

Perlmann, Joel

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## **Working Paper No. 648**

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# **Views of European Races among the Research Staff of the US Immigration Commission and the Census Bureau, ca. 1910**

by

**Joel Perlmann**

Levy Economics Institute of Bard College

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Levy Economics Institute  
P.O. Box 5000  
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504-5000  
<http://www.levyinstitute.org>

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses support for, and opposition to, racial classification of European immigrants among high-level researchers at both the United States Immigration Commission of 1907–11 (the Dillingham Commission) and the Census Bureau during those same years. A critical distinction must be made between the Commission members—political appointees who mostly supported some form of restriction at the time of their appointment—and the top research staff, whose views were remarkably wide ranging. Moreover, even staff members committed to a racialized outlook—such as Daniel Folkmar, author of the Commission’s infamous Dictionary of Races and Peoples—deserve a closer look than historians have given them; for example, Folkmar and his superior on the staff had requested commentary from Franz Boas, who was then emerging as the most prestigious academic critic of racial theories (theories that assume group differences in behavior arise from biological endowments). Another feature of the narrative concerns the surprising number of staff who transferred from the Commission to the Census Bureau to work on the 1910 Census. Debates continued at the Bureau as well, this time over how to present the results of the new “mother tongue” question, which had been introduced to the Census questionnaire in response to pressure for a European “race” question. Indeed, Folkmar was also the chief author of the Census Bureau report on the mother-tongue data.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is part of a larger study about how the American federal statistics system came to classify European immigrants in racial terms in the years after 1898—and on the interpretation of those terms. The classification system then devised, the *List of Races and Peoples* (the *List*, henceforth), remained in use for fully half a century; the list appears in table 1. Moreover, in 1909 it came close to being adapted for the United States decennial Census. In earlier work I have described how mid-level bureaucrats at Ellis Island had become frustrated with the way in which the origins of arriving immigrants were being classified (Perlmann 2001).<sup>1</sup> The crucial problem was that many different peoples were coming from the multinational empires of Russia and Austro-Hungary, but they were described in the records only by country of origin, either as Russian or Austrian. Similar, if smaller scale, problems came to mind as well, for example immigrants from the German Empire. How then to distinguish, for example, Polish Catholics from Jews or Finns leaving the Russian Empire, Slovaks from Hungarians or Ruthenians leaving the Austro Empire and so on? These Ellis Island officials decided (on their own dubious authority) to collect supplemental information for a few years from the arriving immigrants—information on color, religion, province, and mother tongue, and then they concluded that they could get at what was needed from a single descriptor: race. They soon amended the label for the descriptor to race or people, without any explanation, but probably to emphasize that they were not claiming that any given category was one thing or another. The new Commissioner of Immigration, Terrence Powderly, accepted their suggestions in 1898. The list was a crucial part of every subsequent *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration* until about the middle of the century. The United States Immigration Commission, created in 1907, adopted the classification system as well, and literally every page of the 41 volumes of the Commission's *Reports* (most published in 1911) discusses the immigrants in terms of this classification system. Indeed, the Commission extended the use of the *List* significantly, by applying it not merely to immigrant arrivals, but to all foreign-born inhabitants of the United States, and also to all offspring of the foreign born throughout *their* lives.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in 1909, the Immigration

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<sup>1</sup> The summary of that paper extends over the next few paragraphs.

<sup>2</sup> The commission did not trace immigrant descent beyond the second generation. This choice probably reflected above all the fact that the “new” immigration had not yet produced a third generation and that the census itself was

Commission twice tried to have the classification system become a new question in the upcoming decennial census. One effort “to insert the word ‘race’ into the list of items to be canvassed” (that is, in addition to the “color” question that was already on the list) passed the Senate without discussion in January. However the race item was deleted in the House-Senate reconciliation committee meetings. A second effort in April involved the executive secretary of the United States Immigration Commission, W.W. Husband, and their resident anthropologist, Daniel Folkmar, appealing to the Senate Census Subcommittee, but the intriguing discussion went nowhere. The reason for the defeats was the same in both cases: several Jewish organizations bitterly protested the notion of classifying “Hebrews” as a race or people.

For these Jews, “Hebrews” were a religion and only a religion. Even accepting only the second, weaker claim meant that any federal classification of these people explicitly violated the separation of church and state. The relevant Jewish organizations spoke especially for the more assimilated and well-to-do second generation of German Jews, rather than for the huge more recent Eastern European Jewish immigrants. Indeed some of the latter wrote to the Immigration Commission to encourage classification of Hebrews as a race or people. In any case, when the issue reached the Senate Census Subcommittee, it was easier to table the Immigration Commission’s request than to deal with angry, articulate Jewish elites (including Senator Guggenheim, himself a member of that elite). However, in the months that followed, various other groups (immigrant associations, social workers, and the like) turned to the Census Bureau to urge the adoption of some sort of classification system for immigrants that went beyond “country of origin”—for precisely the reason that the Ellis Island officials had first stressed, the heterogeneous arrivals from the multinational empires. And so, three weeks before the 1910 census enumeration began, the Director of the Census asked for, and received, Congressional action to add a question on *mother tongue* to the census—actually on “mother tongue or nationality,” but the latter term dropped away in the implementation. The question captured the diversity of peoples through their mother tongue rather than through their description in the list of races or peoples.

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not tracking immigrant offspring past the second generation. Inter-marriage was also much more common among the European groups by the third generation, complicating any such effort.

In this paper I present another facet of the classification issues, focusing on some of the remarkable individuals who worked on these issues around 1910. The most sophisticated and well-trained social scientists involved were not working at the Bureau of Immigration, but at the United States Immigration Commission and at the US Census. Indeed, a number of crucial players worked at the Immigration Commission where everything was discussed in terms of race or people and then at the Census Bureau on the mother tongue data. In the latter role, they debated what mother tongue data revealed and how it should be presented. Although the paper trail to identities of these people and to their discussions is decidedly uneven, there is more than enough to show a diversity of views about the meaning of the race and mother tongue statistics. What did race mean and what was its sociological significance?

Stepping back one analytical level, I think it is fair to say that for historians of this period the multiple meanings of the term race, and also the centrality of racial concerns to immigration restriction (especially before World War I), remain in contention. Consequently the point I am stressing here is directly relevant to our historiographical context: among the highest level of researchers working for the US Immigration Commission (USIC) and at the Census Bureau there was a dramatic range of contradictory views. Oscar Handlin's celebrated essay in *Race and Nationality in American Life* stressed the extent to which the "social science" of the commission's *Reports* was deeply flawed, and Mae Ngai stressed the connections between Census Chief Statistician, J. Hill, and the eugenics movement. On the other hand, Robert Zeidel warns not to exaggerate the racial concerns of the commissioners or the bias of its reports, and, with Aristede Zolberg, emphasizes the wide range of issues that the commissioners were worried about—such as an excess of unskilled laborers. These other issues, as much as, and probably more than, immigrant racial composition determined the reports and recommendations of 1911, if not the immigration legislation a dozen years later (Handlin 1957; Ngai 2005; Zeidel 2004; Zolberg 2006).

