

## VITAL TOPICS FORUM

## Voicing the Ancestors: Readings for the Present from Anthropology's Past

Ira Bashkow, Carolyn M. Rouse, Grant Arndt, Arzoo Osanloo, and Rena Lederman

## INTRODUCTION: HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY THAT IS DESIGNED TO INSPIRE

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13296

**Ira Bashkow***University of Virginia*

"Voicing the Ancestors" was conceived in 2014 as a new genre for sharing interest in the history of anthropology. Richard Handler and I were then planning a conference session in memory of the influential historian of anthropology George Stocking, who had been our teacher. One side of Stocking's persona was the rigorous scholar whose books and essays exemplify high standards of polish, layered construction, reflexivity, and erudition. But he also had a searching and playful side, wrote haikus, knitted symbol-rich Christmas stockings, and was interested in creative experiments (Bashkow 2016; Manganaro 1999, 312; Stocking 2001; 2010, 208). Indeed, Stocking's last book was a genre-bending "self-deconstruction" that reflected upon his own scholarship in the context of his family history, youthful Communist Party membership, FBI file, episodes of depression and writer's block, careerism, and experience of mental and physical degeneration with advanced age (Stocking 2010). To honor this experimental side, we asked session participants to choose a text from the past that they find intellectually, ethically, or politically important, explain its significance, and read a selection from it aloud—thereby giving voice to a chosen ancestor. The session proved fun and interesting: a forum in which anthropologists shared inspiration by conjuring predecessors whose voices were heard afresh and found to resonate in new ways. The session had the welcome effect of enlarging the intellectual genealogies of all of us who were present. The novel format caught on. Additional sessions devoted to "voicing the ancestors" were held during the 2015, 2016, and 2017 annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (Bashkow et al. 2019; Handler et al. 2016, 2017). This forum brings together presentations given in 2017.

Voicing the Ancestors is a genre for recovering, reinterpreting, and sharing work from the past in service of present-day theory and practice. But since it was started to honor the memory of a scholar who is often remembered as having opposed just such projects as "presentism," explanation is needed. I provide that explanation in my essay about Stocking's early criticism of presentism, its forgotten historical context, his later changes of mind, and its meaning for us today. Then, Carolyn Rouse brings to light Claude Lévi-Strauss's surprisingly pertinent 1952 booklet on *Race and History* and explains why he was right that the concepts of race and progress must be debunked conjointly. Grant Arndt recovers in the backstory to Nancy Lurie's theory of Indigenous activism an often-forgotten tradition of collaborative activist anthropology in Native North America. Arzoo Osanloo finds in an unlikely text by Robert Redfield a powerful old-yet-new understanding of the problem with employing legal means of redress for crimes like gender violence that bring shame upon victims. And Rena Lederman describes a remarkable collection of texts assembled by Mary Douglas that Douglas herself loved and that conveys a counterintuitive message about the sources of people's moral judgments that is hard to swallow for anyone, but especially for many twenty-first-century undergraduates.

We hope that the Voicing the Ancestors genre will open discussion of the history of anthropology to a wider circle of ideas and contributors. Many, perhaps most, anthropologists treat texts authored by predecessors as crucial resources for present theory and practice, while recognizing that it is not only the few texts that are currently in fashion or in the teaching canon that have this value (Handler et al. 2016, 368). We tend to read very widely, and a great many of us cherish texts from the past that have fallen into obscurity (or never emerged from it). Memorable phrases and ideas from these texts stick with us, and we find they cast light on the present and offer models for anthropological practice today. To recover these vintage texts from forgetfulness and hold them in the light of

present-day collective contemplation is more than just a salvaging of outworn goods from the dustbin of history—intellectual dumpster diving. It is a way of nourishing ourselves and our field by connecting thoughtfully to anthropology's own underappreciated or neglected ancestors—rediscovering our own “invisible genealogies” (Darnell 2001). Although the term “ancestors” might imply a fixed canon of disciplinary progenitors, as anthropologists we know that ancestors, like other kin, are made—by activity in the present—as much as discovered. Historical knowledge is similarly unknown and inaccessible unless it is actively reinterpreted, and shared. Renewing, creating, and sharing knowledge of anthropology's ancestors is a way of remaking the firmament of our field.

## NOTES

**Acknowledgments.** This forum is based on the roundtable session “Voicing the Ancestors,” which was held at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Washington, DC, December 2, 2017. I wish to thank Grant Arndt, Don Brenneis, Fred Errington, Deborah Gewertz, Rena Lederman, Arzoo Osanloo, and Carolyn Rouse for participating, and Lee Baker, Regna Darnell, David Dinwoodie, Lise Dobrin, Fred Gleach, Alex Golub, Richard Handler, and Michael Lambek for their encouragement of this project over many years.

## Essay

# On History for the Present: Revisiting George Stocking's Influential Rejection of “Presentism”

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13297

**Ira Bashkow**

*University of Virginia*

In 1965, as a young PhD teaching US social history at UC Berkeley, George Stocking wrote an editorial in the first volume of the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences (JHBS)* that warned against the pitfall of evaluating material from the past according to present purposes. To do so, he wrote, was “presentism”—a potential methodological vice. Like the familiar vices of greed, sloth, anger, gluttony, vanity, pride, and lust, presentism was not to be forsworn absolutely, because the underlying impulse is to some extent unavoidable—and, indeed, beneficial in the right time and measure. But when indulged without skillful control and well-tended limits, the presentist impulse, Stocking argued, could lead unwary scholars into a corruption of purpose.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Bashkow, Ira. 2016. “George Stocking's Stockings: Needlepoint to Pique the Historical Imagination.” *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 40: n.p. <http://histanthro.org/george-stockings-stockings/>.
- Bashkow, Ira, Sebastian Braun, Margaret Bruchac, Robert Hancock, Ira Jacknis, Mindy Morgan, and Saul Schwartz. 2019. “Voicing the Ancestors: Fieldwork Predecessors and Indigenous Communities in Native North America.” Theme section of *Disruptive Voices and the Singularity of Histories*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Darnell, Regna. 2001. *Invisible Genealogies: A History of Americanist Anthropology*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Handler, Richard, Ira Bashkow, Jacqueline Solway, Lee D. Baker, and Gregory Schrempf. 2016. “Voicing the Ancestors: Readings in Memory of George Stocking.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (3): 367–86.
- Handler, Richard, Robert Brightman, Pauline Turner Strong, and Alexander D. King. 2017. “Voicing the Ancestors II: Readings in Memory of George Stocking.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 461–88.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 2001. *California from Marin to Malibu: A Haiku Album*. Privately printed. Copy in possession of the author.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 2010. *Glimpses into My Own Black Box: An Exercise in Self-Deconstruction*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Given that “Voicing the Ancestors” deliberately pushes those limits, it is appropriate here to revisit Stocking's precept and reevaluate its meaning for the history of anthropology in the present. But in faithfulness to the precept itself, we must begin with what it meant in its own time and motivating context. Ironically, even as Stocking's criticism of presentism would become influential among anthropologists, the historical situation that prompted him to make it is today little known.

## WHAT PROVOKED STOCKING TO SPEAK UP AGAINST PRESENTISM? ROBERT WATSON, THOMAS KUHN, AND THE FOUNDING OF THE JOURNAL OF THE HISTORY OF THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

When Stocking wrote his editorial, *JHBS* was a new, precarious, and improvisatory venture. It was started by Robert Watson, a clinical psychologist who had only recently turned

to studying history. In the middle of a “successful but modest career” combining clinical practice with teaching and writing on child psychology, psychological testing, and clinical methods, in 1953 Watson wrote a short journal article on the “origin and development” of his field, surveying the “men and ideas” that had been “influential in shaping clinical psychology” (Evans 1982a, 91; Watson 1953, 321). It struck “a responsive chord,” he later wrote, eliciting “more requests for reprints than I had had for all my other articles combined”; after some soul searching, he “decided explicitly to become a historian of psychology” (Watson 1972, 287). He plunged into study of “the great psychologists” of the past (Watson 1963) and led a movement to create a “Division of the History of Psychology” within the American Psychological Association (Hilgard 1982). Other steps he took to establish the history of psychology as “a self-conscious subdiscipline” included founding a dedicated history of psychology doctoral program at the University of New Hampshire (Evans 1982b; Hilgard 1991, 84; Richards 1987, 202).

Watson was a stockholder and board member in a private clinical psychology journal that at this time of rapid growth of the field was expanding into a publishing house, Psychology Press, and seeking to found additional journals. He proposed an international historical journal that would attract a wide readership from across the fields of psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, history, sociology, and anthropology (Carlson and Watson 1965, 4; Watson 1972, 288–89; Watson and Thorne Wood 1994). When the press’s board agreed to fund the plan, Watson was given fifteen months to assemble an editorial board and get the first issue ready. Helped by the eminent Harvard psychologist and historian of psychology Edwin G. Boring, Watson successfully recruited a prestigious editorial board of “old and new men” representing different “behavioral sciences” (Ross 1982, 314). In addition to psychologists, neurophysiologists, and psychiatrists, there were two sociologists (Alvin Gouldner and Robert Merton), the anthropologist Paul Bohannon (who was Watson’s colleague at Northwestern University), and Stocking, who in turn brought in the historically minded linguistic anthropologist Dell Hymes. But soliciting articles from the different fields proved more difficult. Despite his best efforts, Watson received article submissions from psychologists only, and a number of these were “suspiciously yellow-paged” (i.e., old, having presumably been rejected by other journals; Ross 1982, 314–15; Watson 1972, 289). Finally, as the deadline neared, Stocking and his graduate mentor, the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell, each contributed articles.

When the inaugural issue was printed and mailed to the fledgling journal’s contributors, subscribers, and editorial board members, Stocking was dismayed by its uneven quality. Three articles by psychiatrists offered antiquarian studies of past “moments of greatness—typified by the great pioneers” of their field. One presented lengthy excerpts from a 1602 medical textbook, evaluating them against current knowledge, while another surveyed “the influence

of classical Greek mythology” upon Sigmund Freud (Mora 1965, 50; Diethelm and Heffernan 1965; Tourney 1965). An article by an experimental psychologist plotted annual article counts in four areas of psychology, presenting this as a “test” of the “hypothesis” that anomalous findings spur scientific activity (Krantz 1965).<sup>1</sup> A second quantitative article used “a matched control group design,” statistical analysis, and survey data to evaluate the “correlates” of “eminent” stature in the field of psychology; it defined the “dependent variable,” eminence, as “a man’s reputation among his peers” (“to retain as much sample homogeneity as possible, women . . . were not included”), and its main finding was that the “eminent” enjoyed statistically significant “socio-economic and educational advantages,” including affiliation with “eminent teachers” and institutions. But far from seeing this as evidence of class, academic, or (unmentioned) racial exclusivity, the author described a pure merit system in which “eminent teachers . . . attracted potentially-eminent students predisposed by virtue of their middle class training to appreciate the necessity for hard work and delayed gratifications” to achieve eminence, and then “the eminent teachers recommended their potentially-eminent Ph.D.’s for appointment at other universities where scientific eminence and productivity were properly appreciated, and the potentially-eminent novitiate continued the productive ways he learned from the Master” (Wispe 1965, 89, 96–97; cf. Hilgard 1991, 92). By and large, the articles were self-congratulatory, the authors positioning themselves as privileged witnesses to the grandeur and progress of science, and nearly all took for granted a present-day conception of their field of study—for example, psychology studies mental processes and psychiatry mental pathology—in interpreting historical material. Indeed, the founding editorial, printed at the head of the issue, gave pride of place to a present-day vision of the “behavioral sciences” as a whole, describing them as united by their common, abiding “interest in man’s behavior” (a phrase used unselfconsciously), though “new techniques of research produced new directions” (Carlson and Watson 1965). Overall, it was not a strong start.

The second issue, printed three months later, was little better, but for Stocking this might have caused only embarrassment (at being listed on the editorial board) were it not for the appearance of another, more troubling editorial. Written by Watson in a somewhat grandiose, heavy-handed style as a “general statement of policy,” this second editorial dedicated the journal to the purpose of using history to “foster a sense of unity” among the different disciplines of the behavioral sciences. The “historical method,” it suggested, “is a way to implement interdisciplinary cooperation.” All would-be authors were “urged to consider” developing their material in such a way as to “make a contribution to an increased integration of the behavioral sciences which can only be salutary.” Although authors were reassured that any “failure to draw out” such “implications” would not be “a reason for hesitation in acceptance” of a submitted manuscript, Watson asserted it

was his “editorial obligation” to at least “mak[e] sure that [every] author is aware of this issue” (Watson 1965b, 107).

Stocking perceived Watson’s policy as an attempt to direct historical inquiry to a preconceived purpose. Having previously been a Communist Party member who was forced to sign a McCarthyist loyalty oath (albeit with a qualifying statement) to receive his Berkeley job, Stocking had had enough experience with ideological litmus tests to be very sensitive to suggestions that a predetermined intellectual result would be favored (Stocking 2010, 77). He worried that the present purpose would distort historical interpretation, and he objected to viewing historical study instrumentally, as a way to “implement” goals. As a new Berkeley faculty member, Stocking was teaching History 101, the large lecture course on historiography that was required for history majors, and Watson’s editorial policy seemed to contravene some of what he was teaching (78, 89).

This was a period of polarizing change in intellectual history and the history of science, when younger scholars like Stocking were openly questioning long-established ideas about scientific progress. The historian of science Thomas Kuhn, who was Stocking’s senior colleague at Berkeley, had recently published an influential book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, calling scientific progress an “image” that is crafted in textbooks and other presentations of “finished scientific achievements,” works that are “no more likely to fit the enterprise that produced them than an image of a national culture drawn from a tourist brochure” (Kuhn 1962, 1–2, 135–45). Focusing on the history of astronomy, physics, and chemistry, Kuhn showed that science is more than the knowledge expressed in formal theories; it is a form of structured community activity, involving collectively held, tacit assumptions, expectations, and ways of asking questions and framing explanations—a place- and time-specific, holistic order of ideas and practices very much like what an anthropologist might call a culture, and which Kuhn termed a scientific “paradigm.” Even the meanings of terms and the ways of seeing and measuring by which scientists derive concepts and sense impressions from the “flux of experience,” Kuhn wrote, are trained, “prepared in advance”—transmitted culturally within a scientific community of predecessors and contemporaries, sustained by social institutions (127–28). To replace the “unhistorical stereotype” of science as a progressively growing knowledge “stockpile,” Kuhn argued for studies that “display the historical integrity of [a] science in its own time” (1–3).

Watson’s writings on the history of psychology typified the historiographical approach Kuhn rejected. As a psychologist, Watson took for granted that “the solid core of our history” is the “history of experimental psychology,” the area most like the natural sciences (Watson 1960, 254). In his own turning to study history, Watson’s model was Edwin Boring, himself an experimental psychologist, and a staunchly positivistic proponent of the idea that scientific knowledge progresses by accretion who had been writing about the history of his field for several decades, avocation-

ally but extremely impressively, with encyclopedic scope (Boring 1950; Evans 1982a, 92; Watson 1972, 289). Boring had retired in 1949 but was still active and intellectually formidable. It was to the aged Boring that Watson dedicated his first historical book, *The Great Psychologists*, which traced “the ‘brilliant steps forward’ of a few great psychologists” from ancient times to the present, constructing an uplifting heritage for the field based on published sources and secondary accounts (Watson 1963, vii).

In the same *JHBS* issue as his editorial policy statement, Watson published a paper of his own that illustrated his vision for how history could “implement” behavioral sciences integration. After effusively praising the “individual architects” and “leaders” of psychology’s emergence from its “pre-experimental” phase into the light of a laboratory science, Watson left off the individualist style of history that he was coming to see was old-fashioned (and that Boring had criticized), and, surveying his field as if from a great height, he proposed a typology of eighteen to twenty past and present intellectual trends (“inclinations or tendencies”) that he termed “prescriptions” (Watson 1965a, 130–31, 133; cf. 1963, 478–495). The prescriptions Watson favored included “hypothetico-deductivism,” “quantification,” “operationalism” (which Boring championed), and “environmentalism” (as opposed to innateness); these he presented as deservedly dominant. But other trends he labeled mere “counter-prescriptions,” like most of “personality theory,” “Gestalt psychology,” “psychological phenomenology,” and calls “for increased complexity in theorizing” (133–37).

