of blacks, whose intellectual limitations coincided with a higher mortality rate than the white population. Blacks lacked the

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<sup>57</sup> "The Future of the Negro," *New York Times* (1857-1922) 1898.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



knowledge and the wherewithal to seek “proper medical treatment.”<sup>60</sup> Citing the failure of the Liberian colonial experiment, the impracticality of abandoning the South, and the failure of education, Hrdlicka suggested his own plan: “...[S]catter the negroes in the South over the whole United States and the recent acquisitions in the West Indies and the Orient...Once dispersed the negro would be more amenable to education and to the influence of law and morals.” By diluting the concentrated black population, the livelihood of the local whites would be improved, and a gradual dispersion would not negatively impact the Southern economy. Hrdlicka failed to address the specific improvements possible for the black bodies for whom he suggested dispersal; rather, the overall moral refinement inherent in further interaction with whites served as motivation enough to recommend his plan.

Hrdlicka’s premature scheme lacked any quantitative support, especially given the limitations of his study on the colored orphans. Without a sufficient sample size, his scientific findings only spoke to the increased presentation of medical abnormalities like rickets among the malnourished black orphans. His work only proved that the phenomena of malnourishment and its detrimental effect on childhood growth existed across both racial groups, obviously a socioeconomic concern and not a racial one. The taint of scientific racism flavors Hrdlicka’s suggestion at the end of his talk “...that the scientists of the country should formulate and publicly support some definite proposition for the solution of the negro question.” However, he does rather progressively encourage integration of blacks over outright separation as in proposals for colonization. Similarly liberal-minded, Hrdlicka does not advocate the negative eugenics of sterilization that would soon emerge among Madison Grant and Charles Davenport, but

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

envisioned the normalization of blacks, with the normal being the white body and lifestyle. He disparaged the prejudiced and unsatisfactory work of the laymen in favor of a technocratic solution. Only such a team could genuinely understand the “gravity of the negro problem.”

Mimicking his shift from an absorption with racial comparisons in the preliminary report to more broad observations on the lack of a “degenerate” type in his final publication, Hrdlicka’s later article in the *New York Herald*, “Science Proves that the Waifs of New York are not ‘Degenerates,’” highlighted the reformative nature of the New York children’s asylums.<sup>61</sup> From the outset, Hrdlicka’s comments appeared to confirm the very theories he had not proven with his study of the orphans at the New York Juvenile Asylum. For example, “Dr. Hrdlicka says that a thorough knowledge of the children will alone sufficiently clear up the problem of what may be expected for their future... By inspecting a single sheet of paper containing all that is worth knowing about the physical points one may see at a glance the exact condition of the child.” Hrdlicka suggested his belief in the traditional connection between the moral and mental state of the individual and the physical state of the body. From his research, he previously ascertained the lack of such a connection, as those children deemed morally and mentally inferior through criminal behavior or atypical parental stock actually possessed bodies and measurements within the “normal” range. Even in the article he recognized his inability to find a “single child whom I could conscientiously term a thorough physical degenerate.” With proper remediation and instruction, a “good body and a healthy mind” could be attained, as even “clergymen and congressmen once waifs.” Despite the quantitative data affirming the environmentalist analysis

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<sup>61</sup> "Science Proves That the Waifs of New York Are Not "Degenerates"," *New York Herald* April 2, 1899.

regarding the improvement of the children, Hrdlicka would not publicly relinquish his nineteenth century foundations positing the mind/body connection.

Hrdlicka deserted his previously ardent call on American scientists to address the “negro problem” in his *New York Herald* article, despite the wide audience of this popular periodical. Conceivably, he lacked any numerical support for the existence of a “negro problem.” By denying the existence of a “physical degenerate” or even the hesitancy to uphold the biological inferiority of blacks, Hrdlicka encapsulated sociocultural biases actually aligned with more progressive intellectuals like Boas. Still, he was unwilling to publicly tie his scientific findings to that position. By the dawn of the twentieth century, Hrdlicka could not maintain the false bridge forged between racial and biological inferiority.

### Chapter 3: Old and New Americans



FOUR GENERATIONS OF OLD AMERICANS  
 Mrs. E. B. Decker (standing), 27 years; Mother, 50 years; Grandmother, 74 years;  
 Daughter, 4 years. Original derivation English, Scotch, German.  
 (Washington, D. C.)