When I show the decided diversity of views among the researchers of the 1910 period then, my paper provides some additional grist for Zeidel's mill. However, my impression is that the researchers at the Immigration Commission and the research they conducted can be considered conceptually apart from the commissioners, their desire to make recommendations, and the rewrites of reports that Handlin stressed and Zeidel partly confirms. Zeidel provides an excellent discussion of the process by which the commissioners met throughout, and the nature

of the crucial last meetings at which they decided on recommendations. I come away from that description thinking that we will understand the process of commission research, and especially the varied staff views of commission researchers, if we think of two quite independent levels of work.<sup>3</sup> The commissioners did indeed encourage or accept a wide range of studies by a wide range of researchers, but the establishment of the commission is probably still best explained as Speaker Joe Cannon's stalling mechanism. Likewise, the recommendations of the commission are probably less related to the findings of the reports and more related to the fact that most of the commissioners had in fact spoken for *some* form of immigration restriction before they had been appointed. The USIC Commissioners were not Madison Grant and their recommendations were not those of the 1920s. Still, Lodge had very publicly stressed that racial differences that took millennia to create would not disappear in foreseeable time; Burnett may have concurred, and it was Dillingham and his assistant, W.W. Husband, who first proposed the quota solutions that became law in the twenties. Others, such as Jeremiah Jenks, were very likely influenced by a weaker form of the racial argument, such as the social danger of mixing discordant stocks. In sum, I argue that the diversity of researchers views was wide and that it is intriguing that the commissioners tolerated that diversity, but it does not necessarily follow that the researchers findings convinced men who awaited the results of rationale inquiry and I do not think that most of the commissioners acted like such men on most of the issues, even if the commissioners sometimes said that they did.

At the Census Bureau, the balance of research and politics was different, and the Dana Director was himself an accomplished social scientist who was interacting with his staff. The result is that the decisions about presentation seem to involve the research staff more fully than at the Immigration Commission. One reason for this difference was simply that the Census publication was not expected to provide explicit policy recommendations for Congressional legislation as was the summary of the *Reports of the Immigration Commission*. The commission's studies were conducted with a large budget over the better part of four years, involving a staff of three hundred. My interest is in the top level of researchers, who generally coordinated the work in the field and wrote some of the studies.

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<sup>3</sup> If Jenks or Neil, the two immigration commissioners with sophisticated academic backgrounds in the social sciences, were interacting with researchers, we don't hear about that (except in the connection between Jenks and Franz Boas).

**Figure 1. The List of Races and Peoples**

African (black)	Korean
Armenian	Lithuanian
Bohemian and Moravian (Czech)	Magyar
Bulgarian, Servian, Montenegrin	Mexican
Chinese	Pacific Islander
Croatian and Slovenian	Polish
Cuban	Portuguese
Dalmatian, Bosnian and Herzegovinian	Roumanian
Dutch and Flemish	Russian
East Indian	Ruthenian (Russniak)
English	Scandinavian
Finnish	Scotch
French	Slovak
German	Spanish
Greek	Spanish-American
Hebrew	Syrian
Irish	Turkish
Italian (north)	Welsh
Italian (south)	West Indian (except Cuban)
Japanese	Other peoples

**Source:** *Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration* for 1910



## RESEARCHERS WORKING FOR THE UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION COMMISSION, 1908–11

The most famous of the people who worked with the Immigration Commission, probably already at the time and certainly today, was Franz Boas. In 1907 he was already an international authority as professor of anthropology at Columbia, although much of his career in that role remained before him. Likewise, his clearest formulations about the importance of cultural rather than biological influences upon mental characteristics and the relativism inherent in judging cultures were in the formative stage. Still, Boas had already been emphasizing how little evidence actually existed for the claims that race played a large role in determining mental attributes and that racial characteristics (physical or mental) changed only very slowly whether through the impact of new environments or as a result of interracial unions. Moreover, he had been condemning American popular and legal discrimination against blacks for several years. Indeed, he had delivered, at the invitation of W.E.B. DuBois, the commencement address at Atlanta University in 1906.<sup>4</sup>

Boas interacted with the Commission in two ways, both relevant to the interpretation of race by commission researchers. One of these interactions, well-known in the history of anthropology and well-publicized at the time, involves the celebrated research project he produced, eventually published in mid-1911 as “Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants,” the 38th volume of the Immigration Commission *Reports* (US Immigration Commission 1911a). To everyone’s surprise, Boas had found that head size and shape changed considerably over a generation in a new environment. These two features of bodily form had been thought to be highly stable measures that could be used to classify races across the ages.

Boas had been interested in these themes of racial stability and change for several years and he had been linking them explicitly to the American scene, in connection with both blacks and immigrants. In fact, he had thought for several years about projects similar in their large purpose to that which the immigration Commission eventually funded.<sup>5</sup> So it was well in line

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<sup>4</sup> Especially useful summaries can be found in Gilkeson (2010) and Hyatt (1990). See also Stocking (1968).

<sup>5</sup> Two years earlier, he had floated a research proposal informally to Greenwich House, a progressive charitable organization New York City. In a letter to its director, his Columbia colleague, Vladimir G. Simkovitch, Boas envisioned a study that would explore intergenerational change among blacks and the implications of black-white unions, a possible long-term solution to the problem of the American color line. For example, he asked, whether the mulatto represented “an intermediate type or is there a tendency to reversion towards either race?” Boas to

with his ruminations over years that early in 1908 Boas entered into discussions about funding with Jeremiah Jenks, the Cornell professor who was one of the nine members of the Immigration Commission. Exactly how and when the two came into contact is unclear, but in March and April of 1908 Boas was pressing Jenks for a decision and Jenks was reporting back regularly on the interest of Commission members and what Boas could clarify for them.<sup>6</sup>

For our purposes, this episode is an example of the Commission's willingness to get involved with a prominent researcher—some of whose iconoclastic views were already on the record—to produce an empirical study about racial change. Surely neither the Commission nor that researcher expected outcomes so dramatically suggestive of racial mutability; nevertheless, they must have had some sense of whom they were dealing with. Indeed, as Zeidel stresses, even after the preliminary reports pointed in that direction, the commissioners approved fuller funding. Moreover, there is no evidence that when the results came in, the commission ever considered burying the study. True, the summary volumes (over which Boas had no control) would eventually stress that the Boas project was an isolated study whose outcomes would need to be digested.<sup>7</sup> But certainly the liberal funding the commission provided, and its ability to tolerate the results, seem to indicate the possibility of a wide range of views about race at the level of the researchers. We will return to a less well-known interaction between Boas and Immigration Commission work below.

Far less well-known than Boas at the time was Emmanuel Alexandrovich (E.A.) Goldenweisser. Later, he would work briefly at the Census Bureau, where we will encounter him again; he then moved to the Federal Reserve, where he served most of his career as chief economist, and as a president of the American Economic Association. He had been born in Kiev in 1883 into a “secular, cosmopolitan Jewish” home of a well-known Russian jurist. The father

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Simkovitch, March 15, 1906, FB/APS. But that proposal went nowhere. Likewise, late in 1908 he made a very visible call for further evidence about racial change through both immigration and intermarriage (discussed below).

<sup>6</sup> There is no initial approach to Jenks in the Boas correspondence; indeed the first mention is a letter of January 4, 1908 to Husband requesting printing of a form and clerical help “Professor Jenks told me he would mention the matter to you,” as though Boas and Jencks already had an agreement (FB/APS). It is clear from the correspondence of March through June 1909 that the agreement came later. It is probable that the earlier letter, just after the turn of the new year, was mistakenly dated 1908 instead of 1909, but even if that is the case, the letter to Husband would still have preceded the agreement with the Immigration Commission by many months. Also notable is that there is no response from the generally scrupulously careful Husband.

