who an outsider would describe as a redneck. There he is holding a sign reading "King’s Dream Lives!" After this was all over, I went on retreat with some of the leaders. There was a lot of crying and opening up. My God, how these men’s values have changed. They talked about how working to rule was the most liberating moment of their lives, how they were for once in control. They come away from this with values of solidarity and community, values beyond striving only for a few dollars more. They come away with that which is very difficult to find today: their humanity.

It would be nice if that were the end of this story. The next night I meet Pat Buchanan’s local coordinator, 49-year-old Teamster member John (Bob) Patkus. He’s just gotten some bad news: A few hours earlier he was told he would soon lose his $6,000-a-year second job. ABF Freight Company has announced 450 layoffs, and after twenty years of working weekends, he’s one of them. He’s also not too happy about the concessions his full-time employer, RJR Nabisco, has been demanding as of late. “There are no more real jobs out there,” he says. “Americans are getting squeezed.”

Patkus has brought me to his Glad Tidings Assembly of God church, a fundamentalist group that has mushroomed from a pro-life prayer circle into a 500-strong congregation in the same handful of years as the Decatur labor wars. Here one finds a cradle-to-grave operation, providing all the social services and community once offered to immigrant groups by labor organizations. One also finds lots of blue-collar workers here, many of them active union members. One U.P.I.U. worker from Mueller Company, dressed in the khaki uniform of the Assembly’s worldwide corps of “God-centered” Royal Rangers—a kind of Cub Scouts for Jesus—says he was sympathetic to the Staley workers and fears twelve-hour shifts are coming his way, too. How is he planning to vote? Anybody But Clinton. Probably Bob Dole. “I’m pro-life,” he says. I meet another Teamster, Tom Campbell, who says he loves the church and is proud of its expansion. What’s the secret to its growth, I ask? “Pastor has taught us the value of teamwork. Individuals are powerless,” Campbell says. “He has taught us that in union there is strength.”

THE RIGHT’S ATTACK ON ‘CULTURAL RELATIVISM’ AS SYNECODCHE FOR ALL THAT AILS US

Patterns of Culture Wars

Micaela di Leonardo

Far more, however, is being accomplished under the flag of Culture Wars than has been recognized. In particular, since the 1980s neoconservatives have developed an increasing fascination with anthropological topics. We’ve seen Pat Buchanan’s Zulus, Saul Bellow’s “Proust of the Papuans,” Allan Bloom’s indictment of the discipline’s “sex obsession,” Newt Gingrich’s innately giraffe-hunting men and the multiple scathing references to Boas, Mead, Benedict, Herskovits and a host of contemporary practitioners in Dinesh D’Souza’s latest simulacrum of scholarship, The End of Racism. Thus the Culture Wars onslaught means both art, entertainment and higher education, and the “other cultures,” including domestic ones, thought to be the province of anthropology. The growing negative cynosure of the New Right’s eye, however, is not anthropology as a whole but the anthropological construction of cultural relativism, or the attempt to envision other cultures from within their own cognitive frameworks. That knackered old warhorse of the introductory anthropology classroom is up and running again, stung to seeming life with injections of New Right steroids.

Coincidentally, this academic year marks the centenaries of two anthropologists today most closely associated with the concept—of Franz Boas’s first appointment at Columbia University and of the birth of his student, Melville Herskovits, who founded the department of anthropology at Northwestern University. And this fin de siècle, eerily like the last, witnesses the perverse combination of rapidly increasing class and race in-
For the New Right, cultural relativism is simply one of the many arrows in its Culture Wars quiver that successfully reaches its mark.

against "cultural relativism" is an extraordinary one-stop shop for a bricolage of New Right causes. Consider: It links parochial American notions of the "heathen ways" of foreigners and domestic racial minorities to the widespread public sense that, in spawning civil rights, feminism, gay rights and "entitlement" (economic democracy), the 1960s "went too far," "denied our Western traditions" in favor of a "permissiveness" connected somehow to exactly those "heathen ways." Thus the rightist feeding frenzy surrounding Derek Freemann's 1983 attack on Margaret Mead's Samoa research.

