

Ellsworth Huntington: considerations on the letters of the “distribution of civilization” map of Civilization and Climate

Fernando José Coscioni

University of São Paulo

São Paulo, SP, Brazil

e-mail: fernando.coscioni@gmail.com

 0000-0001-8431-1321

p. 51-68

revista

Geo 

USP

espaço e tempo

Volume 24 • nº 1 (2020)

ISSN 2179-0892

How to cite this article:

COSCIONI, F.J. Ellsworth Huntington: considerations on the letters of the “distribution of civilization” map of Civilization and Climate. **Geosp – Espaço e Tempo** (On-line), v. 24, n. 1, p. 51-68, apr. 2020. ISSN 2179-0892.

Available in: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/geosp/article/view/162309>. doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2179-0892.geosp.2020.162309>.



Este artigo está licenciado sob a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence

Ellsworth Huntington: considerations on the letters of the “distribution of civilization” map of Civilization and Climate¹

Abstract

Coming from an author who was significantly influenced by Social Darwinism, Ellsworth Huntington's (1876-1947) intellectual efforts played a decisive role in strengthening American Human Geography in the early twentieth century. The article aims to contribute to the understanding of an important episode that occurred during the expansion period of the academic Geography in the USA. It was the elaboration, based on the responses to a questionnaire letter sent to hundreds of intellectuals, of a map of “distribution of civilization” by Huntington that sought to rank the regions of the world on a scale from 0 to 10. The map was published in one of the chapters of *Civilization and climate*, a book that had its first edition in 1915 and a third extended edition in 1924. That work is one of the first more systematic attempts to discuss a specific geographic epistemology and to elaborate a geographical theory of history that were produced in the USA, which is why it has an unique importance in the history of Geography. The article, by analyzing the reactions to Huntington's letter by his intellectual peers, aims to discuss some aspects of the intellectual dispute between the more naturalistic approaches influenced by the Darwinist lexicon and the more culturalist approaches that emerged in the humanities in the early twentieth century English-speaking-world.

Keywords: History of Geography. Social Darwinism. Human Geography in USA. Ellsworth Huntington.

¹ This article received financial support from São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP, grant number 2016/18128-1) in agreement with Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Ensino Superior (CAPES).

Ellsworth Huntington: considerações sobre a correspondência referente ao mapa de “distribuição da civilização” da obra *Civilization and climate*

Resumo

O esforço intelectual de Ellsworth Huntington (1876-1947), autor que sofreu significativa influência do darwinismo social, foi decisivo para fortalecer a Geografia Humana estadunidense no início do século XX. O artigo procura contribuir para a compreensão de um importante episódio ocorrido durante o período de expansão da Geografia universitária nos EUA, que foi a elaboração, com base nas respostas a uma carta com um questionário que o geógrafo enviara a centenas de intelectuais, de um mapa de “distribuição da civilização” que hierarquizava as regiões do mundo numa escala de 0 a 10. O mapa foi publicado em *Civilization and climate*, que teve sua primeira edição em 1915 e uma terceira, estendida, em 1924. A obra é uma das primeiras tentativas mais sistemáticas de discutir uma epistemologia geográfica específica e elaborar uma teoria geográfica da história que foram produzidas nos EUA, fato que lhe confere importância singular na história da Geografia. Analisando as reações à carta de Huntington, o artigo discute aspectos da disputa intelectual entre as abordagens mais naturalistas, influenciadas pelo léxico darwinista, e as mais culturalistas, que emergiram nas humanidades no mundo de língua inglesa no início do século XX.

Palavras-chave: História da Geografia. Darwinismo social. Geografia Humana nos EUA. Ellsworth Huntington.

Ellsworth Huntington: consideraciones acerca de la correspondencia para el mapa de “distribución de la civilización” del libro *Civilization and climate*

Resumen

Los esfuerzos intelectuales de Ellsworth Huntington (1876-1947), el autor que fue significativamente influenciado por el Darwinismo Social, desempeñaron un papel decisivo en el fortalecimiento de la Geografía Humana estadounidense a

principios del siglo XX. El artículo busca contribuir a la comprensión de un episodio importante que ocurrió durante el período de expansión de la geografía universitaria en los Estados Unidos, que fue la elaboración, basado en las respuestas a una carta de cuestionario enviada a cientos de intelectuales por el geógrafo, de un mapa de “distribución de la civilización” buscando clasificar las regiones del mundo en una escala del 0 al 10. El mapa fue publicado en uno de los capítulos del libro *Civilization and climate*, que tuvo su primera edición en 1915 y una tercera edición extendida en 1924. Este trabajo es uno de los primeros intentos más sistemáticos de discutir una epistemología geográfica específica y la elaboración de una teoría geográfica de la historia que se produjo en los Estados Unidos, un hecho que le da una importancia muy singular en la historia de la Geografía. El artículo, al analizar las reacciones a la carta de Huntington por parte de sus colegas intelectuales, tiene como objetivo discutir algunos aspectos de la disputa intelectual entre los enfoques más naturalistas influenciados por el léxico darwinista y los enfoques más culturalistas que surgieron en las humanidades en el mundo de habla inglesa a principios de siglo veinte.

Palabras-clave: Historia de la Geografía. Darwinismo social. Geografía Humana en los Estados Unidos. Ellsworth Huntington.

Introduction

The period of institutional consolidation of academic Geography in the USA coincides with the decades in which the work of Ellsworth Huntington (1876-1947) enjoyed a reasonable repercussion. One of the most important moments in this geographer's trajectory was the publication of the work “Civilization and Climate”, which had its first edition in 1915 and another extended and definitive edition in 1924. This work constitutes the first most successful attempt to rationalize a geographical epistemology and to formulate a geographical theory of history that was made by the author and it occupies a place of great importance in his trajectory in the disciplinary field.