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the summary volumes were used to perform the shifting of interpretation that Handlin found widespread. Still, Boas had offered some similar cautions himself, and he noted differences in the speed of changes in bodily form between Jews and Italians. Of course, it is likely that he still thought the findings far more important to views of immigration than, say, Lodge did.

felt his sons' futures would be blocked in the Russian Empire, and the family emigrated to New York City after Emanuel finished the gymnasium in Kiev. He enrolled in Columbia, and eventually completed a doctorate in economics there. Since his subject was the Russian immigration to the United States, he was hired straight out of graduate school to head up the Commission's data collection on "immigrants in cities." Emmanuel also had an older brother, Alexander Alexandrovich (A.A.), who would finish his own Columbia Ph.D. in 1910—in anthropology under Boas. It is very likely, then, that E.A. Goldenweisser also knew something of Boas's work on race generally, and surely he knew Boas's research for the Immigration Commission (American National Biography 1999a and 1999b).

E.A. Goldenweisser's background prior to 1909 suggests that he had no truck with a simplistic racial ranking of immigrants, or the threat that the new immigration posed. His writings over the next few years leave no doubt about his views. He published a summary of his Commission research in *The Survey* in January 1911, just as the Commission's *Reports* were moving towards release. He clearly meant to have his say, whatever Jenks, Husband, and the Commissioners might be concluding.

The Italian, the Hebrew and the Slav, according to popular belief, are poisoning the pure air of our otherwise well-regulated cities; and if not for them there would be no congestion, no filth, no poverty....

[In fact this] study strongly indicates that racial characteristics are entirely subordinate to environment and opportunity in determining the immigrant's mode of life... the more successful members leave for better surroundings, until finally the entire colony is absorbed in the melting pot of the American city.<sup>8</sup>

A year later, his paper in the *American Journal of Sociology* provided the first refutation of Francis Walker's famous argument that immigration causes race suicide, because the poor immigrants drive down wages and the native worker responds by restricting fertility. Goldenweisser showed that the evidence—high immigration correlated with low native fertility—was spurious in that both were the product of urbanization and industrialization (Goldenweiser 1912).

Another example of an analyst opposed to the Commission's final pronouncements was

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<sup>8</sup> Reprinted in Davis and Schwartz (1920).

Roland P. Falkner, who for a time headed the investigation of the children of immigrants in schools. By 1911 he was serving as Assistant Director of the Census Bureau, and from that desk he wrote in 1911 to congratulate author I.A. Hourwich (of whom more below) upon the publication of an article critical of immigration restriction.

I have read [your article] with a greater pleasure in that it confirms and as it seems to me with unimpeachable testimony the views respecting immigration which I have had for a long time.

...The vigorous language of the restrictionist, its apparent appeal to patriotic feelings in the preservation of American institutions has mislead many who ought to have known better. It was a distinct disappointment to me personally that the Immigration Commission came to the conclusion that restriction was desirable. I cannot believe that a judicial weighing of the facts which were brought forward by them should incline opinion to such a view.

You are the more to be congratulated on this scholarly essay in that you have drawn so largely upon the evidence of the Immigration Commission to reach the conclusions at variance with theirs. (Falkner to Hourwich, 1911; IAH/HL)

In the light of the pronouncements by Goldenweisser and Falkner, as well as Boas's views, it is hard to know what to make of a claim by Jeremiah Jenks in 1913. In a lecture to the senior class at Yale's Sheffield Scientific School, part of a series of guest lectures on *Questions of Public Policy*, he asserted, "...[S]o far as can be ascertained, all of the field agents of the Commission, perhaps a hundred, even before the final statistical results of the investigation had been fully calculated and the results made manifest—simply through their personal observations—had become convinced that the restrictive policy was needed. So striking a unanimity on the part of people, coming from different sections of the country, with different political views" Jenks argued, was remarkable (Jenks 1913). Leaving aside the curious appeal by a professor of public policy and a past president of the American Economic Association to the views of agents "simply through their personal observations" and before the data had been studied, what are we to make of the claim of unanimity. Perhaps we can assume that even an official as visible as Falkner (by this time number two in the Census Bureau) had said nothing of his views, but Goldenweiser, as we have seen, had published his in *The Survey* and *The American Journal of Sociology* during the two preceding years. Moreover, Franz Boas had been

increasingly outspoken on the connections between race prejudice and immigration restriction and his study for the Commission hardly demonstrated his allegiance to the central conclusion Jenks reports (Jenks 1913).

Of course, there were others among the commission's top research staff whose views were much closer to those of Lodge, or even Madison Grant. Joseph Hill, who would serve for many years as the Census Bureau's Chief Statistician, may have been one of these; certainly he was also involved with eugenics societies (Ngai 2005; JH/NA). His assistant, Julius H. Parmelee, also a loan from the Census Bureau to the commission, likewise seems to have placed a good deal of weight on racial heritages (as we will see below). However, for our story, Daniel Folkmar was the commission's most important senior researcher who believed that physical differences among European races were crucial to their mental characteristics. Folkmar wrote the notorious fifth volume of the Commission Reports, *The Dictionary of Races and Peoples*—and he would then move to the Census Bureau to work on the new mother tongue data. Turning 50 in 1910, Folkmar had grown up in Wisconsin, attended a local college in his early twenties, and then, apparently for brief periods, studied at Chicago and Harvard. Later still, he taught at two normal schools and led one of them. In the mid-1890s he undertook advanced study in France and Belgium and he received a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Paris in 1900; a part of his published thesis dealt extensively with the differential development of races, their traits, and with racial classification (Folkmar 1900).<sup>9</sup> A typical passage, dealing with immigration, captures the flavor.

For the study of emigration problems, the survival of the fittest is ...crucial. The study of such questions shows us the close connection between anthropology and practical policy... The legislator cannot govern wisely the races under his dominion without knowing the qualities and limits of the powers of races and nations and the influence that climate or the environment have upon them... Babington [an 1890s critic of race thinking] is right to combat the tendency to always be thinking about race ... But Babington goes too far in denying the existence of race and attributing all the phenomena of life to the environment. He says, for example 'Differences of present condition (between English and Irish) are sufficiently accounted for by long-continued

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<sup>9</sup> This was an expanded version of the original thesis, published the preceding year as *L'Anthropologie Philosophique: Consideree come Base de La Morale*. On Folkmar, see also the entries in Winters (1991) and Marquis (1924), as well as Handlin (1952: 1840ff).

differences of environment...’ Yet what he calls ‘long-continued differences of environment’ cannot be related to individual particularities unless one takes into account heredity, and such variations in the course of succeeding generations that amount to what evolutionists call the origins of a new race. (Folkmar 1899: 154–5)<sup>10</sup>

Thus survival of the fittest, and possibly Lamarckian-type mechanisms, explain how environment creates new races over very long periods, and these races in turn, such as the English and the Irish, differ in their character. All this, moreover, is background to legislating immigration policy.