#### <sup>62</sup>A Shift in Course

On the tail end of his study on orphans in 1898, Hrdlicka made a dramatic move that would indelibly shape the course of his career. In a few short years, Hrdlicka significantly altered his career path: from junior physician at a research hospital to a field anthropologist. His exposure to the

indigenous populations of the Americas and his international field work expanded his focus from the quantification of the “normal” to the quantification of an “American” identity. In the coming years, Hrdlicka would solidly institutionalize both American physical anthropology and his own position as a leading scientist and public intellectual, quickly shedding the personality of the reticent young researcher. While Hrdlicka never repudiated his racism, his search for the “American type” reveals the diminished hold of traditional race science principles on Hrdlicka as an intellectual. His obsession with the quantification of race morphed into an unfailing support of the new immigrants.

Amidst the bureaucratic turmoil at the Pathological Institute, Hrdlicka’s friendship with the young Franz Boas brought him into contact with Frederick Ward Putnam, then president of

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<sup>62</sup> Aleš Hrdlicka, *The Old Americans; a Physiological Profile*, The American Immigration Collection. Series Ii (New York,: Arno Press, 1970), 2a.

the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a leader in the institutionalization of American archaeology and anthropology.<sup>63</sup> Under the auspices of Putnam and the American Museum of Natural History, Hrdlicka set off on his first expedition along with a Norwegian ethnologist, Carl Lumholtz, to examine the skeletal remains of indigenous peoples in Northern Mexico.<sup>64</sup>

Although a seemingly random diversion from his interests in medico-anthropometry, Hrdlicka's journey with Lumholtz to collect anthropometric measurements served as a logical progression for Hrdlicka and his desire for "normal" data. In his memoir, Hrdlicka articulated: "And I found there at last my 'normal' humans. But it soon was evident that these could not be used for comparison with the whites on account of racial differences. Thus there was once more a grievous disappointment."<sup>65</sup> His identification of the Indian remains as "normals" poses another conundrum in Hrdlicka's ever ambiguous terminology. Throughout his research in the State Hospitals, Hrdlicka reserved the term "normal" for those outside of the asylum system: socially, mentally, and physically untainted by any hint of the criminal. This selective definition does not seem to fit with his appointment of the deceased Indians as such, considering that Hrdlicka had no knowledge of their sociopolitical conditions during life. His musings would also appear to convey his identification of normal as a characterization that transcends race. He labelled the Mexican Indians as normal, and only discounts his measurements because of the

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<sup>63</sup> Terry A. Barnhart, "Frederick Ward Putnam," *American National Biography Online* (February 2000), <http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-00485.html>. Accessed February 22, 2011.

<sup>64</sup> Frank Spencer, "Ales Hrdlicka," *ibid.*, <http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-00304.html>. Accessed February 22, 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Hrdlicka, "My Journeys," 11.

potential “racial differences.” Accordingly, Hrdlicka must have theorized categories of normal and abnormal within each race, regardless of the “scientific” stipulations for each group.

Hrdlicka’s journey in the winter of 1898 marks a significant turning point in his intellectual development: “...[T]he journey to Mexico had meanwhile revealed new and beautiful horizons, in science, in travel, in human interests of all sorts. It was the beginning of my racial studies and gatherings and wanderings all over the globe.”<sup>66</sup> The aspect of comparative racial studies was likewise prominent in his other 1898 publication on the “Physical Differences between White and Colored Children.” Although his focus on racial differences diminished in favor of more general environmental improvement by the time of the final study publication in 1900, Hrdlicka returned to the Pathological Institute in New York eager to continue publishing and establishing his presence in the field of physical anthropology. Simultaneously, Boas attempted to secure for Hrdlicka a position in Washington, D.C. but funding remained scarce in the nascent discipline of American physical anthropology. Eventually, Putnam secured financing for a series of expeditions in the American Southwest and Northern Mexico, and again asked Hrdlicka to join him. By the spring of 1899, Hrdlicka resigned from the Institute. Before synthesizing any of the massive data collection he had gathered since his start in the fall of 1896, Hrdlicka “...pack[ed] up the anthropological records into cases which were removed to the cellars of the Hospital to which subsequently, due reportedly to fire, they were lost.”<sup>67</sup> As previously discussed, only his public work on the New York orphans remains from this period.

