

Human Remains and the Construction of Race and History, 1897-1945

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the use of human remains as tools for research and display over the course of a fifty-year span in the United States. It explores the shift away from racial classification toward emerging ideas regarding human prehistory and evolution. This project serves as both an intellectual history of the discourse surrounding these remains and a cultural history of the exhibitions that millions of visitors encountered at museums and fairs throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

To Emily

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Despite the collaborative nature of this project, the interpretations are my own, and therefore any mistakes in judgment are entirely my own.

Introduction

In May of 1864, as the Civil War raged, a lone American Indian man died at the hands of a pair of U.S. soldiers near a dusty outpost in rural Minnesota. The soldiers shot the man twice. One bullet struck him in the head. A second bullet entered his body through either his mouth or neck.¹ Either wound was probably enough to prove fatal, possibly even killing him instantly. Although his body was healthy and strong at the time of his death, his face now lay totally disfigured. In most circumstances, the soldiers would have simply left the body. In this incident, however, the soldiers were compelled to bring the remains of the man back to the fort. That decision would prove critical for the fate of the man's skeleton.

When considered within the context of the long history of settlement in the American West, the circumstances surrounding the death of the single "hostile Sioux," who died somewhere between the ages of 25 and 28, were common. Frontier violence ebbed and flowed, but was taken for granted as enmeshed within everyday existence in the mid-nineteenth century United States. What happened to the body of this particular young Dakota man after his death, however, was striking. Word of the killing spread quickly and white civilians from the village arrived at the fort to celebrate. After having suffered its ill fate at the hands of American troops, the body was dragged across the grassland to the fort, where it was badly mutilated. Eventually, both soldiers and settlers began beating the body relentlessly. The lower jaw of the corpse, likely already grossly stained and torn due to the gunshot wound, was further shattered into small pieces. The scalp was cut off and carried away as a souvenir—a memento of death. The settlers smashed and cut the once strong bones belonging to the lifeless corpse.² Once the settlers were finished, they buried the body. The corpse lay below ground, but a short while before being disinterred it was removed in the name of science, several bones going missing in the process.³

A few months later, a medical officer at the fort was gently placing the man's bones into a box in response to an order to collect human remains for science. The remains were shipped to a museum where they would be studied, displayed, and interpreted by generations of scholars and members of the public over the ensuing

¹ New Ulm Post. 20 Mai 1864. New Ulm Historical Society, New Ulm, Minnesota. Historical records of the United States Army corroborate much of the story appearing in the *New Ulm Post*. Scouting parties of volunteers were ordered to search the region, and firefight broke out when three Native Americans fired upon a pair of soldiers. The soldiers returned fire, with bullets striking the single young man in the head and neck. See, Memorandum. "Inventory and Assessment of Human Remains from the Historic Period Potentially Affiliated with the Eastern Dakota in the National Museum of Natural History." Stephanie A. Makseyn-Kelley and Erica Bubnaik Jones. Repatriation Office, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. April 24, 1996.

² While Muller does detail the scalping and removal of specific body parts, it was not until 1996 that physical anthropologists at the Smithsonian determined the extent of the individual's injuries, which included a broken hip bone, cracked ribs, and cut marks on his right radius (an arm bone). See memorandum. "Inventory and Assessment of Human Remains from the Historic Period Potentially Affiliated with the Eastern Dakota in the National Museum of Natural History."

³ Letter from Alfred Muller, Acting Assistant Surgeon, U.S. Army to Surgeon General, U.S. Army, March 26, 1866. Army Medical Museum Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. It should be noted that bodies of African-American Union soldiers were mutilated by soldiers of the confederacy, marking bodily mutilation as an obvious sign of harsh racial tensions. Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 44-45.

decades. Eventually transferred to the Smithsonian Institution, the remains became part of a growing project to understand humanity through a changing kaleidoscope of ideas about race and prehistory. Scientists, eager for evidence to support their ideas, helped spur the growth of spaces colloquially known as *bone rooms*. While the scientists were chiefly responsible for using the bones in the production of ideas about the classification of races and, increasingly, the deep human past, they relied heavily on collectors of all kinds to gather specimens. Museums concerned with natural history, medicine, and anthropology – in their quest to solve the riddles of race and human history – turned to human remains for answers. Indeed, the debates that emerged in anthropology and medicine about race would not have been possible without human remains. This dissertation chronicles the history of collecting, researching, and displaying human remains during the most active period of growth for museum collections of this kind – from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century.

Shortly after the killing of the young Dakota man in 1864, a German-American newspaper from a village near the fort reported the details of the skirmish from the perspective of the settlers. Reflecting on the incident, the paper stated, “it is time to hunt down these red beasts with iron pursuit.”⁴ Newspapers crowed at the small victory over the Native Americans, but the incident did not settle the tensions that had boiled over just two years earlier in the Dakota War of 1862, a conflict resulting in the death of hundreds of combatants and civilians. In truth, the U.S. Army was still clumsy and disorganized in the region. The shooting of the young Dakota man in truth probably represented to the settlers a rare show of competence from the military, its best soldiers slowly drained away to fight for the Union in the South.⁵

Within a few months, the bones of the young Dakota man lay not buried within the ground, but resting on the makeshift operating table of a physician. The fort’s assistant surgeon, a measured and experienced man named Alfred Muller, lamented the circumstances surrounding the young Native American’s death and mutilation in a letter, describing it as “unnecessary ill treatment.”⁶ Muller would have possessed vivid memories of violent fighting just a few years earlier. He received high praise for his effective treatment of the wounded settlers following an attack. Despite his intimate familiarity with frontier violence, he found the beating of the corpse by the settlers to be grotesque. With the bones now laid out before him, he carefully handled and examined each one, writing his own detailed notes on the state of the body. The bones were indeed badly cut and damaged in some places – however, many of the individual bones had been spared. Furthermore, the manner in which the course of the violence had cracked and broken some bones, and not others, was fascinating (and potential useful) for observation and study. Despite Muller’s feelings about the treatment of the corpse of the lone

⁴ New Ulm Post. 20 May 1864. New Ulm Historical Society, New Ulm, Minnesota. Historical records of the United States Army corroborate much of the story appearing in the *New Ulm Post*. Scouting parties of volunteers were ordered to search the region, and firefight broke out when three Native Americans fired upon a pair of soldiers. The soldiers returned fire, with bullets striking the single young man in the head and neck. Memorandum. “Inventory and Assessment of Human Remains from the Historic Period Potentially Affiliated with the Eastern Dakota in the National Museum of Natural History.”

⁵ Mary Lethert Wingerd, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 296-297.

⁶ Letter, Alfred Muller to Army Medical Museum. March 26, 1866. National Anthropological Archives. Army Medical Museum Records, Reel 1, AMM #13.

American Indian, he did not rebury the body once it had been removed from the ground. Instead, after his careful examination, he decided to send the remains to Washington, D.C., where the United States Army had recently founded a medical museum. Muller had received a catalogue of the new museum's collections, and he believed that the skeleton of the American Indian might be of use to scientific endeavors described in the publication.⁷ Several weeks later, he sent a second parcel containing the bones of the man's missing hand, which Muller had managed to procure from some unnamed source in the name of science.⁸ The surgeon possessed reservations about the treatment of the body before burial, yet the notion that the body of a Native American should be sent to a museum in order to advance the medical and anthropological study of race and the human body was considered both just and worthwhile.

For a time, beginning around the start of the Civil War and stretching well into the twentieth century, collecting human skeletal remains was a frequent intellectual, cultural, and social pursuit centered primarily upon a changing and diverse network of scholars and scientists affiliated with a number of museums in the United States.⁹ Supplemented by the work of amateur collectors, museum collections grew rapidly in major cities across the United States. The gradual and piecemeal acquisition of human remains and subsequent attempts to draw important ideas from their study would eventually develop into an outright competition to fill bone rooms with rare specimens. Fueled by competing desires and ideas, several major museums grew to dominate medical and physical anthropological collections, hoarding and attempting to fully comprehend the utility of the newly acquired bone empires on a nearly industrial scale. The course of events was as often heady as it was dramatic. While the process of collecting, interpreting, and displaying the dead in museums became ever professionalized and systematic, it never resembled the patterns that its early practitioners envisioned as its aims. The desire for scientific collections and competing ideas about race and the history of mankind fueled the growth of bone rooms, which outgrew storage areas and spilled into hallways and occasionally onto gallery floors in the form of an exhibition. Physicians and anatomists coming of age at the time of the Civil War, like Alfred Muller, began to learn about early efforts to systematically collect skeletons for science – and therefore the idea of disinterring the grave of a Native American to send his remains to a museum seemed almost natural.¹⁰

⁷ Letter from Alfred Muller to Surgeon General, U.S. Army, March 26, 1866. Army Medical Museum Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸ “The . . . Indian belonged to one of the hostile Sioux tribes and was killed by soldiers in May 1864, about 12 miles south of this fort. I am sorry to state that the body was badly mutilated by soldiers and citizens before I was able to secure it; one of the hands and the scalp having been cut off and carried away, the lower jaw having fractured . . . besides other unnecessarily treatment of the corpse.” Letter from Alfred Muller to Surgeon General, U.S. Army, May 9, 1866. Army Medical Museum Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁹ I understand this group as the primary discursive community of my study. These individuals left behind a rich library of archival documents – museum memoranda, correspondence, field notes, and voluminous publications. Later on, a select few would also leave critical oral histories – adding to what we know of the development of this community.

¹⁰ Recent additions to this literature include Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) and Tony Platt, *Grave Matters: Excavating California's Buried Past* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2011).

Following their arrival in Washington, the bones of the lone Dakota man appear to have been placed on exhibit in the museum, though the details of the possible display are murky. It is likely that the skeleton was temporarily used in teaching long-forgotten visitors lessons about “comparative anatomy” for some time in the late nineteenth century. The bones of the Native American would have been identified as such, a Dakota stand-in for a diverse range of tribes across the Americas – a lone and broken man standing for the very idea that these bones were among the last of a unique and vanishing race. In some instances for display, bones were presumed to be similar enough to be simply interchangeable within racial categories; if the jaw was too broken or shattered for display, the museum could simply replace the broken or missing bone with another, similarly sized, portion of another Native American skeleton. For a few decades following the Civil War, medical students could have poured over the bones that still bore the cracks and cuts of a harsh beating. At some point, the bones were probably on exhibit to teach young medical students about the harsh nature of the injuries they might encounter on modern battlefields.¹¹ Packages accompanied with letters, many with stories like Alfred Muller’s, arrived almost daily to the museum from around the American West and from expeditions around the globe.¹²

The original goal of the Army Medical Museum (AMM) was to collect examples of battlefield injuries so that Army surgeons might better understand how to treat the wounds of modern warfare. Soon after the museum opened, however, remains like those sent from Muller further encouraged the curators of the museum to undertake a project in comparative racial anatomy, a long standing scientific endeavor to classify the races of mankind based on their physical features and appearance.¹³ Medical doctors, anthropologists, and other scientists in the United States and Europe came to believe that perceived behavioral attributes of the various races of mankind – such as intelligence and industriousness – could be directly correlated to physical characteristics. For some, the racial attributes could be measured and, indeed, ranked on a grand scale of human kind. George A. Otis, who personally collected and measured hundreds of skulls for the Army Medical Museum, concluded simply, “the American Indians must be assigned a lower position on the human scale than has been believed heretofore.”¹⁴ While not all scientists were as bold and direct in their conclusions, the practice of collecting, researching, and displaying non-white human remains largely served to support the scientific racism that dominated the era. As these theories developed, human remains were collected at dozens of museums of medicine and natural history across the United States. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, certain collections grew more rapidly than others, due to opportunistic collecting and uneven levels of interest among museums for obtaining rare bodies and body parts. Despite this sporadic growth, these decades constituted the most active period of collecting human remains for museums – a legacy

¹¹ I discuss the likelihood of these events when I return to this narrative in Chapter 2.

¹² The remains of this individual have subsequently been repatriated. Personal Communication, David Hunt, Smithsonian Institution. December 3rd, 2009.

