

ARRIVING AT A COMMON GROUND: JOHN REED SWANTON AND  
AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

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## Abstract

This project examines the life of renowned anthropologist John Reed Swanton (1873-1953 ) and his work with indigenous peoples. Combining several methodologies that included archaeology, anthropology, history, and linguistics, Swanton's research methods anticipated ethnohistory. His contributions to Native Southeast studies remain indispensable and his work in the Native Northwest, particularly with Haida and Tlingit communities, continues to serve as an important reference point for many scholars. Reared in the "Boasian" school of thought, John Swanton rejected both evolutionary and racial frameworks in which to evaluate Indian cultures. He remained an exemplary anthropologist from the beginning of his professional career at the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1900 through his retirement in 1944.

A key aspect of this study concerns the dynamics of the individual dialogs that took place between Swanton and some of his Indian informants. These interactions provide a window into the ways in which anthropologists and Indians interacted. At times, anthropologists and Indian collaborators grasped the other's intentions. Just as often, however, the two parties held incompatible expectations, and as a result, misunderstood each other. For example, Swanton appreciated the storytelling creativity and individual artistry of his Haida collaborators, but often overlooked the intentions of the southeastern Indians who shared their stories with him. Many of the creation stories southeastern Indians told Swanton referenced the difficult circumstances they were currently facing or had undergone in the recent past, such as attacks on their cultures, removal, and alcoholism. Swanton often disregarded creation stories that included such material, as he felt they indicated cultural loss.

## Acknowledgments:

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My parents, Tony and Mary DeSanti, deserve special recognition for the unwavering love and support they have provided me throughout my life. Their dedication in ensuring that I had the opportunity to pursue my life's ambition is testament to their integrity, compassion, and willingness to always prioritize their children's well-being above all else. I find it impossible to imagine a more complete and perfect two people to call Mom and Dad. This project is dedicated to them.

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# **Arriving at a Common Ground: John Reed Swanton and American Anthropology**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The history of anthropology, aside from encompassing a considerable body of theory regarding human behavior and culture, is filled with accounts of significant individuals and their contributions. While it is important to remain vigilant against extolling only an individual's virtues when writing a biography, providing a critical overview of a person's life can provide clarification of particular time periods and subjects. In this instance, presenting a thorough account of an anthropologist's life helps illuminate the interactions that have always taken place between them and Native people.

Therefore, in this study I propose to do just this by examining the life of one of American anthropology's most important individuals, John Reed Swanton (1873-1958). Much of today's scholarship on the Native southeast and Native northwest builds upon Swanton's contributions. His meticulous research, which included scouring archives along with field work, provides a body of work indispensable today. Swanton's research methods anticipated ethnohistory, using an interdisciplinary approach to culture. And while not exempt from the prejudices of his time, Swanton argued against racial and evolutionist theories.

While not as systematically influential as Franz Boas, or widely known as some of his contemporaries, an account of Swanton's life that focuses on his reasons for undertaking a career working with indigenous people will illustrate his accomplishments and worthiness as one of anthropology's most important figures. Through an examination of Swanton's life, the way in which anthropology developed as a profession will also become apparent. How an individual anthropologist of Swanton's repute interacted with Indian peoples, focusing on how these

exchanges shaped his life as well as those he relied upon for his research is also an important dimension worthy of exploration.

As such, part of this project rests on my contention that no matter its overall agenda in the past, anthropology can be seen as a grand dialog that ensued between representatives of white America with indigenous peoples. At its core, these communications took place at the individual level, between scholar and Indian. And just as it is commonly acknowledged that anthropologists influenced Natives through these encounters, and not always for the better, these personal encounters also served to challenge the ethnocentric assumptions of some anthropologists. Through these encounters, many Indian individuals directly altered some of the assumptions a number of anthropologists made about assimilation and the right for tribal communities to be left alone.<sup>1</sup>

Another way in which this study differs from previous anthropological biographies is that it takes an ethnohistorical approach to a person's life.<sup>2</sup> The common misassumption among some outside the field is that the discipline solely devotes itself to studying indigenous North Americans. This is understandable considering the discipline's genesis during the federal government's Indian Claims Hearings of the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> However, ethnohistory is the combining of

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<sup>1</sup> Some cross-cultural encounters that directly influenced the assumptions of individual anthropologist are well known due to the controversial nature of a particular issue or of a person's charismatic personality that helped garner public interest. James Mooney's staunch support of the use of peyote for Native American Church ceremonies is a perfect example. However, just as many scholars' views underwent changes in less dramatic fashion through an accumulation of insights and experiences gathered from years spent living with Native communities. See L. G. Moses, *The Indian Man: A Biography of James Mooney* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 190-192.

<sup>2</sup> Ethnohistory added a complexity to the study of Native peoples and their societies by combining the methodologies of history and anthropology. By utilizing written documents alongside ethnographic observations, a more balanced and accurate assessment of Native American cultures and histories was made possible. The discipline first arose as a way of making sense of disputed Native land claims during the Indian Claim Hearings during the late 1940s through the 1970s. Along with expanding the way Native history could be approached and viewed, ethnohistory lent crucial testimony, aiding many Native communities seeking justice for the federal government's violation of their treaty rights.

anthropological and historical methodologies in the study of human cultures. A crucial aspect of this pursuit mandates employing comparative approaches to source material in examining individual cultures in contact with others, with attention focused on change over time. In reality, nothing restricts ethnohistory's methodologies being applied to non-Native North American indigenous peoples or even to large, industrialized nations. As James Axtell once commented regarding just this point, "The group or region studied is less important than how it is studied and with what organizing focus."<sup>4</sup>

Along with misassumptions regarding ethnohistory, similar oversights persist regarding the nature of biography, particularly within academia. The trend for several decades in academic history has been to shy away from using biography as a tool of analysis. This reluctance is not entirely unwarranted, since using a person's life to understand an entire era can be filled with many shortcomings. However, a careful and nuanced approach to an individual's life, while not crystallizing or giving the "truth" about an entire era, can still be a useful strategy. What an individual brought to bear throughout the course of his or her life's work, particularly with regards to Indian people, can provide important glimpses into that person's specific psyche, giving us insight into the deeply personal nature of such contacts. Whatever anthropology winds up declaring as orthodox about certain cultures at various times, individual dialogs between anthropologists and aboriginal persons played significant roles, even if this truth did not always show up in what anthropologists said or wrote for their peers. In order to understand anthropology's transition from its ethnocentric and racist past to its current status as a much

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<sup>3</sup> William T. Hagan, "The New Indian History," in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> James Axtell, "The Ethnohistory of Native America," in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 13.

improved method of learning about the human condition, the specifics of individual lives on all sides must be scrutinized more thoroughly.<sup>5</sup>

Swanton's career also marks anthropology's emergence from its less centralized, recreational beginnings to a truly professional discipline. Thus, his life story, previously omitted amidst the many biographical accounts of his colleagues, broadens our understanding of this time of transition. To be sure, L.G. Moses' book on James Mooney and Donald Worster's on John Wesley Powell offer excellent insights into the lives of two important figures in the field. Moses and Worster skillfully show how each of their subjects established the groundwork for what later became professional anthropology.<sup>6</sup> Yet, neither Mooney nor Powell acted during the so-called "professionalization" of anthropology. Franz Boas, Frank Cushing and others have all also received their due as founders of modern anthropology, but John Swanton remains a glaring omission in the scholarly literature.

Such omission is surprising. His many books and nearly two hundred articles produced over forty-plus years as an anthropologist covered a wide range of issues and continue to serve as indispensable starting points for many contemporary scholars of indigenous peoples. In particular, as the "dean" of southeastern anthropology, he left behind a near encyclopedic amount of scholarship over the many cultures originally from that region. This treasure trove pertaining to southeastern peoples, many of whom underwent the federal government's removal policies into Oklahoma in the 1830s and 1840s, remain indispensable to students of this area.

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<sup>5</sup>Donald Worster deserves credit as one of the more prominent historians to recently use biography successfully as a way of better understanding a person's life and times without romanticizing his subject. His work over the life of John Wesley Powell, and, more recently, John Muir, illustrate that biography remains a useful tool of analysis in the hands of a responsible scholar. See Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> See L.G. Moses, *The Indian Man: A Biography of James Mooney* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984) and Donald Worster, *A River Running West: The Life of John Wesley Powell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Indeed, as Alfred Kroeber remarked, in a discussion of Swanton's contributions to Indian history, "he erected his largest monument: the Southeast...to such a degree that it remains undisputedly his and that mention of the area automatically brings to all of us the association of his name."<sup>7</sup> Contemporary scholars still echo these sentiments. According to historian James Carson, "Swanton's work lies at the heart of an interpretation of southeastern Native cultures that has dominated scholarship from the 1930's until the 1990's."<sup>8</sup> His time spent in the region provided future scholars with a conceptual framework in which to construct specific studies of individual Indian communities in the Southeast. Several studies of no small significance in recent years owe much to Swanton's systematic work in the region. Michael Green's study of Creek cosmology as a guiding principle for their society rested in large part on Swanton's foundational examination of the Green Corn Ceremony.<sup>9</sup> Joel Martin's Sacred Revolt utilized Swanton's findings as a basis for locating the origins of the Creek Civil War within millennial, eschatological thought.<sup>10</sup>

While not as well known, his work amongst the Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia and the Tlingit of Southern Alaska is important in its own right. He showed a talent for learning languages as a young man and employed this skill as an anthropologist. He received his first assignment as a professional in 1900 when he served on a joint undertaking between the Bureau of American Ethnology and the American Museum of Natural History. His task was to evenly divide his time gathering artifacts for the museum as well as collecting

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Kroeber, quoted in Fenton, William, "John Reed Swanton, 1873-1958" *American Anthropologist* 4 (August-1959): 663.

<sup>8</sup> James T. Carson introduction to John Swanton, *Creek Religion and Medicine* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), vii.

<sup>9</sup> See Michael D. Green, *The Creeks* (New York: Chelsea House, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> See Joel Martin, *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogee's Struggle For a New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

cultural information. However, he quickly became enamored of Haida oral traditions, primarily mythological stories, leaving no real time for artifact collecting.<sup>11</sup> As an admirer of art, Swanton took to collecting and transcribing Haida texts with an unparalleled enthusiasm amongst his peers. Over the course of his work, he came to appreciate the story tellers as much as he did the stories themselves. Swanton loved poetry and came to see Haida story tellers as creators in their own right, weavers of art through the telling of myths, stories, and songs. As a result, he parted from the views of his time, which stressed the importance culture served in constructing groups as opposed to individuals. Up until Swanton's time, due in large part to the work of Ruth Benedict and other "Boasian" scholars, theories of culture tended to neglect the role individuals served in constructing culture. Anthropologist Thomas Bilosi, commenting on theories of cultural relativism of the 1930s, stated, "In this view, a culture is an integrated, coherent whole, which is greater than the various shreds and patches that make up its parts."<sup>12</sup> This was certainly the understanding of Franz Boas himself, who believed this to apply particularly to the Northwest Pacific Coastal region. Instead, Swanton contended for a view still very much in use today, namely that the way a story or song is sung varies from teller to teller, and that oratorical variations serve as creative expressions of the individual as well the communities they reside in. In many cases, the same story was told differently, with intentional variations. This reveals the unique circumstances certain orators found themselves in, with the content often purposely tinkered with to serve as commentary over a historical situation. Only recently has Swanton's importance to Haida studies become recognized for its scope and depth. As Robert Bringhurst

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<sup>11</sup>Bill Siverly review of *A Story as Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World*, Robert Bringhurst, in *Wicazo Sa*, Vol 17, No. 2 Sovereignty and Governance, II (Autumn, 2002), 196.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Biolsi "The Anthropological Construction of Indians: Havilan Scudder Mekeel and the Search for the Primitive in Lakota Country," in *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria, Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology* (University of Arizona Press, 1994), 136.

stated in his magisterial compendium of Haida oratory, “everything we have in the way of classical Haida literature comes through the transcriptions of one man [Swanton]...”<sup>13</sup>

Closely related to the Haida culturally and linguistically, the Tlingit of southeastern Alaska and the west coast of Canada served as the focus of Swanton’s second excursion as a professional anthropologist. This time he worked for the Smithsonian Institution. From the end of 1903 through the late summer of 1904, he recorded and translated a large number of Tlingit myths and songs. While not as conversant with the Tlingit language as with Haida, Swanton’s work with them laid the groundwork for later scholars to assess Tlingit life-ways. The large body of myth and religious data he collected helped future scholars from a variety of disciplines better understand how pervasive themes of reincarnation are to the Pacific Northwest Coast and how such concepts varied from not only other First Nations groups, but how they compared to those found in the religions of India as well. (In essence, Northwest reincarnation themes are clan based and omit the idea that rebirth is governed by a clearly defined set of ethics or karmic merit).<sup>14</sup>

Swanton’s handling of mythic and religious material during his first two trips set the basic pattern for his entire career. Perhaps surprisingly, Swanton demonstrated more appreciation for his collaborators and the stories they told him, particularly in his approach with the Haida, than at any other point in his career with Native peoples. He reproduced as faithfully as possible what his collaborators spoke to him, opting for minimal commentary. In fact, Swanton’s short commentary concerning what he collected from many Native sources can be frustrating to readers today who are accustomed to reading lengthy commentaries over tribal lore

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Bringhurst, *A Story as Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 13-14.

<sup>14</sup> Antonia Mills and Richard Slobodin, *Amerindian Rebirth: Reincarnation Belief Among North American Indians and Inuit* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), xxii-xxiii.

and oral traditions. As a faithful recorder of these myths and legends, Swanton allows readers to interpret the stories for themselves. To be sure, some semblance of context is necessary, and that is provided. What is not nearly as apparent as some readers might expect, though, is some sort of standardized anthropological analysis of what each tale means. By restraining his commentary as much as possible during such encounters, Swanton suggested the aboriginal material could be better assessed on its own terms. At times, he did comment on a story and could be every bit as flippant in his dismissal of the material's worth as any other anthropologist. More often than not, however, one finds in Swanton's work a concerted effort to allow the Native material as much unfettered expression as possible. Only later would he discuss in general fashion the material's meaning and relevance as it pertained to theories of his day, sometimes only in his private journals that remained unpublished until his death.

Without such in-depth collecting and recording, Northwest Coast ethnography would certainly not be as vibrant a field as it eventually became. For instance, his time spent with the Tlingit led Swanton to put forth his own unique criticism of linear cultural evolution, arguing that there simply was no hard evidence that family organization evolved through successive stages of matrilineal to patrilineal descent. Using the Tlingit as a springboard into the investigation of other tribes, he aptly demonstrated that family organization amongst "primitive" peoples often varied amongst the two methods, and that some groups eschewed such organizational methods entirely. Furthermore, even within the same society, variation among the means of social organization could be found.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the more influential studies relying on his findings in the Northwest include Sergei Kan's *Symbolic Immortality: The Tlingit Potlatch of the Nineteenth Century*, which examines Tlingit mortuary practices and approaches to death through the ceremony of

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<sup>15</sup> John Swanton, "Some Anthropological Misconceptions," *American Anthropologist* (19) Dec. 1917, pg. 459-470.

potlatches, and Antonia Mills and Richard Slobodin's edited volume, *Amerindian Rebirth: Reincarnation Belief Among North American Indians and Inuit*. This latter volume remains the best compendium for comparative examination of Native conceptions of reincarnation with other Native groups as well as worldwide. Much of the fine work by its contributors would not have been possible were it not for Swanton's linguistic and ethnographic work. Swanton's skill at recording verbatim what his collaborators relayed to him, along with a penchant for listening attentively, often for eight hours at a time with hardly a break, helped make it possible for other anthropologists and religious studies scholars to make cross-cultural comparisons between reincarnation motifs in the Northwest with those of India. Also heavily reliant on Swanton's field work in this region is Marie Mauze, Michale Harkin, and Sergei Kan's ethnographic account of Northwest ethnology from the first arrival of Europeans to the present day, entitled *Coming to Shore: Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions, and Visions*. From his magisterial two volume work over the Haida, important studies in their own right like Bringhurst's *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* owe much of its content over Haida mythology as grand poetry to Swanton's labor. And as mentioned previously, such pioneering ethnographic work in the Northwest has taken a distant backseat to Swanton's work in the Southeast. However, a case can be made that both sets of contributions are of equal value, in their own right.

Swanton's work in the Northwest and Southeast showcased a remarkable ability to conduct research across disciplines. Although his career may have preceded the development of ethnohistory as a specific field of enquiry, John Swanton's work certainly exemplified the interdisciplinary approach that is conventional in anthropology today. In fact, despite the label not coming into existence during his career, ethnohistory is exactly what he did when he traced the formations of distinct Indian communities and language families in the Southeast,

particularly those of the Creek Indians. Much of this was made possible by combining archeology and ethnography together. His work in linguistics is among the more important contributions of the first half of the twentieth century, having compiled lexicons for Haida Tlingit, Dakota, Tunica, and Muskogean languages, and demonstrating their relationship with kinship patterns as well as their affinities with smaller groups. He also collected numerous oral traditions and mythologies for the Tlingit and southeastern peoples.<sup>16</sup> Most of these collections are presented in both English and their indigenous languages, no small feat for such diverse communities.

Furthermore, Swanton was virtually alone in how he went about constructing his southeastern studies, which included lengthy monographs over the Creek, Chickasaw, Chickasaw, Natchez, as well a plethora of other communities previously neglected like the Caddo, Tunica, and Catawba. Before him, no attempts to coherently arrange the sizeable body of southeastern material had been made. Foreshadowing contemporary understandings, he realized that along with field work amongst existing cultures in Oklahoma, in-depth examinations of the written documents of their past needed to be undertaken as well. Assessing as best as possible the meaning Native peoples ascribed to their histories, Swanton realized that it was just as crucial to note how others outside those same cultures perceived them and recorded their interactions with them. Although archival research was thought to be a stifflingly tedious task by anthropologists, he fastidiously combed the libraries for explorer, missionary, trader, and soldier accounts of their dealings with and understandings of southeastern peoples centuries before.<sup>17</sup> Swanton also put these written documents to use, mapping southeastern geographies of

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<sup>16</sup> Fenton, William, "John Reed Swanton, 1873-1958" *American Anthropologist* (4) August, 1959, pg. 664.

where many communities had once resided, moved, and interacted with early French, English, and American colonists. Many early twentieth-century anthropologists clearly believed that a lot of the smaller tribal communities spoken of in centuries old colonial documents were once part of the larger nations known as the Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Seminole, and Choctaw. Swanton verified not only this assumption, but demonstrated that tribes previously believed to no longer be in existence had in fact joined together with other small groups to form new ethnic identities, some of whom continued on in his lifetime. While perhaps not as exciting to him as working in the field with Indian people themselves, Swanton's deep familiarity with these written sources resulted in carefully crafted accounts of southeastern cultures from the beginnings of European contact up to the twentieth century. He also gathered an extraordinary amount of information from the descendants of the peoples he read about, solidifying his reputation as a responsible scholar willing to put in the necessary library time alongside field work. His work gave a sense of narration and cohesion lacking in the works of some of his contemporaries.

Reared in the "Boasian" school of thought, Swanton followed the standard of immersing oneself as much as possible into a specific culture and learning as much as possible about it on its own terms. In lieu of making comparisons across widely diverse areas and peoples, the focus became one in which anthropologists spent months, even years living with the same culture or closely related ones. Due to the instruction he received, and partly as a result of his own personal scruples, he rejected biological evolution as an appropriate model of analyzing Indian peoples and cultures in general. For instance, his article entitled "Some Anthropological Misconceptions" written in 1917, argued against using biological evolutionary theory to explain

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<sup>17</sup> William Fenton, "The Work of John Reed Swanton," *Essays in Historical Anthropology of North America: Published in Honor of John R. Swanton in Celebration of His Fortieth Year with the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution, 1940), 3-6.

culture.<sup>18</sup> In this same article, he also defended the integrity of Native oral traditions, arguing that when properly assessed on their own terms, they could be immensely useful for understanding their histories. Perhaps not radical by today's standards, given prevailing assessments of Native oral traditions during the first half of the twentieth century, Swanton's views were quite novel.

While rejection of cultural evolutionism and scientific racism generally typified Swanton's approach, the prejudices of United States society during his life occasionally found expression in the way he spoke of Indian people. However, this parroting of some of his contemporaries' prejudices was less pronounced compared to the views of some scholars like W.H. Holms and W.J. McGee. As an example of the sort of assessment of Native peoples as undeniably inferior in every facet of their being, McGee once commented to a gathering of his colleagues in Washington that "[t]he savage stands strikingly close to a sub-human species in every aspect of mentality...The range from the instinct and budding reason to higher animals to the thinking of lowest man seems far less than that separating the zoomimic savage from the engine using inventor."<sup>19</sup> Despite these extremely prejudiced viewpoints, McGee actually stood with many early anthropologists in believing that supposedly backward peoples could still benefit from exposure to superior civilization. Unquestionably taken for granted, "Western Civilization" represented the measuring stick by which all other peoples were evaluated. But in the case of Native Americans, by imposing assimilationist policies upon them, it was also assumed that these supposedly primitive people could nonetheless rise above the stage of

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<sup>18</sup> John Swanton, "An Anthropologist Looks Forward and Backward" (1944), Manuscript 4816, National Anthropological Archives, Washington, D.C., 459-470.

<sup>19</sup> McGee, William John. "Anthropology and Its Larger Problems." *Congress of Arts and Sciences: Universal Exposition, St. Louis, 1904*. Ed. Howard J. Rogers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905-7.

savagery.<sup>20</sup> Time and patience would pay off, but it is important to point out that he and others did not see a time in which Indian peoples would ever be the equal of a white man.<sup>21</sup>

McGee's views come across as almost optimistic compared to Holmes's decidedly pessimistic outlook. Holmes viewed the future of Indian peoples as one of inevitable extinction, with no possibility of full assimilation, stating "We are now able to foretell the fading out to total oblivion in the very near future. All that will remain to the world of the fated race will be a few decaying monuments, the minor relics preserved in museums, and something of what has been written."<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, he commented on the futility of attempts at assimilating or "civilizing" Native peoples, saying that "[p]rimitive peoples could not stand an enforced civilization. No better example of this can be cited than that of the American Indians, who even on their own soil have resisted civil conditions unto death."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps no statements better exemplify many of the beliefs underpinning early American and British anthropology in the nineteenth-century. Spoken with great assurance, these statements demonstrate the conviction many anthropologists and fellow citizens held that Native people were at the present time, racially inferior, had always been so, and would continue to be so, despite the heroic efforts of Western civilization to wrest them from their ignoble status. They also point to a time in which optimism lagged in the

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<sup>20</sup> The most well-known occurrence of the United States using its legal system in an attempt to destroy Native American cultures and ways of life is the boarding school era. The education of Indian children in matters of Western culture developed in conjunction with the United States' expansionist policies after the American Revolution through the end of the nineteenth century. The policy of actively seeking the eradication of Indian cultures and forcing Indian children to attend boarding schools located far away from their homes became a matter of national policy from roughly the late 1870's through 1934. Some of the finer studies that examine this era include, Brenda Child's *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), which examines the boarding school experience through a series of unpublished letters between students that resided of the best treatments on this era are

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Hoxie *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Bison: University Of Nebraska Press, 1984), 122.

<sup>22</sup> Holmes, William Henry. "Some Problems of the American Race." *American Anthropologist* 12 (April-June 1910): 149-82; p. 166.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 161

government's plan to incorporate Native people through a painless assimilation. Such sentiments smack of clear racism. Scholarly quibbles over the distinction between racism and ethnocentrism may have mattered little to the legion of culturally dispossessed Indians affected by the policies dreamed up by both groups in Washington. However, the "ethnocentricists," who felt Native peoples lacked the proper cultural conditions to advance, represented at least a more optimistic viewpoint, one that could eventually lead to a cease-fire on the attack of Native cultures. With their views lacking the uncompromising belief in the genetic inferiority that the racialists held, tribes faced a slightly better chance that legislative and reformist minds could be changed.

Unlike a number of other fellow scholars, Swanton's prejudiced language never poisoned his studies throughout or his overall beliefs: that culture is relative, that each society possessed integrities of their own, and that cross-cultural comparison for the sake of making value judgments needed to be avoided. Though both Holmes and McGee deviated from the earlier and more optimistic viewpoints of Powell and Fletcher, who never questioned both the eventual certainty and moral righteousness of full assimilation, they remained influential in anthropology and in promoting governmental policy towards tribes in the early twentieth century. They spoke to not only their Bureau colleagues but to the public at large. Expression of such sentiments beyond the confines of the ivory tower jeopardized the less warlike policy towards American Indians. If the pendulum of Indian policy currently swung in the direction of assimilation, condescending and racist as it was, it was at least a reprieve from warfare and allowed the possibility that Native peoples could convince well-intentioned ethnocentric whites that their cultures deserved to exist on their own terms. A window of opportunity existed to cease policies designed to devalue Native cultures out of existence. If word got out that influential scientists

and government policy makers now believed Indians to be too far down the road of extinction or to be biologically inferior, even this already slim possibility became less viable.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, if supposed experts blamed Indian obstinacy for the failure of governmental policy to transform Indian people, the future did not look any brighter for Native Americans in terms of retaining any tangible sense of self-determination or control over their own destinies.

To better grasp Swanton's work and placement amongst his peers, a distinction needs to be made between ethnocentric language that guided an entire work, in some cases used to promote socio/political policies towards Indian peoples, and biased language that did not permeate an entire study. The latter is unfortunate but the consequences less catastrophic for Indian people than the former. Swanton's work never placed him in a position to directly impact governmental policy impacting Native people, while Holmes and McGee's certainly did. A good example of someone that respected the humanity of Indian peoples as well as the right to their beliefs, but nonetheless often couched their views in ethnocentric terms was James Mooney. Mooney, who risked his career to stand with Native peoples in some instances, was fond of distinguishing some of his informants of mixed ancestry as "half-negro mongrels" with those of "fairly healthy blood."<sup>25</sup> By today's standards, this is indeed a racist statement and wholly unacceptable. There was no indication, however, that Mooney's unfortunate choice of language led him to consider Indian peoples to be biologically inferior to whites, or that he felt their cultures were devoid of worth in his own time.

Swanton too could occasionally lapse offhandedly, referring to Native peoples as "primitive" or even "savage." Yet, at the same time, he was aware that non-Indian assessments

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 87-89

<sup>25</sup> James Mooney, *The Aboriginal Population of America North of Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collection LXXX, No. 7, Smithsonian Institution, 1928). p. 3.

of indigenous peoples were inherently biased, and could severely limit their value if one was not responsible. Consider his views on outsider evaluations of Native cultures early in his career. “Estimates of Indian character by white men are seldom satisfactory,” Swanton remarked, “being based on the standards current among whites at a certain place and time or colored by romantic or dogmatic considerations.”<sup>26</sup> Some of his colleagues and immediate predecessors accepted the forced assimilation of Indian peoples and encouraged federal policies based upon their professional experiences with tribes. Swanton, on the other hand, again in the initial years of his career, showcased a philosophical commitment to cultural relativism, stressing that “the final moral estimate of a tribe or nation is a thing that no other tribe or nation is competent to undertake. It will be made by different individuals differently, depending on the standards, environment, and prejudices, or, on the other hand, sympathetic person acting as judge.”<sup>27</sup> These views not only accord with the practice of viewing culture pluralistically and relatively, which became more widely accepted in the 1930s, but reveal Swanton’s own appreciation for the diversity of the cultures he worked with.

Despite these bouts of cognitive dissonance by Swanton, his approach to Native cultures distinguished him from many scholars of his time. Even so, his experiences with Indian people did not transform him into an activist for Native peoples who directly encouraged legislative measures that recognized Native sovereignty. But, he never adopted a position that argued against such principles either. James Mooney, for instance, who is best known for his work on the Cherokee, strongly petitioned the government to allow Indians unfettered access to the Peyote Religion (Native American Church), which used the cactus plant for ceremonial

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<sup>26</sup> John Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998), 49, Originally published: Washington; G.P.O., 1911 (Bulletin/Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology; (43).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 51

purposes. Such a hard line stance by policy makers resulted in Mooney's banishment from further field work; the government viewed him as a liability to integrationist policy.<sup>28</sup> Ironically, Mooney agreed with assimilation overall, but his take on peyote demonstrates that one's own personal views were not at all monolithic or immutable. Given enough time, even staunch ideologues for assimilation could modify earlier sentiments. Individual anthropologists, along with the discipline itself, changed over time in accord with more accurate understandings of culture and human rights.

Other Progressive Era anthropologists saw it as part of their mission to encourage the assimilation of Indian peoples. From this viewpoint, Alice Fletcher in particular acted as a spokesperson, arguing for a gradual, more humane assimilation of Native peoples over immediate implementation. Doing so was not only seen as more compassionate but also as allowing tribal cultural data to be gathered in an orderly fashion before the total incorporation of Indian peoples as American citizens was complete in 1924.<sup>29</sup>

While ambiguous early in his career on the topic of coerced assimilation of Indian people, Swanton indicated later that he certainly did not share the exuberance some scholars held towards the eventual cultural dispossession of Native peoples, gradual or not. After retirement, he reminisced on his career, recalling this era in which anthropology and government policy towards Native Americans intertwined. Speaking of the time Christian missionaries served as Indian agents tasked with forbidding Indian peoples from practicing their religions, Swanton commented on instances in which anthropologists discouraged such policies. He lauded his discipline for eventually encouraging public opinion against this discrimination, stating that

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<sup>28</sup> Moses, *The Indian Man*, 190, 207.

<sup>29</sup> David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 68-69.

“since then the churches have learned something of that toleration inculcated by the founder of Christianity and missionaries take courses in anthropology before entering upon their work, but it was not so when I first entered the Bureau.”<sup>30</sup> Able to appreciate such a development in his discipline, Swanton certainly approved of the more responsible and open stance anthropology adopted towards non-Western peoples, particularly Native Americans.

While Swanton’s long career in anthropology contributed to the discipline adopting a more progressive approach to Native peoples, certain holdover values from the nineteenth century persisted well into the mid-twentieth century. Even with evolutionary and racial prejudices tempered, and with both dismissed as dominant methodologies in the discipline, understandings of culture as unchanging over time continued to inform the way many scholars viewed tribes. Anthropological field work at times suffered a kind of tunnel vision, devaluing modern Native cultures for not demonstrating direct cultural continuities with what was recorded earlier from their ancestors. Thus, tribes that had assimilated aspects of European and American culture, all the while retaining their distinct tribal identities in the present on their own terms, suffered accusations by anthropologists that they were no longer “real Indians.” Swanton, in attempting to reconstruct the histories of the peoples he worked with, sometimes made these assumptions. A good example is found in a statement he made regarding a Chickasaw informant. “[T]he ancient social organization of the Chickasaw is so completely discarded that practically all of the younger people know nothing about it, and even the older ones can only furnish fragmentary information on the subject,” Swanton claimed. “[T]here are surprisingly few [Chickasaws] who can provide reliable information.”<sup>31</sup> The important lesson that comes from

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<sup>30</sup> John Reed Swanton, “Notes Regarding My Adventures in Anthropology and with Anthropologists,” *Manuscript 4651, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives* (1944),43-44 Hereafter cited as “Notes Regarding.”

these inconsistencies in Swanton's opinion of Native peoples, of which there are many more, is that each generation of anthropologists suffers its own prejudices, which even the most progressive practitioners have been unable to rise above entirely. As Swanton demonstrated, even those professing the virtues of cultural relativism as their guiding methodology in working with other cultures suffer from projecting outside assumptions onto aboriginal societies. A distinction was that instead of seeing aboriginal cultures as having always lagged culturally behind western peoples in the great race towards "civilization," Swanton and other relativists sought evidence of pristine, unchanged cultures that had been preserved from ancient times. The reality is that all cultures are, and always have been, in a state of flux and change over time. Some proponents of cultural relativism overlooked this truth and unquestionably assumed that cultures were constantly stable and stood alone in their uniqueness from those around them. Any deviation noted by anthropologists from what early missionaries, explorers, and traders recorded was viewed automatically as cultural decline.

In terms of instances in which individual Native orators purposely altered the contents of a given story to comment on contemporary issues, many anthropologists overlooked the adjustability so integral to oral tradition. Along with misunderstanding this feature of Native cultures, these scholars also missed an opportunity to see and appreciate these cultures on their own terms, as they struggled to retain what little autonomy was left to them. On the other hand, the case for anthropologists and Indians mutually misunderstanding each other's intentions should not be overstated either. There is little doubt that in some instances, anthropologists understood perfectly well the intentionality behind a story's alteration. They simply did not

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<sup>31</sup> John R. Swanton, "Social and Religious Beliefs and Usages of the Chickasaw Indians," in *Forty-fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, (Washington: GPO, 1928), 170, 190.

appreciate Indian people using their stories to make unwelcome editorials concerning their current situation. Since indigenous traditions and cultures were supposed to eventually disappear through assimilation, with their records appearing only in museums and books for the sake of scientific posterity, it follows that such tactics on the part of Indians to protest in this manner went unappreciated. So too, some Indians certainly intuited a scholar's unwillingness to respect not only the malleability of their stories, something innate to oral traditions, but disapproval of their struggle to perpetuate their cultures *on their terms*.

Overall though, a case can be made that scholarly misappraisals showed themselves most clearly in the way anthropology approached indigenous myths and oral traditions in the early twentieth century. Since such an academic biases against the merit of Native oral traditions lasted for the better part of a century, it seems only prudent to say a few words concerning the manner in which anthropologists approached oral tradition-based societies, as well as how they continued to be devalued and misunderstood by the larger society studying them. By the late nineteenth century, military resistance against the United States was no longer a viable option for Native peoples. However, they continued to resist in new ways. Many Indians realized that anthropologists were positioned to effect legislation impacting their societies, and spoke to anthropologists as a way of using them to offset future policies destructive to their cultures. In some instances, Native peoples used such occasions to ameliorate preexisting ones. Tribal individuals succeeded in some cases, and along the way, benefited from having some of their traditions and histories recorded permanently during this precarious time in their histories. Native historians and keepers of tribal lore sensed the ominous state of affairs facing their societies. Many of them used the deluge of anthropologists to their reservations as catalysts to

jumpstart the transmission of their traditions to the younger generation.<sup>32</sup> This process was already taking place and Native peoples had an interest in transmitting their traditions prior to this time, but during some of the most severe attacks on their cultures and ways of life, many Native peoples resisted in a multifaceted manner. One strategy, where it was possible to do so, lay in co-opting the anthropological enterprise to serve their own interests by attempting to alter the ethnocentric perceptions of field workers.<sup>33</sup> In the end, some Native peoples used their interactions with anthropologists as part of a multifaceted struggle against attacks on their cultures.

Specifically, indigenous people used a feature common to cultures that utilize oral traditions in lieu of written histories, namely—telling a story wherein temporal demarcations are abolished, leaving room for current significances to be projected backwards as a way of commenting on present realities. This dimension of Native cultural transmission remained a dividing line between them and the dominant western culture. They also highlight a difference

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<sup>32</sup> By far the most useful study demonstrating the capacity of Native peoples to arrange their narratives in ways so as to provide commentary on current social and legal situations impacting them is Peter Nabokov's *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). An excellent example discussed by Nabokov concerns three Iroquoian narratives accounting for the creation of the Confederacy. Depending on the circumstances, any one of them could be used, if deemed appropriate for a given situation. While Nabokov's study is more of a generalized examination into Native ways of history on this point, Theda Perdue's *Nations Remembered: An Oral History of the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles in Oklahoma, 1865-1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), is indispensable for shining a light on the remembered histories of southeastern tribes after their exodus from the southeast into Oklahoma.

<sup>33</sup> As other historians have chronicled elsewhere, many early anthropologists served as government agents. Some individual Indians served as reformers during the assimilationist era and enjoyed access to key policy makers. But for the vast majority of Indians living during this time, options often rested on using what lay at hand to one's advantage as best as possible. At times, attempts to influence the perceptions of these key outsiders by Indians consisted of simply using their stories to level harsh criticisms of the institutions and policies these anthropologists represented. While such tactics can be seen as signs of understandable frustration, they should not be overlooked as potentially subversive as well. For example, the Potawatomi at one point used stories whereby Trickster served as a stand-in for the colonial mindset many non-Indians held. As Peter Nabokov points out, "...Trickster's misbehavior displays not his own infamous improprieties but those of the antisocial forces for which he is a stand-in. By allowing himself to "'play the part'" of the Europeans, so to speak, he dramatizes the dire consequences of their way of life to any Indian participants in their institutions." See Gary Gossen, "A Version of the Potawatomi Coon-Wolf Cycle: A Traditional Projection Screen for Acculturative Stress," *Search: Selected Studies by Undergraduate Honors Students at the University of Kansas* 4 (Spring 1964), p. 14 cited in Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 113.

in the way myths and stories are understood cross-culturally. Written traditions run the risk of forsaking their usefulness in grappling with current issues by a preoccupation with validating past events. On the other hand, American Indian oral traditions are considered to be living embodiments of a people's culture and can be purposely altered to remain useful in contending with contemporary realities through commenting over current situations. Alive with power, these commentaries, as Alfred Kroeber once remarked, "provide practical assistance for people confronting actual problems and unexampled social catastrophes."<sup>34</sup>

For anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the relevance of tribal mythology depended not in how it continued to inform living cultures in the present, but in how accurately it reflected tribal ways and beliefs centuries earlier. Swanton could be ignorant of important characteristics underpinning indigenous oral traditions. In most cases, he overlooked the purposes indigenous peoples had for altering their stories and mythologies. For cultures based mostly around oral communications, a story's worth often rested on its ability to speak to and cause reflection on new circumstances, to remain relevant as a people met new obstacles and situations. If a story lacked malleability and failed to keep pace with the historical experiences of a community, it faced being discarded. This is not to say Native stories and traditions changed without any checks and balances as to the process. Rather, as these stories and legends remained "people specific," new details and experiences could be easily incorporated into preexisting narrative structures.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, to simply view an altered story as a sign of cultural declension is to miss the point entirely.

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<sup>34</sup> Alfred Kroeber quoted in Karl Kroeber, *Artistry in Native American Myths* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 86.

<sup>35</sup> Indigenous creation stories in particular are known to speak primarily to specific tribal communities, not necessarily for other groups. Therefore, creation stories in particular not only chronicled the ways in which various communities came to see themselves distinct and unique people, they served as ongoing accounts that reflected new experiences and changes to their ways of life.