Watson observed in his *JHBS* article that certain prescriptions like experimentalism, quantification, and the “demand for rigor in theorizing” were “ways of behaving . . . of such general nature as to be shared with other sciences”; they were “prescriptions” with “a reference wider than that of one science” (Watson 1965a, 133, 136). Although he did not say so explicitly, he seems to have hoped that the pan-scientific compass of these “prescriptions” would be confirmed by comparing the different behavioral sciences, in much the same way that an earlier generation of positivists (identified with the prewar Vienna Circle) had sought to “unify” *all* the sciences (social and natural both) by finding (and prescribing) common values like objectivity, rationality, empirical methods, and physicalist language; Boring still clung to this old-fashioned scientific ideal, though it was then collapsing, in part due to Kuhn’s influence (see, e.g., Boring 1950, 655ff.). As a psychologist, Watson’s intellectual habit was to approach questions in terms of probabilities and sampling, and he advocated “the value of a quantitative approach in the study of history” (Ross 1970, 288).<sup>2</sup> The full suite of behavioral sciences is a larger sample of disciplines than is psychology alone, so it made sense to try to determine which prescriptions were emerging into dominance across multiple fields, because this would increase their likelihood of being integral to psychology’s own first paradigm-to-be, which (as Watson interpreted Kuhn) would make it a true science, as against the less-promising counter-prescriptions,

which possibly were destined for further marginalization and scientific oblivion (Ross 1970, 136; Watson 1963, 495; 1967, 436, 440–41; 1972, 293). In this way history, like an oracle, would both predict and prescribe—as Watson said, “implement”—the direction of “integration” and future scientific progress (Watson 1965b, 107; quoted above).

To Stocking, Watson’s prescriptive history was retrograde to the point of self-caricature, and his editorial making it the official policy of the journal was nothing short of outrageous. Moreover, similar issues had come to the fore in another context Stocking found troubling. An anthropology journal had recently published sharp criticism of Stocking’s own first publication on the nineteenth-century evolutionist thinker E. B. Tylor. As Stocking explained in a lengthy rebuttal, his critic, the anthropologist Morris Opler, was engaged in a vigorous polemic against Marxist anthropology and materialist theory, and his commitments in that debate had distorted his reading of Tylor’s writings. Stocking believed that Opler’s interpretation of Tylor was in error because he was projecting onto Tylor purposes of Opler’s own time, and he had criticized Stocking’s work wrongly when it did not back his side of the controversy. The lesson Stocking drew from the case was that when “a *present-day* theoretical polemic” is anachronistically “read back” into much older material, “historical misinterpretation is the all too frequent result.” Just as the “field anthropologist” must try to understand people in the context of their own culture, the historian must try to understand past anthropological writers in the context of their time—not exclusively so, but as an indispensable part of “the activity of historical interpretation proper” (Stocking 1965a, 142, 144). In concluding his response, Stocking (1965a, 143) made this clear:

This is not to suggest that the history of anthropology should not be relevant for the ongoing activities of anthropologists. On the contrary . . . current anthropological theory may profit greatly from a careful historical look at the writings of earlier anthropologists. In many instances, [they] were dealing with problems which are still pertinent; and their ideas, some of which may yet be fruitful, are all too easily lost in the short historical memory of the discipline . . . . Ultimately, the utility of earlier thinking for present anthropology will have to be judged by the standards of the present . . . . The relevant issue is . . . does it help to answer questions that anthropologists are now coping with . . . ? [Even so,] the anthropologist looking to the past for fruitful hypothesis should always be conscious of the historicity of his [or their] material.

Stocking called this methodological imperative “the need for . . . historicism,” and he subtitled his response to Opler: “A Special Plea for Historicism in the History of Anthropology” (Stocking 1965a, 144).

Having just finished writing that essay when he read Watson’s policy statement, Stocking sent a letter criticizing it, and Watson replied by inviting him to write the next editorial himself (Stocking 2010, 89). Appearing in *JHBS*’s third issue, Stocking’s editorial built upon and extended the line of thinking of his rebuttal of Opler. The editorial is implicitly addressed to practitioner historians from psychology

and adjacent fields, on the understanding that “the history of the behavioral sciences . . . will be written primarily by behavioral scientists,” not historians (Stocking 1965b, 217; see also Stocking 1967, 387). Stocking offers them a cautionary tutorial on historiography that points up greenhorn mistakes that professional historians know to avoid, along with a compact introduction to Kuhn’s “brilliantly controversial” critique of the common assumption that “the development of science is a cumulative ever-upward progress” (213–14). Kuhn should have gone farther, Stocking writes; he had limited his study to science’s “internal development” while neglecting its relationship to broader (“external”) intellectual currents and social and economic conditions (214). Nevertheless, his approach “does encourage us . . . to understand the ‘reasonableness’ of points of view now superseded [and] to see historical change as a complex process of emergence rather than a simple linear sequence—in short, to understand the science of a given period in its own terms” (215).

The main lesson from the discipline of history that Stocking sought to teach those behavioral scientists who wished to write the history of their fields was the importance of a “commitment to the understanding of the past for its own sake” (Stocking 1965b, 212). Echoing Franz Boas in “The Study of Geography” (1887), a favorite text of Stocking’s from his dissertation years onward, Stocking wrote that the historian seeks to understand the past “because it is there” and “demands no more of it than the emotional satisfaction which flows from understanding a manifestation of the changing human self in time” (Stocking 1965b, 213). Such “understanding” is distinct from “judgment,” which is an evaluation or assessment of things past in terms of “some present . . . standards” (213). In order to approach the past in a spirit of “understanding,” historians strive to set aside their own assumptions—the perspectives of “the on-going present” (213). But achieving such historiographical purism is hard when history is written by “the professional behavioral scientist,” because they bring other goals to this work. For them, it is not enough that an account is historically true. They “demand of the past something more: that it be related to and even useful for” the present life of their field (213).

Stocking cited Watson’s editorial (that “emphasizes the utility of historical study as ‘a way to implement interdisciplinary cooperation’”) and “a number” of other articles “in the first issues of our journal” as examples of this practitioner tendency to study “the past for the sake of the present” (Stocking 1965b, 211, 213–14).<sup>3</sup> Exacerbated by “the occasional strident scientism and . . . residual reformism of the behavioral sciences,” this present-centered orientation to the past “can become rather pedantically involved in the search for ‘firsts’ and ‘founders’—for the agents of cumulative forward progression”—as well as in a paradoxically presentist “antiquarianism” that searches the past “for analogues, for precursors” of current ideas (214). “At its most neutral, the result is the sterile tracing of theoretical lineages which is served up in ‘history of theory’ courses in many behavioral science departments” (215). But “precisely because the

behavioral sciences are for the most part in Kuhn's terms 'pre-paradigmatic,' their historiography is more open . . . than that of science generally" to the special risk of history being used as an "arena of competition" among a field's "competing schools," whose partisans "may attempt to legitimize [their] present point of view" by projecting it into works of the past (215). Such an approach to the past leads "inevitably," Stocking warned, to the historiographical pitfalls of "anachronism, distortion, misinterpretation, misleading analogy, neglect of context, [and] oversimplification of process." These are the characteristic "sins of history written 'for the sake of the present.'" They are the "vices" of an amateurish orientation to history that Stocking termed "presentism" (215).

Stocking was not alone in his reaction to Watson and the first *JHBS* issues. In a lengthy review essay in the journal *History of Science*, the historian of medicine and psychology Robert Young wrote of having "very mixed feelings" about the new journal: it should have been "an important development in the field which gives hope for the future," but too many of the papers were written by "experimental psychologists and other scientists" who naturally "search for anticipations" of "current views" rather than trying to "understand a problem in its own terms as it was seen in a different period" (Young 1966, 17–19). "Casting about for pedagogic benefits," these practitioner historians reverse "the way history actually happened," writing it "backwards from the viewpoint of a modern textbook"—so that "the result is shockingly bad history" (3, 18). In Young's reading, this problem was much "in evidence" throughout the first volume of *JHBS*, which sadly exhibited a "lack of high standards of scholarship" (36). Especially "disappointing" were the contributions of Boring and Watson, which "betray little grasp of the implications" of Kuhn's critique, offering old-fashioned scientific "hero worship" permeated by "extraordinarily naïve positivism" (3, 17, 19). From the perspective of a professional historian, Young wrote, "Boring and Watson on historiography is extremely embarrassing" (19). There was only one contributor to *JHBS* Young praised, and it was Stocking (19, 36–37). Stocking's research article in the journal's debut issue (a half-year before his editorial) narrated how the young Franz Boas, during his initial arctic field research, questioned the physical basis of perception and shifted gradually "from physics to ethnology" (Stocking 1965c). This article alone, Young wrote, was "a model for future studies in the history of the behavioural sciences" (Young 1966, 37).<sup>4</sup>

#### **ANTHROPOLOGISTS TAKE UP STOCKING'S REJECTION OF PRESENTIST HISTORY**

Over the years *JHBS* improved, becoming the distinguished journal it is today, and few still remember the story of its rocky start and Watson's ill-conceived policy.<sup>5</sup> But Stocking's naming and shaming of presentism would have a life of its own apart from it, becoming an influential "programmatic manifesto" for the history of anthropology specif-

ically (Stocking 1992, 60). When Stocking reprinted his editorial as the first essay in his collection, *Race, Culture, and Evolution* (1968), he separated it from the context that had provoked it, giving readers the impression that the paper "posed the issue clearly with reference to anthropology" (Darnell 1977, 400).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, a landmark review of the history of anthropology literature written by Regna Darnell a decade later called Stocking's intervention a watershed of "professionalization of the history of anthropology," marked by "the imposition of historical standards on scholarship considered to be a contribution to disciplinary history" (400). Stocking "distinguished quite didactically between historicism as the side of the angels and presentism as the ubiquitous pitfall of anthropologists trying to be historians," Darnell wrote (2010, v). It is understandable that anthropologists have paid little attention to the parts of Stocking's essay that were addressed primarily to psychologists, but without knowing the story behind them, it is hard to make sense of the intensity and stridency of his rejection of presentism. Ironically, an essay advocating historicism itself became dehistoricized!

In the half century since he published it, Stocking's essay has been assigned in numerous history of anthropology courses and discussed at conference sessions and in books and articles. It has been widely questioned (see, e.g., Darnell 2010, vi; Price 2004, 342), but its "neatly bipolar categories" have become well-known among historians of anthropology and those in science and technology studies and other related fields (Darnell 2006, 215; Darnell and Gleach 2007, viii; 2009, viii).<sup>7</sup> Take it or reject it as a guidepost, but one is expected to know about it as a historiographical meme. "Avoid presentism" could almost be called rule one of the historiography of anthropology. Like many rules, though, it is understood as one to be broken: it is plainly impossible for a scholar working in the present to avoid all traces of presentism (Kuklick 2014, 76).

Even in his editorial, Stocking tempered his idealization of historicism and renunciation of presentism, observing that "historians are undeniably conditioned in a thousand subtle ways by the present in which they write" (1965b, 213). There is a perceptible shift in tone and stance after Stocking's rhetoric climaxes with the invocation of "sins" (quoted above), when he reverses course and, in a more forgiving tone (which, in retrospect, we can see was deeply in character for him), acknowledges that full historicist understanding is unattainable and "exists only as a kind of historical Holy Grail—never to be found by sinful man" (215). He then quotes a full page by his intellectual ally Dell Hymes that directly *counters* his earlier argument against presentism. Writing about linguistics and linguistic anthropology, Hymes suggests that present-day scholarship in these fields has "a definite need" for historical study that brings "renew[ed] attention to problems posed" in earlier periods because they have fallen off the agenda for no good reason. Historical study would help linguists "put in full perspective many of our [present-day] problems and assumptions,"

including the definition of the scope of linguistics itself, which earlier was conceptualized boldly and expansively but which (“by reaction against an earlier perspective considered too sweeping”) had become “very narrow” (Hymes 1963, 60–61; quoted in Stocking 1965b, 215–16). Stocking called Hymes’s position “an enlightened presentism,” and he closed his essay by allowing that there may indeed be “compelling reasons for a much more active presentism in the historiography of the behavioral sciences” than he had at first let on (215, 217). This is, indeed, the same position he had taken up in concluding his earlier essay responding to Opler (Stocking 1965a, 143; quoted above). But this walking back of his initial denunciation of presentism within the bounds of the *JHBS* editorial is rarely remembered.

### STOCKING’S SUBSEQUENT DECADES OF SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT PRESENTISM VERSUS HISTORICISM

Stocking continued to walk back his rejection of presentism for the next fifty years. When reprinting the essay in *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, he prefaced it with a note saying he was now “inclined to qualify” the “suggestion that the historian approaches history simply because ‘it is there’” (1968, 2). In 1982, he qualified it still further, characterizing that earlier statement as “rash” and observing that, “obviously,” historians take up past topics for study “because they are interesting to ourselves and we assume they will interest others”: “Historical understanding thus presupposes a continuing tension between past and present” (Stocking 1982, xvii–xviii). Later, in *Victorian Anthropology* (Stocking 1987, xv, see also 285, 305), he again wrote of that “continuing tension” in explaining how he had come to “reconsider a position I had affirmed rather strongly at the very beginning of my career,” namely, the “critique of disciplinary histories written from a ‘presentist’ perspective.” In a 1992 volume of essays, he said that “the programmatic ‘historicism’ I advocated in 1965 has long since been qualified by my residence among anthropologists and by further historiographical reflection. These have made me more appreciative of the role of present interest in . . . historical inquiry” (1992, 9, see also 215). In *After Taylor*, he described his understanding as having “evolved since I wrote the essay on ‘The Limits of Presentism and Historicism’” (Stocking 1995, xvii). When invited to respond in a 1999 roundtable that included reflections on his ideas of presentism and historicism by Clifford Geertz and Marc Manganaro, Stocking wrote that “I have over the years retreated somewhat from the programmatic terms in which I represented the ‘presentist/historicist’ distinction in 1965,” and that while he was “still strongly (if somewhat more flexibly) committed to an ‘historicist’ orientation,” he no longer saw it “as the sole approach to historical inquiry” but pluralistically as one approach among many (Stocking 1999, 330). In 2001, he again wrote of his “changing attitude toward the uses of ‘presentism,’” “acknowledging the legitimacy (and inevitability) of . . . ‘presentist’ motives” (Stocking 2001, 161n1, 26, see also 77, 246). Finally, in his memoir, he

expressed “regret” over his phrasing in the 1965 editorial and once again described himself as having “over the years . . . retreated further from the ‘strong’ position” that that essay announced (2010, 89, see also 144–45).

Those who knew Stocking personally will recall that he was quick to speak of his second thoughts and ambivalence about presentism. In the interdisciplinary History of Human Sciences Workshop at the University of Chicago, which I attended as a graduate student for several years starting in 1987, it was something of a regular shtick for certain faculty colleagues who were among his closest friends to playfully needle Stocking over his early position, prompting earnest commentaries that combined protestation (it was not *all* wrong) with the admission of guilt. Far from holding fast to a dogmatic, absolutist damnation of presentism, in conversation Stocking was keen to explore the gray zone where desirable present-day purposes and careful historicist interpretation were well blended or in productive tension. So it is only appropriate that we continue and widen this conversation he so often invited.

Even as Stocking retreated from the immoderate aspects of his 1965 call to eschew presentism, he held firm to the “plea for historicism” (Stocking 1965a) as an unexclusive, positive injunction, and this was reflected in the writing genre he favored throughout his career. He called this a “somewhat ‘retro’” genre of narrative intellectual history (1999, 335). His many essays and book chapters in this genre are framed by intellectual history questions of how and why ideas and institutions changed over time. With a few exceptions, his writings focus on individual scholars as actors, and he pauses the narrative frequently to place them (along with their ideas, questions, methods, institutions, funding sources, and so on) in larger social and intellectual contexts of the day—the ideal of historicism. There is an emphasis on piecing together the backstory to the way the scholar’s activities and ideas changed—what were their relevant experiences, discussions, and interactions?—by using evidence from primary sources like unpublished letters and notes found by doing original research in archival collections. There is also an emphasis on bringing to light obscure or hard-to-find sources, instead of primarily discussing publications that are well known. The evaluation of merit in old ideas—sorting good from bad—is subordinated to the goals of explaining the ideas, how they arose and changed, and why they seemed reasonable at the time (see also Darnell 1977, 402; Geertz 1999, 308). In writing different works over the course of five decades, Stocking experimented by varying many particulars of this narrative intellectual history genre, for example, sometimes highlighting institutions and funding (Stocking 1992, chs. 4–5; 2001, chs. 9–12), or lacunae and “books unwritten” (Stocking 1991), but “richly detailed historicist cum biographical” narrative remained his genre of comfort, in which he enjoyed mastery (Marchand 2014, 144).

Like Stocking’s other students, I was apprenticed in this genre, and I continue to write in it, though not exclusively

(Bashkow 1991, 1995, 1996, 2011, forthcoming; Dobrin and Bashkow 2010a, 2010b).<sup>8</sup> I appreciate historicism as a methodological virtue, while also prizing the power of narrative to elicit reader interest, humanize subjects as characters, convey an empathetic understanding of their thoughts and activities, bring out their life's drama and the interpenetration of their ideas with emotion-laden experiences, and integrate diverse types of materials. Narrative provides a way of placing the viewpoints of different actors in dialog with one another and in multiple contexts, and of introducing the reader to new material as a story unfolds. But the genre also has drawbacks for anthropologists and their students. For the anthropologist writer, the genre is often associated with the expectations of professional historians, who expect a narrative to be based on contemporary evidence, prototypically from archival repositories. To the extent a narrative foregrounds *past* perspectives, it can require a lot of interpretive work by readers to find its relevance for current practice.

