

American Anthropology and Colonialism: A Factual Account

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Over the past two decades, the subject of the history of anthropology has become ever more contentious: the discourse of post-colonialism has been overtaken by that of the decolonization of anthropology itself. [1] This has become particularly acute in the United States because of the intense and profound issues of race and racism here today. The concern about American anthropology's collaboration with colonialism that began at the end of the 1960s (the concern, not the collaboration) has given way to the idea of the inescapability of complicity within a "settler-colonial" society. There has, in fact, been the anthropological equivalent of a Kuhnian paradigm shift as successive generations have grown up without knowledge of the anthropology of 50 years ago, let alone 150 years. There is a good deal of criticism of the past of the field, but, sadly, very little of it is informed by serious scholarly research into this vital subject. We are presented with slogans, caricatures, and "cardboard history" (Eidson 2019).

American anthropologists were quick to seize on the trope: "anthropology is the child of Western imperialism" in the troubled late 1960s and to apply it to their own history. It is remarkable that this idea has been generally accepted, considering the virtual absence of published research to support it through the past 50 years. Typically, the "proof" that is offered by writers is cited as "Asad 1973; Gough 1968." This is particularly ironic because these and most other critical articles of that era were directed explicitly at British anthropology, not the discipline common in the United States. The only chapter in "Asad 1973" that involves American anthropologists reports the New Left's attack on British social anthropology! And,

remarkably, “Gough 1968” doesn’t actually deal with the topic of the title at all (“Anthropology and Imperialism”). There is only one summary paragraph baldly stating the claim! Her paper is actually a call for contemporary anthropologists to study revolutionary movements. She does not even attempt to demonstrate her own British anthropology’s involvement with colonialism. [2] Instead of accepting “cardboard history” and slogans, [3] let us look at the actual record of the relationship between American anthropology, colonialism, and settler-colonialism. [4]

American Anthropology and the “Overseas” Colonial World

Until World War II American anthropologists worked almost exclusively within the borders of the United States and Canada. Both the prehistory and the early professional history of the field involved research with Indians in the United States and First Nation peoples in Canada, but during the 1930s the outlook of the field expanded to take in studies of ethnic groups and communities in rural and urban America, both “Black” and “White.” Some of this research was motivated by the needs of society during the Great Depression, some by the problem of “race” and discrimination, and others by general and theoretical concerns, such as the “Yankee City” studies led by W. Lloyd Warner. [See Lewis 1998:721.]

The original claims of the complicity of anthropology with colonialism referred to the overseas colonies of Great Britain, France, Netherlands, Portugal, Belgium, and Germany. But, in fact, only a very few pioneering American ethnographers went abroad for research before WWII, and hardly any in those colonial areas. America’s major imperialist venture in the Philippines in the first decades of the 20th century attracted several anthropologists. Franz Boas’ second Ph.D. student, William O. Jones (himself half Indian), Fay-Cooper Cole, and Laura Benedict devoted much of their time in the field to the collection of material culture for exhibition in museums. Roy Barton, however, conducted deeper long-term studies of Ifugao culture and social structure from 1906 through 1940.

Carleton Coon did research in French-controlled Morocco and Ralph Linton did his work in the French colonies of the Marquesas and Madagascar. Margaret Mead, ever the pioneer, not only did research in American Samoa but followed that with fieldwork in Manus and mainland New Guinea, Australian mandate territories at that time, as were Reo Fortune’s Dobu and Hortense Powdermaker’s Lesu. Mead’s last pre-war stop was in Dutch-controlled Indonesia on Bali. Cora DuBois, Edwin Loeb and Raymond Kennedy worked in different parts of Indonesia. [5] Melville Herskovits studied the kingdom of Dahomey in French West Africa in 1931, and his students, William Bascom and Joseph Greenberg, later worked in Nigeria. Boas’ student George Herzog did ethnomusicology in Africa and the Pacific. The only case of an American anthropologist working for a colonial government in Africa that I am aware of was, ironically, the very left-wing Jack Sergeant who did a study of agriculture for the administration in Nigeria.

Most of the other early American anthropologists who ventured outside of the United States

did research in independent countries of Latin America. Robert Redfield and Elsie Clews Parsons worked in Mexico, Ruth Bunzel and Sol Tax in Guatemala, Charles Wagley in Brazil, and Melville Herskovits in Haiti (as well as British and Dutch colonies of Trinidad and Surinam respectively). W. Lloyd Warner and D. S. Davidson did research in Australia. These independent nations were “settler colonial” societies, of course, but it was almost impossible to avoid settler colonies if one looked for “diversity” and “other cultures”—which was the writ of anthropology in those days.

John Embree studied a community in Japan and Cornelius Osgood did research in Korea. As far as I know no American anthropologist did ethnographic research in India or China until after WWII, but Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball did pioneer studies of communities in Ireland, as did Charlotte Gower in Sicily.

In 1929 Robert Lowie, as editor of *American Anthropologist*, reported, “Of 39 contributions printed in 1928, 23 deal with North American archaeology and ethnography; 4 with Latin America; 1 with Asia; 1 with Africa; 4 with Australia, Oceania, and Indonesia...” But in 1944 he concluded an overview of “American Contributions to Anthropology” writing “...the World War is expanding our interests. As our archeologists have already turned pan-Americans, let us cease being Americanists and turn global anthropologists.” He was prescient.