¹³ Michael Rhode and James Connor, “A Repository for Bottled Monsters and Medical Curiosities: The Evolution of the Army Medical Museum,” in *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America’s Changing Communities*, Amy Levin, ed. (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press., 2006), 177. Comparative anatomical collections started arriving at the museum in 1867.

¹⁴ As quoted in David Hurst Thomas, *Skulls Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). 58.

critical to those concerned with the modern day fate of these mummies, medical specimens, and human skeletons. Significant ideas about the human body that were hotly contested between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century frequently turned to these collections of human remains for evidence in support of various ideas. In their transition from grave to museum bone room, human remains were understood to be endowed with new scientific meaning. By the turn of the century, skeletons would become a key tool for testing the numerous and diverse theories surrounding the races of mankind being developed in a range of disciplines in the United States. At almost every turn, however, the grand vision laid out by the early founders of these collections – who claimed that secrets of racial evolution would be laid bare in the scientific examination of human bodies – seemed to veer further off course. Grave robbing, scientific racism, and ethnocentrism damaged the reputations of museums and scientists on a global scale.

This dissertation is a cultural and intellectual history of human remains as objects for display and research in the United States from the mid-to-late nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War. It revolves around the question of how human remains that were collected for research and display in museums and on international exposition fairgrounds functioned as tools in the development and popularization of theories about the human body – including those in race, medicine, and human prehistory. As historian Steven Conn noted, “Museums functioned as the most widely accessible public fora to underscore a positivist, progressive and hierarchical view of the world, and they gave that view material form and scientific legitimacy.”¹⁵ Similarly, exhibitions at international expositions introduced the public to a tangled array of scientific and pseudo-scientific claims. As with the material culture collections studied by Conn, collections of human skeletal remains contributed to the positivist, progressive, and hierarchical view of the modern age. Unlike material culture collections, however, collecting and studying human remains often had concrete and direct implications for theories about the human form – scientists and scholars developed ideas about race and human evolution that were ultimately disseminated widely throughout American culture. Ideas about the body, particularly when related to race and gender, were critical in reinforcing – and sometimes deconstructing – basic cultural conceptions of humanity. Human remains collections worked to shape significant perceptions about living and seemingly vanishing races around the globe. As scientists worked to articulate and defend their theories, they created large collections of human remains to serve as both evidence and explanatory models. Especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, human remains were frequently presented on their own, lying silently under the glass cases that lined museum halls and presented to the public as being representative of discrete facts – points of hierarchies, stages in evolution, or the “comparative anatomy” of racial classification. Gradually, however, museums began to leverage human remains – and artistic representations of bodies drawn from the observation of human remains – as elements of *narrative*. Increasingly present in these narratives about human evolution or prehistory were descriptions of new discoveries of human ancestors outside the Americas. The dominant narratives then changed, depending on the intellectual arguments drawn out by curators and the dramatizations of journalists describing museum exhibits. Through these narratives surrounding ancient human history and human evolution, museum visitors

¹⁵ Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life. 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5.

were presented with a changing array of ideas on a variety of contested subjects. This dissertation explores how these changes were borne out in several major exhibits. Increasingly, an interest in human prehistory gradually displaced racial classification as the central scholarly debate that consumed the oft obsessive drive to build human remains collections at museums of medicine, anthropology, and natural history in the United States.

Chapter 1 explores the practice of collecting human remains for science, examining the roots of scientific racism and how particular discoveries of human remains began to captivate broader audiences. Chapter 2 traces the attempts to document and record the races of mankind through the practice of collecting skeletons in the early twentieth century, and maps important pieces of legislation over evolving ideas about racial classification theory. Chapter 3 breaks slightly from the narrative of collecting human remains in order to examine more closely the history of one of the most popular and influential medical museums in the United States, the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia. Whereas much of the dissertation focuses on museum anthropology, this chapter examines the particular use of human remains for the study of race and prehistory within medical contexts. Similarly, Chapter 4 serves as a case study of the early history of the San Diego Museum of Man; thought to be the largest exhibition of ideas about race and prehistory to date when it opened in 1915, the exhibit set an important precedent for blending artistic representations of ideas in anthropology alongside the display of actual human skeletons and mummies. Chapter 5 traces the rise and dramatic fall of scientific racism in the United States as witnessed through the ongoing practice of collecting and organizing human remains in museum contexts. As the problems of racial classification theory were exposed, scholars studying and collecting human remains in North America began to shift their attention to a longer view of human history. The final chapter of this dissertation explores the emergence of prehistory alongside a declining focus on racial classification in the United States.

A small group of individuals in both the anthropological and medical community organized the drive to collect and display human remains, but their work was supported by a whole host of professionals and amateurs, who, over time, submitted thousands of human remains to natural history and medical museums in the United States. Some of the central figures in this saga included the most luminary anthropologists of the era, including Ales Hrdlička, Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, and Earnest Hooten. The tradition established in the medical community – by a number of physicians like Alfred Muller, who were increasingly receptive to the idea that certain skeletons might be preserved for future research and teaching – resulted in the creation of a modest number of medical museums found mostly in major urban centers like Philadelphia. During the period examined in this dissertation, the manner in which museums interpreted human remains underwent a series of gradual transitions. Whereas scientists researching and collecting human remains in the mid-to-late nineteenth century were primarily concerned with race, scholars working at the same institutions fifty years later were more concerned with questions of evolution and human history – topics, for a time, explored under the scientific appellation of *racial history*. Central to this story is the history of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment that would build the largest collection of human remains in the United States – if not the world – under the guidance of the fervent and controversial Czech-born American scientist named Ales Hrdlička. Following the lead of

the Smithsonian, museums in cities such as New York, Chicago, and San Diego would progressively collect human remains from around the world and periodically display transitioning ideas regarding race and human history. Rivalries and disagreements over the practice of collecting information about the human body, including the intellectual and cultural ownership of remains, became increasingly heated over the course of the early years of the twentieth century, only to die down as the intellectual center of physical anthropology moved away from the museum to the university. Figures like Hrdlička and Boas worked together as often as they were in personal and professional tension, disagreeing over the correct interpretation of bodies as it pertained to questions of race and occasionally finding personal distaste in their respective approaches to science.

Despite this narrative of waxing and waning influence of these collections in American culture, the issues surrounding the process of gathering, researching, and displaying human remains do not represent a simple declension story – debates surrounding human remains collections would re-emerge in new forms later in the twentieth century. Ethical challenges from indigenous communities – challenges that often demanded the return of their ancestors for permanent reburial – would significantly reshape the story. A new series of controversies and ethical challenges would again give museum bone rooms a prominent place in popular and scholarly discourse, though the nature of this contest was starkly different from that imagined by the founders and early organizers of these collections. An engine working to drive this story was the emerging competition over remains and clashing ideas over their exact meaning and significance. In 1901, for example, a collector working on behalf of the University of California, where a University Museum was quickly being established, remarked upon seeing a private collection of archaeological materials, “I obliged him to bequeath the whole to the State University, so that this might not go East or abroad.”¹⁶ Indeed, while museums frequently cooperated in their efforts to build skeletal collections, there was as often an underlying sense of competition for the best specimens, including discoveries of human remains thought to be particularly productive to teach scholars about race or the past. This dissertation considers how museums determined and reassessed the value of remains for both scholarship and exhibition.

The remains themselves, for the duration of this entire period, were essentially static.¹⁷ Once they were removed from the ground, taken from a battlefield, or removed from other kinds of burials, they often sat still for generations behind the scenes of museums and universities, moved only periodically to be measured or displayed. Perceptions related to these remains, however, changed drastically among the scientific community, the public, and indigenous communities around the globe between the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. This was not purely a phenomenon confined to the United States. Collections of human remains are equally as large in European medical schools and museums, but the meaning of the collection and display of the body in the United States involved tensions specific to American efforts to understand race as a factor in the history of humanity. In no small

¹⁶ Diary. P.M. Jones. 1901. Sunday, January 20, 1901. Photocopy of original. Accession No. 24. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁷This notion can also be seen in the use of the Civil War dead in crafting particular political and nationalistic agendas. “Without agendas, without politics, the Dead became what their survivors chose to make them.” Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 269.

part, exhibitions held at museums and fairs that featured human remains frequently offered explanations regarding the unique racial landscape in the United States. At the same time the practice of burying and mourning the dead was becoming, in many settings, increasingly secular, the use of the dead by scientists to understand disease, anatomy, race, and human history gradually became an important component in the development of numerous museum collections.¹⁸

Historically, human remains may have received less scholarly attention than other kinds of museum collections, but when scholars did choose to study them the research they produced sometimes resulted in important claims that rippled throughout numerous other scientific and academic fields throughout the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Starting in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, when remains were displayed or described in detail (and often were extremely exaggerated), newspapers frequently worked to capture public imagination of these items. This resulted in momentary explosions of interest in the subject of bodies, race, and prehistory – viewed through the lens of skeletons or mummified bodies. With the decline of scientific racism in the inter-war years, the rise of the study of human prehistory largely displaced the study of racial classification in anthropology and archaeology. While the scientific theories these collections of remains supported seem to stand on shifting ground, the size and scale of museum exhibitions nevertheless only continued to grow during the decades between the First and Second World War.

This narrative is of course not wholly linear. Despite a general decline of scientific racism, some scholars representing minority viewpoints in the early 1960s still echoed the racial theories of scholars from the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Early claims about prehistory too, are apparent in the research and display of remains in the late nineteenth century, but the notion of our knowledge about human prehistory as being drawn from the bones of the dead only became central to the activities of physical anthropologists by the middle-third of the twentieth century. Even as new, field-changing discoveries were occurring in biology, chemistry, genetics, and paleoanthropology, museum exhibitions using skeletons – or their artistic representations – were left unattended or permanently encased in forgotten corners of museum galleries. By the end of the twentieth century, many of these exhibits were removed from public view (the displays were considered too dated and overly controversial) and were eventually replaced with the modern exhibitions we see at museums today. Although modern visitors are occasionally offered glimpses of the remains of Egyptian mummies, pre-colonial settlers, and anatomical medical specimens, the contexts surrounding these displays have changed dramatically over the last century and a half.

If, as Conn has postulated, the Gilded Age and Progressive Era witnessed the rise of an “object based epistemology” during a rapid period of museum building in the United States, I argue that it would be possible to explore how the human body was utilized as a tool for the production and dissemination of knowledge alongside other

¹⁸ For a discussion on the secularization of the dead in the United States, see Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Later in this dissertation, I compare the ideas of Carleton S. Coon, the twentieth century anthropologist to Samuel George Morton, the nineteenth century anatomist and Louis Aggasiz, the nineteenth century zoologist.

objects exhibited at museums and fairs throughout the same period.²⁰ In order to study this phenomenon, I have chosen to focus upon the practice of collecting and displaying the dead as a cultural phenomenon in the United States. This dissertation also explores the intellectual history of the many significant and contested ideas drawn from the study of the dead in museum settings, peeling away some of the many layers of meaning derived from skeletons stored in bone rooms.

Other scholars interested in the history of museums and museum anthropology have largely documented the institutional narratives surrounding the more dominant strains of cultural anthropology and archaeology.²¹ Later histories opened a rich field of museum history in the United States, but these too have focused primarily on the development of material culture collections and displays.²² Together, these histories argued that the study of material objects dominated anthropology in the United States until sometime in the 1920s or 1930s.²³ While these histories contribute mightily to our knowledge of the history of museum anthropology, museum histories and histories of anthropology have largely left a documentary and interpretive gap surrounding the history of collecting, displaying, and studying the remains of human beings from around the globe. Within natural history museums, these collections were defined as belonging to physical anthropology. In more modestly sized medical museums, bones were studied for a variety of reasons; however, racial science and human history were subjects that extended into medical circles as well, with collections of bones primarily understood as tools to advance the education of physicians, especially in the nineteenth century.

The smaller group of scholars who have studied the practice of collecting human remains in the United States have tended to examine the practice within several particular contexts.²⁴ Related works on the history of physical anthropology, both in and outside of

²⁰ Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, 24.