With such a long life filled with eclectic interests and pursuits, Swanton showed signs later in life of having assimilated his experiences with Native people into a growing awareness and appreciation of the sheer diversity of knowledge in the world and its availability through unorthodox methods. This led him to granting legitimacy to neglected or ostracized topics then and now considered by most scientists to be on the periphery of acceptable interests. Specifically, he became convinced that extrasensory perception represented a real phenomenon worthy of scientific attention, aside from fringe hobbyists.<sup>36</sup>

Swanton's upbringing prepared him to accept such unorthodox views much of his career. He remained a deeply religious man his entire life as a member of the Church of the New Jerusalem, commonly referred to as the Swedenborgian Church. This tradition, while Christian in many tenants, differs in key regards to traditional Christian beliefs in several ways. The church traces its particular practices to Emanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth-century scholar-turned-seer who claimed to experience visceral images of both Heaven and Hell. Without going into great detail at this point, followers of the New Church believe Swedenborg to have been shown the afterlife in great detail through many visions. These visions came to him later in life and he came away with a certainty that these other-worldly abodes were real places of different spiritual gradations.<sup>37</sup> A hallmark tenant of the New Church is that beneath the veneer of the Jewish and Christian scriptures remains a spiritual truth aside from their literal, contextual meanings. From this belief, all reality, including knowledge itself, has an inner, non-corporeal

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<sup>36</sup> Extrasensory Perception, often abbreviated as ESP, refers to a sizable body of actions in which a person is believed to sense phenomena outside of the five senses. Essentially, actions such as clairvoyance and clairaudience, refer to an ability to see things and hear them without those things being physically present. Telekinesis refers to moving a physical object with the mind alone. ESP has many other activities that fall under its heading. All such actions refer to the mind's ability to sense things visually before they either happen or become apparent, in the "mind's eye," or audibly discerning something not physically present. Moving objects through the faculty of the mind alone can also speak to an ability to impart information from one person's consciousness to another's mind.

<sup>37</sup> Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), 58-60.

meaning, complimenting whatever exterior truth. New Church doctrine is characteristically tolerant of other religious beliefs and is open to new knowledge about this world and cosmos in general.

From immersion in this tradition, Swanton developed an inquisitiveness that lingered long after his retirement. Drawing in part upon his beliefs from the Swedenborgian tradition, he remained open to the possibility that ESP and other parapsychological features presented science with empirically provable phenomena.<sup>38</sup> He took issue with what he felt was the snobbishness of the so-called hard sciences like geology, biology, and physics towards anthropology, remarking on physicists and chemists “looking down their noses at the more modest stunts of Indian medicine men and those who study them.”<sup>39</sup> Here was an indication that Swanton perceived an arrogance as to what science claimed for itself and the bias many scientists held towards non-Western methods of gathering knowledge. Swanton believed that science remained suitably able to incorporate such unorthodox subjects like extrasensory perception. All that remained was the willingness to do so.

Influenced by his religious beliefs and professional experiences, Swanton came to a greater appreciation for how “truth” could be arrived at in a variety of contexts. He began to earnestly question the comfortable certainties Western culture took as a given, believing in the likelihood that there existed phenomena not explainable from a purely materialistic perspective. For example, in an account of his thoughts on science and his career in anthropology, he wrote of science’s limitations in explaining all “truth,” stating that “Those who believe that ultimate knowledge can be obtained by scientific methods alone are in for a disillusionment.” Swanton

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<sup>38</sup> Gilbert, Robert, “The New Church,” *New Religions: New Religious Movements, Sects and Alternative Spiritualities*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 31-32 and Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1972m 53-74.

<sup>39</sup> Swanton, “An Anthropologist Looks Forward and Backward,” 1-2.

attempted to push discussion forward, penning a self-published book near the end of his life entitled *Superstition—But Whose?* in which he arranged what he believed amounted to evidence of telekinesis and clairvoyance, discussing even a personal experience with such matters as a young man.<sup>40</sup>

There is evidence that he retained a side interest in parapsychology at the beginning of his career as well. In a letter to his mother while in Alaska, he commented that he was reading a book published by the Society for Psychical Research entitled *Real Ghost Stories*. While the title seemingly conveys a tone of triteness, he showed an enthusiasm for them as they might pertain to his studies. “These are certainly remarkable,” he wrote, “I am steeping myself in such things just so as to become an appreciative listener when the Indians tell me of monsters of various kinds. I have become the most credulous of hearers, I assure you.”<sup>41</sup> A legacy of his interest in nontraditional scientific pursuits, along with a growing readiness to consider a wider range of possibilities after death helped propel anthropology into new and exciting directions. Today, a small but growing number of anthropologists devote their attention to the “anthropology of extraordinary experience.” Many anthropologists since Swanton’s time, working at various times and places, have reported quite unusual experiences in the field.<sup>42</sup> Until recently, however, these reports were not officially recounted in academic journals or books for fear of a backlash. No

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<sup>40</sup> John R. Swanton, *Superstition—But Whose?* (Newton, Massachusetts, 1953).

<sup>41</sup> Letter to Mary Swanton from John Swanton November 18, 1900, Gay Worcester and Swanton Letters: 1759-1955” Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University 85-m68-85-m128 80:1:5 S Carton 1. Cambridge, Massachusetts. While Swanton’s wry humor can be seen in this letter to his mother, Swanton demonstrated his essential respect for his Indian informant’s stories on this trip, never disparaging them. The Swedenborgian Church’s beliefs maintains a posture of openness to possibilities such as this and it would be a mistake to discount Swanton’s life-long participation as an abiding influence on his profession life.

<sup>42</sup> David E. Young and Jean-Guy Gouler, *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience* (Broadview Press, 1994), 7-13.

longer, thanks to early efforts by Swanton and others, is it considered virtual career suicide for a scholar's own experiences of a non-ordinary nature to serve as a legitimate object of study.

Although not an activist, he did much outside of his official capacities to inform the wider public about Native peoples and their cultures. Given his copious writing tasks as an anthropologist, Swanton remarkably wrote numerous articles for his church's several journals. Within the pages of *The New Church Messenger*, *The New Church Review*, and *The New Christianity*, he occasionally wrote passionately about the innate racial equality of humans. Along with articles over Christian theology, he also took pains to explain the basic integrity each indigenous culture throughout the world possessed, encouraging would-be missionaries to remain mindful of the pitfalls of confusing their own cultural assumptions with their professed faith.

In the end, this study is an attempt to present an account of one man's life, including the experiences that influenced the way in which he interacted with Native people and approached their cultures. The conclusions reached will more clearly define John Reed Swanton as one of the more influential and important anthropologist of the early twentieth century. Along with this, I hope to promote a better understanding of the dialogs and personal engagements that took place between scholars and Native peoples as anthropology morphed into a well-established, professional discipline.

## **Chapter 2: Early Life Experiences and Influences (1873-1890)**

Despite coming from an economically humble background, Swanton always enjoyed the support of his family and was lucky enough to live near a small library that allowed him access to explore his interests in history and science. While Swanton is best known as an anthropologist, his interests went beyond this and extended into other disciplines, such as archeology, psychology, biology, and poetry. His own unconventional personality and upbringing in a small and marginalized Christian tradition also contributed to a later interest in fringe subjects, like parapsychology. Swanton's career testifies to an abiding appreciation for culture and how knowledge can be derived. He believed that there exists a diverse array of epistemologies in the world, mandating that Western scientists pay due diligence to the ways different cultures construct their own realities and arrive at useful wisdom. And while Swanton certainly made mistakes in his career, his open-mindedness helped prevent him from accepting theories without question just for the sake of career expediency.

The reasons why becomes somewhat clearer by examining how Swanton lived his life and approached his professional work. In particular, his early life experiences gives a window into why he chose to conduct his career as he did, as well as providing insight into why he became interested in parapsychology later in life. One gets the distinct impression after reading his private diaries and journals that beneath the surface of a carefully crafted and responsible body of academic writing, hid a youthful exuberance for exploring ideas from nontraditional angles. Painfully shy and self-deprecating, Swanton possessed a deep yearning to learn as much as possible about the nature of human beings and their reality. He understandably kept his more unorthodox views and interests

separate from his role as a professional anthropologist. The possibility existed that had he attempted to insert his more unorthodox interests into his academic writing, he most likely would have paid a price in terms of professional respectability.

An extremely introverted and withdrawn man, he chose the written word over the spoken one as his preference of communication. He never taught a college course and admitted that he dreaded presenting papers and giving talks to large public audiences. Therefore, if some of what he wrote about remains relevant but unfamiliar, it is due largely to his hesitance to make himself the subject of attention. Instead, communication through articles as well as personal diaries and journals became his preferred outlet for expressing his opinions and innermost musings on a range of issues. The fact that even the majority of his professional writings apparently did not convey his penchant for rebelling against orthodoxy to the extent his later work did should not be seen as scholarly apprehension on his part. His published writings display a careful evaluation of the facts of an issue. Even when opposing a viewpoint, he tried always to convey the complexity of the problem and to acknowledge the sensibility of the other side's argument.

John Reed Swanton was born February 19, 1873 in Gardiner, Maine, a small industrial city along the Kennebec River. The earliest account of his direct family line in America traces back to the late 1700s in Boston. Primarily of Anglo stock, the majority of his ancestors originally hailed from southwest England. However, at least part of his ancestry can be considered of Irish stock as well, with some of his distant relations having "passed over to Ireland in the Elizabethan period and becoming so closely identified with the native Irish that they were among those evicted by Cromwell."

Apparently, the Swanton line also shared a distant French relative who served under Napoleon. A distant relative also served as an admiral in the British navy, helping to take Quebec from the French in 1760.<sup>1</sup> Although the number of ancestors who served in a military capacity at some point is unclear, a fair number of them worked as shipbuilders and navigators in England and the United States, a point of pride for Swanton, who found the recounting of family history an enjoyable hobby.<sup>2</sup> Shipbuilding and maintaining supply stores remained a Swanton family staple, at least outside of John's own immediate family, who took different career paths than their relatives.

Born to Walter Scott Swanton and Mary Olivia Worcester, John never knew his father, who passed away while John was still in his mother's womb. The fact that he never met his father remained a source of restlessness throughout his life, a kind of unresolved pain that lessened as he grew older, but never dissolved completely. What little he learned of his father's life and personality gave Swanton a measure of comfort. The only sibling not interested in working the family business, Walter Swanton had sought instead to make his mark as a newspaper editorialist. A conscientious man, he

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<sup>1</sup> John Reed Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes, Family and Personal History until 1898," pg. 15 Swanton Family Papers, 1759-1955, 40v-44v: Typed Transcripts, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Cited hereafter as "Autobiographical Notes."

<sup>2</sup> Swanton composed a few journals detailing his family history. One of them recounted his life through 1898, while he wrote the other after retiring from the Bureau of Ethnology recounting both family history and his own memoirs of a life spent in anthropology. Throughout his life, he possessed a pervading sense of awkwardness and sense of social alienation due to various anxieties and insecurities. One gets a sense of his feelings of estrangement from his introductory remarks in the 1898 journal. Aside from serving as personal entertainment, he hoped the information he recorded could be of help to another Swanton down the line, stating that his endeavor would be a success in "whatever benefit may accrue to his descendents from a knowledge of their ancestor's doings and derelictions." While he felt inept at conveying his hopes and deepest sentiments socially, Swanton at a young age found an outlet in writing, as well as a sense of purpose that could hopefully prove useful one day, stating, "At the same time it will not do for him to accept the judgments of the past as to the virtues and vices of his forebears, for some of the greatest advances of mankind have been made by its outcasts, men and women condemned by the sentiment of their time." One picks up here sense of abiding purpose and hope in life vying against feelings of inadequacy, a theme that would remain throughout his life.

became interested in the nation's increasingly heated debate over slavery's expansion into new territories. When circumstances in Missouri and Kansas boiled over into violent debate, Walter moved with his wife to Missouri. There he delivered a series of editorials scathingly attacking the proponents of slavery's spread into Kansas.<sup>3</sup> What is unclear is whether Walter believed in strict abolitionism on moral grounds or the Free Soil philosophy, which opposed slavery on an economic basis.<sup>4</sup>

What is certain is that Swanton looked back on his father's editorial activities with pride, stating in a biographical account that "in view of the reputation which the G.O.P. has acquired in the present century, it seems strange to have it called the 'radical party of Missouri', as did my father. Perhaps a little more radicalism might restore some of its ancient significance." Swanton himself held views similar to those of his father's. However, political involvement never seemed to hold much appeal to Swanton, who tried to keep such views separate from his professional writings. This was not always the case, however, and some of Swanton's disdain for social inequality did manifest itself in his writings. After the paper eventually failed, Walter partnered with another man in a seed business back in Maine, which helped in part to support his wife after his death. While his father never made much money or attained what many would equate with personal or economic success, what little Swanton mentioned about him indicates that he admired his father's character and independent spirit.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the author was unable to locate any examples of these editorials. Swanton only briefly mentions his father's short time spent as an editorialist in his journals.

<sup>4</sup> Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes,"4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 4a.

Swanton's father possessed a noble character and desire to see social injustices rectified. Despite never knowing him, these qualities endeared Swanton to his father. Growing up without a father, particularly one as conscientious as Walter, likely contributed to Swanton's shyness and uncertainty in social settings throughout his life. This was a pain he shared with his mother, Mary Worcester Swanton, who never knew her father either. Mary was one of two children born to Henry A. Worcester, a minister in the New Church ministry (Swedenborgian Church). He apparently fell ill while in his thirties and died when Mary was still an infant. Mary's loss of her father left her with a deep commitment to the New Church, vowing to rear her children in its traditions.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not such devotion should be seen as a kind of compensation to hold onto something so important to the father she never knew is debatable. What is clear is that Mary's rearing of her children in New Church traditions influenced them greatly and left them with lifelong commitments to the Church's teachings.

Perhaps as a result of their shared losses, Swanton and his mother remained close all throughout their time together. Having lost her own father, and having no firm attachment to her remaining sibling, Mary felt an abiding need to protect her three children, particularly John, whose awkward shyness distinguished him from his two older brothers. John seems to have humored his mother on this point, recounting later how their home resembled a kind of "boy's club," with his brothers and cousins partaking in enough recreation to ensure he grew up "suitably masculinized."<sup>7</sup> Later, when John attended Harvard, his mother must have felt a sense of pride, as her father attended there

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<sup>6</sup>John R. Swanton, "Scientific Knowledge and Deep Religious Feelings Were United," *The New-Church Messenger* (March 14, 1959), New Church Messenger "One Swedenborgian's Experience with Religion," John Swanton, published posthumously by *The New-Church Messenger* in 1959.

<sup>7</sup> Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes," 23.

in the early 1820s. Accustomed to corresponding at length with his mother and brothers during even his most isolated expeditions as an anthropologist, Swanton never wavered in his commitment to his family, particularly his mother. One gets the sense that John, as the most sensitive of his siblings, identified most closely with his mother's anxiety, an anxiety no doubt compounded by growing up fatherless and without much financial support. He seemed particularly aware of his mother's vulnerabilities and looked after her as best he could.<sup>8</sup> New Church services and literature helped calm Swanton's mother during her vulnerable moments, as it apparently did John. He certainly remained the most visibly devoted to his mother's church, penning countless articles for New Church periodicals throughout his adult life.<sup>9</sup>

Swanton's father Walter passed away while the family was living in Missouri. Afterwards, Mary moved to Gardiner, Maine, where Swanton would soon be born. She and Walter's time in Missouri had produced John's two older brothers, Henry and Walter, Jr. The night of John's birth coincided with a terrible winter storm. Ironically, he would begin his professional career in the wintry Pacific Northwest, something that he chuckled over years later.<sup>10</sup> Swanton spent his formative years in Gardiner, originally founded as a plantation by a Dr. Sylvester Gardiner, who was said to have been a loyalist who fled during the War for Independence. The town's location along water ways led to

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Worcester Swanton to Judge Barnard, 6/15/03 "Correspondence Concerning the Engagement and Wedding of Alice and John Reed Swanton; April-December 1903" (by Dorothy Swanton Brown) Found in Scrapbook in Westport Island, Maine June 1998 Swanton Family Papers, 1759-1955, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America (Radcliffe College. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Swanton Family Papers hereafter cited as (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>9</sup> While John Swanton contributed more articles to the various New Church periodicals, his two brothers each wrote a fair number as well. All three could discuss theology in depth. For John to have been as involved in writing in-depth articles for his church while serving as an anthropologist is impressive. What John once said regarding his life-long allegiance to his faith, that "it is a religion I have never been able to get away from," applied to his brothers as well. See Swanton "Autobiographical Notes," 17.

<sup>10</sup> Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes," 2.

its becoming a nexus of water powered mills.<sup>11</sup> Confirmed as a city in 1849, Gardiner became synonymous with lumber, paper milling and shipbuilding. As is so often the case for small cities with a limited range of economic options, market incentives slowly degraded the area's natural environment. Swanton bitterly complained of the polluted refuse that came from the pulp mills and lamented that the lumber mills detracted from Gardiner's natural beauty. Aside from the milling industry, most other economic pursuits comprised of small, family-owned businesses.<sup>12</sup>

With an increased reliance on railroad connections after 1851, Gardiner became famous worldwide for exporting ice. Cut in blocks from the surrounding rivers, it was covered in sawdust in storage facilities, keeping it frozen through the summer months before it was shipped out. Despite living through its boom era, Swanton fondly recalled the city as a small place with small businesses that provided a comfortable place to grow up. By the end of Swanton's life, however, much of Gardiner's industry had declined to the point where most people from then on commuted to surrounding cities for employment.<sup>13</sup>

Family bonds grew even tighter and more tangible upon the Swantons' arrival in Gardiner. The relative isolation Mary and her two toddlers experienced in Missouri, far away from the more familiar East Coast, ended with their move. Here, in a modest-sized home, the immediate family lived alongside Swanton's Aunt Dorcas and grandmother Olive Gay Worcester. Not clear is whether the home belonged to Mary or Dorcas, who came from Swanton's father's side of the family. What is apparent is that his aunt's

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 5a-6a.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid ,7.

presence played a crucial role in John's upbringing. Kind-hearted, Dorcas helped Mary raise John and his brothers. Imbued with a frank, somewhat blunt forthrightness, her strong character and a laudable sense of duty towards her family helped provide a stable environment for the Swanton household. John remembered her dealings with the local merchants being conducted with the utmost integrity, commenting that "the idea of taking advantage of anyone in business dealings of any kind was to Aunt Dorcas, not only unchristian, it was unthinkable...Aunt Dorcas' honesty hewed to the line under each and every circumstance." Swanton's own sense of honesty and integrity throughout his life can be traced to Aunt Dorcas' own example she set for John and his brothers. For all her qualities though, Aunt Dorcas lacked the ability to discern the Swanton boys' wry sense of humor. In particular, John recalled the fun he had playing sly tricks on her while helping her run errands in town. John's comedic subtleties, perhaps honed on his mother and aunt while growing up, remained part of his personality through adulthood. Without Dorcas's presence, it is doubtful whether John would have eventually blossomed into the man he later became, crediting her with providing an ideal example of kindness and honesty.<sup>14</sup>

John's maternal grandmother, Olive Gay, already lived in Gardiner when Mary moved back. Little is known of Olive Gay other than the fact that she is said to have been a kind lady and to have enjoyed the finer things in life, despite living in the same small town for most her life and not possessing much wealth. Not clear either is how close John's mother and his grandmother were. One gets the impression that Mary remained closer to her sister-in-law Dorcas than her own mother. That is not a certainty, however. Regarding, Olive Gay, she did not live long enough to develop a long-term

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 2a-3.

relationship with John, as she died when he was only eight years old. Swanton's memories of her consisted of a woman of refined tastes and habits, who enjoyed modest get-togethers and enjoyed doting on her youngest grandchild. John, being the youngest, with his birth taking place in her home shortly after his father's passing, no doubt played a part in her spoiling him. Her death was the first but by no means his last acquaintanceship with the death of a family member.<sup>15</sup> Other deaths later on in his family proved more unexpected than with his grandmother's and furthered his familiarity with tragedy.

As far as John's closeness to either Swanton grandparent, it appears he maintained the closest contact with his paternal grandmother Catherine Reed Swanton, at least once he grew older. He often visited her when she relocated to Bath, Maine when he had time off from his professional duties. She lived into her nineties and passed when John was twenty five years of age. The Reeds originally hailed from Boston and were apparently known as a family of some influence. Catherine's sister married a wealthy local man, who increased her social standing and allowed them a comfortable living. Catherine's brother lived for a time in the West Indies and married a woman named Ann Rogiers. John recalled a peculiar incident involving a descendent of this family, who was living in Germany for a time. This person once contacted John looking for documentation on their family in order to satisfy Nazi requirements to hold a museum directorship. This distant relative lost their job to a Nazi party member, and John could furnish little in the way of documentation from his end. The incident troubled Swanton, who commented in his memoirs whether or not the last name Amory was somehow being

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 2.

connoted with the Amorites of the Bible. While always interested in tracing the Swanton family line, John lost track of this particular branch of the Reed family.<sup>16</sup>

John recalled little of his paternal grandfather, John Bernard Swanton, Jr., other than to comment on his sense of entrepreneurship and long life, something he shared with John's great grandfather, though not John's father or many in their family tree since then. John Bernard Swanton's father (Swanton's great grandfather) served as a deputy collector off the port of Bath, Maine for several years. After that, he ran a general hardware store and chandlery business, an occupation that employed several of his sons, including Swanton's grandfather. The company formed as a partnership, going by the name Swanton, Jameson & CO. In terms of providing a livelihood and employment for relatives, the business was a success. John Bernard Swanton, Jr. inherited the business, continuing in his father's footsteps before handing things over to Swanton's Uncle Henry.<sup>17</sup> However, the chandlery never became a large-scale business or prospect for expansion into another industry.

John's profession as an anthropologist is what makes him by far the best known of his relatives, but his career did not translate into significant personal wealth either. Like most of his relatives, he struggled with finances most of his life, receiving only a moderate respite from financial concerns towards the end of his career. Even then, he never achieved much comfort in this area, as medical expenses from poor health sapped much of his savings later in life.<sup>18</sup> The notable exception to his family's financial

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<sup>16</sup> Swanton Family Genealogy, 6 (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>17</sup> Swanton Family Genealogy 2 (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>18</sup> Swanton did not earn much of a salary during the first half of his career. His professional life coincided with the professionalization of anthropology, but this would not be reflected in terms of salary until the 1920s. Even with a slight pay increase, Swanton experienced financial difficulties throughout his life.

fortunes was his uncle Henry, whose employment at the store sparked an ambition to embark on a career in commerce and politics, which he achieved with success.

John's father, Walter, disappointed his own father in not taking to the family business. As a consequence, Walter and his father maintained a strained relationship. Walter's father lavished the most attention onto his brother Henry, while his wife, Catherine, doted on Walter. Upon John's grandfather's retirement, Henry came to own his portion of the business, eventually becoming a trustee of the Bath Savings Bank, serving on the board of directors of the First National Bank, and working as the director of a ferry company. Towards the end of his life, he served as a member of the state senate in 1891 and 1892 and manager of the Eastern Steamboat Company from 1890-1895.<sup>19</sup> For the most part, though, the Swanton family lived modestly, struggling alongside many in the nation during economic hardships, like the depression of the 1870s, when a worldwide crisis caused many factories and workshops to close their doors. The family considered itself lucky that their own business stayed afloat.

The moderate success of the Swanton family business did not necessarily carry over in terms of health and longevity. Swanton's paternal great grandfather's longevity proved an exceptional case to the Swanton family in many ways. Although Swanton himself and some other relatives lived long lives as well, it was in spite of poor health, persistent illnesses, and premature deaths, remaining unfortunate fixtures for the Swanton family. Consistent experiences with illnesses of various sorts left behind painful emotional reverberations throughout many of Swanton family member's lives. Along with John's and his mother's losses of their fathers before they were born and his

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<sup>19</sup> Swanton Family Genealogy by Louise Swanton, 1976, pages 2-3, (SFP: 1759-1955).

grandmother's death when he was young, several Swanton cousins on both sides of his family lost a parent early on as well.<sup>20</sup>

A large family that prided itself on its earnest concern for the welfare of its members, the Swanton's close ties served to uphold them through tragic times and circumstances. Just as many cousins lost a parent early on, so too did many of themselves succumb to illnesses common at that time. The virulence of certain diseases like measles, mumps, and smallpox introduced the young Swanton to death. His two older brothers, Walter Irving and Henry Aiken, both suffered their own bouts with childhood illness. Henry (often referred to as Harry in many family letters), who was born in 1870, suffered from a form of palsy that caused him difficulty walking his entire life. Swanton also recalled a close call concerning his brother Walter Irving, who was born in 1869, upon being misdiagnosed with smallpox.<sup>21</sup> In the end, Walter nearly succumbed to measles instead, making the misdiagnosis irrelevant. John recalled his mother's frantic attempts to disinfect the virus through the burning of coffee.<sup>22</sup> By all accounts, it appears that few relatives escaped being touched by the specters of illness and death, most of them early in their lives. Ill health did not keep John or his brothers or many of their relatives from achieving success in their lives. Both of Swanton's brothers attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and achieved modest employment during their lives.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes," 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 13a.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 14.

If the specter of ill health amongst those closest to him remained a fixture in Swanton's life, it by no means turned him into a bitter or resentful person. Noted by his contemporaries during his career for his charitable disposition toward the chronically ill, Swanton could personally identify and sympathize with such conditions. While some of his relatives suffered from physical ailments, Swanton suffered from emotional distress. Tormented by a nervous disorder his entire life that resulted in severe intestinal complications, he admitted the long-ranging toll such illness took on his life. According to Swanton, his illness not only presented physical complications but hampered much of his social life growing up. For instance, he never attempted his hand at sports or playing musical instruments while a child or young adult, even showing an aversion to social settings, particularly those in which he was the focus of attention. As he was prone to doing, he admitted to these anxieties in his autobiography:

I freely admit general dumbness in musical lines but part of my failure to develop in this direction was due, I feel sure, to an almost constitutional illness which proved to be one of the miseries of my existence. I do not know the underlying cause of this but it is possible that the nervous strain in the family which exhibited itself as restlessness in Walter and laid the basis for Harry's attack of infantile paralysis took it out on me in this other way. I suffered untold mental agonies at times from this, and it undoubtedly had an effect on my entire life, though it may have been accompanied by some compensating factors.<sup>24</sup>

Despite his health troubles, which persisted throughout his life, Swanton carefully camouflaged the worst of them when interacting with other people. Through his numerous public-speaking engagements throughout his career, and countless interactions with colleagues and scholars across many disciplines, only the closest understood the difficulty Swanton encountered internally.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 23.

Some of the personal and professional consequences of such physical and emotional conditions presented Swanton with both obstacles and opportunities in his professional life. On the one hand, his aversion to social settings remained an issue all his life, even through his later years. He admitted that at the age of seventy-three, he still could not bear to look people in the eye, resulting in many an awkward moment when he failed to recognize someone, and that this sort of social discomfort “of course, has ruined me as a speaker for no matter how completely I may have a subject in hand, it goes from me or becomes inextricably entangled when I face an audience.”

Despite these inner conflicts and crises of confidence, Swanton always remained well-liked and his condition seemingly did not impact his proficiency as an anthropologist. Be that as it may, Swanton suffered greatly internally and paid a price for maintaining a strong composure later in his life. Perhaps no better summarization of the extent of Swanton’s inner turmoil he felt growing up can be found than in his own words, writing candidly about his feelings:

although the greater part of my life has been past in the midst of three of our greatest cities, my mind is always threatening to stampede me to the back country and I am sure it would take me to the utter wilderness if I gave it rein. My idea of happiness is a small remote farm, or rather farm-garden, where I would raise vegetables and spend most of my time worrying the soil or roaming down little frequented lanes. I would not have animals on my mentally ideal farm. I dislike the gaze of cows and hens are dirty.

He went on to reveal that such a self-characterization did not “mean that I am a hater of my kind or misanthrope. I give it to illustrate that strange psychological urge which has been the undercurrent of my life’s activities.”<sup>25</sup> As a result, when it came time to decide

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 26.

on a career, his shy, introverted nature resulted in choosing one in which the majority of his time could be spent writing and eschewing public speaking whenever possible.<sup>26</sup>

Given Swanton's admission that he suffered emotional difficulties and extreme shyness, psychologists today might diagnose Swanton with mild forms of agoraphobia and depression. His first experience with education remains one of the earliest indicators that Swanton suffered from an anxiety condition that could manifest itself socially at times, especially when he was young. His grade school teacher, Mrs. Morill, played an important role in sparking his interest in history.<sup>27</sup> Early on, however, she was forced to carry him into the classroom, as his anxieties overcame him. The tragic circumstances that would later befall Mrs. Morill and her husband pained Swanton. Upon her death some years after Swanton left that school, her husband committed suicide, serving as yet another example of someone close to John dying prematurely and tragically. Reflecting on the way a public education may have served to alleviate his social fears, Swanton felt that his experiences with private schooling at a young age were mixed. On the one hand, for such a sensitive child, private education shielded him from the more open social environment of a public school. The more intimate environment of private school, particularly the attention he received from Mrs. Morill, encouraged his early interest in history. In the end though, he felt that attending a private school through his adolescent years most likely inhibited his socializing process. The environment of the private education did not reflect typical life, necessitating that he and other students like him adjust accordingly when they left.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 20.

Swanton's social trepidations and shyness growing up made him ideally suited for a life of research, where he could spend the majority of his working hours in libraries or working with Native peoples living in remote parts of the country. Although his ailments may have limited his social experiences, they increased his sensitivity of those around him. This side-effect of a nervous disposition, coupled with his quite and reserved demeanor, seems to have instilled in him patience and an ability to listen to others at length. Swanton's ability to focus in on individuals with undivided attention paid dividends in his field work. His patience for sitting hours at a time, dutifully recording the many stories and traditions his Native collaborators shared with him, paid off in demonstrating the unique role individuals play in articulating the meaning behind a particular tradition or story. By focusing on his collaborators as individuals, Swanton came to appreciate the uniqueness of a story or tradition as performance art. Native "informants" often looked upon telling a story as an opportunity to perform, instilling a story with their own uniquely personal account of what mattered most to them at that time.<sup>29</sup>

Despite Swanton's introverted, cerebral nature, he did occasionally engage in recreational activities with his brothers and friends from around his home. The town of Gardiner, while small, provided plenty of opportunities for young boys to pass the time, especially during the summer months. The place Swanton grew up was divided into 4-5 acre parcels. The space was once larger, but the Maine Central Railroad eventually obtained the land along the river front. The acres split into east and west sections, with

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid,12.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Bringhurst *As Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 66-67.

Swanton's home lying along the eastern side. This left plenty of room for the young Swanton and his friends to explore and engage in various forms of recreation.<sup>30</sup> The house itself was sequestered on a hill and stood a story and a half high. Swanton recalled that the house always remained painted white, with a porch extending along the front of the house. From Swanton's descriptions of the house's interior, it is apparent that he and his family enjoyed ample room, enough to accommodate them and the friends that often came to visit.<sup>31</sup>

Even with ample room in their home, staying indoors, as with most young boys, remained something to be avoided for the Swanton brothers if at all possible, particularly during the spring and summer months. Swanton, his brothers, and friends used to spend hours swimming along the Kennebec River. To reach their various swimming spots, the boys almost always walked along the tracks of the Maine Central Railroad, where the local freight yard was positioned near the river.<sup>32</sup> Inevitably, the boys enjoyed catching rides when a trainman's attention was diverted. More often than not, though, a trainman simply gave the boys passage on a handcar as a matter of course, dangerous as such an activity could be.<sup>33</sup> Regarding the train track excursions and rides, an elder Swanton commented, "It remains one of the miracles and proof that there is a special providence for boys that none of our gang was killed or maimed for life or drowned in the river. I am reminded of the Scotch saying, 'Him that is born to be hung will ne'er be drowned,'

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<sup>30</sup> Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes," 7a.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 10a.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 6a.

but it has gone astray in our case unless I or one or two others commit some heinous offense in our seventies or eighties, or possibly nineties.”<sup>34</sup>

Another favorite recreational activity that Swanton enjoyed was passing long summer days away along nearby beaches and shores. This proved amongst the fondest memories of Swanton’s childhood. Being near waterways and amidst wide open areas provided him with opportunities to think and socialize on his terms, rather than indoors or at school, where Swanton often felt boxed-in and anxious. Below the town of Gardiner abided a series of nearby beaches where Swanton and his friends swam and “walked the logs,” as the boys referred to it. A fun activity, the game could also be quite dangerous, as well. Swanton described the activity, “in walking one has to step quickly lest the log roll him into the water or sail off into some place from which he could not escape to another.” The boys engaged in contests to see who could stay on the same log the longest. During one of their contests, a close call occurred involving his brother Harry. Swanton recalled that “on one occasion Harry got each foot on separate logs which began parting company with each other and called to the rest of us desperately, ‘I’m being [split]. I’m [splitting.]’ “We were unable to help and he did ‘split’ to the extent of tumbling into the river, but wet clothes were the only resulting tragedy, and probably the sunshine attended to them.” Such horseplay, while dangerous, bonded Swanton to his brothers and helped him open up socially.<sup>35</sup> One gets the impression from his journals that Swanton remained a well-liked boy growing up but constantly felt unworthy of such attention from other kids. Consequently, he lacked the confidence to take the initiative in meeting new people and maintained few close friendships as a young man.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 6a.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid,6b.

Introverted or not, most of the friendships Swanton made from this early time in his life ended for reasons other than his shy, standoffish demeanor. In short order, kids moved away for various reasons and attended different schools as they grew older. However, Swanton's friendship with Alex Forsyth, whom he referred to as "my first chum," remained a bond from when they were young boys through high school and their lives afterward. The two remained inseparable while growing up, with the Swantons and Forsyths taking turns hosting the other family's child for days at a time. Alex was an only child, bright and outgoing in ways Swanton found admirable. He was cousin to a famous singer in the area and excelled musically himself. Swanton dryly recounted his mother's attempt to instill in him the same aptitude for music as Alex possessed, commenting, "My poor mother struggled valiantly to elicit some taste of that kind but there was no sap apparently in the wood and after struggling to make me a violinist and then pianist, she had to admit her failure and retire from the field."<sup>36</sup> Alex remained an excellent student through college and possessed some athletic ability to compliment his musical talents. Alex's talents and more extroverted personality, so different from Swanton's own abilities and demeanor, never seemed to bother him. Rather, the two friends seemed to balance each other.

Alex always accompanied Swanton and his brothers on their railroad and swimming odysseys, but the two enjoyed their own favorite pastimes together as well. Both enjoyed building small toy boats to race the other along a nearby brook by Swanton's home. Even when Alex was absent, Swanton enjoyed this as one of the more peaceful and serene activities of his youth. The bodies of water surrounding Gardiner always held a close place in Swanton's heart. According to Swanton, the pitiful state of

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 22-23.

the roads in the surrounding area made traveling by foot nearly impossible, and at best, extremely inconvenient. Most long-distance travel was done by boat and he acquired an appreciation for the many boats and steamers that often docked along the Kennebec.<sup>37</sup>

Swanton looked back on these times spent with Alex and other friends along the river with a mix of nostalgia and sense of melancholy for how polluted the river and waterways eventually became later in his life. His comments as an elderly man portray his natural sense of poetry and ability to convey profound feelings of love and loss simultaneously: “As I think of those days, of the waters of a deep blue under the summer sky, the ripples chasing the one another up the beaches, and the glorious sunshine of some of those lovely days, I forget the sawdust, mud, the eelgrass, and some; of the grosser objects borne along by the current, and the Kennebec has a lovely place in my memory.”<sup>38</sup> These experiences, perhaps mundane and easily forgotten by most people with the passage of youth and entrance into middle age, remained as poignant and ripe with personal meaning for an elder Swanton as when he first experienced them.

Swanton’s inquisitive, contemplative nature encouraged his interest in history and the study of culture and human behavior. Alongside his interest in anthropology was an abiding fascination with the origins of life and discerning the meaning of existence. Perhaps more so than any other anthropologist of his time, Swanton remained a deeply spiritual man, crediting his lifelong faith with seeing him through the difficulties of his youth and experiences as an adult. Swanton, who often struggled early in his career to remain a believer, gave his mother credit for introducing him to his religion, commenting,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 6a.

Mary Olivia Swanton was one of those saintly women who loved everyone. My devotion to the present New Church body stems from this mother of mine...my memories of mother are all lovely, but not of overindulgence. She buried her life in the duty God had left her of raising three active and not always submissive boys. Religion for them was first in her thoughts and she was devoted to that type of it to which her father had ministered.<sup>39</sup>

Swanton's religious views and the way in which he attempted to harmonize them with the empirical findings of science, are crucial for understanding him as a person. Another factor in Swanton's openness to unusual subject matter was due to his allegiance to The New Church, a most un-orthodox Christian tradition.

Described throughout its existence variously as heretical, new age, liberal, spiritual, and scientific, the Swedenborgian Church (referred interchangeably as The New Church and The Church of the New Jerusalem) represents one of the more unique expressions of Christianity. Not clear is whether Swedenborgianism was ever intended to become a distinct denomination, which may explain the reason for its slow growth. Nonetheless, The New Church formed as a distinct denomination in 1787 in London. From there, small New Church groups spread to the United States along the East Coast. The first official General Convention took place in Philadelphia in 1817, reporting 360 adherents across nine states. At times, the church's low numbers seemed to portend its demise. However, while never amounting to more than 10,000 or so adherents in the U.S., the Church of the New Jerusalem's viability is bolstered by adherents abroad.<sup>40</sup>

Followers of the denomination share in common with other Christians a belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the redemptive interpretation behind his death and

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<sup>39</sup> Swanton, John, "One Swedenborgian's Experience with Religion," *New-Church Messenger*, (March 14, 1959), 84.

<sup>40</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 463.

resurrection. They do depart in their insistence that God granted Emanuel Swedenborg personal visions of the spiritual world and in the way God discloses “His” divine will and what it means for humans.<sup>41</sup> Apparently, these episodes occurred spontaneously, during which Swedenborg would remain in a trancelike state, reporting back his visions to those around him. At times, it was said that he maintained a kind of dual consciousness during some of his experiences, responding to questions from his friends about what he was viewing of the afterlife.<sup>42</sup>

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1771) was born in Stockholm, Sweden to a theologian father and into an era that witnessed an increasing concern with justifying religious belief with the findings of Western science. With the Enlightenment’s emphasis on locating the components of reality through scientific investigation of the material world, religion risked becoming irrelevant.<sup>43</sup> Having enjoyed a privileged position of authority in Europe for centuries, religion now found itself on the defensive, with appeals to the supernatural and divine inspiration of the Bible no longer sufficient for maintaining credibility in age of science and reason. To remain a viable force in those countries most influenced by Enlightenment thought, many theologians earnestly sought proof of God through the application of scientific principles to the study of the natural world. While God remained omnipotent, it now remained incumbent upon his most favored creation

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<sup>41</sup> The Swedenborgian Church uses the male pronoun to describe the deity, which follows common practices by members of the other two Abrahamic traditions, Judaism and Islam. This was certainly the case in Swanton’s time but may have changed today in some cases, depending on the particular church and group in question.

<sup>42</sup> Slater Brown *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> Keeping in mind that Roman Catholicism and forms of Protestant Christianity formed the basis for most Enlightenment thinkers’ assessment of religion, the standards for evaluating traditions outside of a Western context nonetheless were assumed under this heading, as well. This situation remains relevant today, as an increasing awareness is taking hold that holds that Western standards for assessing the truth claims of religion may not be entirely appropriate or applicable to non-Western traditions, i.e., outside of a Jewish, Christian, Islamic context.

(human beings) to locate the meaning of his message within the natural laws underpinning the universe. Along with this orientation came new methods for analyzing written documents, which were vigorously applied to the Bible, demonstrating its historical trajectory as a body of oral tradition handed down for centuries. This approach also revealed the Bible to have undergone an extensive editing and redacting process prior to being canonized. Nonetheless, the Bible's otherworldly inspiration remained true for many, but its existence as a document written by people who reflected the prejudices and limitations of their cultures and times became evident as well.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence, religious scholars attempted to grapple honestly with modernity while continuing to try and demonstrate religion's relevance.

