

Chapter Title: Why White People Love Franz Boas; or, The Grammar of Indigenous Dispossession

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Book Title: Indigenous Visions

Book Subtitle: Rediscovering the World of Franz Boas

Book Editor(s): Ned Blackhawk, Isaiah Lorado Wilner

Published by: Yale University Press. (2018)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt22h6qn7.11>

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Chapter 7 Why White People Love Franz Boas; or, The Grammar of Indigenous Dispossession

Audra Simpson

Our Indian relations, from the foundation of the Republic to the present moment, have been administered with reference to the ultimate advantage of the government itself.

Lewis Henry Morgan, *The League of the Iroquois*, 1851

In the composition of *our* people, the indigenous element has never played an important rôle, except for very short periods.

Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, 1911

THE MIND OF CIVILIZED MAN

This essay considers the significance of Boas's treatise on race and culture, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, attending to the text through a reading of its articulation of social ideals and their theoretical and political implications. Such a reading helps us see that Boas's work of 1911 was far from the revolutionary or paradigm-shifting text it has been hailed as.¹ Instead, a set of conclusions emerge that require further conceptual and political attention, particularly regarding the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Indeed, reading the text alongside the anthropological framework that Boas intended it to supplant—Lewis Henry

Morgan's social evolutionist ordering of the world's peoples—one sees that the nineteenth-century cultural hierarchy Morgan envisioned continued to inform subsequent theories of difference.

Rather than liberating Indigenous people from colonialism *The Mind of Primitive Man* erases indigeneity. It establishes a dualistic binary regarding the value of cultural and bodily differences and their presumed vitality and value as well as their suitability for state and settler absorption. Its political use, then, remains in keeping a particular political order intact. Crucial to uncovering the political supposition of absorption that serves in this book as an unquestioned virtue is Boas's presumption of the sturdiness of precise differences between peoples, differences defined through notions of decline and flourishing as well as demographic and statistical notions of bodily and cultural integrity. Such integrity becomes a form of evidence in Boas's book, creating a line of argumentation that leads one to think about who will live and who will die within a new political state: who will be worthy of salvage, sympathy, and, ultimately, incorporation—enfranchisement and equality.

The presumed inevitability of Indigenous decline and disappearance is present throughout Boas's thinking. This declensionist narrative—a story about Indigenous culture loss and demographic weakness necessitating Boas's salvage of those whose displacement he pretends is inevitable—seems rather remarkable, coming as it does from an ethnographer and linguist who spent considerable time with Native people, living and dead.² Such a view is thus far from a break with the past. Boas, like his anthropological predecessor Morgan, worked in concert with a settler state that sought to disappear Indian life and land in order to possess that land and absorb that difference into a normative sociopolitical order.³

“OUR”

Boas and Morgan both enjoy a central place in American anthropology. Each is seen as a progenitor of the current discipline. Each deserves critical, genealogical, and political contemplation. Moreover, each laid the groundwork for an American variant of anthropology that lives within the present, either in a disavowed but nonetheless living form (Morgan) or in a celebrated form (Boas). No matter what the gravitational pull of each is, both are central figures in American anthropology, and both, as evidenced by the epigraphs to this essay taken from key works by them, are directly concerned not only with the study of culture but also with the lives of Native people—constructed by Morgan as “our Indian relations” and by Boas as “the indigenous element.”

By the time of their scholarly recognition, both Morgan and Boas had published articles and monographs that catalogued or documented various forms of Indian life. Some of their works were considered groundbreaking in the study of Indigenous life and culture. Each had become an advocate, of a sort, for his ethnological and ethnographic subjects—thus, the possessive pronoun underscored in the epigraphs was also, in the mind of its writer, a form of advocacy. However, the discursive move from “peoples” to “element” in these quotations charts a larger political process that maintains structuring presuppositions of property, of ownership, and of inheritance (as culture, as difference). Both Morgan and Boas maintain the allegory and the structure of *possession* to make such claims and require that culture and difference be defined as something like, or equivalent to, property.⁴

It is this claim of ownership, not in *relation to* but *over* people in the first epigraph, and in distance but presumed *with* place, over people (as possessions) in the second epigraph, that helps us see the shared world of assumptions from which both remarks developed: both are claims of possession fundamentally in accord with the state these men and their anthropologies were in.

