

# That Which Belongs to Us: The Grammar of Possession & Collegiality in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Anthropology

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Any seasoned academic knows: grant-writing is the entire job. Franz Boas was no stranger to this— in a grant proposal to the Council for Research in the Social Sciences, likely dated to late April or early May 1930[1], he “beg[ged] to request that an appropriation of \$3500”[2] (a sum with the modern buying power of \$57,281[3]) be made for an ongoing, seven-year investigation of utmost importance— the “question of the survival of African habits and the attitudes of American Negroes.”[4] He cited previous contributions to the project by his department: Melville Herskovits, in North America and Suriname, Elsie Parsons in the Cape Verde Islands, Manuel Adrade in Santo Domingo, Zora Neale Hurston in Eatonville, Florida, Louisiana and the Bahama Islands. This investigation, he urged, aimed to understand, “the question of the survival of African habits and the attitudes of American Negroes,”[5] to solve “this problem,”[6] that of folkways, of which “even [in] our northern Negroes a good many African habits survive.”[7] A visit to the Guinea Coast, “from which most of our Negro slaves came,”[8] he urged, was indispensable— funding was imperative.

Boas, 72 at the writing of this proposal, is touted as the Father of Modern Anthropology by many (including prolific Harlem Renaissance writer, anthropologist, and Barnard alum Zora Neale Hurston, who fondly called him Papa Franz)[9], [10], [11], [12] for his

theories of cultural relativism— that individual cultures should be understood on their own terms, and not in comparison with Western civilization. During his tenure at Columbia University (1896-1942), Boas founded the first Department of Anthropology in the United States: his so-called impartial progeny that, in the words of Boas himself, “illuminates the social processes of our own times and may show us, if we are ready to listen to its teachings, what to do and what to avoid.”[13] If anthropology, as a discipline, was meant to teach us “what to do and what to avoid,”[14] what is to be made of “this problem” of African cultural survival in the Black communities under study? And, who is implicated in this grant proposal? Note the use of, “our northern Negroes,” “our Negro slaves.” That which belongs to us; ours. Inherent to the language within this grant proposal is a claim of collective ownership over an observed and distanced subject. Inherent to the language within this grant proposal is that collective ownership over this observed and distanced subject is possible at all— person becomes other becomes thing to be owned. The grammar of “our,” paradoxically, also generates a sentiment of unity and responsibility to the thus-possessed noun; ours, as in, those who are ours, and “our” inherited responsibility to them. Where do these conceptions of ownership, of “us” (and consequently, of “them”) come from? Where do they place Zora Neale Hurston, who is cited as a researcher in Boas’s 1930 grant proposal, and who is actively from the communities under investigation?

This paper aims to contextualize the ideological implications of Boas’ 1930 funding proposal for the “Investigation of the Survival of African Influences Among the North American Negro Population.” More specifically, this paper considers and contextualizes the articulation of the “our” within the proposal. To contextualize the “our,” I will contextualize the plural singulars mentioned in the grant proposal: singular individuals, such as Franz Boas and Zora Neale Hurston, who in turn direct us to singular institutions, such as Columbia the College and Columbia the University. I will contextualize the emergence of Anthropology at Columbia University through an against the grain reading of archival material from the Anthropology Department, the Council for Research in the Social Sciences, and the Columbia Spectator, as well as considering the grammar of possession within the doctrines of notable anthropologists of the early nineteenth century.

Ultimately, by attending to this material according to the emergence of the “our,” both possessive and collegial, it becomes apparent that anthropology projected whiteness (or rather, Anglo-Saxonism) as the default cultural setting of the observer, or the anthropologist. Boasian interventions, despite their rejections of the racist conclusions of physical anthropology, still preserved ethnography and anthropometry as valid ways of knowing. Boas was the creator of an anti-racist and culturally relativistic tradition; at the same time, Boasian anthropology perpetuates the ceaseless, inherently violent white gaze and ways of knowing that characterized American physical anthropology in the 18th and 19th century. Then contemporaneous Black scholars (for the purposes of this paper, Zora Neale Hurston and W.E.B. Du Bois) also grappled with these dual realities. Hurston acknowledged, if not praised, the “spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at [her native surroundings]”[15]; Du Bois, while praising the anti-racist work of Boas, critiqued the project of modern anthropology as one deeply enmeshed in American liberalism and anti-Black, anti-Indigenous policymaking. Understanding and contextualizing Boasian anthropology’s claim of ownership over Black bodies, folklore, and traditions, is essential; the ossification of the “our,” and implied white gaze and ways of knowing, of anthropology is concurrent with the professionalization (and continued celebration) of the field not only at Columbia University, but throughout the universities and museums of the United States. As such, we carry these intellectual legacies with us. Us, members of a society integrated with the rhetoric of Boasian anthropology; us, members of the University that begat this intellectual and perceptual violence; it is our legacy, that which belongs to us.

This research falls in the tradition of contemporary indigenous and Black anthropologists. Specifically, the trajectory of this paper mirrors that of Audra Simpson, of Columbia University proper, who considers Franz Boas’ 1911 treatise, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, alongside the anthropological framework laid out of Lewis Henry Morgan’s 1851 work, *The League of the Iroquois*. [16] Just as I consider the conceptual background of the “our” in Boas’ 1930 grant proposal, Simpson considers the discursive move from Morgan’s “our Indian relations” to Boas’ “the indigenous element,” [17] and ultimately argues that this grammatical shift mirrors and maintains narratives of Indigenous dispossession and declensionism, [18] as well as dismisses the breadth of

Indigenous sovereignty. In a similar vein, my project aims to situate and consider the grammar of ownership, of the “our” used in relation to Black bodies and culture, within the context of a burgeoning Anthropology Department, the making of Columbia the University, and coexisting Black scholarship (namely Hurston and Du Bois). This research also works in tangent with a larger body of scholarship that challenges the racial contradictions of American liberalism underscoring anthropology,[19] as well as a larger body of student-led research unearthing the legacies of enslavement in our universities’ departments.[20], [21]

The first section of this paper considers the possessive “our” as it presented in nineteenth-century anthropology in the United States. This first section delves into the subfields of ethnography and physical anthropology. Within each subfield, the following early anthropologists and their seminal works are considered: Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Samuel G. Morton, Josiah Nott, William Ripley, and Livingston Farrand. Since anthropology at Columbia in the nineteenth-century folded under the branch of Political Science, this section will also consider John Burgess and William Dunning. The second section of this paper considers the collegial “our” as it was presented in Boasian anthropology. This second section considers Boas’ *The Mind of Primitive Man*, W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Black Folk: Then and Now*, and Zora Neale Hurston’s research in the South as part of her career within Columbia’s Anthropology Department.