Swedenborg's life illustrates this point well. He spent the majority of his younger years studying the natural sciences, producing many texts on geology, astronomy, physics, and paleontology and earning the praise of his peers as an educated and sound man of scientific proclivities.<sup>45</sup> Always interested in religion, Swedenborg's interest in the subject drastically increased when he turned fifty-seven. From then on, Swedenborg's identity expanded to include the roles of mystic and prophet to go along with scientist when he recounted his vivid and graphic visions of the spiritual world, including Heaven and Hell. Swedenborg's message rested upon the eschatological realization of the second coming of Jesus Christ, like so many millennial movements before and after his time. However, rather than referring to the apocalyptic upheavals believed to accompany Christ's return, Swedenborg's message differed in remarkable ways. According to one historian, Swedenborg's message purported, "the second coming

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Elliot Friedman *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), vii.

<sup>45</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 484.

of Jesus Christ is made in the inspired Word of God though Swedenborg's disclosure of its spiritual meaning; it is thus a way of reading the Bible revealed in God's good time by most extraordinary means." Rather than a literal Second Coming, which most traditional Christian traditions taught consistently for much of the religion's history, Swedenborg offered a radically new alternative. God's granting Swedenborg a spiritual (see infallible) interpretation of the scriptures accounted for the Second Coming itself. Swedenborg commented on his role as a prophet that "I enjoy perfect inspiration. The inner sense of the Word of God has been dictated to me out of Heaven."<sup>46</sup> Swedenborg's message that the Second Coming referred to the realization of God's will through a new interpretation of the Bible appealed to intellectuals and those disgruntled with the rigidity of Calvinistic and Roman Catholic dogma. Behind the literal sense of the Jewish and Christian scriptures lay a spiritual meaning that transcended both the literal meaning and historical context in which they were written.

For Swedenborg, the key to discerning this spiritual meaning rested on his doctrine of correspondences. Similar to concepts found in Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, correspondences refer to locating the relationship existing between the world of matter and the spiritual realms. All physical phenomena remains a reflection of something spiritual, even at the most minute levels. At the heart of this belief in correspondences is the idea that things do not exist in of themselves, nor are they responsible for their own origins; there always remains an unseen, interior catalyst that manifests itself physically into the sensible world of feeling and emotion. As a Swedenborgian minister articulates it, "the spiritual flows into and manifests the physical in the same way that a scowl or a smile is the physical representation of an inner reality or state of being. The facial

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 484-485.

expression doesn't exist in and of itself, cut off from any other reality, but completely derives its particular form from a force existing in the intangible world. A force flowing outward from the intangible manifests and ultimates [sic] in a physical form that corresponds to that inner reality. Hence, a scowl corresponds to a troubled or irritated mind; a smile corresponds to amusement or peacefulness.”<sup>47</sup>

According to Swedenborgianism, reality is comprised of what appear to humans as distinct orders of being: the physical world of animals, minerals, and vegetables and the spiritual and celestial. In reality, all realms prove to be artificial distinctions, put in place to allow for the gradual unfolding of God’s will through his creation. The elements of nature and the spiritual realms all contain “nuances” of the one divine essence, allowing for “the dual experience we can have in nature: a sense of concealing and revealing. The natural world can appear to have a veil draped around it, showing only itself; and at other times be seen as a window into something beyond and within.”<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the various planes of existence reinforce one another through infinite correspondences not always readily apparent. The Bible, along with prayerful contemplation, allows for these correspondences to become intelligible. New Church doctrine stresses that all correspondences lead ultimately to God.

The conviction that a higher meaning lay beneath the surface layer of the Judeo-Christian scriptures remains a tenant distancing New Church from Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant traditions. New Church doctrine is characteristically tolerant of other

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<sup>47</sup> Jim Lawrence, [http://www.swedenborg.org/odb/sermon\\_detail.cfm?sermonID=3347](http://www.swedenborg.org/odb/sermon_detail.cfm?sermonID=3347) [Accessed June 10, 2010]. This was taken from a sermon in 2000. While theologies do change over time, the New Church’s core belief behind the idea of correspondence remains stable. In essence, Swanton would have easily understood and accepted this sermon’s usage of correspondences.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, [accessed June 10, 2010]

religious beliefs and is open to new knowledge about this world and cosmos in general, even ideas outside of a Western Christian worldview. The theology of the New Church remains intact to this day. At the same time, larger, more mainline churches in Swanton's time and now look at New Church teachings with extreme skepticism, despite the fairly tolerant posture Swedenborgians themselves are known for. The church's toleration of new ideas appealed to Swanton, as did the focus on inner meanings behind exterior reality. Swedenborg's eclectic theology and ideas appealed to many people, conservative and liberal alike.

While some of its tenants differed from traditional Christianity, many adherents understood the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus similarly. On his adherence to New Church doctrine, Swanton commented that "it is a religion I have never been able to get away from." He went on to explain in part why he remained a believer his entire life, stating "I am a Swedenborgian in part because Unitarianism seems to be absolutely at odds with the most beautiful conception of the Redeemer of mankind that literature affords, the Gospel of John, and because the tripersonal idea of God obscures my thought of deity and does violence to my common sense. To Swedenborgians Jesus Christ is the only God of Heaven and earth and the sole object of our devotions."<sup>49</sup> Ironically, despite the denominations of the small town of Gardiner and surrounding localities existing peacefully, members of each maintained confidence in the truth of their own tradition over and against one another while at times remaining open to truth outside of a Christian outlook entirely. Swedenborgian theology no doubt appealed to Swanton's own

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<sup>49</sup> John Reed Swanton, "Notes Regarding my Adventures in Anthropology and with Anthropologists," *Manuscript 4651, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives* (1944), 17. Cited hereafter as "Notes Regarding."

introspective personality as well. The emphasis on inner contemplation fit the shy, thoughtful temperament of Swanton perfectly.

Other anthropologists besides Swanton undoubtedly maintained their own religious beliefs, although an increasing number opted for a more secular outlook. Some of his colleagues, along with a growing number of scientists across academia, remained atheists or agnostics, believing the dawn of the twentieth century, with the technological and social gains taking place, made religion and belief in the supernatural outmoded at best and harmful at worst. Telling in his candor, Swanton later in his life commented on the reasons why he remained reluctant to explain his beliefs to them. Swanton conveyed his reluctance in trying to communicate his religious ideas to his peers, commenting:

Yet from what I knew of my anthropological associates I was aware that I could not explain my beliefs to them in ways that they would have understood or accepted. This was because I would have had to base my argument on Swedenborg's claim to have had immediate contact with spirits and on the results of these contacts. At the time the possibility of such experiences was rejected absolutely by practically all those able to speak authoritatively for science. While spiritualism had had for a time a widely extended vogue, it was connected with so much mediumistic fraud that any claims whatsoever to spiritual contacts were met with ridicule.<sup>50</sup>

Swanton firmly believed that deep religious feelings could be united with science and that religion needed to be open to the new realities facing American society. For him, his faith not only grounded him personally, it eventually harmonized with his professional life as well. His thoughts on this matter aptly sum up what remained his conviction until his death: "No scientist is just a scientist and nothing else. He has also a Civic side and a religious side, either positive or negative, which is his attitude toward the entire cosmos and what he thinks its meaning to be. I can't believe that knowledge ends

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<sup>50</sup> Swanton, John, "One Swedenborgian's Experience with Religion," *New-Church Messenger* (1959) 85-86.

at a certain place, and my feelings have been altogether on the positive side....” Never pronounced in his professional work as a Smithsonian employee, he found the proper forum for their expression in several church journals, where he expounded on theological points and their relevance for modern times. His reasons for supporting a just society devoid of legalized discrimination, couched in secular language in his many professional writings, took on a theological tone in his writings for his church.<sup>51</sup> These sentiments seem to be in line with Swanton’s views as a young man and towards the end of his life. Particular viewpoints went through a maturation process, and he did not always convey consistent views in his writings, but a prevailing theme underpinning Swanton’s beliefs about society was distaste for racial discrimination.

Even with his time spent outdoors with his Alex and his brothers, Swanton by far spent the majority of his free time perusing Gardiner’s local library, which, despite its modest size, contained a wide selection of books. Here, Swanton was introduced to the wonders of world history, losing himself in the great accounts of the Old and New Worlds. As he grew older, he took the initiative to increase his knowledge of world history, reading as wide array of material as he could acquire, often spending his own meager allowance to purchase books he wished to own permanently. Content to lose himself within the generalized accounts of the ancient Greeks, Romans, Hebrews, and peoples of the Far East on his own initiative, he began taking notes over the various monarchies, dynasties and important individuals from each era of human history. He did this as a means of disciplining himself, ensuring that he retained as many facts as possible. Here, Swanton’s voluminous, self-instituted note taking resembled a practice of James Mooney, who used his copious lists of tribal names and geographies as a way of

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<sup>51</sup> Regamey, Antony, “Dr. John R. Swanton, 1873-1958”, *New Church Messenger* (March 14, 1959), 83.

seeking employment at the Bureau of Ethnology.<sup>52</sup> And while the young Swanton likely remained ignorant that such initiative would pay dividends in a career in which such a strong work ethic was a necessity, the long hours spent honing his mind to retain facts and think critically about source material certainly aided him greatly in his professional career.

The difference between Mooney and Swanton lay in Swanton's interest in Native North American history coming gradually, while Mooney's fascination emerged much earlier in his life. Both, however, demonstrated the way in which self-motivation in educating oneself often paid off later on in their lives. For Mooney, demonstrating a deep familiarity with the names and geographies of hundreds of tribes and their migratory routes was the only way to earn a position with the Bureau, as he received no formal education in ethnology or opportunity to attend college, unlike Swanton. With no real accreditation process or formal educational standards that could be evaluated, being hired by the Bureau often consisted of luck and having the good fortune of being noticed for a skill of immediate need. For Swanton, who maintained an antiquarian's interest in the history of the world until his teens, taking copious notes of names and places likely served to fill his time in general as much as prepare him for his future career as an anthropologist.<sup>53</sup>

When Swanton's interest turned towards ancient American history, like many people of his time, it was sparked by William Hickling Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* and *Conquest of Peru*. As his first introduction to indigenous peoples in general,

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<sup>52</sup> L.G. Moses, *The Indian Man: A Biography of James Mooney* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 11-12.

<sup>53</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 1.

Prescott's accounts presented Swanton with a perfect example of a "Master Narrative" of American history.<sup>54</sup> Swanton never encountered a Native person until his undergraduate trips to New Mexico and South Dakota, and there is little indication that he ever privileged or focused in depth on the Native voices marginalized within European and white American written accounts. To be sure, he discussed indigenous cultural data he came across, but paid little concern for how Native peoples responded to and changed over time through such encounters with Europeans and Euro-Americans. Maine and Massachusetts, where Swanton came of age were once home to numerous Native cultures such as the Penobscot, Narragansett, Pequot, and Wampanoag, amongst countless others. By the time of his birth, these aboriginal nations' populations had suffered devastating losses, with many dying in wars of extermination waged upon them, through exposure to various diseases, and a slave trade that sent many to the West Indies.<sup>55</sup> Descendants of these cultures certainly continued to reside in Maine or Massachusetts, but the possibility for a non-Indian to encounter a Native person on a regular basis remained much lower in the Northeast than in other regions of the United States. The low demographic numbers, degree of acculturation, and memory of bloodshed encouraged the remaining indigenous peoples of the region to remain concealed. In fact, it would not be until the Red Power

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<sup>54</sup> Master Narrative refers to the purposeful or unintentional suppression of Native viewpoints from the colonial record between Europeans and indigenous peoples. This practice led to centuries-long privileging of European and white American accounts of Native peoples and their histories, often sanitizing the record of violence and injustices perpetrated on the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the addition of many Native peoples to its ranks, academia has attempted to discern aboriginal views of themselves and the invaders into their homelands.

<sup>55</sup> Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 313-326.

movement almost a hundred years after Swanton's birth that many East Coast aboriginal peoples attempted to reclaim their ancestral identities in earnest.<sup>56</sup>

As a result, like many fellow residents of the East Coast, Swanton's exposure to Native peoples remained extremely limited. Options for learning about them consisted of reading outlandish dime novels of a westward expansion that all too often lauded the process of colonialism and dispossession of Native inhabitants. No doubt, the residents of Maine read the newspaper's triumphant accounts detailing the "pacification" of Plains tribes. Later, these newspapers told of the deplorable conditions of the reservations and of the federal government's plan to adopt reform measures through assimilation. Ironically, those with the least exposure to Indian peoples and their "plight" became the strongest advocates of Native people. However, there is no indication that Swanton ever read dime novels, but he did enthusiastically read books such as *Footprints of Vanished Races* and *The Mysterious Mound Builders*, which reflected the prejudiced approach many people took towards Native peoples and their histories. The early literature Swanton consumed touched on a particular issue that raged until the dawn of the twentieth century, the idea that any signs of what experts considered traces of "high civilization" could not be considered of Native American origin. By far the most attention focused on the megaliths in Central and South America, the cliff dwellings of the North American Southwest, and the giant earthen mounds in the American Southeast

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<sup>56</sup> For an excellent chronicle of upper East Coast indigenous cultural survival from first contact through the present, with particular emphasis on Maine's Penobscot, see Pauleena MacDougall, *The Penobscot Dance of Resistance: Tradition in the History of a People* (Durham: University of New Hampshire, 2004), 16-34.

and Midwest. These constructions were believed to be the remains of cultures with “Old World” origins.<sup>57</sup>

One of the more insidious instances in which Native peoples suffered disenfranchisement as a result of this viewpoint concerned the Pueblo people of the southwest. After the Mexican-American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo mandated the United States treat the Pueblo as citizens. The American government coveted Pueblo land and resources, while simultaneously expressing admiration for the high level of “civilization” found in the region. Rather than uphold the terms of the treaty and respect Pueblo sovereignty, the United States conjured a variation of the myth of an “outsider” origin for the plush Pueblo land holdings. Only in this case, the United States sought to use the erroneous belief that the Aztecs were responsible for Pueblo culture, giving them a tortured justification for claiming ownership of Pueblo water ways and lands. If Pueblo culture and property derived from a foreign source, then what title did they hold? As archaeologist Randall McGuire states, “They used the Aztec myth to argue that Pueblo civilization was nothing more than a thin veneer taken from the Spanish. The Pueblo were only latter day imitators of the lost race that had left the great ruins. This idea legitimized the taking of Pueblo assets and the denial of their civil rights.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, no one of scholarly repute seriously considered the peoples already living in this hemisphere when Columbus arrived to be the obvious candidates for Pueblo architecture and a myriad of other sophisticated Native works of art and

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<sup>57</sup> Randal McGuire “Why Have Archaeologists Thought the Real Indians Were Dead and What Can We Do about It?,” in Thomas Biolsi and Larry Zimmerman, *Vine Deloria Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 69-70.

<sup>58</sup> McGuire “Why Have Archaeologists Thought the Real Indians Were Dead and What Can We Do about It?,” 71-72. See also Hall, G. Emlen, . *Four Leagues of Pecos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 118. and Lekson, Stephen H. 1988. “The Idea of the Kiva in Anasazi Archaeology,” *Kiva* 53 (3): 213-234.

properties. Only a few maverick scholars and the Indians themselves thought that could be the case. So tenacious was the belief in a mystical “outsider” origin for the mounds that it took until Cyrus Thomas’ 1894 pronouncement, proving once and for all Native peoples built the mounds, to change anthropological opinion.<sup>59</sup>

The early literature Swanton consumed undoubtedly awoke within him a curiosity for history, but in the process conditioned him, like it had countless others, to gloss over the viewpoints of indigenous peoples. For instance, Prescott cared little at all for Aztec views of the Spaniards, the downfall of their empire, or the Aztec texts put together after the conquest by a priest. He once commented in his journal that, “I hope my readers will take more satisfaction than I do in the annals of barbarians.” Elsewhere, he elevated what he felt really mattered, stating “nor do I think they will bear expatiating on to any great length. But the overturning of their old empires by a handful of warriors is a brilliant subject, full of important results, and connected with *our history*.”<sup>60</sup>

Francis Parkman, another popular historian of early America that Swanton read while growing up, today enjoys a far better reputation than does Prescott. Parkman is often referred to as having possessed a “sense of Native Americans as important historical agents.” However, his handling of Native sources and assessment of Native accounts of their histories echo Prescott. Speaking of Iroquois accounts of their dealings with another tribe, Parkman once wrote, “Indian traditions are very rarely of any value as historical evidence,” and that “Indian traditions of historical events are usually almost

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<sup>59</sup> McGuire, 72.

<sup>60</sup> C. Harvey Gardiner, editor, *The Literary memoranda of William Hickling Prescott*, V. 1 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), p. 229 quoted in Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

worthless.”<sup>61</sup> Parkman’s approach included Native people in his historical accounts only to use them as foils, over which the superiority of Anglo civilization could be demonstrated. In his selective rendering of American history, Parkman inaugurated a “school of suspicion” towards both Native motives and of accounts of their own pasts.<sup>62</sup> According to historian Francis Jennings, Parkman and his ilk did not just misinterpret their source material; they purposely lied about what they said. A more charitable description of how many nineteenth-century historians interpreted their sources is to say they were guilty of lying by omission, stretching the truth of Euro-nobility while neglecting the truth about Native peoples.<sup>63</sup> Even as late as 1969, some scholars continued to parrot Parkman’s insensitivities towards Native peoples, describing them as “primitive” and “savage.”<sup>64</sup> Dishonest and poor in terms of scholarship as these studies were, they could be taken out and used as incontrovertible proof that something was seriously amiss in the manner in which historians and their books depicted Native Americans. The long and ugly master narrative of American history needed drastic reformation.

While great emphasis should not be placed on Swanton’s early reading choices, as he did not parrot these author’s estimates of Native accounts of history, it explains some

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<sup>61</sup> Francis Parkman, *The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century*, Part Second (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1930 (1867), p. 545 quoted in Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.; Francis Parkman, *Count Frontenac and New France Under Louis XIV*, V. I (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1897 {1877}), 164; quoted in Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>62</sup> Nabokov, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, vii, 41-42.

<sup>64</sup> A good example of how racist language concerning Indians continued to be used in scholarly discourse as late as 1969 can be found in the work of historian Bernard Sheehan. Sheehan accepted what Jennings coined the “civilization-savagery dichotomy,” consistently referring to Indians as uncivilized and savage. See Jennings *Invasion of America* 12 and Bernhard W. Shehan, “Indian-White Relations in Early America: A Review Essay,” *William Mary Quarterly*, 3 Ser., XXVI (1969), 283.

of his ignorance when first working with Native peoples. Some of these work's biases in favoring what non-Indians wrote remained with Swanton throughout his career, despite taking a more charitable view of indigenous accounts than many of his predecessors. And while anthropology had by Swanton's time surpassed history in using aboriginal accounts of the past, the value placed on this information still all too often paralleled the sentiments of Prescott and Parkman. Much later, Swanton commented on what supposedly passed for a well-rounded history in his youth and his naïve gullibility, commenting, "I accepted everything I read as gospel truth. The serpent of adverse criticism had not yet entered into my peaceful Garden of Eden."<sup>65</sup> Through his own conscience, professional education, and experience working with Indian peoples, Swanton did in fact transcend much of the prejudices of the authors of his youth. Yet, in other ways, he never departed from the biases of his own culture, which privileged the written word over the spoken one, ensuring that, despite a more positive posture towards Native peoples, he favored white accounts of Native history over what Indians said about themselves and their pasts.

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<sup>65</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 1.

### Chapter 3: Becoming a Harvard Man (1890-1898)

Swanton's voracious reading continued through his teenage years and found direct applicability later in his education and throughout his career. However, looking at Swanton's early education, it is apparent that he could easily have ended up earning a reputation as a successful archaeologist. And while his career certainly showcases a keen familiarity with archaeological methodologies, early experiences while enrolled at Harvard convinced Swanton to choose anthropology as his career of choice.

When the time came for Swanton to enter high school, his brothers, Walter and Henry, made their own plans to enter the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.). The prospect of moving caused some anxiety within Swanton. While his mother and brothers could recall living briefly elsewhere, notably Missouri, Swanton remembered only Gardiner as his home. And while his future endeavors took him all around the country, his heart always remained with the East Coast. For his early education, Swanton remained relatively near his hometown, as Gardiner is close to Harvard and adjacent cities. Nonetheless, the change proved momentous. Harvard exposed him to the world of anthropology.<sup>1</sup>

Swanton, though, entered the Ivy League school with no clear plan for what he would choose as a career. Harvard proved an optimal choice, as previous relatives had also attended the prestigious institution.<sup>2</sup> Given his interests in history in general, he simply wished to continue them in a more intensive fashion, paying little mind to the future applicability of such

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<sup>1</sup> John Reed Swanton, "Notes Regarding my Adventures in Anthropology and with Anthropologists," *Manuscript 4651, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives* (1944), 1. Hereafter cited as "Notes Regarding."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2, John Swanton, "One Swedenborgian's Experience with Religion," *The New Church Messenger*, Mar. 14, 1959, 84.

knowledge.<sup>3</sup> And even when he thought he had decided on his exact career path, like so many college students during his time and ever since, he changed direction during the course of his education. In Swanton's case, he oscillated back and forth between archeology and anthropology. As his career demonstrates, he eventually combined the two crafts, but that possibility was not so apparent at the time.<sup>4</sup>

In 1890, misfortune struck at home when Swanton's beloved great-aunt Dorcas died. The loss of Dorcas, despite her being quite elderly, devastated the Swanton family. Swanton, seventeen years old at the time, possessed nothing but fond memories of her, as she, along with his mother and grandmother (mother's side) formed a loving matriarch that raised Swanton and his brothers. Her honesty and integrity served as a role model for the Swanton brothers and helped maintain a stable home life, particularly for Mrs. Swanton, who dealt with her own losses and hurdles in life. A good example of her benevolence and integrity can be seen in how she treated people outside the family. Alex's father, Ephraim Forsyth, delivered groceries to Aunt Dorcas, but in his later years, often forgot which goods to bring. He often forgot to show at all. In Swanton's opinion, it would have been all too easy to take advantage of Mr. Forsyth's feeble-mindedness, but he recalled with admiration his aunt's determination to consistently remind him of his schedule and help him when she could.<sup>5</sup> Aunt Dorcas' kindness and forthrightness in her communications and interactions with people remain the two attributes Swanton and his brothers recalled about her, commenting,

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<sup>3</sup> Swanton's generation, as with previous generations before him, lacked the deep concern with the direct marketability of their educations so common today. This is not to say that no thought was given to future employment after high school or college, just that obtaining a general, antiquarian appreciation of and grasp of history was thought important enough to ensure employment in some capacity.

<sup>4</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 18.

<sup>5</sup> John Reed Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes, Family and Personal History until 1898" page 2a Swanton Family Papers, 1759-1955, 40v-44v: Typed Transcripts, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Cited hereafter as "Autobiographical Notes."

Aunt Dorcas' honesty hewed to the line under each and every circumstance. I don't think she ever had an 'ulterior motive,' but she at times mortally offended those who dealt in them. There are those who cannot understand what it is to be forthright. She was not pretty nor gifted with honeyed language and was evidently no 'ball from belle.' On one occasion it is said, she was wall-flowering at a dance when a young gentleman came up and asked, 'aren't you dancing this evening, Miss Gay?' 'I might if I were asked' was the prompt reply which we hope the youth was a gentleman enough to respond to, but this was no hint with Aunt Dorcas. It was a simply statement of fact. And that was all there was to it. No doubt this frankness was somewhat annoying when my aunt was young, but in her old age it was enjoyed by everyone and they were disappointed if she failed to come across with it.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that Swanton owed much of his relatively stable childhood and kind disposition in large part to the example set forth by his Aunt.

With this loss weighing down on him, Swanton readied himself for high school and the departure from all of the comfortable certainties of his hometown. In the fall of 1890, Swanton departed for Chelsea, Massachusetts, with his good friend Alex Forsyth and his family. Given the small size of Gardiner, it is surprising that Chelsea possessed a reputation amongst Swanton and his friends for being boring, with the common view that no place was "as dead as Chelsea." Relatives of the Forsyths lived there, however, so attending high school in that town made sense for Swanton, who enjoyed free lodging with Alex and his family. For the time being, Swanton's mother remained in Gardiner.<sup>7</sup>

If the town of Chelsea held a reputation for being dull, the high school was surprisingly advanced for its time. The school opened its doors in 1845, with little guarantee of it remaining in operation past that first year. With no real leadership and poor behavior on the part of parents and students, a decision was made to continue with the school, but with major overhauls. Part of the problem seemed to be the interplay between the males and females, as well as a need for a more professional faculty. Thus, a decision was made to separate the sexes by floor sections and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 2a.

<sup>7</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 2.

to hire individuals trained to teach a wider range of subject matter.<sup>8</sup> By Swanton's time, the school's expansion allowed for a gymnasium as well as a laboratory for chemistry and physics courses. A decade and a half after Swanton and Alex graduated from Chelsea High, a devastating fire destroyed the school, which has subsequently been rebuilt and undergone several renovations and expansions.<sup>9</sup>

Swanton never developed memories or nostalgia for high school as he did for other activities of his youth. One reason for this is that high school in Swanton's time operated differently than today's standard four-year term. At the time, it was not uncommon for individuals planning to attend college to go to high school for only a year. By enrolling in a focused curriculum that prepared an individual for college, students could offset the need to remain in high school for the normal duration. Swanton planned just such a scenario, so he simply did not have the luxury of developing his usual wistfulness about such matters when it came to high school. However, after a year of attending school in Chelsea, Swanton decided to stay another year. He gave no particular reason for this, but as a shy, introverted type, he probably felt apprehensive about attending college after only a year of high school. Swanton simply stated in his journal that, "I had decided that, as I should be obliged to enter with conditions, it would be best to take one more year at Chelsea." This more than likely meant that Swanton simply looked upon the transition with a fair amount of trepidation and felt his nervous constitution made him susceptible to complications in college that other students were exempt from. Opting for another year meant increased socializing with his peers, which may not have been a poor decision by Swanton and his family.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Chelsea Historical Society, "Chelsea High School," <<http://olgp.net/chs/index.htm>> [accessed Mar. 1, 2012].

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Alex vehemently disagreed with Swanton's decision to stay another year. Given their long history as childhood friends, this is understandable. Alex simply did not want to miss beginning college without his best friend at his side. As a result of this decision, Swanton's mother moved to Chelsea and found a house close to the school. By this time, Swanton's two brothers were enrolled at M.I.T. but lived with Swanton and his mother for the time being. A cousin from the Swanton side also came to live with them in Chelsea. John Camp Swanton planned to attend M.I.T., where his older brother Fred was already a senior. John and Fred seemed to parallel the contrasts between Swanton and his friend, Alex. Fred was said to be quite serious and dedicated to his studies, going on to a career building electrical equipment on warships. John Camp enjoyed a lively social life and excelled at sports. What little Swanton recalled about his high school years referenced John Camp, who played baseball. In another early tragedy in Swanton's life, John Camp died just before he turned 21 due to a heart condition. His passing occurred while Swanton was enrolled at Harvard, and the loss greatly impacted him and the rest of the family.<sup>11</sup>

Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, Swanton's decision to remain in high school for a second year proved synchronistic with recent developments at Harvard and forever changed his future. During the summer after his first year of high school, Swanton learned that Harvard would be offering a course for the first time, entitled, "American Archaeology and Ethnology." According to Swanton, the class required "properly equipped graduates." Essentially, this course was reserved for upper classman with the necessary prerequisites for what was touted as an intense class. On learning of the offering, Swanton recalled his love of ancient history and

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<sup>10</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 2.

<sup>11</sup> Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes," 2, 30.

“decided that American archeology and ethnology was what I was going to study.”<sup>12</sup> No doubt, the lingering memory of Prescott and other writers of Swanton’s youth helped in his excitement at this point.

The extra year at Chelsea served to prepare Swanton for this class and college in general, but he needed advice on which classes to focus on during his last year of high school. After contacting current curator of the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, Frederick Putnam inquiring on this matter, Swanton began preparing to undertake a surprisingly diverse curriculum, covering the gambit of the liberal arts and sciences.<sup>13</sup> On Putnam’s advice, Swanton in his years at Harvard, took courses in advanced English composition, chemistry, meteorology, geology, zoology, and, geography. In addition to these courses, he also studied paleontology, psychology, botany, and French and Spanish languages. Swanton particularly enjoyed his one class with the eminent philosopher George Santayana.<sup>14</sup> While Chelsea High lacked the necessary curriculum for Swanton to get directly started on such a future regiment of course work, Putnam’s advice served to guide him to reading material that proved helpful. Plus, by contacting Putnam, Swanton made it known that his interest in archeology remained high. As a result, his name recognition served to put him on the radar of not just Putnam, but those that worked closely with the famous curator.

In the fall of 1892, the time finally came for Swanton to begin his education at Harvard. The entrance exams proved intense, with Swanton failing in Advanced Latin. However, he

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<sup>12</sup> Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 2-4.

<sup>13</sup> The sound advice Swanton received on the best courses to take his second year of high school owed much to Putman’s foresight into the necessary skills future anthropologists would need in order to be successful. Putnam represented a handful of individuals at the time who anticipated the need for future scholars to possess specific educational grooming for a career in anthropology, as opposed to the more recreational, non-professional backgrounds of many of the field’s operatives of the late nineteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 4.

passed all other tests without incident and Harvard accepted him without any further issues. But the incident did stick with Swanton long into his later years. While Swanton never overtly stated his stance on social issues or politics in his time, one anecdote from this incident gives insight into his future sympathies. At first, he somewhat humorously blamed his failure on a dislike for Latin, but his tone became more serious, commenting further, “Probably my feeling is due to an early sympathy for independent expression, and a distaste for both Pagan and Christian Roman imperialisms.”

This hostility against colonialism stemmed from Swanton’s personal experiences growing up in a religious tradition always outnumbered, marginalized, and oftentimes, maligned. For this reason, Swanton said that he “felt considerable initial contempt for conservatives and was inclined to take up readily with innovations in custom or in thought.” Somewhat contradictorily, Swanton went on to state that “for a long time this temperamental radicalism did not affect my politics,” yet immediately before saying this, spoke strongly in favor of the righteousness of women’s suffrage, wondering how anyone at any time in American history could have seen it as anything but logical.<sup>15</sup> Regarding these sentiments, Swanton more than likely wished to show sympathy for marginalized groups and ideologies yet to maintain a distance from some of the more radical political streams of thought at the time of writing his memoirs.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, little is known concerning Swanton’s views on the institutionalized racism towards African Americans of his time as a youth and adult. Yet, from his admissions here and

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<sup>15</sup> Swanton, “Autobiographical Notes,” 37-38.

<sup>16</sup> Swanton wrote his personal memoir of his career and autobiography after retiring from the Bureau of American Ethnology. With the late 1940s and early 1950s brimming with Cold War paranoia and suspicion towards radical ideology, Swanton may have written his accounts with these matters in mind. In the end, this is speculation but it does seem rather odd that Swanton stated his allegiance with marginalized groups, but wished to distance himself from certain political implications one may draw from this.

elsewhere, it is likely that as with Indians he could demonstrate sympathy generally for their mistreatment while simultaneously using disparaging language when speaking about them.<sup>17</sup> In the end, what is clear from Swanton's memory of failing his Latin entrance exam is that it elicited feelings of sympathy for marginalized peoples and ideologies when he wrote about it in his autobiography. Another certainty is that Swanton's failing here in no way served as a predictor of his success in working with foreign languages, as his long career translating and transliterating tribal languages attests to.

With the transition from high school to acceptance into college complete, Swanton enjoyed close comradeship with Alex again, with the Forsyths serving as hospitable host for Swanton, taking him into their new home in Somerville, Massachusetts. Alex and Swanton usually walked to campus. Swanton's brothers took up residence nearby, as did their mother, Mary. However, his older brothers soon decided the commute to M.I.T. to be too time consuming and moved to Boston.<sup>18</sup>

Swanton's mother debated where to live, but decided to move to Boston to live with her two oldest sons for a short time before moving to Roxbury, Massachusetts. This latest move proved ideal for Mary, as her good friend Ednah C. Silver lived there. The daughter of a prominent New Church minister and active member herself, Ednah remained busy teaching and writing for the church, and gladly accepted Mary's assistance helping around the house. Mary lived with Ednah for a few years, during which time she enjoyed a much-deserved respite from

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<sup>17</sup> See John Swanton, *Are Wars Inevitable?* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1943), for his ability to dismantle racist constructs passing as science in the abstract, yet speak disparagingly of non-Western peoples and their cultures as backward or, to use the most commonly favored term at the time, "primitive." In this case, the subject matter revolved around the universal reality of war's existence amongst all peoples throughout history, and that this unfortunate and universal activity should not be used to disparage or categorize one culture as less than another.

<sup>18</sup> Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes," 37.

moving and trying to keep pace with her three sons.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly enough, Ednah's house connected to the exact Swedenborgian Church Mary's father ministered to before she was born. At various times, this home housed one or more of the Swanton boys during their respective educations, and served as a meeting spot for church members to deliver papers dealing with theological matters, several of which Swanton provided.<sup>20</sup>

But delivering papers on the finer points of Swedenborgian theology greatly diminished once Swanton's studies at Harvard picked up. From that point on, Swanton's studies occupied most of his time. What little free time he enjoyed was spent journaling about his experiences, anxiously debating his career path after graduation, and attempting to develop relationships with fellow students and faculty. No easy task for Swanton, he knew he needed to establish at least minimal acquaintanceship with his professors. Of specific importance were those professors most prominent in archeology. If Swanton hoped to eventually obtain employment in that field, he needed to establish his work ethic in the eyes of those individuals in positions of influence at Harvard.

Swanton's time at Harvard and early experiences in archeology and field work cannot be understood without placing them in the context of the developments of nineteenth century anthropology at Harvard and museums nationwide.<sup>21</sup> For several decades after its founding in 1886, the Peabody Museum of Archeology produced more doctorates than any other program before Franz Boas began his own extremely successful tenure at Colombia.<sup>22</sup> According to

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<sup>19</sup> Swanton, "One Swedenborgian's Experience with Religion," 84.

<sup>20</sup> Swanton, "Autobiographical Notes," 39.

<sup>21</sup> While Swanton vacillated whether to focus on archeology or anthropology for a career, he initially began with a fervent intention to become an archeologist. He eventually opted for the role of anthropologist, but not until certain experiences while a student at Harvard convinced him to do make the change.

historian Curtis Hinsley, at no other establishment “did the university department of anthropology arise so clearly or so directly from the museum context as had been the experience at Harvard.” These circumstances never arose again afterwards, because “by the time of World War I anthropology in the United States had shifted away from material culture studies and the museum base to such an extent that significant interactions between the diverging structures and interests of department and museum became rare.”<sup>23</sup> Swanton’s arrival came during a golden era in terms of museum and departmental collegiality that witnessed a degree of collaboration that earned Harvard an extremely positive reputation amongst aspiring archeologists and anthropologists.

George Peabody’s funding in 1866 for the establishment of both a museum and professor fund took several years to come to fruition. The donation stipulated that the construction would begin once the fund reached \$100,000, and upon completion, the museum would belong exclusively to Harvard Corporation. Peabody’s stipulation for the professorship allowed for funds to be used to acquire material collections for however long it took to fill the chair. With the building fund set quite high for the time, it did not reach its mark until decades later, while the professor endowment earned interest enough to maintain collection endeavors for twenty years.<sup>24</sup> This inaugurated a successful campaign to furnish the burgeoning institution with artifacts, with the expectation that it would rival any other institution’s collections, including those overseas.

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<sup>22</sup> Curtis Hinsley, “The Museum Origins of Harvard Anthropology 1866-1915,” in *Science at Harvard University: Historical Perspectives* ed. Clark Elliot and Margaret Rossiter (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1992), 121.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 122.

Enthusiasm for archeology among Harvard staff remained great, but development of a formalized program, with regularly scheduled classes, lingered for a few years. While part of the problem lay with inadequate funding, a dearth of archaeology students and lack of faculty with appropriate levels of training accounted for the majority of the delay. Furthermore, the few instructors that taught archeology classes did so sporadically. The museum's first curator, Jeffries Wyman, learned early in his tenure that the best way to continue to increase the museum's inventory and slowly develop a larger student base and professionally trained staff depended on outsourcing teaching duties to field workers.<sup>25</sup> This allowed interested students to learn firsthand the methods of archeological fieldwork and for collectors to begin thinking about a career in museum work or teaching.

Unfortunately, this pattern of outsourcing allowed for would-be amateur archeologists to become overly optimistic about career advancement or institutional recognition for their efforts. E.O. Dunning is a good example of an individual that started out optimistic about a possible career in archeology, only to see those expectations dashed due to a lack of consistent institutional support. Dunning, originally a minister from Connecticut, seemed content to work for around \$300.00 a year under Wyman's guidance because he expected to eventually enjoy archeology as a full time profession. In fact, Dunning sought Wyman out first, offering to serve as a collector for the Peabody Museum, focusing on the Tennessee area.<sup>26</sup>

However, after a few years, Dunning lost patience with what he saw as a lack of institutional support and recognition for his work that translated into career advancement. So angry did Dunning become towards Wyman that he openly considered offering his services to the Smithsonian. While he never did this, he eventually ceased his archeological endeavors

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 123.

altogether to work in the mining industry.<sup>27</sup> Dunning's example represented the experiences of many amateur archeologists and collectors of the time that sought to channel a hobby into a sustainable career. Minimally, these individuals expected to be recognized for their contributions, which never really came to fruition for many of them. The conflict consisted in a chasm of differing expectations on the part of individuals and museum and colleges in the late eighteenth century. Curtis Hinsely summarizes this misperception, commenting:

The canons of nineteenth-century American individualism bred expectations of success, reward, and recognition for hard labor that could clash sharply with the structures and purposes of institutions—even those of modest size and resources like the Peabody Museum. Additionally, the widespread public understanding of science (especially those sciences emerging from the broad domain of natural history) as empirical collecting of observations encouraged the conviction that the observation in the field are not merely important to the scientific process—they surely are—but that such observations themselves constitute science. In the midst of confusion over scientific roles, Mr. Peabody's museum occupied the difficult and ambiguous position of offering encouragement without formal accreditation or the promise of a position.<sup>28</sup>

Dunning and other collectors expected to be placed in positions to enjoy recognition with the public and to control access to the materials they amassed for museums and colleges. In the end, few served as anything more than as collecting agents who were more often than not never given credit for their findings. Things turned out differently for Swanton and some of his fellow Harvard graduates, as circumstances within archeology and anthropology changed after their graduation. On this point, Swanton benefited from a coordinated curriculum designed to practice archeology professionally. To be sure, his arrival at Harvard fortuitously coincided with institutional changes that made a professional career in archeology easier. But the more relevant reason was that, despite amateurs like Dunning possessing hands-on experience in the field, they

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<sup>27</sup> E.O. Dunning to Jeffries Wyman, Jan. 10. 1873, cited in Curtis Hinsley, "The Museum Origins of Harvard Anthropology 1866-1915," in *Science at Harvard University: Historical Perspectives* ed. Clark Elliot and Margaret Rossiter (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1992), 128.

<sup>28</sup> Hinsley, "The Museum Origins of Harvard Anthropology," 124.

simply suffered from the lack of a formalized education necessary to write research articles and place their findings within the broader context of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century findings.