What do I mean by “state”? Quite literally, the conceptual and political state in which these enunciations were made, states that are connected to the writing and thinking that the two authors were engaged in. Anthropology is sometimes still hard-pressed to consider the political contexts of theorization and writing, but scholars have thought very explicitly about the political consequences of knowledge and, in particular, of writing.⁵ *The Mind of Primitive Man* invites such interrogation. But its self-conscious efforts to demolish racist assumptions reside within a larger context that accounts for its possibility and its findings. So, what is the context for this book, especially in relation to Morgan’s work? More specifically, what is the context for the ideation that Boas and Morgan put forth? Here I want to center the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples in what is now the United States, Canada, and the Arctic as the critical context for these enunciations, as the context for the further science to which they contributed. Such dispossession makes possible not only the conditions for their science, but also for *settler states*, that is, states predicated upon the active and ongoing dispossession of Indian people from land and life. Anthropology has served to mark such difference within that political frame.

Patrick Wolfe has argued that the settler variant of colonialism is a “structure not an event,” and this intervention, which has impacted thinking about the temporality and form of colonialism, has its place in the architecture of this argument. Yet anthropologists, who were part of this structure, exhibited a blind spot with regard to the critical context of their regional or local “investigations.”

They elided settler state formation from their studies, instead focusing, especially in the Boasian moment, on what was being lost: “culture.” Boas’s ethnological move was to break into a locality and gesture toward meaning—to imagine that the forms of life he studied and witnessed were, indeed, different, driven by their own logic, that they should be understood in their own terms, and that they could not be judged (or ranked, as Morgan would have it) but ought to be explained by recourse to a preexisting cultural world.⁶ Yet what was being lost was not culture but land—Indian land, and lots of it.

MORGAN AND BOAS

We are reminded at every anniversary of Boas’s—his death, his birth, his books (see, for example, the occasion that led to this book)—that he is significant. Part of that significance lies in the unstated and stated move away from Morgan’s approach—the way in which “culture” could theoretically have life beyond an ethnological grid and then, normatively, should be understood in its own terms. Boas’s significance is measured by his hands-on ethnographic work with the difference that he documents, and its departure from Morgan’s evolutionary sequence of geographic and temporal difference, each people belonging to a temporal type, read through material objects, economics, political density, and so on.⁷

Boas, according to the reigning interpretation, reshaped an American version of the field.⁸ He moved away from Morgan’s evolutionary scale, and he stood up against scientific and racist orthodoxy in scholarly and popular texts. His linguistic science proliferated a reconstruction of the notion of culture itself, and he labored to institutionalize his model of anthropology through vanguard students who became notable scholars and public intellectuals. He took political stands in public and scholarly forums. His approach and his scholarship, in short, thoroughly reshaped anthropological theory and method, a development that manifested itself in the establishment of the first Department of Anthropology in the United States, at Columbia University.

Because of this significance, it may seem odd to think about Boas in terms of what predates him, of that which precipitates or perhaps anticipates him. We know from *The Mind of Primitive Man* that at the very least Boas took a range of presumptions—craniology as an indicator of intellectual capacity, for example—and revealed them to be unscientific, thus false. But are there deeper commonalities between Boas and Morgan? And can we use them not only to see how Indigenous peoples are perceived but also, to a certain extent, how they perceive themselves and push back against expectations?

Morgan's master ethnography, *The League of the Iroquois*, predates Boas's first collection of a people's tales, *Chinook Texts* (1894), by forty-three years. Just as Boas's book was the work of the Chinook storyteller Charles Cultee, Morgan relied upon the lineage and the knowledge of Ely S. Parker, a condoled Seneca Chief ("Donehogowa") who provided Morgan with much of the data for his book—so much that Morgan inscribed the book as "a product of their joint researches." This collaboration resulted in a procedural account of Iroquois history, material culture, and ceremony, one that encodes a revivalist tradition—Karihwi:io, the "Good Message" of Handsome Lake—as the paradigmatic version of ceremony and, by virtue of its iconic status, a form of traditional culture. Philip Deloria and Scott Michaelsen have assessed the relationship of Morgan and Parker. Deloria located Morgan's desire to understand the Iroquois within a white male masculinity that feared its own decline amid the waning influence of the industrial Northeast, the "closing" of the West, and thus the closing of opportunities to create oneself through bodily violence.⁹ These concerns belong, in Wolfe's terms, to "the settler complex": the settler seeks to establish roots and to indigenize such roots where ancestries are lacking.¹⁰