After completing his European studies, Folkmar signed on as “Anthropologist and Lt. Governor” in the Philippine Civil Service, where he served from 1903 through 1907, and produced an *Album of Philippine Types* (1904). Apparently, he joined the staff of the United States Immigration Commission as anthropologist for 1908–09. It is likely that during his Philippine service Folkmar had met Jeremiah Jenks (who was then on a federal study commission dealing with the Philippines and would soon be appointed to the Immigration Commission).<sup>11</sup> Folkmar would soon move to the Census Bureau, and (during World War I) to the War Department, where he studied soldiers’ characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

Folkmar’s views about the centrality of racially stable attributes had not changed since the time of his doctoral dissertation ten years earlier. In 1909, he testified before the Senate’s Census Subcommittee with W.W. Husband about the advantages of adding the “race or people” question to the census enumeration. His statement ends:

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<sup>10</sup> The reference to is to Babington (1895), a posthumous publication of remarkable interest, available in the Library of the University of Chicago and Google Books.

<sup>11</sup> A possible relative of Jenks may have introduced them. Folkmar had worked with anthropologist Albert Ernest Jenks there. See, for example, United States War Department (1905: 417). On Folkmar, see also the entry in Winters (1991) and Marquis (1924).

<sup>12</sup> Focusing, it seems, on physical differences (not mental aptitude) and classifying them in part by ethnic origin, under the guidance, among others, of the leading eugenics researcher, Charles B. Davenport. See United States Army Surgeon General (1921).

In conclusion, the inquiry into the racial elements of America is the inquiry which will disclose the crucial elements of weakness and of strength in the nation—of far greater moment in the long run than a census of manufactures and of wealth. It will give us the first true picture of the American race of the future, and its necessary place in the world's civilization.<sup>13</sup>

The Dictionary of Races and Peoples was originally intended to guide the Immigration Commission workers, but when it became clear that it would appear too late for that, it came to be seen as the Commission's summation of knowledge about each race or people. Partly it rested on the disciplines we would think of as today as history, economics, sociology, and cultural anthropology; partly it summarized differences resting on physical anthropology or archeology. The whole was leavened with a generous sprinkling of ethno-racial stereotyping and generalizations about national character. The Dictionary has been reviled and mocked at least since Oscar Handlin's essay on the Commission in the early fifties. Yet when it appeared in 1911 *The New York Times* ran a respectful full-page story about its interesting discussions. A decade later, physical anthropologist Hrdlicka praised the *Dictionary* in a survey of his field as "very credible" (US Immigration Commission 1911b; New York Times 1911; Hrdlicka 1919).

My interest is not in revising our view of the report, except to note that while it included a virtual compendium of stereotypes, it also relied on much of the serious work of the time and the preparation of the *Dictionary* must have involved reading a good deal of scholarly writing that went well beyond the stereotyping. My concern, however, lies elsewhere, namely with the strange connection between Franz Boas and the creation of the *Dictionary*. This was his second and less-well-known interaction with the United States Immigration Commission to which I referred earlier.

The social and academic status of Boas and Folkmar were, of course, very different. Boas was a highly-respected professor at a leading university, an international leader in the field. Folkmar was a hired staffer. Whereas Folkmar seem to have maintained his views about the role of biology in establishing character differences among races, Boas's outlook was evolving at precisely this time towards the view that

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<sup>13</sup> Folkmar's 1909 testimony in United States Congress, 1st Session, 61st Congress, hearings before the committee on the census of the Senate on the bill (H.R. 1033) to provide for the thirteenth and subsequent decennial censuses.

evidence for such racial influence was lacking. Yet Boas, Folkmar, and Husband interacted about the centrality of race in general and about the *Dictionary* in particular.

In late 1908, as vice president of the American Anthropological Association, Boas gave an address at the annual meeting entitled “Race Problems of America,” which must have in part have been stimulated by, and in turn stimulated further, his own work for the Commission. Generally, he was concerned with “the development of the American nation through amalgamation of diverse European nationalities.” He criticized some of the fears of restrictionists that the process of racial amalgam was so different than it had been in the European past. Generally however, he stressed how little data was actually available about changes in “type”—physical type first and foremost—across generations in new environments. This, of course, was exactly the subject of his own ruminations for several years, and of his work in progress for the Commission. “The whole problem of the effects of race intermixture upon the various characteristic traits of human types is entirely unsolved.” So while “it behooves us to be most cautious in our reasoning, and particularly to refrain from all sensational formulations,” data was really needed on all aspects of racial intermarriage and its effects. The very question of intermarriage rates is critical, but not now treated in the census data.

We do not know the influence of racial cohesion. Obviously, this is one of the fundamental points that ought to be known to gain a clear insight into the effect of recent immigration. [It is] one of the most urgent desiderata for an understanding of the composition of the American population. I may therefore express the hope that this question may be included in the census to be organized next year, or may be otherwise provided for by an inquiry to be undertaken under the auspices of the government.<sup>14</sup>  
(Boas 1909)

Soon after the talk was delivered, W.W. Husband, the commission’s secretary, wrote to Boas about the talk (he and Boas exchanged numerous letters over staffing, project costs, publication, and the like).

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<sup>14</sup> Back in January of the same year, Boas wrote to Jenks, “The further I get along in my work the more important becomes the question of intermarriages, which you told me is being investigated on the basis of the census Reports by your Commission.” He suggests everyone involved get together to discuss the issue. Boas to Jenks, Jan. 29, 1909, FB/APS.



Dr. Daniel Folkmar tells me that at a meeting of the Anthropological Society in Baltimore recently you read a very interesting paper, a part of which was devoted to an argument in favor of taking the United States census by race. This has been a matter of discussion here for some time ... I would be very glad indeed, if you could furnish me with a copy of the Baltimore paper.<sup>15</sup>

Boas's had made but one, vague mention of the Census, and that in the context of many cautions against exaggerating the evils of present immigration trends. But surely what must have struck Folkmar was that even Boas could see the value of a Census question that would expand knowledge of these issues. This was the issue that had brought Folkmar and Husband to the Senate Subcommittee on the Census—having the Census include a version of the “race or people” question. Perhaps, Folkmar or Husband also thought that if the Columbia authority's name could be invoked, they might yet succeed in their efforts. In any case, Boas sent the paper; Husband must have realized that there wasn't much it would do for his cause.

Nine months later, Husband turns to Boas to get a reading on the progress of Folkmar's *Dictionary*.

I think I have mentioned to you casually the work of Dr. Daniel Folkmar, who is preparing a “Dictionary of Races” to be included in the report of the Immigration Commission....

It seems to me ... that it will be an addition of value to the report, but of course, we wish to exert every effort possible to make it as correct and authoritative as may be possible. The enclosed introduction was rather hastily drawn, having been prepared by Dr. Folkmar early in the work. I am also enclosing articles on the Hebrew, Ruthenian, and Polish races. The article on the Hebrew race represents some of Dr. Folkmar's earlier work in this regard, and, as you will note, is much briefer....

I think this will give you a pretty clear idea of what we have in mind, and I want to ask your opinion relative to it. In the first place I would like to know whether you think the plan is a good one, and if so, whether you would approve in general of the way it is being carried out... [and] how can we best satisfy ourselves as to its accuracy and scientific value from an ethnological standpoint. I know, of course, there is considerable disagreement as to various racial classifications, etc... [but] how can we make

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<sup>15</sup> Husband to Boas, Jan. 29, 1909 FB/APS.

it the best thing possible in this line... Dr. Folkmar is anxious to submit this work to some authorities on the subject, and because of that, I suggested that I would write to you.<sup>16</sup>

There is no reason to doubt that both Folkmar and Husband did indeed want serious readings of the work, and in fact we will soon see that there is strong evidence showing that Folkmar sought out just such feedback on his own. But it may be too that Husband in particular was not merely aware of the disagreement among ethnologists to which he refers, but was also concerned that giving Folkmar his head could create a political embarrassment. Husband, for example, was already familiar with the Jewish protests over the classification of Hebrews as a race or people rather than a religion (to which I referred in the introduction).<sup>17</sup> He may have wanted to be sure there were not similar minefields through which he would have to carry the *Dictionary*.