After Wyman's death in 1874, circumstances changed at the Peabody Museum.<sup>29</sup> When the ambitious Frederic Putman replaced Wyman as curator, he took the museum and the discipline of archeology to new and unforeseen heights. His own uncompromising work ethic was backed up by an expectation of professionalism from his students and those contracted as collectors. Putman's influence on Swanton's young career proved immense, despite the decision by Swanton to eventually choose anthropology as his profession. Under Putman's guidance, Swanton experienced his first archeological excavations and exposure to Native Americans.

A few words regarding Putnam's accomplishments and career are necessary, since his role in communicating to the wider public the crucial role museums served in national life during the late nineteenth-century remains indispensable. Also, under his watch, archeologists and anthropologists began drifting away from their close partnership with federal policies aimed at assimilating Indians. During Putnam's time, these disciplines became increasingly beholden to their own fields and institutions and less concerned with ensuring ideological coherence with Federal Indian policy<sup>30</sup>

Putnam hailed from Salem, Massachusetts, and early in life showed an interest in museums and their collections, spending much of his time at the local Essex Institute. While a teenager he met the famous professor of natural history Louis Agassiz, who invited him to study at Cambridge. Twelve years later, George Peabody donated over a hundred thousand dollars to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 87-88.

create the Peabody Academy of Science, where Putnam worked until he began his tenure at the Peabody Museum itself. Somewhat surprising, despite his contributions in archeology, Putnam always desired to specialize in ichthyology, and in fact worked in that area exclusively while in Salem. But by 1880, perhaps out of career necessity, he devoted himself entirely to archeology and anthropology. He credited his zoological and biological backgrounds in preparing him for his work in ethnology, commenting in a letter to fellow scholar, Lewis Henry Morgan, “I obtained during the 8 years I was a pupil and assistant with Prof. Wyman, both in human general anatomy have prepared me for my archeological & ethnological research in a better manner than if I had gone directly to these later studies without that previous zoological knowledge, and therefore while I am no longer a student in zoology I am one in anthropology.”<sup>31</sup> This committed by Putman propelled the museum beyond anyone’s expectations.

Putnam’s ability to harness the loyalty of a core group of staff, students, and field workers bolstered the museum’s collections, despite the economic crisis of the 1870s, and speaks to his dedication to the profession. Extraordinary for the time period, Putnam at one point also retained succession of female staff members, most notably Alice Fletcher. Male and female students and assistants mostly conducted archeological work and developed close relationships with Putman. Regardless of whether their work with archeology or ethnology translated into a career or even professional recognition, many of these students and staff workers contented themselves with the overall experience of working with such an intensely dedicated person as Putman.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Putnam to Lewis Henry Morgan, Apr. 8, 1880, quoted in Hinsley, “The Museum Origins of Harvard Anthropology,” 125.

<sup>32</sup> Hinsely, *The Museum Origins of Harvard Anthropology*, 126-127.

But for all of Putnam's laudable allegiance to his profession, his views and conduct remained grounded in common nineteenth-century ethnocentric assumptions about Native people. The most pervasive view of Indians at this time, aside from being viewed as "primitive" and backward, rested the belief in their imminent cultural demise. The desire to accumulate as much material remains of a people believed by the dominant society to be "out of time" remained a priority of anthropologists and archeologists. The primary goal consisted of demonstrating the development of culture in the Americas through a series of hierarchically arranged stages. Henry Lewis Morgan's theory that Native societies could be categorized along a hierarchical scheme from stages of savagery, barbarism, to degrees of civilization (never fully realized as being on par with Anglo civilization) remained the theoretical starting point for nineteenth-century scholars.<sup>33</sup> Along with encouraging the government's assimilation of Indian people, anthropologists and curators like Putnam hoped to accumulate as much of the remaining material elements of these cultures for scientific posterity that supposedly yielded universal truths about the successive stages of cultural advancement that occurred in the Americas.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 17-18.

<sup>34</sup> Regarding the eventual parting of ways between federal policy makers and anthropologists, see Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 84-113. Hoxie traces Federal implementation of policy to incorporate tribal lands and peoples into the dominant stream of American life. While early ethnologists viewed their roles more expansively than did the government, many viewed their actions in terms of scientific benevolence. Ethnologists saw assimilation as a gradual process, one in which scientific theories of race and culture would be utilized in order to ease Native peoples' transition from "primitivism" to civilization. Along with this collaboration of science and federal policy, anthropologists and archeologists hoped to record as much data on indigenous peoples in the United States as they could before these cultures disappeared entirely, relics of bygone eras consumed by the steady march of "progress." Due to the belief that indigenous Americans would soon disappear, the Federal Government felt these allied disciplines would become obsolete. For the ethnologists and archeologists, it is doubtful that a majority ever agreed with any sort of time limit on their fields. Hoxie not only illustrates shifting public opinion over the assimilation of Indians but how scholars eventually shied away from viewing their work as part of these federal policies. Looking at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, Hoxie illustrates how central the theme of Indian progress remained, with expositions dedicated to missionary work, boarding schools, and success in implementing agriculture on reservations. The overall tone remained optimistic regarding Native people's entrance into mainstream society,

One of the more damaging activities that took place during this time concerned the trafficking in Native American bodily remains. Grave robbers supplied museums with physical specimens, mainly skulls, to measure cranial dimensions as a way of determining the “racial” capacity for intelligence of Indians. A strong indictment of anthropologists and archeologists from this era is that they conducted their science in Indian country as though the Native Americans no longer existed or felt attachment with their departed ancestors or their possessions.<sup>35</sup>

Putnam’s own career is replete with examples of either directly engaging in such activities or actively promoting his student workers and staff to do so. For example, while Putnam mostly relegated his scope to Tennessee, Ohio, and New Jersey, he sponsored some work in the Great Lakes region at one point and commissioned amateur collectors to procure some remains from Ojibwe burial mounds in 1873. One of these individuals, Henry Gillman, wrote to Putnam on his luck during an outing, “I have been disappointed in not getting more. But the Indians are fast moving away or dying out.”<sup>36</sup> This incident underscores both the objective to obtain Indian remains and the detached attitude so many like Gillman showed towards the dire circumstances Native people faced at that time. Even acknowledged

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and that such an eventuality rested on continual federal policy that encouraged progress. The 1876 fair witnessed close collaboration between Smithsonian scientists and federal policy makers. However, by the 1893 Columbian Exposition, the optimistic tone no longer reigned, as policymakers demanded a separate Indian exposition apart from the one put on by Frederick Putnam. The reason is that Putnam wished to use the Peabody’s exhibit to show the cultural development of Indians from first contact with Columbus to the present. He used Indians, dressed in regalia, as a way of supplying visual aids showing this theme. Policymakers, more concerned with demonstrating the progress continuing to be made in assimilating Native Americans, felt that displaying living Indians as they looked and dressed in the past did a disservice to the attempts to “civilize” Indians and contributed to negative stereotypes in the public’s view of them.

<sup>35</sup> David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archeology, and The Battle For Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 52-55.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Gillman to Frederic Ward Putnam, Oct. 6, 1876, quoted in Hinsley, “The Museum Origins of Harvard Anthropology,” 127.

progressives like Franz Boas partook in this unsavory activity, all the while admitting the base immorality of such actions. On the plundering of Indian graves, Boas once commented, “It is rather a perilous business to procure Indians’ skulls in this country—The Natives are so jealous of you that they watch you very closely while you are wandering near their mausoleums & instant & sanguinary vengeance would fall upon the luckless—who would presume to interfere with the sacred relics.” Boas went on, acknowledging the rapid decline also taking place among Indian communities while he engaged in such actions, “There is an epidemic raging among them which carries them off so fast that the cemeteries will soon lack watchers—I don’t rejoice in the prospects of death of the poor creatures certainly, but then you know it will be very convenient for my purposes.”<sup>37</sup> By the time Swanton entered Harvard, trafficking in Native remains met with some disapproval, though not purely for moral reasons.

To cease what was believed to be viable research into the physical and cultural evolution of humans because it seemed morally offensive lacked enough motivating force to convince scientific institutions to cease their activities. Only when the basis of categorizing cultures into hierarchies of lowest to highest based on skull sizes and subjective comparisons of cultures became questioned scientifically did archeological and anthropological institutions moderate these actions.<sup>38</sup> Essentially, behind the mad scramble to acquire Indian remains and artifacts in the noble service of science in the nineteenth-century lay a dark and brutal story of cultural theft and an institutionalized mindset of seeming indifference towards living Indian people on the part of scholars and museums curators, like Putnam. A case can be made that the majority of

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<sup>37</sup> Franz Boas quoted in Robert Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820-1880* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 66.

<sup>38</sup> While Native people sought an end to grave pillaging and divestment of their artifacts since the practice began in the eighteenth century, their activism did not pay off until passage of the Native American Graves Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990. Tribes now enjoy a degree of federal protection from grave theft, but many contend it is not enough, as federally funded institutions still find ways to delay the return of tribal remains and other material items.

anthropologists and archeologists today look back with regret at the actions of their predecessors in these matters. However, during Swanton's time at Harvard, procuring Native remains remained commonplace. In fact, Swanton's first experiences in practicing archeology consisted in attempts to acquire Indian bodily remains, something he did not find in the least appealing.<sup>39</sup>

Swanton's time at Harvard continued successfully through a mountain of difficult course work. The years he spent reading prepared him to think critically and analyze an issue thoroughly. As good of a student Swanton as was, it is surprising that he earned two C's in Spanish. He also earned a C in an English class. These were anomalies on an otherwise stellar academic record, and Swanton still managed to graduate magna cum laude. Always anxious to analyze the reasons why things befell him, Swanton commented in his journal that he wished he had continued on with German throughout college, as it would have opened German ethnographic literature to him. Plus, with his interest in theology, he no doubt looked at much of the biblical scholarship being published in German with interest. Two years of German in high school never translated into learning the language fluently and remained one of Swanton's regrets after college.<sup>40</sup>

Swanton's senior year at Harvard proved to be an important one, as the Archaeological and Ethnological Department began offering Anthropology I to undergraduates. George Dorsey, Harvard's first Ph.D. recipient in anthropology, played an instrumental role in the museum-led scrambles for Native artifacts in the nineteenth-century. Hailing from Ohio, Dorsey quickly established himself as someone with potential to make great contributions to the field. He received his undergraduate degree at Denison College, his masters and doctoral degrees from Harvard, the Ph.D. coming in 1894. His first claim to fame came when asked to assist Putnam at

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<sup>39</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 16.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 8.

the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 by conducting field expeditions to South America. He taught anthropology and archaeology courses at Harvard until his appointment as assistant curator at the Field Museum in Chicago in 1894. At only 29 years of age, he became full curator in 1896.<sup>41</sup>

Swanton remembered Dorsey's class as disorganized and uninspiring. Putnam served as co-instructor for the class, but taught only two weeks over the discovery of some moccasins in Kentucky. Looking back, Swanton realized that neither Putnam nor Dorsey's strengths lay in teaching. Despite respecting them both, Swanton's maturation in his studies helped him see his scholarly elders in a more realistic light. Swanton saw Dorsey as an outstanding field worker, but too restless to be a quality teacher in the classroom. His assessment of Putnam is less flattering in terms of a scholar, commenting, "He was, it must be confessed, no more a natural teacher than was Dorsey, and his field work was limited in character, his principal contribution to American Archeology being in advertising the subject and building up the Peabody Museum."<sup>42</sup> For all of Putnam's successes, he suffered a permanent blemish on his reputation amongst his fellow scholars for never earning a degree while attending Harvard, which left some colleagues believing he lacked sufficient training in their field.<sup>43</sup> Putnam explained himself at one point, "I was present at the examination of several students who took the degree, but never cared for it myself. In after years I realized that it would have been better for me had I obtained the degree in 1859 or 1860. It is simply one of those cases where one omits to do in youth what would have proved advantageous later." In reality, Putnam's experience in archeology and

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<sup>41</sup> A.L. Kroeber, "The Place of Boas in Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956), 156.

<sup>42</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 9.

<sup>43</sup> Curtis Hinsley, "From Shell-Heaps to Stelae: Early Anthropology at the Peabody Museum," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, ed. George Stocking Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 59-62.

presiding over museum collections more than compensated for a lack of a specific degree in his field, but served as ammunition against him for those colleagues that did not like him.<sup>44</sup>

Competency in teaching classes over archeology and anthropology had little to do with proficiency in the field, however. Most instructors, like Putnam and Dorsey, concerned themselves more in collecting artifacts and administrating field work than managing teaching loads. According to Swanton, the last semester of his senior year witnessed the first time the archaeology-anthropology course was taught by a “real teacher of the subject at Harvard.” Dr. Frank Russell took over the class after Dorsey became Director of the Anthropology program at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Swanton remembered Russell as an excellent instructor and as someone to be heeded on the hardships of field work. Unfortunately, Russell’s career at Harvard was short lived after he contracted tuberculosis. But his influence on Swanton remained strong, as Russell’s example of dedication to his craft of remaining focused and dedicated up until his death, inspired the young Swanton. Swanton’s own meddle would be tested later in life. Maintaining a positive attitude in the face of personal tragedy while conducting field work, away from friends and family, was a condition Swanton became intimately experienced with.<sup>45</sup>

Swanton’s first foray into archeological field work was under Charles Willoughby, who is an example of someone that who earned a college degree, yet served his profession well by enthusiastically leading archeological digs and labeling Harvard’s collections and ordering them better than anyone before him.<sup>46</sup> Willoughby caught Putnam’s attention through mutual

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<sup>44</sup> Putnam to Charles W. Eliot, June 22, 1898, Charles W. Eliot Papers (Harvard University Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts).

<sup>45</sup> Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 10.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 10.

archaeological circles and requested his assistance for the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 and persuaded him to come to the Peabody Museum at Harvard, where he served the remainder of his career as curator and director, respectively.<sup>47</sup>

During the summer of 1894, Swanton accompanied Willoughby to Maine in order to help excavate a site once inhabited by the "Red Paint People." Known for the abundance of red ochre used at their burial sites, their discovery elicited a fair amount of excitement and controversy. The burial sites, known since the 1840s, did not receive the attention of the archeological community until Willoughby devoted himself to the task from 1892 to 1894. While no skeletons remained, wooden artifacts of such quality that they rivaled those found in the Pacific Northwest were found in abundance. The red ochre at the graves and unique wooden artistry distinguished this settlement from the surrounding Algonquin communities recently unearthed.<sup>48</sup> Competing viewpoints amongst scholars quickly sprung up over the identity of the "Red Paint People" and to what extent they shared a common culture and ancestry with subsequent Native communities throughout the eastern seaboard.

Controversy over the "The Red Paint" settlements cannot be understood without properly placing them in the broader debate regarding the antiquity of Native Americans in the Americas. William Moorhead took over for Willoughby, and after examining the artifacts and tools, declared that "the graves represent an ancient and exceedingly primitive culture, totally different from that of the later Alonquian tribes inhabiting the region."<sup>49</sup> Just how ancient this community goes back is still being investigated today, though the sites they inhabited are now more

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<sup>47</sup> Earnest A. Hooton, *American Antiquity* 9: 2 (1943): 235-239.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Willoughby, "The Red Paint People of Maine," *American Anthropologist* 17: 2 (1915): 406-409.

<sup>49</sup> Warren Morehead, "The Red-Pain People of Main," *American Anthropologist* 15: 1 (1913): 39.

commonly referred to as the “Morehead burials” and viewed as sharing common burial and hunting and fishing practices with sites more recently discovered in the area.<sup>50</sup>

Moorehead’s contention that the “Red Paint” settlements were thousands of years old incurred the wrath of those who proposed a relatively recent Native American arrival into the Americas. The chief proponents of the view that no human presence existed in the Americas during the Ice Age, William Henry Holmes and his colleague and student, Ales Hrdlicka, made careers out of attacking any scholar claiming otherwise. So vehemently did the two seek to undermine an early human occupation in the Americas, many scholars simply kept contrary findings secret for fear of sabotaging their careers.<sup>51</sup> To suggest humans resided in the Americas at the same time as mammoths and other megafauna proved risky, as most scholars opted to conform to the belief that human occupation occurred at most a few thousand years ago.<sup>52</sup>

Holmes and Hrdlicka cast large and intimidating shadows from their positions at the Bureau of American Ethnology, and it was not until 1927 that definitive proof turned up indicating a human presence in the Americas during the last ice age. What came to be forever known as Folsom points (unique chipped stone projectiles) were found in Folsom, New Mexico. The ancient spear points were found imbedded in bison ribs, indicating that the bones and spear points had been deposited at the same time. The bison were of a species from the Pleistocene era and extremely large. Despite the protests of Holmes and Hrdlicka, by 1927 the presence of humans in the Americas during the Pleistocene age became the orthodox view. Then, in 1937, an even older spear point style was unearthed beneath the original Folsom site. The newly christened Clovis points represented a different style of projectile, one even older than the

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<sup>50</sup> <<http://seacoastnh.com/history/prehistoric/redpaint.html>> [accessed Mar. 12, 2012].

<sup>51</sup> Thomas, *Skull Wars*, 136-137.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Folsom design. The Clovis spear-head points, heavier than Folsom points, were primarily intended for mammoths. According to historian David Hurst Thomas, “This was the first time that elephant-hunting Clovis remains were found below (and hence older than) the bison-hunting Folsom artifacts. Today, archeologists use the term *Paleoindian* to distinguish these Clovis and Folsom occupations from later Native American populations (sometimes called Ne Indians).” Clovis sites all over the United States reveal dates of 11,500 and 10,900 years ago, with some locations going even further back.<sup>53</sup>

To be sure, Holmes, Hrdlicka, and their faction continued to deny the ramifications of the Folsom and Clovis discoveries, with Holmes commenting that “he would never believe men and those prehistoric mammals were contemporaneous...until arrowheads were found imbedded in the bones of the latter in such a manner as to prohibit question that they were shot into them while the animal was still living.”<sup>54</sup> What is interesting about Hrdlicka’s stance is that he appeared to only become uncompromisingly against an early Native presence in the Americas after affiliating with Holmes in Washington. And while Swanton did not necessarily call Hrdlicka’s integrity into account, what little he could recall of the man personally remained tepid. On the one hand, an older Swanton appreciated Hrdlicka’s correctives to some of the more extreme estimates for human presence in the Americas, but felt that “Hrdlicka carried his opposition to such extremes that he was wholly in error regarding finds of real antiquity in Florida and certain parts of the west...Right or wrong, he did not have a character likely to make him widely popular.” Swanton then commented on a long-standing bit of dark humor amongst his Washington colleagues on an incident in which a southwestern Indian shot at Hrdlicka, but

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 154, Emphasis author.

<sup>54</sup> Franklin Folsom, “The Story Behind the Folsom Site, *The American West: The Magazine of Western History* 11:6 1974: 34-39.

thankfully missed. While an unpleasant incident, it remained a fact that Hrdlicka was not a well-liked colleague at Bureau, and Swanton felt that had he lived in Europe prior to WWI, he would have been challenged to several duels for his “Hrdleresqueness” attitude, which seems to indicate he possessed an obnoxious one.<sup>55</sup>

“The Red Paint” burial sites in Maine proved relevant regarding the larger debate surrounding humanity’s antiquity in the Americas, but Swanton’s experiences helping Willoughby proved less than engaging and served as definite sign that his future career path did not lay in archeology. Only later did Swanton recall the dig’s importance in terms of larger questions facing the archeological community. He did remember helping excavate the expected layers of red ochre, along with stone artifacts, slate spears, and the handle of a stone knife. Swanton noticed peculiar markings on the handle, which Willoughby speculated was “intended to represent a settlement of very obtusely roofed houses located at the falls of a stream.” Swanton maintained a decidedly sarcastic tone through parts of his account of his work in Maine, and while he respected Willoughby, it is apparent that he believed much of the work done there remained speculative. Attempting to make inferences, like with the stone knife, remained guesswork and it is inferable that Swanton favored dealing with people more so than artifacts and other material remains. This is surprising in lieu of Swanton’s shyness and aversion to social interactions, but digging around for bones and artifacts did not appeal to him, though it would take a few more archeological expeditions for him to make his mind up to pursue another career path.

Part of what Swanton took away from this expedition at the time was how little control field workers had over who they worked with. Archeology remained fairly disorganized and

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<sup>55</sup> Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 36-37.

established, professional workers like Willoughby were often forced to work with disagreeable or amateurish workers. Swanton recalled Gordon Willey, who established his reputation working in Honduras, joining the expedition a few weeks after work started at the Red Paint sites. Willey played up how rugged working in Honduras was, but proceeded to complain incessantly about their lack of comfortable lodging arrangements. While Willey's complaining grated on Swanton's nerves, Willoughby maintained a professional demeanor towards him.<sup>56</sup>

The summer of 1895 witnessed Swanton once again undertaking field work tied to the tenure of human occupation in the Americas. German-born archaeologist Ernest Volk led a small group of field workers to a site in Trenton, New Jersey, along the bottom of the Delaware River. The place itself was on land owned by two ladies. Putnam hired Volk mainly to unearth the Trenton Gravels, a site at the heart of the controversy over human antiquity in the region. As was the case with the Red Paint sites, Swanton did not appreciate his experience working in the field in New Jersey, either. He also recalled breaking a vessel with his pick-ax and begrudging Volk for noting it in his record of the expedition. The incident likely proved inconsequential, but Volk's work on the region helped support mounting evidence of humans living in North America during the Pleistocene Era.<sup>57</sup>

While the trips to Maine and New Jersey failed to inspire Swanton, not all archeological work turned him off. That same summer of 1897, Swanton joined Rowland Dixon and a small group of amateur field workers in Madisonville, Ohio, to excavate a recently discovered village. Dixon, a fellow Harvard man, led the expedition. Dixon remained a fervent worker at the museum and taught many classes. Reared in the Boasian tradition like Swanton, Dixon did not excel as a scholar to the extent many of Boas's students did. Unlike Swanton, Dixon eventually

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 10-12.

<sup>57</sup> See Ernest Volk, *The Archaeology of the Delaware Valley* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1911).

strayed away from viewing cultures as relative, and began promoting racist views through anthropometry. He also acquired a reputation for being difficult to work with and fell out of good graces with Franz Boas after WWI due to his willingness to perpetuate racial theories that were coming into question as valid explanation for why cultures differed from one another. Fellow scholar A. M. Tozzer remarked in his obituary about Dixon possessing, “unsympathetic impartiality, of ruthless condemnation, or of detached approval,” when engaging with other colleagues.<sup>58</sup> Swanton did not comment on Dixon’s difficult attitude or questionable theories when transcribing his memories after retiring. However, he did recall the sad downward spiral of Charles Metz on the trip. Metz worked as a physician in Madisonville and proved a congenial partner for Putnam to work with and the two remained lifelong friends. Sadly, Metz descended into alcoholism, which severely hampered his career as an archeologist. Swanton wrote in his journal that Metz’s supervision consisted primarily of “little more than an evening visit to see what we had found during the day. He would stand on the pile of earth thrown from a trench in a very warbly manner and gaze abstractedly at anything to which we called his attention.”<sup>59</sup> Metz’s career continued on at the benevolence of Putnam, who referred to him as Ohio’s finest archeologist and nominated him for a series of awards.<sup>60</sup>

The background of this trip concerned the identity and cultural pedigree of the people responsible for the impressive mounds that dotted much of the Ohio and lower Mississippi Valleys. Commented on by Spanish conquistadors and other early European arrivals, it wasn’t until the late eighteenth century that scholars seriously devoted themselves to discovering the purpose of the mounds and the identity of the people behind their construction. Popular theories

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<sup>58</sup> A. M. Tozzer, A.M. Roland Burrage Dixon”, *American Anthropologist* 33: 2 (1936): 291-300.

<sup>59</sup> Swanton, “Notes Regarding my Adventures in Anthropology and with Anthropologists,” 15.

<sup>60</sup> Hinsley *Science at Harvard University*, 131.

contended that the sheer magnitude of mounds and material found beneath them exempted the ancestors of modern Native Americans from being responsible for them. Many influential scholars posited an ancient mound-building civilization existed in the United States with ties to Europe or the Middle East. Some of the more popular candidates responsible for a “high” civilization in the Americas, one lost over time and supplanted by culturally inferior groups (from Asia) consisted of the following: The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, Vikings, and descendants of a legendary Welsh prince named Madoc.<sup>61</sup>

The mystery surrounding who was responsible for the great mounds in these regions was finally put to rest once and for all by Cyrus Thomas. Hired by John Wesley Powell, founder of the Bureau of Ethnology (1879), Cyrus Thomas headed the quest to investigate the identity of the mound-builders. He originally believed no cultural connection existed between the mound-building societies and contemporary Indian people. Swanton, later in his career and established at the Bureau, credited Powell for his good judgment in hiring Thomas and bemoaned the lack of more scholars like him.<sup>62</sup> Essentially, the evidence amassed by Thomas and others such as James Mooney definitively showed that the ancestors of modern Native Americans built the mounds throughout the Ohio Valley and Eastern portions of the United States. While Thomas received the majority of the credit in solving this mystery, James Mooney’s hard work among the Cherokee deserves recognition, as his research proved crucial to Cyrus’ theoretical turnabout.<sup>63</sup>

Through working with Cherokee collaborators, Mooney learned that mounds in the southeast served as the basis for ceremonies, such as the Green Corn Dance. Thomas at first

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas, *Skull Wars*, 128-130. The theory that a contingent of Israelites arrived in the Americas at some point has never been shared by Jews, as the missing tribes never presented a mystery to Judaism. The theory became a popular explanation for some Christians and remains a staple of Latter Day Saints (Mormon) belief.

<sup>62</sup> John Reed Swanton, “Notes Regarding my Adventures in Anthropology and with Anthropologists,” 39.

<sup>63</sup> Cyrus Thomas, *The Problem of the Ohio Mounds* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1889).

dismissed evidence of recent ceremonial presence at some mounds in traditional Cherokee lands, viewing such actions as recent actions by the Cherokee, not evidence of their ancestor's activities. However, Mooney's primary collaborator with the Cherokees, Ayunini (Swimmer), adamantly stressed that many of the mounds in their territory served as mini-town houses lodging various medicine persons, many of which oversaw sacred fires during ceremonial times. As Mooney understood Ayunini's explanation, those persons with the authority selected sites near bodies of water, where the land was cleared and a fire pit dug out. The bones of deceased elders and holy men and women were then interred there. Tribal members erected walls and roofs around the pits, after which several feet of earth was then buried on top. Sacred fires lighted the surrounding area during ceremonial occasions. Mooney also learned that the walls helped hold back spring-time flood waters in the region.<sup>64</sup> Mooney later quoted Thomas in expressing "extreme pleasure in obtaining an explanation of a feature of the mound [s]...that had puzzled archaeologists."<sup>65</sup> With questions over Native people's antiquity in the Americas and the identity of the mound-builders laid to rest, anthropologists refuted some of the more outlandish theories concerning these issues.

Swanton's experience in Ohio as part of this investigation seemed to hold his interest more so than did his time in Maine and New Jersey. The mystery surrounding the mounds, along with the quantity of skeletons found at their site, held his attention. Furthermore, his previous experience likely informed him on how to better excavate a site, determine the significance of findings, and to do so without damaging any materials in the process. The Ohio expedition also marked the only time in Swanton's career working around such a large quantity

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<sup>64</sup> Moses, *The Indian Man*, 39-40.

<sup>65</sup> James Mooney, "Cherokee Mound Building," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Apr.1889) pp. 166-167; 169.

of human remains. Caught up in the moment, as well as the time period, he showed interest in the task at hand and had little misgivings on the morality of such actions. He described his time in Ohio as “the richest archeological site I had worked in up to that time...”<sup>66</sup> A letter sent to his mother while in Madisonville demonstrates a matter-of-fact account of some of the findings, giving little insight as to how Swanton personally felt about this task, commenting, “It will take weeks to sort out and pack everything.” Everything included 43 skeletons, pottery, animal bones, and several ash pits.<sup>67</sup>

Whether Swanton’s attitude would have changed if the human remains represented more recent burials will never be known. The rest of his field work from then on consisted of working with living Indian informants, with minimal contact with skeletal remains. An important point to keep in mind here is that Swanton’s social awkwardness and anxiety likely reared themselves on these expeditions. From his memoirs, it is apparent that he recalled the novelty of traveling to new places and the aesthetic appeal of the areas with more enthusiasm than he did with the actual work.

Despite proving a more interesting experience for Swanton than the Maine and New Jersey trips offered, Madisonville convinced Putnam to advise Swanton to consider opting for a career outside of archeology. He could tell that the young Swanton’s heart was not in it. Upon returning to Cambridge to write up the expedition’s findings and to clean the assortment of bones, Swanton recalled the enthusiasm Putnam showed in washing bones, which bothered some of his students, including Swanton. Swanton’s only comments on his feelings towards this show that he felt the practice unpleasant, but said nothing about the integrity of such practices: “It was

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<sup>66</sup> Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 15.

<sup>67</sup> John R. Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, Aug. 8, 1897, Swanton Letters: 1769-1955 (85-m68-85-m128 80:1:5 carton 1. Swanton Family Papers, 1759-1955, 21-38, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hereafter cited as (SFP: 1759-1955).

not really attractive to me but I worked manfully at it all winter, and was still doing so in April or early May when Prof. Putnam descended to the vault where I was engaged....” Putnam presented Swanton with the more appealing opportunity of accompanying George Pepper, another protégé of his, to work with the Navajo in New Mexico. Swanton leapt at the opportunity, leaving the Ohio recording work behind for as long as possible. While the trip to New Mexico presented more archeology work, the group would be working closely with Navajo tribal members. Up to this point, Swanton had experienced no encounters with living Native people.<sup>68</sup> After this trip, however, Putnam made the decision for him, stating, “I guess you always did hate a bone.” Swanton found this quite humorous and not entirely untrue. After this brief conversation, Swanton bid a fond farewell to the more than half decade spent at Harvard, going to work with Franz Boas full-time at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.<sup>69</sup>

The New Mexico trip would make an indelible impact on how Swanton conducted himself on future encounters. Labor commenced at Chaco Canyon in 1896, where excavations of the impressive Pueblo Bonito ruins began in earnest. George Pepper served as one of the heads of the expedition, but worked closely with experienced southwestern archeologist Richard Wetherill too. Pepper benefited from Putnam’s habit of seeing potential in persons lacking an education and hiring them to conduct field work. He aroused Putnam’s attention and admiration by finding a small burial site sort on Staten Island.<sup>70</sup> The work in New Mexico was funded by The Hyde Exploring Expedition, owned by two brothers that inherited their wealth from a soap company. And while Putnam and the American Museum of Natural history organized things,

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<sup>68</sup> Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 15-16.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 16.

day-to-day operations were handled by Pepper and Wetherill.<sup>71</sup> Even with his self-perceived social shortcomings, Swanton managed to get along with his fellow colleagues, although the same cannot be said concerning others in his group. Swanton described Pepper as young and congenial enough. He did find it comical that Pepper, who had never been out west, tried to prepare Swanton about what to expect, as though the situation would be as rugged as dime-story novels described them to be. Swanton described Pepper's antics:

When he first went out west his ideas of western life were of the Kit Carson pattern as understood by writers of the Harry Castelman school, and he accoutered himself accordingly, in particular allowing his raven locks to grow over the back of his neck much to the admiration I gathered of a circle of admiring damsels to whom he recounted his adventures in the 'wild and wooly west' after his return.<sup>72</sup>

Not everyone found Pepper as amusing as Swanton, though. Richard Wetherill and George Pepper despised one another. Wetherill, who had lived among Indians and was intimately familiar with Navajo culture, felt Pepper to be an upstart, too cocky to do professional archeology. He and his wife ran a trade post at Pueblo Bonito and homesteaded until tragedy struck in 1910 when Wetherill was shot dead by a Navajo man. Conflicting accounts persist over the events surrounding the shooting of Wetherill, but the local press presented it as a massacre of a white man by a pack of "Navajo savages." Wetherill was said to be in pursuit of a man responsible for stealing a horse. Regardless of what actually led up to his murder, the incident shook both the white and Navajo communities.<sup>73</sup> A good indication that the murder was the despicable action of one man and not a conspiracy among a group of Navajo comes from the fact that Wetherill's wife, Marietta, continued to live the remainder of her life among them, even

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<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Reyman, review of *Pueblo Bonito*, by George A. Pepper, preface by David Stuart, *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 8:1 (1998).

<sup>72</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 16-17.

<sup>73</sup> <[http://wetherillfamily.com/murder\\_of\\_richard\\_wetherill.htm](http://wetherillfamily.com/murder_of_richard_wetherill.htm)> [accessed April 15, 2012].

being adopted into a clan at one point. She blamed the murder of her husband in part on the pressure a local surveyor put on the Navajo to get rid of her husband. Wetherill owned homestead rights to a large swath of the area, but wished to see Chaco Canyon turned into a national park. On this point, his wishes and the federal government's ran parallel. His only request stipulated that the American Museum of National History retain the rights to finish their excavations in the region. Marietta felt that a desperate Navajo was cajoled into killing her husband. Pepper so despised Wetherill that he abstained from showing any sympathy to Marietta after the murder.<sup>74</sup>

Much of the expedition's work consisted of long days spent overseeing hired Navajo workers dig up the pueblo in the hopes of finding artifacts, particularly turquoise. Little is mentioned in Swanton's recollection of the amount of skeletal remains found on this trip, but some digs turned some up. Interacting with ancient remains or recent corpses is usually cautioned against in many Navajo communities. While all Native American tribal nations possess unique ways of approaching and dealing with death, the Navajo's customs seem uniquely disposed to stirring internal conflict in cases like this. Traditionally, Navajo beliefs strongly discouraged any interaction with the dead and kept mourning ceremonies brief.

Many anthropologists before and after Swanton's time incorrectly presented Navajo views on death as though it were an intrusive, evil reality, something almost to be ignored entirely as a coping strategy. However, Navajo people present a different understanding, stressing that everything, including death, has a place and purpose in this world. Problems arise when things in the universe become entangled and unbalance the cosmos. In this case, living

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<sup>74</sup> Reyman, review of *Pueblo Bonito*. Also, for an account of Marietta's life as an adopted member of a Navajo community and her views on her husband's murder, see Kathryn Gabriel's reproduction of Marietta Wetherill's transcripts in *Marietta Wetherill: Life with the Navajos in Chaco Canyon* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

human beings belong with other living things, while the deceased no longer belong in this world, possessing different but no less important destinations and destinies. Intense grieving and mourning ceremonies could cause a departing ancestor to remain behind in order to watch over their relatives. This causes disharmony and can lead to sickness and other calamities in a community, as the spirit loses its way and purpose in arriving to the next world.<sup>75</sup>

Swanton and the rest his colleagues ignored Navajo beliefs. Their archaeological activities would have been seen as calling the spirit of those disturbed ancestors back into this world, which could bring illness and disharmony to that person and his or her community. Again the emphasis should not be on the remains as representing evil, but that things have their proper place in this world. Within Navajo beliefs is a concept known as “Hazho,” which is a philosophical orientation that all things in this universe are interdependent and exist harmoniously together. Every facet of existence has an integrity and role to play in assuring balance. Humans are to take this view and make it a living part of their lives, doing their part in maintaining equilibrium. To do so is referred to as “Walking in Beauty.”<sup>76</sup>

Swanton gave no sign that he knew of Navajo beliefs or that Pepper and Wetherill appreciated these dimensions of Navajo culture. Pepper and Swanton did express annoyance at some of the Navajos “stealing” (Swanton’s word) turquoise when an opportunity arose. Despite the admonishments about handling bodily remains and artifacts associated with the deceased, it could be that these particular Navajos did not subscribe to this belief. Culture is not a static phenomenon by which every individual accepts and practices each aspect in equal proportion.

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<sup>75</sup> Peggy Beck and A. L. Walters, *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge: Sources of Life* (Tsaile: Navajo Community College, 1977), 14-16.

<sup>76</sup> Lori Alvord and Elizabeth Cohen Van Pelt, *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear: The First Navajo Woman Surgeon Combines Western Medicine and Traditional Healing* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000), 57-64.

There is always a negotiation between practices, beliefs, and individual adherence to them in every society.

A better explanation, however, concerns the unique economic challenges Native American communities faced in the late nineteenth century. All tribes suffered terribly from an accumulation of wars, epidemics, and subsequent governmental policies to eradicate their cultures and ways of life. The flood of archeologists and anthropologists in the latter-half of the nineteenth century contributed further to cultural divestment, as communities parted ways with valuable artifacts and other resources as a means of supporting themselves financially, however meager payments were. Many anthropologists and archeologists knew the fragile circumstances these communities experienced and took advantage of it. The scholars profited financially, but during this time, buoying oneself professionally served just as a high a purpose. Being first to acquire a particular artifact or to record a story brought prestige and recognition, attributes desirable at any time professionally, but in that era even more so. Without clearly delineated standards on how to become “professionalized” in these disciplines, garnering the attention of curators and people of economic influence proved crucial for anyone looking to be hired on a permanent basis. Faced with grinding poverty and the very real possibility of starvation in some cases, many Indian people parted ways with valuable cultural items in exchange for money or promises of assistance in dealing with the surrounding non-Indian communities. Sadly, some anthropologist earned the trust of Indian communities, only to abuse that bond.

A notable example of a famous anthropologist from this era who engaged in such actions was Frank Cushing, the peculiar ethnologist known for his field work in the Southwest amongst the Zuni Pueblo. Cushing was eventually adopted into a prominent leader’s family, thus gaining direct access to Pueblo customs. Cushing did serve the Zuni as a mediator between their

community and neighboring non-Indian ranchers and government officials, but eventually created more discord within the Zuni community than he did to offset tensions with outsiders. Despite his strong grasp of the language, he often pretended to not understand requests to leave during various ceremonial functions. But by far his and other similarly situated anthropologist's greatest insult to Indian peoples came when they published sacred tribal accounts and pilfered ceremonial objects against Native wishes. Cushing never viewed his actions as dishonest and insulting, as he felt that breeching Zuni customs mattered within that context only and little to outsiders. But, the Zuni felt differently, particularly when his published accounts were made accessible to them.<sup>77</sup> One historian, commenting on Cushing's actions within the wider arena of overall Indian-anthropologist encounters in the nineteenth century, aptly points out an unfortunate precedent, saying "the pattern of Cushing's activity—overcoming suspicion, winning acceptance, assisting in the solution of village problems, serving as an agent of acculturation, and eventually betraying this trust—was one repeated often by anthropologists and writers."<sup>78</sup> This pattern of behavior by anthropologists was not one of isolated affairs, but rather the accepted manner of what passed for scientific research methods at the time.

There is good reason to believe that the Navajo workers Swanton encountered experienced similar circumstances. To be sure, cultural prohibitions likely caused some anxiety in them, but the reality of life in the late nineteenth century necessitated compromises. Swanton noted admirably, albeit in a backhanded way, the skills of the Navajo. "The Navajos are a pretty decent set of red skins," the young anthropologist quipped, "living principally by means of their herds of sheep and goats and the famous Navajo blankets made by the women of the trip." He

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas, *Skull Wars*, 74-76.