Because of his extensive field research, Hrdlicka was selected as the assistant curator of the newly formed Division of Physical Anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

part of the Smithsonian Institute, in 1903. In a move that would solidify his position in the Washington establishment, Hrdlicka would eventually become the head curator in 1910, a position in which he remained for the next thirty years. Traveling throughout the United States for the first decade of the twentieth century, Hrdlicka's research interests centered on the question of the "origin and antiquity of the aboriginal population of the Americans," a subject riddled with controversy in the early 1900s.<sup>68</sup> He immersed himself in international field work which led to his theory on the evolution and migration of man from Africa into Asia and across a land bridge over the Bering Strait into North America some 12,000 years ago.

Hrdlicka also found himself engaged in the contemporary debate over the increased immigration of Southern and Eastern European immigrants. As the United States Immigration Commission finalized its report on the consequences of recent immigration, Hrdlicka set the National Museum on a fourteen-year course to unquestionably determine the nature of the "Old American" and ascertain its supposed endangerment by the influx of foreigners.

### **The Search Begins**

In 1910, Hrdlicka set out to determine just what exactly was the "American type," and how better to make such an appraisal than go to the Americans who had supposedly been in the United States the longest. If his environmentalist predilections held any validity, those individuals whose families had emigrated to the United States well in the past would bear some marking of a unique American breed so to speak. He could definitively define the constitution of a white American.

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<sup>68</sup> Spencer, "Ales Hrdlicka."

Ever the conscientious and rational scientist, Hrdlicka most plainly laid out the premises of his Old Americans investigations at the outset of The Old Americans: a Physiological Profile, the final 412-page study published in October 1925.<sup>69</sup> He explained: “The motives that led to them were, on one hand the desire to learn just what physically, and in some measure also physiologically, the Old American stock represents, what developmental changes, if any, have already been realized in it, and towards what it is tending; and on the other hand a strong need of reliable standards that could be used for comparison in anthropological work in this country.”<sup>70</sup>

Hrdlicka explicitly shaped his new search for the normal in the shadow of his work done in the late 1890s with a similarly collaborative spirit:

The want of proper American standards was most forcibly brought home to the writer in connection with his earlier work on the abnormal classes. These researches were carried on under the auspices of the New York State Pathological Institute and eventually with the cooperation of nearly thirty physicians in the various institutions of the insane, feeble-minded, etc. of the State of New York, during the years 1896-98; and after numerous data were gathered on upwards of 11,000 of the abnormals, we were suddenly thwarted by the impossibility of contrasting our records with standard records on normal Americans. It was then that the necessity of establishing such standards was seen to be the foremost necessity of American anthropology, and it was the ever-present consciousness of this want that led, when conditions appeared propitious, to the studies on the “Old Americans.”

Who were the Old Americans and why spend 14 years (1910-1924) researching their physical state? Hrdlicka did not single-handedly and exclusively pursue the answer to this and other questions. His research on the typical American for fourteen years involved his colleagues most directly at the National Museum and further along the Atlantic seaboard at Yale, Harvard, and

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<sup>69</sup> Intriguingly the year following the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, excluding Asian immigration and attempting to reduce the influx of Southern and Eastern European peoples.

<sup>70</sup> Hrdlicka, *The Old Americans; a Physiological Profile*, 4.



University of Virginia among others, while Hrdlicka also traveled across South America, Europe, and Asia at the behest of his other research interests.

Though his magnum opus on the subject of Old Americans did not arrive until 1925, Hrdlicka remained engaged with the public sphere on the issue of the American type throughout the period and continued to develop his own ideas on the fundamental nature of an “American race.” In his popular pieces in papers like the *New York Evening Post* and the *New York Times*, Hrdlicka’s views on an American physicality shifted over time. In January 1917, an article established Hrdlicka’s stance on the American melting pot, saying, “The American man, on the other hand is a fine specimen—too fine, indeed, for his chief trait is pronounced individual variation...This gives Dr. Hrdlicka a start, but he is convinced that no distinctive American physical type exists as yet—and he fears that intermarriage may prevent such a type from being developed. Congress certainly ought to do something.”<sup>71</sup> Since this article consists of the journalist’s paraphrasing of Hrdlicka’s words and not direct quotation, the language does not necessarily reflect Hrdlicka’s own opinions. Clearly, the author personally disapproved of intermarriage between native whites and all others to the point of advocacy for laws against miscegenation. However, Hrdlicka’s key message from this article seems to be that his research had not yet revealed an American type.