Back when Stocking wrote his 1965 editorial, he did not foresee that anthropologists would be his most important readership, that practitioners rather than historians would form the main audience for his work (but see Kuklick 2014, 67, 69, 89). But just a couple years later, he was hired away from the Berkeley Department of History by Chicago's Department of Anthropology.<sup>9</sup> Over time, Stocking came to embrace the irony that, despite his published opposition to practitioner presentism, he became a meaningful contributor to the current-day life of his adoptive field—that he himself became “a presentist presence in anthropology” (Handler 2005, 200; see also Manganaro 1999, 316). If one were to read only his 1965 essay, one might guess that he would spurn involvement in the ongoing disciplinary project of theory building, seeing it as a corrupting influence on his historiography. Yet in his publications over many following years, he regularly framed historical explorations in terms of anthropological disciplinary concerns of the day. One of the compliments he was paid that meant the most to him was by an American anthropologist who said, “You gave us back Boas”—a reference to his rediscovery of the work of Franz Boas that had fallen into disciplinary oblivion (Stocking 1992, 9; 2010, 183). As Handler observes, Stocking's historicist “recreation of the pattern of Boas's thought is itself an important contribution to anthropological culture theory” (Handler 2005, 199–200). The example shows that historicist history writing can also be presentist theory making.

### **THE CHANGING MEANING OF REJECTING PRESENTISM; OR, PRESENTISM VERSUS HISTORICISM, HISTORICIZED**

As the introduction to this forum explains, “Voicing the Ancestors” is a genre of history of anthropology that is designed to inspire us in the present and inform current practice and, as such, runs afoul of the well-known precept that we must avoid “presentism,” a precept that, indeed, was promulgated by the scholar we started the series to honor. But as I have shown, George Stocking was no intransigent

censor of presentism. Even his 1965 editorial criticizing presentism included exceptions and contrapuntal arguments, like his endorsement of Hymes's case for an “enlightened presentism,” and over the next fifty years he many times repudiated an uncompromising rejection of presentism, drawing attention to its necessity and even its virtues in the history of anthropology. For most of his career, Stocking was actively interested in exploring how presentist and historicist impulses are constructively integrated in valuable scholarship. It is fitting to honor his legacy with a genre of history of anthropology that is devoted to balancing them.

But the world of today is also different from that in which Stocking framed his criticism of presentism, and the basic problem that prompted him to do so is no longer pressing. Like other young historians of science in the 1960s, Stocking felt a burning imperative to temper the image and the power of science. To a still-earlier generation, science, epitomized by Galileo's and Newton's “revolutionizing” of astronomy in the seventeenth century, was idealized as the “highest and noblest achievement” of Western civilization because it manifested a unique kind of progress in which metaphysical assumptions, often tied to religious authority, fell before accurate knowledge of nature based on observation and discovery (Shapin 2010, 3). Indeed, this celebrated “revolution” in science was widely identified as the turning point to modernity, when stultifying traditional dogma yielded to modern, free-thinking rational inquiry, laying the groundwork (so it was suggested) for Euro-American liberal democracy. In the mid-twentieth century, this foundational narrative of twinned scientific and civilizational progress was baked into the general education curriculum of Harvard College, which Stocking attended (Tresch 2014, 157), and it was extended to anthropology by Stocking's graduate mentor at the University of Pennsylvania, A. Irving Hallowell, who narrated the rise of scientific anthropology as the culminating product of a Euro-American trajectory of cultural evolution.<sup>10</sup> But Stocking, like many of his peers, reacted strongly against these ideas, which increasingly came to seem suspect as the Cold War hardened and the Vietnam War began. The appealing image of science as produced in the purity of individual scientists' observation of astral nature distracted from appalling realities, such as that science had emerged historically in situations created by European exploration, imperialist conquest, and trade; that it had grown into a central pillar of the military-industrial complex that was a driving force of Cold War politics; and that it regularly threw its authority behind racial exploitation and violence—as evident in the long history of scientific racism that Stocking chose for his dissertation topic. The significance of historicism was that it would undercut the idea that science progresses on a universal pattern. A historicist narrative shows how knowledge arises from historically contingent activities of individuals whose knowledge-making activities are partly idiosyncratic and partly conventional within the compass of a specific time and place, all the while struggling for patronage, credibility, authority, funding, and other interests

(Marchand 2014, 145; Shapin 2010). As such, historicism is bound to reveal the oversimplification intrinsic to teleological narratives of progress by discovery. Stocking made just such an argument in writing about the early career of Franz Boas in the *JHBS* debut issue. Although Boas's 1883 expedition to Baffinland appears "in retrospect" to have been a "fateful" turning point for Boas when he formulated the culture concept, decisively changing the history of anthropology, in reality, his shift unfolded over a much longer period and was "gradual and continuous," with "no really sharp break, no conversion experience, no sudden realization of 'the significance of culture'" (Stocking 1965c, 53, 64). The example of this discipline founder thus belies, Stocking was showing, the heroic narrative of scientific progress arising through transformative moments of discovery.

Kuhn's book crystallized the idea that history could revise this image of science, announcing that project in its very first sentence: "History," Kuhn (1962, 1) predicted, "if viewed as . . . more than anecdote or chronology, could produce a decisive transformation in the image of science by which we are now possessed." For Stocking and many others at the time, these were inspiring words. The heated intellectual battle sparked by the book pitted on one side those like Stocking who were excited to use history to breach the ideological fortifications that protected science in its epistemological citadel, and on the other side defenders of that citadel who kept alive the idea that scientific knowledge progresses along a distinctive trajectory toward ever closer approximation of observed, ahistorical reality (Daston 2016, 119; Marchand 2014, 134).

It was as part of this battle over the image of science that Stocking launched his attack upon presentism, triggered by the psychologist Watson. Psychologists turned out to be one of largest audiences for Kuhn's book, but they read it primarily as a guide for finding their own way into the citadel, as directions for making their field a true science like the others at last (Kaiser 2016, 83; Driver-Linn 2003). They were so securely situated on the side of the status quo that they were barely aware of the insurgency. Eager chronicler of the progress of his field that he was, Watson, when he founded *JHBS*, apparently expected the historians of other behavioral sciences to document progress for their fields. But beyond this, he wanted historians to *further* scientific progress—to actually assist with moving it forward by helping plot their field's likely trajectory. We can thus understand why Stocking exploded at Watson's editorial policy statement suggesting this: because he saw his vocation as a historian in exactly opposite terms. It was not to further solidify but to *contest* the simplified teleological narratives that buttressed Cold War science. *That* was the kind of history Stocking really meant when he rejected "presentism." Indeed, his oeuvre finds coherence in opposing all such grand metanarratives of scientific progress while also refusing the competing metanarratives of economic and political determinism (Stocking 2010, 154–55). There can be little doubt Stocking succeeded in his goal of producing narratives

of the past that are intricately woven, thickly contextualized, polysemous, and sharply resistant to simplifying teleological constructs of any easy description. Nor was Stocking alone in such work. There is now a large library of richly detailed, historicist history of anthropology (Kuklick 2014). But writing such history once served a larger polemical and political purpose—a paradoxically presentist one of demonstrating its value as against teleological simplifications—that in anthropology has been amply achieved.

The battle set off by Kuhn's book has also been long ago won and left behind in the history of science and science studies, where science of every kind is now understood to be shaped by place- and time-specific contingencies like ways of knowing, styles of reasoning, modes of persuasion, technical equipment and practices, institutions and funding, "stratified global political economies" of knowledge, other networks of power relations including configurations of patriarchy and white supremacy, and the personal connections, serendipitous experiences, and idiosyncratic predilections of individual scientists (Daston 2016, 120; Marchand 2014; Tresch 2014, 165). As the distinguished historian of science Lorraine Daston (2016, 118, 120, 124) observes, "historicism has triumphed so completely" in these fields that the question now is whether anything is left to be salvaged from the old idea that science is special, a "way of knowing" and form of community activity distinct from "other human activities." All the more reason, then, not to feel bound by Stocking's rejection of presentism. Like everything else, like even historicism, its meaning is changed with the times.

#### NEW TIMES, NEW PURPOSES FOR HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Having gone back to the moment when the spell was cast in order to lift it, I want to return to the present and share three thoughts on writing history of anthropology today.

First, as anthropology becomes more diverse, inquiry about new areas of history open up. What we find may not be pretty—such as under-recognition of Native collaborators—but it expands understanding of what our field has been. It enables us to see it now as *including* those Native collaborators along with other minority, amateur, un- or underemployed, and other anthropologists who have not always been recognized as forming part of the field (see, e.g., Bruchac 2018). Not only does this right historical wrongs; as Alex Golub (2018, 33) suggests, it is an opportunity to find in "anthropology's past . . . resources with which to imagine a more inclusive future" by giving the "legitimacy of tradition to anthropologists who are too often told their ideas or subject positions are novel or illegitimate." This genealogical "chartering" role for the history of anthropology, in which past precedents support present inclusiveness, is a constructive one.

Second, anthropology, like other scholarship, is facing a transformation in reading. Increasingly, people read on screens; there is a generational shift toward consumption of more video and audio relative to text, and readers are

becoming more impatient and distracted (Carr 2010). These are trends that pose a particular problem for historical texts that are complicated, technical, thickly contextualized, and minutely detailed. Historians of anthropology, like anthropologists, love to explore complexity, and many of our writings basically argue that things were more complicated than simplified ideas can explain. This might be fine when we write for our colleagues, who have a high tolerance for detail, but the more we write for wider audiences of students and nonspecialists, the more we need to simplify, streamline, synthesize, and tell readers quickly and clearly what they should get out of our text and why they should care (Cronon 2012). If we are to reach today's impatient readers, we must encourage skillful writing techniques of creative nonfiction and follow the lead of other anthropologists who are imaginatively using new media like video, novelization, and comics. Some of the simpler storylines developed in the past, like the formerly rejected narrative of discovery, may actually prove a useful model for anthropologists addressing audiences in the present.

Finally, we no longer live in a world where the value and institutional viability of anthropology itself can be taken for granted. In Stocking's time, universities were growing rapidly, disciplines were expanding, and jobs were plentiful. Disciplines and their founders were accorded significant credibility and authority. In that context, showing how knowledge is actually formed out of interest, power relations, reactions to contingencies, erasures, and so on, surprised common expectations. But such goals were paradoxically an expression of anthropology's secure institutional position at the time, its overall health and confidence: attacks were intended to be purificatory, the assumption being that the patient was strong.

But we now live in a time when anthropology (as other liberal arts) is far from institutionally secure. Whereas in 1965 it might have been spirited and valorous to claim that science was overesteemed, we now face the opposite problem: a corrosive public mistrust of scientific and other expertise. What is needed now are ways to *strengthen* knowledge claims. We need new models for history of anthropology, as Suzanne Marchand (2014) writes, "that do not throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. We are quite well aware, now, that our foremothers and -fathers invented particular kinds of 'objectivity' to suit their own purposes—but didn't they also learn new things in the process?" As a student of Stocking herself, Marchand does not come lightly to her conclusion that "in the present situation, it is actually incumbent upon us to explain to students, deans, and tax-paying citizens that we actually do know things, in more or less stable and defensible ways, and that this knowledge is worth transmitting and cultivating further" (145–46).

In today's anthropology, there is little risk of becoming blind to the shortcomings and flaws of our disciplinary forebears. Skepticism regarding narratives of heroic discovery runs wide and deep, and, far from idealizing disciplinary

founders and past progress, most students come to the field already knowing that anthropology's past was corrupted by racism, sexism, and coloniality (Kuklick 2014, 72). So the challenge now is to give readers reason to think about anthropological work done in the past with a measure of generosity. Past anthropologists are not gods to revere, but neither are they idols to smash. Many did indeed address "problems which are still pertinent" (Stocking 1965a, 143; also quoted above). Many did indeed arrive at insights, engage in activism, or create knowledge in ways that have the potential to guide and inspire us in the present.

This is by no means the first call for historians of anthropology to embrace presentist motives. Regna Darnell has urged this for decades, as has Riki Kuklick and others—even Stocking himself, as I show here. But the contrast between 1965 and today is instructive for the present. For as Stocking saw, "Ultimately, the utility of earlier thinking for present anthropology will have to be judged by the standards of the present" (Stocking 1965a, 143; also quoted above). But it was unimaginable then what vital imperatives anthropologists would now be facing.

## NOTES

**Acknowledgments.** I thank Grant Arndt, Karina Atkins, Regna Darnell, Jim Fernandez, Richard Handler, Mary Kuhn, Rena Lederman, Sean Mallin, Dennis Proffitt, Saul Schwartz, David Singerman, and Daniel Willingham for reading drafts of this essay. Lise Dobrin helped with skillful editing. Shelby Slotter and Kathleen Feeney helped me access materials in the George W. Stocking, Jr., Papers at the University of Chicago Library Special Collections Research Center and in the Robert I. Watson Papers, Archives of the History of American Psychology, The Drs. Nicholas and Dorothy Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, The University of Akron.

1. The hypothesis was derived from Kuhn (1962), discussed below.
2. In their "expertise in quantitative methods," Watson felt, "psychologists have something positive to contribute . . . to the study of history in general," and he regularly used quantitative sampling in his historical researches, as in his scientific ones (Watson 1972, 292). For example, his research for a 1960 essay on psychologists' "neglect of the history of psychology" included sampling every tenth page of a directory of psychologists, "about 5%" of the membership of the History of Science Society, and every fifth name at random from a list (drawn from the work of George Sarton) of medieval writers who "made reference to what I consider to be psychological work" (Watson 1960, 251, 253; see also Richards 1987, 202).
3. This last phrase is Stocking quoting a historiographical classic, Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* ([1965] 1965). Ironically, Butterfield was himself highly presentist (or "Whiggish") when it came to the history of scientific progress, in which he believed fervently (see Tresch 2014, 156).
4. Soon afterwards Young invited Stocking to join him for a several months residency at Cambridge University, which for Stocking was a formative experience (Stocking 2010, 94, 100–103).

5. For his part, Watson was eager to learn from professional historians about the “methodology of history,” and he graciously accepted the main thrust of Stocking’s and Young’s critique, incorporating their essays into the methodological canon of the nascent field of history of psychology (Watson 1960, 255; 1975, 10–11; Hilgard 1991, 81, 83, 91). He and Stocking kept up a cordial professional relationship. In 1966, when Stocking visited Chicago, Watson arranged for him to lecture at Northwestern and held a dinner for him at his home with colleagues in psychology and anthropology (Watson to Stocking, March 4, 1966, and April 11, 1966, George W. Stocking Jr., Papers, Box 29, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library). Watson was interested not only in Stocking’s ideas about methodology but also in the substance of his research on Franz Boas. In the mid-1930s, while a PhD student in psychology, Watson had taken courses with Boas and Ruth Benedict at Columbia (Watson to Stocking, July 7, 1964, George W. Stocking Jr., Papers, Box 31, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library).
6. In a short preface, Stocking noted that the essay “appeared originally” in *JHBS*, which was “founded in 1965 primarily by a group of psychologists and psychiatrists,” but went on to suggest that it expresses “an underlying historiographical point of view” that he continued to hold in “the present less polemical context,” albeit with qualifications and “second thoughts” I discuss below (Stocking 1968, 1–2). As Darnell observes (1977, 403), Stocking readily applied the critique of presentism to writings on the history of anthropology by the anthropologists Leslie White and Marvin Harris, whose approaches to history were “so intensely partisan” in terms of theoretical debates of their time “as to forestall understanding”; but even on Harris, he later reversed himself (Stocking 1967, 383–84, 386; 1982, xvii).
7. Its ready uptake may have been facilitated by its similarity to the anthropologist’s polarity of ethnocentrism versus relativism. Riki Kuklick’s last (posthumous) publication is a remarkable comparison of “‘presentist’ and ‘historicist’ approaches” across “the literature on the history of sociocultural anthropology” through 2013 (Kuklick 2014, 62, 63).
8. While in graduate school, I spent the better part of two years researching and writing a lengthy biographical essay that explored how a particular anthropologist’s fieldwork was affected by its colonial context (Bashkow 1991). Because this context had a great many facets (international politics, local politics, research funding, etc.), which each had to be researched, I experienced challenges in the work that slowed my progress, even while Stocking was urging me to complete the essay in time for it to be published in a thematically appropriate volume of *History of Anthropology* and so I could resume my PhD studies proper. I remember well how he encouraged me to move forward in the writing, advising me to build my interpretations into the way I introduced the characters and emplotted the events. “Just tell the story,” he would say, emphatically. It was the way things unfolded that would show what was important.
9. Although for a time he held a second appointment in history at Chicago, Stocking resigned it after the historians twice blocked his promotion, which the anthropologists had decided he merited (Bashkow 2016; Stocking 1992, 3).
10. Like Stocking’s editorial, Hallowell’s paper in the first volume of *JHBS* is also commonly misremembered. It bears the evocative title “The History of Anthropology as an Anthropological Problem,” which promises a brief for studying the history of anthropology in an anthropological way. This could mean several things. It could mean approaching past anthropologies and diverse regional traditions of anthropology from an anthropological viewpoint that is particularist, relativist, and contextualizing—similar to Stocking’s ideal of historicism. It could also imply that the history of anthropology should be written by anthropologists themselves, using anthropological research methods, reflexive interpretative approaches, and materials like oral histories rather than archival research exclusively. Because these possible messages of the title were themes in Hallowell’s teaching, it is understandable that they have been attributed to his essay (e.g., Darnell 1977, 400; 2010, vi; Darnell and Gleach 2005, viii–ix; 2006, vii; 2016, x). But to read the essay as published is to discover that it is something else again—that it actually proposes a triumphant narrative in which scientific anthropology emerges from the “proto-anthropology” of mythology and religion by cultural evolution. “All cultures,” including “early western culture,” Hallowell wrote, “provide answers to some anthropological questions” about “man and his nature” as “an integral part of mythology and religion,” but only “in the case of western culture” is there “an intellectual shift from the level of folk anthropology to a level of systematic observations and inquiry detached from traditional beliefs, and inspired by values giving prime emphasis to the search for more reliable knowledge” (Hallowell 1965, 24–26). This shift “directs attention to distinctive features of western culture . . . which made the rational and empirical study of man possible in a manner unparalleled in any other culture,” including “the development of modern science as a rational approach to the study of phenomena which transcends folk knowledge on all fronts” (36). Thus, for Hallowell, anthropology’s history is unambivalently a story of progress, and his claim is that it is of a piece with the kind of scientific progress exhibited in better known fields like physics and astronomy. It is this progress that, as he writes at the end of the essay, should be studied as “an anthropological problem—as a significant part of man’s pursuit of knowledge about himself as part of his cultural adaptation” (36; see also Marchand 2014, 134; Stocking 2010, 71).