For Morgan the manufacture of roots, of ownership, began in Aurora, New York, with his discovery of arrowheads that required explanation, explanation that would find answers through the practice of "playing Indian." Such play became impersonation and hobbyist practice, which in turn morphed into amateur science once Morgan and Ely Parker began to share information and Morgan gained access to the Seneca community of Tonawanda. Morgan became linked with the family of Parker—his sister, Carrie, and his brother Nicholson—who also provided Morgan with information on Iroquois history as well as material and symbolic culture.¹¹

Morgan's early work with the Iroquois occurred within the maelstrom of unambiguous settler force exercised through the law. When he met Morgan, Parker was attempting to reverse the Buffalo Creek Treaty, which in 1838 had dispossessed the Tonawanda band of the Seneca in favor of the Ogden Land Company, laying the groundwork for the removal of the Tonawanda to the West. The Seneca pointed out that this treaty was signed illegally, without the consent of the Seneca, and was thus in violation of Iroquois diplomatic protocols. At the age of twenty, Parker was "raised up" as a condoled chief to fight against the treaty. Bilingual and coming from a chiefly line, he gave testimony in the US Senate and in the courts. His work with Morgan on *The League of the Iroquois* was partly motivated by this attempt to maintain Seneca sovereignty and prevent the removal of his people from their home.¹²

Much changed in anthropology between Morgan's *League* and Boas's *Chinook Texts*, and these changes are not only theoretical but also historical and structural: the US Civil War, the "settlement" and dispossession of Indigenous territory via law in the United States, the legislative apex of federal Indian law known as the Dawes Act of 1887, the Indian Act of Canada in 1876, the opening of the Bureau of Ethnology in 1879, the outlawing of the potlatch in 1884 in Canada, the popularization of scientific racism from the 1850s on, and the "closing" of the (American) frontier—in short, the geographic formalization of the settler status of the nation-state with its attendant race-based "immigration." These processes contextualize Morgan's and, later, Boas's inquiries. It is only *because* of these processes that their inquiries could take place.

One need look only to the present to find the ways in which these precepts have moved through time. My ethnographic engagements and commitments are to the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke. These cross-border Indigenous nationals refuse the techniques of settler governance (the "gift" of citizenship, for example) and articulate their forms of self-governance and nationhood within a biopolitical state of care that has geopolitical designs on Iroquois territory. The ongoing dispossession of Indians from land and life in Canada cannot be excised from a discussion of Morgan's legacy. As the people I work with traverse the international boundary line between the United States and Canada, they deal with two settler states predicated upon their consent, upon their disappearance, upon access to their territory and to the stark, structural, and historical process that Wolfe has described as "elimination."¹³

Wolfe distinguishes the settler colonial goal of Native elimination from genocide, in which the goal is the erasure of a people, by highlighting the settler's territorial imperative.¹⁴ All Indians have to do is be Indians to ensure that settlers will attempt to eliminate them, for to be Indian is to be defined materially, in relation to a stretch of territory, and thus to be in the way. In Wolfe's critical formulation, settler colonialism seeks to destroy in order to replace and does so in a bid for territory—settler colonialism's "irreducible element."¹⁵ This is its grammar, its organizing principle. "The Native" then, must be eliminated, for Native people are always in the way. Their land is what is desired, not their labor, not their souls.

The effect of this state project on the people I work with at Kahnawà:ke is not only a radically depleted land base. With territories historically throughout the Mohawk Valley and a recognized influence upon the formation of all eastern North American colonial and national spheres, Iroquois, or Haudenosaunee, communities now live on fourteen reservations in the United States and Canada—a radical reduction of their historic territory. The people I work with

live on a fraction of their own original seigniorial grant. My work assesses the challenges of formulating tribal membership on such a radically depleted land base, amid a scene of dispossession, within a reservation that is located on traditional territory but whose people simultaneously traverse two settler states to work and live in accordance with their sovereign imperatives in their land base.