²¹ See, George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987). And George Stocking. *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992). Only a decade before Stocking published *Victorian Anthropology*, historian Thomas Haskell published his landmark study examining the professionalization of the social science disciplines. Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

²² Bruce Kuklick explores the early development of collecting for museums in the United States from the Old World civilizations of the Middle East. Bruce Kuklick, *Puritans in Babylon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Steven Conn offers several works important to the history of museums and museum anthropology. In his first book, Conn traces the rise and fall of museums as central figures to the growth of the American intellectual tradition. Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*. In Conn's most recent work, he argues that museum objects have lost their centrality in presenting knowledge to museum visitors over the course of the twentieth century. Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). Ira Jacknis' work traces the development of collecting from cultures of the Pacific Northwest as an example of broader trends of collection building for museums in the United States. Ira Jacknis, *The Storage Box of Tradition: Kwakiutl Art, Anthropologists, and Museums, 1881-1981* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

²³ George Stocking, *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 8.

²⁴ Anthropologist Kathleen Fine-Dare places the practice of acquiring human remains within the broader systematic collecting of Native American material now falling under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Kathleen S. Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 30-40. Historian Louis Menand examines the practice of collecting and measuring skulls in the context of the study of race and human evolution in the long nineteenth century. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of*

the museum, have also appeared in print since the 1970s. Central to the development of this literature was historian Frank Spencer, who studied the emergence of a professional field of physical anthropology in both Europe and the United States.²⁵ Other historians and anthropologists examining the body have explored the body's materiality, focusing on the abstract and metaphoric meanings drawn by medical, anthropological, psychological, or other theoretical thinkers.²⁶ Parts of the body or "specimens," it has been argued, represented *facts* that could be placed together as evidencing broader interpretations of race, disease, and history.²⁷ Scholars examining the history of death and burial in the United States have created a diverse literature, examining the growth of cemeteries, the rise of the funeral industry, and the secular and spiritual meaning of death throughout the history of the United States.²⁸ Human remains collected for "science" were interpreted as having lost their spiritual context once taken from the cemetery, burial ground, or morgue. Once the body became an *object*, it became a tool in scientific study and display. This transformation would lead to a series of major ethical questions surrounding the treatment of human remains by museums and universities in the United States. Ann Fabian's recent work capably presents the early history of collecting and studying the dead in the United States, situating this history within broader cultural and intellectual trends in the United States.²⁹ This dissertation builds upon these claims and examines them as they extended into the rapidly professionalizing worlds of physical anthropology and medicine in museum contexts. While the connection between scientists working with museum collections of human remains has been taken for granted in most works on the subject, a history of the growth of these collections and the ideas drawn from them – during what was perhaps their most active and influential period – has never been written.

In conducting a more in depth study of how museums collected, researched, and exhibited human remains, we are left with a different story than the scholars who have studied the establishment of the field of museum anthropology through the lens of the development of material culture collections. Museums actively debated ideas as they chose what to collect, their priorities for research, and how to best display ideas through exhibitions built around human skeletons. Museum anthropologists and medical doctors primarily concerned with human remains engaged with a different scholarly audience than did biologists and sociologists, and their discourse surrounding race and human prehistory embraced a decidedly different trajectory than the scholarship surrounding

Ideas in America (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001). To date, the archaeologist and museum curator David Hurst Thomas has written one of the most complete accounts of the collection and study of human remains in the United States. Thomas, however, is primarily interested in answering a series of modern questions about the legacy of museum collection of human remains. Thomas, *Skull Wars*.

²⁵ Spencer produced a number of major works, including Frank Spencer, ed. *A History of American Physical Anthropology, 1930-1980* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).

²⁶ For a brief summary of these theoretical issues, see Katherine Ott, "The Sum of Its Parts: An Introduction to Modern Histories of Prosthetics" in *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*, eds. Katherine Ott, et. al. (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 4-5.

²⁷ Erin Hunter McLeary, "Science in a Bottle: The Medical Museum in North America, 1860-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2001), 14.

²⁸ A brief summary of the literature surrounding death and burial in the United States can be found in Michael Kammen, *Digging up the Dead: A History of Notable American Reburials* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 22.

²⁹ Fabian, *The Skull Collectors*.

material culture. The gravity of the arguments made about race and human history were often made on weight of physical evidence drawn from human remains (and gradually a small number of fossils and replicas). Further delineating a separate trajectory from those studying material culture – as the field of material culture studies slowly moved away from museums toward the university – the center of the field of physical anthropology remained in museum contexts until the Second World War.³⁰ Medical museums, on the other hand, experienced the era entirely differently than did their counterparts collecting human remains for natural history museums. For a time, they engaged with natural history museums concerned with anthropology discourses ranging from race to gender and history, but these museums' decline in significance for medical training was largely due to technological developments in medicine, rather than major theoretical shifts, as in anthropology. Medical museums, therefore, are at times critical to the story of collecting human remains, but they repeatedly fade in and out of the dominant narratives and discourses – this includes recent debates concerning the ethical display of indigenous bodies surrounding mainly the collections of universities and natural history museums. Medical museums, in a parallel fashion, witnessed a changing series of ethical guidelines for proper collecting and display of human remains; however, this debate has been less obviously situated in indigenous activism.

Rather than entering into the fray of the very meaningful contemporary debates surrounding human remains collections, my intention in this dissertation is to provide a more complete context for the history of these collections. Making the case for the significance of these collections is perhaps easier than gauging the exact size and scope of human remains collections in the United States.³¹ Remains are spread throughout large and small museums throughout the country and cataloguing information is often vague and limited, though the information museums provide to tribes, researchers and casual visitors has grown to be much more detailed in recent years following the completion of federal mandated surveys. Recent estimates have placed the number of Native American remains in museums in the United States at about 500,000.³² Adding to this figure are smaller collections of African-Americans, European-Americans, and collections of remains from indigenous peoples from around the globe. It is estimated that an additional half-million sets of remains of Native Americans have been acquired by museums in Europe since the nineteenth century.³³ More than 116,000 sets of human remains and nearly one million associated funerary objects are considered by museums in the United States to be culturally unaffiliated, meaning that no specific ancestral origin has been ascribed to them.³⁴ Although potentially surprising, these are conservative estimates.

³⁰ This claim was also made by a physical anthropologist who lived through the transition. T.D. Stewart, "The Growth of American Physical Anthropology between 1925 and 1975," *Anthropological Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1975): 193-204.

³¹ The National Park Service maintain several major databases related to NAGPRA inventories. These inventories suggest the total number of human remains at museums in the U.S. National NAGPRA Online Databases. "National NAGPRA Online Databases," National Park Service, Department of Interior, accessed February 5, 2012. <http://www.nps.gov/history/nagpra/ONLINEDB/INDEX.HTM>.

³² Megan J. Highet, "Body Snatching & Grave Robbing: Bodies for Science," *History and Anthropology* 16, no 4. (2005): 434.

³³ Highet, "Body Snatching & Grave Robbing," 434.

³⁴ This fact is crucial to those hoping to secure remains and affiliated funerary objects for repatriation, as legal guidelines have heretofore required cultural affiliation to be established before repatriation of human

While modern ethical debates became increasingly vocal and articulate at the end of the twentieth century, the course of these complex issues was largely determined by the history of collecting and interpreting these remains before the Second World War. The history of these collections is dramatic – centered upon an ongoing competition to establish the largest and most prestigious museums in cities across the United States.³⁵ Driven by ego and a sense of urgency, as well as intellectual pursuit, scholars established a new field as they collected and their studies worked to shape ideas about race and what it means to be human. For scientists who collected the dead, the desire to obtain remains for growing bone rooms often suspended or fully displaced codes of ethical behavior. Museum curators, as well as amateur collectors, competed and collaborated in order to understand the body as a scientific object, and at the same time, visitors to museums that chose to display the bodies of the dead proved continually enthralled, almost surprised, by the *humanity* of ancient and recent bodies they found exhibited before them. Over the course of the past century and a half, bone empires have expanded unevenly and the manner in which they have shaped American culture has undergone a remarkable transition – this dissertation aspires to tell the story of the voiceless remains that gradually made their way to museum shelves and exhibit cases in cities across the United States.

remains and sacred objects can occur. See Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, “Remains Unknown: Repatriating Culturally Unaffiliated Human Remains,” *Anthropology News* 51. No. 3. (March 2010): 4.

³⁵ Certain museums benefited from their location, as well as the energies of particular curators. The Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, for instance, gradually collected thousands of skeletons from shellmounds and burials discovered around the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Field Museum, American Museum of Natural History, and the Peabody Museum of Ethnography and Archaeology at Harvard occasionally received queries and offers of skeletons stemming from accidental discoveries in proximity to the museum. Just as often, however, building collections was as much about the project to build and compete on a global scale with other museums.

Chapter 1 – Collecting Bodies for Science in the Late Nineteenth Century

Starting in the 1870s, rumors of mysterious discoveries taking place throughout the American West captured the attention of scientists and the public. As settlers and explorers roamed to the edge of the continent, some parties uncovered unusual bodies previously unknown to science. Tucked deep into caves, buried near elaborate ruins, and frozen in arctic permafrost, naturally mummified corpses stupefied early observers. Although the earliest discoverers were unaware of this, bodies of the Ancient Puebloans in the American Southwest were to become critical in shaping the emerging disciplines of archaeology and anthropology in North America. At issue was not just what to do with ancient remains upon their discovery, but also how to interpret their meaning as objects of science. Despite their apparent meaning within the prehistoric indigenous history of the Americas, many in the United States understood these rare bodies through the same lens that was driving the collecting of the more recent dead—the study of race. When new bodies were discovered, the first questions that usually arose focused on the *racial origin* of these mysterious bodies and their relationship to the modern races of the Americas. While the age of these mummies made them an important rarity, the primary purpose for collecting and permanently preserving these new skeletons was to ascribe them a place on the puzzle that was the scientific taxonomy of races. Scientific publications and heady discourse about the division of the races only seemed to reify popular desires to collect human remains. Museums in the United States, almost as though aiming to catch up with their older European counterparts, began collecting bones in North America with a heretofore-unseen furor.

Naturally mummified remains fascinated scholars yet they were also recognized as more than mere tools for archaeological science. In the late nineteenth century, American mummies captured popular imagination in a manner parallel to existing Victorian fascinations with Egypt. Certainly, the colonialist mania for collecting Egyptian antiquities took root in North America at the same time, but the puzzle of mummies from an ancient civilization in the American Southwest diverted attention to the mystery of the so-called *Cliff Dwellers*.

Since the Civil War, the number of museums collecting skeletons and mummies with the intention of studying racial science grew at slow but steady pace. Major museums in the United States gradually acquired collections of human remains around the expanding sciences of physical anthropology and comparative anatomy. Museum leaders would come to view the acquisition of new skeletons as a wise investment in emerging scientific disciplines. Natural history museums, in particular, began collecting skulls of non-white individuals, hoping to build upon the work of individuals like Samuel George Morton, who had earlier built a collection of several hundred skulls and published a series of influential books based on his observations. Now considered poor, inconsistent, pseudo-scientific, and racist, Morton's work was nevertheless highly regarded at the time. The influence of his work would help frame future debates in physical anthropology.³⁶ Many early museum collectors worked in a fashion similar to

³⁶ This dissertation focuses primarily on the professionalization of the physical anthropology and medical community as they worked to build collections of human remains in major museums in the United States.