In “Civilization and Climate”, Huntington drew up a map on which, based on pre-defined criteria, he sought to rank the level of “civilization” of the various regions of the world. For this purpose, in 1913 the author sent a questionnaire and a map of regionalization of the world space to hundreds of intellectuals in which he explained his intention to draw up a distribution map of “civilization” and asked the recipients to classify the regions of the world on a scale of 0 to 10 from some criteria that he has defined as relevant to determine the level of “civilization” in any part of the world. Some of these intellectuals answered the letter with the completed questionnaire, others answered the letter without completing it, but they explained the reasons why they hesitated to participate in the questionnaire.

The analysis of the letters sent in response to the questionnaire, consulted in the Huntington Papers, the archive left by the Geographer, will be done with the objective of elucidating the mixture of resistance and acceptance that marked the reception of Huntington's intellectual work and the conflict existing in the Human Sciences during the time between the

strongly hierarchical approach of regions of the world proposed by the Geographer, which is a typical manifestation of Social Darwinism, and the more relativistic positions that did not accept the idea that the people and the cultures of the world could be hierarchized.

From a methodological perspective, this subject of the relationship among Social Darwinism, the period of academic institutionalization of American Human Geography and a specific element of Huntington's trajectory and work is linked to the concern with the insertion of geographical ideas in widely social and intellectual contexts that have marked the historiography of the discipline for the past approximately 30 years². The choice to address a specific intellectual dispute revealed in the analysis of letters articulating it with a broader concern with the influence of an intellectual current that transcends the disciplinary field, and which, at the same time, was fundamental to the construction of its epistemological specificity in the USA, stems from this methodological orientation

The institutionalization of academic Geography in USA

The last decades of the nineteenth century were marked by the birth of the first outlines of the division of intellectual labor that would mark the production of knowledge throughout the twentieth century. The Geography of this period was characterized by the specificity of an intellectual project that aimed to integrate human and natural aspects for the construction of a man-milieu relationship science. In this context of intensification of the division of intellectual labor, the scope of the discipline, which inherited a holistic and romantic tradition from the works produced by Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and Carl Ritter (1779-1859), leads its academic legitimacy at risk. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the discipline needed a theoretical systematization that went beyond the mere integrated description of human and natural elements of the surface of the earth and gave it legitimacy to be institutionalized as an autonomous field. The use of the evolutionary positions derived from the wide range of appropriations suffered by the work of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), who arrived at the Human Sciences through Social Darwinism, was fundamental so that, in this critical period, Geography could legitimize its university presence in great part of the English-Speaking-World (PEET, 1981; LIVINGSTONE, 2008 [1992]; STODDART 1966, 1981; HERBST, 1961).

In the USA, until the final decades of the nineteenth century, Geography was practiced by isolated scholars, a fact that reflected the absence of university institutionalization of the discipline. In this period, the production of geographic knowledge in the country was closely linked to amateur geographic societies (SCHULTEN, 2001, p. 69), which housed a very diverse audience, from bureaucrats and politicians to academics, and the tradition of field surveys that produced a wealth of information on the western US (MARTIN, 2005, p. 330). This situation reveals the incipience in the academic professionalization of the discipline that lasted until the last decades of the nineteenth century. The impulse that would lead to the construction of a specific disciplinary field in the United States began only in 1880s, when W.M. Davis (1850-1934), a training geologist who was instrumental in strengthening the discipline in the country, became a

² Among the examples of these contextualist approaches which inspire this article are the works of Livingstone (2008 [1992]), Capel (2012 [1981]) and Berdoulay (2003 [1981]).

teacher of Physical Geography at Harvard University, where he taught between 1885 and 1912 (MARTIN, 2005, p. 341).

Davis was directly responsible for the creation of the *Association of American Geographers* (AAG) in 1904. The creation of this institution was a decisive event for the disciplinary professionalization because it marked a break with the amateurism of the hitherto existing geographic societies. The birth of the AAG was accompanied by the appearance, between the years of 1899 and 1914, of courses of Geography inside important institutions, for example, the universities of Harvard, Pennsylvania and Yale. This growth of academic Geography that begins to occur in the early twentieth century contrasts sharply with the late nineteenth century when, according to Geoffrey Martin, there were only five professors of Geography at American universities (MARTIN, 2005, p. 354). It is also important to note that the fact that Geography courses began to be offered in many academic institutions in the first decade of the twentieth century did not, in many cases, imply the existence of specific geography departments, as the Harvard and Yale cases attest.

Although Harvard was the center of Davis' pioneer intellectual developments, it was at the University of Chicago that the first department of Geography of the country arose in the year of 1903. The creation of a department in Chicago was a consequence of the actuation of Rollin Salisbury (1858-1922), who, like Davis, was a training geologist. The emergence of the study of human problems from the focus of environmental influences was decisive for Geography in this institution (PATTISON, 1981). The growth of the interest with Human Geography had, in this period of the first two decades of century XX, a central role for the discipline to conquer conditions of minimum autonomy with respect to Geology.

The period of the first decades of the twentieth century was marked by the elaboration of the first attempts to define the object of Geography in American lands, with a special importance to the publication of Ellen Churchill Semple's monumental work, "Influences of Geographic Environment", in the year of 1911, and to some presidential discourses presented in the AAG that sought to delimit the scope of the discipline, as are the cases of the speeches of Albert Perry Brigham (1915), Nevin Fenneman (1919), Charles Dwyer (1920) and Harlan Barrows (1923). Huntington's intellectual efforts lie in this context of dispute over the determination of a legitimate definition of the object of Geography and of the expansion of the university presence of the discipline in the United States which characterizes its search to constitute conditions of *relative autonomy* (BOURDIEU, 1968, p. 106) as a disciplinary specific field in the first decades of twentieth century. The awareness of the incipience of the American Geography in relation to the more consolidated European traditions, especially the German and French ones, was fundamental for this impulse to have some success in the period.

Ellsworth Huntington's trajectory

Ellsworth Huntington published most of his works and articles during a period when Geography consolidated its academic institutionalization in the USA. His epistemological positions, as we'll see, were strongly influenced by Social Darwinism and it contributed to the elaboration of a controversial geographical theory of history that considered the role of the natural environment in the development of diverse peoples, racial groups and civilization as a whole.