## The Possessive “Our”: Nineteenth-Century Anthropology in the United States

Anthropology in the nineteenth-century United States was marred, if not entirely defined by, its connections to the enslavement of African people and the dispossession forced upon Indigenous peoples. In the nineteenth-century, anthropology was a science dedicated to human classification, race-making, and racial hierarchization, as enforced by the two branches of anthropological knowledge: ethnography and physical anthropology. This section of the paper first considers the precedents of these two ways

of knowing. Then, this section considers the echoes of physical anthropology in the work of John Burgess and William Dunning, and the 1894 course listings within the Political Science Department at Columbia College.

Indigenous people were the primary subjects under the study of ethnography. Such work was often dedicated to understanding the so-called “savage mind”[22] of Indigenous people: their language, their social organization, their culture. Funding for this work was provided by the United States government in large, particularly by the Bureau of Indian Affairs[23] or the Bureau of American Ethnology,[24] as a cornerstone of nineteenth-century policymaking over Indigenous peoples, their cultural patrimony, and their lands. At the heart of this research was the image of the “helpless Indian,” to be “saved” by the civilizing force of white America. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, an “Indian agent” and ethnographer, in his 1811 report to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, urged government intervention on Indigenous sovereignty and patrimony:

“...nothing should, for a moment, divert the government or people, in their appropriate spheres, from offering to these wandering and benighted branches of the human race, however rejected by them, the gifts of education, agriculture, and the gospel.”[25]

The rhetoric of “wandering and benighted branches of the human race,” of a subcategory of people to be salvaged by white civilization, echoed the other branch of anthropology prevalent in the nineteenth-century: physical anthropology. Physical anthropology encompassed tools of pseudoscientific[26] racial measurement, such as anthropometry (the study of the physical measurements of bodies) and phrenology (the study of the physical measurements of crania). The American School, a subgroup of physical anthropologists (or rather physicians, anatomists, and geologists), used anthropometry and phrenology as the basis for polygenism, or the idea that racial variation was caused by a human’s immediate environment, and as such, was evidence for separate human origins and, thus, for separate human species.[27] The logic of polygenism was summed in Samuel G. Morton’s (of the University of Pennsylvania[28]) *Crania Americana*, a volume of so-called scientific analyses of Morton’s collection of human crania (many of them collected as the result of American colonial expansion and military conflicts),[29], [30] and since its publishing in 1839, has been cited as both the

methodological basis of physical anthropology and the ideological basis of scientific racism in the United States. In his introduction, so titled “Varieties of the Human Species,” Morton states:

“The condition of man, under these infinitely varied [geographical] circumstances, is less the effect of coercion than of choice.... the native of the torrid regions of Africa, oppressed by a vertical sun,... thinks no part of the world so desirable and delightful as his own.... The exceptions to this rule are chiefly to be seen in the civilized communities of modern times, in which the spirit of migratory enterprise is without limit.”[31]

In other words, according to Morton and the larger theory of polygenism, human variation (or, the “condition of man”) was explained by “the choice” of geographical circumstance, which for all but the migratory “civilized communities of modern times” (implied to be those of Anglo-Saxon descent), was a fixed decision. He argues “that each Race,” which for Morton are the Caucasian, Mongolian, Malay, American, and Ethiopian Races,[32] “was adapted from the beginning to its peculiar local destination,”[33] as opposed to the monogenic single-origin hypothesis of human evolution that would begin to gain traction with Charles Darwin’s publication of *Descent of Man* in 1871.

The work of the American School— particularly of the theorists Samuel G. Morton, Louis Agassiz (of the predecessor of the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences),[34] and the slaveholding Josiah C. Nott (also of the University of Pennsylvania, as well as founder of the Medical College of Alabama)[35] — directly demanded the continued subjugation of enslaved people, both dead and alive. Samuel G. Morton’s cranial collection,[36] now held by the Penn Museum and in the process of repatriation, includes (among the more than 1,300 human crania) the remains of at least fifty formerly enslaved peoples from Cuba and the United States, and since the passage of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, has repatriated the skeletal remains of at least 266 Indigenous people;[37], [38] Josiah Nott, who specialized in the etiology of yellow fever, published work that “fix[ed] with accuracy the value of life among the colored population”[39] for the supposed monetary benefit of insurance companies in the South.