## REFERENCES CITED

- Bashkow, Ira. 1991. “The Dynamics of Rapport in a Colonial Situation: David Schneider’s Fieldwork on the Islands of Yap.” In *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*, edited by George Stocking, 170–242. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bashkow, Ira. 1995. “‘The Stakes for which We Play Are Too High to Allow of Experiment’: Colonial Administrators of Papua on

- Their Anthropological Training by Radcliffe-Brown." *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 22 (2): 3–14. <https://repository.upenn.edu/han/vol22/iss2/3/>.
- Bashkow, Ira. 1996. "'To Be His Witness if That Was Ever Necessary': Raphael Brudo on Malinowski's Fieldwork and Trobriand Ideas of Conception." *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 23 (1): 3–11. <https://repository.upenn.edu/han/vol23/iss1/3/>.
- Bashkow, Ira. 2011. "Old Light on a New Controversy: Alex Rentoul's Account of the Trobriand Women's Sagali." *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 38 (2): 9–18. <https://repository.upenn.edu/han/vol38/iss2/4/>.
- Bashkow, Ira. 2016. "Why a Newsletter?" *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 40. <http://histanthro.org/why-a-newsletter/>.
- Bashkow, Ira. Forthcoming. "The Cultural and Historical Openness of the 'Melanesian Way.'" *Journal of Pacific History*.
- Boas, Franz. 1887. "The Study of Geography." *Science* 9 (210): 137–41.
- Boring, Edwin G. 1950. *A History of Experimental Psychology*. Second edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bruchac, Margaret. 2018. *Savage Kin: Indigenous Informants and American Anthropologists*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Butterfield, Herbert. (1931) 1965. *The Whig Interpretation of History*. New York: Norton.
- Carlson, Eric, and Robert Watson. 1965. "Editorial: The Birth of a Journal." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1): 3–4.
- Carr, Nicholas. 2010. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: Norton.
- Cronon, William. 2012. "Two Cheers for the Whig Interpretation of History." *Perspectives on History* 50 (6): n.p. <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2012/two-cheers-for-the-whig-interpretation-of-history>.
- Darnell, Regna. 1977. "History of Anthropology in Historical Perspective." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6:399–417.
- Darnell, Regna. 2006. "Reflections on Departmental Traditions and Social Cohesion in American Anthropology." *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 2:212–41.
- Darnell, Regna. 2010. "Introduction." In *Edward Sapir: Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist*, v–xiv. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Darnell, Regna, and Frederic Gleach. 2005. "Editors' Introduction." *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 1:vi–x.
- Darnell, Regna, and Frederic Gleach. 2006. "Editors' Introduction." *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 2:vii–viii.
- Darnell, Regna, and Frederic Gleach. 2007. "Editors' Introduction." *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 3:vii–viii.
- Darnell, Regna, and Frederic Gleach. 2009. "Editors' Introduction." *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 5:vii–ix.
- Darnell, Regna, and Frederic Gleach. 2016. "Editors' Introduction." *Local Knowledge, Global Stage. Histories of Anthropology Annual* 10:ix–xiii.
- Daston, Lorraine. 2016. "History of Science without Structure." In Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty: Reflections on a Science Classic*, edited by Robert J. Richards and Lorraine Daston, 115–32. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Diethelm, Oskar, and Thomas Heffernan. 1965. "Felix Platter and Psychiatry." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1): 10–23.
- Dobrin, Lise, and Ira Bashkow. 2010a. "'The Truth in Anthropology Does Not Travel First Class': Reo Fortune's Fateful Encounter with Margaret Mead." *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 6:66–128. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/398061>.
- Dobrin, Lise, and Ira Bashkow. 2010b. "'Arapesh Warfare': Reo Fortune's Veiled Critique of Margaret Mead's Sex and Temperament." *American Anthropologist* 112 (3): 370–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01246.x>.
- Driver-Linn, Erin. 2003. "Where Is Psychology Going? Structural Fault Lines Revealed by Psychologists' Use of Kuhn." *American Psychologist* 58 (4): 269–78.
- Evans, Rand. 1982a. "Obituary: Robert I. Watson (1909–1980)." *American Psychologist* 37 (1): 91–93.
- Evans, Rand. 1982b. "Robert I. Watson and the History of Psychology Program at the University of New Hampshire." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 18 (4): 320–21.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1999. "'The Introduction into Anthropology of a Genuinely Historical Eye . . .'" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 4 (2): 305–10.
- Golub, Alex. 2018. "Welcoming the New Amateurs: A Future (and Past) for Non-Academic Anthropologists." *Commoning Ethnography* 1 (1): 32–44. <https://doi.org/10.26686/ce.v1i1.5204>.
- Hallowell, A. Irving. 1965. "The History of Anthropology as an Anthropological Problem." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1): 24–38.
- Handler, Richard. 2005. "Raymond Williams, George Stocking, and Fin-de-Siecle US Anthropology." In *Critics against Culture: Anthropological Observers of Mass Society, 186–203*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Hilgard, Ernest. 1982. "Robert I. Watson and the Founding of Division 26 of the American Psychological Association." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 18 (4): 308–11.
- Hilgard, Ernest. 1991. "The History of Psychology: A Survey and Critical Assessment." *Annual Review of Psychology* 42: 79–107.
- Hymes, Dell. 1963. "Notes toward a History of Linguistic Anthropology." *Anthropological Linguistics* 5 (1): 59–103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30022398>.
- Kaiser, David. 2016. "Thomas Kuhn and the Psychology of Scientific Revolutions." In *Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty: Reflections on a Science Classic*, edited by Robert J. Richards and Lorraine Daston, 71–95. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Krantz, David. 1965. "Research Activity in 'Normal' and 'Anomalous' Areas." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1): 39–42.
- Kuhn, Thomas. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kuklick, Henrika. 2014. "History of Anthropology." In *A History of the Modern Social Sciences*, edited by Roger Backhouse and Phillipe Fontaine, 62–98. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Manganaro, Marc. 1999. "Some Reflections on the Career of George Stocking (with Asides to Eliot, Frye, Jarvie, Handler, et al.)." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 4 (2): 310–18.
- Marchand, Suzanne. 2014. "Has the History of the Disciplines Had its Day?" In *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, edited by Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, 131–52. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mora, George. 1965. "The Historiography of Psychiatry and Its Development: A Re-Evaluation." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1): 43–52.
- Price, David. 2004. *Threatening Anthropology: McCarthyism and the FBI's Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Richards, Graham. 1987. "Of What Is History of Psychology a History?" *The British Journal for the History of Science* 20 (2): 201–11.
- Ross, Barbara Carr. 1970. "Psychological Thought within the Context of the Scientific Revolution, 1665–1700." PhD dissertation, University of New Hampshire. <https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/927>.
- Ross, Barbara. 1982. "Robert I. Watson and the Founding of the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 18 (4): 312–16.
- Shapin, Steven. 2010. *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as if It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1965a. "'Cultural Darwinism' and 'Philosophical Idealism' in E. B. Tylor: A Special Plea for Historicism in the History of Anthropology." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 21 (2): 130–47.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1965b. "Editorial: On the Limits of 'Presentism' and 'Historicism' in the Historiography of the Behavioral Sciences." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (3): 211–18.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1965c. "From Physics to Ethnology: Franz Boas' Arctic Expedition as a Problem in the Historiography of the Behavioral Sciences." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1): 53–66.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1967. "Anthropologists and Historians as Historians of Anthropology: Critical Comments on Some Recently Published Work." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 3 (4): 376–87.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1968. *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*. New York: Free Press.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1982. "Preface to the Phoenix Edition." *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, xi–xxi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1987. *Victorian Anthropology*. New York: Free Press.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1991. *Books Unwritten, Turning Points Unmarked: Notes toward an Anti-History of Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Department of Anthropology. Copy in possession of the author.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1992. *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1995. *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888–1955*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 1999. "Presentism and Historicism Once Again: The History of British Anthropology as Intellectual and Personal History." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 4 (2): 328–35.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 2001. *Delimiting Anthropology: Occasional Essays and Reflections*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. 2010. *Glimpses into My Own Black Box: An Exercise in Self-Deconstruction*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Tourney, Garfield, 1965. "Freud and the Greeks: A Study of the Influence of Classical Greek Mythology and Philosophy upon the Development of Freudian Thought." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1): 67–87.
- Tresch, John. 2014. "Cosmologies Materialized: History of Science and History of Ideas." In *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, edited by Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, 153–172. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Watson, Charles, and Patricia Thorne Wood. 1994. "Frederick Thorne and the Founding of the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 50 (1): 4–6.
- Watson, Robert. 1953. "A Brief History of Clinical Psychology." *Psychological Bulletin* 50 (5): 321–46.
- Watson, Robert. 1960. "The History of Psychology: A Neglected Area." *American Psychologist* 15 (4): 251–55.
- Watson, Robert. 1963. *The Great Psychologists: From Aristotle to Freud*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Watson, Robert. 1965a. "The Historical Background for National Trends in Psychology: United States." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (2): 130–38.
- Watson, Robert. 1965b. "Editorial: Policy and Its Implementation." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (2): 107–08.
- Watson, Robert. 1967. "Psychology: A Prescriptive Science." *American Psychologist* 22 (6): 435–43.
- Watson, Robert. 1972. "Working Paper." In *The Psychologists*, edited by T. S. Krawiec, 275–97. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Watson, Robert. 1975. "The History of Psychology as a Specialty: A Personal View of Its First 15 Years." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 11 (1): 5–14.
- Wispé, Lawrence. 1965. "Some Social and Psychological Correlates of Eminence in Psychology." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1): 88–98.
- Young, Robert. 1966. "Scholarship and the History of the Behavioral Sciences." *History of Science* 5 (1): 1–51.

# Claude Lévi-Strauss's Contribution to the Race Question: *Race and History*

---

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13298

**Carolyn M. Rouse**

*Princeton University*

When I started doing research on race in different institutional domains, if someone would have told me that I would be drawn to the work of structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss, I would have laughed. When I started my journey to study how race and inequality are reproduced in religion, medicine, development, education, and media, I had been inspired by Marx, Boas, Mead, Du Bois, Hurston, Geertz—anybody but Lévi-Strauss. But when Ira Bashkow asked me which ancestor I would voice for his 2017 AAA roundtable, I chose Lévi-Strauss and his fifty-page 1952 booklet entitled *Race and History*. This booklet was one of a series written by cultural anthropologists for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to try to combat racism (Muller-Wille 2010).

## **UNESCO AND THE CONTEXT OF RACE AND HISTORY**

In order to understand what motivated Lévi-Strauss to publish his unique perspective on the humanness of human prejudice, it is important to understand the history of UNESCO. During World War II, many European and American leaders were already discussing ways to prevent another war fueled by racism and anti-Semitism. They concluded that building peace required citizens of modern nation-states to be taught to appreciate and tolerate cultural diversity in order to see the “other” as human. Fulfilling that vision, UNESCO was ratified in 1946 as an international organization dedicated to peace, intercultural exchange, human rights, and freedom through the promotion of science and education.

One of its first agenda items was to issue a scientific statement on race. To that end, UNESCO commissioned a group of leading anthropologists, sociologists, biologists, and psychologists to write a statement on “the race question” (Hazard 2012). They wanted the statement to explain to the public why race was nothing more than a “social myth” and racism “one of the social evils” (UNESCO 1950). Two anthropologists contributed to this first version of *The Race Question*, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ashley Montagu. This

1950 version, which I will call the original statement, represents the cutting edge of scientific and social scientific theories on race even today. It is an extraordinary statement that I continue to use in my own teaching.

UNESCO leaders apparently thought that, given the horrors of World War II, debunking race as a meaningful category of biological difference would be easy. But if they imagined that the original 1950 statement would be universally embraced, they were sorely mistaken. Unfortunately, *The Race Question* was far too radical for its time, and it was criticized by scientists and social scientists who remained committed to locating racial difference in behavior and biology. Based on their criticism, the original version of the statement was significantly revised by another group of scholars, and a new, and official, statement was published in 1951 (UNESCO 1951).

In the 1951 official version, the authors argue that the data were not yet in on race and difference and that what scientists knew thus far (or thought they knew) indicated that racial groups were indeed distinct and bounded. In this revised statement, the idea that race is a “social myth” was replaced with:

The concept of race is unanimously regarded by anthropologists as a classificatory device providing a zoological frame within which the various groups of mankind may be arranged and by means of which studies of evolutionary processes can be facilitated. In its anthropological sense, the word “race” should be reserved for groups of mankind possessing well-developed and primarily heritable physical differences from other groups. (UNESCO 1951, 1)

Not without reason, this revised statement was regarded by public commentators as “a victory for racism and the defeat of a naive humanitarianism” (UNESCO 1952, 7).

A chastened UNESCO tried to explain the 1951 revisions in a document entitled *The Race Concept: Results of an Inquiry* (UNESCO 1952). This document, which I refer to as the Inquiry, is even more dreadful than the 1951 statement itself. It includes exchanges between supporters of the original 1950 statement and critics who were behind the 1951 revised statement. Ultimately (and oddly) it both defends the revisionists and distances itself from the authority of their claims. The Inquiry's editors wrote, “It is important to avoid presenting the new [1951] Statement as an authoritative manifesto published by Unesco as the last word on the race question” (UNESCO 1952, 8). By so saying, they

effectively declared the 1951 statement on race irrelevant to UNESCO's mission. Even so, its publication set into motion a research agenda in the field of physical anthropology that lasted for three decades (Muller-Wille 2010).

Anyone reading the 1951 revised statement today will recognize that it belongs in the enormous dustbin of bad scholarship on race. But I want to recall this inauspicious history of the UNESCO statement to highlight, once again, how improbable it might seem for an African American scholar to find inspiration for her own work on race and inequality in a related UNESCO statement, written by one of the original coauthors.

### CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS'S RACE AND HISTORY

Lévi-Strauss did not participate in the 1951 rewriting and instead published a separate UNESCO booklet entitled *Race and History* (1952). While I do not know what motivated Lévi-Strauss, I choose to read his booklet as a subversive retort to the 1951 statement's flaws. The fact that UNESCO published Lévi-Strauss's text speaks to the institution's own efforts to subvert both the 1951 statement and the Inquiry. In *Race and History*, not only does Lévi-Strauss challenge zoological theories of racial difference, but more radically he challenges the very idea of human progress that underlies racism.

What Lévi-Strauss homed in on was a celebration of human rights built on the foundation of what we now describe as modernization theory, or the idea that history is proceeding along a unilinear trajectory from barbarism to freedom, and that Europe and white people in the United States represent the leading edge of this historical movement (Hazard 2012; Rist 2002). Lévi-Strauss recognized that one cannot simultaneously disavow racism, or the idea that some groups are better than others, without also doing away with the idea that cultures evolve or that history is a totalizing process (Visweswaran 2003).