Morton, opportunistically collecting skulls from distant contacts and acquaintances and mimicking or responding to his taxonomies of the races of mankind. The collections of private physicians and early amateur collectors, too, established a tradition of skull collecting in the United States in the period following the Civil War. Mysterious packages would arrive at museums—sometimes accompanied by vague, handwritten notes about the provenance of the bones. Medical officers working as agents for the Army Medical Museum were among the first to systematically collect skeletons for a major museum collection in the United States. Where Army medical officers first tread, postal carriers soon followed, allowing amateur collectors to ship skeletons from far-flung locales to museums in Chicago, New York, or Washington, should they be so inclined. As professional archaeologists began their work in the American West, amateurs took it upon themselves to collect skulls and artifacts on their own. For many museums, knowing the racial origin of the specimen was enough to assign it a catalogue number and carefully place it into a drawer in a bone room.³⁷

In 1875, when mummies were discovered in the Aleutian Islands, the *New York Times* referred to them as “a discovery of momentous interest to the scientific world.” Despite such inflated language, the paper had actually not exaggerated the claim; in fact, the article might well have extended it to fellow journalists and members of the public who seemed equally captivated by the mysterious remains. Furthermore, archaeologists, anthropologists, and private corporations who had been collecting in Alaska for decades recognized the discovery of a collection of mummies as a useful human-interest story for promoting their work.³⁸ Naturally mummified remains of human corpses discovered in North America, the skin on their faces pulled tightly back by centuries of quiet preservation, made for especially captivating stories. Mummies discovered in North America were often wrapped in traditional blankets or decorated with sacred burial goods. The hair of the mummies, either only peeking out from the blankets that wrapped their bodies or flowing down from their head, ranged from dark black to various shades of red and blond—discolored after centuries of stillness in caves or other dry locations that allowed for the preservation of the body. Mummified remains discovered in places like the Southwest or Alaska were alternatively viewed with fascination, mystery, and revulsion. Coming under the scrutiny of display and careful study, the remains of the very ancient dead discovered in the American West transitioned from curiosity to antiquity *and* to scientific specimen. Despite their apparent utility in understanding the history of the continent, mummies discovered in North America in the late nineteenth century were viewed through the lens of the ultimate American qualifier: race. These naturally mummified corpses might have the ability to teach about ancient civilizations, to be sure, but most who viewed the mummies in this era hoped that they might reveal secrets about

Numerous other works explore the earlier history of collecting, researching, and displaying the body as it relates to race and prehistory. The leading work in this new scholarship is Fabian, *The Skull Collectors*.

³⁷ By the 1870s, a reliable postal network had been established in the United States. The Gold Rush, the Civil War, railroads, and the rapid growth of urban centers had worked to solidify a modern communication networks. The relative ease of shipping packages allowed human remains to move about within the United States. For more on the creation of a modern postal network in the United States, see David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

³⁸ One work of scholarship highlighting this kind competition surrounding collecting in the Pacific Northwest, specifically among the Kwakiutl, is Jacknis, *The Storage Box of Tradition*.

the racial origin of the modern American Indian. While the arid climate and dry caves were ideal for preserving and mummifying human tissues, it is important to recognize that not all ancient remains laid to rest in these conditions mummified. Although these mummies captured headlines and were the subject of important popular exhibitions, their collection was but one component of a larger project to collect and classify the bones of populations around the world.

The lengthy *New York Times* article that followed the discovery of a new group of mummies from Alaska details the condition of the remains and informs readers that they were scheduled for shipment to Philadelphia, where they were displayed at the Centennial fair the following year. The display of the Alaskan mummies at the 1876 world's fair built on earlier precedents of displaying human remains, but research into non-white, ancient, or otherwise unusual bodies was to assume a heretofore unseen centrality; alongside the public's burgeoning understanding of what was represented by human remains was the scientific community's organized inquiries into comparative racial anatomy and prehistory.

The Alaskan mummies were shipped to Philadelphia, where they were displayed in front of the throngs who toured the Centennial Exposition.³⁹ Presented as scientific commodities and tools for solving the riddles of race and time, human remains briefly assumed a moment of great prominence in American consciousness. This chapter details the professionalization of the practice of collecting, displaying, and researching human remains in several different contexts. Bodies were a significant attraction for popular audiences attending fairs and private museums in the United States in the late nineteenth century. The public read of their discovery in newspapers and in works of fiction, and they were eager to view them firsthand. As significant, however, was the growth and organization of collections of human remains in museums—institutions that conducted significant amounts of scientific activity—during the same period. Between the 1870s and the conclusion of the century, theories surrounding the notion of race and racial difference came to dominate studies of human remains in the United States. Race so thoroughly dominated the study of the body that even the bodies of the mysterious ancient dead were framed in the concept of race. The Alaskan mummies on display in Philadelphia were no exception. These mummies were but a small part of a growing project to define mankind through the systematic collection of rare corpses.⁴⁰

Although many continued to dismiss the value of antiquities found in North America, a growing fascination with the discovery and display of ancient objects and remains took hold in the United States following the Civil War. When it came to ancient history and, in particular, mummified remains, the Old World seemed to possess vastly superior and more significant relics (for some this was read as evidence underscoring notions of cultural and racial superiority). In order to satisfy a desire for the valued relics

³⁹ "Alaskan Mummies: What Capt. Hennig Found in the Aleutian Islands, An Indian Tradition the Bodies of a Chief and His Family That Have Been Preserved a Century and a Half Their Transfer to San Francisco. The Tradition. The Truth of the Story," *New York Times*, January 18, 1875, 5.

⁴⁰ For the purposes of this chapter, I will attempt to stay as close as possible to the definition of "antiquities" as used by the historical figures I am examining. It should be noted, however, that this definition, at various times, either includes or appears to neglect human remains and burial goods. For the most part, however, anthropologists, policy makers, and other writers of this period conceptualized ancient human remains and all of the burial goods discovered inside the ancient graves of North America as "antiquities."

of the Old World, Americans collected vast quantities of both objects and remains through both professional archaeology and private patronage in Europe, Africa, and Asia.⁴¹ By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, new discoveries in the American West dramatically threw open a new region for professionals and amateurs to collect ancient remains. The remains found within or nearby cliff dwellings came to be defined as distinctly *American*—set apart from the ancient history of the Old World. Prevailing racism and popular notions of a savage, static, and simple American Indian might have created a tension with simultaneous efforts to preserve sophisticated ancient ruins, but most observers were either blind to or willing to accept this incongruity. It was taken for granted that the careful study of recently uncovered skulls and bones—understood as relics of extinct ancient peoples, clues to a wandering tribe from some distant land, or the mysterious advanced ancestors of a people who slid back into a primordial savagery—might help solve the mystery of the American mummies and the Cliff Dwellers.

Only one year before the lauded discovery of mummies by the Alaska Commercial Company, another *New York Times* article articulated the popular antipathy toward the antiquities found in North America. The paper reads:

Our people are not much inclined to think of a great antiquity as belonging to the inhabitants of this continent, or to value highly the relics of our extinct human races. The popular contempt for the red Indian, and the knowledge that all which can be preserved of his tools, implements, and weapons, and works of art, form but a poor collection of antiquities, are in part the explanation of this indifference.⁴²

Running counter to this racial and cultural bias, however, were new discoveries of previously unknown archaeological treasures. These discoveries would give rise to an almost frantic race to collect them for museums in the United States. Archaeologists and their sponsoring institutions engaged in political maneuvering and rapid collecting throughout the American Southwest in a complex competition for artifacts.⁴³ Museums sought ancient pottery and baskets from around the world, just as they sought ancient human bodies, as objects that provided evidence for scientific theories. Practitioners of anthropology, archaeology, and physical anthropology viewed themselves as competing against time and other scholars—but the main threat to the systematic growth of bone rooms were looters. Museums feared that the best specimens—those perceived of possibly valuable for unlocking racial secrets through science—were about to vanish before their very eyes. They were willing to take steps to protect them (at least so as to preserve them for future collecting by professionals). The competition to collect human remains was on, with museums variously competing, trading, and cooperating to fill the shelves of bone rooms with remains from around the world.

⁴¹ I have written more detail on this subject in, Redman, “*What Self Respecting Museum is Without One?*”

⁴² “American Antiquities,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1874, 4.

⁴³ The best summary of these events can be found in, James Snead, *Ruins and Rivals: The Making of Southwest Archaeology* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2001).

1879: Regulating Bones, Establishing Empires

The year 1879 happened to be critical for the history of archaeology and anthropology in the United States. The developments of that year fostered a continued growth in the desire to collect, study, and display bodies of the dead over the ensuing decades. Several major events took place over the course of the year. Congress authorized the founding of the Bureau of Ethnology (later called the Bureau of American Ethnology, or BAE), and Frederic Putnam published a major volume on the archaeology and ethnology of the American Indians of the American West. At about the same time, Lewis Henry Morgan, then the nation's most well-known anthropologist, was elected president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Morgan's election to the head of a major scientific organization was a bellwether for the growing stature of anthropology within the broader scientific community. Additionally, the Anthropological Society of Washington and the Archaeological Institute of America, two important organizations for the promotion of professional disciplines of anthropology and archaeology, were founded.⁴⁴ This year therefore signals a turning point in professional, academic anthropology in the United States.

One year following his election to head the AAAS, Lewis Henry Morgan appointed a Swiss explorer and writer named Adolph F. Bandelier to explore the ruins of the American Southwest. Before venturing off on his expedition, Bandelier briefly visited John Wesley Powell, an internationally recognized scholar and adventurer who was familiar with the region following his well-known explorations of the Colorado River. Powell, who had lost an arm in the Civil War, encouraged Bandelier in their meeting to carefully examine the state of newly discovered archaeological monuments in the American West and report to scientists in Washington. By August of 1880, Bandelier traveled west to begin a study of a series of ruins at Pecos, New Mexico. What he found at Pecos was unsettling. Describing his initial reaction to viewing the ancient dwellings he wrote, "Most . . . was taken away, chipped into uncouth boxes, and sold, to be scattered everywhere. Not content with this, treasure hunters . . . have recklessly and ruthlessly disturbed the abodes of the dead."⁴⁵ The bones, skin, and burial goods of the dead had been preserved for centuries, but it had seemingly taken only a few moments to ransack, with looters making off with spoils.

The newly founded Archaeological Institute of American expressed concern to officials in Washington D.C. about the fate of sites like Pecos, but such concern resulted in little official action. Many within the federal government articulated doubt that all such sites throughout the American Southwest could be protected under federal law.⁴⁶ Despite a slow start, the rise of professional organizations concerned with the promotion of archaeological research and the protection of antiquities would prove to be significant in the movement to preserve archaeological sites in the United States. Central to the

⁴⁴ Ronald F. Lee's important history of The American Antiquities Act of 1906 begins by chronicling the significance of the year 1879 as a starting point for efforts in American archaeological preservation. I follow his formulation for the significance of the year 1879 for American archaeology and anthropology. See Ronald F. Lee, "The Origins of the Antiquities Act," in *The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation*, ed. David Harmon, et. al. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2006), 15-34.

⁴⁵ Lee, "The Origins of the Antiquities Act," 17.

⁴⁶ Lee, "The Origins of the Antiquities Act," 18.

growing concern over the preservation of antiquities was the desire to collect the bodies of the dead for science.

The Roots of Scientific Racism in the United States

By the time the Army Medical Museum began collecting bodies for use in studies of comparative anatomy, Samuel George Morton, a physician and professor of anatomy, had already built a large personal collection of skulls in Philadelphia.⁴⁷ Morton's collection of crania, obtained through friends and contacts spread around the globe, provided a clear example on which the physicians at the Army Medical Museum could base their own collections and research.⁴⁸ Indeed, when the Army Medical Museum decided to publish a catalogue of their own collection of crania, the work was modeled after Samuel George Morton's *Crania Americana*. The Army Medical Museum hoped to expand on this research by making its own catalogue available to a much larger number of students and scholars of comparative racial anatomy around the country. Scholars were understanding race in what appeared to be an increasingly complex and sophisticated manner, buttressing their ideas with detailed measurements of all aspects of the human skull.⁴⁹ The combined work of scholars like Morton and those at the Army Medical Museum laid the foundation for the rapid expansion of museum collections of human remains in the United States.

Morton was a leading figure in American science during the antebellum period. Considered by some to be the intellectual father of physical anthropology, Morton's personal collection of human crania, by 1849, contained over 800 specimens.⁵⁰ Each of the skulls were of varying age, completeness, and origin. Some were stained white due to prolonged exposure in the hot sun, others stained a deep, mahogany brown from the dirt they had long rested in before being disinterred and shipped. His collection, initially organized for pedagogical purposes, eventually enabled him to produce studies supporting the notion that the measurement of cranial capacities helped identify particular races. Each skull, upon its acquisition, was carefully measured, labeled, and delicately placed on a shelf for preservation. In the words of contemporary archaeologist David Hurst Thomas, "To Morton, the human skull provided a highway back in time, a way to trace racial differences to their beginning."⁵¹ For Morton, races were unchanging and

⁴⁷ Ales Hrdlička, perhaps the central figure in this dissertation, argued that American physical anthropology began in 1830 in Philadelphia with Samuel George Morton. C. Loring Brace, "The Roots of the Race Concept in American Physical Anthropology" found in *A History of American Physical Anthropology 1930-1980*, ed. Frank Spencer (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 17.