Like all Indians in what is now the United States and Canada, Mohawks were reframed as populations to be managed rather than nations to be treated with. Contemporary Mohawk citizens thus work to articulate their sovereignty and nationhood against techniques of dispossession, which include racialized forms of recognition that issue from the geopolitical project of settler sovereignty. State-articulated classifications of reservation membership limit the numbers of people that are recognized as Indian via regimes of gendered and raced management. Such regimes also limit the land that Indians can lawfully possess. Even such legal possession is not substantive, as it is simply the “right to reside” on land “held for your use and benefit.”

This biopolitical regime of recognition arose at the same time that an anthropological regime of knowledge cemented itself in museums and in the annual reports published by the Bureau of American Ethnology. In the representations disseminated by these reports, Mohawks are *known* in a particular way: as people organized into clans, as “Romans of the Forest,” as this continent’s first Democracy, not to mention the many other highly laudatory assemblages of cultural difference that have circulated in anthropological and popular discourse on Indians. These marks of laudatory difference are predicated upon an ethnological trope that is common to both Morgan and Boas: the wonder of complexity that delights the observer who greets those presumed to be fundamentally *savage* and finds instead the surprisingly civil.

Morgan and his followers in Iroquois studies have bequeathed to his successors, including Boas, such concepts and forms. This is a vexed legacy, a strange laurel, like a backhanded compliment but on a much larger scale and with far more serious consequences. The people I work with, who are unambiguously Iroquois and who know themselves as such, fail gloriously at being classical Iroquois. Generally, I would argue that the entire “gens” of Iroquois are anthropological classics no more. And perhaps they never were. The classic texts made them appear so through categorizing, storytelling, and through the phantasm of expectation that governed their apprehension. Such frames became distilled into the procedural: what could be seen—law; kin; apparent, unambiguous, and graspable “culture.” Or what would become culture.

Morgan’s love of hierarchy, the evolutionary infrastructure of his work, established expectations that most Indians would fail, particularly within his

evolutionary stages of Upper Savagery and Barbarism. Morgan anticipated that his Iroquois subjects could climb above their present conditions and, with the help of his advocacy, enter the colonizer's imaginary as whitened citizens of the modern West. Citizenship would adjudicate the tensions he saw between the noble savage and the actually barbaric.¹⁶ But those who were most enmeshed with colonial economies were impossible to fit into such neatly arranged categories of identity. These include the Kahnawà:ke Mohawks of the nineteenth century and also of today.

ORDER AND INSIGNIFICANCE

What are the stakes of Morgan's concept of Indigenous perfection, and what has this done to the politics and possibilities of Native lives as they are lived today? These questions emerge from the aforementioned settler colonial project to eliminate indigeneity, as usefully defined by Wolfe, but also from the efforts to continue to dispossess and to impose settler sovereignty over land and lives. This project has been the focus of less analysis, but so much is missed without it.

The logic of this project as it bears upon Indigenous culture (the lived and difficult kind, the imperfect, uncodable kind) is revealed in Mark Rifkin's *When Did Indians Become Straight?* In this book Rifkin has offered a crucial intervention that demonstrates the biopolitical techniques of settler society to render Indigenous romance, governance, and philosophical systems knowable and governable.¹⁷ These systems were imaged and textualized into a heteronormative social order that, in effect, made Indians straight. The system relies on a model-driven social science that is blind to a people's true family relationships, circuits of affection, and modes of governance.