While seven years had passed, Hrdlicka did not abandon his research or compromise his theories because of a lack of scientific evidence for a typical “American” form. He maintained his skepticism regarding the melting pot, repeating his position in the *Journal of Heredity* later that year. Hrdlicka posited that “[h]is observations of these persons have convinced him that the

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<sup>71</sup> "Untitled," *New York Evening Post* January 19, 1917.

melting pot is a myth...A century or two is not long enough time to alter the fundamental physical traits of these people, nor will a few centuries more obliterate their marks of difference."<sup>72</sup> While some blending of the "Pilgrims, Virginians, Dutch, and Huguenots" occurred, fundamental differences still existed among their descendants.

Only near the culmination of his research did Hrdlicka's message begin to change. At a meeting before the New York Academy of Sciences and the American Ethnological Society, Hrdlicka signaled not only a complete volte-face on the melting pot theory, but also a disdain for the rising anti-immigrant feelings: "In the United States...the white man's race problems have solved themselves in a very favorable way. The incoming Europeans have blended with the native stock in a way that many people call most successful, and there seems little doubt that the traditional 'melting pot' of this country is an established fact." The language of his presentation, using phrases like "race problem," immediately harkens back to his 1898 talk on the "negro problem" and his preoccupation with the "abnormal": "The strongest emphasis was laid by Dr. Hrdlicka upon the need of keeping from this country the physical and mental defectives..."<sup>73</sup> At this point, blacks and their overall unhealthy status in America completely fell to the wayside as Hrdlicka focused on the "white man's race problems."

In six years' time, from 1917 to 1923, Hrdlicka decided that the American people, at least whites, were in fact a melting pot, coincidentally as the Congress debated the further restriction of Southern and Eastern immigration. He went further in his presentation, saying, "There is little basis for excluding from the United States any part of the white race."<sup>74</sup> As the son of Bohemian

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<sup>72</sup> "What Is the Typical American Like?," *Journal of Heredity* 1917.

<sup>73</sup> "Full-Blood Indians Going Fast, He Says," *New York Times* (1923-Current file) 1923.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

immigrants himself, Hrdlicka's personal motivations in making such a statement become relevant. Did his research prove the reality of the melting pot, or did the maelstrom of nativism in the 1910s and 1920s inspire his ardent and public disapproval of immigration legislation restricting the entrance of certain groups of whites? Although his personal intent cannot be discounted, Hrdlicka was, by now, an established scientist whose reputation for methodological rigor was well known. Perhaps a feeling of personal injury by the nativist movement prompted him to reexamine his thesis, but he would still have to square it with science.

### **Finding the American Type**

The sheer breadth of The Old Americans signifies a dramatic professional maturation, with the assertiveness of a renowned and confident figure, compared to Hrdlicka's earliest work at the New York Juvenile Asylum as an unknown interloper in anthropology. While both studies relied on the data of roughly 1,000 subjects, the detailed and close analysis of the assorted areas of interest found in his publication in 1925 dwarfs the level of exposition in his 1900 report. Before delving into the history of the research project and the specific questions to be examined in Old Americans, Hrdlicka asserted his outright conviction in the existence of an American race: "[This new blend] has in fact progressed so far that since the war of the Revolution the Americans constitute, so far as behavior is concerned, a universally acknowledged, separate and fairly distinctly characterized unit of the white race which is no longer English, Dutch, French or Irish, but American."<sup>75</sup> He left the *physical* existence of an American race to be determined throughout the course of his profile, though clearly foreshadowing his agenda. Hrdlicka's main interest rested in the discernment of the physical modifications in this "sub-type of the white

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<sup>75</sup> Hrdlicka, *The Old Americans; a Physiological Profile*, 2.

people.” From that statement alone, Hrdlicka positioned the white population as a characterization above national identity, to the exclusion of all non-white peoples.