In fact, Franz Boas had plans for the development of American anthropology that included the rest of the world. As early as 1905 he wrote, “...anthropological work is to make students in our country familiar with the value of foreign cultures and civilizations, and to make our people more appreciative of the achievements of foreign nations. It so happens that my own personal work is directed primarily to the study of primitive tribes, but I consider my own work as merely a phase of this more general problem; and I have been working towards the introduction and extension of studies relating to the civilizations of foreign nations, such as the Latin countries and also to those of Asia.” [6]

Boas’ first attempt to organize research beyond North America was the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897–1902) for which he had planned ethnographic studies in Siberia and China, recruited Russian researchers, and saw to the publication of their results. He intended to have “all lines of anthropological research” applied to “East Asiatic problems” as well as “the problems found in China, the Malay Archipelago, East Indies, Africa, etc.” [7] But he only succeeded with the Siberian research. He struggled in vain to establish an Institute of Chinese Studies at Columbia. [8]

There were relatively few anthropologists in the United States before 1945 and by the time a growing number of American ethnographers and linguists (well under a thousand) were set loose upon the rest of the world in the late 1940s and 1950s, most of Africa and Asia were about to become—some countries had become—independent of their European rulers. The involvement of American anthropologists with Western imperialism and colonial governments was quite rare. When they carried out research in those countries, they were usually not engaged in aiding the governments with the control of their peoples, although

there were a few who worked for development projects intended to aid people in the newly independent countries. [9] Even without inquiring further into the research that hundreds of American anthropologists did in the period of decolonization and after the end of European colonialism, it is clear that they were not the handmaidens (sic) of colonial governments. It is time for American anthropologists, at least, to unburden themselves of the yoke of that imperialism. And far from being the ones who created an atmosphere of Western superiority, it was precisely the anthropologists coming from the Boas-influenced American school who spread the word of appreciation for other cultures and contempt for ethnocentrism and racism. It was their fundamental standpoint.

Anthropologists and American Indians in the Settler-Colonial United States

The subject of the relationship between American anthropologists and the indigenous peoples of North America is currently a fraught subject in the anthropological community. Controversy started with a breezy satire by Vine Deloria, Jr. in 1969, but the idea has gained currency that anthropological research on American Indians was so harmful that a recent editor of the *American Anthropologist* went so far as to claim that “its salvage/savage ethnography project” led to the “erasure of Indigenous peoples” (Thomas 2020). More recently the outgoing president of the AAA issued a public apology to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas for the “record of extractive research conducted on indigenous communities” and “the traumatic effects of anthropology’s enduring legacy on Indigenous communities.” (Issued online November 17, 2021.) The rest of this paper will give an overview of the history and nature of the anthropological enterprise as it pertained to American Indians in the first 60 years. It will focus on ethnography and linguistics, leaving archeology, ethnohistory, and biological anthropology aside.

The beginnings of anthropology as a recognized academic discipline in the United States can reasonably be dated from the mid-1890s when Franz Boas began teaching at Columbia University, [10] but there was much important work in ethnology and linguistics, as well as archeology, before these became distinct academic fields. Interest in and writing about the languages and cultures of indigenous peoples of the Americas began as early as the first contacts between Europeans and the peoples whose lands they were about to take over. Peter Whiteley’s survey, “Ethnography” (2004) begins with accounts almost from the time of “discovery” (sic), citing among others the Spanish writers Bernardino de Sahagun, Diego de Landa, and Bartolomé de Las Casas. Thomas Jefferson was perhaps the most prominent figure in the American colonies with an interest in the languages and the “antiquities” of the American Indians (*Notes on Virginia*, 1785) but there were many others, earlier and later. Whiteley’s list notes the works of Father Lafitau on the Iroquois, the reports from the Lewis and Clark expedition, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft’s folklore collections, Albert Gallatin on Indian languages, and Lewis Henry Morgan, whose *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-ne, or Iroquois*, is of incomparable value. (For more examples see Patterson 2001.)

The narrative I want to tell begins in 1846 when the Smithsonian Institution was created “for the increase and diffusion of knowledge,” and under its first director, Joseph Henry, the study of America’s indigenous population, its languages, antiquities, and ethnology, became a vital concern for a corps of researchers. In 1879 the Smithsonian established a special unit, the Bureau of Ethnology ([BE], later called Bureau of American Ethnology [BAE]), to organize and support all of the intellectual and scientific activities relating to Native America. It was under the direction of Major John Wesley Powell, a dynamic and popular Civil War veteran, geologist, and explorer turned enthusiastic ethnologist and linguist.