⁴⁸ The best summary of Samuel George Morton's collecting and research is Fabian, *The Skull Collectors*. Fabian details how Morton influenced other scholars, like those at the Army Medical Museum, collected and studied their own collections, which soon outpaced Morton's personal collection of skulls.

⁴⁹ Fabian, *The Skull Collectors*, 176-177.

⁵⁰ Morton built his collection through professional contacts spread around the globe. Those contacts would acquire skulls through various means, including the robbing of graves, in order to contribute to Morton's growing collections. According to at least one account, several of these researchers endured great risk to obtain skulls, a theme that is explored in more depth in later chapters. See Emily Renschler and Janet Mongre, "The Samuel George Morton Cranial Collection: Historical Significance and New Research," *Expedition*. 50, No. 3 (2008): 31.

⁵¹ Thomas, *Skull Wars*.

arose as a result of separate origins, a concept known as polygenesis.⁵² Others argued in favor monogenesis, the idea that all races arose from a single lineage of mankind (often starting with Judeo-Christian idea of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden). This single creation of mankind, monogenesists believed, continued evolving into distinct races. Others, like Morton, argued that direct observation of human skulls proved otherwise.⁵³

Morton made numerous conclusions based on his collection, including that Native Americans were a race distinct from the Inuit and Mongolians. Intelligence, or more specifically cognition, was thought to be determinable through measurements taken from the shape and size of the skull. Morton would eventually stretch his conclusions, based largely on these measurements, to argue that the races were distinct species.⁵⁴ In 1981, biologist Stephen J. Gould re-examined the Samuel George Morton collection and argued that Morton had intentionally distorted his data in order to present Caucasians as an intellectually superior race. Gould presents his conclusions alongside numerous other examples of scientists attempting to reach similar conclusions about race-based intelligence, namely that whites were naturally more intelligent than blacks or American Indians.⁵⁵ Gould's high-profile work was part of a new wave of scholars who continued to deconstruct racial classification theories, describing them as distinctly pseudo-scientific and racist. Some in the anthropological community have challenged Gould's argument that Morton *intentionally* distorted measurements,⁵⁶ while other scholars agree that the data was skewed on purpose.⁵⁷ Regardless of his intentions, Morton read his evidence as directly pointing to the existence of distinct racial groups. Certainly, American and European intellectuals had been keen on the idea of scientifically classifying the races for some time—but Morton's presentation of detailed skull measurements and illustrations appeared scientific and rigorous, yet tantalizingly incomplete. Morton's work seemed to invite the collecting of more evidence.⁵⁸

Morton himself never fully stretches his argument to present whites as a superior race, yet he does little to prevent his readers from making the very small mental leap to that conclusion.⁵⁹ While Germans, English, and Anglo-Americans possessed the largest cranial capacities, the smallest belonged to American born blacks. Native Americans were described by Morton as, “averse to cultivation, and slow in acquiring knowledge; restless, revengeful, and fond of war, and wholly destitute of maritime adventure.”⁶⁰ He

⁵² Samuel George Morton was able to convince another important American scientist of the era, Louis Agassiz, that polygenesis had occurred. Louis Menand, “Morton, Agassiz, and the Origins of Scientific Racism in the United States,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 34 (2001-2002): 111. C. Loring Brace carefully parses out Morton's polygenist viewpoint vis-à-vis other French anthropologists of the era, arguing that their positions were more akin to Morton's than other American theorists of the period. Brace, “The Roots of the Race Concept,” 18-19.

⁵³ Brace, “The Roots of the Race Concept,” 20.

⁵⁴ John S. Michael, “A New Look at Morton's Craniological Research,” *Current Anthropology*, 29, No. 2 (1988): 349-350.

⁵⁵ Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996).

⁵⁶ Michael, “A New Look at Morton's Craniological Research,” 353.

⁵⁷ Menand, “Morton, Agassiz, and the Origins of Scientific Racism in the United States,” 110-113.

⁵⁸ A more complete summary of the development of race theory in the early United States can be found in, Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁵⁹ Michael, “A New Look at Morton's Craniological Research,” 353.

⁶⁰ Menand, “Morton, Agassiz, and the Origins of Scientific Racism in the United States,” 110.

drew these conclusions from the sizes and shapes of the skulls of other races, arguing that the smaller brain cavity of Native Americans led to a decreased level of average intelligence. Upon his death in 1851, Morton was eulogized in the South as having helped to definitively and scientifically prove the inferiority of the African in relation to the European.⁶¹ The evidence presented by Morton lent itself to obvious scientific and social conclusions, most of which supported the status quo of race relations in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although Morton's publications were widely read during his lifetime, his influence waned following his death. This was partially because he had very few students.⁶² Morton's work also became increasingly associated with an anti-Darwinian, pro-Confederacy alignment that became increasingly unpopular following the Civil War. In particular, French anthropologists, who were largely opposed to the institution of slavery, worked to separate themselves from Morton.⁶³

Despite Morton's gross inaccuracies and distortions, his studies are especially significant in that they were based heavily on the close observation and study of collections of human remains gathered from around the world. Not only were his ideas widely read by scientists of the era, but the success of his work only underscored the perceived utility of skull collections for future science. Morton's work would help to create a professional precedent, signaling to young scholars that the question of race could be scientifically understood through the collection and study of human skeletons. During his own lifetime, Morton's work was critical to the development of medical museum collections like the Army Medical Museum. While his influence waned in later years, the practice of collecting, measuring, and studying the skeletons of races from around the world continued.

The Army Medical Museum and the Medicalization of Race and Human Remains

Established by Surgeon General William Hammond in 1862, the Army Medical Museum was initially created for the purpose of collecting examples of battlefield pathology during the Civil War.⁶⁴ Indeed, even after the war, medical officers continued to comply with the order to collect bodies and body parts illustrating wounds, diseases, or the result of surgical procedures encountered by Army physicians working in the field. As the museum developed, the interest of the curatorial staff evolved into "comparative anatomy." For museum curators in the era following the Civil War, the broad influence of thinkers and collectors ranging from Samuel George Morton to Charles Darwin and even earlier individuals including Thomas Jefferson (who collected and wrote about the skeletons of Native Americans in Virginia) proved foundational.

⁶¹ Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 14-15.

⁶² Ales Hrdlička – a figure explored in depth throughout this dissertation – postulated as much in 1918. As quoted in, Brace, "The Roots of the Race Concept in American Physical Anthropology," 17.

⁶³ Brace, "The Roots of the Race Concept in American Physical Anthropology," 18-20.

⁶⁴ Numerous basic overviews of the history of the Army Medical Museum are in existence, but one of the most informative accounts of William Hammond's role in the creation of the museum can be found in Morris Leikind, "Army Medical Museum and the Armed Forces institute of Pathology in Historical Perspective," *The Scientific Monthly* (August 1954): 71-78. More recent accounts can be found in Rhode and Connor, "A Repository for Bottled Monsters and Medical Curiosities," 177. Comparative anatomical collections started arriving at the museum in 1867.

These and other writers, in their use of human skeletal remains as scientific (or pseudo-scientific) evidence, pushed museums to apply techniques of comparative anatomy across human kind.⁶⁵ Some expanded upon ideas in natural history, arguing that similar taxonomies could be applied not only between the species of the animal kingdom but also between the particular races of mankind. These ideas gradually extended into the halls of the museum, where battlefield wounds and birth defects were examined alongside the display of skeletons of American Indians, reptiles, and birds.

The museum was divided into several sections, including a large “anatomical section,” that focused on collecting “normal” human skeletal material. The anatomical section, in the era following the Civil War, focused mainly on collecting human skulls. The majority of the human remains collected for the Army Medical Museum for the purposes of comparing the anatomy of different races were from American Indians, though remains from humans of Europe, Africa, Oceania, and Asia gradually complemented these collections. While the Army Medical Museum’s interest in comparative anatomy pushed it to collect bodies from human populations around the globe, the remains of indigenous groups were emphasized for these collections. When the opportunities arose, the museum collected the remains of African Americans and a smattering of European-Americans from North America. The museum even diligently built a sizable collection of skulls and complete skeletons of the many animals that dotted the landscape of North America, displaying many of them alongside human skeletons for visitors to the medical museum.⁶⁶

In 1866, when the museum moved to the site of Ford Theater, where President Lincoln had been assassinated only one year earlier, the museum assumed a somber tone on the top floor of the building. With the site open to the public, museum leaders assumed that many visitors might recoil at the idea of seeing medical specimens in glass jars and the skeletons of victims of violence in the American West. Nevertheless, in spite of the new location, or possibly because of the chilling memories associated with the building, visitors began pouring into the museum. One army physician argued that the location of the museum was fitting, eerily invoking the assassinated president, “What nobler monument could the nation erect to his memory, than this somber treasure house, devoted to the study of disease and injury, mutilation and death?”⁶⁷ But the museum was not simply a medical museum as understood in the terms laid out by the physician. In

⁶⁵ Darwin wrote about his observations of human remains collections on display in Paris in Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Second Edition. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1909): 169-172. Thomas Jefferson’s widely cited efforts as amateur archaeologist resulted in his observation, description, and collection of skeletal remains from American Indian graves. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999): 100-105.

⁶⁶ *List of Skeletons and Crania in the Section of Comparative Anatomy of the United States Army Medical Museum for use during the International Exposition of 1876 in Connection with the Representation of the Medical Department U.S. Army* (Washington D.C.: Army Medical Museum, 1876). This small catalogue of the AMM’s collection, printed in time for the 1876 World’s Fair, lists over 1,100 examples of animal crania and another 1,155 individual animal skeletons in the collection. The skeletons, collected from throughout North America, represented animals ranging from large mammals encountered in the American West (such as pronghorn and buffalo) to small birds and reptiles.

⁶⁷ As quoted in, Robert S. Henry, *The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology: Its First Century 1862-1962* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General Department of the Army, 1964): 55. This quote is attributed to Lt. Col. J. J. Woodward.

fact, the museum was collecting human remains from around the globe, in addition to adding sporadically to collections of artifacts representing material culture. Slowly, the museum became one of the most popular tourists destinations in Washington, D.C. Although the museum was open for only four hours a day and children were not allowed admittance, the museum received about 6,000 visitors in 1867. Within a matter of only four years, the number of visitors to the small museum *tripled*. The first curator of the museum, Brigade Surgeon John Hill Brinton, observed, “the public came to see the bones, attracted by a new sensation.”⁶⁸ Despite the astounding popularity of such exhibits over the same period, museums commonly assumed popular audiences might find the display of human remains to be repulsive.

Over the course of the several decades following the founding of the Army Medical Museum, the US Army and the Smithsonian crafted an agreement for the ethnographic materials acquired by the Army Medical Museum to be transferred to the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian, in turn, contracted to submit remains relevant to the Army’s research to the Army Medical Museum. This was no idle promise. In fact, the Smithsonian and Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) soon began mounting expeditions across North America that would turn up human skeletons, including John Wesley Powell’s famed survey of the Rocky Mountains. Federally-sponsored expeditions routinely discovered and collected human remains throughout North America, many of which were subsequently turned over to the Army Medical Museum. Although the Army Medical Museum received a highly visible portion of its collections from such publicized scientific expeditions, the bulk of the collections housed under the comparative anatomy section quietly arrived following the Civil War from Army and Navy medical officers in the American West and around the globe.