In searching for candidates who fit the requirements of being an “Old American,” Hrdlicka developed a series of questions which guided his overall research trajectory: Is the human body plastic enough as to manifest physical changes in the few centuries since the first Western European immigration to North America? Has there been uniform improvement among the population, or degeneration as well? How do the newest white immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (or “whites of recent immigration” as he termed them) affect the “Old Americans”? And finally, “Would it be well to try to keep it pure—have the Old Americans marry only among the Old Americans—or is new blood desirable?”<sup>76</sup> His most recent interest in the American form came from the work of his colleague at Columbia University, Franz Boas. “Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants,” Boas’ 1911 study, was published at the same time as the final report of the Dillingham Commission. Whereas the Commission cited a severe threat from the Southern and Eastern European immigrant, Boas concluded “that under the American environment the physical type of Jewish and Italian children changed with remarkable rapidity and with a tendency towards more intermediate forms.”<sup>77</sup> Hrdlicka sought to directly and more substantially scrutinize the topic of recent immigration. Applying Boas’ conclusions to his own work, he hypothesized, “Were this true, the formation of a new, more homogenous American type ought to be a question of but a few generations, and the type should be already well advanced among the descendants of the oldest American families.” Therefore, it

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 3.

can be inferred, with a natural and inescapable physical amalgamation of various ethnicities, the United States should bear no fear nor animosity toward the newer white immigrants.

To identify the “Old American,” Hrdlicka and his team first sought out those Americans whose ancestors on both sides were born in the United States at least four generations. Ultimately, such stringency resulted in a dearth of subjects so Hrdlicka altered the research parameters to only two generations on each side of the family born in the US.<sup>78</sup> His efforts gained such prominence in the anthropological community and the broader “patriotic Societies” that even Theodore Roosevelt offered to sit for measurements in 1915.<sup>79</sup> However, because of declining health, Roosevelt never made it to Washington to sit for measurements before his death in 1919. Hrdlicka was deeply disappointed noting, “The data would have been of much historic value and would have, in a way, crowned the whole effort.”<sup>80</sup>

In all, by the end of 1924, Hrdlicka and his research assistants fully examined and measured over 900 subjects, with 1000 subjects examined for his analysis of pigmentation. The main categories of investigation were individuals from the North, South, and Appalachia. Hrdlicka considered the selection of individuals and families to be fairly representative, and in stark contrast to his previous work in the asylums, he expressly excluded: “the subadults and the senile.” He went further by also selecting against “...the inbred population of the small towns in New England; the old-time middle states farmer; and the western pioneer.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 7.

With these parameters, Hrdlicka recruited subjects for the study through public advertisement, in addition to personal recommendations from colleagues. In August 1915, Hrdlicka again reached a broader audience with a write-up entitled “Scientist Appeals to Service People.” Raising awareness of his project, the article explained that Dr. Ales Hrdlicka was “engaged in an interesting research into the changes which have taken place in the descendants of the old Americans.” At this point, Hrdlicka’s target rested with individuals with at least three generations “American.” To assure the readers of the honest merits of the work, the author indicated that the investigation’s report would be “strictly scientific.”<sup>82</sup> With similar announcements and brief articles, individuals across the country sent family portraits and descriptions of their lineage to Washington in hopes of becoming a subject for Hrdlicka’s study. The designation of “Old American” held considerable weight in the xenophobic climate of the 1910s and early 1920s.

By 1918, Hrdlicka announced the discovery of the quintessential American, a young woman from Clinton, Massachusetts named Betsy Buell. Under the headline of “Clinton Girl Picked as Truest American Type,” the article explained the investigation’s stringent physical examination criterion and the extent of the competition Buell overcame: “Over a thousand women subjects were examined and there were many who failed in just one particular, perhaps in but one point of the health or physical test or were above or below the age limit. Indeed it is very difficult to find many with a sufficient number of ancestors in this country.”<sup>83</sup> Though the article did not stipulate the means by which Hrdlicka determined the appropriate requirements for the

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<sup>82</sup>“Scientist Appeals to Service People,” in *Ales Hrdlicka Papers* (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 1915).

<sup>83</sup> “Clinton Girl Picked as Truest American Type,” in *Ales Hrdlicka Papers* (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 1918).

“American type” as far as age, respiration, foot size, and the other measurements, one can interpret this gap as evidence of Hrdlicka’s continued employment of arbitrary assignments for his “normal.” No scientific or objective authority could have asserted the embodiment of the typical American to be a twenty-two year old female with dark brown hair and pleasant facial features. It would seem that Hrdlicka based his judgements on nothing more than his own subjective opinion, just as he based his identification of young white female orphans as the embodiment of the “feminine” in his 1898 investigations. But, given his stringent use of measurements, Hrdlicka in all likelihood selected Buell as an example of mean measurements. To many of America’s oldest families, Hrdlicka’s seal of approval as an “Old American” garnered delight among his lay audience, especially after the publication of his larger report in 1925. Some years later, Buell held fast to her title with wedding announcements published in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* proclaiming “America’s 1918 Most Perfect Girl Weds.”