In making a *science* of relationships through a system and study of "kinship," much was effaced: philosophical order, political order, and the practice and representation of sovereignty. In *The League of the Iroquois*, Morgan, with the help of Ely Parker, rendered the "clan" as the basis of Iroquois political order. Through this reduction of Indigenous life to a discernable unit of analysis, the clan, meaning and political possibility—sovereignty, romance, gender formation—are served up for governmental management by the state. Such processes were imaged through the seemingly neutral, depoliticized anthropological study of family structure.¹⁸ Indigenous kinship was rendered, in Rifkin's terms, "either as a block to national citizenship to be eradicated or as a curiosity to be preserved so as to indicate the nation's positive inclusion of aboriginal residues."¹⁹ The Iroquois "enjoy" a prominent position in this history because they were Morgan's template.²⁰

Rifkin's central intervention is to track the translations of Native social and political life within North America as something other than what they were, political orders as well as forms of love and affection. Such a process requires a critique of heteronormativity, which not only privileges the "domestic sphere" of the household but also the "domestic space" of settler nationalism.²¹ By destabilizing social science's natural order of social and familial definitions, Rifkin demonstrates how Native peoples have been structured out of their own social and romantic orders into a literary and ultimately liberal imaginary of heteronormative domesticity and governmentality. Indians became known as clans, gens, and other apparent orders rather than subjects of sovereign political orders, domesticities, sexualities, and political trajectories. They became, in a word, "governable."

This transition to another political order via citizenship carries more than a burden of signs. It carries a cost to sociability and meaning. If one is enfolded within a new regime of citizenship, other forms of intragroup recognition are soon undermined—in this case, an intragroup recognition that goes beyond the "clan" and its presumably totemic functions. By the time of *The Mind of Primitive Man*, this process simply did not concern Boas. Indigenous specificity, Indigenous sovereignty had become nonissues for him (unlike *race*). The purpose of his book was to demolish, case by case, any scientific basis for the presumption of racial inferiority, preparing those proven to be up to the task for entry into mainstream society. This was Boas's version of Morgan's settler assimilationism. Just as they had been enfolded into Canadian and American governance and into the settler imaginary through the study of kinship, Indians would now be enfolded into the concept of race (though not, at first, into citizenship), a new form of nonrecognition and imminent disappearance. The idea of Indigenous disappearance was statistically untrue; the erasure of a sovereign history within the broader category of race was shockingly dismissive.

The Mind of Primitive Man was a scientific restoration of the capacity of the formerly degraded and an extended argument for the integrity of all cultures. Boas's conceptual architecture would produce a nascent liberal defense of the value of difference that, once defined in particular ways, could then be protected.²² His concern was for the discernment of culture, including "primitive" culture: "From our point of view, the striking features of primitive culture are the great number of associations of entirely heterogenous groups of phenomena, such as natural phenomena and individual emotion, social groupings and religious concepts, decorative art and symbolic interpretation. These tend to disappear with the approach to our present civilization, although a careful analysis reveals the persistence of many, and the tendency of each automatic action

to establish its own associations according to the mental relations in which it regularly occurs.”²³ This definition of culture (of a sort) presents itself as dispassionate analysis, an objective effort to understand many groups of people (difference), “solved on the basis of scientific knowledge, not according to emotional clamor.”²⁴

But what of a “culture” that is not sturdy enough to withstand the assault of “civilization”? Boas argued that such cultures, though perhaps less sturdy and vigorous, should not be considered as belonging to “an earlier stage of development.” This is a differently articulated, temporally equivalent form of life. A new language does not avail itself to Boas (that comes later), and he has to deploy the binary of “primitive” and “civilized” as he restores the former to a form of recuperated integrity. Freed from Morgan’s temporal grid of hierarchical value, this new approach to culture became a salvage project, the effects of which shape policy and law today.

Elizabeth Povinelli, Michael Asch, and others involved in Native rights cases query the intersections of such cultural definitions with specific policies and forms of political restriction.²⁵ I will simply note the pitfalls of “pure” culture as a constraint upon Indigenous people today. Such definitions feed directly into settler regimes of exclusion in maddeningly lawful ways, calling into question the very lawfulness of the law itself. What jumps to mind are federal recognition requirements in the United States, land title cases in Australia, aboriginal rights cases in Canada, particularly the 1996 *Van der Peet* decision.²⁶

Throughout *The Mind of Primitive Man*, despite his critique of popular and scholarly science on differences between the races, Boas accords little space to Indigenous people. In the critical chapter “Race in America,” he assigns them only four sentences. Such limited attention is glaring given his numerous ethnological publications on the Northwest Coast, his work in museums across the continent, his articles on Inuit peoples, his time spent measuring animate and inanimate bodies, collecting material and discursive culture, training and collaborating with field-workers such as George Hunt and with students such as the Yankton Sioux linguist and novelist Ella Deloria, with whom he began working shortly after 1911. These were Indigenous people who clearly were in possession of the culture and the politics of their communities.²⁷ How, then, does Boas assign to indigeneity the space of not only diminishment but also infinitesimal insignificance?