The Impulse to Do and “Need” for “Salvage”

Estimates of the population of the so-called “New World” (the so-called “Americas”) vary widely but there is a rough consensus that the population of indigenous people in the area known today as the United States and Canada must have been at least 2,000,000. By 1860, according to government census figures, there were a total of 339,421 Indians in the United States, but by 1880 there were only 306,543. [11] Some of this apparent loss of numbers in those 20 years can be accounted for by individuals with dual or mixed ancestry being counted with the non-Indian population, as well as unreplaced losses through death. Whether the loss of numbers was due to assimilation or mortality, the concerned observer of 1880 might reasonably assume that there was a “progressive annihilation” of peoples as well as their cultures. As the historian Curtis Hinsley writes, this apparent fact lent “an urgency to Indian studies that emerged in Americans’ frequent expressions of ‘salvage ethnology’: a unique blend of scientific interest, wistfulness, and guilt” (1981:23). He might also have added humanitarian and humanistic concerns.

As Jacob Gruber pointed out 50 years ago, much of the work in ethnography from the middle of the nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth was driven by a sense of urgency because of the ongoing and imminent loss of cultures and peoples. Those who cared were well aware of the seemingly inexorable incursion of more populous, technologically more powerful, and greedy nations into the lands occupied by peoples who lived in smaller groups and were unable to defend themselves. The relentless westward invasions of Euro-American settlers (colonists) caused disastrous loss of numbers among indigenous societies, sometimes to the point of extinction, as the result of disease, warfare, and murder. These encounters usually caused the destruction of cultures and social organizations, or forced them “underground,” even when the people survived. Indigenous peoples were forced to change as a result of the loss of land and livelihood, restriction to reservations, the necessity (and the attraction) of working for the newcomers, the adoption of Christianity, the impact of schooling, taking on new material culture, and much more.

As Gruber wrote, “In the face of the inevitable and necessary changes, in the face of an almost infinite variety of man whose details were essential to a definition of man, the obligation of both scientist and humanist was clear: he must collect and preserve the information and the products of human activity and genius so rapidly being destroyed” (1970:1293). Gruber

considers this attitude an aspect of Victorian humanism, “the development of some sense of compassion and awareness for the condition of the poor and the economically disenfranchised” (1293). “And out of an amalgam of moral and scientific concerns, an emergent anthropology—...—found a method and a role.” [12]

John Wesley Powell spent much time exploring the American Southwest where he was acquainted with Indians. He was one of those who cared. According to Natalie and Richard Woodbury,

Furthermore, a widespread conviction among scholars, government officials, and the general public that the settling of the West would bring an inevitable end to the primitive lifeways that had remained unchanged throughout the centuries proved to be Powell’s most powerful stimulus for organizing the BAE research program. He and his colleagues believed that whatever could be learned about the Indians had to be learned very soon, otherwise it would be too late” (1999:285).

Powell intended to organize anthropological research in America through the Bureau of Ethnology (Woodbury and Woodbury 1999:287) and considered their highest priority to be surveying Indian tribes and their languages. According to Powell, ‘all sound anthropologic investigation... must have a firm foundation in language. Customs, laws, government, institutions, mythologies, religions, even arts cannot be properly understood without a fundamental knowledge of the languages which express the ideas and thoughts embodied therein’ (Powell quoted in Woodbury and Woodbury 1999:286).

Powell also hoped that the linguists and ethnographers who worked for the Bureau would contribute to an appreciation of Indian ways in order to be able to promote plans for the betterment of Indian conditions—for their very survival, as he understood it. He considered this work to be more pressing than antiquarian research because languages and cultural features were being lost all the time as older members of these cultural and speech communities passed away. The interest of members of Congress, however, who were the ones who appropriated funds for the enterprises of the Bureau, was in archeological materials for the collections in the National Museum, especially from the so-called “Mound Builders” of the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys. “...there was little enthusiasm for Indians and Indian cultures” in Congress (Judd 1966:20-21). [13]

Despite the budgetary problems, before the turn of the 20th century the Bureau employed or otherwise enjoyed the services of devoted and enthusiastic contributors—all amateurs, of course. Powell had written, “A large number of persons including missionaries and teachers among the Indians, Indian agents, Army officers, scholars connected with the colleges of the United States and others are assisting in this general work” (Judd 1966:3-4). Most of the research on linguistics and ethnology, however, was done by members of the staff and several dedicated volunteers who devoted much of their lives to these pursuits. If these 19th-century pioneer researchers had college educations they would have been in such fields as classics, European languages, geology, art, architecture, and history; they could not have

studied anthropology yet. Their writ was to produce knowledge for the world—not for government application—and it seems clear that the members of that other agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who were the ones charged with controlling Indian lives, had little or no interest in their work on Indian mounds, languages, “pagan rituals,” etc. (Hinsley 1981:50).

These researchers were pioneers, and as one of them (Otis Mason) put it, there was “no priesthood and no laity, no sacred language...” Like many of his contemporaries, he assumed that anyone undertaking anthropology did so out of love. [Thus an “amateur”—the original meaning of the word.] “...we are working for the pleasure of it” he wrote someone (Hinsley 1981:87). As Neil Judd remarked, in his brief history of the Bureau, “...good men worked for very little” (1966:20). And a couple of women, Alice Fletcher and Frances Densmore, apparently worked much of the time without any funds from the Smithsonian at all—only with what they could scrape together from other sources. (Fletcher was awarded a fellowship by Harvard’s Peabody Museum in 1890. A wealthy widow from Pittsburgh had given the money to support Fletcher’s “scientific and philanthropic researches” [Mark 1988:203].