### **The Old Americans**

With publication of The Old Americans in 1925, Hrdlicka finally provided uninterrupted explanation regarding the historical and physical sketch of the Old American stock. Despite providing extensive comparative data on the thousands of “measurements and morphological observations” made during the course of his research, Hrdlicka remained true to form in his hesitation to draw sweeping conclusions from his data. Phrases such as “[w]hatever the value of the above data may be...” riddle his chapters as if Hrdlicka still feared the backlash of his peer scientists if he were to make any paradigm-shifting assertions.

In his chapter, “Remarks,” Hrdlicka offered up his final conclusions on many of the issues raised in the press concerning the characterization of the American type and the existence of an American melting pot. Using excessive qualifications in his long-winded statement, Hrdlicka clarified: “The Old Americans are seen to represent on the one hand a group of still considerable variability, but on the other hand a group that already comes closely to deserving the characterization of an anthropological unit. In other words, the ‘melting pot,’ while its work of unifying the many component elements is evidently not yet completely finished, has nevertheless advanced so much in that direction that the stock possesses already a moderately distinctive character.”<sup>84</sup> In 1916, Hrdlicka had doubted to some degree a rapid environmental influence on the human form, but that doubt had completely disappeared by 1925. His previous position had aligned him with the staunch nativists who argued for the exclusion of non-Western Europeans, like himself, but now, he pushed for a “plastic” view of the body, which minimized any “threat” from the new immigrants. According to Hrdlicka, the offspring and subsequent generations of the hundreds of thousands of immigrants arriving since the late nineteenth century could physically adapt to the “American type,” just as the Old Americans had shed their distinctly English, Irish, or Scotch forms.

Hrdlicka went even further, arguing that the physical improvement of the Old Americans over their previous European physiognomy showed no degeneration in any respect, but rather “With rational guidance the improvement may well be extended.”<sup>85</sup> This statement immediately brings to mind the eugenics movement of the Progressive Era. However, Hrdlicka completely separated himself from the negative eugenics of sterilization and reproductive restrictions

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<sup>84</sup> Hrdlicka, *The Old Americans; a Physiological Profile*, 408.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*



supported by Davenport and Grant.<sup>86</sup> Though racist by modern standards, Hrdlicka's urgings to improve the white race mimic the postulations of Teddy Roosevelt encouraging natalism among American white women, relatively benign fodder for his contemporary society.

Laying the groundwork for his immigrant advocacy, the culminating pages of Hrdlicka's book turned from the exclusive discussion of the Old Americans to "The Future American Type." Reflecting the absorption of the day with the man of the future, Hrdlicka addressed the demographic position of Old Americans as a dwindling minority, but from an optimistic standpoint. With continuing intermarriage between Old Americans and newer immigrants, the American form would continue to change to some degree: "...a conglomerate which through ever-increasing intermixture may doubtless in the course of a few generations be expected to approach a newer blend—the American type of the not far distant future. This type, we may surmise from all the available data, will not be far from the Old American type of the present, and yet will be somewhat different, particularly in the physiognomy and in behavior."<sup>87</sup> Hrdlicka did not mean for this difference to inspire fear. Like the improvements engendered by the positive environment of the asylum among the waifs of New York in his 1897-8 study, Hrdlicka predicted a parallel trajectory with the new comers: "...[J]ust as the older population so the later comers to this country have been undergoing a gradual physical improvement, leading in stature and other respects in the direction of the type of the Old Americans."

Assuaging all doubts as to the veracity of his claims, Hrdlicka shifted into the language of the scientific in order to inspire maximum confidence: no possible "biological danger" existed among the newcomers. The 1924 immigration restrictions actually obstructed the potential for

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<sup>86</sup> Higham, *Strangers in the Land : Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, 153.