Consider this narration, which acquiesces to the settler notion of the *inevitable*, incontrovertible disappearance of Native people: “When British immigrants first flocked to the Atlantic coast of North America, they found a continent inhabited by Indians. The population of the country was thin, and

vanished comparatively rapidly before the influx of the more numerous Europeans.”²⁸ Boas goes on to write that Indians, since that time, “have never become sufficiently numerous in any populous part of the United States to be considered as an important element in *our* population.”²⁹ Indians are here seen as a possessed group, weak and vitiated and above all statistically insignificant to “our” population—that is, Boas’s readers, sympathetic or unsympathetic but presumably white, requiring persuasion of just this sort. Native people were insignificant to this readership, if not yet completely disappeared.

By considering the racial and biological discourse that creates this structure of disappearance, Boas develops new considerations about difference. He distinguishes culture as an attribute of the biopolitical and raced thinking of the day, pushing back against the dominant, popular thinking of the day on difference: “Without any doubt, Indian blood flows in the veins of quite a number of our people, but the proportion is so insignificant that it may well be disregarded.”³⁰ *Our*. Such sentiments are expressed during the moment when Iroquois people on the Canadian side of the international boundary line were crossing the border to work steel, when they were living according to traditional governance on reservations on both sides of the border, when they were participating in pan-Indian rights associations on the American side of the border such as the Society of American Indians (founded in 1911, the year *The Mind of Primitive Man* appeared). These are people who in 1914 would declare war on Germany before the United States did so and would, as members of sovereign nations, refuse citizenship from both Canada and the United States. In 1924 Iroquois leaders were incarcerated when their long-house government was forcibly dismantled by Canada, and, because of Canada’s violation of existing treaties, they subsequently sought recognition as a nation-state at the League of Nations.³¹ These actions, animated from prior and existing forms of sovereignty, are evidence that the Iroquois of that time were firmly, assertively their *own* people.

By contextualizing *The Mind of Primitive Man* within the history of the Iroquois, the logic of these engagements with settler force, these interruptions of the settler narrative of Indigenous disappearance, these refusals of the possessive logic of “our people” is clearly registered. Given Boas’s residency in New York and extensive familiarity with the developing ethnography of the Northeast, how could such actions not become part of his critical imaginary? Consider this permissive moment within the text and recall the previous point about blood: “Much more important has been the *introduction* of the negro, whose numbers have increased many fold, so that they form now about one-eighth of *our* whole nation.”³²

Boas specifies this notion of “introduction” several pages later with a reference to the “tearing-away from the African soil and the consequent complete loss of the old standards of life, which were replaced by the dependency of slavery and by all it entailed.”³³ Still, his talk of “introduction” in place of bondage or enslavement parallels his inability to discuss contemporary Indigenous politics. His softening of the historical injustice of slavery, his effacement of the individual and collective will in violent bondage in his construction of the origins of the “race problem,” is imbricated in Indigenous dispossession. The elimination of Indigenous peoples from their lands enabled enslaved black bodies to be imported for white aggrandizement. This triangle of capital accumulation is not clear to him. In a book purporting to be about race, this is a staggering oversight.

To develop a more robust intersectional analysis at the confluence of racial enslavement and Indigenous dispossession would require a deeper consideration of Boas’s legacy—one that would take into account his dismissal of the claims and political concerns of contemporary Indigenous peoples and the conceptual limits of Boas himself. In many ways this book promises to dismantle or destroy the theories of the day but in doing so reinvigorates key concepts in the maintenance of an ongoing settlement project. Such ideas reach beyond bodily differentiation into a heuristic of incontrovertible disappearance—a heuristic that carries Morgan’s project through Boas into our times more fully than we recognize.