The early years of Huntington's academic life were devoted primarily to the study of climate and the search for evidence of climate change. Climatic themes appear and reappear throughout his work, and very often the question of their possible influence on the civilizing process is the unifying link in the equation of the geographical problem of the relation between man and environment in his writings. Among the main works that sought to deal with geographical issues from this problematic are "The Pulse of Asia" (1907), "Palestine and Its Transformation" (1911), "World Power and Evolution" (1919) and "Civilization and Climate" (1915/1924). The case of "Civilization and Climate", which is the work chosen for our analysis in this article, is peculiar because it had two main editions, one from 1915 and another one extended with many rewritten passages, that was published in 1924. The version of 1924 will be used as a reference for presenting Huntington's thought in a more extensive and finished form than the 1915 version.

This interest in the relations between man and the climate was followed, as early as the 1920s, by the concern about what he called the "character" of people and of racial groups. His interest in these themes was evidenced in works such as "The Character of Races" (1924), "Tomorrow's Children: The Goal of Eugenics" (1935), "Seasons of Birth: Its Relation to Human Abilities" (1938) and "Mainsprings of Civilization" (1945), which was his last great work. The main concern that permeated all of Huntington's prolific production was the question of the origin, distribution and attainment of civilization. This question was addressed based in a triadic model that conceived civilizing process as being determined by an amalgam among biological inheritance, physical environment (with great emphasis on climate) and culture. This triad, which reconciles his interests in culture with his precocious passion for the study of the climate and with the eugenics conceptions in which he believed, is the basis of his geographical theory of history and of the method from which he understood the civilizing process.

The institution with which Huntington maintained connection for much of his life was Yale University, where he began to work in 1907, accepting the job offered by Herbert Gregory, through the mediation of W. M. Davis, his main intellectual mentor. It was through this institution that the Geographer obtained his doctorate in 1909. When he arrived at New Haven in 1907, Huntington came across an institution which, although extremely prestigious, did not have a specific department of Geography. The geographers who worked there formed a minor part of the Geology department (MARTIN, 1973, p. 71). Gregory was the main responsible for the existence of a geographic effort in the department of Geology of Yale in the early twentieth century. When he stepped down from the department due to health issues in 1909 and passed it on to paleontologist and geologist Charles Schuchert, Geography would then begin to lose strength in the institution. With the Yale curriculum reform in 1911, the number of students choosing to attend Geography courses declined (MARTIN, 1973, p. 74).

During the first period at Yale, between 1907 and 1914, after publishing "The Pulse of Asia" in 1907, the author produced a stream of articles, public speeches and papers presented to the AAG, an institution in which he was elected for the first time vice president in 1913. During this period, Huntington developed two ideas that became closely associated with his research. The thesis that there are climatic pulsations in historical time (it considers climate variation as relevant to the study

of the human temporal scale and not only for natural history) and the notion that there would be a “climatic optimum” for man, regardless of racial groups (MARTIN, 1973, p. 77).

After ending his first passage through Yale, in 1918 he worked in the US Army because of the country’s entry into World War I. Government services involved 52 geographers in various agencies. Huntington’s contribution occurred in the Military Intelligence Division (MARTIN, 1973, p. 146). The Geographer remained working in Washington until the summer of 1919, and returned to work in Yale in September of that same year (MARTIN, 1973, p. 150).

The period between 1915 and 1919 is quite important in the trajectory of the author. He published in 1915 the first edition of “Civilization and Climate”, a work that would later be extended and republished in a new edition in 1924. In this work, Huntington offers the first more complete systematic development of his theory of the civilization process based on the triad composed of biological heritage, culture and climate. In 1919, the Geographer published “World Power and Evolution” which, to a certain extent, is a continuation of the same problematic that he dealt with in “Civilization and Climate”. The 1920s were marked by the decline of Geography at Yale. This decline provoked, especially between 1926 and 1926 – as the author’s letters in the period shows –, a crisis between Huntington and the institution. The Geographer claimed an improvement in his institutional status within Yale and the creation of a Geography department at the university, a venture in which he was unsuccessful.

However, this decade was also one of the most productive in terms of publications for Huntington’s trajectory. In this decade, the Geographer refined the hypothesis of climatic variations in relation to man and elaborated more developed syntheses of his theory of the civilizing process. In addition to publishing in 1924 the definitive edition of “Civilization and Climate” and the eugenicist work “The Character of Races”, Huntington published “The Pace of Progress” in 1926, “The Human Habitat” in 1927 and wrote more than 70 short texts, including articles and book chapters. It was in this decade that the definitive rupture with Geology and the affirmation of Human Geography as a strategy of delimitation of the disciplinary identity was consolidated in the USA. Concerns about the philosophy of history, affiliations with eugenics ideas, and social Darwinist epistemological postures began to become quite clear in the work of the Geographer in the 1920s. Huntington, at the height of the repercussion of his work, was elected president of the AAG for the year 1924 and, in a presidential address given in December 1923 entitled “Geography and Natural Selection”, in which he listed a series of possible utilizations for the Darwinian concept of “natural selection” in the discipline, the social Darwinist epistemological conceptions that structured his geographical discourse were exposed to members of the association (HUNTINGTON, 1924a).

The author maintained connections with Yale University until the end of his life, however, from the 1930s onwards, his efforts to create a department of Geography in the institution declined considerably. It is worth noting that this decrease in his effort occurred simultaneously with the consolidation of Geography as an academic discipline in other US universities. Yet, it is important to remember that almost all of these other universities did not have the prestige and symbolic capital associated with Yale. This reinforces the hypothesis that Geography expanded its academic presence in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, but at the same time

it maintained a fragile and dominated institutional position in the ensemble of disciplines that formed the intellectual field of the country.