Despite his concern to save as much knowledge of languages and cultures as possible, Powell did not have an organized research program “beyond the whims of individuals” (Hinsley 1981:274). He had the notion that people of talent who had a commitment to truth had to be free to follow their own genius, so “each of the ethnologists pursued his particular muse” (Moses 1984: 223). Matilda Stevenson recalled that “my instructions were usually these from Major Powell: ‘Go and do the best you can, you know best how to pursue your work and I know that you will accomplish all that is possible’” (Hinsley 1981:274).

Although working in the framework of a US government institution, it was not their job to aid in governing or even advising. They were employed to collect, not recommend. Their accomplishments included recording many languages and various aspects of very many Indian cultures for posterity, for “science,” and for the descendants of those Native Americans. It would be available for whenever they or their descendants would need and want this information. Powell had declared that the classification of Indian languages was “not only of scientific interest but of great importance in the administration of Indian affairs,” but it is hard to see why that should have been the case (Judd 1966:5-6). As Neil Judd summarized, “Ever since [its inception], the Bureau of American Ethnology has been looked upon at the Smithsonian Institution as a sort of unwanted but tolerated stepchild. It was given space but left to fend for itself. Even the clerks bit and clawed at Bureau personnel” (36). Clearly it was not looked upon as a significant tool for colonial rule. According to one historian, “The contributions of ethnographic [including linguistic] research to government Indian policy were...indirect and minimal. Most probably both government and church policy would have remained the same in the absence of a science of ethnology” (Bieder 1986: 249).

From 1881 until 1964 the Bureau published *Annual Reports* (81), *Bulletins* (193) and other publications packed with thousands upon thousands of pages of linguistic, ethnographic,

and archeological monographs and shorter papers, usually profusely illustrated. These publication series were begun in the days of the self-taught researchers but continued well into the 20th century, publishing the works of the professionals. Almost all of these dealt with the Native peoples of North America but there was a much smaller percentage about cultures of Central and South America. (The massive six volumes of *The Handbook of South American Indians*, organized by Julian Steward, were issued between 1946 and 1959.) Even a cursory consideration of this mass of material should suggest that they were not intended for colonial rule but for “the diffusion of knowledge” and to increase understanding and appreciation of Native Americans. There are many, many short articles on every imaginable subject but there are also major works hidden in these annual reports. For example, the 699-page Sixth Annual Report of the BE for 1884–1885 begins with a long article about ancient art from Colombia (much of it magnificent), continues with “Aids to the Study of Maya Codices,” and then J. Owen Dorsey’s monograph “Osage Traditions” (“of the elders”). Much of it is in the Osage language with interlineal and free translations in English. That volume ends with the 275 pages of Franz Boas’ first and greatest ethnographic work, *The Central Eskimo*.

The Bulletins and the Annual Reports were the places to find grammars, dictionaries, and ethnographies of Indian peoples and their languages. The 900-page *Handbook of the American Indian Languages* of 1911, edited and organized by Franz Boas, contains sections on 14 different languages by 10 contributors. Some of the major works they published were Alice Fletcher & Francis La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, as well as La Flesche’s numerous monographs on the Osages (see Bailey 1995). There is James Owen Dorsey’s *A Study of Siouan Cults*; despite its old-fashioned 1880s usages, an important and well-illustrated account of beliefs, practices, art, language, custom, tales, etc. There we find Frank H. Cushing’s “Outlines of Zuni Creation Myths” (1896), Washington Matthews on Navajo silversmiths, and James Mooney’s *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak*, a major achievement of the BAE. Alexander Lesser, who studied the Ghost Dance several decades later, said of this book,

Few religious movements have been so fortunate in their contemporary chroniclers as the Ghost Dance of 1890 in the sympathetic record of James Mooney. In his long historical account and commentary, Mooney enlarged upon earlier movements of a similar nature, ghost dance origins and sources, the doctrine, the forms of the dance, its psychological aspects in the trances, the spread of the religion in detail, the local forms of the religion among a number of the tribes, and the actual historical events which brought some tribes into conflict with the government over the doctrine. (Lesser 1933). [14]

Mooney’s work contains heartbreaking descriptions of the “broken promises and starvation” that led to “the outbreak” and resulted in the massacre of Wounded Knee in 1890, which he describes, including tragic pictures. He was the son of poor Irish immigrants, an Irish nationalist and activist, and he understood the Ghost Dance to be “a movement of revolt, religiously directed, an attempt to throw off an alien yoke, and recover aboriginal freedom,” in the words of Alexander Lesser. (Lesser was a student of Boas in the 1930s and an activist for Indian rights as well.) Anthony F. C. Wallace thought that “Mooney’s capacity to

empathize with Indian aspirations for a better nativistically oriented way of life...,” and “his approach to the Ghost Dance and to the Peyote religion, which he supported against criticism in his testimony before a congressional committee” came from his personal experiences, including “an awareness of ancient glories, of a sense of wrong and deprivation, and a dream of a golden age returned” (1965:vi). Mooney also published major studies of the Kiowa, Cheyenne, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee who had remained in North Carolina when others had been forcibly “removed” to Oklahoma.