Lévi-Strauss explicitly rejected the evolutionary model of cultural change just before economist Walt Whitman Rostow published his five stages of economic growth (Rostow 1960). Rostow famously theorized that all economies transition linearly from "traditional" (egalitarian with limited technologies) to "high mass consumption" (disposable incomes and advanced industry). Because almost all countries now have some form of industrialization, one could argue that at one level Rostow was right. His model, however, misses the fact that communities deliberately break away from states and reject technologies that limit their sovereignty (Scott 2010). Also, states experience deindustrialization, which was the case in Zambia in the 1970s after the collapse of the global copper market (Ferguson 1999). Despite the deficiencies of Rostow's model, linear notions of human progress came to dominate economic development theories in political science and economics for over half a century.

Against this tide of ethnocentric theorizing, Lévi-Strauss embraced a stochastic model of cultural change, where new-

ness emerges from combinatory randomness. He compared cultural change to genetic mutations and meiosis, where a random selection of genes—50 percent from each parent—produce a unique offspring (Muller-Wille 2010). He used these metaphors to represent how cultures borrow ideas and technologies from one another to produce unique and surprising sensibilities and material cultures. Lévi-Strauss also used metaphors of gambling to represent how "history" leads to cultural diversity and the illusion of linear progress.

Following the Holocaust, the fear was that pointing out cultural differences encouraged unfavorable comparisons between the West and the Rest. To avoid negative comparisons, postwar social scientists felt compelled to argue that all cultures and people have the same potential—a seemingly innocuous statement unless you ask the obvious follow-up question: The potential for what? The implicit answer: to be like white Europeans and Americans. In contrast, Lévi-Strauss recognized that trying to make the point that all cultures and people are essentially the same leads us back to unfavorable comparisons because it is obvious how culturally distinct tribes in the Amazon are from French nationals in Paris, for example.

To get at the violence underlying a desire to make others into our own image, in *Race and History* Lévi-Strauss opens by asserting that the impulse to erase cultural difference is "an inversion of the racist doctrine," by which he means they are fundamentally similar (Lévi-Strauss 1952, 5). He uses examples of violence to describe how this impulse to erase difference has manifested in behavior:

In the Greater Antilles, a few years after the discovery of America, while the Spaniards were sending out Commissions of investigation to discover whether or not the natives had a soul, the latter spent their time drowning white prisoners in order to ascertain by long observation, whether or not their bodies would decompose. (Lévi-Strauss 1952, 12)

He goes on to describe this anecdote as representative of the paradox in cultural relativism.

The more we claim to discriminate between cultures and customs as good and bad the more completely do we identify ourselves with those we would condemn. By refusing to consider as human those who seem to us to be the most "savage" or "barbarous" of their representatives, we merely adopt one of their own characteristic attitudes. The barbarian is, first and foremost, the man who believes in barbarism. (Lévi-Strauss 1952, 12)

In the section titled "The Idea of Progress," Lévi-Strauss states:

Progress is neither continuous nor inevitable; its course consists in a series of leaps and bounds, or, as the biologists would say, mutations. These leaps and bounds are not always in the same direction; the general trend might change too, rather like the progress of the knight in chess, who always has several moves open to him but never in the same direction. Advancing humanity can hardly be likened to a person climbing stairs . . . a more accurate metaphor would be that of a gambler who has staked his money on several dice and, at each throw, sees them scatter over the cloth, giving a different score each time. What he wins on one, he is always liable to lose on another, and it is only occasionally

that history is “cumulative,” that is to say, that the scores add up to a lucky combination. (Lévi-Strauss 1952, 22)

Lévi-Strauss considered the metaphor of rolling dice as applicable to cultural traits as it was to biological traits. Genes, like culture, are the end result of diffusion, exchange, and the type of binary juxtapositions and bricolage that we see in language and myth. Continuing this gambling metaphor in a later section titled “Collaboration between Culture,” he states:

The situation of the various cultures which have achieved the most cumulative forms of history is very similar. Such history has never been produced by isolated cultures but by cultures which, voluntarily or involuntarily, have combined their play and, by a wide variety of means (migration, borrowing, trade and warfare), have formed . . . coalitions . . . This brings out very clearly the absurdity of claiming that one culture is superior to another. For if a culture were left to its own resources, it could never hope to be “superior”; like the single gambler, it would never manage to achieve more than short series of a few units, and the prospect of a long series turning up in its history would be so slight that all hope of it would depend on the ability to continue the game for a time infinitely longer than the whole period of human history to date. (Lévi-Strauss 1952, 41)

In *Race and History*, Lévi-Strauss's goal was to assert that cultures are in fact not equal, but unique, and that these differences must not be read as inferiority, or as if a culture has yet to arrive at some crucial developmental stage of mass production and consumption. Rather than *products* of history, cultures are *accidents*—and therefore incommensurable. From Lévi-Strauss's perspective, the UNESCO rhetoric that all cultures are equal, while well-intentioned, only invites comparisons that could bolster racist ideas about biological inferiority and cultural backwardness.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE AND HISTORY

After over twenty years in anthropology, I have walked through a veil. This new perspective has changed my appreciation for older works by anthropologists including Claude Lévi-Strauss. African American students often refuse to take anthropology courses because they are turned off by words like “savage” and “primitive.” Who isn't? I ultimately came to understand that the most brilliant and subversive ancestors of our discipline used the language of the day because it was necessary to scaffold radical new ideas on old. Rhetorically deploying the language of the day, Lévi-Strauss was able to assert that Europeans were as savage as the “other” because all humans are similarly constrained by how our minds make sense of the world, through a grammar of relationality (Lévi-Strauss 1966).

In my own work on race, I have noted that one of the most significant reasons why institutions reproduce race and inequality is because of the underlying assumption that blacks are lacking—genetically, socially, intellectually, materially. In keeping with this notion of blacks as less evolved than whites, the interventions designed to ameliorate disparities are often predicated on beliefs about the need for black self-improvement. Lost in these discourses is any celebration

of the extraordinary resilience of a people who struggled for more than two hundred years to be under the aegis of the rule of law, both in the United States and colonial Africa. This resilience is best exemplified by the fact that in the face of wealth, employment, housing discrimination, mass incarceration, and educational inequities, black health disparities are relatively miniscule (Rouse 2016).

Because social scientists often overlook the aspects of “black culture” that work, policy efforts often focus on fixing black people rather than on the structures that constrain their behavior (Kelley 1997). In health care, for example, the presumption that higher rates of morbidity and mortality among African Americans are due to deficiencies in knowledge, behavior, or genetics has led health-policy experts to put resources toward improving outcomes that are largely unhelpful (Rouse 2009). Recent “enlightened” health policies, for example, have focused on targeting the genetic differences responsible for health disparities, once again collapsing race and biology. Similarly, culture of poverty theories, which explain intergenerational poverty as the outcome of poor people acting in ways that are incompatible with wealth accumulation, have been used to explain disproportionate rates of black poverty and mass incarceration. In the case of educational disparities, which manifest in disproportionate rates of labeling black students as learning disabled, segregated advanced placement courses, and disproportionate rates of suspension, educational-policy research often focuses less on structural issues like poorly financed schools and racism, and more on test scores, curriculum, and student motivation. In other words, what I have observed ethnographically is that liberal notions of progress often play as much of a role in reproducing structural inequalities as racism.

Rejecting the idea that Africans and African Americans need to mimic white Europeans and Americans in order to be taken seriously is often the first step black folks take toward liberating themselves from self-hatred. In the case of the Nation of Islam and other black radical religions, rejecting the measures of progress and enlightenment used by whites to determine their worth was essential for freeing them from their own abjection (Rouse, Jackson, and Frederick 2016). These groups have challenged white supremacy by promoting Afro-centrism, an epistemology and ontology that highlights the role of blacks as subjects rather than objects in history. Many who discover Afro-centrism say it attracted them because it was the first time they were told about the accomplishments of Africans and African Americans in history. In Afro-centric recapitulations of history, rather than being backward, Africans are described as having civilized the world. Using history in this way to challenge white supremacy certainly empowers blacks psychologically. Unfortunately, by merely inverting the racial hierarchy, rather than rejecting comparisons altogether, Afro-centrism ultimately reproduces the cultural relativism paradox described by Lévi-Strauss.

In the last sixty years, evolutionary theories of culture, and narrow definitions of a good life, continue to shape

the international aid regime's economic and political policy agendas. The notion of cultural deficit also allows scholars to write papers like "The Case for Colonialism," which was published in the summer of 2017 in *Third World Quarterly* (Gilley 2018). This paper argues that Europe should re-colonize Africa. Why? To improve a series of metrics that are actually the same metrics used by the international aid regime to articulate why structural adjustments, foreign direct investment, extractive industries, and the securing of private property are so critical to Africa's development. Lost in these metrics are examples of the genius of Liberians and Sierra Leoneans who radically slowed the Ebola outbreak in 2014, long before Western institutions stepped in.

Lévi-Strauss's radical theses on race and history have not always sat well in development circles. Lévi-Strauss presented a similar version of his *Race and History* argument in a talk at UNESCO in 1971 entitled "Race and Culture." The reception to that talk was hostile. In the preface of *A View from Afar*, Lévi-Strauss gives detailed reasons why people who celebrated UNESCO's mission treated his talk as blasphemous (Lévi-Strauss 1992, xiv–xvi). In essence, they were unwilling to acknowledge the cognitive dissonance required to both claim not to be racist and work to remake the developing world in the image of Western Europe and America. Lévi-Strauss gave almost the same talk again at UNESCO in 2005 to an adoring crowd. By 2005, Indigenous rights were being celebrated and the idea of preserving traditional cultures was in vogue. Changing political discourses have altered how Lévi-Strauss's theories have been received, but Lévi-Strauss never changed his position about race. For Lévi-Strauss, zoological categories of racial difference merely provided pseudo-scientific authorization for ethnocentric theories of human progress and value.

UNESCO wanted the statements it commissioned to support the idea that all humans were equal and that with the right opportunities all cultures could evolve similarly. But Lévi-Strauss had something far more radical in mind when he wrote *Race and History*. What he read in UNESCO's efforts to humanize the "Third World" was a form of racism that he recognized as deeply human but also wrong and destructive. Lévi-Strauss believed that being part of a culture requires a commitment to its beliefs and values to the exclusion of others. He wrote, "Cultures are not unaware of one another, they even borrow from one another on occasion; but, in order not to perish, they must, in other connections, remain somewhat impermeable toward one another" (1992, xviv–xv). When it comes to rethinking race, and the source of racial disparities, one can learn from Lévi-Strauss's unapologetic commitment to cultural relativism. Cultural value comparisons and progress narratives lead us right back to treating racial, ethnic, and cultural differences as evidence that something is lacking. Lévi-Strauss argued that instead of thinking that the West is more advanced, we must embrace how truly primitive we all are.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Ferguson James. 1999. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gilley, Bruce. 2018. "The Case for Colonialism." Originally published and withdrawn by *Third World Quarterly*. Reprinted online by National Association of Scholars. [https://www.nas.org/articles/the\\_case\\_for\\_colonialism](https://www.nas.org/articles/the_case_for_colonialism).
- Hazard, Anthony Q. 2012. *Postwar Anti-Racism: The United States, UNESCO, and "Race," 1954–1968*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kelley, Robin D. G. 1997. *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1952. *Race and History*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1992. "Race and Culture." In *A View from Afar*. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Muller-Wille, Staffan. 2010. "Claude Lévi-Strauss on Race, History, and Genetics." *Biosocieties* 5 (3): 330–47.
- Rist, Gilbert. 2002. *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Blind Faith*. London: Zed Books.
- Rostow, Walt Whitman. 1960. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rouse, Carolyn. 2009. *Uncertain Suffering: Racial Health Care Disparities and Sickle Cell Disease*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rouse, Carolyn. 2016. "Racial Health Disparities and Questions of Evidence: Assessing What Went Wrong with Healthy People 2010." In *Comparing Approaches to Health Inequalities and Justice: A Dialogue on Theory, Methods, and (Inter-)Disciplinarity*, edited by Mara Buchbinder, Michelle Rivkin-Fish, and Rebecca Walker, 259–84. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Rouse, Carolyn, John Jackson, and Marla Frederick. 2016. *TeLévisé Redemption: Black Religious Media and Racial Empowerment*. New York: NYU Press.
- Scott, James C. 2010. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchists History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- UNESCO. 1950. *The Race Question*. With contributions from Ernest Beaglehole, Juan Comas, L. A. Costa Pinto, Franklin Frazier, Morris Ginsberg, Humayan Kabir, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Ashley Montagu. Paris: UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001282/128291eo.pdf>.
- UNESCO. 1951. *The Race Question*. Revised version of 1950 text by Ashley Montagu based on criticisms from Hadley Cantril, E. G. Conklin, Gunnar Dahlberg, Theodosius Dobzhanski, L. C. Dunn, Donald Hager, Julian S. Huxley, Otto Klineberg, Wilbert Moore, H. J. Muller, Gunnar Myrdal, Joseph Needham, and Curt Stern. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. 1952. *The Race Concept: Results of an Inquiry*. Paris: UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0007/000733/073351eo.pdf>.
- Visweswaran, Kamala. 2003. "The Interventions of Culture: Claude Lévi-Strauss, Race, and the Critique of Historical Time." In *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*, edited by Robert Bernasconi, 227–48. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

# Rediscovering Nancy Oestreich Lurie's Activist Anthropology

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13299

**Grant Arndt**

*Iowa State University*

Nancy Oestreich Lurie worked collaboratively over several decades with the Ho-Chunk Nation and other Indigenous groups in Wisconsin in a number of activist projects that challenge our tendency to see contemporary collaborative work with Indigenous peoples as the product of a dramatic rupture in the history of the discipline. Such ideas of rupture almost invariably invoke activist Vine Deloria Jr.'s once-explosive charge in *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) that anthropologists up to that time had failed to help Indian communities in their struggles for survival. Lurie knew Deloria and worked with him both as a scholar and activist. Yet while she wrote with passion about the need for anthropological engagement (Lurie 1971a), she also cautioned that Deloria had ignored exceptions and countertraditions for rhetorical effect (Lurie 1973). She criticized later generations of anthropologists for turning Deloria's critique into a self-justifying cliché that erased memories of anthropologists like Sol Tax, D'Arcy McNickle, Alexander Lesser, and Phileo Nash who worked with American Indian leaders in struggles for rights and sovereignty in an era when such work was out of sync with the standards of disciplinary recognition (Lurie 1999). This tradition, and its examples of activism, suggests the need for a more complex account of the legacy of collaboration within the history of anthropological engagements with Indigeneity. Here I draw renewed attention to Lurie's essay on "The Contemporary American Indian Scene" (1971b), a text that anticipates and has much to contribute to today's anthropology of Indigeneity, helping us understand our connection to that too-often-forgotten tradition of anthropological activism.

## THEORIZING THE AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT

"The Contemporary American Indian Scene" appeared in a volume that has an important place in the history of North Americanist ethnohistory: *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*. This textbook, which Lurie coedited with Eleanor Burke Leacock, offers dynamic, historical accounts of the development of what Lurie dubbed (at the suggestion of June Helm) "contact-traditional" ways of life. Rejecting the idea of

the "pristine aboriginal culture" or the ethnographic present, contributions to the collection traced Indigenous life through centuries when, as Lurie summarized, "different Indian societies traded, formed alliances, and entered into treaties and compacts among themselves and with different European groups" (423). As with well-known later work on the historically and culturally dynamic nature of Indigeneity, Lurie described the period before Europeans were able to disrupt Indian autonomy as one in which many peoples experienced material enrichment and cultural development—a period brought to an end by the violent loss of land and resources and the impact of disease (427).

Lurie's own chapter served as the volume's conclusion, bringing the historical trajectories traced by other contributors' accounts of their particular culture areas together into a unified history of Indian life in the contemporary period. The bulk of its pages are devoted to a long historical narrative with many interesting things to say about the conditions of frontier interactions, the development of contact-traditional cultures, the impact of federal Indian policy on reservation communities, the implication of urbanization for Indian politics, the powwow as a dynamic feature of contemporary life, and the emergence of intertribal political organizations like the National Indian Youth Council. She develops some of these ideas elsewhere in her oeuvre, but what makes "The Contemporary American Indian Scene" different is her attempt to organize them into a theoretical framework that is informed by her own experience of collaboration in the sort of nation-rebuilding efforts that have long been foundational to contemporary American Indian life, but that quickened in the post-World War II period. In effect, the essay is Lurie's attempt to develop a theory of the emergence of modern Indigenous activism in Native North America.