<sup>78</sup> Marc Simmons, "History of the Pueblos since 1821" in, *Handbook of the North American Indian*, ed. Alfonso Whitcomb Ortiz (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), 9: 219.

went on to describe that they sold these and other material to Wetherill's trade post in abundance.<sup>79</sup> The reasons for Navajo involvement at Pueblo Bonito remain complex, and it would be a mistake to settle for simplistic explanations, such as declaring them to be cultural apostates. On the other hand, viewing their participation as one of only economic motivations is a mistake, too. Each individual Native person that worked there and elsewhere with anthropologists and archeologists in this era did so for complex reasons. What is apparent is that not all Navajos took umbrage to all non-Indian excursions into their communities, as Wetherill's presence among them was tolerated for decades. And, the fact that his wife remained among them as an adopted tribal member after Wetherill's death points to more personal reasons for living and working closely with outsiders in some instances.

A major reason why Swanton enjoyed this expedition more than his previous experiences is due to his encounters with the Navajos that worked around the camp. Pepper often left supervision of the workers to Swanton, as he and Wetherill busied themselves with other errands in the afternoons. Swanton's nervousness understandably increased exponentially, given that this presented him with his first interactions with Native people. Luckily for Swanton, the Navajos treated him kindly and related to him through humor and playful teasing. For instance, Swanton's stress over the trip and his duties often caused him to nod off for minutes at a time, only to awaken in a panicky state. One of the older workers, Tomasito, imitated Swanton's behavior in front of everyone, but did so in a way that made clear that no true offense was meant. Swanton enjoyed such levity, as it helped break any tension he felt about his presence there. Tomasito also bestowed upon him the name Hastin Hazho. Translated as "Mr. Lookout," the name spoke to Swanton's tendency to use the phrase to excess when he felt a Navajo excavated

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<sup>79</sup> John R. Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, June 12, 1898; (SFP: 1759-1955) and John Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 17.

carelessly. Rather than take offense, Swanton seems to have quickly grasped the fact that Native American bantering suggested affection towards the recipient of such jesting.<sup>80</sup>

Part of working amicably with Native people meant respecting their manner of policing themselves. One day around noon, Swanton fell asleep near Wetherill's store. Upon awaking, he noticed the Navajo had ceased working for the day. For whatever reason, Swanton felt that they were taking advantage of him and owed more time working. His insistence that they continue met with outright refusal. A short while later, a room he and a Navajo had been working in collapsed beneath tons of rock. Embarrassed by his stubbornness, Swanton felt grateful that the Navajo's action saved his and another man's life. The Navajo determined the start and end of a work day by the sun's position, and had been correct in their actions on this point, too.<sup>81</sup>

Another instance in which the Navajo dictated the terms of their employment concerned occasions in which ceremonies took precedent over the dig. When the entire Navajo community partook in them, Swanton's group had no choice but to oblige them. One of the bigger blunders Swanton made at Pueblo Bonito concerned one of these ceremonies. On a hot June evening, a few hundred Navajo prepared a four-day healing ceremony five miles from the excavation encampment. Swanton and Pepper arrived there with every intention to simply observe the proceedings. In a long letter to his mother, Swanton recounted the ceremony rather disparagingly and expressed annoyance at the singing and dancing.

At one point, the head healer, who also served as one of the more well-known and liked workers, made several efforts to invite Swanton to participate. According to Swanton, "I think Pepper would have done so, if I had been willing to go, but I was afraid my authority over the

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<sup>80</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding, 17-18.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

men would be ruined, so I declined.”<sup>82</sup> This proved a missed opportunity for Swanton and an unfortunate misreading of how exactly one earns and maintains status in Navajo society, and by extension, many other Native communities. The ceremony’s purpose involved healing a tribal member, and such occasions involve the entire community coming together to pray and show solidarity for the sick person. Often times, the illness manifests itself in an individual, but is interpreted as a sign that the entire community is in need of healing too.<sup>83</sup> The healer’s insistence that Swanton participate signified a desire to deepen the Navajo’s relationship with him. By taking part in the ceremony, it is likely that Swanton would have engendered feelings of respect among the Navajo towards him, as participation would have demonstrated respect. Swanton and Pepper overlooked the premium Native people place on establishing relationships with outsiders, and that such bonds are established and maintained through mutual displays of respect and affection towards one another.

With three previous archeological digs under his belt, Swanton left New Mexico with invaluable experience in working at a major archeological site. Thanks to Pueblo Bonito, he enjoyed his first interactions with Native people. This last experience proved a mixed blessing, as Swanton seemed to get along with the Navajo, but missed out on learning crucial aspects of tribal etiquette and how Indian communities expected archeologists and anthropologists to conform to their expectations on these matters. He seems to have grasped this to an extent on his next experience working with Native people in South Dakota. However, as a still inexperienced student of archeology, not to mention person of his time, Swanton never really took to direct participation in Native ceremonies or community affairs. Along with this, it is likely that some of his hesitance had more to do with his own insecurities and fear of appearing foolish than it did

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<sup>82</sup> John R. Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, May 9, 1897. (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>83</sup> Alvord and Cohen Van Pelt, *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear*, 90-95.

with belittling Native practices. He certainly did not seem to intentionally offend anyone by abstaining from participating in such occasions. What is certain is that from this time forward, Swanton's career accelerated and never let up. His undergraduate and graduate educations served to prepare him well for the long and distinguished career ahead as an employee of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

After receiving his M.A. degree in 1897, Swanton received the new Winthrop Scholarship. At a modest \$200, the award nevertheless allowed Swanton to expand his horizons. This included Swanton making the momentous decision to begin working with Franz Boas at Columbia. By this time, Boas had already earned a reputation as an important figure in ethnology and linguistics. His research methods and approach to field work focused on rigorous analysis of individual Native communities, qualities that appealed to Swanton. The transition proved to forever alter Swanton's career path and approach to anthropology, and it marked the beginning of the end of his time as an archaeologist.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Hinsley, *Science at Harvard University*, 133-134.

## **Chapter 4: Professional Beginnings and the Boasian Method (1898-1907)**

Despite ultimately rejecting archeology as a career, Swanton's participation in excavations in Maine, New Jersey, Ohio, and New Mexico prepared him for his career in anthropology and helped him later in pioneering the field of ethnohistory. For a shy and awkward young man from a small town, the experience of traveling across the country and engaging in professional activities eventually buoyed Swanton's confidence. To be sure, he remained an introvert throughout his life, but the moments of self-doubt diminished in intensity as a result of these experiences. After all, his work ethic and attention to detail earned him the respect of his era's influential luminaries in archeology most notably Frederic Putnam.

In a day in which field workers and students remained disposable, Swanton possessed a reputation that made him a desirable student and colleague to work with. With Putnam's blessing, Swanton prepared to move to New York City to begin studying under Franz Boas at The American Museum of Natural History. Putnam's logic in encouraging such a transition for Swanton rested with the fact that Boas served as one of the most promising ethnologists at that time and remained so until his death in 1942. In particular, Boas's work in linguistics and mythology managed to take anthropological theory down new and uncharted paths. Putnam held Swanton in enough esteem to recommend him to Boas, and the change in focus positioned Swanton to become a renowned pacesetter in his own regard.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Reed Swanton, "Notes Regarding my Adventures in Anthropology and with Anthropologists" (1944), Manuscript 4651, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives, 19. Hereafter cited as "Notes Regarding."

Boas's career and contributions to anthropology serve as the starting point for when most historians believe modern anthropology begins. And while he served as a pioneer in contesting evolutionary models of human culture and advocating a theory of cultural relativism, his personality often rankled fellow scholars and even ruined long-term professional and personal relationships. In some ways, while Swanton and Boas possessed radically different personalities, their eclectic interests early in their lives and ability to systematize several methodologies while examining historical and ethnological matters united them.

Born in Prussian Westphalia (Germany) in 1858 to liberal Jewish parents, Boas received early encouragement to pursue a variety of intellectual endeavors until he decided upon what suited him best. He began with interests in the sciences, specifically geography and physics. His interest in geography propelled him to learn more about the impact that environmental conditions play in cultural development. In 1883 he combined his skills in geography with his interests in folklore and physical anthropology on an expedition to Baffin Island to study environmental influences on the native Inuit populations.<sup>2</sup> On this expedition, experiencing brutally harsh conditions, Boas demonstrated an early progressive attitude towards non-Western peoples. In a personal letter, Boas observed, "I often ask myself what advantages our 'good society possesses over that of the 'savages' and find, the more I see of their customs, that we have no right to look down upon them... We have no right to blame them for their forms and

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Cole *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 102-103.

superstitions which may seem ridiculous to us. We 'highly educated people' are much worse, relatively speaking."<sup>3</sup>

Such an introspective, enlightened attitude existed alongside equally disparaging actions that seemed to annul his progressive words. For instance some of his early conduct among the Northwest coastal tribes remains among the most scandalous in early anthropology, as he participated in outright deception and theft of Indian artifacts and bodily remains. An example of what is by no means an isolated incident comes from an expedition in 1888 to British Columbia, where Boas pleaded with a photographer to take the Indian community's attention away from him while he robbed their cemetery. Oblivious to the feelings of the Indians, he later commented, "someone had stolen all the skulls, but we found a complete skeleton without a head. I hope to get another one either today or tomorrow....It is most unpleasant work to steal bones from a grave, but what is the use, someone has to do it." Boas was not in any way above such deplorable actions in order to secure name recognition and a position as a museum curator in the United States. In any event, Boas made the northern and northwestern native peoples and regions his primary areas of study for most of his career.<sup>4</sup>

By the time Swanton arrived in New York, nervous about embarking on a new path, Boas's stormy tenure at Chicago's Field Columbian Museum had recently ended, too. A short time prior to that, Boas's anger at the method of organizing and displaying Northwest artifacts at Washington's National Museum further solidified his reputation as

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<sup>3</sup> Franz Boas to Marie Kracowizer, Dec. 12, 1883, quotation from Herbert Cole "The Value of a Person Lies in his Herzensbildung: Franz Boas' Baffin Island Letter-Diary, 1883-1884" in George Stocking, Jr. (ed.) *History of Anthropology, Vol. 1, Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 37.

<sup>4</sup> Boas quoted in Ronald Rohner "Franz Boas: Ethnographer on the Northwest Coast" in June Helm, ed., *Pioneers of American Anthropology: The Use of Biography* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 88.

outspoken and willing to engage in ideological battle for his views. Boas believed a purely evolutionist view of the development of human culture lacked coherence and foundation in empirical evidence. His problem with the National Museum's arrangement of artifacts concerned similar items being placed alongside corresponding items, with an emphasis on showing how each category of instrument or artifact conformed to an evolutionary framework that showed a development from primitivism to civilization. Boas accused Otis Mason, one of the chief architects of this arrangement, of engaging in shoddy ethnology. According to Boas, before attempting to etch out universal laws of societal development, in-depth study of specific cultures must take place first. Only then could comparisons be made, albeit even then with a high degree of caution.<sup>5</sup> On the National Museum's arrangement, he commented, "We want a collection arranged according to tribes, in order to teach the peculiar style of each group. The art and characteristics of a people can be understood only by studying its productions as a whole."<sup>6</sup> While Boas's views represented a better working model than those of some of his contemporaries, his abrasiveness in expressing his views served to burn some professional bridges. But his prowess as a scholar prevented him from being completely shunned or unemployed. By the late 1890s, he held a curator position at the American Museum of Natural History, as well as a lecture position in anthropology at Columbia University.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Franz Boas, "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology," in Bohann and Glazer, eds., *High Points in Anthropology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 87.

<sup>6</sup> Franz Boas, "The Occurrence of Similar Inventions in Areas Widely Apart," *Science*, 9 (May 20, 1887) 485-486. See also "Museums of Ethnology and Their Classification," *Science*, 9 (June 17, 1887), 587-588.

<sup>7</sup> L. G. Moses, *The Indian Man: A Biography of James Mooney* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 111.

While Putnam contacted Boas concerning Swanton's interests, Swanton felt it proper to send a letter, as well. Swanton laid out his evolving interests from archaeology to ethnology, and how honored he felt to soon be working with Boas. As an example of the contradictory attitude held by so many anthropologists regarding Native Americans as cultural holdovers from bygone eras but deserving of respect at the same time, Swanton wrote that he wished to acquaint himself more with the languages of "so-called primitives than for those which have become highly developed." Whether Swanton was attempting to earn favor with Boas, whose early questioning of an evolutionary model of culture was becoming increasingly pronounced, is unclear. What is also interesting from this exchange is that Swanton expressed an interest in studying the Tungusic peoples of Southeast Asia more so than any other group. Nowhere in Swanton's private journals or autobiography did he ever mention such an interest, and he never mentioned it again in later writings. That said, this may be an indication that his early interests in world history never entirely diminished, despite working so closely with Native American archaeology up to that point.<sup>8</sup>

Swanton's arrival in New York coincided with a series of anxiety attacks. Although excited about his change in career focus, the sprawling metropolis of New York City, with its congestion and towering buildings, presented a jarring contrast to Gardiner, Maine. No other experience presented Swanton with such a constellation of what he dreaded the most—overwhelming social stimuli and deafening noise. A perfect storm of

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<sup>8</sup> John Swanton to Franz Boas, Mar. 17, 1898, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society, B: B61: Sullivan, J. to Take, H.W. Box 87. Hereafter cited as FBP, (APS).

anxiety-inducers nearly caused Swanton to reconsider the move, but he chose to see things through to their eventual improvement.<sup>9</sup>

Swanton's first task under Boas consisted in traveling to South Dakota to expand upon and revise Lakota texts collected by George Bushotter. Bushotter's experiences present an interesting example of how some Native Americans viewed anthropology and its worth at the height of the government's plans to assimilate them. A Lakota by birth and cultural upbringing, Bushotter was born in 1864 in Dakota Territory at a time in which the Plains tribes faced continual American encroachment into their lands. Bushotter lived a short life, but a full one, filled with experiences that illuminated Indian negotiations in the white world in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. His parents reared him in traditional Lakota culture, instilling in him an abiding love of his people's language and mythology. At the time, warfare with Americans remained a clear and present danger, and Bushotter desired to enter into battle and earn recognition in a Warrior Society. However, he proved timid when faced with violence, and discovered instead a predilection for scholarly pursuits, something that served him well later in life.<sup>10</sup>

A fascinating dimension to Bushotter's early life concerns how his own people viewed him. One account states that he engaged in disrespectful behavior towards sacred objects and animals while a young boy. Rather than earn him the vengeance of his community, many felt he was destined to be healer, as his actions followed a pattern of other medicine persons, namely the role of a heyoka (contrarian). One of the primary roles of a medicine person is to restore a person's health, which is often understood as a

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<sup>9</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 20.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond DeMallie, "George Bushotter: The First Lakota Ethnographer," in Margot Liberty (ed.) *American Indian Intellectuals of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Margot Liberty (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 105.

restoration of balance between the individual's faculties, their surroundings, and their community. Throughout the process, the patient often comes to a better realization about his or her own identity and place in society.<sup>11</sup>

One way of viewing Bushotter's peculiar quirks, then, and the significance some of his people attributed to them is through his later life's activities, which consisted of recording Lakota language and traditions as a means of educating non-Indians about them. Because so much distortion about Indian people persisted at this time, a case can be made that some Indian men and women became cultural brokers in order to correct prejudiced views held of them by whites. Such examples include Susan and Suzette Lafleshe and their half-brother, Francis (Omaha); Charles Eastman (Dakota); Ella Deloria (Dakota); and Bushotter himself. In one sense, Bushotter's one year work as an ethnologist (1887-1888) fulfilled the role of a healer at the same time he and other Indians instilled a more appreciative attitude in whites regarding their cultures and traditions. Along with this, these Native individuals' work granted their people with a permanent record of some of their traditions and provided a sense of pride in them at a time when Indian traditions were under severe attack.

Bushotter attended Hampton Institute in Virginia, where he met James Dorsey of the Bureau of American Ethnology. Dorsey took a liking to the young man, and the two developed a close partnership. In his brief career, Bushotter left the Lakota and non-Indians 248 stories and 3296 pages, all hand-written. Bushotter's goal in working with Dorsey and the Bureau of American Ethnology is best summed in his own words:

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<sup>11</sup> For a perfect example of this healer-patient dynamic from a Lakota perspective, see Gerald Mohatt and Joseph Eagle Elk, *The Price of a Gift: A Lakota Healer's Story* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 43-50.

The stories I am writing will for the first time give an authentic statement of my tribes and their foundations. I take up everything from the games of the boys and girls to the religious beliefs. I think, judging from the profound ignorance of the white people concerning all matters concerning the Indian, that the work will be both interesting and instructive.<sup>12</sup>

Sadly, Bushotter's work has not received the appreciation from anthropologists that it deserves. He died young from a disease that shortened his career to one year. Franz Boas was never satisfied with Bushotter's work on the Lakota language because it seemed rushed and imprecise in parts. Plus, Dorsey died before he could put Bushotter's collection into its final form, which involved a book-length study that intended to illustrate varying Lakota dialects. The main reason for Swanton's work South Dakota involved working with collaborators to fix any errors in Bushotter's notes and transcriptions.<sup>13</sup> But while Bushotter's work with Lakota language was left incomplete, his work in gathering cultural knowledge remains indispensable in its thoroughness. This no doubt is due in large part to his Lakota heritage and insider status amongst his people.<sup>14</sup>

Another important fact that is overlooked about Bushotter's linguistic work is that he was a fluent Lakota speaker, unlike Dorsey, Boas, or Swanton. His ability to easily communicate with other Lakota, despite his boarding school education, positioned him to uniquely interact and convey other Lakota people's thoughts and feelings in a way that came across as natural. His training as an ethnographer, while lacking, did not in any way preclude his intimate connection to the culture and traditions of his people.

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<sup>12</sup> H. R. Dawson, Bureau of Education, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, enclosing letter from G. Bushotter, Hedgesville, to Dawson, Jan. 7, 1888, with news clipping, "Indian Life: A Gentlemanly Savage at the Smithsonian from *The Capitol* (n.d.), Commissioner of Indian Affairs-LR, 1888-829, RG75 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives).

<sup>13</sup> DeMallie, "George Bushotter," 114.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

Swanton arrived at the Rosebud Reservation Agency in the early summer of 1899, where he quickly began transcribing Lakota texts and fixing errors in Bushotter's and Dorsey's studies. However, not knowing the precise directions to the agency and being too embarrassed to ask for help, he inadvertently first traveled to the opposite end of the reservation. He camped out with a postmaster that planned to return to the agency a few days later. The South Dakota weather and environment those few days served to agitate Swanton enough to cause him to step out of character and complain incessantly about the conditions. Seemingly a trivial matter in terms of how anthropologists interact with Native collaborators, it is important to remember that a scholar's mood and temperament must play a role in how they conduct themselves towards informants. Just as important, these influences play a role in how a story or tradition is portrayed, or how the Native individual is spoken of in the anthropologist's notes. For two nights, Swanton experienced the characteristically powerful thunderstorms and fly-and-mosquito blitzkriegs that South Dakota is known for. He also nearly escaped being bitten by rattlesnakes while on a horse and buggy just before arriving at his proper destination.<sup>15</sup>

An indication that the conditions upset Swanton enough for him to portray a Lakota man and an aspect of his culture in a negative light occurred on this itinerary. He commented,

the man caught sight of the reptile first, pulled his horses to one side and took the really profound risk of entrusting me with the reins while he got out and broke the back of his snakeship with one or two well directed blows of his buggy whip. The Reptile was a big fellow just crossing the road in front of us and it was as well that the horses did not catch sight of him. The episode also shows that my Indian was not an old timer for in that case he would as soon thought of demolishing his grandmother.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> John Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 21.

One may assume that Swanton's attitude here is indicative of his customary sarcastic humor, as much of his private remembrances contain. However, he displayed an unusual attitude of agitation here, evidenced by his descriptions of the preceding storms and insect irritations. However, as testament to Swanton's ability to balance a bad mood, and more importantly, an emotionally vulnerable condition exacerbated by an abrupt change in career plans, he went about his duty at Rosebud with utmost professionalism. This is evidenced by the Swanton's own admission that he was treated courteously immediately after arriving, ameliorating his irritability, and sincerely expressed appreciation for his primary informant's patience with him.

At the risk of overstating Swanton's brief expression of irritability and subsequent apology, it is crucial that the entire range of an anthropologist's feelings and expressions, including those in the moment, be taken into account when assessing their field notes and final records of their experiences on a given expedition. Even when Swanton experienced more "traditional Lakotas being hard monetary bargainers" in exchange for knowledge, he expressed a begrudging admiration.<sup>17</sup> In no way an excuse for using disparaging and cultural insensitive language, it should nonetheless be taken into account that scholarly appraisals of Indians (and by extension, any group being studied) are often in part influenced according to the anthropologist's mood and environmental circumstances at any given time.

Many anthropologists can be annoyed by particular conditions and circumstances, and at the same time, truly believe disparaging things about the culture of their collaborators. The historical record on this is obvious. However, the numerous

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<sup>17</sup> John Swanton to Franz Boas, May/22, 189, FBP, (APS).

appraisals made by anthropologists of Indian cultures, particularly as regards the worth of their knowledge, are often treated as essential and timeless. The story or traditions told by an individual are treated as representative of the culture of that tribe at that time, without any consideration as to the emotional or environmental influences on the Native person speaking with the anthropologist. When possible, an approach that takes both the anthropologist and Native collaborator's immediate circumstances and internal feelings into account should result in a more holistic appraisal of the dialog that takes place on both sides.

One last feature of Swanton's work in South Dakota needs to be discussed, and that is his work with his main collaborator, Joseph Estes. Swanton's quest to obtain useful correction to Bushotter and Dorsey's "Siouan Texts" hit a wall until he made the acquaintance of Mr. Estes. Boas advised Swanton to not only collect linguistic data on Lakota language and regional dialect differences but to be open to all things ethnological, too. He specifically recommended that Swanton try and work only with tribal elders or "full bloods," if possible, as Boas felt that they likely lived and spoke Lakota more traditionally.<sup>18</sup>

Estes's "blood quantum" or features are never mentioned by Swanton. Regardless, he did not apparently conform to Boas's or Swanton's expectations of living a traditional Lakota life, yet proved indispensable in helping translate Bushotter's and Dorsey's texts. Estes walked in both Indian and white worlds. His life serves as a reminder that an individual's Native cultural knowledge is not incompatible with success in the non-Indian world. Like Bushotter, he grew up speaking Lakota language and learning Lakota culture. And, like the vast majority of Native cultural-brokers, he

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<sup>18</sup> Franz Boas to John Swanton, June 23, 1899, FBP, (APS).

attended boarding school. Estes went to the Hampton Institute for three years in Virginia<sup>19</sup> He met and married Anna, a recent arrival from Norway who like a moderate number of other European women immigrants found themselves working in the Indian Service and marrying Native men in the late nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

Men like Estes walked a fine line between maintaining the respect of their people while earning the praise of government bureaucrats tasked with assimilating Indians. Things did not always go smoothly in such a role, and his marriage to a white woman of above average wealth certainly complicated matters. For example, Indians in positions like Estes ideologically agreed with assimilation but sought ways of doing so on their terms and according to their values. The case may be that such men and women attempted to teach their young people white ways without entirely supplanting or instilling disrespect in traditional customs. From Native viewpoints, acculturation did not mandate devaluation of traditional culture.

These difficulties reared their head in 1901, as Estes pursued a superintendent position and acquired one at the Santee Sioux Agency school. Soon after, he suffered a smear campaign that nearly derailed his career. An Agent named Harding accused Estes of beating his wife and regularly engaging in violent social behavior, particularly towards whites. These accusations were eventually proven false, as his wife and many other non-Indians came to his defense.<sup>21</sup> While professional jealousy likely played a role in Harding's attempt at ruining Estes' career, Estes' response indicates that he felt it had more to do with race and his marriage to a white woman. His letter of defense to the

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<sup>19</sup> Cathleen D. Cahill, "You Think it Strange That I can Love an Indian," *Frontiers* 24 (2008), 113.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs states, “there is no truth in what he alleges, except the single statement that I am married to a white women.” In this same letter, he went on to attack Harding’s credibility, stating that Harding at one point wrote glowing reviews of him, commenting, “I am vouched for by Mr. Harding as a progressive man of intelligence, integrity and good character, and also strongly recommended for promotion: And almost in the same breath, as a wife-better, and all around bad man.”<sup>22</sup> Anna went so far as to pen a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to contest these charges, stating, “Mr. Estes is a kind, affectionate husband and father, and devoted to his family.” Anna, realizing the importance of highlighting her husband’s virtuous qualities as a husband and family provider, qualities in accordance with governmental goals of assimilation, commented further, “He has been teaching most of the time, and I have been with him as his companion almost constantly....My husband has not only treated me kindly and provided for me properly ever since our marriage, but in 1896 he had his life insured for my benefit in the NY Life Insurance Co.”<sup>23</sup>

Swanton’s encounter and collaboration with Estes proved fruitful. Swanton noted the warmth with which Estes greeted him and how eager he took to the task of remedying Swanton’s Lakota documents. Even with school in session, Estes would speak with him during breaks. All in all, Estes helped considerably with over 100 pages of the Bushotter texts.<sup>24</sup> Lost on Swanton in his work with Estes was the fact that Estes did not meet the supposed criteria of a “traditional” Lakota that he and Boas desired for the job. What

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Estes to William Jones, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 13, 1901, Personnel File, Joseph Estes, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis Missouri. Hereafter cited as (NPRC).

<sup>23</sup> Anna Estes to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 20, 1901, Personnel File, Anna Estes, (NPRC).

<sup>24</sup> John Reed Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 20.

Swanton and Boas overlooked at this point in their careers is something that many scholars and the general public still overlook about Native people: Indigenous individuals do not necessarily lose their cultural knowledge by familiarity and engagement with other cultures and non-Native institutions. In this case, working with a Lakota man fluent in his people's customs and language that lived in the white world did not detract from his usefulness in helping anthropologists with their goals, despite giving inklings to the contrary.<sup>25</sup>

Another overlooked aspect of Swanton's work with Estes concerns how oblivious he likely was regarding Estes's unique social circumstances. Caught up in a situation that presented him with dual and sometimes conflicting loyalties, Estes must have been under an enormous strain. While Estes seems to have enjoyed the respect of his people, not all Indians who worked with whites at this time were looked upon in the same way. Unauthorized individuals telling sacred stories to outsiders, revealing the location of sacred sites, and collaborating with foreigners that imperiled the well-being of the community at large are a few of the actions by which a Native person could incur the anger of his people.

A sad example of a once revered Native man that lost standing with his people at the expense of working with an anthropologist was the Cherokee medicine man named Swimmer. The account is also testament to the unprincipled way some anthropologists gathered information from their collaborators and abused their trust. James Mooney accused Swimmer of holding back information, which was true. However, it is always the prerogative of the Indian to what extent they reveal cultural information. As part of a medicine society, Swimmer realized the consequences of conveying sacred information

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<sup>25</sup> Swanton to Boas, July 22, 1899, FBP, (APS).

to outsiders, especially whites. However, Mooney questioned his honor and assailed his prowess as a medicinal specialist. When Swimmer caved in, his fellow healers tried to get him to stop. When that did not work, they told of his betrayal to other Cherokee.<sup>26</sup> Mooney seemed to care little for Swimmer's future reputation. "Here were prayers, songs and prescriptions for the cure of all kinds of disease," he commented, "...love charms to gain the affection of a woman or to cause her to hate a detested rival; fishing charms, hunting charms...prayers to make the corn grow, to frighten away storms, and to drive off witches; prayers for long life, for safety among strangers, for acquiring influence in council and success in the ball play...It was in fact an Indian ritual and pharmacopeia."<sup>27</sup> To be sure, Swimmer made the decision to break Cherokee protocol, but Mooney knew him well enough to realize which buttons to push to get the information he needed from him. Mooney used Swimmer's egotistical needs for recognition from an outsider, leaving the Cherokee medicine men to sort things out once he left back for Washington. Unlike with Swanton and Estes, Mooney knew only too well the circumstances of his primary collaborator.

Aside from remaining in good standing with his community, Estes obviously contended with racism, distrust of his abilities, and possible violence directed at him and his family.<sup>28</sup> The attitude of many anthropologists in Swanton's time and since then towards Indian collaborators was that Native partners exist solely for their benefit. Indian collaborators did not exist in bubbles, however, detached from the world around them.

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<sup>26</sup> Moses, *The Indian Man*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> James Mooney, "Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees," in *Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), 310.

<sup>28</sup> Cahill, 127.

One wonders how Swanton would have reacted had he known of Estes's struggles? Would he have acted as Mooney did, and used it to gain advantage somehow? Swanton's personality indicates that he would not have done so, but Mooney's actions are surprising, too, as he developed a reputation for defending Indian traditions to policymakers. It bears repeating that the circumstances taking place in an anthropologist's and Native collaborator's lives influence the dialog that ensues. More importantly, it can impact the manner in which a story is told and the meaning an anthropologist takes away from it, which may or may not be what the informant intended.

To Swanton's credit, he also defended Bushotter's earlier work by claiming that his mistakes were due to mixing Lakota linguistic variations, some of which can be significant. Bushotter spoke Brule and attempted to transcribe the grammar spoken by informants using a Teton dialect. Swanton also demonstrated an attribute that showed why his later work with the Bureau of American Ethnology was so meticulous.<sup>29</sup> He felt it best to master the text of only a few stories rather than try and learn every variation of a story or word at once, a mistake made by Bushotter and so many early ethnologists. Giving a thorough analysis of a handful of stories made later anthropological comprehension of the language easier, as it diminished the possibility of mistakenly mixing Lakota dialects. Boas agreed with Swanton's approach and congratulated him on a successful first involvement doing important linguistic work.<sup>30</sup>

After spending the summer in South Dakota, Swanton returned to New York City. His hard work at Columbia the year before studying linguistics from Boas paid off in South Dakota. Although tedious, translating and transcribing Native languages proved a

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<sup>29</sup> The Bureau of Ethnology was changed to the current Bureau of American Ethnology in 1894.

<sup>30</sup> Swanton to Boas, July 22, 1899. FBP, (APS).

good fit for Swanton. His calm demeanor suited the almost meditative concentration it took to do such work. Swanton continued his training under Boas at Columbia through the fall and winter of 1899, working on finishing the Bushotter texts. In terms of his doctorate, with a family connection at Harvard, Swanton wished to earn his PhD through that institution, and was allowed to do so.<sup>31</sup>

As a result of his success with Native languages and the fact that he enjoyed working with them more than participating in archaeological digs, Swanton, with Boas's encouragement, decided to write his dissertation on the Chinook language. Boas had recently returned from a field outing to the Columbia River region to collect linguistic and mythological material from the Lower Chinook communities. Collecting and preserving this dialect assumed a priority for Boas, as it stood a real chance of disappearing altogether in a short while. The rapid loss of Native languages can be traced to the disastrous era of assimilation in the late nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth (1880s-1934) and remains a critical issue facing many communities today. The view that Native American population numbers were in rapid decline at the same time deserves more scrutiny, however.

The late nineteenth century saw many influential men and women involved in Indian affairs and policy programs predict the inevitable extinction of Native Americans due to their supposed inferior racial makeup. The idea of "The Vanishing American" persists in some quarters of academia today, but a close examination of the facts reveals that Native population numbers at that time were actually increasing. The myth, however, helped fuel anthropologists' insistence that only a limited window of opportunity existed to gather information and materials from Indian people before it was

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<sup>31</sup> John Reed Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 21.

too late. This helped gain federal funding for expeditions and studies. Also, for those that blamed inferior environments for Native cultural inferiority and declining numbers, the myth served their purposes as well. Policy reformers bent on rapidly assimilating Native people and rescuing them from their supposed downward demographic spiral benefited from perpetuating this fiction, as Washington continued to devote funding to their projects.<sup>32</sup>

This does not mean that life for Native people during this time period (1880s-1920) proved easy, or that real danger to their lives was a myth. On the contrary, this time period witnessed drastic changes in the lives and circumstances of tribes and consistent devaluation of their cultures. The negative consequences stemming from this era are still felt in many Indian communities today. Language retention remains as one of the most pressing issues for tribes, and this crisis in the late nineteenth-century was already apparent to anthropologists. For example, Boas believed the crisis facing the Chinook language to be such that he wanted Swanton off his Lakota work and urged him to undertake work in this area. The Chinook lived along the lower and upper Columbia in Oregon and Washington. The Shoalwater Chinook dialect (Lower group) faced an immediate crisis, as their last fluent speaker passed in 1897, something that all too often happened to be the case with many Native communities then and well into contemporary times.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For the best treatment on this subject, see Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes & U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982), 126-127.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Bringhurst, "The Audible Light in the Eyes," in *Coming to Shore: Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions, and Visions* ed. Marie Mauze, Michael Harkin, and Sergei Kan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 163.

Swanton was amenable to Boas's counsel and began working on his dissertation, eventually titled "Morphology of the Chinook Verb." In this study, Swanton gave a brief history of Chinook ethnography, which included Boas's earlier collection of Chinook texts that Swanton based his study on. Essentially, Swanton used Boas's records to establish grammar and the different sounds words make depending on preceding words.<sup>34</sup> Aside from finding the research fascinating, Swanton's later recollections of his dissertation shed light on his views as a young PhD candidate of Boas. He commented,

The circumstances connected with my first linguistic discovery, or rather supposed discovery, are important on account of the light they throw on the character of my teacher and the strong hold he had on the affections of his pupils. He had noticed that certain sounds in Chinook tended to change in consonance with changes in the sounds preceding, and he suggested that I make lists of the words in which such changes were exhibited. One morning, after I had been engaged in this for a while, Dr. Boas looked over my material and told me that it indicated a certain law to exist. At that moment his secretary happened to come in and Dr. Boas said to her, "Miss Andrews, Mr. Swanton has just discovered an interesting law." The discovery was his but the credit was given to me. Dr. Boas did not even say "we have discovered it." He was too much interested in the discovery to care who made it.

Swanton continued, "Later I made sufficient finds in my own right I am sure, but this one particularly impressed itself upon me and stamped upon my mind an assurance of the high-mindedness and disinterested devotion to truth of the man whom I was working. Later I could recognize that he has his weaknesses like the rest of us, but the incident above related has had an enduring effect upon me." Indeed, Boas's improprieties in his dealings with Indians and egocentric contests for professional recognition with academic

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<sup>34</sup> John Swanton, "Morphology of the Chinook Verb," *American Anthropologist* 2 (April-June 1900): 200-201.

rivals are well known. But for the young Swanton, such praise served to settle his nerves and give him needed confidence during a particularly difficult bout of anxiety.<sup>35</sup>

Swanton's PhD oral and dissertation defense took place in June 1900 at Cambridge. His committee consisted of Frederick Putnam, Franz Boas, Charles Bowditch, and a Dr. Russell (first name unclear). The exam seemed to go smoothly, with Boas asking a few questions concerning his dissertation, Putnam asking him to give a brief overview of his experience in archaeology, and Bowditch asking him advice relevant to Mayan studies. This obviously confused Swanton, but Bowditch was simply curious what he thought of certain matters because that is the area he planned to work next. The unspecified Dr. Russell's role is interesting in that his comments during the exam demonstrate the embarrassment some anthropologists felt at the continued lack of standards for awarding any degree in the field, let alone a PhD. He remarked, "It is foolish to hold an examination of this character and we shall not give anthropology a respectable status until we specify a major and minor as in other departments." Swanton recounted with humor that Russell quickly qualified his remarks, that they did not reflect upon Swanton himself, and that he "respected [Swanton]." After his diatribe, Russell did not ask any questions.<sup>36</sup>

Anthropology eventually developed criteria for bestowing degrees. However, before this took place in the late 1920s-early 1930s, certain standouts in archeology and anthropology, such as Putnam, Mooney, and Boas, already set in place a system whereby scholars corrected earlier mistakes in their fields. In reality anthropologists had been

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<sup>35</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 19-20.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

correcting earlier theories and moving the field continually forward long before anthropology was declared a professional discipline.

What Dr. Russell's comments meant during Swanton's exam is what one historian described accordingly: "Graduate training as the road to professional status was largely the work of what Cannon has called the 'Germanophile reformers' in high education, who thought that scholarship needed rigorous training and continuous discipline to make it more modern. Thus professional training meant a hierarchy of specialized course work leading to a degree."<sup>37</sup> Swanton's class load lacked today's curriculum guidelines, but his experiences as an undergraduate and graduate student certainly prepared him for his career. He was more ready than the multitude of amateur collectors who moonlighted as ethnologists before and during the start of his career, with several exceptions already noted.

With his dissertation and doctoral exam out of the way, Swanton must have felt a sense of pride, despite his doubts about his worth as a scholar. Throughout his education, his mother encouraged him to stay the course and consistently admonished him to stay strong in his religious faith. Swanton and his two brothers' professional successes remain notable, given their humble backgrounds. But they never overcame the financial consequences of their modest beginnings, either. Money remained a consistent problem for Swanton, sometimes to crisis-inducing proportions later in his life. For instance, during his work in Ohio, he only possessed eleven dollars in his account. His mother was helpless in this regard, but Swanton found catharsis in writing letters home and keeping his mother abreast of his experiences in general. What little solace he found in finances

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<sup>37</sup> Moses, *The Indian Man*, 230.

he compensated for in discussing his and his mother's mutual reading of Swedenborgian writings.<sup>38</sup>

The final step to becoming a full-fledged employee of the Bureau of American Ethnology consisted of Swanton taking a civil service exam to assure his federal credentials. This criterion was due to the fact that anthropologists at this time served as federal employees who enacted the government's assimilation program. The close relationship between early ethnologists and the federal government existed since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, as cranial measurements of different ethnicities often accorded with legalized discrimination against non-whites. This proved particularly strident in the Antebellum South. Later, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Army became directly involved in gathering Indian skulls for scientific study.<sup>39</sup>

But, by Swanton's time, federal policies supported ethnological inquiry so long as their work did not encourage perpetuation of their cultures. Federal policymakers contented themselves with the understanding that ethnologists would gather what remained of early humanity's attempts at civilization in the Americas before their descendants disappeared forever. John Wesley Powell's consistent politicking served the key to eventually winning tepid federal support for ethnological study of Indian tribes. However, support of the Bureau of Ethnology was never made official by an act of Congress, though funding was granted for studies to take place. Powell accomplished

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<sup>38</sup> John R. Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, Dec. 22, 1896, Swanton Letters: 1769-1955 (85-m68-85-m128 80:1:5 carton 1. Swanton Family Papers, 1759-1955, 21-38: Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, Sep. 5, 1897, Swanton Letters: 1769-1955 (85-m68-85-m128 80:1:5 carton 1. Swanton Family Papers, 1759-1955, 21-38: Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hereafter cited as (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>39</sup> David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archeology, and The Battle For Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 23, 42.

this first by developing a platform that conformed to government policy expectations. He also stressed that the work he and his bureau colleagues did was integral to not only the future of Native Americans but to society as a whole. Essentially, the use of science to learn about the progress of civilization among Native Americans held the potential of illuminating future developments among humanity in general.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding his claims that science held the key to bettering the lives of Native people, Powell first won over the confidence of federal officials through his remarkable survey and exploration of the Great Basin and the Colorado Plateau. Due to this work and knowledge of the tribes of those regions, the government placed him in charge of gauging the needs and living conditions of the Numic communities. Powell adroitly used his findings of the Great Basin tribes to win the Bureau of Ethnology a permanent home at the Smithsonian Institution. The deplorable living conditions of the Great Basin peoples under the government's current reservation system necessitated a more compassionate alternative, one in which they were incrementally assimilated into American society. In the meantime, the program's success first depended on establishing better living conditions for the Native inhabitants. One thing remained clear to Powell—the rapid immigration of whites into the Great Basin region irreparably changed the way of life the indigenous peoples of the area, as it had every other region of the United States.<sup>41</sup>

Ethnologists did not always toe the line on assimilation, however. In fact, Swanton supported James Mooney's advocacy of peyote usage during Native American

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<sup>40</sup> Donald Worster *A River Running West: The Life of John Wesley Powell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 397.