The Smithsonian Institution has now put the publications of the BAE online and it is possible to access these articles easily. Each volume of the annual reports offers a remarkable mix of information about American Indian language and culture. If we look, for example, at the seventh annual report, delivered in 1884–85, published in 1891, we first find the very important work by Powell himself, “Indian linguistic families of America north of Mexico.” This classification stood for some decades until Edward Sapir did the next classification. It is followed by W. James Hoffman’s “The Mide’wiwin or ‘Grand Medicine Society’ of the Ojibwa,” an important institution for healing among various Algonquin groups in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere. This monograph, rich in detail and lavishly illustrated, covering all aspects of Mide’wiwin belief, practice, symbolism, material culture, and songs, etc., has long been the basis for further research on this important subject. The author explains, at the end of the work, that the Ojibwa are to be moved to reservations and “take lands in severalty.” He claims that “The chief Mide’ priests, being aware of the momentous consequences of such a change in their habits, and foreseeing the impracticality of much longer continuing the ceremonies of so-called ‘pagan rites,’ became willing to impart them to me, in order that a complete description might be made and preserved for the future information of their descendants” (Hoffman 1891:300).

The Mide’wiwin monograph is followed immediately by James Mooney’s documentation of “The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees.” He explains that the work is a selection of formulas taken from manuscripts written by “shamans of the tribe for their own use” in the Cherokee script invented by Sikwa’ya (Sequoyah) in 1821. The formulas cover “every subject pertaining to the daily life and thought of the Indian, including medicine, love, hunting, fishing, war, self-protection, destruction of enemies, witchcraft, the crops, the council, the ball play, etc., and, in fact, embodying almost the whole of the ancient religion of the Cherokees.” He writes, “The formulas contained in these manuscripts are not disjointed fragments of a system long since extinct, but are the revelation of a living faith which still has its priests and devoted adherents, and it is only necessary to witness a ceremonial ball play, with its fasting, its going to water, and its mystic bead manipulation, to understand how strong is the hold which the old faith yet has upon the minds even of the younger generation” (1891:309).

Alice Fletcher was a self-taught ethnographer, encouraged by Frederic Ward Putnam, the leading organizer of early anthropology (and an important patron of Franz Boas). She went west in 1881 to do first-hand research as well as to be a do-gooder. From her first trip she became very well connected with the influential and educated La Flesche family, of Omaha,

Ponca, and French origin (Mark 1988:47); she found her calling. Alice Fletcher devoted almost 40 years to writing about various Indian groups of the Great Plains and collecting recordings of their music. She is credited with 46 monographs on ethnology and music as well as having been one of those Euro-Americans who, along with Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904), Charles W. Cadman (1881-1946), and others, including Francis La Flesche and Frances Densmore, convinced musicians to take Indian music seriously (P. Deloria 2004:204; Smithsonian NAA). [15]

Joan Mark wrote that Alice Fletcher learned, “An ethnographer needed an informant, a knowledgeable insider who was as committed as she was to their joint task of recording for posterity” (1988:88), and Fletcher’s “informant” was much more than that. Francis La Flesche, the son of that family, was her co-author of their major work, *The Omaha Tribe*, and she treated him as an adopted son. He would go on to his own distinguished career as a researcher at the BAE, producing an important corpus of ethnography, linguistics, and musical recordings, mostly of the Osage people. Their book was not received very gracefully by two of the up-and-coming young Boasians, Paul Radin and Robert Lowie, but it had a better reception among the Durkheimians in France and has stood the test of time as a major ethnography together with other works about the Omaha (Mark: 337ff.). The anthropologist Robin Ridington gives it a glowing review as the pioneering product of the collaboration of an outsider and a member of the tribe in his introduction to a reprint edition. He calls it remarkable because of the wealth of its documentation of so many aspects of Omaha culture and life and “because the Omaha tribe itself is remarkable in the beauty and cosmic symmetry of its fundamental forms” (1992:XXX).

Alice Fletcher was unusual because she did get involved with the US government as a sometime adviser and intermediary. Considered an expert on Indians, she produced a 693-page *Report on Indian Education and Civilization* in 1888. Fletcher was closely aligned with the Omaha tribal faction that favored assimilation and she played a role in the individual allotment of land among them. It was a decision she came to regret, and in some quarters today her name is anathema, regardless of her contributions to knowledge of American Indian civilizations.

Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Washington Matthews (a physician), and J. N. B. Hewitt (a member of the Iroquois Nation [Tuscarora]) were others who stand out for their devotion to the cause of recording Indian languages and cultures “before it is too late.” They witnessed rapid changes—and losses—of languages and cultural practices, decade by decade. For many years Frances Densmore dragged massive recording machines from one end of the country to the other, documenting the music and its accompanying artistic and cultural and features of more than 30 Indian groups. (The University of Wisconsin library catalogue lists 69 entries for her books and recordings.) In her works she gives full credit to the Indian artists, ritual leaders, poets, composers, “informants,” whose words and works she recorded both as transcriptions and, where possible, actual sound recordings. Her books are packed with drawings and photographs, especially of those who have performed or given information.