D'Souza, inspired by Allan Bloom's diatribes against it, sees cultural relativism as the product of anthropology's early-century dominance by Franz Boas, whose leftism and Jewishness he finds reason to mention repeatedly. He mounts a broad-based indictment of the "cultural relativist" work of Boas and all his students, which somehow also indicts feminism and gay rights. He interprets cultural relativism in typical kitchen-sink fashion as the heresy that "denies that race is a meaningful natural category and holds that all cultures are equal...group differences are largely the product of environment and specifically of unjust discrimination...the mission of sound policy is not to civilize the barbarians, but to fight racism and discrimination....According to the relativist paradigm, the apparently outrageous customs of other cultures were to be politely overlooked, or explained as ingenious and necessary adaptations to the special needs of a particular environment."

Not only is this a ridiculous set of statements—even as parody it is a mesh of three separate arguments: the modern scientific understanding of race as contingent gene frequencies, not permanently bounded populations; classic liberal political pluralism; and the radical demand that culture be considered in the context of wealth and political power. But there is strategy in intellectual mushiness, and this potpourri of criticisms reanimates the dominant Victorian view of race, culture and civilization.

This vision is nowadays, as my childhood family physician Doctor Sal used to say of viruses, "goin' around." Despite the fact that his egregious racism was bare-faced enough to prompt black neocons Robert Woodson and Glenn Loury to resign in a huff from the American Enterprise Institute, D'Souza is clearly part of a larger rightist attempt to siphon off diffuse but growing nostalgia for the style and certainties of the Victorians and Edwardians—Masterpiece Theatre, Victoria magazine,
Merchant/Ivory productions—for its own agenda. Paul Johnson's call for European recolonialization of the Third World, Samuel Huntington's absurd racist pronouncements about the "coming clash of civilizations," Arthur Schlesinger's trumpeting of Europe as the "unique source" of all liberating ideas in world history, Gertrude Himmelfarb's fervent approval of the starving proletariat and workhouses of the Victorians, Murray and Herrnstein's racist revanchism in The Bell Curve and D'Souza's attempts to rehabilitate the old racist, imperialist traditions of nineteenth-century anthropology and to vilify their twentieth-century anthropological detractors are all part of this well-remunerated rightist campaign.

This campaign takes place, as it were, with and without footnotes—largely purged of its anti-Semitic base by and for the Commentary crowd, or not. Witness the extraordinary parallels between D'Souza and others and the anonymous filth that showed up recently in faculty mailboxes at Northwestern University (and that also has been circulating on the Internet). "Anti-Semitism—Found" rambles on, through eight tiny-print pages, about Jews as the "eternal enemy of mankind" who endanger America through their ownership of all mass media, using them to promote "the Jewish doctrines of race mixing, feminism, homosexual rights, etc." Franz Boas bulks large in the narrative as "a European Jew who came to dominate the Anthropology Department at Columbia University in 1896 when that science was in its embryonic stages." Boas's students—among them Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict ("two Gentile ladies whose books and field studies became mandatory reading for a whole genera-

Despite chimerical portraits drawn from without and within, anthropology's historical circle of the we has never been exactly global. Founded within the crucible of Victorian imperialism, the discipline was Janus-faced from its inception—involving both in the repeated discovery of the "psychic unity" of all humans, in E.B. Tylor's phrase, and in the tortured racist circumlocutions of skull-measuring biological anthropology, a tradition only ended after World War II and recently revived under the banner of sociobiology. Anthropological practice in every decade of this century, like that of all intellectual disciplines, has reflected the changing Zeitgeist and contemporary political contestations.