<sup>41</sup> Moses, *The Indian Man*, 14-16.

Church ceremonies. From the late 1870s to 1934, the federal government outlawed Native religions as part of the “civilization” programs. Upon hearing of Indian agent complaints against Mooney, then Bureau Director Jesse Fewkes called him back to Washington to account for his actions. Mooney’s reprimand consisted in his never being allowed to conduct field work in Oklahoma. This devastated him, but was the blow was lessened by it being near the end of his career. However, Swanton felt the government crackdown on Native religious beliefs to be a bit overzealous, and commented on Mooney’s unfortunate treatment: “On receiving this complaint, Fewkes ordered Mooney to come home and report. If I have gotten the story straight, I believe this to have been a mistake. The head of an office should be prepared to back up his men until an accusation leveled against any of them is substantiated, or at least until he has had a chance to reply.”<sup>42</sup> But, true to Swanton’s kind personality and willingness to give everyone but himself the benefit of the doubt, he excused him by sympathizing with Fewke’s sensitivity to criticism. Swanton had nothing but positive things to say about Fewkes in a short biographical account he wrote in 1930. And even when Swanton commented harshly about a particular colleague, its tone remained cheerfully sarcastic and came nowhere near the scathing insults other associates leveled at one another, as seen in various feuds that took place.<sup>43</sup>

Before Swanton could catch his breath and settle into his new career as a Bureau of American Ethnology employee or make any significant acquaintanceship with his colleagues, Boas tapped him to participate in the largest ever research and collection

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<sup>42</sup> Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 44.

<sup>43</sup> See John Swanton and F. H. H. Roberts Jr., *Jess Walter Fewkes* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1930) From the Smithsonian Report, 609-616; and Swanton, “Notes Regarding,” 44.

survey of the Northwest Coast. An unprecedented project of this scale necessitated not only the collaboration of many scholars from different backgrounds and specialties, but an extraordinary amount of funding, too. The man responsible for providing the financial backing, Morris Jesup, had recently assumed the role of president of the American Museum of Natural History in 1881. By the late 1870s, many of the museum's private donors dwindled off. The previous president, Robert Stuart, became too busy to keep up the public advocacy necessary for the institution to flourish and resigned. Despite being engaged in private enterprise and other business pursuits, Jesup enthusiastically offered to take over for Stuart.<sup>44</sup>

Jesup's already demanding schedule increased exponentially after assuming his new duties. Burnout remained unlikely, however, for he differed from Stuart in his fascination with world history, particularly Native American history. His funding for earlier projects, which included the Jesup Collection of North American Woods and research in Peru, were well known. He also lent significant support for the Arctic expedition by Robert Peary. His taste for large-scale projects and belief that collecting material should go hand in hand with research made him the perfect individual for Frederick Putnam and Franz Boas to appeal to for support.<sup>45</sup>

What came to be known as the Jesup North Pacific Expedition held the potential for the American Museum to not only accrue a treasure trove of artifacts, but to shed light on one of the most pressing questions of the time—the peopling of the Americas. The vast majority of scientists at that time no longer ascribed to fanciful theories that Native

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<sup>44</sup> William Adams Brown *Morris Ketchum Jesup: A Character Sketch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 137-138.

<sup>45</sup> Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 146.

Americans were the descendants of ancient Israelites, Phoenicians, or Welsh princes, but contended, as most scholars do today, that the ancestors of Native North Americans originally hailed from Asia. The exact place in Asia is commonly assumed to be Siberia, with ancient Paleo-Indians journeying across an ice free plain connecting the two continents during the last Ice Age some 12,000-15,000 years ago.<sup>46</sup>

Jesup did not take much convincing that this project warranted all of the resources he and the American Museum could amass. In 1896, Jesup appealed to a board of trustees for funding and support, writing,

In closing our reference to the work of the Department of Anthropology it is proper to add a few words regarding a subject of great interest, not only to the specialist in this subject, but also to persons interested in scientific research in other fields. I refer to the theory that America was originally peopled by migratory tribes from the Asiatic continent. The opportunities for solving this problem are rapidly disappearing, and I would be deeply grateful to learn that some friends of the Museum may feel disposed to contribute the means for the prosecution of systematic investigation in the hope of securing the data to demonstrate the truth or falsity of the claim set forth by various prominent men of science.

Finding no volunteers to head such a project, he took charge carried it out himself. The Jesup expedition sent delegations of scientists to the coast British Columbia, the coast of Washington, the southern interior regions of British Columbia, and even parts of Siberia.<sup>47</sup> The project lasted for six years, during which heavy field work was conducted

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<sup>46</sup> The contention that the Bering Strait theory sufficiently accounts for today's modern Native people is a controversy in some Native circles. Some Native people argue that their tribe's oral traditions state that they have always resided in this land, precluding a migration over a land bridge. The most vocal advocate for a North and South American origin for Native people was Vine Deloria Jr., who argued that much of the body of Indian oral traditions can be interpreted as giving reliable information on the history of Native people on this continent. As diverse as Native oral traditions and creation accounts are from one another, Deloria believed they shared a common view that Indian people have always been in the Americas, refuting an origin from Asia or elsewhere. For the best treatment on Deloria's views on this topic, see, Vine Deloria Jr., *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997), 67-93.

by archeologists, anthropologists, geologists, meteorologists, and an assortment of other scientists. Boas oversaw much of the anthropological aspect of the work in British Columbia, with the main tribes studied being the Kwakiutl and Bella Coola, located along the central coast, the Salish, Quinault, and Quileute of the southern coast. Swanton worked with the Haida, who occupied the north coast of British Columbia in what used to be named the Queen Charlotte Islands. However, the Haida homeland, reflecting decades of struggle to reassert their right to practice their traditions and the legal fight over many decades to win recognition of their jurisdiction over their territories, is now referred to as Haida Gwaii (Islands of the People).<sup>48</sup>

With such a monumental undertaking was declared a success at its conclusion, it is interesting that the primary reason for the project, demonstrating a connection between North America and Siberia, neglected almost entirely study of Alaskan tribes. Swanton's Haida work briefly connected with Alaska, but the only real study there was done by him in 1903. Even then, he worked only with the Tlingits and made no serious inquiries into a possible Siberian connection. On this point, it seems clear that Boas had reasons for studying the Northwest Coast and its Native inhabitants other than discovering proof of an Asiatic link. In fact, it is telling just how indifferent Boas felt the stated purpose of the Jesup Expedition was, despite paying lip service to it. Sometime after the project's end, he commented:

An inquiry of this kind seemed profitable from two different standpoints. First of all, we had reason to hope that we should be making an important contribution to the knowledge of the relations existing between the primitive inhabitants of America and those of the Old World; further, we anticipated that a study of the

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<sup>47</sup> Brown *Morris Ketchum Jesup*, 169-170.

<sup>48</sup> Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 147-148. See also Daina Augaitis, Lucille Bell, Nika Collison, *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 1-2.

historical developments of a large territory, inhabited by peoples of simple types of culture, would furnish us with the means of approaching more methodically and with greater precision the most troublesome problems of ethnography, the question of independence or borrowing.

What Boas is referencing is his own developing idea about cultural development and the transference of ideas across vast regions. He wished to study these cultural exchanges in a systematic fashion, and the Northwest Coast proved ideal for this purpose. He commented further on this point,

It seems to me that the results of our work have fully justified this method of carefully studying a continuous area with the purpose of clearing up its historical relations. Not only did we find everywhere clear proofs of borrowing, but we were also enabled to follow the migrations of ideas and tribes with relative certainty. The tribes of the North Pacific Coast no longer appear to us as stable units, lacking any historical development, but we see their cultures in constant flux, each people influenced by its nearer and more distant neighbors in space and time. We recognize that from [an] historical point of view, these tribes are far from primitive, and that their beliefs and their ways of thinking must not be considered those of the human race in its infancy which can be classified unreservedly in an evolutionary series, but that their origin is to be sought in the complicated ethnic relations between the tribes.<sup>49</sup>

Here, it is apparent that Boas envisioned the Jesup project as an ideal opportunity to prove his ideas of cultural relativism and the process of cultural exchanges, not as an opportunity to prove the Bering Strait Theory.

With his new credentials as a certified employee of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Swanton set out for Haida Gwaii in August of 1900. His job was to obtain linguistic, mythological, and social organization information on the Haida, with an emphasis on obtaining artifacts, as well. The majority of his work took place over a six-month period during the winter of 1900-1901; he returned to the United States in the spring of 1901. The complexity of the Jesup project necessitated using the most qualified

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<sup>49</sup> Franz Boas, quoted in William Adams Brown *Morris Ketchum Jesup: A Character Sketch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 169-170.

scholars, which were in short supply then. Boas realized Swanton's competency and persuaded the bureau to pay Swanton's salary while the American Museum paid his field expenses. This ensured that the young anthropologists work with the Haida would not be compromised by hiring an incompetent field worker that would have just gotten in his way.<sup>50</sup>

Swanton's work with the Haida, less known than his contributions in the Southeast, nonetheless offers intriguing insight into the mind of a young anthropologist, who possessed an optimism and momentum never entirely displayed in quite the same degree later in his career. One of the main reasons for this is that his career was just beginning and the many responsibilities that came with working at the Bureau had not taken a toll on him yet, as they eventually did to everyone that worked in there. Even for someone as apolitical as Swanton, being around an environment of political jockeying over publications and quests for professional notoriety at times sapped even the most optimistic of anthropologists of energy and optimism. Another factor pertained to Swanton's thoughtful and introspective personality. The tranquil beauty of Haida Gwaii, with the region's consistent but peaceful rains and striking sunsets comforted Swanton in a way no future field work environments did. For one sadly accustomed to experiencing panic attacks, worsened by his time spent in New York City and the novelty of a new job, Swanton could not have experienced a better assignment for his first outing as a professional anthropologist.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 25.

<sup>51</sup> John Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, Sep. 13, 1900 (SFP: 1759-1955). A series of letters to his two older brothers also mention the awe and almost reverent attitude Swanton held about Vancouver and the small towns he worked in on this trip.

Alongside this almost Edenic paradise existed signs of hopelessness and devastation from centuries of European intrusions. These scenes greeted Swanton as he disembarked from the steamer, named the Princess Louise. The first village he worked at was Skidegate, and a bleak social scene greeted him. Earlier onboard the steamer, Swanton met his first collaborator, a pleasant fellow named Daxhiigang, or Charlie Edenshaw, as he was known to English speakers. Edenshaw's reputation as a wood carver carried him great esteem among his village and clan. Swanton admired him, especially given the loathsome social circumstances facing his community. Swanton no doubt knew of the deplorable conditions facing Indian communities. The literature and testimony of Indian agents, archeologists, and anthropologists testified to the consequences of colonialism.

Even before arriving at Skidegate, Boas had met with him at a hotel in Victoria, British Columbia, where he told Swanton to expect harsh social conditions. Boas then left Swanton to his own devices.<sup>52</sup> However, it is one thing to know something intellectually but entirely another to experience it firsthand emotionally. Even his work with the Navajo did not compare to Skidegate, as his time spent with the Navajo lasted only a few months. Plus, he interacted with only a handful of Navajo men and never experienced life in a Navajo community, which no doubt experienced similar complications. Swanton's first impressions of Haida Gwaii show how revealing these circumstances were to him:

The island population is now shrunk to not over seven hundred, of whom three hundred are here. There is not an old house standing—all have modern frame structures with the regulation windows...The missionary has suppressed all the dances and has been instrumental in having all the old houses destroyed—everything in short that makes life worth living...I have taken down one text and

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<sup>52</sup> Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, Sep. 14, 1900, (SFP: 1759-1955).

begun a study of the grammar using that as a basis. The verb promises to be difficult...<sup>53</sup>

Such circumstances assailed Swanton's sensibilities, but for Edenshaw, it presented a life all too familiar to Indians at the dawn of the twentieth century. His skill as an artist positioned him as a man of power and positive influence in his community, as the Haida are renowned for their awe-inducing artistry, particularly in woodcrafts. To this day, Haida artists enjoy a reputation in the Northwest and in all of Native North America as meticulous and extremely talented. As people who infused their own being into inanimate wood, breathing life into it and transforming it into sacred, living representations of spiritual beings and cultural heroes, men like Edensaw played the role not unlike that of the trickster-transformer hero, Raven. With the introduction of wage labor and a burgeoning market economy in the region, Haida craftsmen faced the choice between selling their works to outsiders or wallow in even greater poverty than they had already experienced. These circumstances are parallel to ones that faced tribes back in the United States during the same time period.<sup>54</sup>

Other Haida and Native Northwest Coast residents took seasonal work in cannery businesses to the south in Vancouver. This left already depleted villages, the backbone of Haida life, teetering on ruin. Traditional ways of life competed in an uphill struggle against unrelenting economic and industrial change. As testament to the ruin that took place to Haida communities in only a century's time, Swanton estimated that the total Haida population in Canada and Alaska was at most 1000. A hundred years earlier, with

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<sup>53</sup> John Swanton to Franz Boas, Sep. 23, 1900 (Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York). Hereafter cited as (AMNH).

<sup>54</sup> Bringhurst, *A Story Sharp as a Knife*, 137-140.

dozens of villages dotting the region, it is estimated that the Haida population was around 12,000. By far, the most insidious culprit in such demographic loss was smallpox.<sup>55</sup>

Those individuals capable of providing for their families during this time likely did so with feelings of regret and shame. The traditional Haida world existed for millennia—at least it did to the extent that they controlled the trajectory of what they defined as traditional, as cultures change constantly. A basic understanding of life as a series of interlocking and interdependent relationships among human being and the non-human world served as the frame of reference for Haida communities. Beloved family members and leaders could come back again as whales and otters or be reincarnated back into their family line, depending on the actions of their relatives. Potlatches often proved paramount in these regards, as these ceremonies mourned the loved one properly and helped ensure their entrance into the underworld and the possibility of a return to human form later in this world.<sup>56</sup>

To witness this world undergo such rapid change and see one's beloved stories and ceremonial lifeways be viewed by outsiders as nothing more than relics of "primitive" people, eager only to acquire them to buttress museum collections and expound on theories of the progress of civilization, bothered the conscionable Swanton.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 69-70. See also Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, Oct. 7, 1900, (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>56</sup> See Mary Giraudo Beck, *Shamans and Kushtakas: North Coast Tales of the Supernatural* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Books, 1991) 7-12. Potlatch as one of the primary economic systems of Northwest communities has received much scrutiny. See Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), 173-223. Benedict was among the first to examine Potlatches from an anthropological perspective. She chose to emphasize their role in the ways in which prestige and status were conferred on the individuals and families that held them. Their function as a means of distributing great amounts of goods across large regions, ensuring those communities experiencing hardship in a particular year did not go without, is elaborated on in Marvin Harris's *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 111-130. By far the best study of Northwest concepts of potlatch as a mourning ceremony, in which the mourning, host family gives away large amounts of goods a year after a loved one's death, is found in Sergei Kan *Symbolic Immortality: The Tlingit Potlatch of the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 181-213.

With his own sensitivities regarding his family's affiliation with a minority and misunderstood religious tradition, Swanton took offense at the lack of respect shown to the Haida by some of the missionaries at Skidegate. He penned a letter to his older brother, Walter, condemning missionary arrogance, referring to them sarcastically as "God-fearing missionaries," and that it would not be enjoyable in the least to be "subjected to the withering scorn, and terrifying anathemas of those almighty Canadian potentates ...It would honestly seem that the average West Coast divine were a man who cannot be endured elsewhere."<sup>57</sup> The situation at the nearby town of Masset, which Swanton visited later, was overseen by a more tolerant church leader. The son of a missionary to a Tsimshian community, he allowed the Haida to practice their traditions freely and openly, including the then-much-reviled potlatch ceremonies. This experience remained one of the better memories of his work in Haida Gwaii, as the contrast with Skidegate, which Swanton described as "seething with religion and scandal," reminded Swanton to acknowledge the dignity and worth of the people he worked with.<sup>58</sup>

Swanton's empathy likely contributed to some of the older Haida men enthusiastically agreeing to work with him. He exhibited little pretense or pushiness in his dealings with Haida elders, opening up opportunities to learn an underappreciated dimension to Haida culture—their epic body of oral tradition that Swanton came to revere and classify as on par with the world's great Greek and Roman classics. In fact, after working with a particularly impressive Haida elder, Swanton eagerly instructed his brother Walter to tell their mother about his experiences, commenting, "You may simply

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<sup>57</sup> John Swanton to Walter Swanton, Oct. 21, 1900, (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>58</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 28-29.

picture me like Homer on the shores of Ionia rescuing from oblivion the ancient-lore of these North American Greeks, and spending my evenings deep in a modern novel.”<sup>59</sup>

Swanton worked with several Haida collaborators. He said only positive things about these individuals, but one Haida storyteller especially captured Swanton’s attention and admiration on this trip. This person lived a remarkable life before meeting Swanton or knowing anything about these curious outsiders known as anthropologists. Known as Ghandl among his Haida community and born into the Eagle moiety, he grew up in the town of Qaysun, where he acquired a reputation early on as a skilled storyteller. By the time Swanton met with Ghandl, he was blind and frail, the results of a life marked by its share of tragedy. One would be hard pressed to find at this time a Native person who had not lost a loved one to the diseases brought about through contact with Europeans.

Ghandl survived waves of smallpox epidemics but lost his sight due to infection sometime in the 1890s.<sup>60</sup> His small community in Qaysun became a refuge due to smallpox epidemics nearly wiping other villages out. The dreaded disease erupted throughout Haida Gwaii in 1875, forcing the Qaysun survivors to relocate to Xayna. The new village succeeded for a time as a small center of trade with the few non-Indians that made their way through. However, along with outsiders came renewed outbreaks. This time, Ghandl’s community contended with measles and influenza along with smallpox.

Vulnerable and exhausted from these tragedies, many Haida converted to Christianity. Some of them sincerely did so with conviction, but many likely did out of a sense of desperation in a hope to find respite from the plagues. Ghandl converted while living in Xayna in 1887. Part of the conversion process meant receiving a new, Christian

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<sup>59</sup> John Reed Swanton to Walter Swanton, Oct. 21,1900. (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>60</sup> Bringhust, *A Story as Sharp as Knife*, 28-30.

name. Ghandl became known as Walter McGregor to whites.<sup>61</sup> As a younger man with his health still intact, Ghandl could have opted to live a more traditional life of a Haida man, one spent fishing, hunting, and by the late nineteenth century, trading. However, his destiny as a custodian of sacred Haida lore and tradition won out. Amidst such carnage and rapid changes taking place among his people from cultural, religious, and economic standpoints, Ghandl must have felt an urgency to do his part to ensure their traditions lived on.

The stage was set to meet Swanton. The two men worked closely for most of October and November 1900. The terms of their arrangement rested on the right of Ghandl to determine the length of their discussions each day. Swanton usually worked with Ghandl or another storyteller in the early mornings through 5:00 p.m., leaving the evening to rest and arrange his notes.<sup>62</sup> As a skilled linguist in training, Swanton at the time lacked sufficient familiarity with the Haida language to make much headway with Ghandl. Fortunately, he received help during these sessions from another Haida, Henry Moody. Moody spoke both English and Haida, and assisted Swanton greatly. Moody also appreciated the seriousness of this dialog between Swanton and Ghandl. Haida elders viewed their people's stories and traditions as "alive" and sacred. For someone like Ghandl to take so much time to work with Swanton proved that this exchange was not just about sharing stories to pass time. Moody listened to Ghandl's poem and repeated every word verbatim in a loud voice. This assured Ghandl that his words were being taken down as he intended them to be. Swanton's meticulous attention to detail lessened the chances of recording a word or phrase incorrectly, but Moody's efforts

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>62</sup> John R. Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, Oct. 28, 1900, (SFP: 1759-1955).

helped Swanton receive a thorough translation of Ghandl's narratives. His actions also conveyed respect for Ghandl's role as storyteller and poet. Ghandl deserved to have his words and the feeling behind them accurately conveyed to Swanton.

As a lover of poetry, Swanton quickly developed a respect and appreciation for Ghandl's skill as a storyteller. Ghandl impressed on him the beauty of Haida poetry in its richness and ability to invoke in him the same sense of wonder and awe he encountered reading poets from western culture. On more than one occasion, Swanton commented on how the Haida poetry and myths contained put them on par with Greek and Roman traditions and that it was a shame most of the world remained ignorant of them. In one letter to his mother, Swanton mentions working with an old man, commenting "I have unearthed a sort of epic or saga in five parts." The rest of the letter is unclear, but in parts reads, "Perhaps it would make Mr. Jesup jealous for to me to even say that...My work has gone on very satisfactorily, however, and the climate seems to agree with me."<sup>63</sup> His work with Ghandl and other Haida reveal the personal nature of anthropological work. For those times Swanton listened reverently to Ghandl, he must have felt a sense of timelessness, free from the distractions of a new job and the stress that this no doubt caused him. Here, in Haida Gwaii, Swanton experienced a man with whom he felt deeply connected, a man that treasured stories and poetry every bit as much as he did. This intimate dimension of anthropological field work remains a facet often overlooked and holds ramifications about the way scholars view cultures.

Boas's influence on Swanton proved substantial, but he never shied from standing up for his own ideas and convictions. Swanton came to appreciate the crucial role individuals play in the transmission of information. Cultures are not entities in their own

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<sup>63</sup> John R. Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, Oct. 21, 1900, (SFP: 1759-1955).

right, but are a composite of individuals that express idea and beliefs uniquely. Men like Ghandl controlled the meaning of a story, not just by the words they used, but the way they spoke them. A storyteller's physical mannerisms, such as facial expressions and other gestures, often influence the same story's meaning, depending on the artistry of the person telling it.<sup>64</sup> Swanton, just beginning his professional career, seemed to have picked up on this facet of working with collaborators and collecting information from them. Most anthropologists at that time, including Boas, emphasized the shared or common experiences over individual ones. On this point, he stressed, "Ethnology...does not deal with the exceptional man; it deals with the masses."<sup>65</sup> Ruth Benedict, another one of Boas's students, broke ranks with Boas on this matter too. However, she was just arriving at Swanton's practice of emphasizing individual roles in establishing culture in 1935. Her comments illustrate how progressive Swanton's approach was thirty five years before she made the following observation:

There is no more communal authorship in folklore than there is a communal designer in ironwork or a communal priest in religious rites. The whole problem is unreal. There is no conceivable source for any cultural trait other than the behavior of some man, woman, or child. What is communal about the process is the social acceptance by which the trait becomes a part of the teaching handed down to the next generation.<sup>66</sup>

Swanton's quiet demeanor and love of poetry helped him appreciate Ghandl's and other Haida elder's skill as weavers of sacred tales. If he had his way, Swanton would have spent the entire expedition gathering Haida lore. However, Boas demanded he also attempt to procure artifacts for the American Museum, something Swanton seemed

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<sup>64</sup> Angela Cavender Wilson, "Power of the Spoken Word," in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 107-108.

<sup>65</sup> Franz Boas, "The Ethnological Significance of Esoteric Doctrines," in Franz Boas, *Race, Language and Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 314.

<sup>66</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Zuni Mythology* vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), xxix.

reluctant to do. Swanton's hesitancy to partake in the plundering of relics and human remains solidified when he became all too aware of the legacy of abuse inflicted on the Haida by anthropologists in these regards. One incident took place only a few short years before his arrival.

That any Haida agreed to work with Swanton or any other anthropologist after George Dorsey's actions testifies to Swanton's likeability and sense of trustworthiness among those Haida he encountered. Dorsey and another man pillaged a shaman's grave near Hunter's Bay, Alaska, deeply offending the local Haida. So outrageous were Dorsey's brazen acts, the local clergyman in Masset complained bitterly, "[The Indians] tell me that bones & other things have been removed wholesale, & that the perpetrators had not even the grace to cover up their excavations." The church man, J. H. Keen, condemned Dorsey in a Victoria, British Columbia, newspaper.<sup>67</sup> Dorsey was actually arrested for his actions but quickly released on his own recognizance and a promise to return the stolen items—a promise that he never fulfilled.<sup>68</sup> Swanton mentioned the anger over this incident in a letter to his mother. He apparently escaped being treated as a scapegoat, but his tone, while not overtly harsh, shows Swanton's contempt for Dorsey's actions. "Here there are several interesting rows of graves on blocks of wood, boxed in, and having one or two carved figures in front," he reported. "An acquaintance and former instructor of mine, now in Chicago, made himself rather notorious right here by cleaning up the remains of all the dead Haida he could find here for the scientific betterment of his museum."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Daily Colonist*, Aug, 12, 1897, quoted in Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 175.

<sup>68</sup> Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 174-716.

When Boas admonished Swanton to serve as a collector along with gathering ethnological information, he attempted to pass those duties to George Newcombe, employed through the University of Pennsylvania. He worked in Haida Gwaii during the same time Swanton was there. Swanton, wanting no part in grave robbing or any activity that could be perceived as such, wrote Boas, characterizing Newcombe as strong “where I am not, i.e., in collecting.” Boas stubbornly insisted that Swanton continue with his ethnographic work but try and collect artifacts if the opportunity presented itself. Newcombe lacked Swanton’s abilities as a scholar and field worker, and Boas stressed this to Swanton. “I do not like to get specimens through Dr. Newcombe,” Boas exclaimed, “because he has not the scientific knowledge that you have, and your specimens will be well explained, while his will not be explained.”<sup>70</sup> Needless to say, Swanton simply continued on with his work of recording Haida traditions, and simply let the acquisition of Haida artifacts and bodily remains to other scholars that came after him. He felt confident that his recording of myths, songs, and linguistic material would more than compensate for what he lacked in acquiring material items.

Despite his Haida work being underappreciated and remaining relatively unknown by fellow anthropologists, Swanton’s sense of mission and sincere belief that Haida poetry deserved recognition come through in his correspondences and memoirs. A few letters Swanton penned to Boas after months of grueling work convey this. Here, at the end of his first expedition as a professional anthropologist, Swanton evaluated his work:

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<sup>69</sup> John R. Swanton to Mary Olivia Worcester, July, 12, 1901, (SFP: 1759-1955).

<sup>70</sup> Swanton to Boas, 9/30/1900; Boas to Swanton, 11/5/1900, Acc. 1901-1931, (AMNH).

I have got to that point in my career on this coast when my career seems to calm to a [seriatim] conquest of legends, beginning at Skidegate, extending to Massett and Kaigani and thence continuing its papery way from the Tungas [Tongass] to Copper River. At the same [time], I should shrink from the undertaking and I expect I shall be back within a year. But supposing I cannot make a complete sweep of Massett and Kaigani before it is time to return, it would break my heart to feel there was a story left that I had failed to gather...Haida mythology, I want to state here, [cannot] be defined as animal worship. The Haida pantheon was decorated just as lavishly as the Roman, and they seem even to have risen to the level of an Olympian Jove.<sup>71</sup>

One gets the impression that Swanton exhausted himself in Haida Gwaii. And while Swanton eventually put his findings from there to publication in numerous articles and a few large collections commemorating the Jesup Expedition, he never again would practice anthropology in quite the same way as he did during those months in 1900-1901. He remained fairly open minded regarding Native cultures later in his career, but his work with the Haida showcased a young scholar at the top of his game. Swanton's meticulous work helped future generations of Haida hold onto their sacred traditions. He was indeed the right man at the right time to meet with the elders he did. Through their collaborations, anthropologists and Haida communities are able to enjoy a body of rich oral history that has proven to be as informative as it is timeless in the truths they convey.<sup>72</sup>

Upon returning to Washington, Swanton enjoyed a few years settling into his new home in and his work as an anthropologist at the Bureau of American Ethnology. He finally met Bureau founder John Wesley Powell, though the few meetings between the two took place near the last months of the general's life. Swanton remembered him being

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<sup>71</sup> John Swanton to Franz Boas, 1/16/1901, in Bringhurst, *A Story Sharp as a Knife*, 178.

<sup>72</sup> For an example of Swanton's Haida work in published form, see John Swanton, *Haida Texts: Massett Dialect* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1908). See also, John Swanton, *Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1905a), and John Swanton, *Haida Texts and Myths: Skidegate Dialect* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1905).

somewhat brusque towards him, perhaps in an attempt to gauge the temperament of the young anthropologist. Swanton did observe that even at his advanced age, Powell always seemed deeply engaged in thought and absorbed in his leadership role. Overall, Swanton respected Powell for his hard work in making professional anthropology possible and for laying the foundations of a body of ethnological theory, even though his own work led to him to disagree with most of them.<sup>73</sup> Powell's robust personality likely took the sensitive Swanton by surprise too and the elderly war hero was probably just doing his job to meet with and welcome a new employee.

As the bureau's founder, Powell held a reputation for keeping abreast of who worked for him and the research they engaged in. The survival of the Bureau was never a certainty, and its establishment took a person of Powell's integrity and capabilities to see it founded. Those disorganized early years of the Bureau necessitated that Powell use his discretion over what ethnological pursuits warranted the limited funds available. He customarily allowed his employees wide leverage over their research projects, interfering minimally.<sup>74</sup> This was a practical and perceptive approach, as it gained him the respect of ethnologists who may have disagreed with his theories, but appreciated his willingness to grant them freedom to pursue their interests. Powell's practice in these regards unfortunately led to a minor controversy inadvertently involving Swanton.

Shortly after Powell's death, Secretary of the Smithsonian Samuel Langley began to feel pressure from the House Appropriations Committee concerning continued funding of the Bureau. The central issue concerned criticism over the speculative nature done by the Bureau. Some committee members felt that only practical studies with definitive

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<sup>73</sup> Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 31, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Moses, *The Indian Man*, 16.

results and endings should take precedence over the current methods. Changes meant an increased oversight by the Smithsonian Institution and an elimination of the position of Bureau Director. A new and less powerful position of Bureau Chief was created in its place.<sup>75</sup> Langley liked Powell but felt his method of running things could not be continued. His election of William Holmes over the more popular William McGee, who was most in line with Powell's vision, created a fair amount of controversy. Boas disagreed with McGee's theories but worked well with him and appreciated his loyalty to research-driven initiatives over a policy that disproportionately favored museum collections, and he complained about the selection of Holmes in an editorial in *Science*. In his rant, he argued that Langley's decision to choose Holmes over McGee helped foment a "feeling of general instability in the scientific service of the government.... He added that "Personal inclinations of [Langley] have once more out weighted the principles of continuity and stability."<sup>76</sup>

Part of Langley's new vision called for an investigation into possible mishandling of funds under Powell's administration. However, since Langley did not wish to call into question the competency of a man of Powell's standing, he directed the investigation into Powell's then right-hand-man, McGee. Part of this investigation concerned the funding of Swanton's linguistic work with Lakota and Chinook. He had been promised payment by the Bureau for his completed manuscripts at the end of 1902, which he accomplished. Boas had forwarded some his own money to Swanton before the Bureau distributed

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>76</sup> Boas to editor, Nov. 8, 1902, *Science* 16 (1902), 830.

payment. However, accusations that payment to Swanton was excessive forced him to give testimony at the Smithsonian.<sup>77</sup>

Nothing came of the hearing and Swanton resumed his regular duties. However, he did feel Holmes, who despised Boas, held a grudge against him as well. Swanton sympathized with Holmes, who apparently suffered from a nervous disposition; as a fellow sufferer of such a condition, Swanton related well. However, he did not hold Holmes's ability as Bureau Chief in high regard, as he rarely used his own discretion to make decisions for fear of angering Langley. McGee, tired of the fight to overturn Langley's decision, eventually resigned and worked the remainder of his career in geology. Swanton did not view McGee's contributions to anthropology in a good light. "He did not impress me as a profound thinker," Swanton condemned, "but as intensely desirous to win scientific consideration and while aping originality desperately rather by means of unusual verbiage than new ideas feared to depart from scientific 'party line' of his day." No doubt, Swanton had in mind McGee's adherence to racial theories of cultural development and stubborn adherence to an extremely late date for human presence in the Americas, despite heaps of evidence available to him and Holmes to the contrary.<sup>78</sup>

Swanton spent his early time in Washington revising his notes and translating the Haida texts taken in Skidegate and Masett and seemed content in his new role and surroundings. He also began compiling a dictionary of Haida and helped other

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<sup>77</sup> John Reed Swanton, "Notes Regarding," 33.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 33-34.

colleagues with recording their own Northwest Coast research.<sup>79</sup> As his professional duties assumed a comfortable routine, Swanton appreciated the break in the hectic schedule of archeological and anthropological work he had maintained since graduate school. This short break from field work allowed his social life to catch up, and in the most unexpected fashion. Swanton's shyness remains a defining character trait and he never gave an account in his journals or letters up to this point of his experiences with females. However, that changed in 1902 when he met the love of his life and future wife, Alice Barnard.

Alice's love provided Swanton with confidence and purpose, helping to offset some of the insecurities that had plagued him. Born in 1877, Alice remained a shy and kind woman all of her life. Alice was originally named Fanne Bryant and her background in some ways paralleled Swanton's own tragic circumstances of losing a parent while a child. While Swanton lost his father before being born, Alice's mother passed away while she and her six sisters were young girls. Her father abandoned his daughters, leaving Alice to live in an orphanage for a time. Her eventual adoption into the Barnard family provided her with a stable upbringing but never diminished the pain of her mother's death and her father's betrayal.<sup>80</sup>

Out of professional necessity and sense of adventure, Swanton and Alice decided to marry on the same night that Swanton was to set out for Alaska to conduct ethnological work with Tlingit Indian communities. Their engagement met with great joy on both of their family's sides. Swanton and his brothers remained close throughout

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<sup>79</sup> Lianne Burke, Chronological Summary of the Activities of John R. Swanton (1970), 1, National Anthropological Archives: Smithsonian Institution. Hereafter cited as CS (NAA).

<sup>80</sup> John Reed Swanton to Dorothy Swanton Brown, n.d. 1955, (SFP: 1759-1955).

their lives, making it unfortunate that his older brother Harry was unable to attend the wedding, scheduled for December 16, 1903 in Washington, D.C. at the Church of the New Jerusalem. He was in Florida and his travel plans were being held up for some reason. As was the custom of the Swanton brothers to joke around with each other, Harry jested John about trying to get out of the marriage by running away to Alaska and that Alice must have discovered his plan. Alice did get along well with Swanton's brothers, and they both missed his presence.<sup>81</sup>

Alice remained closest to Swanton's mother, Mary. The two became close and confided in one another for the remainder of their lives. Mary assumed a maternal role to Alice and provided her with advice and comfort, especially when Swanton was away for work. Mary also confided her own insecurities to Alice, perhaps against her better judgment, for Alice needed no warnings for what she would soon know firsthand. For example, while happy with the engagement, Mary expressed concern to Alice in a letter regarding Swanton's meager salary not being sufficient to provide for a family in the spring of 1902.<sup>82</sup> Sadly, while they made ends meet, financial difficulties did plague John and Alice, which especially caused the bride great stress throughout their marriage. Alice, despite her cheerful demeanor and genuine kindness, suffered from what would today be diagnosed as an anxiety disorder. Her experiences with a volatile, unpredictable childhood left her with insecurities similar to Swanton's own. An example of this came in the way she expressed feelings of inadequacy to a friend about marrying a man of

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<sup>81</sup> Henry Swanton to John Swanton, Dec. 15, 1903, Correspondence Concerning the Engagement and Wedding of Alice and John Reed Swanton, April–December 1903, Additional Papers, 1784, 1924 (85-m267-87-m167, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hereafter cited as Correspondence Concerning (SFP: 1784-1924).

<sup>82</sup> Mary Olivia Worcester to Alice Barnard, n.d., Correspondence Concerning (SFP: 1784-1924).

Swanton's worth and intellect. Her friend consoled her and assured her that this was not true, but Alice's emotional distress remained an issue for her for the rest of her life.<sup>83</sup>

The night of December 16 arrived and resulted in Swanton and Alice's joyful wedding, followed by the newlyweds leaving their celebrating families to set out for Sitka, Alaska. The purpose behind this second trip to the Far North centered on finding the extent to which Haida and Tlingit communities shared a common linguistic and cultural heritage. Swanton and Alice spent four months in Sitka and Wrangell, Alaska. After taking some time to take in the beautiful Alaskan scenery and seafood and enjoy their honeymoon, Swanton spent January 9 through March 21, 1904 working with Northern Tlingit collaborators, and March 21 through May 5 collecting cultural data from the Southern Tlingit.<sup>84</sup>

Swanton's work produced a significant body of Tlingit oral literature. By far, the greatest body of his Tlingit work is contained in the classic, *Tlingit Myths and Texts*, which contains over a hundred myths.<sup>85</sup> However, despite most critics agreeing that his Haida work represents his best work among the Northwest Coastal tribes, Swanton's Tlingit material remains more well-known and in great circulation. One reason why Swanton's Haida work remains superior to the work with the Tlingit is that he was distracted on this trip in a way he was not a few years prior. With his wife along, he likely felt an obligation to spend as much time as possible with her, resulting in him cutting some corners. Alice kept a diary of their trip, and while she enjoyed herself the

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<sup>83</sup> Nellie Wilson to Alice Barnard, Apr. 27, 1903, Correspondence Concerning (SFP: 1784-1924).

<sup>84</sup> John Swanton, *Social Condition, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1909), Introduction.

<sup>85</sup> John Swanton, *Tlingit Myths and Texts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, 1909).

majority of the time, she did admit some annoyance at Swanton's long hours away from her. And Swanton apparently insisted on working with his Tlingit singers late into the night, at times using a small room right next to her quarters, keeping her up. Her entry on March 3 reads, "John's old Indian friend comes down here now and sings in the phonograph. I can hear him in my room. It sounds awful."<sup>86</sup> Whether or not she voiced these displeasures is unknown. What is clear, judging from Swanton's previous work with Indians, is that regardless of his wife's annoyance at times, protocol demanded he respect the times his collaborators felt comfortable working with him.