Lurie (1971b, 418) terms the "heightening of political activity . . . evident among American Indian people since about the close of World War II" an "articulatory movement" akin to the "revitalization movement" concept proposed by Anthony Wallace (1956, 1970). Wallace saw revitalization movements as entailing the inspired reformulation of cultural norms and social practices by a charismatic leader, whose visionary insights were institutionalized as a new, revitalized, sociocultural order (see Harkin 2004). Lurie (1971b, 419) calls the phenomenon she is attempting to describe "articulatory" because, rather than focus on

resynthesizing Indigenous practices, it aims to overcome the gulf between economics and culture and rejects the widespread idea that American Indian peoples face a choice between accepting “economic marginality as Indian communities” or seeking “prosperity through individual assimilation.” “Articulatory” activism seeks to combat poverty and marginality by finding ways to improve the “material foundation for existence” while actively supporting “Indian identity” as “an essential component of satisfactory community life” (419). The movement is “articulatory” in seeking projects that can deal with the institutional framework of the encompassing society without undermining social solidarity and cultural commitments. Those playing leadership roles in the articulatory movement act not as charismatic prophets but as community organizers able to motivate others to undertake projects that address collective needs by drawing upon behavioral norms already “widely embraced” within the community (419). Later in the chapter, Lurie suggests some of the norms evident in many American Indian communities that she feels have allowed for the then-emerging cooperation between activists from different tribal nations. They include orientation to consensus decision making, an emphasis on reasoned persuasion, a rejection of materialism, highly developed patterns of institutionalized sharing, respect toward other persons, and a general flexible adaptability (444–48).

Lurie argued that “articulatory responses have occurred spontaneously for a long time, but what characterizes the contemporary scene and justifies speaking of a movement is the development of a united Indian voice, even relating Indians in Canada and the United States, able to verbalize its goals, and stressing the sense of crisis for Indian people. The objectives are to reach the larger public in order to win understanding of and support for Indian goals and to counter policies and public attitudes that are inimical to those goals” (419). Also, rather than seeking to reorganizing Indian societies to fit the encompassing system, “the movement that is underway among Indian people seeks to reorganize the total society to allow articulation into it on their own terms” (423).

### LURIE’S THEORY’S ACTIVIST ORIGINS

Lurie’s theory of the articulatory movement in “The Contemporary American Indian Scene” was clearly a work in progress, resonating with but not fully developing ideas she expressed in a range of published and unpublished writings in those decades. But offered at a time when most of the touchstones for subsequent theorizations of Indigeneity were only just beginning to emerge, it primarily reflects the insights Lurie had gained through her own collaborative work over more than a decade on exactly the sort of projects she dubbed “articulatory.” Yet this collaborative work goes unmentioned in the text and thus has been lost to later generations of scholars.

Lurie spent much of the 1950s testifying as an expert witness on behalf of tribes bringing suit against the US government before the Indian Claims Commission. In the process,

she became a key figure in the debates within anthropology over the need to take a stand against the federal government’s effort to terminate tribal sovereignty and the role of anthropologists as expert witnesses in Indian land-claim cases (Lurie 1955). Her anthropological engagement deepened in the 1960s to become a mode of practice that she later always identified, using Sol Tax’s (1975) term, as “action anthropology” guided by a “fundamental faith” in the ability of people to identify and solve their own problems when given the means to do so (Lurie 1961). Lurie had taken up the banner of action anthropology while working as Tax’s main assistant on the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference, which brought together representatives of Indian communities from around the country to forge a collective agenda for Indian politics in response to the devastating impacts of federal Indian policies (Lurie 1961). The conference was the first major application of the ideas about collaborative anthropology that Tax and his students had begun to develop during the previous decade as a result of their experience at a field school in Iowa, where they worked with Meskwaki People (Daubenmier 2008; Gearing, Netting, and Peattie 1960; Lurie 1999; Smith 2015).

Lurie’s involvement in the American Indian Chicago Conference led to her being recruited by Indigenous activist Helen Miner Miller, leader of a Ho-Chunk committee seeking to organize a federally recognized government for Ho-Chunk people in Wisconsin under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which they did, successfully, in 1963. Lurie collaborated with Miller, the first elected tribal chair, on a “self-study” of Ho-Chunk needs, that was carried out by a Ho-Chunk research team with survey instruments written by Miller. The study had a two-fold goal of legitimating the new Indigenous polity to outside supporters while also mobilizing consensual political participation from Ho-Chunk people themselves—its constituents. Miller and Lurie’s coauthored report of the study’s findings, published by the Ho-Chunk tribal government in 1963, contain the first public expression of the key elements that would later inform Lurie’s theory of articulation (Miller and Lurie 1963, 52–53; see also Arndt 2017).

It was just after this project with Miller and the Ho-Chunk Nation that Lurie produced her first draft of the paper that became “The Contemporary American Indian Scene.” She subsequently developed it as part of a group of American and Soviet anthropologists whose discussions of evolutionary and historical approaches to Native North America eventually led to Leacock and Lurie’s (1971) *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*. Lurie spent the next three years developing further drafts of the text in correspondence with Sol Tax, D’Arcy McNickle, and others, incorporating critical ideas about pan-Indianism (Thomas 1965) and comparative perspectives on Indigeneity (evident in Lurie 1968b), in order to build a new theory of articulation that carried forward the insights of her collaboration with Miller.

As she continued to work on the manuscript, Lurie was recruited by Menominee activist Ada Deer to participate in a



**FIGURE 1.** Lurie (left of the “American Indians” placard), James White (center), and members and supporters of DRUMS at a protest action held in Milwaukee’s First Wisconsin National Bank, April 1971. (Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-35256)

campaign to overturn the federal government’s termination of its treaty-based relationship with the Menominee tribe and the removal of the Menominee reservation from trust status. She started working with the activist group Determination of Rights and Unity of Menominee Shareholders (DRUMS) and undertaking the background research that would allow her to become an expert witness for the Menominee in their quest to have federal recognition of their sovereignty and their reservation restored (Figure 1). Her research led her to argue that the federal policy of termination had “subjected the Menominee to all the disabilities attendant on colonial status,” setting up the same sort of pernicious economic, social, and political effects that characterized “classic colonialism” in other parts of the world (Lurie 1972, 258–59). She used her status as an academic and scientist (at the time, chair of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee) to speak on behalf of the campaign for restoration in newspaper editorials (e.g., Lurie 1968a), and she made such politics and Indigenous action central to accounts of American Indian history in Wisconsin that she wrote for general audiences, some of which became foundational to Wisconsin’s educational curriculum on American Indian issues in subsequent decades (Lurie 1969).

### THE INSIGHTS OF ACTIVISM

These activist engagements, as well as the increasing visibility of Indigenous activism across Native North America, led Lurie to make certain changes to “The Contemporary American Indian Scene” before its publication. She had ended her 1968 draft with an epilogue about the apparent impasse of current activism in which she confessed that she was “pessimistic that unless Indians can work a change in official and public attitudes soon, their communities will not be able

to survive to contribute to experiments in developing new social alignments for modern industrial society.”

But in the published text, that pessimism is gone, and her new conclusion is optimistic, even utopian, a response to the emergence of Indian activist projects across the continent. The highly visible Indian movement of the late 1960s, Lurie suggests, is “worth careful attention,” because “Indian people have not had to make their delight out of necessity or whole cloth. They have old, tried models of community and culture that have stood the test of adversity and have proved flexible and adaptable to the technological complexities that so many people fear will dehumanize us” (470).

Lurie also added a few sentences on Vine Deloria’s 1969 critique of anthropologists. She noted that many anthropologists “have been shocked and hurt to find that the views expressed by [Deloria] are far more widely shared than they ever realized. Research among Indians of benefit only to the anthropologists is criticized in the same breath as efforts on the Indian behalf, presumably on Indians’ terms, but undertaken without real Indian involvement or advice. There is resentment even when there is total agreement with what whites have to say. Indians want to say it themselves” (Lurie 1971b, 469).

In other words, Indians should speak for themselves as the experts and authorities over their goals for their lives, both individually and collectively. Lurie’s words were addressed to anthropologists and others of her era at a time when the dominant scientific faith tended to discount Indian voices as irrelevant to scientific theorizing and to the discovery of solutions to social problems, but her words also resonate with the struggles of our own era and our concern for the many forces seeking to mute Indigenous voices.

Lurie’s theory of the articulatory movement provides an early attempt to give voice to a vision of Indigenous culture rooted in the sovereignty of Indigenous communities, reflecting their contemporaneity and acknowledging their interdependency—all core commitments of work on Indigeneity in Native North America today (Cattellino 2008; Lambert 2006; Nadasdy 2017; Powell 2018; Simpson 2014; Strong 2005). It is an attempt to theorize Indigeneity as a contemporary intellectual, political, ethical, and social commitment, not merely a predicament, envisioning forms of development that realize Indigenous values under contemporary conditions. It attests to a passionate anthropological engagement with the question of decolonization so central to contemporary anthropological work. Yet Lurie’s primary commitment was to her relationships with people, and she worked before academics came to view their theoretical writings as a primary field of political action. “The Contemporary American Indian Scene,” like all her writings, was a work in progress that only partially does justice to the vision of a collaborative anthropology of Indigeneity she had developed through her participation in the articulatory movement it describes.

## CONCLUSION

Until she passed away in 2017 at the age of ninety-three, Nancy Lurie was my most important mentor and critical interlocutor. Even though we emailed regularly, I am still piecing together the story of her activism as I read through and process the field notes, correspondence, and manuscripts she left behind. These documents speak of the depths of her passionate commitment to the cause she labeled “articulation.” Their message for me has been a sense that the contemporary anthropology of Indigeneity, rather than being a break with the discipline’s past, or even a sharp turn away from it, is in fact a continuation and development of an important tradition within it. It is an empowering yet also challenging way of understanding the history of anthropology, one that can inspire us in our ongoing efforts to continue pushing back against the “forces working to dehumanize us.”

## NOTES

**Acknowledgments.** I am indebted to Larry Nesper, Dawn Scher Tomae, Ada Deer, Max Viatori, April Eisman, and especially Ira Bashkow, who provided superb editorial advice and feedback.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Arndt, Grant. 2017. “Nancy Lurie’s Action Anthropology and the Reorganization of the Ho-Chunk Nation.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory, Manitoba, Canada.
- Cattellino, Jessica. 2008. *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Daubenmier, Judith M. 2008. *The Meskwaki and Anthropologists: Action Anthropology Reconsidered*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Deloria, Vine, Jr. 1969. *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. New York: Macmillan.
- Gearing, Frederick O., Robert McC. Netting, and Lisa R. Peattie, eds. 1960. *Documentary History of the Fox Project, 1948–1959*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Harkin, Michael. 2004. “Introduction: Revitalization as History and Theory.” In *Reassessing Revitalization Movements: Perspectives from North America and the Pacific Islands*, edited by Michael Harkin, xv–xxxvi. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Lambert, Valerie. 2006. *Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Leacock, Eleanor B., and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, eds. 1971. *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1955. “Problems, Opportunities, and Recommendations.” *Ethnohistory* 2 (4): 357–75.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1961. “The Voice of the American Indian. A Report on the American Indian Chicago Conference.” *Current Anthropology* 2 (5): 478–500.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1968a. “Angry US Indians Refuse to Vanish: Insist on Own Paths to Progress.” *Milwaukee Journal*, August 4.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1968b. “Variant Adaptations of Minority Groups to Encompassing Systems.” In *Proceedings of the VIIIth Annual Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences*, edited by Juan Comas, 154–56. Tokyo: Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1969. “Wisconsin: A Natural Laboratory for North American Indian Studies.” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 53:2–20.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1971a. “As Others See Us.” *New University Thought* 7 (Spring): 2–7.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1971b. “The Contemporary American Indian Scene.” In *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*, edited by Eleanor B. Leacock and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, 418–80. New York: Random House.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1972. “Menominee Termination: From Reservation to Colony.” *Human Organization* 31:257–69.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1973. “Action Anthropology and the American Indian.” In *Anthropology and the American Indian*, edited by James Officer, 5–15. San Francisco: Indian Historian Press.
- Lurie, Nancy. 1999. “Sol Tax and Tribal Sovereignty.” *Human Organization* 58 (1): 108–17.
- Miller, Helen Miner, and Nancy Oestreich Lurie. 1963. *Report on Wisconsin Winnebago Project*. Chicago: Social Security Administration, Department of Housing, Education, and Welfare grant to the Wisconsin Winnebago Tribe.
- Nadasdy, Paul. 2017. *Sovereignty’s Entailments: First Nation State Formation in the Yukon*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Powell, Dana. 2018. *Landscapes of Power: Politics of Energy in the Navajo Nation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Smith, Joshua J. 2015. “Standing with Sol: The Spirit and Intent of Action Anthropology.” *Anthropologica* 57 (2): 445–56.
- Strong, Pauline Turner. 2005. “Recent Ethnographic Research on North American Indigenous Peoples.” *Annual Review Anthropology* 34:253–68.
- Tax, Sol. 1975. “Action Anthropology.” *Current Anthropology* 16 (4): 514–17.
- Thomas, Robert K. 1965. “Pan-Indianism.” *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 6 (2): 75–83.
- Wallace, Anthony, F. C. 1956. “Revitalization Movements.” *American Anthropologist* 58 (2): 264–81.
- Wallace, Anthony, F. C. 1970. *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

# The Law Knows No Shame: Robert Redfield’s “Primitive Law” and the Persistence of Honor in Contemporary Societies

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13300

**Arzoo Osanloo**

*University of Washington*

In 1941, Robert Redfield delivered a lecture on “Primitive Law,” which was later published in the *University of Cincinnati Law Review* (1964) and reprinted in Paul Bohannan’s edited volume *Law and Warfare: Studies in the Anthropology of Conflict* (1967). Born in Chicago in 1897, Redfield had joined the anthropology faculty at the University of Chicago in 1927, eventually serving as dean of the Division of Social Sciences. He wrote important ethnographies of the Tepoztlán and Chan Kom in Mexico and synthetic works such as *The Primitive World and its Transformation* (1953). Redfield also held a law degree (JD) and was interested in bringing studies from anthropology to bear on legal scholarship, particularly to debunk ideas about the nature of law that are West-centric, based exclusively on Euro-American legal systems.

Redfield’s essay, which began as a law school address, sought to distinguish law in “civilized societies” from law in those that were “primitive.” Redfield was responding to Bronislaw Malinowski’s contention that law can be found in all societies as rules that individuals follow for “personal and social reasons” (Redfield 1964, 2). Redfield considered this definition of law to be overly broad and argued that it failed to capture the “special peculiarities of law” in state-centric legal systems. Early in the essay, Redfield noted that “to us, who live under a developed system of law, law appears as something very different from the personal and cultural considerations which motivate our day-to-day choices of action. It appears as a system of principles and restraints of action with accompanying paraphernalia of enforcement. The law is felt to be outside, independent, and coercive of us. Within its labyrinths we find our way as best we can” (2–3).

Despite evolutionary language that many anthropologists today would take issue with, Redfield points to a critical feature of statist legal systems: that courts “are powerless to recognize obligations” that societies based on custom were able to account for (3; citing Seagle 1937, 285). Such obli-

gations derive from social relations and socially diffuse but commonly held beliefs about compensation for loss and conflict avoidance, which are structured through moral codes of honor. In Euro-American contexts, ideas about such duties remain, but they are often beyond the capacities of juridical institutions to address. Thus, in “modern” societies, actions that are based on social duties appear anomalous and are unaccounted for by legal institutions. As Redfield notes, “The highly developed state with its powerful law looms so large that perhaps we do not always see that within it are many little societies, each in some ways a little primitive society, enforcing its own special regulations with a little primitive law of its own” (4).

Redfield goes on to point out that a key feature distinguishing Euro-American state legal systems is that they treat harmful actions, such as murder or theft, as violations of impersonal law—crimes—rather than as, first and foremost, harms to specific persons or groups. This contrasts with their treatment in nonstate societies as harms that are suffered by the victim’s family. By taking the reader through a survey of ethnological examples, Redfield shows that legal institutions and proceedings in nonstate societies are concerned with mediating the quest for redress for such harms by the victim’s next of kin, whether by facilitating compensation or regulating retaliation. They thereby address the concern with social obligations, which in these cases amounts to the victims obtaining payback or retribution. In modern Euro-American legal systems, however, the state, in a sense, steps in and usurps the victim’s right to redress: it *seizes* the harmful action as an injury to the whole of society, treating it primarily as a violation of state-enacted criminal law, and only secondarily (and, in practice, optionally) as a harm to the victim or the victim’s family. That the legal system attributes greater importance to the crime against the state than the harm to the victim is reflected in the harsher punishment it metes out, as severe as incarceration and death, while victims, if they choose to pursue redress at all, may seek only monetary damages. Thus, what such societies often leave unaddressed is the damage to the underlying relationship between the victim and perpetrator and the need for repair. That damage is sometimes acknowledged procedurally, but only in derivative forms, such as, in some jurisdictions, allowing for

victim-impact statements, which may be presented during the final, sanctioning phase of the process but in no way bind the judge's determination. No-contact orders often block perpetrators from communicating with victim's families, denying them direct expressions of remorse. Such personal moral accountings are the types of social obligations to which Redfield alludes in his essay. Beyond providing redress and healing the relationship, they may lead to broader social repair.