In the early years of the Civil War, the Surgeon General authored a circular calling for medical officers to collect materials of “morbid anatomy, surgical and foreign bodies removed, and such other matters as may prove interest in the study of military medicine or surgery.” The circular added, “These objects should be accompanied by explanatory notes.”⁶⁹ In 1867, the Surgeon General again wrote a circular; the document added an instruction that medical officers, “collect crania together with the specimens of Indian weapons, dress, implements, diet, and medicines.”⁷⁰ This collection, the circular explained, intended “to aid the progress of anthropological science by obtaining measurements of a large number of skulls of the aboriginal races of North America.” It was necessary, therefore, “to procure sufficiently large series of adult crania of the principal Indian tribes to furnish accurate average measurements.”⁷¹ Building on the tradition of Morton, the medical museum wanted to aid the young science of anthropology by collecting thousands and skulls and skeletons.

Word spread throughout military ranks that the Army Medical Museum was interested in acquiring bones, and personnel around the world were eager to oblige.

⁶⁸ As quoted in, Henry, *The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology*, 56.

⁶⁹ Morris. “Army Medical Museum and the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Historical Perspective,” 72.

⁷⁰ Various sources detail the history of the Army Medical Museum. I have relied on the introductory remarks to the Army Medical Museum Records at the National Anthropological Archives to craft the opening paragraphs of this section. See, Introduction, Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷¹ As quoted in, Henry, *The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology*, 59.

Skeletal material began arriving in Washington almost daily. The Army's official call for specimens echoed throughout the American West, but a boomlet was also felt throughout the military expeditions elsewhere in the United States as well as throughout naval stations around the world. Following the distribution of this circular, shipments started to appear from the far corners of the earth. The purpose of the collection, early on, was to further the professional education of medical officers through the study of various medical conditions that might be encountered during military service. The assumption of the early circulars was that medical officers in the United States Military might benefit from two kinds of collections, those demonstrating the various forms of battlefield injuries common during wartime, and those of the exotic bodies of non-white races that surrounded the military bases of the United States Army.⁷² The letters that accompanied the parcels to Washington were at times matter-of-fact about the shipment of human remains to the museum. Occasionally, the letters sent to the museum contained vivid details. Stories of collecting human remains sporadically contained sentiments of excitement and feelings of danger. Collecting skeletons, after all, was a serious business. Removing skeletons from sacred graves was understandably as an affront to most Native American tribes and many groups were ready to protect their ancestors with force. Officers working on behalf of the medical museum, ironically, were willing to risk life and limb to collect bodies or parts of the dead.

As the letters and boxes poured into the museum, curators may have been shocked or mystified by some of stories contained within the correspondence accompanying the shipments. In 1867, a medical officer named W.H. Forwood wrote a letter accompanying a shipment of a human skull. Forwood was stationed at Fort Riley in Kansas, but he had acquired a skull that he claimed was of a Cheyenne killed at the San Creek Massacre in 1864. The correspondence accompanying the cranium fails to articulate how, exactly, Forwood acquired the cranium or why it arrived at his desk in Kansas.⁷³ Despite the seemingly unusual nature of Forwood's submission to the Army Medical Museum, this type of occurrence was actually quite typical. Numerous Army Medical Museum acquisitions were reported to have been collected from the site of the of Sand Creek massacre⁷⁴ and the battleground of Little Big Horn⁷⁵, as well as numerous smaller skirmishes between the United States Army and American Indians. Remains were as often acquired from burials as they were from battlefields. Because American Indians confined to reservations were commonly buried at or around Army forts, medical officers were aware of their burial location and could acquire the remains readily.⁷⁶

⁷² In his 1954 article about the history of the Army Medical Museum, Morris Leikind describes the early museum as a sort of graduate school for medical officers. Morris, "Army Medical Museum and the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Historical Perspective," 73.

⁷³ Letter, W.H. Forwood to Surgeon General. January 20, 1867. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, AMM #8-11. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁵ AMM #2120, this crania arrived at the Army Medical Museum with two conflicting accounts of its provenance. One set of AMM records indicates that the skull belonged to a bugler who was the first man killed at the Battle of Little Big Horn. Another letter indicates that the soldier actually died two days following the battle. See AMM #2120, Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁶ AMM #136, for instance, is the skull of a Mandan, acquired from a cemetery at Fort Berthold, North Dakota. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Medical officers, in fact, took advantage of nearly every opportunity to acquire the remains of non-white individuals for the Army Medical Museum. This occasionally included the remains of African Americans, most likely only recently freed from the bonds of chattel slavery before their death. Remains from Vicksburg, Mississippi of eight African-Americans were sent to the museum in 1869. The collection included a rare find, the fragmented remains of a black infant, which was considered especially important to the Army Medical Museum.⁷⁷

While the Army Medical Museum was interested in acquiring both white and non-white remains, the number of American Indian and African-American remains heavily outnumbered the number of European-American remains that the institution received while it was collecting for the purposes of comparative anatomy. The skeletal materials of white individuals that *were* collected often included those on the fringes of society.⁷⁸

Despite the apparent demise of the field of phrenology—a study whose proponents argued that certain functions could be directly mapped onto the size and shape of the brain and skull—similar ideas continued to creep into racial classification theory. In May of 1872, the Army Medical Museum received a shipment that demonstrated how earlier anatomical theorists influenced the collecting of human remains. A letter accompanying a pair of crania stated that medical officers working for the Japanese government explained the origins of the two skulls. The first was a cranium of what was described as an “educated Japanese gentleman,” and the second was the cranium of a “Japanese criminal.” The men were close in age at their respective deaths, the gentleman dying at about age 35 and the criminal dying at 34 years of age. The underlying presumption in the donation was that the nature of their education and their lived experiences during their lives may be reflected in the size and shape of their crania, delineating specific ranges within the supposed races of man. Japan, like many regions in the United States, outlawed most medical dissections, and therefore human remains or skeletal materials were difficult to acquire.⁷⁹

An undated letter, written from Fort C.F. Smith in Montana by assistant surgeon Jas. P. Kimball during the wave of collecting in the American West following the Civil War, points to the opportunistic nature of military skull collecting. The letter accompanying the shipment describes the enclosed materials as, “Three . . . Indian Crania—Blackfeet—Picked up on the Rose Bud Creek . . . at a place said to be the site of a former battlefield between the Crows and the Blackfeet in which . . . the Crows being the victors, carried away their dead leaving the bodies of their enemies upon the field.” The assistant surgeon assured the museum, “The story is as well authenticated as any of the local traditions and it is considered of beyond doubt that these Crania are those of

⁷⁷ AMM #400 and AMM #404-410. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁸ AMM #637, for instance, was the skull of a white man, aged about 30 who was hanged at Fort Benton, Montana by a group described as “vigilantes.”

⁷⁹ Letter from Arthur Finkinsen and Dresden Drusticklund (sp?) to The President of the Smithsonian Institution. May 24, 1872. Army Medical Museum Records. AMM # 916-917. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

fallen Blackfeet.”⁸⁰ Bodies of the dead, strewn across the blood soaked nation, had become a medical and scientific commodity.

The memoirs of William Henry Corbusier (1844-1930) possess another example of opportunistic collecting of human remains on behalf of the museum. Corbusier was an Army surgeon and prolific writer, recording his experiences in the American West and later in the Philippines. In February of 1875, Corbusier was stationed among the Yavapai when he was ordered to help supervise the displacement of 1,400 Indians from the Rio-Verde Agency. The group was ordered to walk, on foot, about 150 miles through rough terrain. Conditions were harsh and the group grew tired and hungry, having been forced to leave behind the foot-sore cattle intended as food. Eventually, a group of Native Americans turned on the military officers, and the unarmed Indians were driven back by the officers, including Corbusier. Corbusier’s account reads:

I collected ten wounded men, whose wounds I dressed, and found four dead, shot through the head. These were buried and on my way back to Camp Verde, I disinterred the heads and sent the skulls to the Army Medical Museum, as they showed the so-called explosive action of a bullet passing through the skull which it broke into many pieces.⁸¹

Corbusier’s account might be surprising given the paternalistic sympathy he shows for the Yavapai throughout his memoir.⁸² Nevertheless, his decision to collect the skulls of the deceased American Indians and send them to the Army Medical Museum was common, and it demonstrates the overwhelming influence of the scientific orders circulated amongst Army surgeons stationed throughout the American West.

The Army Medical Museum also worked with medical colleges to collect the remains of non-white individuals. In 1869, the skull of an elderly African-American male was sent to the museum via Georgetown College; the body had previously been used for dissection.⁸³ Georgetown College later contributed the remains of other individuals similarly used in teaching anatomy through dissection. Medical students of the era, often responsible for acquiring their own cadavers for dissection, sometimes even sold to the Army Medical Museum the crania of the cadaver used in their studies.⁸⁴ Though these collected remains do include the bones of at least one white female, the majority of remains acquired following dissection are of non-white or mixed race individuals.⁸⁵

Records of the Army Medical Museum indicate that military medical officers took a great personal interest in the project of collecting remains. Although the circular

⁸⁰ AMM #638. Undated letter from Jas. P. Kimball to George Otis. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸¹ Robert Wooster, ed. *Soldier, Surgeon, Scholar: The Memoirs of William Henry Corbusier, 1844-1930* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003): 91.

⁸² Several years later, Corbusier returns to the San Carlos Agency and meets with some of the individuals who had been relocated under his supervision. He writes, “Very little had been done for them, and they were only a little better off than they were in 1875.” Wooster, ed. *Soldier, Surgeon, Scholar*, 92.

⁸³ AMM #411. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁴ See, for instance, AMM #1802 and 1830. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁵ See AMM #1756-1758. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

was, in fact, considered an order, remains were collected out of personal and professional interest. In 1879, the Army Medical Museum received a letter from a surgeon who claimed to have collected a cranium a decade earlier, shortly after receiving a copy of the circular order. The surgeon wrote of the circular, “I complied with that order to the utmost of my ability. I then forwarded the collection to Washington as ordered except one Ogalalla skull of a young squaw that died of phthisis. I retained that skull on account of the remarkable beautiful teeth she had—every tooth was perfect and of the most symmetrical order.” The assistant surgeon continued, “I secured the skull from a scaffold that was created on a high hill, over looking a small indian (sic) village . . . As I got it in the day time, and before the eyes of many Indians, who could see me in the distance, I had a lively adventure with it.” He concludes, “perhaps partly on that account, I held on to it as long as I did, as a trophy.”⁸⁶

As the Surgeon General’s call for specimens was published and republished, specimens continued to arrive in Washington in a steady stream. The list of specimens was as long as it was dramatic and diverse: a cranium of a Cheyenne Indian reportedly killed at the Sand Creek Massacre,⁸⁷ and that of an ancient Roman from Carthage.⁸⁸ The collection even included a pair of skull fragments from a team of stagecoach robbers who had been captured and killed by vigilantes before they could be brought to jail.⁸⁹ Further illustrating the fact that the Army surgeons spread around the American West possessed a common understanding of the “scientific” project of race-centered comparative anatomy was the fact that intricate details about the deceased person were included when available. Shipments of remains included not only the person’s race, tribe, sex and age, but also sometimes their name and a general portrait of their social standing within their community.⁹⁰

Remains brought to the Army Medical Museum for the purposes of comparative anatomy were understood to help advance theories about race. Though the remains would later be used to develop ideas about human prehistory and evolution, at the turn of the nineteenth century collections of human remains were most often relied upon for research relating to comparative racial schemes. Several scholars affiliated with the Army Medical Museum were interested in the project of understanding race as a component of their broader studies in medicine. George A. Otis, who worked for the Army Medical Museum from 1864-1881, worked tirelessly to build collections intended to represent both proper methods of surgery and the comparative racial characteristics of mankind. Otis was particularly interested in the acquisition of skulls, hoping that other scholars might utilize the crania for comparative racial studies, though the vast majority of his own work was focused on surgical methodology. Otis, working with other medical officers, published massive volumes recounting the medical history of the Civil War before publishing, over

⁸⁶ Letter from G.P. Hachenberg to Surgeon General. October 20, 1879. Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁷ National Anthropological Archives, Army Medical Museum Records, Reel 1, AMM #8.

⁸⁸ National Anthropological Archives, Army Medical Museum Records. Reel 2, AMM #382.