To the exigence of this work, Nott said, "If the risks upon [the colored] are badly selected, upon whom would fall the losses?... upon the poor, honest, industrious,... unsuspecting man." Using mortality statistics from various Northern and Southern cities (Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, notably) acquired by himself and Gouverneur Emerson (also of the University of Pennsylvania), Nott came to the conclusion that Northern formerly enslaved Africans and African Americans had higher mortality rates than their enslaved counterparts in the South. Nott argued,

"The negro is naturally mild and docile; the Indian, on the contrary, is an untamable, carnivorous animal, which is fading away before civilization, in spite of the efforts of missionaries.... the negro attains his greatest perfection, physical and moral, and also his greatest longevity, in a state of slavery." [40]

Nott not only took as premise the so-called "inevitable demise" of Indigenous populations, but argued that higher mortality rates in Northern cities among formerly enslaved populations were a direct result of emancipation. His blatantly anti-indigenous rhetoric echoes that of Schoolcraft, two decades his predecessor, and predicts the declensionist narrative popularized by later schools of anthropology, including Boasian anthropology. Regarding his latter argument, Nott's editor (in response to this article) more bluntly stated that the condition of the Northern, formerly-enslaved individual "has, so far from improving, sunk lower and lower, beyond measure lower than in any city where the institution of slavery exists." [41] Thus, his editor concludes, "one might think that our friends and fellow-citizens at the North would have enough to do to look after the condition of their own affairs, instead of troubling themselves with ours." [42] While "Statistics of Southern Slave Population" was only a fragment of the work produced by Nott (his most notable being *Types of Mankind*, co-written in 1854 with Egyptologist George Gliddon), it was representative of the overt racism validated by physical anthropology.

Furthermore, though Nott's article (and his editor's subsequent response) was written almost fifteen years before the Civil War, the language used harkens to the Lost Cause revisionist narrative popularized in the postbellum South by organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy [43] and edified by Northern institutions such as

Columbia University itself.[44], [45] At Columbia (and, notably, concurrent to Boas' arrival on campus), figures such as John Burgess (of the eventual Political Science Department) and William Dunning (and his Dunning School of Reconstruction history) popularized such rhetoric. John Burgess, educated within the research-heavy German tradition, was an early advocate of the University; he was also an early advocate of scientific racism and social Darwinism,[46] and in his study of Reconstruction and international politics, he produced a false academic legitimacy for racial hierarchies and the Lost Cause narrative. Burgess' influence at Columbia specifically cannot be understated, as he sat as the Dean of the School of Political Science from 1890 to 1912, and in 1908, sat as the acting President of the College on at least one occasion.[47] Dunning, a further example of Burgess' influence as his student and contemporary at Columbia, also adopted the justification of slavery preceded in Nott's work. In his 1898 *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics*, Dunning argued that "slavery had been a *modus vivendi*," a necessary social contract to assure the coexistence between two otherwise incompatible races.[48] That is, just as Nott argued that slavery reduced the mortality rates and increased the quality of life of African and African Americans, Dunning argued that slavery prevented interracial conflict and chaos; both argued that White enslavers were the truest race moderators, who saved both the enslaved individual and larger society (including the North) from the natural consequences of racial coexistence.

The influence of physical anthropology on Columbia's Political Science department extended to the coursework offered. In 1894, Columbia became the first college in the United States to establish a professorship in sociology, appointing Franklin Giddings to the position.[49], [50] Now considered one of the four founders of American Sociology, Giddings was academically encompassed by the larger School of Political Science, but in the 1894 to 1895 catalog for Courses in Sociology, he insisted that while "the University Faculty of Political Science already offers a wide range of instruction in the cognate branches of social science," the "newly established chair will provide for a thorough study of philosophical or general sociology," with the term sociology specifically referring to the "scientific study of society as a whole, a search for its causes, for the laws of its structure and growth, and for a rational view of its purpose,



function, meaning or destiny.”[51] Gidding’s intellectual emphasis on the causality of social processes was rhetorically similar to Boas’ definition of anthropology that opened this paper,[52] and indeed, anthropology was encompassed in Gidding’s vision of an education in sociology. The courses listed for the 1894 to 1895 academic year were divided into three groups: principal, special, and related courses. The eighth (of eleven) principal courses in sociology was a course on “Physical Geography and Anthropology,” so described:

“This course treats the relation of man to the earth, and the influence of physical environment upon him. The subjects considered are physical geography, science of anthropology, prehistoric archaeology, ethnology, anthropometry, and comparative mythology. Two hours a week: Drs. Ripley and Farrand.”[53]

The 1894 to 1895 course on Physical Geography and Anthropology espoused the principal ways of knowing of nineteenth-century anthropology— namely, ethnology and physical anthropology (as encompassed by anthropometry)— and while the specifics of the lectures are not detailed in the course announcement, the brief details given of the course are worth noting. In the 1894 academic year, anthropology existed at Columbia as a subset of sociology, which was itself a subset of the fledgling School of Political Science. Anthropology, and its methodologies and teachings, were considered viable, principal pursuits towards the answer to Giddings’ question of sociology, of the laws, causes, and structures of society.

In further following the details of this course, this paper also considers the lecturers themselves. William Ripley, who was named in the catalog as an Officer of Instruction and a Lecturer on Physical Geography and Anthropology (while Livingston Farrand was not), lectured at Columbia from 1893 to 1901.[54] Within this time, he authored the book, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study*, which was an outgrowth of these principal lectures at Columbia[55] and originated as “a study of aboriginal societies and cultures,” which then produced “an analysis of the relation of primitive man to his physical environment.”[56] The intellectual focus of his book was not Indigenous people (as in his lectures), and instead, turned its gaze to “Europe— the continent of all others wherein social phenomena have attained their highest and most complex

development.”[57] Ripley considered language, anthropometry and phrenology as indicators of three European races: the Teutonic, Alpine, and Mediterranean.[58] Ripley transplanted anthropological classification systems into the field of sociology for the same race-making purpose. While his primary focus was on his so-claimed races of Europe, he situated the Teutonic, Alpine, and Mediterranean races in comparative terms:

“Slavery also always produces a terrific death rate which vitiates all comparison between the statistics for the white and the negro.... Such an institution exercises a selective choice upon the negro; for the survivors of such severe treatment will generally be a picked lot, which out to exhibit vitality to a marked degree, all the weaklings having been removed.... The European races in their liability to consumption stand midway between the Mongol and the Negro, climatic conditions being equal.”[59]