I find Redfield's essay helpful in my own research, as I explain below, and especially worth revisiting at a time of heightened public concern with the inadequacy of criminal prosecution for redressing the harms of gender-based violence, such as sexual predation of women by powerful men. In examining the "modern" dimensions of state law, Redfield casts light on the role of honor and shame, allowing us to better understand the importance and public circulation of such concerns today. His disambiguation of law is exceptionally insightful for unpacking the conditions in which we live today and providing a sort of history of the present. As such, my interest in this voicing project is not to salvage the persona of a forgotten disciplinary forebear but rather to draw on his significant and somewhat overlooked findings to consider what they reveal about our present condition, especially as it relates to injury and the everlasting desire for social repair.

Redfield, writing from within his own societal context, approaches law in the essay as a product of social evolution. His language appears to invoke a linear trajectory of civilizational progress and cultural development, culminating in "the phenomenon [of law] as we know it in civilized societies: the systematic and formal application of force by the state in support of explicit rules of conduct" (4–5). He presents examples of "primitive law," drawn from ethnographies, as "rudimentary" anticipations that "foreshadow our law and seem to illustrate the simpler modes of conduct out of which a law such as ours might develop" (5). At the same time, Redfield notes that the "beginnings of law are diverse, not unified" and that there are "many different forms and combinations of modes of conduct" that should be recognized as *legal* in nonstate and even nonliterate societies, including formal mediation procedures, unwritten codes, and systems of sanctions for injuries (5–6). Thus, rather than accepting the terms "primitive" and "modern" as definitive statements about the world, I take Redfield's language to be heuristic, an analytical tool for elaborating how contemporary juridical institutions frame a response to injury while eliding persistent social obligations.

Crucially, Redfield suggests that "modern" law emerges when the state distinguishes criminal law from tort (or personal injury) law, with the former addressing harms to state and society and the latter concerned with harms to individuals. As the law became modern in this way, states privileged the retributive goal of punishing transgressions against society over the restorative aim of mediating between two sides of a conflict (Braithwaite 2002, 7). Indeed, in so-called

modern laws, the concern with making victims whole is written out of the criminal code almost entirely: the state arrogates to itself the right to punish the most egregious crimes, like homicide, on behalf of society, while victims' families are left to pursue redress separately, through a civil proceeding, such as an unlawful death action.

An ethnographic example can help us appreciate how momentous this transformation is—that is, what it means for victims that the criminal justice system is so removed from the pursuit of restoration. In my current research, I consider the meaning and operation of forbearance in Iran's penal codes, both in the substantive criminal law and the codes of criminal procedure. In a case of murder, for instance, Iran's penal code provides redress to victims and their surviving family members in the form of a right of equal (or exact) retribution, but it also allows them to forgo an exercise of that right, in accordance with Islamic principles (*shari'a*). When victims' families forgo punishment, this constitutes forbearance: the perpetrator is spared retributive punishment. But forbearance is usually extended subject to restorative conditions. What this means in practice is that the state promotes a privatized interpretation of the murder, for which the Euro-American system does not account. As we will see, the privatization of murder brings concerns with honor, and the obligations associated with it, into the foreground.

Not only are victims and their families permitted to forgo retributive sanctioning and exercise forbearance, but the laws of criminal procedure encourage government officials, including the very judges who sentence perpetrators, to attempt to reach *solh* (reconciliation) between the parties. The legal codes, however, provide little guidelines for how parties should enact the reconciliation. The urging of settlement without clear guidelines, I argue, has generated a space for civil society activism and produced a veritable cottage industry strategically defined around forgiveness, mercy, and benevolence.

To illustrate, I offer a case from my fieldwork from a criminal court in Tehran.<sup>1</sup> In August 2016, I observed a trial of a wife and two daughters accused of murdering their husband/father. At the end of the three-hour hearing, the women accepted the charge of intentional murder, having admitted to drugging and strangling the victim before dismembering the body and stuffing it into garbage bags for disposal. As the chief judge brought the trial to a close, he had the plaintiffs, the victim's brother and two sisters, and the defendants sign their transcribed testimonies. He then looked at the parties on opposite sides of the room and said, "I think you need to talk."

With the parties' agreement, the judge cleared the room of spectators and pressed the victim's next of kin and the perpetrators to discuss their conflict—at that very moment. As if to assure the participants of the propriety of what was about to occur, the judge announced, "Everything is over. This is the start of the reconciliation and settlement meeting." At this point, the chief judge and his two associate judges

stepped out of the role of triers of fact and became mediators. They would hold a reconciliation meeting, aiming to avoid the imposition of the harshest sentence the plaintiffs could demand, *qisas* (exact retribution), which, in this case, was death.

In a final admonition, the judge turned mediator clarified, “I take no side in this case.” He addressed the victim’s family, “Your right to retribution is preserved by law, of that I assure you. But I want you to consider this: every murder has its reason.” This was a reference to the notarized letters that the perpetrators had submitted, laying out in excruciating detail the victim’s violent behavior, consisting of years of beatings and verbal and sexual abuse. The judge said to the victim’s siblings, “I recommend that you read the letters your nieces have written.”

The victim’s brother spoke first, “I am not ready to execute, but right now I am exploding with grief. So many times, I told them, ‘If you have any problems, tell me,’ but they never did.”

The chief judge responded, “We don’t want to hear this now.” Then, speaking more softly, “Our duty in all cases is to arrive at reconciliation. I want to ask this of you, that you try and find a solution between you.”

On the judge’s cue, the prison guards shepherded the young women toward their aunts and uncle and prodded, “Plead with them. Go!”

The girls fell to their knees and begged for their lives. Through tears, they whimpered, “Forgive us. Please, forgive us.”

The aunts looked away, their arms folded at their chests. “Why should we forgive? Why should we be merciful when they were not?”

The onlookers, playing the role of a Greek chorus, sang the rewards of mercy and compassion in sparing the women’s lives, “By killing them, you won’t receive God’s mercy.”

“I will not consent [to forgo retribution],” replied an aunt.

“They said those horrible things. Our brother didn’t do those things. They’re liars,” cried the other.

The chief judge interrupted, “With your mercy, you will help them become better [people].”

The judges, having read the perpetrators’ detailed letters of abuse, were apparently swayed by their pleas. But the letters, however telling and worthy of sympathy, carried no legal weight. The women had no evidence to support their claims. Their only space for maneuver was to convince their aunts and uncle, the victim’s next of kin, to forgo retribution. This required addressing the family’s concerns with their tainted honor.

Understanding this, one of the associate judges called over a journalist and asked him to write an article in which the defendants would say, “We made a mistake.” Just that. Nothing more. The statement had to be ambiguous, avoiding any implication that they had lied, yet relieving the family’s sense of besmirched honor. With that, the family agreed to forgo retribution.

\*\*\*

What to make of this scene that, even as rendered here in abbreviated form, conveys such a complex positioning of the state’s role and the locus of harm? The case illustrates how the judiciary establishes its own role as one of regulating the space for settling private accounts. In this way, the state claims its monopoly on legitimate violence by requiring that any payback take place within its judicial processes. By giving private individuals the right to ask the state to exercise that violence on their behalf, the state implicates them in its logic for settling disputes, regardless of whether they exercise the right of retribution or forgo it.

One important element of this law is that it further protects the injured parties as *private persons*, giving each victim or, in cases of death, the immediate kin, an individual right of retribution. Unlike in Western contexts, where the state, in a sense, steps in and usurps the individual right of retaliation by dividing the private and public harms in a way that privileges the state’s sanction and leaves the most severe sanction (execution) in the hands of the state, here it is just the opposite. The state gives the victim’s family priority in sanctioning. While there is a public sanctioning mechanism, it kicks in only if forbearance occurs. In those cases, the maximum sentence is three to ten years—for an offense against public security, not murder. This privatization of murder is distinct from Western systems, and yet, perhaps, is more consistent with a liberal legal order.

The state officials, judges, law professors, and members of the *ulama* with whom I have discussed this law argue in very strong terms that the victim is the rights holder because that individual is the injured party. Thus, the state assumes the role of an arbiter, mediating over the dispute. It takes over the role of the tribal council, albeit, in practice, oftentimes working alongside village leaders and other social actors, and, in this context, it uses its discretionary authority, a power that it does not possess in issuing the sentence.

To better understand the effects of the state’s role in such privatization, I return to Redfield, who suggested that “modern” law emerged from “the development of systems of compensation or of forms of socially approved retaliation in . . . what might be called a rudimentary law of torts” (1964, 12). This rudimentary tort law included a formal process and specific sanctions. Legal process began to emerge when “retaliative force [wa]s stylized by custom into a sort of ritualistic revenge” (11). The overall goal of this incipient law, Redfield found, was to rein in “unlimited revenge” between families or tribes. He saw this process of standardization and systematization of retaliative sanctions as developing into a “modern” justice system at the point when the laws of a society began to be more concerned with punishing the harm committed against society as a whole, rather than just the injury to victims and their next of kin. “The beginning of law may . . . be sought,” Redfield wrote, both “in the extent to which there is formal process” and in the extent to which offenses are “thought to be also, or only, wrongful

acts committed against the society,” but it is only with this last transformation that formally imposed sanctions become “the impersonal application of force—that we are likely to think of as [modern] criminal law” (12).

In Redfield’s terms, the Iranian system is modern insofar as it possesses a formalized system of rules that define violations and their corresponding sanctions.<sup>2</sup> It is atypical, however, in that, even as the state prevents injured parties from taking the law into their own hands, it does not take the right of retribution away from the victim’s family. To the contrary, it preserves and formalizes the right of the victim’s family to make the paramount decision over the life of the perpetrator.

My interest was drawn to Redfield’s analysis of “modern” versus “primitive” law for his study of how contemporary legal systems shape the persistence and circulation of discourses of honor and shame in different social contexts. This includes Iran, where I conduct research, but also the United States, where the recent public discourse on gender-based violence mobilized shame of both perpetrators and victims. Shame, in the former context, is raw and in the open, an affective register that individuals reference as an important regulator of both public and private behavior. It is an important element in the wider ethico-religious landscape, which includes law. In the United States, individuals refer less to honor or shame as forces structuring their behavior, and it is not a dominant fixture of the legal system. In the recent spate of public accusations of sexual predation by women against powerful men, however, both accusers and perpetrators regularly cited shame as important factors governing their actions, whether in the case of the accusers, where it prevented them from coming forward sooner, or with the accused, where it was a dominant feature of their public expressions of remorse.<sup>3</sup> In redressing the harms of gender-based violence, such offenses are so shot through with shame, it raises the question: What does it mean for victims that the criminal justice system subordinates restorative sanctions, the only legal means that might rehabilitate the honor of victims?

Redfield’s “Primitive Law” shows that the way the law is structured plays a significant role in how and when people talk about and experience honor and shame. Through Redfield’s insights about the modernization of law, by which he emphasizes codification and, importantly, the sovereign’s seizing of injury (tort) as a violation against the state through the formation of criminal law, we see a reduction in so-called honor crimes. I say “so-called” because crimes against honor remain, but because the legal structure of injury is a bifurcated one, we no longer see it. Only when we go to societies like Iran, where the sovereign has not seized personal injury (tort) as first and foremost an injury against the state, do we gain a better sense of why in some societies honor is so blatant and in others it is latent.

Uniquely, in Iran, the state promotes rehabilitation through the reconciliation procedure. In this sense, the Iranian system is dual: it possesses elements that Redfield would

attribute to both modern and premodern legal institutions. One of the effects of this dual system is that the emphasis on honor is more explicit, rather than implicit, as it is in contemporary Western contexts. The Iranian system’s emphasis on the injury to the victim’s family not only has the effect of accentuating the social importance of the family’s honor but, through the victim’s participation in retributive sanctioning, also serves to further entrench gendered interpretations of honor and shame, conceived as the customs and rituals of “primitive” society. This is why, in the case above (and quite frankly every case), the state’s concern with punishment is deeply rooted in a judicial response that rehabilitates the family’s honor. That is to say, the state’s structuring of the justice system to prioritize victim’s rights affirms and ingrains overt concerns with honor. Indeed, there is even a deeply performative action on the part of the aggrieved family members, who are permitted to announce their decision in an open courtroom, publicly reclaiming their honor by disavowing the shame brought to them by the defendants’ claims.

To be sure, there are contemporary critiques to be made of Redfield’s classificatory approach and evolutionary language, both of which were part of the lexicon of his time, and part of a broader effort, perhaps, to scientize the discipline. Redfield also omits any analysis of the effects of colonialism on law, especially codification. There are, however, important findings in the essay that help us understand how honor, as a residual product of kin-based mechanisms of conflict resolution, endures and circulates today in very different socio-legal contexts and how it structures feelings like shame. Redfield’s analysis sheds light on how some societies make explicit reference to honor and shame in both law and social discourse, while others conceive of it as a vestige of the premodern past, even as they mobilize it in both extrajudicial and quasi-legal processes when victims feel that the legal system has been inadequate to address all harms.

What a rethinking of Redfield’s “Primitive Law” tells us about the contemporary moment is that the codification of tort laws, not just in Iran but even in Western societies, remains bound up with customs that sought to extract damages incurred from the staining of tribal honor. Indeed, while some scholars consider so-called honor and shame societies to be premodern, as Redfield himself did, what his article actually shows is more in line with Latour’s (1993) notion that we have never been modern. That is, the stark distinction between “nature” (or instincts) and “culture” (or law) has never existed. Indeed, while the law is ill-equipped to handle persistent social obligations that emerge from harms to persons, juridical institutions nonetheless steadfastly reproduce them. Modern law, as Redfield strains to show, is derived from the moral concerns of kinship groups, including honor and shame. States diverge in how they codify moral principles and, as such, they vary in shaping the extant apparitions of honor and shame in their social orders. The case of Iran shows that the state seizing injury is not the only possible outcome of modern law. In Iran’s forbearance

system, the state does seize the tort from the victims but also gives it back.

## NOTES

1. I have been studying forbearance in Iran since 2007 through annual research trips. Through participant observation, interviews, and life histories with victims' families, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and social workers, I explore how and why individuals forgive when the law gives them the right to pursue retribution.
2. For Bohannan (1965), law is based on a "double institutionalization," first a recognition of social (or tribal) customs and second their codification. Using this logic, Islamic laws are based on a triple institutionalization—from custom to scriptural injunction to codified law. The delivery of codified *diya* (compensation) in Iran's penal codes is a case in point, which emerged earlier from custom, then Islamic principles.
3. For example, one of Harvey Weinstein's accusers, Louise Godbold (2017), noted that shame was a factor that prevented her from coming forward earlier and asked, "Why do women carry the shame of their perpetrators?" With perpetrators like Matt Lauer, shame emerged as the central element of his public apology: "I feel ashamed." See Jill Disis (2017).

## REFERENCES CITED

- Bohannan, Paul. 1965. "The Differing Realms of the Law." *American Anthropologist* 67 (6): 33–42.
- Bohannan, Paul, ed. 1967. *Law and Warfare: Studies in the Anthropology of Conflict*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Braithwaite, John. 2002. *Restorative Justice and Responsive Regulation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Disis, Jill. 2017. "Read Matt Lauer's Full Apology." *CNN*, November 30. <https://money.cnn.com/2017/11/30/media/matt-lauer-full-statement/index.html>.
- Godbold, Louise. 2017. "My Encounter with Harvey Weinstein and What It Tells Us about Trauma." *ACEsConnection*, October 9. <https://www.acesconnection.com/blog/my-encounter-with-harvey-weinstein-and-what-it-tells-us-about-trauma>.
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Redfield, Robert. 1964. "Primitive Law." *University of Cincinnati Law Review* 33 (1): 1–22.
- Seagle, William. 1937. "Primitive Law and Professor Malinowski." *American Anthropologist* 39 (2): 275–90.

# "My Favorite Book!": Voicing Mary Douglas for Twenty-First-Century Conversations

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13301

**Rena Lederman**

*Princeton University*

These reflections originate in an encounter I had with Mary Douglas in the mid-1980s, when she had a regular visiting appointment at my university. Arriving at my office for the first time one day before we headed to lunch together, she paused at the threshold to take in the wall of volumes before her and exclaimed "My favorite book!" before making a beeline for the one item in my Douglas collection that you are probably not picturing.