Another indication that Swanton compromised his work ethic in his Tlingit work is that he employed the same strategy this entire trip that he used only once in Haida Gwaii when exhaustion overtook him. During one episode gathering information with the Haida, he opted to dispense with transcribing the material in the native language. Instead, he recorded the stories in English only. Swanton did this only once, commenting to Boas, "I think it is entirely possible to put in too much time taking texts. I can take new ones now with very little trouble, but it would only be addressing the known to the known. After having taken a good number of texts, unless one has unlimited time, it seems to me just as well to take the rest in English."<sup>87</sup>

Regardless of his methodology, Swanton's work remains highly regarded among many contemporary Tlingit communities. A series of meetings held by Tlingit elders in 2003 to determine the most appropriate and accurate oral narratives to use in a school

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<sup>86</sup> The Diary of Alice Barnard: April 12-May 21, 1903 In Washington, D.C, Diary December 10, 1903-June 9, 1904 to Sitka, Alaska and Back, March 3, May 2, 1904, Swanton Family Papers, Additional Papers, 1784, 1924, (85-m267-87-m167, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>87</sup> John Swanton to Franz Boas, Feb. 2, 1900, in Robert Bringhurst, *A Story Sharp as a Knife*, 178.

curriculum validated Swanton's contributions. In particular, focus centered on a story, entitled, "Aak 'wtaatseen," (Salmon Boy), which remains a beloved classic that touches upon themes central to Tlingit culture, such as the respect various nonhuman persons deserve and the important role healers play in maintaining community balance between human beings and their animal relative counterparts.<sup>88</sup> In the abstract to the Tlingit elder's symposium, Swanton's work was praised along with some understandable doubts about his objectivity and grasp of the language thrown in. One commentator noted,

In general, his Haida scholarship was better than his Tlingit work; it has stood the test of time and continues to attract the attention of linguists, poets, and others who turn to it as a basis for modern adaptations. As noted elsewhere, there are some problems with Swanton's Tlingit work, but it remains an amazing treasure-trove of material from a century ago that is still precious today, though it needs to be used with caution in many places.<sup>89</sup>

The Tlingit linguist goes on to state the benefits and limitations of Swanton's work,

Still, fluent speakers of Tlingit can decipher the writing and understand the stories today. Some places present problems, either where Swanton was wrong because he mis-heard or mis-understood something; or where Swanton was correct, but the word in question is no longer used or understood by most Tlingit speakers...Despite its faults, Swanton's work remains a monument and a touchstone for the study of Tlingit language and culture today, and we believe that a new generation of scholars can work with knowledgeable community elders to correct or call attention to questionable or problematic parts of Swanton's publications.<sup>90</sup>

Swanton's earliest professional work with Northwest Coastal communities are good examples of how potentially fruitful Indian and anthropological collaborations can be when respect is distributed equally among both parties. Contemporary Haida and Tlingit tribal members acknowledge Swanton's limitations as a non-Indian working

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<sup>88</sup> Swanton, *Tlingit Myths and Texts*, 301-310.

<sup>89</sup> Notes Edited by Richard Dauenhauer as part of the "Aak 'wtaatseen: Alive in the Edd" Unit of the I am Salmon Curriculum, Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI) in partnership with Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Sitka School District, Juneau School District, 2003, pg. 2.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 2

among them over a hundred years ago, but are also able to appreciate his skill at collecting and preserving many of their sacred traditions and cherished stories. The balance struck between Swanton's effort during a time in which many Indians views as "the bad old days" of ethnological inquiry gives rise to the possibility that similar instances can increasingly take place in the future.

## Chapter 5: The Southeastern Legacy (1907-1930)

When anthropologist Ann Jordan and Creek medicine man David Lewis Jr. agreed to collaborate on a book in 2002 exploring the persistence of Muskogee religion, she learned a lesson concerning the sharp contrasts between Indian and non-Indian approaches to history. Lewis, great grandson of the renowned Hitchiti<sup>1</sup> Creek medicine man Jackson Lewis, said to her on several occasions that “you and I live in two different worlds and I can come into your world but you can’t come into mine.”<sup>2</sup> Jordan thought the statement’s meaning was obvious enough. Lewis was born and raised in a Creek culture predicated on spiritual and kinship obligations, whereas Jordan was a white anthropologist with a completely different cultural background. Unlike Jordan, Lewis’ circumstances presented him with a unique opportunity to become proficient in working in both Creek and white societies. Even when Jordan told Lewis what she thought he had meant, he refused to comment directly.<sup>3</sup> Instead, he told her the following story:

When the time comes for me to go into the woods to fast for four days I’ve already made up my mind what years of my life I want to see. I go to the sacred ground or square and use the medicine I have prepared for this occasion. After I have finished all the things I was taught to do, I usually lean back and close my eyes and go back in time. I have gone back to the days I was being born. I have watched my mom push me out into this world as my grandmother received or delivered me and my dad standing close by their side with the medicine in his hand that was to be used on me. I watched as they gave me some medicine to drink and washed me down with another type of medicine to work on my motor system. I have gone back to the time I began to walk. This was a time of training in how to identify the medicine plants you are going to use the rest of your life for your people. You learn the type of flower and color of certain plants and whether they grow tall or stay close to the ground. You learn the type of bark on the tree and the shape of the leaves and their colors. I have watched myself as my grandmother or dad gave me a

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<sup>1</sup> David Lewis Jr. seems comfortable referring to himself as Hitchiti and Creek/Muskogee interchangeably, as the two communities are closely linked culturally and linguistically. However, his own father preferred the Hitchiti designation.

<sup>2</sup> David Lewis and Ann Jordan, *Creek Indian Medicine Ways: The Enduring Power of Muskoke Religion* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, xviii-xix.

medicine root and have me smell and bite into the root so I would know what it tasted like. I have gone back to the days of initiations many times, for what reason I still don't know. I could be the energy or power of the unknown that I witness on that day. I have gone back to the time when as a little boy I sat on my grandmother's lap as she recited the medicine words that someday I would follow the footsteps of our great people who have gone before.<sup>4</sup>

Jordan, a gifted anthropologist and an astute observer and listener, realized Lewis intended to teach her something through this exchange. She needed further clarification and Lewis obliged her, commenting:

So what I meant when I said we live in two worlds and I can come into yours but you can't step over into mine was these two realities. You cannot come into the reality of the medicine people. It is different from the reality of this world. And you will never know it. You will never know what that change of energy is like. But you didn't understand what I meant before. I didn't give you enough information to understand what I meant. You tried to figure out what I meant with what knowledge you had and you didn't know about this other world of mine. I am in your world but I can also live in my world that no person can come into.<sup>5</sup>

At last, the story's message penetrated Jordan's psyche. She came to realize that Indian people have been and continue to be in control of the exchange of knowledge flowing from collaborator to anthropologist. No amount of academic training or sympathetic platitudes compensate for these experiences. Indians can either choose to correct outsider misunderstandings or ignore them. Without coming to grips with the fact that Native peoples retain control over what stories they reveal and in what manner they divulge them, scholars will continue to remain ignorant of the truly important questions to ask.<sup>6</sup>

In this case, David Lewis Jr. told a story in a way not always noticed or appreciated by anthropologists now or in Swanton's time. Many Native people view their oral traditions as

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, xix.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, xx.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, xi.

more than just historical accounts in accordance with Western understandings. They allow individual caretakers of these traditions to use them creatively as living mediums in which current hardships and realities can be commented on and dealt with. Lewis's words highlight the gulf that exists between the experiential realities of being a 21st-century Creek medicine person and academic assumptions. Lewis also validates his role as a medicine person by placing himself within a long line of Creek technicians of the sacred by projecting himself backwards in time, accounting for his birth and subsequent rearing in Muskogee religion. He uses this narrative tactic to comment on the impossibility for scholars to ever fully comprehend, even with extensive field work, what it means to be a Muskogee wielder of sacred power.

Almost one hundred years prior to Ann Jordan and David Lewis's encounter, Swanton worked with David Lewis's great grandfather Jackson Lewis. And, as with Jordan's experience with the younger Lewis, Swanton appreciated Jackson Lewis but often misunderstood him for similar reasons. This encounter took place early during Swanton's work in Oklahoma with the Creek and other communities that had been forcibly removed from their native southeastern homelands. From 1907 through his retirement on June 30, 1944, Swanton worked tirelessly to compile a massive body of Native cultural data from the Gulf Coast regions of the Southeast. His most significant body of work stems from working with the Creeks and their four Oklahoman neighbors: the Seminole, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw. Collectively, they are

known as the “Five Civilized Tribes.”<sup>7</sup> His trips to “Creek Country” took place in 1910, 1911, and 1912.<sup>8</sup>

His legacy in this regard is well established. Oftentimes the significance of an anthropologist’s contributions often takes decades after his death to be appreciated by members of the profession. However, Swanton’s southeastern work received recognition during his lifetime. For example, four years prior to his retirement, the Bureau of American Ethnology published a series of papers over the historical development of American anthropology in Swanton’s honor.<sup>9</sup> And just a year after his death in 1958, Swanton’s good friend, William Fenton, acknowledged Swanton’s encyclopedic collection of ethnological information on southeastern communities, commenting, “Mention of the area automatically brings to all of us the association of his name.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet, despite such an impressive body of work in this regard, Swanton in many ways neglected the lessons he learned during his work with the Haida at the start of his career. He collected hundreds of tribal creation accounts and other oral traditions, and observed religious ceremonies firsthand. His faithful recording of the communications of his collaborators and his own observations of southeastern tribes remained as thorough as his previous work. However, he fell victim to an all-too-common anthropological shortcoming in interpreting Native

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<sup>7</sup> The term refers to these communities’ early contact with whites. Due to adopting some customs of whites, such as English language and elements of Christianity, their southern non-Indian neighbors felt they were more civilized than other Native American tribes. However, these five large and complex tribes retained their Native identities while adopting elements from neighboring whites that proved useful. This characteristic was not always acknowledged or appreciated by whites in the Southeast.

<sup>8</sup> Lianne Burke, Chronological Summary of the Activities of John R. Swanton (1970), 1, National Anthropological Archives: Smithsonian Institution pg. 1-9. Hereafter cited as CS (NAA).

<sup>9</sup> William Fenton, “The Work of John Reed Swanton,” *Essays in Historical Anthropology of North America: Published in Honor of John R. Swanton in Celebration of His Fortieth Year with the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington, D.C. : The Smithsonian Institution, 1940).

<sup>10</sup> William N. Fenton, “John Reed Swanton, 1873-1958,” *American Anthropologist* 61 (August 1959): 663.

American creation stories and other oral narratives: that their meanings are exclusively at the discretion of the storyteller and community involved. Like Ann Jordan learned and came to appreciate with David Lewis Jr., Native persons choose what stories to reveal, how to tell them, and what to omit at any given time during encounters with anthropologists. Swanton was consumed with dissecting southeastern Indian accounts of their own histories in order to shed light on what “really” happened, missing out on one of the key points of Native historicity. Again, indigenous peoples told and determined factual truth according to their own cultural protocols. Consequently, tribal critiques are often embodied within Indian oral accounts and mythologies concerning real historical interactions with Euro-Americans as well as with other Indian nations.<sup>11</sup>

The way in which indigenous peoples wielded oral traditions in this manner, while not unique to the time period Swanton worked in Oklahoma and the Mississippi Valley, seem to be most prevalent in the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. Despite

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<sup>11</sup> While the following example comes from a different tribal context, consider a Three Affiliated Tribe’s (in North Dakota) version of a creation account, told by John Brave, a member of the Mandan. Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear when this story was told, but more than likely comes from the early twentieth-century. Brave stated that when God made “white man’s cattle,” the horns were so crooked and bent out of shape they had to walk “funny” (bow-legged?). God said “save those strange animals for later, for now I’ll make buffalo for the Indians.” Clearly this rendering was meant to convey a moral judgment on the animals Europeans brought with them across the ocean. It is a fact that in many instances, tribes struggled to keep domesticated livestock from eating their crops and other food supplies. Another telling by John Brave (again, without a precise date but probably from 1947-1954) consisted of both God and “Lone Man” finding red-headed maggots in a wolf body. Neither one wanted to take credit for such an abominable sight, so the man threw them across the lake. “In the days to come,” Lone Man spoke, “they’ll have intelligence.” From here, the narrator continued, “when you see white men, some of whom have red heads, they are descendants of those maggots. And today these white men are very intelligent, as it was promised. Today they are doing everything which seems impossible.” On this point historian Peter Nabokov speculates that John Brave may be commenting directly on the construction of the Garrison Dam along the middle Missouri River.<sup>11</sup> Here the storyteller is accounting for the origin and consequences that white immigration have held for his people. It again not only demonstrates the fluidity of Indian myths, but their power to provide a sense of emotional and psychological control over current difficulties, even if only through a story. See Peter Nabokov *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 94-95.

misinterpreting or devaluing this facet of Native oral traditions, Swanton's meticulous work ethic and gathering of information, particularly with the Creeks, proves immensely helpful in illustrating this theme. The folkloric and mythological fluidity from Native communities traditionally located in the American Southeast is particularly interwoven into their tumultuous experiences of leading up to relocations into Oklahoma in the mid-1830s through statehood in 1907. The stories collected by Swanton, in part, seem to reference the negative aspects of white intrusions into their lives. However, one gropes in vain in any attempt to determine exactly when particular stories came into existence. More than likely, many additions or changes were simply added back into ancient narrative formats.

During the later decades of the nineteenth-century into the first two decades of the twentieth, anthropologists strove to fashion as accurate a rendering of the Creek Confederacy's formation as possible. None of them enjoyed the success that Swanton did in this area. When he first arrived into Creek Country in 1907, Swanton made this one of his main goals. Between the years 1907 and 1912 he conducted several expeditions into Oklahoma, Texas, and nearby areas in an attempt to fashion a likely scenario by perusing old Indian agent and missionary records, as well as through interviews with elder tribespersons. On these points Swanton hoped to make the most progress by gathering together traditional creation accounts from various informants.

Swanton found that the Muskogee proper possessed traditional creation stories to account for their arrival into what are today Georgia and Alabama. One such story has them migrating from the west to the east, crossing muddy rivers, and overcoming many tribulations before arriving at their new home. Along the way, kinships with different groups were established due

to episodes along the journey.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, Swanton felt confident that the Creek Confederacy more than likely predated the arrival of Europeans, but continued to grow stronger with early contact until warfare and disease took their toll in diminishing it. But, as was customary for Swanton, he remained humble, commenting on his own historical reconstruction: “Of course, no claim of infallibility is made for this classification. The connection of some of the tribes thus brought together is well known, while others are placed with them on rather slender circumstantial evidence.”<sup>13</sup>

Consisting of two divisions, the Lower Towns resided along the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers, while the Upper Towns spread out along the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers. Over time, the Muskogees incorporated distinct communities into the Confederacy, such as the Tuskegees, Alabamas and Koasatas, Natchez, Euchees, Abekas, Tuckabatchees, Cussetas, and Hichitees. Demonstrating the attractiveness of joining the Confederacy for safety purposes, only the Alabamas, Koasatas, Hichitees, and Tuskegees were of Muskogean linguistic stock. The others were either distantly related or spoke an Algonquian dialect.<sup>14</sup> Proving that language alone did not necessarily ensure close alliances, the Seminoles, while linguistically Muskogean, came to be only nominally part of Confederacy negotiations. Even the name Seminole (“people who camp at a distance”) connotes their designation as a distinctly separate people. Though they maintained many traditional Muskogean stories and mythological traditions, the Seminoles, by the late eighteenth-century, remained out of the purview of their nominal kinsmen when the

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<sup>12</sup> John Swanton, *Early History of The Creek Indians & Their Neighbors* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998) 191-193, original published as John Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1922). See also Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of The Creek Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 3. Debo is among the first scholars to rely on Swanton’s work as a primary reference in charting Creek and other southeastern tribal histories.

<sup>13</sup> Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 203-215, and Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 4-5.

Americans increased influence over the Confederacy. The Seminoles were left alone in Florida to deal with the Spanish.<sup>15</sup>

Swanton's work in establishing the likely history of the Creek Confederacy remains an important contribution, but his concern with locating a perfect match between written records and oral accounts resulted in him refusing to appreciate Creek attempts to use some of those same stories to comment on recent historical episodes of importance to them as well as current events. For instance, Swanton was confronted with an account of Creek origins that served the purpose of commenting on recent developments in their history, not just on Confederacy beginnings. In this case, the version told to Swanton reflects Creek memories of their horrific removal into Oklahoma, abolition of their governments, and the allotment process that ensued after statehood.

The written account Swanton hoped to corroborate came from an anthropologist named Albert Gatschet in 1884. Gatschet worked with Ward Coachman, a man of Alabama descent. He gave Gatschet an account of his people's origins. The Alabama and Koasati stressed their creation as the result of emerging from a cave underground, whereas the Muskogee proper experienced their creation as a migration somewhere back west.<sup>16</sup> The following is the story that Gatschet was told:

Old Alabama men used to say that the Alabama came out of the ground near the Alabama River a little upstream from its junction with the [Tombighee], close to Holsifa (Choctaw Bluff). After they had come out, an owl hooted. They were scared and most of them went back into the ground. That is why the Alabama are few in number. The Alabama

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<sup>15</sup> Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians*, 398-404.

<sup>16</sup> Common throughout the American Southwest and Mexico, emergence cosmogonies are said to be related to horticultural food production. See Ake Hultkrantz, *Native Religions of North America: The Power of Visions and Fertility* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1987), 18.

towns are Tawasa, Pawoki, Oktcaiyutci, Atauga, Hatcafa-ska (River Point, at the junction of the Coosa and Tallapoosa), and Wetumka.<sup>17</sup>

Swanton wanted to see if this account remained current among his collaborators in the early twentieth century. As luck would have it, he came across an Alabama lady in Texas knowledgeable in these matters. Aside from her rendering including the Koasati emerging simultaneously with the Alabama and leaving out entirely mention of an owl, her version is helpful in demonstrating the malleability of Native creation accounts. She narrated,

At first they came out of the earth only during the night time, going down again when day came. Presently a white man came to the place, saw the tracks, and wanted to find the people. He went there several times, but could discover none of them above ground. By and by he decided upon a ruse, so he left a barrel of whiskey near the place where he saw the footsteps. When the Indians came out again to play they saw the barrel, and were curious about it, but at first no one would touch it. Finally, however, one man tasted of its contents, and presently he began to feel good and to sing and dance about. Then the others drank also and became so drunk that the white man was able to catch them. Afterward the Indians remained on the surface of the earth.<sup>18</sup>

Swanton expressed disappointment that the story was not a replication of Gatschet's recording. The fact that the account told to Swanton mentioned the appearance of whites struck him as a sign that the story was no longer remembered accurately. What Swanton overlooked was that the existence of another Alabamian emergence story indicated the story changed for certain reasons. This version suggests an awareness of the consequences of whites upsetting their community.

Working about ten years after Swanton's death, anthropologist Howard Martin located an account almost identical to the one Swanton recorded. A difference lay in that the Cussetas, not the Koasati, emerged alongside the Alabamas. More importantly, this version contained a longer

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<sup>17</sup> Albert Gatschet interview with Ward Coachman, quoted in Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians & Their Neighbors*, 192.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

ending: “Then the others drank also and became so drunk that the white man was able to catch them. After that the Alabamas and Coushattas had to stay on top of the earth and *were not allowed to go near the big cave.*”<sup>19</sup> Granted, Martin’s account may or may not have predated the one told to Swanton and could have been the Native storyteller’s own personal editorial. However, Swanton’s account does mention whites and alcohol. This suggests the likelihood that his collaborator (the Alabama woman) was aware of this version. In any case, by delving deeper into the story’s history, it would have been interesting to see Swanton attempt to interpret this story on its own terms.

Along the same lines, Swanton’s work in Oklahoma also included encountering a Hitchiti migration account explaining how they arrived into the southeastern United States.<sup>20</sup> This version, told to Swanton by one of his most trusted informants, Jackson Lewis, again inserts whites into the foundational narrative of Creek beginnings to act as foils and adversaries. Within the story, the Hitchiti came to a place where the sea was frozen, crossed it, and traversed towards the east until they reached the Atlantic Ocean. Finding themselves blocked by the ocean and admiring the land near the shore, they decided to stay. The women and children helped construct beautiful rattles, and they contented themselves in their new land. Lewis continued:

and while they were there on the shore...people came across the water to visit them. These were the white people, and the Indians treated them hospitably, and at that time they were on very friendly terms with each other. The white people disappeared, however, and when they did so they left a keg of something which we now know was whisky. A cup was left with this, and the Indians began pouring whisky into this cup and smelling of it, all being much pleased with the odor. Some went so far as to drink a little. They became intoxicated and began to reel and stagger around and butt each other with

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<sup>19</sup> Howard Martin, “Folktales of the Alabama-Coushatta Indians,” in *Mexican Border Ballads and Other Lore*, ed. Mody C. Boatright (Reprint, Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1967), 66. Emphasis mine.

<sup>20</sup> Migration accounts are often understood as creation account for some southeastern tribes, as the journey is a creative understanding of how the community came together and developed a sense of identity over time.

their heads. Then the white came back and the Indians began trading peltries, etc. . . . , for things which the white people had.<sup>21</sup>

Surprisingly, an earlier telling recorded by Albert Gatschet around 1880 included many of the same details Lewis's version did, but left out the appearance of whites and their leaving of whiskey to befuddle the Indians, departing, and returning to further weaken them. Gatschet gave no reason for this or let on that he was even aware of different versions of the Hitchiti migration narrative.<sup>22</sup>

Swanton's admiration for Jackson Lewis is on par with his appreciation of his Haida informant, Ghandl, and he did not disparage the seemingly anachronistic inclusion of whites in the migration account he told. Lewis's service to Swanton cannot be overstated, and it is doubtful that Swanton would have been able to produce his classic account of Muskogee religion, *Creek Religion and Medicine*, without his assistance.<sup>23</sup> The two collaborated in 1911, just before Lewis died. As a sign of his admiration for Lewis, Swanton said things like "Jackson Lewis, a Hitchiti doctor who stood high in the estimation of both Indians and whites," and "Jackson Lewis whose evidence is always valuable." Swanton also mentioned, "Jackson Lewis, one of my oldest and best informants."<sup>24</sup>

Lewis's skills as a medicinal specialist and the ease by which he learned to walk in Indian and white worlds, despite not knowing English, stemmed from living a truly remarkable life

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<sup>21</sup> Swanton, *Early History the Creek Indians & Their Neighbors*, 172-173.

<sup>22</sup> Albert Gatschet, *A Migration Legend of the Creek Indians, With a Linguistic, Historic and Ethnographic Introduction*, (Reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1968). Reproduced in Bill Grantham. *Creation Myths of the Creek Indians* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 135-136.

<sup>23</sup> See John Swanton, *Creek Religion and Medicine* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000) originally published as John Swanton, *Religious Beliefs and Medicinal Practices of the Creek Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1924/1925). Lewis and his expertise is cited numerous times in this work.

<sup>24</sup> John Swanton, *Social Organization and Social Usages of the Indians of the Creek Confederacy*, Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report 42:23-472, 1928, pg. 147, 436.

before meeting Swanton. As a young boy, Lewis made the journey with his family during their forced relocation from Alabama into Indian Territory in the late 1830s. During this ordeal, Lewis nearly drowned while crossing the Mississippi River. This experience resulted in his accruing a reputation as a person of power. As he was drowning, Lewis grabbed the horse's tail in a desperate bid to keep from being swept away. Onlookers gasped in horror as the horse nearly went under. However, someone noticed a small person appear and stand atop the horse's back, immediately calming it. This same unidentified person then recounted the little person directing the horse to safety along a nearby shore. Little people hold a place of importance in many southeastern tribal cultures and are seen as spiritual entities warranting respect. From then on, Lewis's name was changed to "Jock-O-Gee." "Gee" means little and the name, in part, recognized that the young Lewis won in his struggle against the mighty river. But there was more to this name change, too. Lewis's other great grandson, Chester Scott, gave the following account of the ordeal based on family tradition:

The name had a second unspoken but more powerful meaning. No one had seen the 'little people' for at least four generations. Yet, it was clear that the mark of the Great Spirit and the 'little people' were on Jock-O-Gee. No one dared to speak the river's name. 'Gee' was as close as they dared to speak the full name of the 'little people.' The knowledge and protection by the 'little people' reside with peace-makers. From the day the river was crossed, 'they' were with Jock-O-Gee, teaching him how to doctor sick people in the new land with new herbs and plants.<sup>25</sup>

From then on, Lewis's road to becoming a holy man and doctor among his people took root.

Lewis also made a living in Indian Territory as blacksmith and served in the Civil War, resulting in many stories being told about his exploits as member of the Creek Volunteers (part of the Confederacy). These accounts of his bravery and near-death escapes during fierce fighting resulted in another name change, Lahta Yahola, which was a traditional Creek name earned

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<sup>25</sup> Lewis and Jordan, *Creek Indian Medicine Ways*, 25-26.

through battle. His grandson, David Lewis Sr., once discussed Jackson Lewis's prowess as a person of great power in an interview with the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, stating, "My grandfather, Jackson Lewis, was able to predict storms and cure all kinds of ailments...I learned a lot from him. I listened well to his words. He told me not to smoke or drink. It would hurt my brain and I could not understand the little folk and be able to cure sickness."<sup>26</sup>

With direct access to such a knowledgeable steward of Creek traditions, why did Swanton fail to appreciate the adaptability of Native oral traditions to meet multiple purposes, one being to provide commentary on issues significant to a community's history since being first documented by whites? As with his experiences with his primary Lakota collaborator, Joseph Estes, Swanton suffered a kind of tunnel vision. He and other anthropologists held expectations of what a "real" Indian was supposed to consist of. Fixed in their minds was the "noble redman" garbed in buckskin and war paint, tirelessly practicing the ways of their ancestors since time immemorial. The rest of the world's cultures, including Swanton's own, could change over time and still be viewed as the same tradition, but Native Americans were expected to remain the same over centuries' worth of time. The fact that Estes and Lewis converted to Christianity while retaining status as respected men in their own communities seemed to be lost on Swanton, too.

A good reason for this is likely due to the nature of the interactions between them, offsetting Swanton's skepticism of their individual testimonies. For instance, the personal dynamic between Swanton and Lewis allowed Swanton to temporarily suspend judgment regarding his profile. But, these experiences with someone that contradicted his immediate outlook did not translate into a new approach in general to the dynamic nature of Native cultures

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 31.

as embodied in their oral traditions. As the following accounts taken from Swanton's additional work with southeastern communities demonstrate, the theoretical methodology he had been reared in proved problematic in fully appreciating possible meanings behind these stories other than as signs of cultural decline.

In one instance, Swanton recorded another Alabama story that conveyed further the consternation Oklahoma Indians felt toward dishonest whites who cheated them out of money. Entitled "Money-Spitter," the tale opens with a parentless girl living with her grandmother. One day while going to round up some hogs and carrying bread made of chaff, she encountered two old women. They asked her what she was carrying, and after telling them, said that she was out "hunting for hogs." Promising to help her in this pursuit, they started off together until they came across some. When one ran away, the girl pursued it until she became so tired that she started coughing. She continued to do so until her coughing fit produced a nickel, followed by a dime, and then a quarter. During this time, she continued to grow increasingly tired from trying to round up the hogs as well. She finally arrived back home but continued to cough, eventually spitting up a whole trunk of money. Seeing the sick girl and the fair amount of silver she had produced, "the white people...liked what the girl coughed up and got it."<sup>27</sup> Another version, more than likely told by the same narrator because Swanton included it within the same heading, states that the girl coughed up frogs instead of coins, and makes no mention of white people stealing from her.

Again, how should the above stories be evaluated? It is not at all clear if these tales were developed in close temporal proximity to their recording or if they predated the barrage of American anthropologists onto reservations. Regardless, individual Indians clearly possessed the

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<sup>27</sup> John Swanton, *Myths and Tales of the Southeastern Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1929), 163-164.

ability to share multiple versions of similar stories. The emphasis each one placed on white duplicitously encouraging drunkenness in order to cheat Indians out of their belongings does reflect the very real life circumstances Oklahoma tribes experienced at the turn of the twentieth-century, and it is to these circumstances one should turn to best account for the reasons Creek narratives changed in the manner they did.

Furthermore, after passage of the Dawes Act in 1887, ten years ensued before allotment arrived at the doorsteps of the “Five Civilized Tribes.” Representatives from each nation attempted to ward off land distribution, which had already devastated tribes like the Iowa and relocated Winnebago. Attempts to create an all-Indian state ultimately failed, paving the way for Congress to abolish all Indian governments through passage of the Curtis Act in 1898.<sup>28</sup> As with removal, a facade of Indian approval for allotment was needed. The ensuing orgy of “dirty tricks” aimed at gaining Indian acceptance is legendary, and led to several violent Indian resistance movements to maintain traditional ways of life. Using alcohol to sway Indians to submit to land redistribution and pitting mixed-blooded citizens against their full-blood kinspersons were just a few of the less-than-honorable means used by representatives of the Federal Government. One Cherokee said of this process,

The Indian people don't want their allotments...but at the same time some of them take them, for they (whites) force them into it...The white man can come among us and give us whiskey and get us drunk and he can get us to do anything...they would send half-breeds around...and hunt the names down of the full-bloods without their consent, and they would take the names down and present them before the Dawes Commission...and take an oath on it...[then, the full-bloods] would find a certificate of allotment sent to them at the post office.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Nabokov *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present 1492-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 257.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Nabokov, *Native American Testimony*, 258.

Concurrent with the allotment of 160 acres per Indian family was the government's belief in the myth of the "vanishing Indian" during this time. While the indigenous population did decrease drastically in the years since first contact, their numbers overall started to rise in the early 1900s. This trend continued, and soon 160 acres simply was not substantial enough to provide for succeeding Indian generations. For a while officials attempted to impede fraudulent land acquisitions at the hands of whites through instituting a twenty-year moratorium for Indians attaining fee simple title to their land. In the meantime, the federal government assumed the role of overseer of Indian allotments and the mineral resources that lay beneath the land. Then, in 1906 the government passed the Burke Act, which allowed the Bureau of Indian Affairs to determine an individual's competency in handling his or her own property transactions.<sup>30</sup> Oklahoma Indians witnessed widespread abuses of this new legislation in the way of fake wills used as stand-ins for deceased Indians and fraudulent deeds written up for individuals that never lived. But appointment of non-Indian shysters as "guardians" for orphaned Indian children awaiting an inheritance from their parents proved to be the most destructive tactic used to separate individuals from their land.

Swanton was no fool and had to have realized the toll these events took on the communities he encountered. However, by his lack of commentary in these regards, he gives the impression of expecting his collaborators to put on hold their current tribulations when telling him stories. He seemed to have overlooked that the sense of Indian despair and hopelessness during the period leading up to Oklahoma statehood in 1907 most definitely informed the kinds of stories Creek Indians told him and other anthropologists. These sentiments often found their way into the narratives they told. How could the legacy of allotment, dissolution of their tribal

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 259-260.

governments, and fraudulent schemes to cheat Indians out of what little land and income they possessed not have contributed to certain myths being told? The structures and contents of the myths may have been old, but the particular contexts in which they were conveyed to scholars during an extremely tumultuous time were certainly not. For instance, another version of the Money-Spitter variety does contain elements that seem to chart out in general imagery this pattern of land theft, especially regarding Indians turning on each other and the consequences of the Burke Act. The narrator stated that:

The White men heard of that first girl who spit out money, came to the place where she lived, and tried to get hold of her. At first the old woman did not want to let them have her, but they kept on teasing until they overcame her with their entreaties and she gave her to them. Then they took her and went on and shut her up in a house. They brought all kinds of things to her. Then she sat down inside of the house and spit out money. But the old woman had nothing.<sup>31</sup>

Another origin story told to Swanton contains synopses of the Alabama's arrival into their traditional homeland of Alabama and Georgia and some of the difficulties they encountered with other tribes and Europeans. Beginning with the Alabama's journey across a large body of water, the story related how they settled down near a river, violently warred with the Choctaw, and then made peace with them. At some point, a man determined to go westward and took a sizable body of tribesmen with him until they reached a white blacksmith. Along with supplying the Indians with tools in exchange for deer meat, the blacksmith also gave them some whiskey. Some of the Indians got drunk while others resisted and took their friends back along the river. The story continued, "the white people came from the other side of the ocean long after the Alabama had crossed and tried to buy land from them. They would get the Indians drunk, and when they had had become sober they would find bags of money hung to their necks in payment

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<sup>31</sup> Swanton, *Myths and Tales*, 213.

for land. It was after they had sold their lands in this way that they came westward.” The story ends with a brief mention of the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-1848.<sup>32</sup>

Two other creation narratives echo the one above. One, a Yuchi account of other tribes’ formation and a leader’s journey to receive God’s message, was recorded by anthropologist Frank Speck. In it, the storyteller recounted how the Shawnee originated in the sky, some of the Creeks from the ground, and the Yuchi from the sun. After mingling with each other, the various Indian nations of the earth decided to remain separate peoples and to go their separate ways. When a Yuchi leader died and passed into the afterworld, Gohantone (creator being) informed him that while the land was supposed to belong to the Indians forever, the recently arrived whites would overwhelm them. They would increase until almost all the Indians would die, and “times would be terrible.” After his counsel with the creator, the dead chief sprang back to life and told a council of Choctaws, Creeks, and Yuchi of the coming crisis. The narrator of this story then ended the story rather ominously, saying “so the thing is coming to pass as Gohantone said it would.”<sup>33</sup>

While not a creation story per se, but still in a similar vein, Swanton recorded a description of the founding of the Coweta and Tuckabatchee alliance. According to tradition, after having read from the Bible the story of Adam and Eve and inquiring further of an elder about the origin of man, he told them that long ago, two Coweta men came from the northwest. After running and leaping through the air, somehow more Coweta came into existence. Then, everyone noticed lighting in the distance across some mountains in the south. Following it, the Coweta came across the Tuckabatchee, who came from the sky. After arriving together into the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 119-121.

<sup>33</sup> Frank Speck *Ethnology of the Yuchi Indians*. Anthropology Publication of the University of Pennsylvania Museum (1:1) 143. Reprint, (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, Inc, 1979).

Southeast, they saw a great flock of people emerge from the sea, known as the Nokfilagi (whites), “People of the foam drift,” and began fighting with and stealing from the Indians. At first the Indians successfully repelled them, but the whites were so devious that the Indians had to make treaties with them and give up more and more land.<sup>34</sup> A different version Swanton collected described the Tuckabatchee and Liwahali alliance in similar detail, but omitted completely any mention of Europeans arriving and stealing land.<sup>35</sup>

The forced removal of many southeastern tribes into Indian Territory resulted in terrible suffering and caused tension within these communities. Unfortunately, circumstances remained strained and filled with further conflict, as political pressure to confer statehood on Oklahoma and the introduction of the allotment policy entered into the lives of the displaced southeastern communities. Historians commonly posit the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 as the last Indian War, not only overlooking the nature and circumstances of the “battle,” but neglecting minor uprisings that occurred in Indian Territory into the twentieth-century as well.<sup>36</sup> A Muskogee named Chitto Harjo (a.k.a. “Crazy Snake”) almost single handedly led a small revolt against the government of Oklahoma dissolving Indian tribal governments and allotting communal land holdings. The “Crazy Snake” Revolt, along with similar “Five Civilized” tribal movements such as that of a Cherokee secret society known as the Keetowahs or “Nighthawks” led by Redbird Smith galvanized many Indian grievances into a united front against attacks on tribal sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> While these resistances ultimately failed, they are more representative of an

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<sup>34</sup> John Swanton, *Social Organization and Social Usages of the Indians of the Creek Confederacy* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1928), 68.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

<sup>36</sup> The massacre of over a hundred Lakota tribespersons, most of which were women and children, resulted from the Government mistaking the Sioux version of the Ghost Dance for an insurrection.

end to armed Indian conflict with the United States than Wounded Knee. The Ghost Dance, while preaching a message of nonviolent resistance to Euro-Americans, also looked to a time in which all whites would disappear during a series of natural calamities, leaving the world to “red people” and ushering in a return to aboriginal ways of life. Oklahoma movements, devoid of strong messianic and apocalyptic undertones, nonetheless sought a similar outcome, albeit through non-supernatural means. This is most obvious through stories told to Swanton and other anthropologists.

Soon thereafter, most tribes in the new Oklahoma seemed to endure the drastic alterations to their lives with equal amounts of resignation and nostalgia for earlier, less troublesome times before removal. Swanton recorded an example of this demeanor through a story told to him by the son of Creek Sam, a Natchez elder. Like he did with Jackson Lewis, Swanton appreciated listening to Creek Sam share his stories and felt his testimony to be reliable. The story is quite lengthy, but the parts that spoke to many Creeks living in Oklahoma held that two brothers were questioning their father as to the proper medicines he used to hunt animals. At first he withheld the information, letting the boys guess at the concoctions to attract game. The boys followed their father to a large mountain whereupon he opened a door and took out a deer. When they were sure that he was gone, the boys jumped down and threw open the door to the mountain:

Then deer, turkey, and all kinds of creatures began running out, and the boys began shooting at them, but they made no impression... Their father heard them, ran back, and shut the gate. Then he told them there were just a few things left inside. He said, “You can now go your way. You have let out all the game we had to live on. I had this game for my own use. Now you may get on as best you can. I am going back.” After their father had started off the larger boy began thinking over what had happened, and made something to follow his father... this is called a wagus (chunk stone)... The thing followed their father and when it had overtaken him struck him first on the heel and then on the

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<sup>37</sup> Nabokov, *Native American Testimony*, 257-258.

knee. He looked around in surprise, stood still for a time, and then went back to his boys, and said “I am sorry for you, but you have wasted what we had to live on. We cannot live any more on that, and we will go westward.

This story most likely references the gradual depletion of game animals through both Indian and white overhunting in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Southeast. A decline in using the proper medicines and maintaining appropriate kinship ties with game animals during the deerskin trade also seems to be referenced here, with the boy’s inappropriate action. But Creek Sam looked at the last part of this story with a measure of cautious enthusiasm, interpreting it to mean that the “Natchez had been obliged to migrate westward to the place they now occupy, but that as some animals were left in the mountain some hope was still left for the Natchez.”<sup>38</sup> This narrator also left out violent eschatological predictions in deriving a particular meaning from the tale. Surely a case can be made that this story Swanton recorded is illustrative of individuals stoically enduring current calamities by comforting themselves with positive reinterpretations of old storylines.

These particular stories and origin tales obviously included bitter remembrances of Removal and resource depletion as well as other calamities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Natchez story likely references problems encountered before removal, but unfortunately, a consistent pattern of Indian dispossession carried on further into allotment and Oklahoma statehood. In order to grasp the total significance of these stories and their contents, one should keep in mind the fact that the Creeks (and other southern tribes), like all North American Indian communities, possessed within their individual communities a plethora of the same basic story outlines, some that made mention of European arrival and some that did not.

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<sup>38</sup> Swanton *Myths and Tales*, 222-226.

It bears repeating that the crux of the matter is not whether a particular version was ancient or recent. The fact that informants had access to multiple editions and choices as to which one seemed most appropriate at a given time is crucial. Also, Indians did not just sit around discussing and debating at length which versions should or should not be relayed to anthropologists. Rather, stories that showed a fair amount of internal tinkering demonstrated a common ethos of southeastern Indian orality. Like so many of their activities and belief systems, storytelling was a participatory action, and storytellers were expected to not only recount traditional narratives, but to act as editorialists as well. While Swanton and others faithfully recorded such stories, they failed to appreciate this unique dimension to oral storytelling. By summarily dismissing these tales for their usefulness because they included details after the contact period with Europeans, scholars missed out on golden opportunities to witness another truism about indigenous peoples. Instead of merely encountering a people out of time, anthropologists stumbled across peoples adapting and reacting to present realities with an arsenal of sacred traditions alive with relevance for modern scenarios.

For many of these stories and creation accounts, Swanton unfortunately eschewed his earlier pattern in the Pacific Northwest of valuing a collaborator's individual telling of a story as a valid expression of their culture. Instead, for many of the examples given here, Swanton operated according to a particular type of cultural relativism—the “integrationist” school of thought. According to anthropologist Thomas Biolsi, scholars favoring this method of relativistic theory, “culture is an integrated, coherent whole, which is greater than the various shreds and patches that make up its parts. Furthermore, the world is filled with an array of

distinct cultures, with discrete boundaries, not unlike species.”<sup>39</sup> Here, Swanton’s approach to southeastern tribes can be best assessed by discussing him alongside another anthropologist, Haviland Scudder Mekeel, who worked with the Lakota in the 1930s.