Ultimately such oversights are about more than irony. This is oversight with fangs. How could Boas spend so much time and energy with living Indigenous people and assign them a role of such insignificance? Analytically and politically, we might want to consider the costs of this conceptual architecture to social scientific inquiry more broadly, particularly since those Boas worked with did not disappear but persisted within deeply challenging times. The question is not about the conditions for protecting salvaged cultural forms within a multicultural regime of valued differences, but about the costs of that imaginary and governmental form. What are the costs of that liberal framing of difference as well as the routing of sympathy?

The costs have been an anthropological story of effacement and disappearance: a normative and empirical oversight that is both empirically false (as Native people did not disappear) and, in its easy reductionism, either in the form of “clans” (Morgan) or “blood” (Boas), theoretically abusive. This reductionism would serve the intellectual and political project of settler governance well indeed. Paradoxically, even though Boas sought in *The Mind of Primitive Man* to demolish scientific bias and the operable premises of scientific racism, Native people occur within the text only in their insignificance, their political

life ignored along with their deep history and rightful possession of their territories. This essay has demonstrated that Boas's oversight is preconditioned on an inability to see or read Indigenous sovereignty and politics in any form other than the reduced, the primitive, or the ethnographically classic, a reading that disappears Indigenous political form, is blind to it, easily hitches it to other things, or dismisses it altogether. The settler governance of Boas's time and of ours loves this sort of social science because it keeps things—and people—in a possessive form and, presumably, thus in place.

Notes

This essay was written for “Indigenous Visions,” a conference convened at Yale in 2011 by Ned Blackhawk and Isaiah Wilner to mark the anniversary of *The Mind of Primitive Man*. The conversations there were excellent, as was the engagement of the audience at the Canadian Anthropology Society meetings in Victoria in 2013. I am grateful to the editors for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter as well as the close readings of Cassie Fennell, Brian Goldstone, Rocío Mañaga, Sean Mitchell, and Sarah Muir, who offered wonderful, strengthening suggestions. Mark Rifkin read this work and helped immensely.

The epigraphs are from Lewis Henry Morgan, *The League of the Iroquois* (1851; repr. Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1996), 458, and Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 252 (emphasis added).

1. See Isaiah Lorado Wilner, “A Global Potlatch: Identifying the Indigenous Influence on Western Thought,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013): 87–114. Wilner locates a profound and heretofore unknown Indigenous influence on Boas's culture concept, which Boas expressed to a broad public in *The Mind of Primitive Man*. In Wilner's reading, the Kwakwaka'wakw moved Boas from a static notion of culture toward a dynamic notion of culture during their potlatches at Fort Rupert in 1894–95, leading to a study of individuals rather than groups and of diversity rather than difference. I offer here a different interpretation of *The Mind of Primitive Man*.
2. Boas excavated, or some would say, robbed, dead Indigenous bodies for the purposes of his research. This, he claimed, was a “repulsive task” but “someone had to do it.” Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 308. See also Laura Peers, “On the Treatment of Dead Enemies: Indigenous Human Remains in Britain in the Early Twenty-First Century,” in *Social Bodies*, ed. Helen Lambert and Maryon McDonald (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 77–99.
3. This is not to say that *all* white people love Franz Boas, whose identity as a German Jewish expatriate has yielded rich ideological fodder for anti-Semitic and white supremacist groups circulating literature on the dangers of “amalgamation”—a world skillfully revealed by Lee D. Baker in “The Cult of Franz Boas and His ‘Conspiracy’ to Destroy the White Race,” *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 156–219. What I pursue here is not that political fringe but the contemporary mainstream of whiteness, the liberal variant that continues to uphold an ideational and governmental settler project that is ultimately whitening and ultimately