The book she singled out was *Rules and Meanings* (hereafter *R&M*), a compilation claiming "philosophical forebears for a course of anthropology that I like to teach" (9). Published in 1973, *R&M* is subtitled *The Anthropology of Everyday Knowledge, Selected Readings*. This anthology's 319 pages comprise forty-five selections by thirty-four different authors from anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, sociology, and more, including a few surprises: for example, writings by someone identified only as "Mrs Humphry" (author of *Manners for Women*, a 1897 etiquette guide), by the avant-

garde composer John Cage, and by the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Hermann Hesse, whose works (e.g., *Siddhartha*, *The Glass Bead Game*) were 1960s countercultural best sellers.

## HER FAVORITE BOOK? ON GOING WITHOUT SAYING

At the time, I found her choice curious. With only a five-page general introduction and brief paragraph-long prefaces for each of the book's eight sections, Douglas appears mostly absent in this text. On second glance, however, that appearance dissolves. While many volumes in the Penguin Education series to which *R&M* belongs appear to background their editors and contain abbreviated selections, Douglas's volume is an extreme case. Because many of its excerpts are so extraordinarily brief and therefore so removed from their original contexts, Douglas's orchestrating presence is palpable.

As a step toward discovering how others have perceived *R&M*'s orchestration, I looked for reviews. Richard Fardon's (1999) excellent "intellectual biography" provides a comprehensive listing of reviews of Douglas's work, but none for *R&M*. In the end, I found only two reviews.<sup>1</sup> Writing in

*The British Journal of Social Work*, Ralph Ruddock's (1974) attention was drawn, as mine had been, toward divining the editor's purposes. He noted that the text's selections show how even the apparently arbitrary conventions of etiquette and the abstractions of musical composition have sociological rationales. Drawing a lesson for social workers who, he suggested, are inclined to focus on personal meanings, he asserted that since the "accepted ways of 'making sense' of the world" vary across social systems, Douglas's critical point must be that if we ourselves were relocated, "our 'common sense' would have been different from what it is" (377–78). While Ruddock lamented the absence in *R&M* of excerpts from Douglas's well-known published work, William McCormack's (1976) review in *American Anthropologist* takes the opposite tack. He simply summarized her introduction and the preface to *R&M*'s first section (see below), as if acknowledging that the whole book (as Douglas herself put it) "expounds . . . what this editor believes ought to be accepted in anthropology" (Douglas 1973, 9).

In the present context, the relative obscurity of *R&M* is doubly ironic. After all, the collection's motivating idea is similar in spirit to that of the "Voicing the Ancestors" series to which this paper contributes. In his introduction to the first "Voicing" collection, Richard Handler (2016, 368) recalled what he and Ira Bashkow learned from their teacher, historian of anthropology George Stocking, that "anthropology as a discipline . . . looped back on itself throughout its historical trajectory; texts that were theoretically salient at one point might fall into insignificance only to be revived a generation or two later, not solely as history but as currently useful theory. And of course, texts that had remained in obscurity hold the potential, we believed, to become theoretically salient again." In *R&M*, Douglas deepens this idea of recurrent forgetting and rediscovery in disciplinary histories by locating that scholarly dynamic within an encompassing "anthropology of everyday knowledge." Douglas emphasizes the need to recover one *particularly* elusive insight. Her single most powerful articulation of this warning prefaces the anthology's first section, as follows:

How the moral order is known—how the inner experience of morality is related to the moral order without—this depends on hidden processes. Each person confronted with a system of ends and means (not necessarily a tidy and coherent system) seems to face an order of nature, objective and independent of human wishes. But the moral order and the knowledge which sustains it are created by social conventions. If their man-made origins were not hidden, they would be stripped of some of their authority. Therefore the conventions are not merely tacit, but extremely inaccessible to investigation.

This book of readings is addressed to the question of how reality is constructed, how it is given its moral bias and how the process of construction is veiled. The dates of the selections are part of the theme and deserve particular attention. Over and over the same questions are taken up as if from scratch. The dates themselves show over fifty years how repugnant and easy to forget is Plato's concept of the good lie, and how difficult to contemplate steadily our responsibility for creating our own environment. (15)

This paragraph about the systematically hidden collective sources of human convictions concerning reality (the "independent," "objective" "order of nature") could serve to introduce *R&M* as a whole. Instead, it prefaces the collection's first and arguably most important section. Entitled "Tacit Conventions," that section includes four very short selections. The first—one paragraph from Ludwig Wittgenstein's 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*—asserts that "language disguises thought" and that "the tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated" (17). Next, in two pages of excerpts from *The Problem of Social Reality*, Alfred Schutz—writing in the early 1950s—gets specific about some of those complications, writing, "only a very small part of my knowledge of the world originates within my personal experience. The greater part is socially derived, handed down to me by my friends, my parents, my teachers and the teachers of my teachers" (18). He also cautions that that social reality is therefore multiple. A two-page excerpt from *Studies in Ethnomethodology* by Harold Garfinkel (written about fifteen years after Schutz) introduces the idea of "background expectancies": "common sense" assumptions about the world that are not only habitual and outside awareness but also freighted with moral bias ("moral" in the sociological sense of "the rule-governed activities of everyday life") (21). While people use "background expectancies as a scheme of interpretation," they cannot generally specify in what those expectancies consist (22). Consequently, "for these background expectancies to come into view one must either be a stranger to the 'life as usual' character of everyday scenes, or become estranged from them."

One way to do that, Garfinkel says (elaborately citing Schutz) is by treating these expectancies "as matters of theoretic interest." Douglas then complements that archetypically philosophical/sociological strategy with a characteristically anthropological double movement. Slyly labeling the section's final selection "For Example, Witchcraft" (when it is in fact more than that), Douglas offers a two-page abridgement of four pages from E. E. Evans-Pritchard's 1937 *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* to illustrate the specific value of the anthropologist's *ethnographic* method of conjoined displacement and familiarization. Readers can glean from this that their own and other people's ordinarily taken-for-granted everyday understandings of persons, places, things, and happenings reflect histories of social agreements whose rationales are discoverable, albeit not predictable.

Besides the substantive interest of its selections, *R&M* is intriguing formally. A few selections—most being ethnographic (e.g., by Pierre Bourdieu, Ralph Bulmer, Evans-Pritchard, Hart and Pilling, and Stanley Tambiah)—are reproduced in *R&M* nearly whole, their authors' intended messages evident and respected.<sup>2</sup> However, as noted earlier, most of the volume's selections are microscopic extracts. Their authors' framings mostly set aside, Douglas vigorously reassembled them as contexts for one another, their senses

reinforcing, extending, or qualifying one another (in some cases also by means of internal citations, like Garfinkel's references to Schutz).

In effect, Douglas built a case that she could have (and indeed has) made in her own words. Had she used the sources one finds here in the conventional manner—as citations embedded in an integrated argument explicitly her own—she would have been more conventionally accountable to her readers. But *R&M* is not that kind of book. Because it was meant to complement her course lectures, it makes sense that she held back her own voice in *R&M*. “Voicing the ancestors” both in form and in substance, the collection is an archive of primary documents, curated so as to invite readers to read them with her.

### TEACHING RULES AND MEANINGS THEN AND NOW

In her introduction, Douglas presents *R&M* as a text she designed for a University College London course (“C3”) variously labeled Cognitive Anthropology, Religion and Morals, or Symbolism that she regarded “as an essential perspective for anthropology—a sinking of artesian wells” without which “the subject [anthropology, that is] easily dries up and appears as a series of barren controversies cut off from the rest human knowledge and vulnerable to the blowing of every fashionable wind” (Douglas 1973, 9).

To find out how she might have used in her teaching the texts excerpted in *R&M*, I consulted a number of Douglas's former students (Richard Fardon and James Urry) and colleagues (Philip Burnham and Paul Richards).<sup>3</sup> I learned that while Douglas was an inspiring postgraduate mentor and colleague, she was less successful as an undergraduate lecturer. For example, Phil Burnham (email, January 4, 2018) reported dealing “with several tearful undergrads who found Mary's teaching quite difficult” (an account echoed by James Urry, who had been among those undergraduates; but see Fardon [1999, xiv–xv] who, also an early 1970s undergraduate, was transfixed by Mary's twice-weekly lectures in Religion, Morals, and Symbolism: “This, I realized, was how anthropologists think”). Burnham surmised that Mary may have “used her undergraduate lectures to work out ideas that she was thinking through and, as a result, was often not as clear in communicating to students as she might have been” if she had had a more strictly pedagogic focus. From that vantage, the book can be understood as part of her self-educating effort to forge connections between her Oxford training and her more contemporary influences, anthropological (Ralph Bulmer) and nonanthropological (Basil Bernstein).

Burnham suggested that “it was more in the context of the department's postgraduate seminars (which we all attended), as well as her postgraduate supervisions, that she engaged with the ideas advanced in the *Rules and Meanings* collection.” He remembers having discussions with Mary in the early 1970s about sociology of knowledge theorists like Garfinkel, Schutz, and Aaron Cicourel whose work “she was not that familiar with but was actively reading at this

time.” The poor reception of *Natural Symbols* may have been a motivation for this exploration: “during the early 1970s, Mary was going through a process of seeking productive theoretical linkages with a range of other disciplines that she hoped would allow her to communicate her basic ideas in a more successful way.”

Douglas hired James Urry after he completed his undergraduate degree at UCL and before he began postgraduate work at Oxford to help with *R&M*'s index and each section's “further readings.” Urry (email, June 13, 2018) recalled that Mary referred undergraduates in her courses to “the strictly anthropological texts”—“she was very keen on Bulmer on animal classification . . . and, of course, her Oxford links”—rather than the wider nonanthropological sources that appear in *R&M*. Douglas's letters to him during July/August 1972 make clear that she intended the book (her words, punctuation, and abbreviation in a letter quoted by Urry) “as background to the C3 course for future years & to show the tradition that leads up from [Durkheim and Mauss's] *Primitive Classification* to Bulmer's Cassowary.”<sup>4</sup> Because “so many of my readings are not anthropological at all (because I want to interest other disciplines) the anthrop Reading list should be longer than usual.” The point was “not to show anthropologists that there is other work going on, but to show philosophers & art historians etc. what anthropology has been doing that is relevant to their concerns.”

A final contemporary note on teaching *R&M*: the collection's challenging sociological arguments are especially counterintuitive to many twenty-first-century anthropology undergraduates, for whom the value of subjective understanding, worth of insiders' representations, and primacy of self-interest are givens. My own students are typically ambivalent about—both attracted to and outraged or repulsed by—social researchers' presumptive license to explain worlds not their own. Their ambivalence deepens when the communities at the center of a researcher's attention are spoken about more than they are spoken with, learned from, or heard. My students often begin with the conviction that, like other mainstream social scientists, anthropologists “study people,” a phrase conjuring objectification: no one wants to “be studied.”

Assigning *R&M*'s first section (described earlier), I have striven to use its juxtaposition of Wittgenstein, Garfinkel, Schutz, and Evans-Pritchard to render my students' sensibilities visible to them not as simply personal but as moral biases reflective of historically distinctive social conjunctures, which they can rethink. In turn, my students have used those selections, together with others I provide (e.g., Kirin Narayan, Renato Rosaldo) and their own sources, to complicate familiar insider (“native”)/outsider and expert/lay hierarchies. That rethinking and this complication are necessary for any future social/cultural anthropology.

Taken together, these readings encourage hesitation about habituated first impressions and inspire curiosity about unfamiliar contexts and perspectives among students who

arrive (quite understandably) attuned to repressive uses of “othering.” How, for one provocative example, can “ethnographic fiction”—like Oliver LaFarge’s 1929 novel *Laughing Boy*—be anything other than cultural appropriation of Navajo experience by an Anglo outsider? Well, how have Navajo read the book? Does their knowledge of place and especially of language enable readings that you may not have anticipated? In a word, Douglas’s texts combine well with others to open conversations of twenty-first-century value.

### BACKSTAGE WITH MARY DOUGLAS

Mary Douglas’s biographer Richard Fardon (1999) has quite reasonably characterized her work as “modernist.” Concerning modernist texts generally, Pauline Rosenau (1991, 34) noted that they are inclined “to restrict interpretation, assign responsibility, [and] clarify authority relations” and, in the interest of conveying information, limit ambiguity so as to “control the proliferation of meaning.” Contrastively, the postmodern style is “dedicated to expanding and enlarging the space available to the reader, to encouraging a plurality of meanings, and to inventing a text that is exposed, unsettled, undefined—a text that embraces and encourages many interpretations.”

Douglas would appear to agree, but with an edge. Douglas’s 1989 review of Marilyn Strathern’s *Gender of the Gift* asserted that “the book is written for a Post-Modern anthropology”: an anthropology “engrossed with problems of authenticity and authority, and profoundly skeptical of claims to objectivity” in which “the front-stage space, in which foreign culture used to be recorded, has been vacated” as inauthentic, and in which “the former back-stage of the fieldworkers’ self-questioning”—the “plumbing,” “how the thing works”—is exposed to view. Stopping short of characterizing Strathern’s work itself in those terms, Douglas admonished the 1980s generation for abandoning the job of “communicating something” about anything other than “itself” (a charge that continues to be leveled by Douglas’s successors against recent anthropological writing).

Douglas clearly scorned “subjectivist” forms of reflexivity. Fortunately, anthropological reflexivity has a more varied lineage. Douglas’s work is itself, I suggest, an exemplar of the kind that deploys the discipline’s distinctively comparativist vision to defamiliarize Western institutions and both popular and social science assumptions about consumption and value, environmental risk, and more—a move that unsettles homebound understandings by juxtaposition with a plurality of others. Although one of Durkheim’s greatest proponents during the balance of her career, Douglas extended her critical social theory to reproach Durkheim for his failure to turn his sociological gaze to the task of exposing the homebound (Euro-American) assumptions underlying his generalizing ambitions.

In that sense, attention to the “back-stage” was internal to the work of anthropology as Douglas practiced it (however unevenly, e.g., Fardon 1999, 102–24). Over the past couple of decades, postmodern (or perhaps, critically

reflexive) anthropologists have trained their sights on Western knowledge practices, treating their styles of comparison and translation, their naturalisms, and their universalisms as ethnographic objects. By those lights, Mary Douglas is our ally. We struggle together “to contemplate steadily our responsibility” for creating the worlds that hold us in thrall, parting company in our choices concerning how to act on that recognition.

*R&M* is a philosophically nuanced, ethnographically multidimensional framework for understanding the social constitution of the natural, the factual, and the normal. However Douglas’s later work and personal commitments appear today, *R&M*’s themes resonate with critical impulses informing gender and sexuality studies, science studies, critical race studies, and more. In his biography, Fardon (1999, xiii) noted Douglas’s “extraordinarily liberal cultural imagination and expression.” Her insistent outward movement from the centers of classic twentieth-century social anthropology (kinship, religion) to its disciplinary neighbors in the social sciences and outside of academia promoted anthropology’s radical deconstruction of Western social theory’s universalisms. A precursor of several recent “turns”—certainly the ethical and the ontological—her archive of sources on the “anthropology of everyday knowledge” is worth a second (or perhaps a first) glance.

### NOTES

**Acknowledgments.** Thanks to Ira Bashkow for organizing the 2017 American Anthropological Association meeting roundtable “Voicing the Ancestors: Readings for the Present from Anthropology’s Past.” Thanks also to Ira and to Philip Burnham, Richard Fardon, Margaret Kenna, Paul Richards, Perri 6, and James Urry for responding to my questions concerning Mary Douglas’s teaching and for commentary on this paper.

1. Fardon told me that he is not aware of others.
2. James Urry (email, July 7, 2018) recalls that the ethnographic readings were assigned in full in Douglas’s course.
3. This modest project does not pretend to be a proper history. I therefore particularly appreciate the generosity of the handful of scholars with personal experience whom I consulted to follow up Douglas’s brief comment concerning the motivation for *R&M*. I thank them for their help; I am, of course, solely responsible for this analysis.
4. Douglas is referring here to Bulmer (1967). This and the following quotations are transcribed as Douglas wrote them in her messages to Urry.

### REFERENCES CITED

- Bulmer, Ralph. 1967. “Why Is the Cassowary Not a Bird? A Problem of Zoological Taxonomy among the Karam of the New Guinea Highlands.” *Man* 2 (1): 5–25.
- Douglas, Mary, ed. 1973. *Rules and Meanings: The Anthropology of Everyday Knowledge, Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Douglas, Mary. 1989. “A Gentle Deconstruction.” *London Review of Books* 11 (9): 17–18.

- Fardon, Richard. 1999. *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography*. New York: Routledge.
- Handler, Richard. 2016. "Voicing the Ancestors: Notes on the Historical Sensibility of Anthropologists." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (3): 367–86.
- La Farge, Oliver. 1929. *Laughing Boy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- McCormack, William C. 1976. "Review of *Rules and Meanings*." *American Anthropologist* 78 (3): 654.
- Rosenau, Pauline. 1991. *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton.
- Ruddock, Ralph. 1974. "Review of *Rules and Meanings*." *British Journal of Social Work* 4 (3): 377–78.