In any case, Folkmar and Husband gave Boas an entry. What would he do with it? Boas never offered his own opinion directly. Instead, "I took the liberty to submit the manuscript to Dr. Simkhovich, whom I asked to look over the remarks on the Ruthenians. I send you his reply. I have submitted the section on the Hebrews to Dr. Fishberg, whose reply I will send when it comes."<sup>18</sup>

We have neither Simkhovich's nor Fishberg's "peer review," but with regard to the former we learn much from Husband's ever-polite reply.

Although Dr. Sinkhovich's letter is one of condemnation rather than criticism, still I am exceedingly glad to have it. As I wrote you, the matter is one concerning which I have no knowledge...The possibility of having different persons write separately upon the various races [seemed unfeasible] and notwithstanding Dr. Sinkhovich's condemnation, I still think that good results will be obtained.

Of course I will lay the letter before Dr. Folkmar in order that he may profit by such criticism as Dr. Sinkhovich has made, because of course the Commission would not authorize the publication of inaccurate and unscientific material upon this or any other subject. I am glad you submitted the section on

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<sup>16</sup> Husband to Boas, Sept. 29, 1909, FB/APS.

<sup>17</sup> Husband would soon draft the introduction to the Immigration Commission's summary volume, which justified the Commission's use of the Hebrew race through a review of recent scholarly authorities (including Jewish authorities) on the issue.

<sup>18</sup> Boas to Husband, Oct. 8, 1909, FB/APS. Vladimir G. Simkovitch was a social Science colleague of Boas's at Columbia, and the Director of the progressive Greenwich House organization mentioned earlier.

Hebrews to Dr. Fishberg. Dr. Folkmar has told me that he consulted Dr. Fishberg to a considerable extent in writing the article....

There will be a meeting of the Commission in New York on October 19<sup>th</sup> and if you have time I would be very glad if I could see you for a little while to talk over this particular piece of work and perhaps others...<sup>19</sup>

That Folkmar was in contact with Fishberg himself is itself important evidence that he was not writing from within a cocoon of cultural insensitivity or academic boorishness. Fishberg, Jewish himself, was the dominant authority on issues of how to think about a Jewish race and within a very few years would publish his own magnum opus on the subject. A few days later, Fishberg in fact sent Boas a critique of Folkmar's draft entry that the latter sent on to Husband. The critique, Husband replied, "is gratifying because it appeals to me as really interested criticism. I will be glad of the privilege of talking the matter over with you and Prof. Jenks if he can remain in New York..."<sup>20</sup>

It appears that they did get together for a talk, but we have no record of that discussion. It is not out of the question that Husband used the New York meeting to "be sure Boas was on board," to be sure Boas was not so upset with what he had read that he would denounce Folkmar's work. In sum, it seems that Husband, and probably Jenks, would have taken seriously any advice Boas might have wished to give about the *Dictionary*. However, all indications are that his well-known combativeness notwithstanding, Boas was reticent to the point of saying nothing directly. Why?

Boas's own views were shifting at the time, and he may have felt he was not in a position to take on what amounted to a frontal attack upon the most important claim of physical anthropology. It might have helped enormously had he told Husband that in his view the claim was thrown about loosely without evidence, and that the *Dictionary* should avoid such claims. He said about as much in the essay Husband had requested nine months earlier. But with so many others supporting the claim that physical racial characteristics strongly influences character, and with no systematic evidence to the contrary yet, perhaps he did not want to argue the point again. In the early fall of 1909, when this exchange of letters occurred, Boas was nearing the end of his preliminary

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<sup>19</sup> Husband to Boas, Oct. 12, 1909, FB/APS.

<sup>20</sup> Boas to Husband, Oct. 14, 1909; Husband to Boas, Oct 15, 1909. FB/APS.

report to the Immigration Commission on the “Changes in Bodily Form” project. A year later, or two years later (when he published both the final report to the Commission and *The Mind of Primitive Man*), perhaps he might have reacted differently.

Other reasons for his reticence may have been still more important. He may have had precious little respect for most activities of the Commission and for most Commissioners. And he may have thought it both hopeless and distasteful to try to have the debate with them, especially after Husband had read his cautions in the address he sent them nine months earlier. Finally, he had his own large project funded by the Commission, and he may not have wanted to endanger his own present and future research support. Whatever the explanations, it does appear that the most important critic of racial determinism in American anthropology had been invited to help chart the course for the *Dictionary* and he did nothing directly to either stop it or shape it.

## **INTERPRETING THE MOTHER TONGUE DATA AT THE CENSUS BUREAU**

In 1910–11, the United States Immigration Commission was winding down. Jeremiah Jenks would return to Cornell. He and yet another researcher at the Immigration Commission, William Jett Lauck, authored *The Immigration Problem*, a restrictionist text that drew heavily on the Commission’s *Reports*. The text ran through many editions and was widely used in college and university courses. In the same months, the Census Bureau was gearing up to write reports on the results of the 1910 enumeration, and it needed expert analysts. Roland Falkner had left the Commission earlier to become the Census Bureau’s Assistant Director; Joseph Hill and his assistant, Parmlee, on loan to the Commission, now also returned to the Bureau. Finally Goldenweisser and Folkmar—two men of very different outlook—came to the Census to work together on the mother tongue chapter of the census report (in 1914, they also coauthored another Census Bureau report, on Japanese immigration).

At the Census Bureau all these interacted with I. A. Hourwich as well. Hourwich, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, was an improbable character; he knew Lenin and Louis Brandeis, Rabbi Judah Magnes and the Director of the US Census. Within a seven-year period, he had been a researcher in the Washington federal bureaucracy, a candidate for the Russian Duma, the author of half a dozen articles published in the most prestigious journals of American social

science, a socialist labor leader at the center of a bitter and important clash, an attorney, and a congressional candidate for the Bull Moose Party. Besides all this, during that period he composed a monumental study of American immigration. In 1909, when we meet him, Hourwich was turning 50; he had immigrated two decades before and had been working in Washington, DC since about 1900. At the Census Bureau he served as an expert on mines.<sup>21</sup>

At the Census, Hourwich had already played a crucial role in connection with the use of the *List of Races and Peoples*. He believed that the 1909 German-Jewish opposition to classifying Jews as a race (in the loose sense used in the *List*) was misguided and he had tried to convince the American Jewish Committee not to object. More crucially, it was he who suggested to the Census Director Durand the course eventually adopted: instead of adding a question about race (to supplement the color question), add a question about mother tongue. Ironically, Daniel Folkmar had already made the same suggestion (without effect) to the Senate subcommittee back in April 1909 when it became clear they would not adopt the “race or people” question. In fact, it is possible that Folkmar and Hourwich together made the eventually successful suggestion to Durand. Our knowledge of the meeting at the Census Bureau in early 1910 at which the suggestion was made and accepted comes entirely from Hourwich’s memoirs. We know that Folkmar moved over to the Census Bureau at about the same time. So it is not impossible that Folkmar, too, may have been involved in that meeting and that Hourwich simply failed to share the credit for the idea with him (Perlmann 2001).<sup>22</sup>

In any case, from his perch at the Census, Hourwich would also write his critique of the Immigration Commission *Reports*, which appeared in multiple editions through the mid-1920s, competing with the multiple editions of the Jenks and Lauck text, *Immigration Problem*.