In the 1930s Huntington published “Tomorrow’s Children: The Goal of Eugenics” (1935), which is a political pamphlet of divulgation of the eugenist movement didactically organized in form of questions and answers with the aim of reaching a widest public. This adherence to eugenics, in our understanding, is an unfolding of the epistemological affinities with Social Darwinism that the author already showed from the beginning of his intellectual trajectory. The emphasis on the role of supposed innate biological differences that, according to the racist thesis endorsed by many American social scientists of the first decades of the twentieth century, would explain the differences in behavior among ethnic groups exerted decisive influence over the entire intellectual production of the Geographer. This involvement with eugenics would lead him to be president of the *American Eugenics Society* between 1934 and 1938, at the end of his life. Two years before his death, Huntington published his latest work, “Mainsprings of Civilization” (1945), which exhaustively synthesizes the entire geographical theory of civilization developed by the author since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The epistemological assumptions of *Civilization and Climate*

In the preface to the 1915 edition of “Civilization and Climate”, Huntington claims that the work is a product of what he calls the “new science of geography”. This “new” discipline, in his understanding, would aim to compare the distribution of physical and organic elements to determine how vital phenomena depend on the geographic environment. The Geographer believes that among the data of reality that must be mapped, the “human character as expressed in civilization” is one of the elements whose spatial distribution most needs explanation. For that purpose, Huntington says that issues such as race, religion and institutions should be considered on the one hand and, on the other hand, geographical location, climates, soils and physical conditions in general. In the cooperation of these various factors would be the explanatory key of the spatial distribution of civilization. After making this brief definition of what he considers to be the central problem of the “new” discipline of Geography, the author says that “Civilization and Climate” is a work focused on the study of the relations between human aspects, as already mentioned, and on a specific aspect of physical environment - the climate - in order to elucidate the mechanisms that affect the distribution of civilization on the earth’s surface (HUNTINGTON, 1915, p. V)³.

In the preface of the 1924 edition, Huntington states, to systematize the central assumptions that had so far outlined his intellectual effort:

In the first edition inheritance, physical environment, and culture were recognized as the three main factors in determining the distribution of civilization. Physical environment was of course treated fully, since it is the main subject of the book. Enough was also said about human culture to show that I fully appreciate its importance, especially as an explanation of the difference between aboriginal

³ Roman numbers in the quotes are from the preface which has a different pagination from the rest of the book in 1915 and 1924 editions.

America and the Old World. Inheritance, however, was dismissed briefly. In the present edition it receives a good deal of emphasis, especially in the first chapter, which is almost wholly new. (HUNTINGTON, 1924b, p. XVI)

And in the first chapter of the same edition, the Geographer explains the two lines of research that make up his research object:

This book has been written because two recent lines of investigation apparently combine to explain at least part of the contradictions which have hitherto proved so puzzling. In the first place a prolonged study of past and present climatic variations led to the conclusion that the climate of the past was different from that of the present. (...) The second line of investigation which originally led to the writing of this book was a study of the climatic conditions under which people of European races are able to accomplish the most work and have the best health. This investigation led to the conclusion that climatic optima applies to man quite as fully to plants and animals. According to this principle each living species has the best health and is most active under certain definite conditions of temperature, humidity, wind movement, storminess, variability, and sunlight, or, more exactly, under certain combinations of these conditions. Any departure from the optimum conditions leads to a decrease of activity and efficiency (HUNTINGTON, 1924b, pp. 5-6).

In the delimitation of the object of study of Geography presented by Huntington in the beginning of the work, the Darwinian epistemology appears as the fundamental frame of reference. In the preface to the 1915 edition, the author speaks in comparison of the distributions of physical and organic elements to understand the influence of the geographical environment on the “vital phenomena”. The “human character as expressed in civilization” appears as the culmination of the organic evolution of the “vital phenomena” to be investigated by the discipline. The placement of the problem of the study of the relations between physical and organic phenomena by Huntington makes clear his view that human civilization and its culture are in fact the products of a progressive process of evolutionary complexification of the “vital phenomena” of nature.

In the preface to the 1924 edition, claiming that inheritance, physical environment and culture are the “three main factors in determining the distribution of civilization”, Huntington is largely replicating the problem of the study of relations between organisms and environment that was at the heart of Darwin’s research concerns and nineteenth-century biology as a whole. The transference of inherited characteristics, the classic theme of the Darwinian debate, is thought by Huntington both in the biological sense and in the cultural and behavioral sense. The physical environment, which also played a decisive role in the debates about changes in the internal structure of organisms and which became the center of the quarrel between orthodox Darwinists and the so-called “neo-Lamarckists”, has its role highlighted and a special appeal for the fact that the geographical tradition that had already existed since the German Romantics emphasized the importance of understanding the relationship between man and the environment. The cross-fertilization of Darwinian debates on biological inheritance and ecological debates on the

organism-environment relationship with the geographical tradition of concern with the study of the man-milieu relationship gives this formulation of Huntington the amalgam of distinct lines of thought that underlies his epistemological postures.

The third element that Huntington points out as a determinant in the distribution of civilization, which is culture, demonstrates that his conception is not only a Darwinian conception but, above all, it is a social Darwinian conception. The geographer bets on a strict interdependence among culture, inheritance and the physical environment as a principle of method for explaining the civilizing process. This interdependence is explicit in the confused and ambiguous tone in which Huntington employs the “inheritance” theme, which can be understood both in the harshest biological sense of transferring organic characteristics from some individuals to others, and in the sense of a psychological and behavioral heritage that would perpetuate the culture.

Social Darwinism is understood here based on the conceptualization provided by Mike Hawkins (1998); this author differentiates Darwinism from Social Darwinism, but, at the same time, emphasizes the reciprocity between both. “Darwinism” would be, according to the author, a worldview structured around four basic assertions: the idea that the totality of organic nature, including human beings, is governed by biological laws; the Malthusian notion that the pressure of population growth on resources generates a struggle for existence among organisms; the assumption that the physical and mental traits that confer an advantage in this struggle may, through inheritance, spread through a given population and the assumption that the cumulative effects of natural selection and inheritance contribute decisively to the emergence of new species and the elimination of others. The shift from a Darwinian approach to a social Darwinian one would, from his point of view, involve the aggregation of a fifth assertion in conjunction with the four so far mentioned. This fifth assertion, a distinctive feature of Social Darwinism, emphasizes that the scientific determinism imposed by the first four assertions extends not only to the physical properties of human beings but also to their social existence and to their psychological attributes which play a fundamental role in shaping elements of the social life, as is the case of reason, religion and morality (HAWKINS, 1998, pp. 30-31).