So whose "cultural relativism" is being dissed here? The term, like many of those adopted into popular culture from anthropology—"culture" itself, ethnocentrism, culture shock, ethnography—is a political and historical Rorschach blot. Whimsical popular commentators gloss it in Cole Porter terms: "anything

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Benedict did indeed articulate the notion that “the diversity of
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tradition whose
produced largely outside the discipline, and many anthropolo-
gists have warned of the inherent connections between “noble”
and “nasty savage” representations. Moreover, in the name of
science or of social justice, a significant group of anthropologists
has always energetically rejected cultural relativism.
Franz Boas was a socialist in the nineteenth-century German
tradition whose evolving concerns reflected both belief in
a broad-based “science”—scholarly rigor—and intellectual or-
organizing against racially restrictive immigration and eugenics
movements, ultimately against fascism. His early ethnological
experiences with Baffinland Eskimos confirmed his socialist
humanitarianism. “The idea of a ‘cultured’ individual is merely
relative,” he wrote, and “a person’s worth should be judged by his
Herzensbildung [formation of the heart]... All that man can do
for humanity is to further the truth, whether it be sweet or bitter.”
Margaret Mead departed considerably from her adviser. A
child of the Progressive Era, despite the many twists and turns
of her half-century career, she was fundamentally a social engi-
nee who envisioned Others as “natural laboratories” from whom
“we”—she explicitly meant the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie and
petite bourgeoisie—might borrow bits of culture to improve the
mechanics of our own civilization. Neither Mead nor Boas,
in any event, self-consciously articulated cultural relativism as
a concept.
Ruth Benedict, far more politically attuned to Boas, also
made use of the natural laboratory model in a creative amalgam
with Gestalt psychology and a deeply egalitarian concern.
Benedict did indeed articulate the notion that “the diversity of
the possible combinations of culture-traits is endless, and ade-
quate social orders can be built indiscriminately upon a great
variety of them.” But she also grasped the nettle of cultural dif-
ference in a world of power politics, arguing that “world-wide
[white] cultural diffusion...has given to our culture a massive
universality...which we read off...as necessary and inevitable.”
Melville Herskovits could be considered the discipline’s ur-
cultural relativist. He did write in 1955 that “morality is univer-

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Clasic “cultural relativism,” then, is a fascinating oxymoron,
an exercise in powerful powerlessness. In its heyday it was a
toothless liberalism that spoke judiciously and tolerantly of
the varying “ways of mankind”—while remaining largely
silent on both the role of Western power in the political-
economic settings of these shifting practices and on the com-
fortable evaluative position of the Western (or non-Western)
ethnographer viewing them. For a form of relativism, in other
words, it wasn’t very bloody relative.

In fact, contrary to the new conservative apologists for “our
humanist traditions,” cultural relativism is actually the descend-
ant of our own precious Western belletristic heritage, a recurrent
trope in the learned armchair essay in cultural criticism. Mon-
taigne, in the sixteenth-century “Of Cannibals,” famously ad-
jures us to “take care not to cling to common opinions...[to]
judge by the way of reason, and not by common report.” He notes
of Brazilian Indians’ cannibalism that “there is more barbarity in
eating a man alive [by European torture] than
eating him dead.

Rightsist, in fact, have made lavish use of this venerable
trope. They simply reverse the evaluative arrows—as in “blacks
and Arabs profited from the slave trade too”—or split relativist
hairs in stigmatizing some while lauding other Others. Social
thought is innately comparative, finding grounds for emulation
and avoidance in the practices of temporal and geographic
“other countries.” For conservatives, it has always been a case of
cultural relativism for me, but not for thee.

The attack on cultural relativism, then, is of a piece with the en-
tire New Rightist program: the hypocritical attempt to rewrite the
American morality play, to lay claim to virtue through focusing on
the mote in Others' eyes while ignoring the beam in one's own. Certainly, moral principles are important. But claiming that "cultural relativism tells us there are no ultimate moral principles" is a canard. All that most of the practitioners of my benighted discipline have ever advocated is the attempt, from the bedrock of one's own enculturation, to empathize with the moral logics of others. The planks of a progressive program, in any event—economic democracy, antiracism, feminism, gay rights, etc.—rest precisely on the invocation of ultimate moral principles. It's not a case of conservative tradition versus present-day license or rebellion, nor of "Western" civilization versus barbarism. We all have histories to extol and deplore; and, thanks to colonialism, all our histories are intermixed over the last half-millennium. It's their choice of globally produced traditions versus ours.