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<sup>21</sup> Born in Vilna into a middle-class Jewish home of *maskilim* (“enlightened modernizers”), he was sent to Russian schools, eventually graduating from the local gymnasium. He went on to the University in St. Petersburg but at the age of 19 was arrested for membership in a revolutionary group and spent 1881–86 in Siberia. After another brief stint in a Russian university he fled to the United States. On Hourwich, see Garraty and Carnes (1999) and references cited there, especially Epstein (1911). Hourwich also served to link Russian Marxism and American quantitative studies of census groups. He showed, in his “The Social-Economic Classes of the Population of the United States” how census occupational categories could be vertically arranged in order to show “subdivisions which we shall here call ‘groups’ in order to avoid all quibbling over the meaning of the term ‘class.’” This work analyzed change in categories over many decades and anticipated by 30 years the work of another census demographer, Alba Edwards, whose work no doubt drew on this early effort by Hourwich, and which provided the basis for using census occupational categories to study inequality. On Edwards, see for example the appendix to Perlmann (1988).

<sup>22</sup> Strangely enough, Folkmar and Hourwich had already met years before when both taught briefly at the University of Chicago. It appears that Folkmar had then consulted with Hourwich about the appropriate statistics for an article he was writing; in any case, Folkmar gratefully acknowledged the latter’s help. See Folkmar (1898).

Hourwich's *Immigration and Labor* (for which the research had been funded by the American Jewish Committee) stressed the supply and demand for labor as the cause of immigration, and the length of time in the United States as the key reason why some groups ("the old immigration") differed from others ("the new immigration").<sup>23</sup> By contrast, those at the US Immigration Commission "were themselves so completely under the sway of popular sentiments that they perceived the effect of race differences" everywhere. Indeed it would seem as if they "proceeded upon the supposition that immigrant races represented separate zoological species" (Hourwich 1912[1923]: 55–8, 250, 457).<sup>24</sup>

At the Census Bureau, Folkmar was put in charge of the new mother tongue information. As we shall see, he was certainly not given a free hand; nevertheless, it underscores the connection between race and the mother tongue question to realize that the head of the Census inquiry on the latter was the Immigration Commission's anthropologist, author of the *Dictionary of Races and Peoples*.<sup>25</sup> The question that faced Census Bureau officials was now what to draw from the data.<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly, some of the conflicts over its use were those that had arisen repeatedly in the past over the "race or people" classification. In particular, insofar as the mother tongue data were meant to proxy race, how well could they do so?

Generally, the officials who were more enthusiastic about racial statistics wanted to make the most of the mother tongue data. Thus Parmelee would write in an internal memo that "the addition of the mother tongue inquiry... thus offer[s] a splendid opportunity for a piece of

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<sup>23</sup> In this work he himself slipped in and out of the looser use of races (without any relation to differences in mental characteristics rooted in physical differences). Thus in describing political and economic pressures for emigration, he could write "of all the races which have come to this country, the Jews, the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Russians, the Finns, and the Armenians, have furnished the only immigrants of this class. As to all others it was just the higher standard of living of the American wage-earner that induced them, like most races that preceded them, to emigrate to the United States" (Hourwich 1912[1923]: 228).

<sup>24</sup> In Yiddish, he had discussed the origins of the concern with restriction as "race hatred." See Perlmann (2001). He was much more outspoken about the issue in English in the preface to the second edition of *Immigration and Labor*, published in 1922. By that time, racial discussion had taken a different turn. He stresses that his book concentrates on the economics of immigration because at the time of its writing, "Our statesmen in Washington took scant notice of the academic disquisitions in the domains of anthropology, ethnology, sociology, eugenics, and political science, which presented the old arguments of the Know-Nothings dressed up in a modern scientific garb" (Hourwich 1912[1923]: iii).

<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the very fact that Census had distanced itself from the use of the "race" question to classify Europeans made the Bureau eager to show, in the Folkmar appointment, that it was not ignoring the connection to the old race issues. More likely, Folkmar was simply an available authority within the bureaucracy who had already been working for years on the related questions, and who was of the right age to take up the responsibility.

<sup>26</sup> Their first level of concern was for the completeness of the responses. Officials were painfully aware that enumerators had to remember to fill in two items in one column—place of birth and mother tongue both in the column marked place of birth. No one knew how complete the returns would be under these circumstances, and some effort went to verifying that the results were complete enough for meaningful analysis.

careful, scientific work in the field of anthropology—a study of foreign race and nationality under the census microscope.” That the “field of anthropology” covered some familiar territory is underscored by a list in Joseph Hill’s files from this time, “From *The Races of Man* by Joseph Deniker.” It was probably sent to Hill by Parmelee or Folkmar.<sup>27</sup>

Folkmar and Parmelee believed that for numerous topics—fertility, intermarriage—it was much more meaningful than birthplace data. Consequently they wanted to see analysis of mother tongue data used for the entire population, not just for the multinational empires. To do otherwise was to count only some members of given races by race while missing others. For example, Germans born in France would not be counted as German. Folkmar’s arguments for the mother tongue data were those he had earlier given to the Senators in favor of the race data (quoted earlier).

[T]he future student will see the need of more of this than we can see today. I believe that, in time, the classification by mother tongue or “nationality” [the new census question Congress had approved was ‘mother tongue or nationality] will replace that by Country of Birth. I base my belief upon the study of foreign censuses and upon the experience of our own Bureau of immigration....Race is the more fundamental factor in social life and in America’s future than is country of birth. If either is to be dropped, let it be the latter.<sup>28</sup>

Other officials, probably including Durand, and apparently Hill, were unconvinced. First, giving up place of birth tables would make comparisons to census

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<sup>27</sup> Earlier (Feb. 1910, prior to the data collection), Parmelee had written to Hill of his concern about the one critical case in which mother tongue would not parallel important racial divisions:

Has the question of separating North Italy from South Italy in tabulating country of birth and specific foreign parentage been seriously considered? This seems as important as the segregation of Austria, Bohemia and Hungary, or of Canada (English) and Canada (French), or the various Polands. The Northern and Southern Italians represent distinct racial types.

He proceeded to suggest ways that enumerators could be made sensitive to this distinction (for example by calling for the listing of Italian provinces). The suggestion must have seemed especially important to Parmelee because mother tongue could proxy for race; with this proxy, the distinction between Italian (North) and Italian (South) would be lost. Yet Italians were by far the largest single immigrant group. Parmelee to Hill, Feb. 7, 1910 (JH/NA).