- “settling,” even where it reaches for multiculturalism. See also Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 228–44.
4. Yael Ben-zvi makes this crucial argument regarding the disappearance of indigeneity in her analysis of Lewis Henry Morgan’s project, “Where Did Red Go? Lewis Henry Morgan’s Evolutionary Inheritance and U.S. Racial Imagination,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 2 (2007): 201–29. “Red” disappeared through a mechanism of evolutionism that enabled “inheritance,” an imagined patrimony of the United States that simultaneously contributed to the black–white binary noted by W. E. B. Du Bois. I am demonstrating in my reading that Boas, who is supposed to have innovated upon and extended beyond Morgan, actually performs the same absorption. For a general, descriptive account of the importance of inheritance in both Morgan’s and Boas’s kinship projects, see Staffan Müller-Wille, “Race and Kinship in Anthropology: Morgan and Boas,” *A Cultural History of Heredity III: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, preprint 294 (Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2005), 255–63.
 5. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1979) is a paradigmatic example of this. Explicit reflection on the politics of anthropological knowledge may be found in Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973). Responsive reflection on anthropological theory and ethnography and the implications of both may be found in George Marcus and James Clifford, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), and a more recuperative history of ideas appears in George E. Marcus, ed., *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (1986; 2d ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
 6. A significant moment is “On Alternating Sounds,” *American Anthropologist* 2, no. 1 (1889): 47–54, in which Boas ruminated on perception, apperception, and savagery (just who is a savage?).
 7. On Boas’s fieldwork with the Inuit of Baffin Island and Pacific Northwest peoples, see Douglas Cole, *Franz Boas: The Early Years, 1858–1906* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999). On Boas’s collaborative, or perhaps less collaborative, ways of acquiring data from the Kwakwaka’wakw, see Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
 8. Boas’s biographer Douglas Cole contextualized his standpoint within the secular (and assimilationist) Jewish experience in Germany. Boas underwent a rigorous classical humanist Gymnasium education that culminated in arduous examinations and a university life of philosophical speculation, club life, and dueling. His intellectual virtuosity served him well in the United States, where he wrote, “It is quite easy to be one of the first among anthropologists here.” By 1906, Cole writes, Boas ranked first among his colleagues in folklore, ethnology, linguistics, and physical anthropology. Cole, *Franz Boas*, 284.
 9. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Scott Michaelsen, “Ely S. Parker and Amerindian Voices in Ethnography,” *American Literary History* 8, no. 4 (1996): 615–38; Patrick Wolfe, “The Settler Complex,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013): 1–22.
 10. On archeological practice providing material for preferred histories on dispossessed land, see Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 99–129.

11. On Ely Parker, see the work of his nephew, the archaeologist Arthur C. Parker, *The Life of General Ely S. Parker, Last Grand Sachem of the Iroquois and General Grant's Military Secretary* (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1919). See also William H. Armstrong, *Warrior in Two Camps: Ely S. Parker, Union General and Seneca Chief* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1978); C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, "Ely S. Parker and the Contentious Peace Policy," *Western Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2010): 196–217; C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, *Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
12. See Genetin-Pilawa, *Crooked Paths to Allotment*, esp. 42–45, for a nuanced account of this legal and political landscape in what is now New York State. There were also settler–Tonawanda solidarities. Some settlers believed the Seneca should not be removed since they also farmed the land.
13. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.
14. *Ibid.*; on genocide, see also Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
15. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388.
16. Morgan ranked the Iroquois as Barbarians on his ethnological scale of difference.
17. Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
18. See David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
19. Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?* 11. Rifkin reads Dakota romance, family, and allotment logics through the writings of Ella Deloria. A related example is the settler panic over affection, sexuality, and governmental form that issued from that complex but ultimately graspable form "Hawaiian kinship" in light of missionary efforts to control and enfold Kanaka Maoli life on their islands. Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Sally Engle Merry, *Colonizing Hawai'i: The Cultural Power of Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
20. See Meyer Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order: The Legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), for a crucial rehabilitation of Morgan's use within British structural functionalism, a regime of analysis focused upon institutions of order such as kinship.
21. Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?* 38.
22. On social and racial differentiation in US settler policy and governance, see Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
23. Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, 238.
24. *Ibid.*, 252.

25. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Michael Asch, "The Judicial Conceptualization of Culture after *Delgamuukw* and *Van der Peet*," *Review of Constitutional Studies* 5, no. 2 (2000): 119–37.
26. See Glen S. Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6 (2007): 437–60.
27. María Eugenia Cotera, *Native Speakers: Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita González, and the Poetics of Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).
28. Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, 252.
29. *Ibid.*, 253 (emphasis added).
30. *Ibid.*
31. See Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 136, for a cross-border summary of this political moment.
32. Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, 253 (emphasis added).
33. *Ibid.*, 272.

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