The introduction to Matilda Stevenson's *The Sia* (1894) demonstrates both the *raison d'être* for salvage as well as a record of the inhumanity that necessitated it. "All that remains of the once populous pueblo of Sia is a small group of houses and a mere handful of people in the midst of one of the most extensive ruins of the Southwest" (1894:9). She opens with an account of the history of the 106 members of a "once populous pueblo" beset by "the murderous hand of an enemy" [the Spanish], smallpox, diphtheria, the assault upon their religion by the Catholic church, and the economic impact of Euro-American settlers. Stevenson was driven to record the ceremonies and myths she thought were doomed to oblivion but she did not ignore the living people. She wrote of their feelings, their current activities, and included photos of leading women potters and their artistic creations. Not erasure but a form of immortality.

Stevenson, Fletcher, Cushing, and other "Victorians" had their blind spots—and who among us doesn't? They could be officious and sometimes unlikeable; they were, most of them, brought up in the United States in the middle of the 19th century and had imbibed the ideas of both cultural evolutionism and romanticism that were all around them. They were born too early to benefit from the philosophy that Franz Boas would instill in his students. But they were not working for the government or the Bureau of Indian Affairs; they were devoted to learning about the indigenous peoples of the land that their people had invaded. And the extraordinary record they accumulated is there for both their descendants and the rest of humanity to learn from. [16]

Peter Whiteley, who has worked closely in recent years with Hopi Indians, writes, "The sheer proliferation of ethnographic materials, in the BAE and other institutional publications, together with their orientation toward salvage, provides the best argument against ethnography's complicity with colonialism. These accounts were not assembled for federal Indian agents to better control subjected populations...: unlike Schoolcraft in the 1820s, Indian agents at the turn of the 20th century, bent on their appointed task to assimilate their subjects, were typically uninterested in or positively hostile to Native traditions" (2004:447).

Whiteley concludes, "In short, as ethnographic research and publication on Native American cultures became more detailed and more complex, they increasingly opened a space of challenge to the colonial consciousness of domination. Perhaps no one was more singularly responsible for this than Franz Boas" (2004:447).

The Professionals—First the Boasians

The BAE would continue to be a major outlet for the linguistic and ethnographic works of the anthropologists who were trained professionals with degrees from departments of anthropology. At first these were mostly students of Franz Boas. These anthropologists had been enculturated, educated—consciously trained—to believe in the equal value of all cultures, to avoid the invidious distinctions inherent in cultural evolutionism, and to fight against the racial determinism that was hegemonic in the late 19th and early 20th century.

This cannot be stressed enough. Boas and his students carried the lesson to the world that “race is not destiny” at a time when that idea was not understood in most disciplines dealing with human beings. In the words of Gene Weltfish, “Our whole training in the Anthropology Department endowed us with the general sense of a common humanity. In going into the field, therefore, we were not moving into the exotic. As for myself, there was nothing ‘strange’ or ‘exotic’ about my field experience; it was intensely human” (1980:131).

Among the most important of the many works of the Boasians were Paul Radin’s *The Winnebago Tribe* (1923), Ruth Bunzel’s three contributions of 1932 later published as *Zuni Ceremonialism* (1992) and A. L. Kroeber’s *Handbook of the Indians of California* (1925). Kroeber’s first ethnographic monograph, *The Arapaho*, was based on field work in Wyoming and Indian Territory (Oklahoma) in the summers of 1899–1901. This research combined participant-observation with many interviews with informants (consultants [knowledge holders]) to produce more than 400 pages of details of ceremonials, beliefs, art work, and ritual regalia that could never be recovered otherwise. Although some of it was based on what old men told him, he was also able to witness Sun Dances and all the activities surrounding them, for example.

In 1901 Kroeber was hired to found a department of anthropology and a museum for the University of California. He spent the next 15 years learning about the native peoples of that state and preparing the *Handbook of the Indians of California*. That work of almost 1,000 pages, based on surveying, more intensive fieldwork with 15 peoples, and archival research, was an attempt to record all that could be known at that time about the indigenous peoples of California, “some fifty little nations.” It is not an exaggeration to call it magisterial or monumental; it was the foundation for studies of California’s Indian population.

Kroeber continued to do research and write about with California Indians until his last days in 1960, finding funds for students and others and publishing the results of their work in the *U. California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* (1903 to 1964). Kroeber collected more than 1,000 sound recordings with speakers of almost 30 languages. His research with the Yurok people has left a legacy of hundreds of narratives, songs, and texts of historic and legal importance, available for their use in linguistic and cultural revitalization projects. And he did much, much more than just his Yurok work. Kroeber also played a major role in the successful prosecution of Indian Land Claims cases on behalf of California and other tribes with his research and his leadership.

The students of Franz Boas considered themselves to be scientists working toward the understanding of human behavior and recording the ways of the peoples of the world. With a few exceptions their work was university or museum based and they scraped together the funds for their research from their institutions, when possible, and from private foundations, family members, and their wealthy and generous colleague, Dr. Elsie Clews Parsons, when necessary. (Parsons, born into a wealthy and socially prominent New York family, was a rebel, a pioneer social scientist, and a prolific researcher and writer.) Here are several examples of funding (taken at random from my bookshelf): The research for

Kroeber's *The Arapaho* (1902) was subsidized by Mrs. Morris K. Jesup, wife of the president of the American Museum of Natural History. Paul Radin's *The Winnebago Tribe* (1923) was bankrolled by his brother, Max, a law professor. (It was published as part of the Thirty-seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology.) Leslie Spier was able to do the research for his *Yuman Tribes of the Gila River* with funding from Yale University and the University of Chicago. These early professionals usually lived from hand to mouth while in the field. Margaret Mead wrote, "We went out with fifty dollars, or a hundred dollars, or a hundred and fifty silver dollars in a canvas bag, and lived as long as we could in summer" [1973:70]).