Ripley does not cite Nott’s “Statistics of Southern Slave Population,” and yet his argument parallels Nott’s study of the vitality of enslaved people and his pseudoscientific argument that slavery ultimately increases the quality of life of those who survive its brutal violences. Furthermore, Ripley’s argument situates slavery as the solution (as carried out by slaveholders) to the “negro problem” of vitality. It is worth noting that this book was published in 1899, thirty-three years post-emancipation. Ripley’s pseudoscientific racial classifications, particularly his descriptions of the Aryan Teutonic race, would later be adopted by eugenicist Madison Grant (who received a degree from Columbia Law in 1890) in his 1916 book *The Passing of The Great Race*, which in turn was referred to as the “Bible” in a letter to Grant by a young Adolf Hitler.[60]

Ripley’s co-lecturer, Livingston Farrand, earned his medical degree at the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1891 and lectured at the School of Political Science from 1893 until 1903, when he was promoted to a full professor of anthropology under Boas. As suggested by his role as lecturer for the 1894 to 1895 Physical Geography and Anthropology course, Farrand was fundamentally a physical anthropologist. From 1897 to 1902, both Farrand and Boas traveled to the Pacific Northwest to study the Indigenous peoples of Siberia, Alaska, and Northwest Canada

with funding from the American Museum of Natural History.[61] Such work encompassed both ethnology and anthropometric measurements of the Tsilhqot'in, Quinault, and Salish peoples, amongst other Native populations.[62] Farrand replicated Boas' measurements as a control,[63] and thus, replicated the exact forms of violence of classification and measurement of Indigenous bodies, both dead and alive. Farrand's involvement with anthropometric research was a direct link between physical anthropology at Columbia before and after Boasian interventions. After leaving his professorship at Columbia in 1914, Farrand became the president of the University of Colorado, from 1914 to 1919. In 1921, he became the fourth president of Cornell University, where in 1929, he declined to intervene on the behalf of Ruth Peyton and Pauline Davis,[64] two women denied housing at Sage College on behalf of their race. In a letter to the mother of Peyton, he insisted that,

"...the placing of a colored student in one of the dormitories inevitably caused more embarrassment than satisfaction for each student... while I have great sympathy for your feeling, I cannot order a change in the procedure of the Dean of Women, under whose jurisdiction the matter falls." [65]

While Farrand and Hurston likely never crossed paths on Columbia's campus (as Farrand left his professorship in 1914 and Hurston did not enroll in the College until 1924), Farrand's refusal to intervene on the behalf of Peyton and Davis was concurrent with a larger trend of dormitory segregation and racial tensions at Northern institutions. Hurston, like Peyton and Davis at Cornell, was ultimately unable to reside at Barnard College, as Black students were denied from Barnard housing until 1969; [66] while this paper does not intend to encompass a larger history of Hurston's day-to-day experience at Barnard, [67] tracing Farrand's legacy at other universities nuances his legacy at ours, specifically within our Anthropology Department.

In considering the grammar of possession, of the "our," in anthropology in the nineteenth-century, certain trends emerge: while the term "our" only appears once in this paper's selected excerpts (in Nott's editor's response, referring to "our friends and fellow-citizens at the North"), [68] language of possession was present throughout. It was present in the explicit race classifications of Morton, Nott, Burgess, and Ripley, by

their qualifications of whom possessed “civilization” and who did not (as in the excerpt from Morton, who claimed migration was “chiefly to be seen in the civilized communities of modern times”).[69] It was also present in the implied positionality of their works: this literature was produced at the crux of academic institutions (especially Columbia), using the human remains of enslaved and Indigenous people (in the case of anthropometry, and the work of Morton, Nott, and Ripley), and with the funding of the U.S. government (in the case of ethnography, and the work of Schoolcraft), by white men deeply entrenched in the active subjugation of human beings (as in the case of Schoolcraft and Nott, who directly owned enslaved people). There are direct references to the very physical possession of other human beings, such as in the arguments of Nott, Dunning, and Ripley, who addressed a white audience about the improved quality of life of their enslaved people. “The negro attains his greatest perfection, physical and moral, and also his greatest longevity, in a state of slavery,”[70] Nott wrote; Ripley argued slavery “exercises a selective choice upon the negro; for the survivors of such a severe treatment will generally be a picked lot.”[71]

Anthropology in the nineteenth-century had two primary objectives (often overlapping), with two primary ways of knowing (often overlapping). Through the use of physical anthropology and ethnography, nineteenth-century anthropologists created stratified hierarchies of race, which in turn were used to justify enslavement and the continued intervention of the United States government upon Indigenous sovereignty and patrimony, as well as to give academic creed and scientific legitimacy to racism.

## The Collegial “Our”: Boasian Interventions in Anthropology, W.E.B. Du Bois, & Zora Neale Hurston

The early September 1899 issue of *Science* included a review of the newly-minted *The Races of Europe* by William Ripley. The reviewer began by commending Ripley:

“The labor and the difficulties involved in a task of this kind are formidable, and the author deserves the thanks of all students for having made easily accessible a vast

amount of scattered literature. He has set forth, with great clearness and in a most fascinating form, certain results obtained by detailed statistical inquiries of great magnitude.”[72]

The reviewer continued, considering Ripley’s purpose (so-identified as “the explanation of the present distribution of human types in Europe”).[73] Then, in his consideration of Ripley’s methodology, the reviewer wrote:

“The ease with which the extremely complex phenomena can be explained... seems to me a reason of weakness of the conclusions set forth by Professor Ripley..”[74]

The reviewer continued to skeptically consider Ripley’s methodology— his mischaracterization of different races, his inadequate analyses of anthropometric data, and his lack of historical (as in, ethnographic) evidence of variation between European people. Furthermore, the reviewer criticized Ripley’s use of racial classification for European variation at all; he noted that the classification of a “race,” should be reserved for “the largest divisions of mankind,” citing the perceived physical differences between what he qualified as the true races: the Europeans, Africans, and Mongols.[75] The reviewer’s indictment of Ripley’s work concluded,