The focus of “Civilization and Climate”, which is the attempt to demonstrate how climate, one of the most important elements of the physical environment, could interfere with the process that led the European races to do “more work” and to have “more health”, reveals the traversal of evolutionary biological conceptions and moral judgments that characterizes Huntington’s thinking. The ability to generate economic surplus is paralleled by the biological condition of having “more health” to rank the position of the European races in relation to other ethnic groups. The propensity to perform “more work” finds explanatory support in the notion that human races are supposed to inherit, by biological transfer, certain psychological attitudes that favor or not progress in the domination of nature. This formulation of Huntington brings together the triad that characterizes his theory of the civilizing process: inheritance, for emphasizing the role of the difference of innate behavior of the European races in relation to other races; the physical environment, for suggesting that certain climates are more propitious to the emergence of individuals who perform “more work”; and culture, for proposing that behavioral differences are directly linked to inheritance and the environment.

The methodological repartition of the object of study of Geography among biological inheritance, physical environment and culture proposed by Huntington agglutinates the tension, discussed in detail by Carl Degler (1991), between the naturalistic explanations based on Darwinism and the explanations more focused on culture and the process of socialization that marked Social Sciences in the USA in the first three decades of the twentieth century. This tension, as a result of the specificity of the epistemological problems with which Geography dealt, ended up having a very productive effect because the classical conception of the discipline as the study of the man-milieu relationship, inherited from the traditions of the nineteenth century, anticipated the problem of the tension between naturalism and anthropocentrism. Social Darwinism, as expressed in Huntington's ingenious methodological elaboration, brought to the surface in the geographic thought of the early twentieth century an older problem with a different epistemological outfit.

The “distribution of civilization” map

The work “Civilization and Climate” was well-known by the map of “distribution of civilization” that Huntington elaborated for its publication. To carry out this work, the author says that in 1913 he sent a letter addressed to people from 27 countries of the most varied parts of the world, including geographers, ethnologists, historians, businessmen, colonial officials, travelers and educators. In the letter, which is quoted in full by Huntington in one of the chapters of the book, the Geographer discusses his goal of preparing a map showing the geographic distribution of the characteristics that are generally recognized as indicators of the level of civilization in a region. Among these characteristics are vague terms such as “power of initiative”, “capacity for formulating new ideas”, “power of self-control”, “high standards of honesty and morality” and “power to lead and control other races” (HUNTINGTON, 1924b, pp. 241-242).

Huntington asked those responding to the letter to divide the list of regions of the world that accompanied it into ten groups on a scale of 0 to 10 where group 10 would include “very highest character” regions, which are the regions where characteristics already mentioned would be found to a high degree, and group 1, the lowest, which would include regions where the indicative aspects of civilization would occur at a lower level. The Geographer told the recipients of the letters that the map that would be drawn up on the basis of the answers to the questionnaire was intended to clarify the geographic, historical, sociological, and economic discussions of the moral and mental qualities that dominate civilization in the various nations of the world. Moreover, according to the author, the enterprise would seek to determine more satisfactorily how much such moral and mental qualities are influenced by the physical environment, race, development, biological variations, and other causes (HUNTINGTON, 1924b, pp. 242-243).

The author divided the world into 185 regions that should be distributed hierarchically in the 10 groups. Each group, according to the rules he established, should contain no less than 15 and nor more than 25 regions (HUNTINGTON, 1924b, p. 243). After sending the letter with the request, Huntington received responses from 137 people. Among people who did not respond, the overwhelming majority were not Americans. Among the US and English recipients, 90% responded to the letter. Of all the respondents, only about one-third responded by doing

the classifications according to the method suggested by Huntington. The Geographer points out that, besides the classifications sent by a part of the respondents, he also received letters of great value that contained suggestions for the elaboration of the map. Among the returned letters were letters from people who did not contribute to the classification but explained their reasons for not contributing and suggested ways in which the author's work could be improved (HUNTINGTON, 1924b, p. 247).

Some letters referring to the elaboration of the "Civilization and Climate" map, both of those who answered the questionnaire and of those who did not respond were found in Huntington's archives. This demonstrates the variety of reactions that other intellectuals within and outside the discipline have had in relation to Huntington's proposed quantitative classification of the degree of civilization in the regions of the world. This variety is symptomatic of the mixture of acceptance and resistance that characterized the reception of his work. We will analyze some of these letters to better understand the terms and justifications for such adhesions and resistances.

In the case of geographers, letters were found with answers from J.A. Herbertson, Hiram Bingham, Harlan Barrows, Walter S. Tower, Ray Whitbeck, Mark Jefferson, Richard Elwood Dodge, Martha Krug Genthe and J. Russell Smith.

Herbertson, who taught at the University of Oxford's School of Geography and was one of the leading names in British geography in the early twentieth century, responded to Huntington's request justifying his decision not to collaborate with the classification of regions of the world. He claimed that the more he looked at the large list of places the American geographer would like to be classified according to the standard of civilization, the more he felt incapable of doing something satisfactory.

Hiram Bingham taught together with Huntington at Yale in 1913, when the questionnaire was sent. He also sent a letter justifying his non-participation in the proposed classification. Bingham said he doubted the "value of a map based on anything else than the opinions of the most highly competent general geographers and anthropologists" and that an "average of guesses made by fairly intelligent men really does not lead anywhere".