It must be reemphasized that these American anthropologists were not employed by government agencies that were involved with Indian affairs until the New Deal era, in the 1930s, during the Great Depression. Then the Bureau of Indian Affairs was under the leadership of John Collier, a prophetic figure, who was determined to change the destructive policies of the past and work for the improvement of Indian life in every way. (Not everyone was convinced that he knew the way.) At this time a number of anthropologists did play roles in this agency—and at least two of them, Archie Phinney (Nez Perce) and D'Arcy McNickle (Salish/Kootenay-Flathead), were Indians themselves. (See, e.g., Kehoe 2014 for discussion of Collier and the Indian New Deal.)

The professional anthropologists trained by Boas and his students were normally free of the Victorian conceits, tried to control their natural ethnocentrism, and did not engage in speculation about "stages of evolution," but, as Regna Darnell has emphasized, there was a continuity, in the early years at least, with the methods and the aims of the earlier researchers. They were trained to report what Yuman, Yurok, and Winnebago informants ("colleagues and collaborators" Mead calls them [1973:69]) had told them, often in the form of texts that were recorded verbatim and then translated. They intended to record what was important to the people they were studying, depending especially on those Mead called the "intellectuals" (1973:71), those Radin saw as "philosophers" [*Primitive Man as Philosopher*]. But they became increasingly aware of the need to consider the realities and the processes of change, becoming more concerned by the late 1920s with the culture and society they witnessed through participant observation. Then the study of acculturation and contemporary realities and problems became of greater concern.

The works of these anthropologists were intended as scholarly or "scientific" works in the interest of "the increase and diffusion of knowledge," in the words of the founding statement of the Smithsonian Institution. They were not intended for colonial rule nor were they of particular interest to those officials. Rather than project negative views to the public about Indians, even the earlier researchers believed that they were preserving important and often beautiful things. They produced specialized products of interest mostly to other anthropologists, to enthusiasts fascinated with Indians, and to those Indians themselves who were interested in their pasts and in the rapidly disappearing elements of their cultures and languages. This pursuit of "salvage" has been severely criticized in recent years but the

critics have too often depended on “cardboard history,” slogans, and the imputation of harm without demonstration of it. [17] The fundamental fact is, without the devoted work of these many ethnographers and linguists, the languages, customs, personality, character, beliefs, arts—and all the rest of what we call cultures, would have been lost. Mostly, there was no one else to record them.

There were few Indians like Francis La Flesche, J. N. B. Hewitt, and, later, William O. Jones, Archie Phinney and Ella Deloria, trained by Franz Boas, who were in a position to record their history, language, and ways of living. Alice Kehoe has an extended discussion of Indians who collaborated with, and sometimes became, anthropologists. As she wrote, “Ideally, such records would have been made by persons of native ancestry, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries only a tiny handful of such persons became fully literate, and these few tended to be ministers, doctors, or lawyers concentrating upon active use of their professions rather than recording of traditions...” (1981:557). American anthropologists saw it as their obligation to make these records of peoples who could not make their own. Without them there truly would have been “erasure” of the ways indigenous peoples.

The research and writing discussed in this paper was begun in an era of intense anti-Indian activity: wars, displacement, and forced change, but, as Peter Whiteley writes,

“...in the long run, Native American ethnography has been—by no means always consciously—a principal means of subverting the premises of colonial reason rather than one of its tools. Despite its multiple problems—discursive, ethical and interpretive—ethnography has been the most powerful contributor to intercultural knowledge and important philosophical complication the world has ever seen, Ethnography has been an important vehicle to preserve a record of indigenous voices, languages, cultural ideas and practices, and social histories—a primary source for recuperation of past forms that are otherwise simply unavailable, to Native people or others. Contemporary revitalization of native rituals and beliefs has often depended on the published canon or ethnography” (2004:460).

Aside from the value of this work for Indian land claims and other human and civil rights cases, Whiteley adds, “For those who would listen, ethnography as a vehicle for the translation and transmission of serious cultural knowledge has greatly deepened understanding of what it means to be a human being” (460). And this idea has been underlined by such recent books as Charles King’s widely reviewed *Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex and Gender in the Twentieth Century*, and Jack Glazier’s *Anthropology and Radical Humanism: Native and African American Narratives and the Myth of Race*. These works feature Franz Boas and four of his students, Paul Radin, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, and his collaborator, Ella Deloria.