“The omission of all detailed and tabular matter have helped to give the book an attractive and popular form, but it has made it impossible to substantiate adequately any of the theories which the author advocates. It is to be feared that this method may mislead the general reader to believe that physical anthropology has accomplished much more than it actually has done.”[76]

The review was signed off: Franz Boas, or the German anthropologist who had arrived in New York to fill a position at the American Museum of Natural History just four years earlier, and who had joined Columbia in 1896 as a lecturer across the Political Science, Philosophy, and Psychology Departments.[77] This review was exemplary of Boasian interventions upon physical anthropology at Columbia. While this was an early example of the academic interventions Boas would come to be known for, the essence of Boas’ philosophy emanated. As in this review of his colleague, Boas would carefully consider studies using anthropometric data as evidence for racial variation and Anglo-Saxon

superiority, and critique their erroneous methods of analysis. However, these interventions were not intended to discredit these often violent ways of knowing, but rather to redirect them to new directions, which were often racist in their own right. After all, Boas did not outright condemn Ripley in his review of *The Races of Europe*. Rather, Boas insisted physical anthropology had simply not accomplished as much as Ripley led his readers to believe.

Boas' seminal 1911 book, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, was a summation of nineteenth-century anthropology. In an attempt to dispel the scientific racism prolific in the field, Boas utilized both evidence of physical anthropology and ethnography. Since Indigenous scholars such as Audra Simpson[78] have already considered the grammar of possession and dispossession within Boas' *The Mind of Primitive Man*, in this context I will instead consider the collegiality of the "our."

*The Mind of Primitive Man* was a cumulative project. Boas had spent the last two decades of his career unraveling the main topics of the book— racial prejudice, the influence of the environment and heredity upon human variation, the mental traits of different humans, evolution, and racial problems in the United States— throughout various series of lectures and published works, dispersed amongst magazines, accredited journals, and reports to the Immigration Commission of the United States.[79] Indeed, an excerpt that would later be found in his "Race Problems in the United States" chapter,[80] was published in *Science*, no. 752, and reprinted in the November 1909 issue of *The Horizon: A Journal of the Color Line*, a publication edited by W.E.B. Du Bois. Boas, in the reprinted excerpt, referred to the "serious problem presented by the negro population of our country"[81]— for European Americans, the fear of integration and miscegenation; for Black Americans, the problem of perceived inferiority and general inequality. The page excerpt in *The Horizon* included the following reflection,

"I do not believe that the negro is, in his physical and mental make-up, the same as the European. The anatomical differences are so great that corresponding mental differences are plausible. There may exist differences in character and in the direction of specific aptitudes. There is, however, no proof whatever that these differences signify

any appreciable degree of inferiority of the negro, notwithstanding the slightly inferior size, and perhaps lesser complexity of structure, of the brain.”[82]

To note in this excerpt was the room left for uncertainty: the plausibility of mental differences, of the potential existence of differences in characters and aptitudes amongst the “races.” In *The Mind of Primitive Man*, Boas argued, with more certainty, the existence of mental differences between Black and white individuals:

“...we must expect that differences exist. There is, however, no evidence whatever that would stigmatize the negro as of weaker build.... It may be that he will not produce as many great men as the white race... but there will be endless numbers who will be able to outrun their white competitors, and who will do better than the defectives whom we permit to drag down and to retard the healthy children of our public schools.”[83]

While the language in *The Mind of Primitive Man* was more evocative than the excerpt in *The Horizon* (particularly regarding the ableist references to the “defectives” who “retard the healthy children of our public schools”), the excerpt reprinted in Du Bois’ journal was argumentatively similar. Boas iterates a logic of different, but equal; a logic of Black exceptionalism amongst mediocrity as the solution to the problem of inequality. While the “our,” of either possession or collegiality, does not explicitly appear in the early version of *The Mind of Primitive Man* excerpted in *The Horizon*, that it was excerpted in *The Horizon* at all suggests a form of at least intellectual collegiality between Du Bois and Boas.

W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the twentieth century’s leading Black intellectual activists entrenched in the traditions of sociology as well as in civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), first met Boas when he asked the Columbia professor to deliver a speech and commencement address at his Atlanta University Conference on Health and Physique of the Negro.[84] In his 1939 essay, *Black Folk: Then and Now*, Du Bois wrote that Boas’ address to the Conference prompted a realization of “how the silence and neglect of science can let truth utterly disappear or even be unconsciously distorted,”[85] and how an “Encyclopaedia of the Negro,” a recount of “the verifiable history and social condition of

the Negro race,” was imperative to getting to the “truth of history,” which laid “in the calm Science that sits between.”[86] Indeed, after the Atlanta Conference, Du Bois repeatedly called upon Boas again as a source of the Truth of Science: Boas was featured in the aforementioned November 1909 *The Horizon* issue; again, he was called upon in May 1910 to present his lecture at NAACP’s Second National Negro Conference (the lecture was later published in Du Bois’ other publication, *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*);[87] and in February 1929, Du Bois corresponded with Boas, asking for the results of his study about “intelligence testing among Negroes,” and requesting future articles from Boas for *The Crisis*. [88]

Despite this intellectual fellowship between Boas and Du Bois, in *Black Folk: Then and Now*, Du Bois criticized the legacies of subjugation perpetuated by modern anthropology. In the context of specifically anthropological studies done on the African continent, he wrote,

“...it is on the whole to the discredit of these sciences that they have so easily loaned themselves to manipulation as servants of administration. Anthropology in recent years has been called upon, not so much to state the truth and lay down reasonable ideals of development, as to tell the administration what scientific paths it may follow as to keep peace with the natives and appease public opinion at home. And especially has it joined the administration in discrediting the educated African and belittling his co-operation in science and in social development.”[89]

Du Bois’ criticism of modern anthropology harkens the grammar of possession of nineteenth-century anthropology. Just as ethnographic studies, such as those by Schoolcraft, were funded by the United States government as an element of policy making over Indigenous peoples, Du Bois suggested that modern anthropology perpetuated cycles of administrative oppression, so justified by the legitimacy of these “scientific paths.” In this regard, this was an instance of “ours,” the possessive. Those who belong to us; those who the administration has political and social control over.