<sup>87</sup> Hrdlicka, *The Old Americans; a Physiological Profile*, 411.

further success among the American population: “It is more likely that the new admixture into American stock, which is everywhere proceeding, will on the whole prove a wholesome stimulus and a leaven that will result in a substantial benefit for the future.”<sup>88</sup> Hrdlicka could not speak to the political and intellectual potential of the immigrant populations, but he could assure his fellow Americans of their physical well-being (though without providing any scientific data in this final chapter since his Old American research did not actually extend to the immigrant population). Forty-three years after his own emigration, the mature scientist eagerly hoped for a similarly advantageous American experience for his fellow Eastern and Southern European countrymen.

### **Stepping into the Immigration Fight**

For all of the years and resources expended in his search for the “Old American,” Hrdlicka did not in truth prove the *lack* of a “biological danger” from newer white immigrants, nor did he prove that the *presence* of a biological danger. He did not study the immigrant population at all in any scientific manner and yet reserved the closing remarks of his profile to address this very issue. The rigorous scientific methodology employed to make narrow conclusions over the course of his career essentially vanished. Not coincidentally, the frenzy of nativism reached a pinnacle with the Immigration Act of 1924. Hrdlicka’s emotional connection with the Southern and Eastern European immigrants came to dominate his public discourse, and he was driven to promote his interests at all costs, even if it required the overt scapegoating and rejection of all non-white populations.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 412.

In a lecture on recent immigration at a YMCA in January 1922, Hrdlicka did just that: He elevated the cause of European immigrants by debasing blacks and Asians. His ultimate loyalty rested with the “white races,” and the inferiority of blacks had yet to be surmounted, either politically, economically, culturally, or socially:

There are two ways of looking at the colored man. One is the humane way, and here we are all glad to acknowledge his many good qualities and to help him in every way in his further development. The other is the impersonal way of cold facts. And here we see that while the black man is no different species of man from ourselves, and while far back he doubtless had the same ancestry, yet he was separated for so long and lived in such unfavorable environment that he became somewhat belated on the road of human development. If we mark the way covered by the white man as 100, the negro will only be somewhere in the seventies to eighties. As conditions progress, he will become disseminated throughout the States. The future is miscegenation. But the 80 plus 100 can never make again a full 100. This is a cloud on the future which it seems cannot be avoided, and in which the only hope lies in the possible surplus of potentialities and hence compensatory effect of the white component.<sup>89</sup>

The dissemination of the black man referred to in this lecture replicates the dispersal Hrdlicka recommended in the 1898 lecture before the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He unabashedly used his perception of blacks as substandard to encourage white Americans to accept European immigration. Adding more whites, regardless of national origin, would offset the negative presence of the black man.

Not only did the “colored man” demean the great American society, the “yellow-brown” man of China, Japan, and Korea similarly debased the American population. While Asians did not rank as low on the scale of races as blacks, “His admixture into our population is nevertheless not desirable, and he brings with him habits and views that are not those of our race. His introduction in larger numbers would be a source of friction and racial troubles for besides

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<sup>89</sup> Ales Hrdlicka, "The American People," in *Ales Hrdlicka Papers* (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 1922).

his qualities he brings in the element of competition. We must beware of Asiatics...”<sup>90</sup> Hrdlicka made such claims without any objective reasoning. His 1890s research failed to prove the physical inferiority of blacks and their inability to be rehabilitated. His body of research reveals no formal study into the Asian population whatsoever; rather, Hrdlicka allowed his personal prejudices to overtake the discussion. Interestingly, Hrdlicka also appealed to the economic interests of his audience in denouncing Asian immigration, a tactic he did not reach for in his discussion of blacks. Not only did Asian immigrants pollute the white American stock with their “habits and views,” they also threatened native business owners. Asians had the potential to rapidly “catch up” with white Americans, and thus, needed to be stopped at the borders. Blacks and Asians were forever tainted because of their poor environmental circumstances and could not escape Hrdlicka’s category of the “abnormal.”

The desire for “proper immigration,” that is, white immigration, continued to fill Hrdlicka’s public agenda over the next two decades, though absent his denigration of Asians and African-Americans. He repeatedly argued that there were unending benefits of white immigrants to American culture and politics, even citing biological improvements to the American stock: “It is they in the main, with the ‘foreign-born’ of the past generations, who made possible the vast material and even much of the spiritual developments of the country, and have directly or indirectly been the source of the affluence of those who now decry them...[America] probably benefitted also biologically. It is a well established biological fact that the addition of wholesome new blood to an old stock is beneficial, and the mass of the European workers brought here

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

surely did not represent anything effete or degenerate.”<sup>91</sup> Hrdlicka aggrandized his conclusions regarding the Old Americans environmental evolution to be applied to recent immigration.