I trust that this brief outline of the first 75 years of anthropology in the United States gives a more realistic idea of its involvement with colonialism and imperialism. Then, as now, an

essential aim of American anthropology was to approach people of other cultures sympathetically so as to gain knowledge for the world and, if possible, to spread understanding and appreciation of others. [18]

However great our knowledge might be, however extensive our collections might prove, we could not comprehend, as would be comprehended at some future time, the full value and significance of either the specimens we were gathering, or especially the facts relating to them and their gathering which we were accumulating; that, in other words, we were not collecting merely for ourselves, but for the future generations! (F. H. Cushing, [1890] in Zedeño 1999:273)

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[2] Pels and Salemink 2000 is sometimes cited as well. For a detailed response see Lewis 2014, Chapter 5, "Imagining Anthropology's History."

[3] Franz Boas wrote to John Dewey, "I object to the teaching of slogans intended to befog the mind..." (FBP:11/6/1939).

[4] I discussed the subject of anthropology and colonialism in my book *In Defense of Anthropology: An Investigation of the Critique of Anthropology* (2014) with its main focus on British anthropology. This paper is an expansion of the portion about American anthropology.

[5] Kennedy, who was murdered while in the field, wrote an article about nationalism and colonialism in Southeast Asia that was important to me. It provided both added understanding and information that helped me develop active opposition to the war in Vietnam. According to Gaddis Smith, "The central theme of his teaching (at Yale) was that 'the caste line of oppression and exploitation, whether in America or the colonies, is a race and color line.'"

[6] Franz Boas to Archer M. Huntington, (FBP:6/1/1905).

[7] Boas, letter to Zelia Nuttall 5/16/1901 in Parmenter 1966:98).

[8] His efforts eventually led to a strong Asian studies presence at Columbia University and the establishment of the Hall of Asian Peoples at the American Museum of Natural History, according to Laurel Kendall, Curator of Asian Ethnography at that institution. (Personal communication.)

[9] A major exception is the involvement of a number of anthropologists with the U.S. Navy in the administration of Pacific islands in the wake of World War II. These had been occupied by Japanese troops before and during the war and retaken by the U.S. This can probably best be thought of as the anthropologists trying to help the islanders survive the ignorance and officiousness of the administrators, but their ability to influence administrative decisions was limited and they often quit in disgust (Falgout 1995). It was also an opportunity for young anthropologists to gain material for their dissertations. This was the time that Micronesia was discovered by such American anthropologists as Homer Barnett (Palau), John Fischer (Truk), Ward Goodenough (Truk), David Schneider (Yap), Melford Spiro (Ifaluk), and Alexander Spoehr (Marshall Islands).

[10] Harvard University had begun awarding Ph.D. degrees at almost the same time but its first two ethnologists, Roland B. Dixon and John Swanton, were both largely trained by Boas.

[11] It is estimated that California's indigenous population was about 310,000 souls in the late 1700s but by 1900, when A. L. Kroeber began his researches only about 15,000 were left (Madley 2016:2).

[12] Samuel J. Redman's new book, *Prophets and Ghosts: The Story of Salvage Anthropology*, is the fullest discussion of the complicated history of salvage both of material objects (museums), language, and ethnography.

[13] Because Powell was driven by the notion that the Indians were losing their languages and aspects of their cultures by the day, he pushed his researchers to collect more and more, forcing them to neglect writing up the results while they gathered more raw material. (See Boas on Albert Gatschet's inability to complete his work [Hinsley 1881:179].)

[14] Lesser concludes his article with his own conclusions. 'The Ghost Dance was not merely a religious revival movement. Its roots lie deep in the gradual cultural destruction which preceded it. Its doctrine and the activities it demanded infused new life into the culture, and constituted instrumentalities for an actual renaissance of the forms of old culture. Along with this renaissance there came into being also new cultural forms, unknown before' (115). Anthropologists were there to document the destruction as well as the cultural transformations. See Lesser's contribution to the subject, *The Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game: Ghost Dance Revival and Ethnic Identity*.

[15] The Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology (for 1914) by the Ethnologist-in-Charge (F. W. Hodge) has an interesting note about the "practical use which musical composers" were "making of the results of Miss Densmore's studies." This was a high point of appreciation (appropriation?) of Indian music and Hodge mentions six composers and four symphony orchestras composing and playing music based on Chippewa and Sioux musical and narrative themes. Presumably the Indian poets and composers did not get royalties, probably not recognition, but we might assume that these efforts

afforded admiration to indigenous cultures that was otherwise rare. The Oneida composer and band conductor Dennison Wheelock did get acknowledgement and respect when his symphonic piece, 'Aboriginal Suite', was played at Carnegie Hall in 1900 (Hauptman 2006).

[16] Each Annual Report begins with an "Administrative Report of the Ethnologist-in-Charge" detailing the researches and other activities of their ethnologists and linguists (nine, in 1914). These are worth reading to see the range of concerns, the remarkable level of activity (at least as reported), and the devotion to scholarship for its own sake. (See, e.g., Thirty-fifth Annual Report.)

[17] A recent example of an article critical of anthropologists is Peter Nelson's 'Where Have All the Anthros Gone? The Shift in California Indian Studies from Research "on" to Research "with, for and by" Indigenous Peoples.'

[18] It is tragic that after 50 years of unremitting "critique," slogans, and "cardboard history" generations of anthropologists have grown up thinking that their predecessors traumatized Indigenous peoples through their attempts to record their lives and explain their common humanity to the rest of the world.