In a return to the possible collegial “our,” the relational “our” in Boas’ 1930 grant proposal could have been understood as a reference to the fellowship between Boasian



anthropology and Black intellectualism in the twentieth-century, as represented by the fellowship between Boas and Du Bois. However, this interpretation of the collegial “our,” was nuanced with Du Bois’s reflections on his own positionality. In the preface to *Black Folks: Then and Now*, Du Bois wrote, “I do not for a moment doubt that my Negro descent and narrow group culture have in many cases predisposed me to interpret my facts too favorably for my race.”[90] Du Bois saw himself in his work, and though his work was in the field of sociology, as elaborated in the previous section of this paper, the disciplines of sociology and anthropology intermixed in their American origins.

Zora Neale Hurston’s reflections on her own positionality as an anthropologist contradict Du Bois’. In the introduction to her 1935 ethnographic book about her research in Florida (including her hometown of Eatonville), Louisiana, and the Bahamas, so-titled *Mules and Men*, she stated,

“When I pitched headforemost into the world I landed in the crib of negroism.... But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn’t see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that.”[91]

Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama. She would later claim she was born in Eatonville, Florida, a place she described as a “pure Negro town— charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all.”[92] The daughter of two formerly enslaved people, she described herself as the Zora of the Black community that raised her— “everybody’s Zora.”[93] In her youth, she earned an associate degree from Howard University, and in 1925, she moved North to attend Barnard College at the bequest and funding of its founder, Annie Nathan Meyer.[94] At Barnard, she was denied housing at the women’s residence and was one of the few Black students on campus (her notable contemporary being her friend and colleague, Langston Hughes).[95] At Barnard, “against a sharp white background,” she felt “most colored... ‘Beside the waters of the Hudson,’ [she felt] her race.”[96]

During her time at Barnard, Hurston was a student of anthropology, and as such, a student of Boas. Hurston, who began her studies at Barnard in the Fine Arts, Economics, and Anthropology departments, had a “term paper called to the attention of Dr. Franz Boas,”[97] and thus was embraced by Boas’ then-established Anthropology Department. There, she was taught the tools of anthropometry (“I am being trained for Anthropometry and Dr. Herskovitch [sic] is calling me at irregular intervals to do measuring,” Hurston wrote to Meyer in 1926),[98] tools of which she practiced on the heads of her Harlem neighbors.[99] In 1928, two weeks before her graduation from Barnard College, Boas sent for Hurston: “I was to go South and collect Negro folklore.”[100] This request came in the context of Boas’ larger investigations into the “negro problem,” so described in the much later 1930 grant proposal. From 1927 to 1932, under the direction of Columbia’s Anthropology Department but under the funding of her patron and the New York socialite Charlotte Osgood Mason (so referenced in Boas’ 1930 grant proposal as “fund provided from other sources”),[101] Hurston embarked on her ethnographic research with her “spy-glass of Anthropology.” Despite her later claim that this spy-glass allowed her to, “see [herself] like somebody else and stand off and look at [her] garment” of race, in a letter postmarked from Eatonville to Langston Hughes, she wrote of her difficulties of impartiality:

“I have to rewrite a lot as you can understand. For I not only want to present the material with all the life and color of my people, I want to leave no loop-holes for the scientific crowd to rend and tear us.”[102]

Note the collegiality of “my” people used by Hurston, in reference to the Black citizens of Eatonville, her hometown, and their folklore and their bodies (as she also collected anthropometric data as part of her research). Further, note the grammatical distance between Zora Neale Hurston, as the writer of this personal correspondence to Hughes, as a part of the “us” but not necessarily a part of the “scientific crowd.” Boas himself would acknowledge the power of Hurston’s positionality. In the preface to her book *Mules and Men*, he wrote, “It is the great merit of Miss Hurston’s work that she entered into the homely life of the southern Negro as one of them.”[103]

Hurston perfectly encapsulated the problem of the “our” in Boas’ grant proposal. She both saw herself as part of those she studied (“my people,” she told Hughes), and outside of them entirely (with the impartial “spy-glass of Anthropology”). The “our” in the case of Hurston was both collegiate and exclusive: Hurston was both part of the “scientific community” and the Black Americans she researched, and also not a part of either. This nuanced relational grammar was contextualized by the history of the field of anthropology, especially at Columbia, and its grammar of possession. Of course, it was not Hurston who used the grammar of “ours” in Franz Boas’ funding proposal for the “Investigation of the Survival of African Influences Among the North American Negro Population.” However, as Hurston was cited mere paragraphs before the mention of “our northern Negroes,” “our Negro slaves,” Hurston’s positionality is crucial in understanding the grammatical reasoning behind the “our.”

## Conclusions

This paper did not fully consider Boasian intellectual interventions in the context of nineteenth-century anthropology. Instead, I gave space for W.E.B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston, two black scholars deeply intertwined with Boasian anthropology. Du Bois, in his interactions with Boas, utilized Boasian anthropology as a tool of activism, and yet, acknowledged its perpetuation of possession, especially in the hands of “the administration.” Hurston, as an anthropologist directly trained under Boas, grappled with both the possessive and collegial nature of the grammar of the “our.” Of course, neither Hurston nor Du Bois authored the grant proposal with the critical mentions of “our northern Negro,” “our Negro slaves.” However, both of their interactions with Boasian interventions demonstrate the shift between the strictly possessive “our” of nineteenth-century anthropology (espoused by Schoolcraft, Morton, Nott, Dunning, Burgess, Ripley, and Farrand) to the plausible fellow “our” of Boasian (arguably Du Boisian and Hurstian) anthropology. While Boasian anthropology was often touted as a complete, anti-racist remaking of anthropology from the nineteenth century, as revealed by the grammar of the “ours” within the seminal works of anthropologists from both the

nineteenth- and twentieth-century, the shifts were gradual (not revolutionary) and done by what we would consider now “native” anthropologists, or anthropologists from the communities they studied.