⁸⁹ National Anthropological Archives, Army Medical Museum, Reel 5, AMM #2117-2119

⁹⁰ National Anthropological Archives, Army Medical Museum Records, Reel 3, Army Medical Museum #636. Specimen described as the crania of “Running Bear”, a man shot in the Dakota Territories.

the course of the following decades, equally massive and serious volumes detailing the advancements of surgical techniques.⁹¹

A National Collection of Skeletons for a National Museum

In 1897, William Henry Holmes, an archaeologist who had recently arrived from Chicago, visited the Army Medical Museum. Holmes, now working for the Bureau of American Ethnology, would eventually rise to a leadership role in the newly formed Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution. Holmes was bearded and serious looking, and he possessed a quiet and reserved, yet affable, personality. Trained as an artist, Holmes was renowned for his ability to capture geological formations in understated watercolor paintings. Over the course of the next several decades, he would become a critical force for anthropology from within the Smithsonian.⁹² As he toured the Army Medical Museum collections, curators explained to him that their interests had shifted away from comparative racial anatomy. The shift caused thousands of sets of human remains to sit, unstudied and undisturbed, in wooden bone room cabinets. The idea that such a valuable resource would remain unstudied prompted Holmes to consider the fate of the remains. Eventually, Holmes requested that the collection be transferred permanently from the Army to the Smithsonian, where he was confident the collection would advance the understanding of the races of mankind.

As a museum leader, Holmes possessed an ability to garner support for the projects and scholars surrounding him. He also maintained impressive foresight, anticipating developments in the field and leveraging them to the advantage of the Smithsonian and the Bureau of American Ethnology. Holmes's decision to acquire the comparative anatomy collection from the Army was especially significant in that it would serve as the impetus for creating a Division of Physical Anthropology within the US National Museum, a critical location for the evolution of ideas about the human body over the course of the next century. The Army quickly agreed to turn over their comparative anatomy collection and the nearly 3,000 sets of remains, including the remains of the lone Sioux killed in 1864, were transferred across Washington to the Smithsonian. Although the skeletons themselves remained largely unchanged from when they were discovered, prepared, or removed from the ground, a sea change in both scientific and social interpretation surrounding these remains would take place in the United States over the next fifty years. Their transfer indicated that it would be the field of anthropology, not medicine, that would take the leadership role in developing academic ideas about race. Many of these ideas would be drawn directly from the study of human skeletal remains in the United States.

Of the 3,761 sets of remains that were ultimately transferred, the vast majority were crania collected without any sort of post-cranial remains (post-cranial meaning all

⁹¹ See, for example, Surgeon-General's Office, *Reports on the Extent and Nature of the Materials Available for the Preparation of a Medical and Surgical History of the Rebellion* (Philadelphia: J.R. Lippincott, 1866). Also see, Alexander George Otis, *A Report of Surgical Cases Treated in the Army of the United States from 1865 to 1871* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871).

⁹² For more on William Henry Holmes, including details on his personality, see Neil M. Judd, *The Bureau of American Ethnology: A Partial History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967): 12, 15, 23-25, 34, 39, 69, 70, 74.

parts of the body other than the skull).⁹³ Crania, in fact, represent nearly 80 percent of the collection.⁹⁴ Studies on the shape and size of human head were intended to provide significant information about race-based intelligence and personality. Given the striking examples of battlefield collecting, one might expect the Army Medical Museum collections to be skewed in terms of gender breakdown. In fact, the number of individuals identified as either male or female is strikingly even.⁹⁵ This reflects the widespread practice of looting and grave robbing taking place across the American West, compounded with the gender balance of many massacre sites where the US Army collected remains for the Army Medical Museum. A large component of the collections originate from the American West: the collection includes 642 sets of remains from California, 163 from the Dakotas, and 57 from Montana. Though the majority of the collections arrived from western territories, numerous remains did come from states like New York and Virginia, reflecting the wide range of locations in which Army medical officers were stationed. While surgeons were stationed at bases throughout the east, those with access to Native American remains were mainly stationed throughout the American West. Surgeons stationed at lonely outposts were also likely to have ample time on their hands, opportunistically acquiring remains as a sort of side project. Just as the symbol of the sun bleached skull came to represent the harshness of the American West, scholars in the eastern United States were hoping to utilize it as a symbol for understanding the secrets of racial difference.

Popular Display of “Scientific” Remains in Gilded Age America

As scientists were gradually extending their reach to collect skeletons from around the globe, private entrepreneurs and showmen continued the tradition of drawing upon scientific and pseudo-scientific ideas to display human remains. Ancient history, portrayed as equal parts mysterious, sensual, and violent, was often used as a hook to grab broader audiences already visiting fairs and expositions. Commercial enterprises that related the bodies of the dead to familiar biblical narratives or triggered underlying anxieties about the racialized and gendered body tended to be especially successful. Many audiences in the United States craved the sight of mummified bodies, which seemed to grab the most headlines and draw the biggest crowds. If stories were laced with undertones of sexuality or violence, it might appeal to certain audiences. Alternatively, secular displays of human remains at fairs and expositions sometimes attempted to appeal to pious religiosity, connecting ancient specimens to known biblical narratives. Although it would be a mistake to classify this popular interest as simple morbid curiosity, those who wrote about these exhibits continually noted the macabre sense of awe and wonder present in the audiences touring fairgrounds and galleries. Although commercial displays of human remains were popular in the late nineteenth century, the practice of private collecting for future display, especially at world’s fairs, would begin to fade after the first decade of the twentieth century. In this context, it is

⁹³ Varying sources provide differing data on the exact number remains transferred from the Smithsonian to the Army Medical Museum, and I am relying here on the Smithsonian Institution’s most current count of remains included in this collection (including remains that have been repatriated since 1990).

⁹⁴ According to the Smithsonian, the exact number is 79.3%. The information in this paragraph was obtained from Dave Hunt, Smithsonian Institution, Personal Communication, December 3, 2009.

⁹⁵ The Smithsonian reports that 33.3% have been identified as females. 33.6% have been identified as males. Dave Hunt, Smithsonian Institution, Personal Communication, December 3, 2009.

likely that some of this popularity transferred to museums that invited audiences in to view similar human remains presented in a subtly different light over the ensuing decades.

Not all plans to create grandiose exhibits of human remains turned into successful commercial ventures. In 1890, just one year before his death, the famed circus owner and showman P.T. Barnum proposed an exhibition for the Columbian World Exposition that would surpass the displays of any previous world's fairs. Barnum proposed to purchase, for the massive sum of \$1,000,000, the mummified remains of the Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses II along with the remains of much of his family. Rameses, as Barnum notes in his proposal, was a villain of the Old Testament, and therefore an untold number of American Christians would be eager to view his earthly remains. Barnum, in an article appearing originally in the *North American Review* and subsequently syndicated in newspapers around the country, wrote:

Think of the stupendousness [*sic*] of the incongruity! To exhibit to the people of the nineteenth century, in a country not discovered until 2,000 or 3,000 years after his death, the corpse of the King of whom we have the earliest record! Consider, too, that that [*sic*] corpse is so perfectly preserved after thousands of years in the tomb that its features are almost perfect; so that every man, woman, and child who looks upon the mummy may know the countenance of the despot who exerted so great an influence upon the history of the world. And it might be a useful thought to this generation, proud of its scientific and mechanical triumphs, to bear in mind that the art that embalmed the body of Rameses so perfectly is lost, with a great many others that were known to remote antiquity.⁹⁶

For Barnum, nearly right up to his death, the display of human remains continued to be cloaked around an interplay of showmanship and education. In Barnum's attempted purchase of the remains of an ancient king, which he intended to display for profit, he seems to recognize the desire Americans possessed for viewing recognizable historical relics, as well as the burgeoning desire to gaze upon the foreign body of ancient history. Despite his grand plans, Barnum's proposal never came to fruition. Other commercial schemes to collect and display the bodies of the dead at world's fairs, however, were more successful, attracting the attention of museums that would soon purchase many of these remains.

Mummies in America

Human remains were not solely within the purview of the professionalizing communities of medicine or anthropology. Nor were scientists, still heavily invested in comparative racial studies, limiting their research to corpses of the recently dead. Although Americans had avidly collected mummies from Egypt for some time, the discovery in the United States of naturally mummified bodies caused a stir. To that point, the only mummified remains many in the United States had ever been exposed to—through either literature or exhibition—of was the sort from Egypt. American archaeologists had yet to penetrate the emerging archaeological discipline in the Middle

⁹⁶ "Barnum on the World's Fair," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 6, 1890, 9.

East, but colonial treasures that made their way to museums in London and Paris were well known in North America.⁹⁷ Mummies, by this time, were already thought of synonymously with pharaohs and pyramids. The notion that bodies of exotic and distant races had been mummified naturally in the desolate American West encouraged fantasies of unknown civilizations. Onto a blank slate of an unknown civilization, archaeologists and looters brought seemingly massive collections of distinct pottery and mummified remains. Many early proponents of the antiquities in the region proposed wild theories disconnecting the contemporary American Indians from their ancestors in the Americas, claiming that only an outside civilization would be capable of constructing such grand structures as the cliff dwellings. This pattern of popular and academic disconnect, featuring rampant contempt for the modern Native Americans and a strange attraction to the mysteries of their apparent ancestors was firm and repeated itself throughout the Americas.

Not only were boundaries stretched in terms of popular understandings of mummified bodies, but also these newly discovered remains emerged from a region with which Americans were already growing familiar: the American Southwest. Despite an emerging popular interest in the region, many writers, artists, and scientists advanced the claim that American Indians generally lived *outside* history as it was commonly understood. Many took for granted the notion that Native Americans maintained primitive cultures in stasis for centuries. The modern Native Americans, many argued, never advanced beyond the level of stone age societies of the Old World, remaining static and without progress. Many gave little credit to the prehistoric relics of the Americas aside from the occasional Mayans and Incas, often describing prehistoric discoveries as “rudimentary” or “crude.” The study of the indigenous history of North America, therefore, was more or less an unknown at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As the century progressed, however, the issue of how to study the history of Native Americans became a significant component of a discourse surrounding the practice of history in the United States.⁹⁸ Especially critical was a growing awareness surrounding the mystery of the Cliff Dwellers. New discoveries of apparently complex civilizations that left behind remnants of their masterful architecture—as well as mysterious burials that included mummified corpses—brought forth a new series of complicated questions. Who were these people? Where did they come from? And most critically, how might these people fit into the complex racial puzzle in the Americas?

The popular media joined archaeologists in pondering both the origin and the ultimate fate of the Cliff Dwellers. Hundreds of articles appeared in newspapers around

⁹⁷ On the tradition of collecting and displaying mummies from Egypt throughout the nineteenth century in the United States, see S.J. Wolfe and Robert Singerman, *Mummies in Nineteenth Century America: Ancient Egyptians as Artifacts* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009).