The refusal to respond to the questionnaire also appears in the responses of Harlan Barrows and Walter S. Tower, both professors at Chicago at the time. Barrows said it would be impossible for him to conduct a study that would allow him to respond to the questionnaire and that any classification he submitted would be of little value. Tower, in addition to rejecting the request, also emphasized the difficulty imposed by the magnitude of the task proposed by Huntington stating that many errors could enter in the work and that, regardless of how much effort the Geographer made, it was "more or less certain" that the results would be "unsatisfactory". In his letter, a greater ambiguity appears in relation to Huntington's effort, for, while Tower is skeptical of the scope of the undertaking, he recognizes that the possibility that something like this map of civilization done with "effective accuracy" would have great value.

Richard Elwood Dodge, who taught at the Geography department of Teachers College at Columbia University, also responded by explaining why he did not participate in the questionnaire. He questions the difficulty of objectively defining what would be the elements that could

demonstrate the existence of a more or less advanced degree of civilization. The number of letters from geographers who did not wish to respond to the Huntington questionnaire is significant and the argumentative pattern of justification for refusals is quite clear. The most striking feature of this pattern is the assumption of inability to classify world regions concomitantly with a questioning of the validity of the method and the assumptions of Huntington's classification, as is clear in the letters from Herbertson, Bingham, Barrows, Tower and Dodge.

Among the geographers who agreed to participate in the classification were the letters from Ray Whitbeck, Mark Jefferson, J. Russell Smith and Martha Krug Genthe. In the cases of Whitbeck and Jefferson, the answers were short, summarizing to point out that they both carried out the classification, but that it also had difficulties; Jefferson even dared to say that he believed that his answers would not be of great value. Genthe commented that, in addition of having difficulties in classifying lower-level areas, she feared that she was more influenced by purely geographical considerations than by the cultural considerations that Huntington seemed to prefer as a qualifying criterion. While Smith, who worked at the University of Pennsylvania, although he participated and sent the classification, said he had the feeling of tyrannic despotism in picking up a country in his hand and deciding whether it will stay in the "barbarous, semi-barbarous or the savage group".

Even those geographers who agreed to send answers to the classification of the map of civilization did it with such a certain resistance and skepticism; however, it is possible to note that there is, both on the part of those who participated in the classification and of those who did not participate, an ambiguity in relation to the effort of Huntington. Although geographers who communicated with the author of "Civilization and Climate" saw the elaboration of the map and its methodological assumptions with much skepticism, they had some recognition of the importance of Huntington's effort of synthesis in *General Geography*.

Among the non-geographers were found letters from important early twentieth century anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie and Roland Dixon, as well as a letter from the economist and anthropologist William Ripley. None of these social scientists accepted the method of classification proposed by Huntington. Boas, who at the time was one of the most important social scientists in the country and who taught at the department of Anthropology at Columbia University, justified his position by mentioning the problem of subjectivity involved in the hierarchy of peoples and cultures:

It has been my endeavor, in my anthropological studies, to follow the same principles that are laid down for natural sciences; and the first condition of progress is therefore to eliminate the element of subjective value; not that I wish to deny that there are values, but it seems to me necessary to eliminate the peculiar combination of the development of cultural forms and the intrusion of the idea of our estimate of their value which has nothing to do with these forms. (Franz Boas, November 5, 1913)

Next, Boas continues and, at the end of the brief letter, states that, in making the map, Huntington would obtain only an aggregation of subjective values that could, in themselves, be the object of interesting studies, but that would not give any answer to the question that the geographer tried to answer. The tension between the relativistic and culturalist position of Boas

and Huntington's belief in the possibility of objective measurement of the civilizational level of the parts of the world prevented the anthropologist from accepting the form of classification proposed by the Geographer as legitimate.

Another important moment of this epistemological divergence between Huntington's approach and the theoretical postures of anthropologists is in the response letter from Alfred Kroeber, a direct disciple of Boas who taught at the time at the University of California. Kroeber argues that the ultimate causes of any historical-social phenomenon are intrinsically human, which makes him minimize the role of biology and the environment and thus puts him in opposition to Huntington's approach.

Robert Lowie, who taught Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History, declined the request briefly saying that he considered himself a layperson to do the classification. William Ripley, who taught at the Harvard Department of Economics, said that Huntington's proposal carried no possibility of reaching "scientific results" and that applying the "geographic method to a compound of statistics and loose generalization may be productive of serious error". Roland Dixon, an anthropologist who also taught at Harvard, was perhaps the social scientist who made the harshest criticisms of Huntington's proposal:

It seems to me that you are trying to do a thing which is in its essence impossible, and that a map based on judgements of the sort you ask for could not be of any real value. In the first place the things to judge are exceedingly difficult to appraise. In the second place, I cannot see what value can accrue from the averaged opinions of many persons about regions that they know nothing about. In the third place, your scheme leaves out entirely the very numerous other factors beside the environment. No account is taken of time, change of environment etc. all of which are elements in the complex problem to be solved. (Roland Dixon, November 9, 1913)

Dixon believes that Huntington's work is based on narrow environmental determinism and, like in Kroeber's criticism, tends to see in the Geographer's proposal a neglect of non-environmental factors. The anthropologists resistance to Huntington's method for quantitatively classifying the world's pattern of civilization largely reflects the aforementioned tension between the explanations of biology and the environment typical of Social Darwinism and culturalist explanations, which deal with the human and social aspects of reality as a function of culture, without resorting to racial-biological aspects. The methodological and ontological separation between culture and nature, which was beginning to strengthen in early twentieth century American Anthropology, was incompatible with Huntington's epistemological postures.