Continued consideration and research into the history of anthropology, especially at Columbia and especially with connections to the afterlives of enslavement, is crucial. Much work is to be done in the years immediately following the arrival of Boas at Columbia and the professionalization of anthropology in 1902, with the founding of the Anthropology Department at Columbia University. Regardless, this project has uncovered the violent rhetoric of Columbia’s early anthropologists— Dunning, Burgess, Ripley, and Farrand— and considered the complicated relationship between the field and its early anthropologists of color— at Columbia, namely Zora Neale Hurston.

## Endnotes

[1] While the original proposal is undated, the reply acknowledging the subsequent approval of funding is dated to May 10, 1930. Unnamed secretary to Franz Boas, May 10, 1930. Columbia Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

[2] Franz Boas to the Council for Research in the Social Sciences, late April/early May 1930, "Investigation of the Survival of African Influences Among the Northern American Negro Population," 2. Columbia Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

[3] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "CPI Inflation Calculator: May 1930 to October 2021."

[4] Boas to the Council for Research in the Social Sciences, "Investigation of the Survival of African Influences," 1.

[5] Ibid., 1-2.

[6] Ibid., 1.

[7] Ibid., 1.

[8] Ibid., 1.

[9] Zora Neale Hurston to Ruth Benedict, December 4, 1933, in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. Carla Kaplan. (New York: Random House, 1996), 219.

[10] Zora Neale Hurston to Edwin Embree, December 29, 1934, in *Hurston: Letters*, ed. Kaplan., 255

[11] Zora Neale Hurston to Melville Herskovits, April 15, 1936, in *Hurston: Letters*, ed. Kaplan., 291.

[12] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (New York: HarperCollins, 1942), 129, 133.

[13] Franz Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1932), 2.

[14] Ibid., 2.

[15] Zora Neale Hurston, *Of Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1935), 1.

[16] Audra Simpson, "Why White People Love Franz Boas; or, The Grammar of Indigenous Dispossession," in *Indigenous Visions: Rediscovering the World of Franz Boas*, eds. Ned Blackhawk and Isaiah Lorado Wilner (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 166.

[17] Ibid., 167-168.

[18] A narrative so described by Simpson as, "a story about Indigenous culture loss and demographic weakness necessitating Boas's salvage of those whose displacement he pretends is inevitable," in *ibid.*, 167.

[19] See, Mark Anderson, *From Boas to Black Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

[20] At Columbia, see, Amy Rupert, "Race Science at Columbia University in the Early 20th Century" (2019); Caroline Jobson, "Sims Invents the Speculum | I Invent the Wincing" (2018); Tommy Song, "William Archibald Dunning: Father of Historiographic Racism, Columbia's Legacy of Academic Jim Crow" (2017), Nicholas Hallock, "An 'Apostle of Reaction' on the Hudson Shore."

[21] Carson Eckhard. "Fall 2018 Report," *The Penn Slavery Project Fall 2018 Report*.

[22] A phrase most frequently used by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Also, worthy of note: Schoolcraft's second marriage was to the southerner and slaveholder, Mary Howard, who herself published the novel *The Black Gauntlet*, a pro-enslavement and reactionary anti-Tom narrative.

[23] As is the case of Schoolcraft's *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1857).

[24] Originally established in 1879, this Bureau worked in conjunction with the Smithsonian and produced annual reports on the “practical value in the administration of Indian affairs” in remedying the “inevitable conflict that arises from the spread of civilization over a region previously inhabited by savages.” J.W. Powell, “Introductory,” in *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), xi-xv.

[25] Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information*, viii.

[26] Such work has been proven time and again to be unfounded. Given the histories of racism and violence such pseudoscience has produced, I purposefully refer to such work as “pseudoscience.”

[27] Adam Dewbury. “The American School and Scientific Racism in Early American Anthropology,” in *Histories of Anthropology Annual*, vol. 3 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 121.

[28] Eckhard. “Fall 2018 Report,” 2.

[29] Michael Weisberg, “Remeasuring Man,” in *Evolution & Development*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2014), 166-178.

[30] Pamella Geller, “Building Nation, Becoming Object: The Bio-Politics of the Samuel G. Morton Crania Collection,” in *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 54, iss. 1 (2020), 52-70.

[31] Samuel G. Morton, “Introductory Essay: On the Varieties of the Human Species,” in *Crania Americana* (Philadelphia; London: J. Dobson; Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1839), 1.

[32] *Ibid.*, 5-6.

[33] *Ibid.*, 3.

[34] “Louis Agassiz,” Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, <https://eps.harvard.edu/louis-agassiz>.

[35] *Ibid.*, 2.

[36] While this paper does not attempt to grapple with Columbia's own collection of the dead, such work has been done about the George S. Huntington Anatomical Collection. Now housed at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., the collection is an accumulation resulting from Huntington's professorship at the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University, from 1893 to 1921. See, Adam N. Zimmer, "More Than the Sum Total of Their Parts: Restoring Identity by Recombining a Skeletal Collection with Its Texts," in *Bioarchaeological Analyses and Bodies*, ed. P.K. Stone. (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 49-69.

[37] *Ibid.*, 11.

[38] "Morton Cranial Collection," Penn Museum, <https://www.penn.museum/sites/morton/>.