<sup>28</sup> Folkmar’s memoranda to Director. Sept. 6, 1910. This memo is actually something of a protest from Folkmar, that he sent up to the Director of the Census (Durand) via Hill. He obviously cared greatly about the matter. The memo begins “I respectfully submit the following considerations against cutting down the tabulation of the Mother Tongue material as suggested after our recent conversation upon this subject...” He submitted related further memos in December (JH/NA).

data from earlier years impossible. Second, while it was important to show the races through mother tongue for the peoples of Austro-Hungary and Russia, the case for race or mother tongue data for many other countries of Europe was far less compelling to them. Third, in the face of linguistic assimilation, just how congruent were racial (or ethnical, or nationality) categories on the one hand and mother tongue categories on the other (even in central and eastern Europe). Ultimately there was a problem of competition for space. Only a fixed number of tables could be presented to the public. Should some of the usual birthplace tables be dropped for mother tongue tables—and indeed should they be labeled as mother tongue tables or race tables? If the standard presentation in terms of place of birth was to be preserved, then tables dealing with mother tongue would get far less attention and serve only a supplemental function. Perhaps Durand, an economist himself by training, was more influenced by Falkner, Goldenweisser and Hourwich—fellow economists all—than by the ethnological outlook of Folkmar and Parmelee.

Besides choices of what to present in connection with mother tongue, the authors of the Census publications faced the question of how to discuss the various immigrant peoples in general and in relation to language in particular. The reports coming from the Bureau of Immigration and the United States Immigration Commission, of course, discussed these entities in terms of the “List of Races and Peoples,” but the Census had avoided adding a new race question and had substituted the mother tongue question; would it now revert to the race terminology in the text? The introduction to the chapter on reporting on “Country of Birth of the Foreign Born” does include some of the old usage of race, although now nationality is invoked as well.

On account of the variety of races represented among the immigrants from certain foreign countries, the Bureau of the Census has avoided the use of such terms as “Germans,” “Russians,” “Austrians,” etc.... Confusion would arise from identifying country of birth with race or nationality. Persons born in Germany, for example, are not all Germans, but include Poles, Hebrews, and others... (United States Bureau of the Census 1912: 781)

The introduction to the chapter on mother tongue is where a discussion of the relationship between language and race would most naturally have come, should the decision makers of the



Census Bureau have wanted to include such a discussion. They obviously did not want that. Instead, the chapter includes a subsection “Mother tongue in relation to ethnic stock,” Werner Sollers has stressed that “ethnic” was used as a modifier well before “ethnicity” was used as a noun, indicating that the modifier represented an earlier phase in conceptualization, with roots in the old language of “ethnology.” Probably so, but here surely “ethnic” is self-consciously chosen instead of race. The discussion itself is revealing.

In most cases the returns for mother tongue may be taken as indicative of ethnic stock. The principal exception to this rule appears in the case of persons reported as English and Celtic, this group including four ethnically distinct peoples, namely, the English, the Irish, the Scotch, and the Welsh. In the case of these people country of origin statistics come much nearer showing ethnic composition than do mother tongue statistics... While English and Celtic as a mother tongue covers more than one group of people, the opposite is true of Yiddish, which is the mother tongue of only part of the Hebrews, the others being returned as speaking Polish Russian, German, etc. A comparison of the returns for mother tongue made by persons born in Russia, Austria, and Germany, however, with the returns on “race” given for immigrants in the reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration, indicates that the census returns on Yiddish-speaking people give a fairly complete enumeration of the foreign-born Hebrews in the United States. (United State Bureau of the Census 1912: 959).<sup>29</sup>

The only use of the term “race” is in quotation marks, and it refers to work of another agency. The rest of the chapter’s methodological introduction concerns how to classify languages into groups. Again, this context would have been a tempting opportunity for Folkmar to discuss the various families of races, whose similarity is seen in their languages, but no such discussion was included.<sup>30</sup>

The census publication lists Folkmar as the sole author of the “Mother Tongue” chapter; however given his other writings (and the internal correspondence) it is clear that the sparse nature of the discussion was not his idea. In fact Goldenweisser is probably the ghost author of

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Goldenweisser (see below) added that the peoples of the British Isles best showed how error in reporting mother tongue arose mostly “where the language spoken was distinctly different from the ethnic stock of the people. In such cases some enumerators reported language spoken while others reported ethnic stock... The number of persons reported as speaking Irish, Scotch, and Welsh was evidently much greater” than Americans who actually spoke those languages and yet “not nearly large enough to cover all the natives of Ireland Scotland, and Wales.”

<sup>30</sup> There is a single exception: the Albanian and Turkish languages are listed near each other “because of the close relation of the two races geographically, socially, and politically.”

some of the chapter, and helped design it all. The same month that the Census publication appeared, Goldenweisser published an article on the new mother tongue data under his own name in the *Quarterly Publications of the American Statistical Association*. This is the second time he took such a path; recall that while at the Immigration Commission he had published his view of the findings about “Immigrants in Cities” in *The Survey*. His paper on the mother tongue data is very similar in wording and presentation to the mother tongue chapter in the Census publication, although it highlights the Yiddish data more fully.<sup>31</sup> In the census publications, Goldenweisser was given credit for a different chapter, on school attendance. Perhaps it was thought best not to have a Jewish name attached to the chapter most clearly related to the long struggles over the race inquiries. Also, the preceding year Goldenweisser had published his devastating critique of Walker’s race suicide thesis. Again, perhaps the Census Bureau thought it best not to have a strong critic of a celebrated restrictionist (who had also been a Director of the Census) write this particular chapter.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Moreover, his paper supports the position ultimately adopted at the Census Bureau for the mother tongue chapter—use it as a subheading to refine country of origin information for countries from which several different peoples came—but there is no need to use it for every country of origin, or to replace the country of origin data with the mother tongue data. Other evidence that Goldenweisser may have been a, or the, moving spirit behind the inquiry, comes from an internal memo from Joseph A. Hill to the Director in 1919, looking forward to the new mother tongue inquiry in 1920. “[T]he subject was carefully considered in connection with the last census and the conclusion was that the language test of race was the best practicable one. Dr. E.A. Goldenweisser, who through his connection with the Bureau during the Thirteenth Census became familiar with the mother tongue returns and their classification, discusses this subject in an article contributed to the *Quarterly Publications of the American Statistical Association* (Dec., 1913),” Memorandum for the Director, Feb. 5, 1919 (JH/NA). Parenthetically, the same memo shows that Hill’s confidence in the mother tongue data in 1920 was important to him, because he saw that birthplace data would be confused in the 1920 enumeration as a result of the breakup of the old regimes after World War I. The mother tongue data, available for 1910 with the old birthplace data, would serve as a kind of bridge if presented in 1920 with the new birthplace data.

<sup>32</sup> A more marginal, if piquant, concern among the bureau officials related to the earlier debates that had generated the mother tongue question as an alternative to treating Hebrews as a race or people rather than a religion. The last-minute addition of the mother tongue question to the census enumeration required that the information be entered in the same box that was used for place of birth; as a result enumerators had overlooked the mother tongue question more often than other questions. Census officials were familiar with incomplete data, of course, and typically chose to supply the statistically probable response when they were convinced that the probability was indeed high; at other times, they typically left the missing data blank. Which should they do in the case of missing data on mother tongue, when the country of birth was Russia? Should they supply “Yiddish”—when the name of the person was clearly Jewish? Apparently E.A. Goldenweisser believed this a safe course, since he, Hourwich, and another east European Jewish staffer (Lewinski) could easily pick out the Jews by name. By contrast, Folkmar preferred to leaving the data blank. All in all, Goldenweisser reported, the special agents did not think the matter of great importance but as it was nonetheless a matter of policy they thought it best to let the Director decide (perhaps thereby going over Folkmar’s head?). Director Durand suggested they investigate 1,000 cases with Yiddish supplied and 1,000 cases with a language other than Yiddish reported. Were the holders of some names virtually all Yiddish speakers? If so, the Jewish language could be supplied to those who had the distinctive names. From the point of view of the original German-Jewish demand that Hebrews should be seen only as

## **EPILOGUE: FOLKMAR'S OWN PAPERS ON MOTHER TONGUE AND RACE, AND BOAS'S COMMENT.**

Folkmar explicitly linked mother tongue and race in a paper he read to the Washington chapter of the American Anthropological Society entitled, "Some Questions arising in the first Census of European Races in the United States." According to a summary of the talk (the full text, alas, has not survived), the talk served as a defense of

the terminology, or nomenclature, adopted in the schedules of the census and in the dictionary, "race" to designate the linguistic divisions of the immigrants. The speaker admitted that in anthropology and biology the term race is applied to physical traits, but maintained that with the census it was not strictly a scientific question but a practical, to designate and distinguish given groups of peoples who come to the shores of this country. The use of the term race seemed to him justified to designate linguistic groups, inasmuch as it points out something essential, that which descends by heredity.