As World War II drew closer, Hrdlicka became so impassioned that he compared American nativism with Naziism: “The prejudices native Americans hold against their foreign-born fellow citizens are comparable to the ‘trumped-up Aryanism’ of the Nazis’ and are weakening the nation.”<sup>92</sup> Hrdlicka’s scientific research may have turned away from the Old Americans, but he remained committed to the complete and total supremacy of the white races, and most specifically, the American white race. If America rejected their white brethren from Southern and Eastern Europe, the nation was just as guilty as the Nazis, who literally criminalized the “abnormal.” The Americans would perpetrate an even greater injustice, however, because the European immigrants qualified not as “abnormals,” but as “normal” members of the white race. Passing over the African-Americans and Asians also locked out of mainstream American society, Hrdlicka could not let such an inequity against Europeans stand.

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<sup>91</sup> Ales Hrdlicka, "National Dinner of Awards Address," in *Ales Hrdlicka Papers* (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 1937).

<sup>92</sup> "Scores Prejudice in U.S.," *New York Times* (1923-Current file) 1941.

## Conclusion

*“Even today there are very few competent to carry on his work. His subject is loaded with emotional drives for the average individual, yet it must be studied entirely aloof from any emotional influences which might vitiate the results. It requires, first of all, the combination of two qualities—capacity for patient, cold-blooded exactness of observation and measurement, and a constructive imagination of the highest order. He has been insistent in his demand that theories of man’s past and future fit the obtainable facts. Naturally this position has aroused strenuous opposition, through which Dr. Hrdlicka has maintained the quiet dignity appropriate to his scientific position.”<sup>93</sup>*

Several years after Hrdlicka’s most fervent championing of white immigrants, a series of eulogies and obituaries were published across the country in honor of his death in the fall of 1943, the loss of a “scholar and gentleman.”<sup>94</sup> The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* credited Hrdlicka with a wide range of achievements both political in nature— the prediction of the coming of World War II in 1937 — and scientific—the theory of the human migration from Asia via Alaska into North America.

Hrdlicka’s labyrinthine worldview regarding the non-white races received no comment in the numerous obituaries published at the time of his death. While he would soon be recognized as an ardent supporter of Southern and Eastern European immigrants with several honorary degrees from universities in then Czechoslovakia and awards from immigrant groups, his conclusions regarding the significance of miscegenation for African-American improvement remained unaddressed in the coming decades. Because Hrdlicka lacked the foresight to understand the importance of racial mutability in America’s future, Franz Boas’s principle of cultural relativism and his early collaboration with the NAACP earned Boas instead the title of

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<sup>93</sup> "A Distinguished American," in *Ales Hrdlicka Papers* (National Anthropological Archives, 1943).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

“Father of American Anthropology.” Unlike Hrdlicka, Boas was outspokenly positioned at the forefront of confronting scientific racism in the first half of the twentieth century.

If Hrdlicka remains a nonentity outside of the field of anthropology, what value does a close examination of his trajectory as a race scientist hold? Firstly, Dr. Hrdlicka was more than just a characteristic “race scientist.” He began his career in the 1890s as an eager and ambitious scientist, trained in the flawed anthropometric theories of the late nineteenth century.

Maintaining rigorous scientific standards throughout his research, Hrdlicka’s findings in both his 1897-8 studies at the New York State Hospitals and Old Americans work led him to adopt the rather progressive views of an environmentalist. To his final years, Hrdlicka did not set out to prove the inferiority of any non-white population as some race scientists. Still, the remnants of racial prejudices inhibited Hrdlicka from making the larger conclusions needed to shift physical anthropology away from its antiquated and subjective foundations.

Hrdlicka’s career illustrates the danger of ignorance regarding personal biases among science professionals. Assuredly, research findings first circulated among the upper echelons of the scientific community eventually reach the broader public. Without accounting for the limitations and prejudices inherent in the endeavors, dangerous and unfounded principles can be perpetuated and manipulated as unquestionable fact by politicians and other public figures. Contemporary scientists and intellectuals must be continuously aware of the social predilections affecting every step of their work.

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