[39] Josiah C Nott. "Article I– Statistics of Southern Slave Population: With Especial Reference to Life Insurance," in *The Commercial Review of the South and West*, vol. 4 no. 3 (New Orleans: American Periodicals Series II, 1847), 275.

[40] *Ibid.*, 280.

[41] *Ibid.*, 292.

[42] *Ibid.*, 292.

[43] Teaching Hard History, Correcting History: Confederate Monuments, Rituals and the Lost Cause – w/ Karen Cox, Learning for Justice: Southern Poverty Law Center, podcast audio.

[44] Nicholas Hallock, "An 'Apostle of Reaction' on the Hudson Shore: John W. Burgess, Reconstruction, and the Birth of the American University," in *Columbia University & Slavery Student Research* (2017).

[45] Tommy Song, "William Archibald Dunning: Father of Historiographic Racism, Columbia's Legacy of Academic Jim Crow," in *Columbia University & Slavery Student Research* (2015).



[46] Hallock, "An Apostle of Reaction' on the Hudson Shore," in Columbia University & Slavery Student Research.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] "A Brief History of Sociology at Columbia University." Columbia University Department of Sociology, 15 December 2021, <https://sociology.columbia.edu/content/brief-history-sociology-columbia-university>

[50] "Franklin H. Giddings, Professor in Sociology," Columbia Spectator, 23 February 1894, 147.

[51] Courses in Sociology Announcement for 1894-1895, 1894-1895, Box 49, Folder 2, Historical Subject Files 1870s-2018, Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library, 1.

[52] Boas, Anthropology and Modern Life, 2.

[53] Courses in Sociology Announcement, 1894-1895, Box 49, Folder 2, 1.

[54] Ibid., 2.

[55] William Ripley, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1899; reprint, Johnson Reprint Co., 1965), v.

[56] Ibid., v.

[57] Ibid., v.

[58] Ibid., xii-xii.

[59] Ibid., 564-565.

[60] Johannes Burgers, "Max Nordau, Madison Grant, and Racialized Theories of Ideology," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 72, no. 1 (2011), 139.

[61] "Farrand, Livingston 1867-1939." American Museum of Natural History Research Library, 15 December 2021, [https://data.library.amnh.org/archives-authorities/id/amnhp\\_1000681](https://data.library.amnh.org/archives-authorities/id/amnhp_1000681)

[62] Franz Boas and Livingston Farrand, "Physical Characteristics of the Tribes of British Columbia," in Northwest Anthropological Research Notes, vol. 8, no.1&2, (originally published 1889, reprint 1974), 628.

[63] Ibid., 628.

[64] R.C. Peyton to Livingston Farrand, July 18, 1929. Black Women at Cornell, 15 December 2021, [https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/earlyblackwomen/challenge/challenge\\_5.html](https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/earlyblackwomen/challenge/challenge_5.html)

[65] Livingston Farrand to R.C. Peyton, July 22, 1929. Black Women at Cornell, 15 December 2021, [https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/earlyblackwomen/challenge/challenge\\_6.html](https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/earlyblackwomen/challenge/challenge_6.html)

[66] Elvita Dominique, "Negotiating Integration: Black Women at Barnard, 1968-1974," in Jumpin' at the Sun: Reassessing the Life and Work of Zora Neale Hurston, vol. 3 no.2 (2005), 7.

[67] Such research has, however, been done by Citlalli Contreras Sandoval, "Open and Closed Doors at the University: Two Giants of the Harlem Renaissance," Columbia University & Slavery Student Research, 2019.

[68] Nott, "Statistics of a Southern Slave Population," 292.

[69] Morton, "On the Varieties of Human Species," 1.

[70] Nott, "Statistics of Southern Slave Population," 275.

[71] Ripley, The Races of Europe, v.

[72] Franz Boas. "Review of The Races of Europe," in Science, vol. 10, no. 244 (1899), 292.

[73] Ibid., 293

[74] Ibid., 293

[75] Ibid., 294.

[76] Ibid., 296

[77] "Departments Reorganized: Changes in the Division of Philosophy and Psychology," *Columbia Spectator*, 11 March 1902, 3.

[78] Simpson, "Why White People Love Franz Boas,"

[79] Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1911), vi.

[80] Ibid., 268.

[81] Franz Boas, "Race Problems in America," in *The Horizon: The Journal of the Colored Line*, vol. 5, no. 1 (November 1909), 10. From the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts.

[82] Ibid., 10.

[83] Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, 273.

[84] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Folk: Then and Now*, (New York: Oxford University Press [reprint], 2007), xxxi.

[85] Ibid., xxxi.

[86] Ibid., xxxii.

[87] Franz Boas, "The Real Race Problem," in *The Crisis: A Record the Darker Races*, vol. 1, no. 2 (December 1910), 22-25.

[88] W.E.B. Du Bois to Franz Boas, February 13, 1929. In the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[89] Du Bois, *Black Folk*, 183.

[90] *Ibid.*, xxxii.

[91] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1935 [reprint]), 1.

[92] Hurston, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, 13.

[93] Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," in *The World Tomorrow* (May 1928).

[94] Sandoval, "Open and closed Doors at the University: Two Giants of the Harlem Renaissance," *Columbia University & Slavery Student Projects*, (2019).

[95] *Ibid.*

[96] Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me."

[97] Hurston, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, 129.

[98] Zora Neale Hurston to Annie Nathan Meyer, Spring 1926?, in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. Carla Kaplan. (New York: Random House, 1996), 62.

[99] Zora Neale Hurston to Melville Herskovits, July 20, 1926, in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. Carla Kaplan. (New York: Random House, 1996), 66.

[100] Hurston, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, 130.

[101] Boas to Council for Research, "Investigation of the Survival of African influences," 1.

[102] Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, April 30, 1929, in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. Carla Kaplan. (New York: Random House, 1996), 109.

[103] Franz Boas, "Preface," in *Mules and Men*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1935 [reprint]), xiii.

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