No, a self-conscious, politically engaged cultural relativism describes the intellectual process, as in the reception of art, of willful suspension of disbelief for the purpose of gaining access to alternative ways of apprehending the universe—because they are there; because we are heirs to long (distinctly but not uniquely) Western traditions of stigmatizing Others that need to be unraveled if we are to know ourselves properly; because Western colonialism has affected even those customs we think of as most Other, and vice versa; because, in the Latin tag, nothing human is alien to us. Such a process is always partial: As the postmodernists are finally figuring out, relativizing is a liberatory technique that must always arise from a contingent, but nevertheless real, Archimedean standpoint. That standpoint is the investigation of the complex contours of political power for the purposes of furthering economic and political democracy. We need to judge, as Montaigne advised, "by the way of reason, and not by common report." Only in this way can we gain access to Boas's sweet and bitter truth.

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'CORPORATE CAMPAIGNS' HIT BUSINESSES WHERE THEY LIVE. SO THEY'RE CRYING 'FOUL!'

Union Do’s: ‘Smart Solidarity’

Thank God we have a system of labor where there can be a strike. Whatever the pressure, there is a point where the working man may stop. —Abraham Lincoln, 1860

By striking they've quit their jobs. —Ronald Reagan, on the PATCO strikers, 1981

Fifteen years after Ronald Reagan fired the air traffic controllers, strikes in America have dipped to a fifty-year low, a mere one-eighth the level of two decades ago. If you think that business leaders no longer worry about the power of workers to take direct action, though, think again. With laws already on the books allowing temporary and permanent replacements, with the threats of downsizing and corporate flight further casting shadows over labor militancy, business leaders are nevertheless pressing ahead to win one added advantage over their employees. They now want Congress to ban organized labor's most effective recent tactical innovation—the anticorporate campaign.

Often called a "corporate campaign," its objective is to hit powerful and highly diversified companies on all fronts by investigating their affiliates, scrutinizing their environmental and investment records, organizing consumer boycotts, submitting shareholder resolutions, complaining to regulatory agencies and doing whatever else it takes to pressure management into a fair settlement.

On September 21 of last year a host of prominent business leaders—including Thomas Donahue, president of the American Trucking Association; Gary Hess, head of Associated Builders and Contractors; and Paul Huard, a senior vice president of the National Association of Manufacturers—gathered at the Marriott Hotel in Washington to demand that Congress take immediate steps toward making these campaigns illegal. "This kind of reprehensible conduct has no place in America and is totally beyond the bounds of the time-honored traditions of labor-management relations," thundered Donahue. A month later, Representative Peter Hoekstra of Michigan obliged with the first of what may be many hearings on what is to be done. "We must make sure that the American workplace is a constructive arena in which the employee and the employer can work together," said Hoekstra, who chairs the House subcommittee that is investigating the matter.

Although labor's record with anticorporate campaigns is mixed (where they are used to the exclusion of or as a substitute for mass action they can demobilize the rank and file), what's worrying business now is a versatile and relentless offensive directed out of La Place, Louisiana, by United Steelworkers Local 9121 against Bayou Steel and RSR, one of the world's largest secondary lead smelters.

“This issue has reached the ideological boiling point for business,” says Ed Keyser, representative of the Steelworkers' corporate campaign department. Keyser began helping the Steelworkers in 1993, when the Local struck Bayou, rejecting a contract proposal that called for no pay increases for six years and gave management the freedom to contract out any job. Since then the Steelworkers have attacked Bayou every which way—which is where RSR comes into the story. The two com-

Eyal Press is a New York-based journalist who writes frequently on corporations.