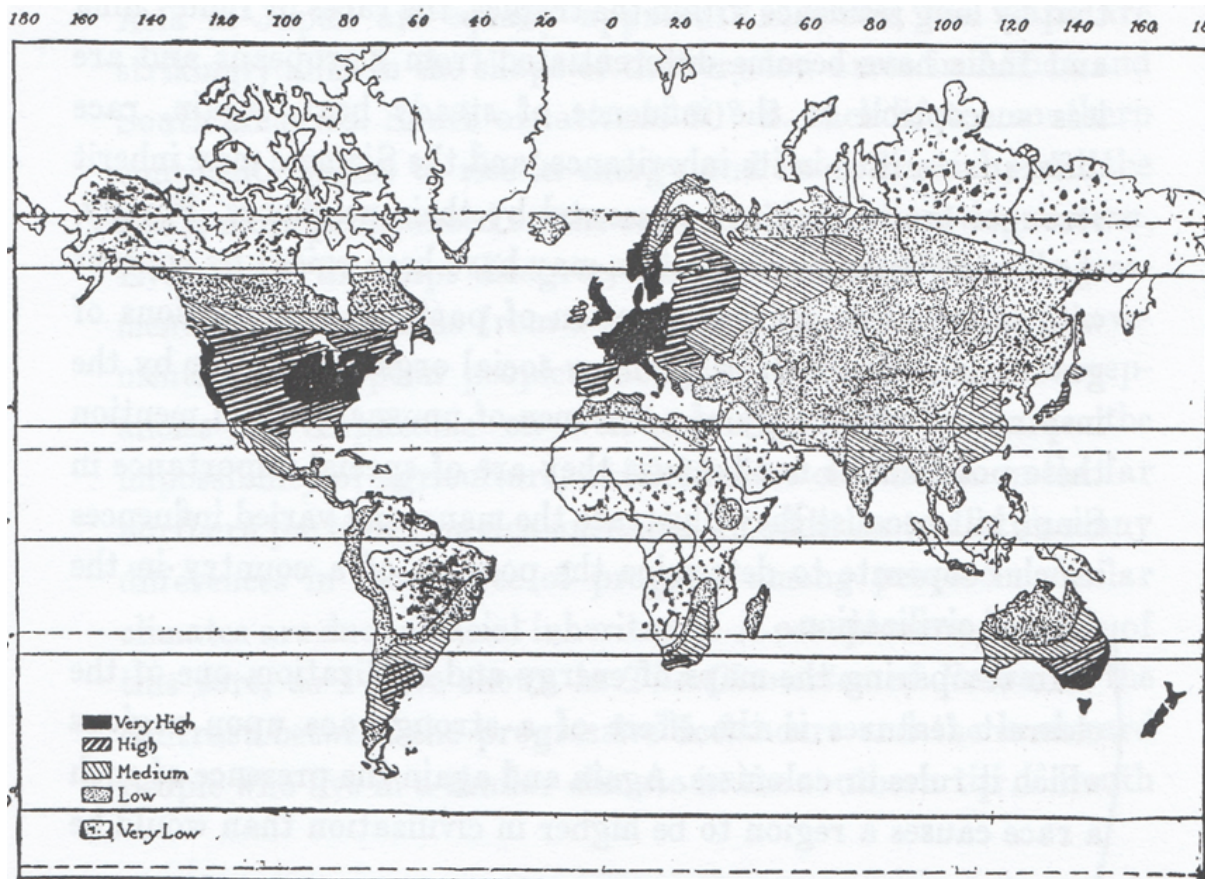
In "Civilization and Climate" the Geographer recognizes the strength of these comments, but, nevertheless, he maintains his position that the aspects on which he was based to define "civilization" are worldwide. To dispel the accusation of ethnocentrism, Huntington argues that the characteristics which are considered by him as indicators of a high degree of civilization have been present in the past in many non-European peoples (HUNTINGTON, 1924b, pp. 254-256).

Answering these criticisms, Huntington explains the procedure that he followed to organize the 50 contributions whose classifications were carried out according to the questions of the

questionnaire. As there was a predominance of contributions coming from the USA, the author decided to divide these contributions into 5 groups: the American group, which offered 25 contributions; the British group, which offered 7 contributions; the group of Germanic Europeans, who offered 7 contributions; the group of Latin Europeans, who offered 6 contributions and the group of Asians, who offered 5 contributions. In order to avoid inequalities of weight in the result due to the number of different contributions of each group, in the calculation of the average of the index of civilization of each country, the average one of each of the groups was used and all the groups had the same equivalence for the elaboration of the overall average. Huntington justifies this procedure by saying that everyone is affected by prejudice and tends to put their region of origin at a higher number than the correct one. He argues that by giving equal weight to five different groups that are animated by distinct ideals the effect of racial prejudice could be eliminated (HUNTINGTON, 1924b, p. 256).

The results of the maps based on the classification of the respondents in Huntington's letter clearly show that there was a shared perception that the areas of greatest urban-industrial concentration in Western countries with great geopolitical weight, such as the USA, France, Germany and England would have a higher "civilization" index. The most important regions of these countries invariably had a rating above 9 on the scale of 0 to 10 proposed in the letter. These regions contrast with the lowest indicators that are attributed to the countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia (except in the case of Japan) (figure 1). These three large areas of the globe are classified as having a "medium", "low" or "very low" level of civilization.

Figure 1 – Distribution of civilization world map done by Huntington based on the answers to his questionnaire. Source: Huntington (1924b, p. 295).



Certainly, this positive evaluation of the wealthier regions of Western Europe and the US bears a direct relation to the geopolitical reality that characterized the Age of Empires⁴ which was a period in which a restricted set of Western powers controlled more than half of the land areas of the world, especially colonies in Africa and Asia. The mooring between the imperial issues in which the English-speaking countries were involved during this period and the geographic knowledge related to the climate debate is fundamental. David Livingstone argues that the discussions of climatic issues by geographers throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deeply embedded in the imperial problematic and were often driven from what he calls the “diagnostic language of ethnic judgment”. For this author, the language of political and moral evolution was, in this period, an important part of the grammar of climate discussion (LIVINGSTONE, 2008 [1992], p. 221). Huntington, by fusing his concerns about the origin and distribution of civilization with the search for determining the characteristics of an “ideal” climate that would favor men’s “energy” and “activity”, is an archetype of this fusion between climate discussion and language of ethnic judgment.