Mekeel enjoyed a reputation among his friends and colleagues as an anthropologist that conducted responsible scholarship, as well as possessing compassion for the downtrodden, including the Lakota. For example, he helped implement the Indian New Deal in 1934, strongly advocating its more humane policy in contrast to allotment. But, at the same time that Mekeel expressed sympathy for Indian people, he gave a rather different impression upon first encountering the Lakota at Pine Ridge in 1930. In his journal, he nonchalantly divided the reservation up into distinct and mutually incompatible Lakota groups: those that were Christian and willingly seeking assimilation, those that were “pagan” and representing “traditional” ways, and what he referred to as “the in-betweens—loafers, criminals, and delinquents. The first two classes are fine individuals—the third (by far the majority) are all bums.”<sup>40</sup>

Much of Swanton’s assessment of the Creek and other southeastern communities resembles Mekeel’s work with the Lakota. However, one of the major differences is that Swanton did not cast aspersions on the character of those individuals or communities he viewed as suffering cultural loss. Swanton did, however, make similar distinctions between individuals and groups he felt retained their heritages and those that had willingly or unwillingly succumbed to assimilation. An example of this comes from his assessment of a particular Chickasaw community around 1919, whom he felt lacked enough cultural knowledge to be of much worth

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Biolsi, “The Anthropological Construction of ‘Indians’: Haviland Scudder Mekeel and the Search for the Primitive in Lakota Country,” in *Indians & Anthropologists: Vine Deloria Jr, and the Critique of Anthropology* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997), 136.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

for his purposes, commenting “the ancient social organization of the Chickasaw is so completely discarded that practically all of the younger people know nothing about it, and even the older ones can only furnish fragmentary information on the subject...there are surprisingly few [Chickasaws] who can provide reliable information.”<sup>41</sup>

But, just as Mekeel at times expressed appreciation for the overall dignity and worth of Indian people, Swanton at various points during his career in the Southeast expressed similar sentiments on par with the lessons David Lewis Jr. conveyed to Ann Jordan. For Swanton, these lessons consisted primarily of him recognizing the inappropriateness of using non-Indian views as final assessments of Native cultures and the meanings behind their traditions. An excellent illustration of this comes from a statement he made while working in the Lower Mississippi Valley: “Estimates of Indian character by white men are seldom satisfactory, being based on the standards current among whites at a certain place and time or colored by romantic or dogmatic considerations.”<sup>42</sup> Along with this, Swanton took the implications of his previous statement and applied it to an overall approach to the study of different cultures, specifically as it pertains to ethics, asserting “the final moral estimate of a tribe or nation is a thing that no other tribe or nation is competent to undertake. It will be made by different individuals differently, depending on the standards, environment, and prejudices, or, on the other hand, sympathetic person acting as judge.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> John R. Swanton, “Social and Religious Beliefs and Usages of the Chickasaw Indians,” in *Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1928), 170, 190.

<sup>42</sup> John Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico* (Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998), 49. , Originally published: Washington; G.P.O., 1911 (Bulletin/Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

Rather than opting to take an easy and lazy way out and accuse Mekeel and Swanton of being hypocritical, a more accurate take on their approaches is to examine the ideology underpinning the way they approached non-western cultures. Both Mekeel and Swanton operated as cultural relativists, which did reflect a more accurate approach to Native people than did the old cultural evolutionist methodology that preceded them. Swanton demonstrated on several occasions in his writings recognition that judging a culture from an outside point of view was not only ethnocentric but unscientific.

However, the integrationist form of cultural relativism went too far in expecting Native cultures to remain internally consistent and wholly distinct from Western traditions. For Swanton, this resulted in envisioning written accounts matching what his collaborators shared with him decades, sometimes centuries later. To the extent Native accounts did not match what was written about them, Swanton often characterized them as signs of cultural decline, evidenced by his comments on the Chickasaw. Mekeel did the same, albeit with a more disapproving manner. In essence, equipped with such an expectation of how Native cultures were supposed to operate, Swanton and Mekeel (and others reared in the Boasian school of cultural relativism) ended up comparing and contrasting persons within the same culture, often finding many of them and entire segments of a community lacking features of what a “real” Indian supposedly resembled. As Thomas Biolsi characterizes the situation, “The cultural relativist apparatus generated a severe classificatory problem for Mekeel in which most Oglala people and most of what they thought and did in the real world of the reservations could not appear as authentically Indian. They were—by anthropological definition—not ‘proper natives.’”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Biolsi, “The Anthropological Construction of ‘Indians,’” 135-136.

A consequence of using artificial criteria in evaluating information on Native communities resulted in many relevant issues near and dear to some tribal persons' hearts in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth being ignored or devalued by anthropologists. Swanton's recording of book-length Creek and other southeastern tribal lore and traditions are vitally important and have proven foundational for all future studies in the region. With that acknowledgment, he overlooked attempts by some Indians to provide commentary on recent events and circumstances in their histories. Swanton compiled oral narratives cloaked in the guise of creation stories that spoke to the pain of forced removals, alcohol dependency, and overall grief at the consequences colonialism had wrought. These were issues on the minds of many elders who wished to comment on their situations in creative ways.

A good example of this also comes from an experience Mekeel had working with a Lakota elder, who wished to convey the important role treaty obligations played in he and his community's life. Mekeel felt that treaties represented a form of welfare that encouraged laziness. He did not feel they represented an authentic or valid dimension of "genuine" Lakota culture. A Lakota by the name of Turning Hawk served with a group of men on the Oglala Council on Pine Ridge. The committee felt it their responsibility to try and ensure the many treaties the Federal Government signed with the Lakota were upheld, especially the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. Mekeel recounted his experience with Turning Hawk in a rather condescendingly dismissive fashion:

[Turning Hawk] wanted to know what I was doing and whether my work would benefit the Indians in any way—whether I was doing good work...He evidently had something to get off his chest. I thought the best plan would be to let him air his grievances—so I very seriously took notes. He rehearsed all the old treaties. Said they had fulfilled their part, the Government had not theirs—had never done anything for them, etc.—old stuff but with much truth to it of course.

If Turning Hawk had couched his grievances over the Government's dereliction of its treaty duties in a creation story or the form of traditional narration of tribal history, Mekeel likely would have reacted in similar fashion. His words make clear that he felt Lakota concerns with treaties failed to impress him, and represented a trivial preoccupation and sign that Pine Ridge suffered rupture from their "real" traditions as a result.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 145-146.

## **Chapter 6: Personal Developments and Life After Anthropology**

Swanton's personal life underwent dramatic changes during the same years he spent working with indigenous southeastern tribes. Swanton's marriage to Alice remained one of mutual love, as their similar personalities complemented one another. Alice's insecurities over her lack of education and Swanton's high standing in this regard proved a nonissue as the years went by. Swanton remained humble in these matters and put Alice's doubts to rest. The trip to Alaska likely helped in this area, as Swanton felt comfortable including Alice with him on research outings whenever possible. Their union also witnessed the addition of three children during the heyday of Swanton's work in Oklahoma and surrounding states. Mary Alice Swanton was born in September 1906, followed by John Reed Jr. in November 1909, and Henry Allen in March 1915.<sup>1</sup>

With the addition of three children and Swanton's career in full-swing by the birth of Mary Alice, it was not possible for Alice to accompany Swanton nearly as much on his trips. She remained at their home in Washington, D.C., for the most part. There, Alice devoted herself to the role of mother with enthusiasm. Sadly, however, Swanton's frequent absences from home, severe financial difficulties, and the responsibility of raising children alone for months at a time, took a severe toll on her already vulnerable emotional state. Alice penned many letters to Swanton while he was away, keeping him abreast of developments in their children's lives.

Some of these letters reveal the enormous stress Alice was under. While Swanton was in Beaumont, Texas, working with the Caddo, Alice mentioned in a letter that John Jr. was

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<sup>1</sup> Swanton Family Tree, Swanton Family Papers, 1759-1955, 85-m267-87-m167 box 2, 80:1:5, 21-38. Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hereafter cited as (SFP: 1759-1955).

suffering from a terrible cough, stating, “These spells he has are just like the hardest whooping cough without the whoop. Will it ever stop I wonder. I do hope it will before I completely lose all of my brain. It does seem to me that if this lasts much longer something will snap in my head. I was very much encouraged till this last spell. Now I am shaken up again in every nerve in my body.” Alice ended her letter with “c.h.s.,” which stood for “come home soon.”<sup>2</sup>

Alice also expressed her anxiety by demanding Swanton provide her updates over his field work in his responses, something not always possible. While there is a good chance she lacked a vested interest in Swanton’s actual work, her letters asking him to share his findings should be viewed as her desire to be part of his life while he was away. Swanton did his best to remain an active part of his children’s lives, frequently sending them gifts despite his meager salary.<sup>3</sup> Financial difficulties only increased Alice’s agitated state. They apparently suffered a particularly hard spell just as Swanton was beginning his work with the Chickasaw, where Alice implored him to work as hastily as possible and return home.<sup>4</sup> Alice benefited from spending as much as time as possible with Swanton’s mother, Mary. And while this helped stabilize her mood at times, Alice grew progressively more depressed and emotionally unstable.

Swanton’s mother became severely ill around 1920 and remained sick until her death in August of 1923. As a life-long member of the Swedenborgian Church, Mary’s passing was mourned by many friends. Her good friend Ednah Silver prepared a notice and account of her life in a church periodical. She also attempted to console Swanton, knowing how close he and

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<sup>2</sup> Alice Swanton to John Swanton 4/24/1912, (SFP: 1769-1955).

<sup>3</sup> Alice Swanton to John Swanton, 11/11/1912, (SFP: 1769-1955).

<sup>4</sup> Alice Swanton to John Swanton, 11/3/1915; 11/6/1915, (SFP: 1769-1955).

his mother had been.<sup>5</sup> Mary Swanton had lived the remainder of her days at John and Alice's home in Washington, D.C., and the loss proved too much for Alice to bear. Alice suffered a nervous breakdown on February 22, 1923, only seven months after the passing of Mary Swanton. Alice never recovered and unfortunately lived in a hospital until she passed away in November of 1926. The loss of his mother and wife so close together nearly crushed Swanton. He received much consolation from his family. Ednah Silver wrote him frequent letters after Alice's passing. In one, she sought to comfort Swanton and encourage him to remain optimistic of seeing her again in the afterlife, in accordance with Swedenborgian beliefs, stating,

Our dear Alice has been freed from her tenement of decay, with completely restored vitality, and completely restored power of expression—all indescribably valuable to her. My dear old Papa used to say a very sweet thing about husbands and wives who loved each other devotedly. When one is called to the higher life there is only one wall of clay between their spirits. They are actually nearer each other than when in this world, where there were two wall of clay.<sup>6</sup>

Swanton proved resilient in the face of such tragic losses. He continued to work with the material he collected from southeastern tribes. He did cut back on some of his field work as he grew older. The loss of Alice also necessitated that he remain closer to home to take care of his children, which seems to have suited him fine. Plenty of important work remained for him at the Bureau of Ethnology. For example, an opportunity presented itself to Swanton that would further solidify his reputation as the “Dean” of southeastern anthropology. In 1939, with the full approval of the Roosevelt Administration, Swanton headed a committee tasked with tracing the archeological, anthropological, and historical route of Hernando De Soto's expedition throughout the Southeast. Here was a project that culled together all of Swanton's skills as researcher—

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<sup>5</sup> Ednah Silver to John Swanton 8/8/1923, (SFP: 1769-1955).

<sup>6</sup> Ednah Silver to John Swanton, 11/9/1926, (SFP: 1769-1955).

using archaeology, anthropology, and a host of methods. His early experiences with archeology, familiarity with written sources, and aptitude for working with Indian collaborators resulted in the monumental *Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition* in 1939.<sup>7</sup>

Public interest in this project forced Swanton to move away from his comfort zone and give a series of public lectures over the scope of this project and what he wished to accomplish. Many of the commission members hoped this project would finally determine with certainty the exact route of De Soto's expedition. Typical of Swanton's quest to be as thorough as possible, while remaining realistic about what could be determined with complete certainty, responded to this question of preciseness,

As near as we can. Nothing is made correct because it is called 'Official.' It becomes recognized as official by the virtue by which it is recognized and carefully done, if every possible line of evidence is brought to bear upon it and it is permanently accepted by historians, students, etc..., why then it is accepted and becomes official.<sup>8</sup>

Given the time period and the Great Depression's disastrous toll on America, many people looked to the De Soto undertaking as an opportunity to encourage patriotism and reinvigorate a sense of optimism in a depressed public. Swanton cautioned against this, as doing so ran the risk of whitewashing history at the expense of false idealism. He felt that telling the true history as accurately as possible, one in which De Soto and his men's frequent atrocities against Indians received acknowledgment, coupled with the contributions of those tribal communities, would

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<sup>7</sup> See John R. Swanton, *Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1939).

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the [Second] Meeting of the De Soto Commission, Held in Tampa, Florida, May 4-5, 1936 (typescript), MS. 4465, Box 1, Folder 1, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as (NAA).

sufficiently serve the purpose of providing entertainment and sound history.<sup>9</sup> This grand project served as Swanton's final major undertaking in the Southeast, and remains today as a sound sendoff for Swanton and fitting testament to how ethnohistory looks when done correctly and responsibly.

With his major involvement in the Southeast complete, Swanton diversified his scope of interests during the last few years of his career. Along with promoting a more respectful appraisal of indigenous cultures within the context of his personal life, Swanton strove to promote more peaceful resolutions to world conflicts, writing a monograph commissioned by the State Department over the origins of war from an anthropological standpoint. This work, which testifies to a remarkable familiarity with world history, put forth points of view that warfare is not an innate activity of humanity, that conflicts can be solved without resorting to armed conflict and bloodshed. Putting forth these views during World War II, he also explored warfare amongst indigenous peoples, declaring them to be as ethically diverse and as capable of rational thought as so-called "civilized" society.<sup>10</sup> Excerpts of this work was presented in some newspapers, ensuring that his message in part reached non-specialists.

Swanton retired from the Bureau of American Ethnology on June 30, 1944 at the age of 71. The transition from workaholic to retiree took some getting used to, as Swanton expressed regret for leaving when he did. He joked with M. W. Stirling, a former colleague at the Smithsonian about coming back, and how he missed his Creek dictionary, which he had donated

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<sup>9</sup> John Reed Swanton, "Significance of the Expedition of Hernando De Soto: Before the De Soto Committee of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America, at Memphis, Tennessee, Saturday, October 30, 1937," MS 7485, (NAA).

<sup>10</sup> John Swanton, *Are Wars Inevitable?* War Background Studies Number 12 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution), 1943.

after retiring. He also offered up a bit of his typical dry wit, admonishing Stirling, “Whenever you think of retiring I would recommend that you plan carefully so as to not fall into the clutches of your descendants and their pets.”<sup>11</sup> But Swanton did enjoy the company of his children and grandchildren. He settled down in Newton, Massachusetts, a small town more like Gardiner, Maine, than the sprawling city of Washington, D.C. that had been his home for so long.

Swanton looked forward to receiving visits from his grown children. His daughter, Mary, kept in touch with him more frequently than any of her other siblings, as she lived nearby. Swanton relied on her company and help around the house, much as he had when Alice passed away. From his correspondences with his children, it appears that Swanton settled comfortably into retirement, but maintained an active mind and interest in current events, particularly politics. And, unlike so many anthropologists after World War II, he remained fairly disinterested in the Indian Claims Commission Hearings.<sup>12</sup> In a lengthy letter to his daughter Mary, he stated the following about the commission and his possible role in participating in the proceedings:

I think I told you about that youth from the Department of Justice who wants me to go to Washington to testify in a land suit on the ground that I spent a month near the spot the suit concerns. If it happens that will not be until September. As all I know has been printed, that looks to be a sheer waste but my experience with the law leads me to think that a training in common sense is useless in that profession.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John Swanton to M. W. Stirling, 1/14/1945, 6/19/1945, Letters After Retirement and Correspondence with M.W. Stirling 1944-45. Records of the Bureau of American Ethnology Series 1: Correspondence: Letters Received, Matthew Stirling, 1925-50, Box 275, (NAA).

<sup>12</sup> The Indians Claims Hearings served as part of the federal government’s plan to settle land claim disputes with Indian tribes. Presented as a noble endeavor that would remedy the centuries of abuse by the government, it actually served as a pretext for changing federal Indian policy, one geared towards terminating governmental obligations involving treaty rights. The policy from 1947-1974 is known as Termination, and saw many tribes lose their federal recognition and lands. See Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986) 28-30.

<sup>13</sup> John Swanton to Mary Alice Swanton, 7/7/1952, (SFP: 1769-1955).

Perhaps out of weariness stemming from nearly forty years spent in the profession, Swanton apparently wanted little to do with these matters. The inconvenience of traveling and having to face an assembly of federal officials proved too burdensome to even contemplate at this point in Swanton's life. This doesn't necessarily negate his mostly positive thoughts regarding many of the Indians he worked with or show that he did not care about their fate. Rather, it reinforces that he was much more reserved than some of his peers, choosing to contribute his thoughts and opinions through writing, where he elevated the dialog about Native people and their histories above the more racist portrayals before his time.

Perhaps part of Swanton's lack of interest in engaging in the Indian Claims Commission rests with an undertaking that consumed him for the last several years of his life. After retiring from his role as a professional anthropologist, Swanton began a quest to find scientific proof for various kinds of parapsychological phenomena, such as telekinesis and clairvoyance. In part, a good claim can be made that Swanton always maintained an interests in such matters, given his close association with the Swedenborgian Church. The church remained open to scientific discoveries, and such phenomena likely struck many members as an interesting avenue of exploration. However, it should be emphasized that while Swanton believed in the reality of an afterlife and omniscient and omnipresent deity, he strongly argued that much of what people claimed as supernatural occurrences could be explained scientifically. All that remained was for scientists to remain open, and the possibility of discovering an empirical basis for such phenomena.

His friends and colleagues expressed astonishment at Swanton's new interests, but if they had paid more attention to many of his writings over science and what he believed were science's limitations given how it was approached in his day, they may not have been so

astonished. For example the same year he retired, Swanton wrote a lengthy critique of anthropology and the hubris of believing that scientists in their current guise uniquely held the key to unlocking all of the universe's mysteries. If new knowledge and breakthroughs in science were to take place, the men and woman in many fields needed to be open to self-critique of their professions, and to be willing to do away with old but cherished theories if evidence called for it.<sup>14</sup>

Criticism of Swanton's new hobby may have been easy at first glance, given the low estimation such topics received then and today. However, the large body of material Swanton collected on extra-sensory perception (ESP) and studies conducted at Duke University under Dr. Joseph Rhine, coupled with his reasoned arguments that scientists should at least remain open to the material, was difficult to throw away altogether.<sup>15</sup> For example, Swanton sent a copy of his self-published book, entitled *Superstition—But Whose?* as well as a thick booklet of studies on ESP and related phenomena, to his friend William Fenton. In a letter to Swanton, Fenton commented on Swanton's interests and the subject matter, stating,

No I have not recovered from the impact of your manuscript on E.S.P. I took it home to read it and Mrs. Fenton has also read it. In fact, I have not given it concentrated attention except at brief intervals. I found it most interesting, but I must confess so out of character with what I am used to reading that I do not know quite how to assess it. I note one thing, however: As in all your historical writings, you are so faithful to the sources and generous in quoting the actual evidence that in this case the argumentation does not stand out sufficiently and the reader gets lost in the quoted accounts.

Fenton expressed an honest response to Swanton's inquiries on matters he had no experience with. The fact that he credited Swanton with going about his work here in similar fashion to his

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<sup>14</sup> John Swanton, "An Anthropologist Looks Forward and Backward" (1944), Manuscript 4816, (NAA). 2-5.

<sup>15</sup> For an excellent account of Rhine's studies on the statistical evidence for the possibly existence of E.S.P., see, Stacy Horn, *Unbelievable: Investigations into Ghosts, Poltergeists, Telepathy, and Other Unseen Phenomena, From the Duke Parapsychology Department* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

professional work is evidence that Swanton's faculties were still sound and his mind sharp as ever.<sup>16</sup>

Not content with discussing his interests with Fenton only, Swanton wrote a lengthy letter addressed to Bureau colleagues at large. In it, Swanton argued passionately for the younger generation of anthropologists to remain on guard against holding to supposed scientific facts in the way religious institutions cling to creeds. The subject matter in question should not serve as a basis for neglecting the scientific method and scientific investigation. Although the following quotation is long, it is the opening salvo to one of his last letters he sent to his former colleagues, and serves as a good illustration that Swanton was well aware of how his interests might be perceived. He somewhat humorously opened by stating:

The Haida Indians, with whom as you know I was formerly acquainted, had a most admirable system for handling antiquated members of the tribe. In any serious emergency, such as the unexpected appearance of White men in 'flying canoes,' they first sent samples of tribal senility to meet the new peril on the ground that such individuals could not hope to live many years longer anyhow, and if danger threatened they would not lose so much calendar time as anyone else. This employment of the aged as guinea pigs has always seemed to me a stroke of genius and I am now offering myself in that capacity. Therefore, please do not fear when you read the accompanying circular letter lest I drag down the fair names of the Bureau of American Ethnology and the Smithsonian Institution by associating them with expeditions into twilight realms of science. Whether this proves the twilight following sunset or that heralding a new day time will show but I am gambling on [its] being the latter. In either case, so far as I am concerned, the game cannot be unduly extended and I will make a most excellent scapegoat.<sup>17</sup>

After discussing the reasons for his interests in these matters and the sensible nature of such investigations, Swanton implored fellow anthropologists to be open to studying any and all phenomena. He felt that the sheer number of charlatans taking advantage of people's

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<sup>16</sup> William Fenton to John Swanton, 5/26/1950, (NAA).

<sup>17</sup> John Swanton, cover page, n.p. circular letter, "My Washington Anthropological Friends," 3/20/1953 (NAA).

vulnerabilities as would-be psychics and mediums necessitated that scientists offer their expertise in resolving such maligned topics. To not do so was an insult to science and their profession. Swanton insisted that he found “no fault with those who do not take an interest in this subject or with those who are skeptical regarding it but with the fact that the present attitude toward it in the scientific world is not scientific. It is a standing refutation of the claim that science is interested in truth and only truth without regard to its source or the implications involved in the acceptance of it.”<sup>18</sup> With such an active professional career behind him and prolific body of literature to his name, Swanton maintained the same intellectual rigor and open-mindedness after his retirement.

Swanton died on May 2, 1958, at the age of 85. Counting his graduate work in archeology, he devoted over forty years of his life to studying Native people and their diverse histories. For scholars of Native American history, his name will always be synonymous with the Southeast. His numerous books and monographs dealing with this subject warrant such a reputation. But his early work compiling linguistic, mythological, and other cultural data on the Haida and Tlingit proves to be just as important to members of those communities today and remain fruitful sources for future studies, both in terms of reconstructing Swanton’s professional career and Northwest coast indigenous history.

Swanton’s career came about at the dawn of the professionalization of anthropology, amidst changes in theories of culture and new education standards for becoming an anthropologist. However, those scholars like Swanton, who were reared in the Boasian tradition, inherited the groundwork that formed the basis of their methodology from men like James Mooney and John Wesley Powell. Reminiscing on the question of professionalism in his field,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 5.

Swanton observed how distinctions between amateur and professional anthropologists may have been overblown. “When I entered the Bureau,” he commented, “I was the only member of it who had even what purported to be an anthropological education and goodness knows that was thin enough.”<sup>19</sup> In reality, despite some new academic standards in the late nineteenth-century, the most important education in anthropology took place outside classroom walls, as it had in the generation just prior to Swanton.

A sharper contrast can be seen in the way Swanton and his contemporaries approached anthropology with Victorian scholars like Edward Tylor and James Frazer. A focus on intense field work, with copious amounts of research with specific communities and geographic regions, separated Swanton and his contemporaries’ approach from the Victorians. As important as Tylor and Frazer were in many regards, they tended to lack direct engagement with the people about whom they wrote about.<sup>20</sup> Only through direct-first-hand engagement with tribal people could new information about them be validated. Swanton not only excelled at field work and collaborating with Native spokespersons, he combined it by familiarizing himself with encyclopedic amounts of the written sources.

To be sure, even someone that worked directly with Indians could misunderstand what tribal persons intended by the stories they shared with anthropologists, as shown by Swanton’s work with southeastern oral traditions. Swanton, however, pioneered the ethnohistorical approach and was consequently ahead of his time regarding the reliability of Indian oral traditions. One of the only academic squabbles Swanton encountered in his career dealt with the

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<sup>19</sup> John Reed Swanton, “Notes Regarding my Adventures in Anthropology and with Anthropologists,” *Manuscript 4651, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives* (1944), 35.

<sup>20</sup> See George Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 257-262.

dependability of using Native oral traditions in establishing tribal histories. Robert Lowie accused Swanton of being naïve in believing Indian accounts could be reasonably used as guides in constructing historical accounts. Lowie stated, “I cannot attach to oral traditions any historical value whatsoever under any conditions whatsoever.”<sup>21</sup> Swanton found this objectionable, and argued that when combined with written accounts, Native oral traditions could be of potential use. Swanton countered,

As to the value of traditional evidence itself my experience may be different from that of Dr. Lowie. It is true that much of that evidence is unreliable but in one particular I have found a very considerable measure of reliability, viz., as to the region, or at least the direction, from which the tribe came. I am not here referring merely to testimony drawn from myths or migration legends but to the opinion current in the tribe or shared by the older members of it. On the basis of my own experience, I would say that in the cases which we can check up the supplementary evidence confirms the tradition about nine times out of every ten. In cases which we cannot checkup we therefore find a preponderance of probability that the tradition of origin has a historical basis.<sup>22</sup>

Compared to the way many anthropologists and historians work with oral traditions today, Swanton’s views here may not sound all that progressive. But his willingness to give conditional credence to Indian accounts was pioneering in his day. In some ways, he held a more progressive approach than some foundational figures in ethnohistory. For example, James Axtell is deservedly held in high esteem as someone that has propelled ethnohistory to where it is today. However, even he occasionally expressed a low estimation of Indian oral traditions that echoed Lowie. Axtell, commenting in 1981 on his fellow ethnohistorians’ paucity of direct communications with living Native peoples wrote that they “need not feel unduly sensitive” to their lack of personal research among contemporary tribal cultures, because few descendants of

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Lowie, quoted in John Swanton, “Dr. Swanton’s Reply,” *American Anthropologist* 17(Jul.-Sep., 1915): 600-600. See also John Swanton and Roland Dixon, “Primitive American History,” *American Anthropologist* 16 (Jul.-Sep., 1914): 376-412.

<sup>22</sup> John Swanton, “Dr. Swanton’s Reply,” 600-600.

“their historical subjects” survived. Furthermore, even if one did turn up now and then, “they had most likely lost much of their historical cultural context.”<sup>23</sup>

While a grand anthropologist and consummate intellectual, Swanton was known by his closest friends and relatives for qualities that transcended his professional career. Kindness and generosity remain hallmark traits Swanton is remembered for. Burdened his whole life with feelings of self-doubt and anxiety, Swanton remained sensitive to the feelings of those around him, especially those of his loved ones. The tragic fate of his wife, Alice, combined with his Bureau responsibilities, could have stymied him completely. His nervous condition could have very well resulted in his own breakdown. However, Swanton maintained his resolve after mourning his loss, dedicated himself to being a single parent, and found renewed inspiration in his work. His dedication to his religious faith struck a balance between his personal as well as private life and helped him keep a healthy perspective on what he felt mattered most in life.

His life and the many influences that came to bear on him certainly played a role in how Swanton interacted with some of his collaborators in “Indian Country.” He was one of the more important anthropologists who lived and worked during a pivotal time in anthropology and he deserves a place alongside Franz Boas, James Mooney, Ruth Benedict, and John Wesley Powell as a worthy addition to biographical studies. Swanton’s rich and varied life also provides an ideal opportunity to examine the inner dynamics that exist between anthropologists and Native people. By turning the academic focus onto scholars and applying the same methodologies they apply to Indians, the result is a richer and more holistic account. This is essentially a call for an anthropology of anthropologists. The current relationship between anthropologists and Native

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<sup>23</sup> James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 10.

people is certainly better than in the past, but much improvement remains possible. John Swanton's life serves as a useful guide of how biography can be used, not just to account for an individual's life, but as a vehicle to better ascertain the motives and influences they carried with them in their interactions with Native people.

## Conclusion: Commentary on Anthropology and its Future

Anthropology, from Samuel Morton and Lewis Henry Morgan to Frank Cushing and Franz Boas to very recently, was what adult white men did to fulfill their boyhood fantasies of playing Indian. Indeed, Cushing and Boas actually dressed in Indian costumes and pretended they were the real thing. The [anthropology] literature, therefore, can hardly be regarded as a science, because it reflects the deep psychological problems of its superstars rather than an honest effort to learn something.<sup>1</sup>

Spoken by late Dakota activist and intellectual, Vine Deloria, Jr., the above statement conveys anthropology's uncertain position within academia at various points in its history. Expressed as well is the deep seated resentment many indigenous people have felt towards the discipline's early history through its display of outright racism and ethnocentric biases directed toward them. The feeling in "Indian Country" towards anthropology today is somewhat better than before, thanks in large part to the efforts of people like Deloria, who, despite the abrasive tone of his criticism, encouraged anthropologists to examine the merits of what he and other like-minded Indians were saying.

Native advocates for Indian rights, arguing for a more balanced approach to their viewpoints, leveled repeated critiques at anthropology and archaeology for such omissions, as well as its prior support of colonial legislation. Anthropology was taken to task for backing much of the disastrous nineteenth-century policies aimed at destroying Native cultures. Along with this, social scientists in general have learned since the Civil Rights era that Native peoples could no longer be counted on to passively sit back and accept what outsiders said and wrote about them. Today, field work is a much more collaborative effort between anthropologists and Indians, with Native viewpoints often serving as focal points underpinning studies rather than as

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<sup>1</sup> Deloria, Vine, Jr. "A Flock of Anthros." *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr., Reader*. Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999), 123.

quaint addendums or trivial postscripts mentioned only to buttress forgone conclusions of non-Indians.

However, much bitterness remains towards anthropology within many Indian communities for its past transgressions, along with suspicion of the motives of workers in the field today, some of whom are Indians.<sup>2</sup> One reason for such skepticism is that no matter how many pro-Native stances anthropologists may take on contemporary issues—and many do—the very premise on which anthropology first came into existence proves an implacable barrier, preventing many Indian people from fully letting their guard down. For example, according to Deloria, since its inception, “anthropology has taken the values and institutions of Western civilization, acted as if they represented normality, rationality, and sanity, and leveled severe criticism of tribal societies, finding them lacking in the rudiments of civilized behavior.”<sup>3</sup>

Alluded to as well is that the organizing principle of early anthropology was an unwavering allegiance to cultural evolutionism, whereby modern indigenous peoples were seen as representatives of a lower, more primitive stage of human development. Through observation of such supposed backwardness, it was presumed that contemporary “civilized” society could witness firsthand the various stages of cultural advancement its own ancestors had passed centuries ago. Essentially, aboriginal societies served as living fossils of what modern peoples had once been like as they had steadily marched, following a trajectory of incremental enlightenment towards what eventually became modern Western civilization. Because of these

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<sup>2</sup> Some late nineteenth and early twentieth century Native anthropologists like Francis Laflesche and Ella Deloria produced quality work. Their contributions served to challenge some of the misassumptions their non-Indian co-workers held of indigenous people. However, their efforts failed to change the overall assumptions of white scholars, who continued to insist on the inevitability of cultural decline and assimilation of Indian peoples.

<sup>3</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. “Anthros, Indians, and Planetary Reality.” *Indians & Anthropologists: Vine Deloria Jr., and the Critique of Anthropology*. (Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1997), 220.

assumptions, anthropology remains suspect in the minds of many Native Americans despite the social sciences no longer utilizing evolutionist assumptions as the cornerstone of their studies.

Despite this lingering resentment, there has been a lessening of hostilities towards anthropology today. This is due largely to many anthropologists recognizing their discipline's culpability in encouraging the Federal Government's colonialist policy of forcibly assimilating Native peoples in the late nineteenth century. Many current anthropologists continue to try to do away with the remaining assumptions that plague the way Native peoples and their cultures are approached. Even so, the legacy of mistreatment at the hands of the social sciences lingers on in the minds of Native people, many of whom continue to dismiss entirely the past work done by anthropologists. However, when anthropologists make genuine efforts to shy away from taking ethnocentric postures, the situation can improve remarkably. This allows for more congenial relations to develop between anthropologists and Indians, ones built on genuine respect. As a consequence, Native people often come to appreciate some of the remarkable work done in the past by anthropologists.

Anthropologists that have managed to develop good relationships with Native people and their communities certainly benefited from Vine Deloria Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins*, first published in 1969. Many of the comfortable certainties the discipline as a whole had operated under for a century before its publication came under attack. No longer could anthropologists take as a given Native people's willingness to share information with them, only to be written off in print as child-like holdovers from an earlier time in human evolution in return. To be sure, Indians had leveled critiques against the ethnocentric assumption of American society as a whole

prior to this, notably during the Progressive Era.<sup>4</sup> However, Deloria's message of Indian nationalism benefited from his razor sharp wit and take-no-prisoners analysis of white privilege. And while many activists last century spoke out in favor of Indian rights, most people in positions of influence in the United States believed so fervently in the superiority of Euro-American civilization and the possibility of bettering nonwhites through exposure to it that little changed from an institutional standpoint. Plus, some of the more influential Native progressives a hundred years ago themselves espoused assimilationist viewpoints, just on terms more conducive to Native values.<sup>5</sup> The time period surrounding the social justice movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, however, proved a more receptive setting for the staunch nationalism of Deloria, members of the American Indian Movement, and reservation activists' admonishment to anthropology and American society in general.

As a consequence of such criticism from Native communities, much of the anthropological work done in North America since the early 1970s has sought indigenous

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<sup>4</sup> For the best overall treatment of Native Americans during the Progressive Era (roughly the 1880s-1920s) and their relationship to white reformers, see Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans & Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005). While Holm's overall argument is that an abiding sense of connectedness to tribal cultures and traditions ultimately foiled the reformist impulses to eradicate Native American cultures, he does discuss some of the more prominent Native individuals, from this era, such as Charles Eastman and Carlos Montezuma, who believed in assimilation through a process that took into account Native sensibilities. A fairly recent study that specifically deals with Native American challenges to Progressive Era policies and the individuals most active in arguing for a more just federal policy towards them, as well as challenging assimilation in general, is Frederick Hoxie's *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era* (Boston: Bedord/St.Martins 2001). Many Indian spokespersons from that time echoed Deloria's sentiments in 1969 but were often subsumed beneath American society's overarching beliefs in the perpetual progress of Western Civilization and its mission to uplift nonwhites from savagery to enlightenment. However, the stage was set by earlier men and women for later Native scholar activists like Vine Deloria, Jack Forbes, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Gerald Vizenor, James Treat, Donald Fixico, and David Wilkins, to mention only a few, to reach a larger non-Indian audience more willing to try and listen to Native peoples on their own terms. The explosion of Native peoples into mainstream academic life was multidisciplinary, benefiting from a slew of Native authors writing about real life issues through fiction. Such notable authors in this group include Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, M Scott Momaday, and recently, Sherman Alexie. These authors produced fiction bridging the multicultural divide, bringing issues directly relevant to Indian communities and made them accessible to non-Indian audiences. Many of these works are today part of Native American history and studies courses across the United States and Canada.

viewpoints regarding their own histories. This is a laudable practice that must remain in place if scholarship pertaining to indigenous peoples is to remain relevant. However, as this study of John Swanton's life argues, anthropological studies would be enhanced by focusing a more thorough and critical light on the anthropologists themselves, as these men and woman serve as legitimate subjects for interpreting inter-group and interpersonal relations. More studies examining the ways in which these individuals have been and continue to be shaped by the forces of their own cultures and altered by their interactions in the field, decade by decade, should be undertaken.

Anthropologist's personalities, shaped by the forces and assumptions of whatever time period they operate in, serve as important components for assessing history. Anthropologists contend that Native people do not operate in cultural vacuums, and never have. This is absolutely correct, but what must be kept in mind is that this observation is equally true regarding the very individuals making this assertion. By examining the entire gambit of Indian-anthropologist encounters, including as much as possible information about the lives of each party, will provide more thorough appraisals of this dimension of cultural history. Furthermore, such studies make anthropologists themselves subject to the very methodologies they have traditionally applied to non-Western peoples. If the social sciences and the methods they rely on are to continue to be useful, supposedly offering up important insights into reality, this approach must be carried forth. There needs to be a change in the mindset of scholars for this to take place, even those scholars of a more egalitarian bent. Long held, perhaps unintentional biases against the validity of non-Western knowledge compared to its own must be honestly examined. Anthropologists must be willing to assess Native traditions on their own merits rather than as occasional buttresses to what was written about them by non-Indians.

For his part, Swanton at times demonstrated an appreciation of this aspect of working with Native people. But, in many ways, his own unquestioned predispositions limited him from fully appreciating some of the uniqueness of those same indigenous cultures he worked with, particularly the creative ways oral traditions could be wielded. The fact that such a responsible, systematic scholar could be so often blinded in their appraisals of Indian viewpoints demonstrates how entrenched prejudices against oral histories were in Swanton's day. The situation today, while better than in his time, continues to be a problem preventing anthropologists and Indians from fully appreciating what the other has to offer. The ability to transcend such biases has always been a possibility, but pervasive cultural norms of racism and unflinching belief in the primitivism of non-Western cultures seems a barrier few scholars are always willing to stray beyond as a matter of consistent practice.

However, as a cautionary note on this point, one should keep in mind that change is incremental within all academic disciplines. There is often a tension, filled with both challenges to prevailing prejudices existing alongside efforts to sanitize entrenched status quos. Early anthropologists like Swanton often suffered from a desire to present Native people as sensible people that used reason and logic to govern their lives, albeit of a kind that lagged behind Western ways. At the same time, many of them saw their work in this area as humanitarian. In their view, the only way the general public and government could be persuaded to eventually accept Native people as assimilated citizens lay in presenting their cultures as primitive but more than capable of "catching" up to Western standards with a vast, coordinated policy of assimilation. Along the way, through long-term interpersonal experiences with Native people, some anthropologists came to eventually show more appreciation for the worth of indigenous cultures in of themselves, on their own terms.

From Native standpoints today, the bag is a somewhat more complicated mix. Continuing to serve as objects of scientific scrutiny at all still carries with it enough of an ethnocentric undercurrent to keep many Native Americans from embracing anthropology. What is apparent is that Indians that do find it worthwhile to work with anthropologists continue to try and ensure that the partnership remains an equal one. Looking back at the background of anthropology and the many offenses some of its earliest practitioners committed against Native people, the current situation is indeed brighter. That said, as Native people continue to choose anthropology or archaeology as career paths, it remains to be seen whether the sincerity by which many non-Indian scholars have embraced their presence and input will remain. Many Native people are optimistic that more Indians working in these fields will help remedy some of more blatant mischaracterizations of their heritages from the past. They also remain hopeful that an increased presence will prevent such inaccuracies and cultural insensitivities from occurring today and in the future.

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