The paper, as well as the dictionary, which the author laid before the society were discussed at some length by Drs. Hrdlicka, Michelson, and Hough, and by Mr. Dieserud. (American Anthropologist 1911)

The explicit defense of mother tongue as a proxy for race "inasmuch as it points to something essential, that which descends by heredity" was very likely no more than a reiteration of Folkmar's long-held views about how language proxies for something that is at least partly in the blood. He may have felt that now it was important to be explicit because people had to appreciate the real value of the mother tongue question. Just as Goldenweisser was getting out from under the restrictions on personal viewpoints in government documents, so too was Folkmar.

In January 1916, Folkmar gave another paper at the second Pan American Scientific Congress in Washington "The United States Census of Immigrant Stocks." This time, Franz Boas was in the audience.<sup>33</sup> Folkmar first distinguishes his topic, the

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a religion, and that the federal government in turn should be "religion-blind," these efforts to identify Jews by name in order to in turn attribute to them the missing mother tongue data was truly a strange twist.

Memos (to Hill and ?) Durand, by Goldenweiser and Folkmar, June 1910 "In Re Jewish names" (JH/NA).

<sup>33</sup> Probably they met at other conferences, and dealt with similar themes. Indeed, a Congress of Americanists actually overlapped with the Pan-American Conference; in the publication of papers from the former, Boas's

white immigrant stocks, from the “Indian and Negro elements of the population.” Then he notes that at long last in the 1910 census,

the United States followed the example of the great countries of Europe which have a highly mixed population such as Russia, Austria-Hungary and to a lesser extent Germany... in a more or less careful effort to enumerate races on the basis of mother tongue....

In a similar way, the Bureau of Immigration has published annually since 1898 the number of immigrants classified by race or ethnical nationality, as well as by political nationality or citizenship.

The census results are limited in that they go back only two generations, mother tongue imperfectly reflects race—and funding is still not forthcoming to fully present the results. Nevertheless, the results available are valuable, and he reviews some of the findings about the proportion in each group. He concludes, “What has the census to say regarding the ‘American race of the future?’ ... It “is to be a true composite of European races, a genuine product of the ‘melting pot,’ a new race in the statistical sense” (Folkmar 1916: 17).

Perhaps Folkmar was moving towards a slightly more celebratory view of melting pot potentialities than he had shown before; but that was not Boas’s concern. Then the following exchange followed the talk.

MR. BOAS. Mr. Chairman, as a rule I am not given to discussion of terminologies, but I think it is generally understood that the word “race” implies descent. In the terminology of the census we find the compounds “German American,” “Dutch-English,” and so on, used, and I cannot but express my regret at the use of this term by the last census which is bound certainly in the public conception, to create very great confusion, because it expresses the idea or conveys the idea that people who happen to speak their mother tongue are of descent from that race combined with the American. I think it would be very desirable if the census were to say that what is meant by that word is merely mother tongue or native tongue.

MR. FOLKMAR. May I just say a word of explanation as to the position of the United States, and I may say of European

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“Modern Populations of America” immediately precedes Folkmar’s “The United States Census of Immigrant Stocks,” both under Physical Anthropology. See Hodge (1916). However, the publication from Pan-American Conference is unusually interesting because of the verbatim dialogue between the two men.

countries as well as to the term “race”? The United States Census does not use the term race officially in this connection. It uses the term which is expressed in the heading of this paper, i.e.: “stocks.”

As to the word “race,” Dr. Boas is entirely right, of course, from an anthropological point of view, but not from a statistical point of view, from the point of view of the census, taken as expressed through decades of European censuses where the word “race” or “nacionalidad” is used uniformly in a dozen countries. This has been discussed by very competent men. I read a paper reviewing some of their discussion before the Anthropological Society of Washington in the course of this census work, and I think the position was maintained that the word “race” was used for convenience in census taking in default of a better. There are four or five distinct definitions recognized for the word “race” in Webster’s and other dictionaries. We even speak of the Caucasian race, and of the subdivisions of this as national races. Of course the word “nacionalidad” or “nationality” is used in two senses, ethnologically and politically, and is used, for instance, in the census of Austria-Hungary, and in that of Servia in the sense I have employed it in this paper. (Folkmar 1917b)

Folkmar may have been shifting slightly, but in the decade before 1916 Boas had shifted decisively away from race as a biological determinant of cultural qualities. The preceding year Boas had written,

This notion [racial purity] prevails among ourselves with equal force, for we shake our heads gravely over the ominous influx of “inferior” races from eastern Europe. Inferior by heredity? No. Socially different? Yes, on account of the environment in which they have lived and therefore different from ourselves and not easily subject to change provided they are allowed to cluster together indefinitely. Equally strong is our fear of mongrelization of the American people by intermixtures between the Northwest European and other European types...[C]areful inquiry has failed completely to reveal any inferiority of mixed European types. (Boas 1917)

Coincidentally, these lines appeared in a piece on “Race and Nationality” (Boas 1915), the terms we have just seen Folkmar juggling. The usage highlights another twist in the terminology that was evolving. “Race and Nationality” were discussed together in important European contexts, especially from the decade leading up to World War I, but they had a somewhat distinct usage in America, and were debated in somewhat different

terms in the American context in these years.<sup>34</sup> Census Director Durand had been eager to resolve the absence of a “race” question in 1910 by adding a question on “mother tongue or nationality.” And this seems to be the attraction of the term, well before ethnicity was used as a noun, nationality—ethnological rather than political nationality in Folkmar’s formulation—was becoming a term of choice to distinguish biological-based races from something else. For Americans that something else more clearly excluded the nonwhite color races—black, yellow, and red. Later, in 1947, Henry Pratt Fairchild (author of the earlier *Melting Pot Mistake*) would write a text on *Race and Nationality as Factors in American Life*. And so, when Oscar Handlin released his essays on *Race and Nationality in American Life*, he did not think it necessary to explain what he meant by the term “nationality,” rather he meant something not captured in the title’s first term.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Nationality was used as a precursor of ethnicity for more questionable claims as well. When John A. Garraty published the last full-scale biography of Henry Cabot Lodge in 1968, he claimed, “What Lodge mean by ‘race’ was, of course, nationality.” A Theodore Roosevelt biographer commented that Roosevelt “equated race with nationality” (Garraty 1968; Harbaugh 1961; quoted in Dyer 1992). On this theme of the passage from the older meaning of race to one in which the term is restricted to the old color races, see Hattam (2007).

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