In addition to all the effort to elaborate a geographical theory of history epistemologically grounded in the Darwinian debates on the organism-environment relationship and in racial thought that essentialized certain behavioral characteristics of human groups as supposedly derived from biological inheritance, Huntington’s thought, as expressed in the work analyzed here, was based on a very particular concept of “civilization”. The conception of a situation of evolutionary inequality between Europe and the US on one side and the rest of the world on the other is corroborated by the use of what Norbert Elias understands to be the general function of the concept of “civilization”, which is, in his view, to express “the consciousness that the West has of itself” (ELIAS, 2011 [1939], p. 23). The social Darwinist philosophy, with its Spencerian comprehension that allowed the emergence of an idea of “universal evolution”, when mixing with the imperial necessity to demarcate a hierarchical difference between the West and the rest and a concern with the geographical foundation of a theory of history, is the great theoretical matrix that underpins all the scientific discourse present in “Civilization and Climate”.

Bibliography

- BARROWS, H. **Geography as Human Ecology**. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, v. 13, n. 1, p. 1-14, 1923.
- BERDOULAY, V. **A Abordagem Contextual**. Espaço e Cultura, Rio de Janeiro: UERJ, n. 16, p. 47-56, 2003[1981].
- BOURDIEU, P. Campo Intelectual e Projeto Criador. In: POUILLON, J. (Org.). **Problemas do estruturalismo**. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1968. p. 105-145.
- BRIGHAM, A. P. Problems of Geographic Influence. **Annals of the Association of American Geographers**, v. 5, p. 3-25, 1915.
- CAPEL, H. **Filosofía y ciencia en la Geografía contemporánea**. Barcelona: Serbal, 2012[1981].

⁴ This term was coined by Hobsbawn (2010 [1988]).

- DEGLER, C. **In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought.** New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- DRYER, C. The Development of Geographic Sense and Concept. **Annals of the Association of American Geographers**, v. 10, p. 3-16, 1920.
- ELIAS, N. **O Processo Civilizador.** Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2011[1939]. v. 1: Uma história dos costumes.
- FENNEMAN, N. The Circumference of Geography. **Geographical Review**, v. 7, n. 3, p. 168-175, 1919.
- HAWKINS, M. **Social Darwinism in European and American Thought (1860-1945): Nature as a Model and Nature as a Threat.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- HERBST, J. Social Darwinism and the History of American Geography. **Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society**, v. 105, n. 6, 538-544, 1961.
- HOBBSAWN, E. **Era dos Impérios (1875-1914).** São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2010[1988].
- HUNTINGTON, E. **Civilization and Climate.** New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1915.
- HUNTINGTON, E. **World Power and Evolution.** New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1919.
- HUNTINGTON, E. Geography and Natural Selection: A Preliminary Study of the Origin and Development of Racial Character. **Annals of the Association of American Geographers**, v. 14, n. 1, p. 1-16, 1924a.
- HUNTINGTON, E. **Civilization and Climate.** 3rd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1924b
- HUNTINGTON, E. **Tomorrow's Children: The Goal of Eugenics.** New York/London: John Wiley/Chapman & Hall, 1935.
- LIVINGSTONE, D. **The Geographical Tradition.** Malden/Oxford: Blackwell, 2008[1992].
- MARTIN, G. **All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas.** New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- MARTIN, G. **Ellsworth Huntington: His Life and Thought.** Hamden, CT: Archon, 1973.
- PATTISON, W. Rollin Salisbury and the Establishment of Geography at the University of Chicago. In: BLOUET, B. (Org.). **Origins of Academic Geography in the United States.** Hamden, CT: Archon, 1981. p.151-163.
- PEET, R. Social Origins of Environmental Determinism. **Annals of the Association of American Geographers**, v. 75, n. 3, p. 309-333, 1985.
- SCHULTEN, S. **The Geographical Imagination in America (1880-1950).** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- SEMPLER, E. **Influences of Geographic Environment: On the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthro-Geography.** New York/London: Henry Holt/Constable, 1911.

STODDART, D. Darwin's Influence in the Development of Geography in the United States, 1859-1914. In: BLOUET, B. (Org.). **The Origins of Academic Geography in the United States**. Hamden, CT: Archon, 1981. p. 265-278.

STODDART, D. Darwin's Impact on Geography. **Annals of the Association of American Geographers**, v. 56, n. 4, p. 683-698, 1966.

Documents – Huntington Papers – Consulted in Sterling Memorial Library (Yale University)

Alfred Kroeber to Ellsworth Huntington, December 6, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series IV, Box 6, Folder 34.

Franz Boas to Ellsworth Huntington, November 5, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series IV, Box 6, Folder 34.

Harlan Barrows to Ellsworth Huntington, November 14, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series V, Box 10, Folder 71.

Hiram Bingham to Ellsworth Huntington, November 8, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series V, Box 10, Folder 71.

J. A. Herbertson to Ellsworth Huntington, February 10, 1914. Huntington Papers, Series V, Box 10, Folder 41.

J. Russell Smith to Ellsworth Huntington, July 3, 1914. Huntington Papers, Series IV, Box 6, Folder 34.

Mark Jefferson to Ellsworth Huntington, November 4, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series IV, Box 6, Folder 34.

Martha Krug Genthe to Ellsworth Huntington, February 23, 1914. Huntington Papers, Series IV, Box 6, Folder 34.

Ray Whitbeck to Ellsworth Huntington, November 4, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series V, Box 10, Folder 71.

Richard Elwood Dodge to Ellsworth Huntington, November 14, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series IV, Box 6, Folder 34.

Robert Lowie to Ellsworth Huntington, November 6, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series V, Box 10, Folder 71.

Roland Dixon to Ellsworth Huntington, November 9, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series IV, Box 6, Folder 34.

Walter S. Tower to Ellsworth Huntington, November 8, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series V, Box 10, Folder 71.

William Ripley to Ellsworth Huntington, November 3, 1913. Huntington Papers, Series IV, Box 6, Folder 34.