⁹⁸ Anthropologist Eric Wolf elaborates on this notion in his 1982 work about European contact with non-European societies. See, Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). The influence of Native Americans on the development of historical consciousness can be found in Steven Conn, *History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Historian Kerwin Klein couples Conn's work with another historian in a review that explores the theme of early understandings of Native American history in the United States. Maureen Kronkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Klein's review is Kerwin Klein, “Native Americans and the Burden of History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 2, No. 3 (2005): 409-417.

the country, reporting discoveries of relics and forcing readers to reevaluate long-held notions about a primitive and unchanging indigenous culture. Many simply could not accept that the seemingly “primitive” indigenous peoples in their midst were capable of constructing grand structures or works of art. These articles reflected and fostered the nation’s genuine fascination with the discoveries, and also presented a newfound boosterism coming from the cities and towns near the ruins in the American Southwest.⁹⁹

To a striking degree, reporting on the mummified remains found in the American Southwest captured both the popular and scholarly imagination. An 1887 article in *Harper’s Magazine* reflects the widespread fascination, and compared the newly discovered mummies to those from the Old World:

There were recently lying in San Francisco, awaiting the shipment to Europe, the remains of four Arizona Indians, which are, perhaps, the most perfect specimens of the natural embalming process of a dry climate ever found in this country. These remains are simply dried up by the action of an atmosphere in which there is no humidity. Even the viscera, which all embalmers in Egypt found it necessary to remove in order to guard against decomposition, have been desiccated like the other parts of the body, so that one has here the practical result of the embalmer’s art with not a single organ of the body removed.¹⁰⁰

Clearly, these mummies were considered a unique and important new discovery. Despite the discovery of hundreds of naturally mummified bodies, scholars remained confounded by their origin. Lacking a clear portrait of the prehistory of the Americas, some scholars and popular writers simply connected the civilizations of the Southwest to the Aztecs, an ancient society of central Mexico known to have a comparatively complex technological history.¹⁰¹

While mummies had already assumed a place in the American consciousness, a major discovery would lead to an unforeseen level of prominence. In December 1888, Richard Wetherill and his companion Charlie Mason accidentally discovered a dramatic series of ancient structures built into cliff sides—later named Cliff Palace. At the site, the two men uncovered a stone axe, pottery bowls, mugs, large water jars, and three human skeletons. Much to their surprise, these discoveries generated little interest from the public until the announcement of their discovery of a naturally mummified child at another nearby site - Mancos Canyon. Human skeletons, though not exactly common

⁹⁹ The National Anthropological Archives maintains a collection of newspaper clippings originally gathered by the Smithsonian Institution’s Department of Anthropology. These clippings come from around the country, but are primarily from newspapers of the American West. Western newspapers reported most heavily on the discoveries and detail examples of temporary displays of mummies in local cities and towns. Records of the Department of Anthropology United States National Museum / National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Box 12. Folder: Cliff Dwellers – Clippings A. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁰⁰ “A Discovery of Indian Mummies,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Issue 08 Vol. 6 (1887): 562.

¹⁰¹ This said, the same article in Harper’s continues by introducing the possibility that living tribes may have been responsible for the burials, “The features of all these bodies would seem to preclude the possibility that they are Aztecs or Toltecs. The weight of opinion of San Francisco archaeologists includes to the belief that they are either Moquis or Zunis, as it is known that both these people have indulged in cave burial.” “Mummies,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 562.

throughout the American West, simply did not capture the public's attention to the same extent that a mummified body did. Mummies offered links to the past that bones, or even vivid literary descriptions of ancient societies and structures, simply did not.

Following the discovery of the ancient mummified child at Mancos Canyon, debate ensued in both scholarly and popular outlets. Newspaper articles demonstrated a lingering confusion as columnists desperately sought to ascribe a *race* to the mummies. Writers and audiences struggled to understand a human body, even a very ancient and mummified one, without a specified race. Race was so critical a qualifier, in fact, that without a discussion of it, an article discussing these mummified remains would have been sorely out of place. One typical article, published in an 1891 Grand Junction, Colorado newspaper read, "They were neither Indians nor Esquimaux. They were not Negroes neither were they Malays nor Mongolians. All indications suggest that they were a white race. They had very soft hair in all cases. In some specimens it was very dark in color; in others reddish-brown, red and light blond." Scientists would later conclude that the hair color might change due to a variety of factors, including gradual dehydration or sunlight. At the time, however, writers were so eager to connect the new discoveries to observable racial characteristics that they were willing to make astounding claims based on only a few small, and potentially misleading, clues. The same article continued by explaining the proposal to purchase the collections for the state, adding, "It is to be hoped that our legislature will appreciate the study of this extinct race enough to save this collection for the state." The author of the article argues that while some in the region postulated a relationship between the Cliff Dwellers and the Moundbuilders to the east, a simple comparison of the skulls demonstrates the racial difference between the two groups.¹⁰²

Academic circles responded to the mystery of the Cliff Dwellers with growing interest, especially as the mysterious artifacts and mummified remains started trickling into museums and universities. In 1890s, a Smithsonian curator with whom the Wetherill brothers were corresponding, explained that, "It has always been a source of regret" that officials in Washington dedicated such little time to protecting and exploring the archaeological ruins of the American Southwest.¹⁰³ Wetherill responded with a letter further detailing the vastness of the collection they had brought together, adding a note that the finds included, "skeletons and dried bodies from the smallest child to the full grown man, and skulls, from a number of which the bodies have decayed."¹⁰⁴ Wetherill certainly had a stake in promoting the value of the collection, and his emphasis on the number and type of human remains in the collection is only further evidence of their

¹⁰² Newspaper Clipping. "The Cliff Dwellers! The Wetherill Collection on Exhibition at Denver," Grand Junction, Colorado, March 21, 1891. Records of the Department of Anthropology United States National Museum / National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Box 12. Folder: Cliff Dwellers – Clippings A. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁰³ Letter from W.H. Holmes to B.K. Wetherill, January 31, 1890. Records of the Department of Anthropology. United States National Museum / National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Folder: Habitations, Cliff Dwellings. Box 18. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from B.K. Wetherill to W.H. Holmes, March 3, 1890. Records of the Department of Anthropology. United States National Museum / National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Folder: Habitations, Cliff Dwellings. Box 18. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

perceived value. Archaeologists and amateurs spread across the American West became increasingly confident as the remains of both bodies and cultures were sought after objects for museum collections. Unfortunately for amateur collectors hoping to strike it rich, museums were generally too poorly funded to even consider paying the exorbitant sums initially demanded by some of the collectors. As the media publicized stories of the finds of ancient ruins, would-be explorers and archaeological profiteers wrote to museums hoping that their travels would be backed financially by museums hoping to add to their collections from the ancient sites of the American Southwest.¹⁰⁵

Display of both the bodies and material culture of the Cliff Dwellers was widespread and attracted audiences to locations outside of large, urban natural history museums. When a Forest Service employee accidentally discovered a small mummified body in Arizona, the body was sent to a nearby town and displayed in a drug store window “for a couple of days,” before being sent to the Smithsonian, “in order to give the public an opportunity of seeing it.”¹⁰⁶ Just as with archaeologists and regional explorers who discovered remains, local cities and towns in the West were often given an opportunity to publicly view remains before their submission to museums in distant urban centers. A Durango, Colorado, newspaper reported in 1892 that a collection belonging to a local man had gone on display and that the free, temporary exhibits in the town might represent the finest collection of ancient relics from the American Southwest anywhere in the country. The paper boasted, “It is questionable, indeed, whether [*sic*] the Smithsonian institute [*sic*] in Washington possesses so complete and varied a collection of relics of an extinct race.” The temporary displays in Durango included a room featuring “ten mummified bodies and eighteen or more skulls, some with hair on them in a good state of preservation.” The paper assured the reader that the bodies were not merely on display as an appeal to the macabre. Instead, it argued, they “afford abundant food for study and investigation.”¹⁰⁷

Despite the apparent gravity of a find of human remains, amateur collectors, if they were not inclined to desperately try to sell the artifacts for a sometimes outlandish sum, were often more than willing to part with the valuable discoveries in order to deposit them at a noteworthy museum. Almost accidentally, the modest rooms allotted to collections of human remains in many museums were filling to the point of capacity.

¹⁰⁵ See, Letter from Scott N. Morris to Samuel P. Langley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, January 21, 1890. Letter from Jas. A. Jones to J.W. Powell, January 29, 1890. Letter from Echi Kneezell to Prof. Langley, October 28, 1890. All letters, Records of the Department of Anthropology. United States National Museum / National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Folder: Habitations, Cliff Dwellings. Box 18. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁰⁶ The body apparently represented the remains of a mummified child, though the paper proclaimed it as evidence that the “Cliff Men” were naturally small in stature and that nearby scientists had proclaimed it to have been an adult. This article was published sometime after 1904. Newspaper Clipping. “Cliff Men Evidently Small: Remarkable Find of Forest Service Man in Gila Country Sent to Smithsonian Institution.” Unknown Date. Records of the Department of Anthropology United States National Museum / National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Box 12. Folder: Cliff Dwellers – Clippings A. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁰⁷ Newspaper Clipping. “Relics of an Extinct Race: Magnificent Collection of Mr. McLoyd’s Now on Free Exhibition in This City.” April 28, 1892. Records of the Department of Anthropology United States National Museum / National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Box 12. Folder: Cliff Dwellers – Clippings A. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Although the national craze for American mummies lasted only a few decades, its effect was significant in pushing museums to acquire mummies and skeletons. The national interest in the discovery of mummies in the Americas also pushed policymakers and commentators to define ancient bodies as valuable “antiquities” and objects for the study of racial classification. Although the terms and definitions would change drastically over the ensuing generations, the cultural value of these discoveries, both accidental and intentional, had been firmly established.

The discovery of the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde, in Colorado, by the Wetherill ranchers in the 1880s and 1890s was perhaps the central event in America’s growing fascination with the prehistory of the American Southwest. Although they would become critical tools for understanding the prehistory of the region, the initial discovery of these remains was couched in terms of their value for racial science. As is discussed in the following chapter, the decision to remove artifacts from Mesa Verde would become significant in the development of both state and federal protections for historic sites.¹⁰⁸ Before that, however, archaeological objects and human remains left behind by the ancient Pueblo peoples fascinated the American public in displays at museums and fairs.

Human Remains at the World Columbian Exposition, 1893

The World’s Columbian Exposition Chicago was one of the most significant cultural markers of the Gilded Age in the United States. The massive fair encompassed 187 acres and was visited by enormous crowds of spectators—ranging from farmers to academics—creating a large and dynamic impact on American culture.¹⁰⁹ Joining the throngs were thousands of Native Americans and other indigenous people—some traveling to the fair driven by the same popular appeal as everyone else. Others, however, were coaxed into attending by offers of economic gain from entrepreneurial endeavors; commercial enterprises meshed with fair organizers in their attempts to bring indigenous peoples to the fair as living exhibits—an established tradition that would continue in varying forms at dozens of fairs and events in ensuing decades. Starting in 1891, anthropologists and archaeologists began the task of gathering a massive amount of material for the planned displays in Chicago. As many as one hundred collectors spread across the globe worked to collect objects for display at the fair. The official anthropological exhibits at the exposition were crafted by F. W. Putnam, then a curator at the Peabody Museum at Harvard, and Franz Boas,¹¹⁰ who would become one of the foremost leaders of the field. Over the next decade, these two respective figures would work to dramatically expand museum anthropology in the United States, managing museums and consulting with and influencing other departments around the country.

In the United States, before the fair, Americans were already fascinated with racial difference and hierarchies. The exhibits at the World’s Columbian Exposition, however, would work to introduce an untold number of visitors to the emerging fields of

¹⁰⁸ Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice*, 99-100.

¹⁰⁹ A massive, and growing, literature exists on the World Columbian Exposition. Recent works range from popular non-fiction accounts of the fair to more specific (and more academic) studies of various aspects of the fair. One study that explores the display of human remains at the fair is Julie K. Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display: International Expositions in the United States, 1876-1904* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009): 42-87.

¹¹⁰ Henry W. Haynes, “American Archaeology during the Past Ten Years,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 4, No. 1 (1900): 17-39.

physical anthropology and archaeology.¹¹¹ Exhibits at the fair subtly and overtly underscored existing ideas of racial difference with scientific undertones, pointing to the emerging studies of human skeletons as key evidence for racial classification theories. Displays at the world's fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century included not just human remains, but also the bodies of living people. Displays regularly focused on indigenous people, generally casting them as savage and primitive natives who had traveled to the fair from far away and exotic lands. Fairs drew large audiences by temporarily hiring and employing native peoples—often instructing them to reconstruct a traditional village and dress in their native style on the fairgrounds.¹¹² Accompanying these displays, in some sense, were occasional displays of human skeletal remains and mummies. In both life and death, audiences came to an understanding that race was the central lens for understanding humanity. Not only was race critical in understanding humankind, it was argued that the human body itself possessed numerous clues waiting to be unlocked by scientific observation. Exhibitions of the anthropological body worked to reinforce race as a classifiable and seemingly static feature of humanity.

The arrival of a diverse audience to the fairgrounds afforded anthropologists the opportunity to take more anthropometric measurements—the measurements of the living that complemented the collecting and measuring of the dead. Boas was hired to organize exhibits of the First Nations people of Western Canada as well as to collect anthropometric data from indigenous people visiting the fair. Boas had been a professor of anthropology at Clark University before arriving in Chicago, a city rapidly recovering from a devastating fire.¹¹³ Of German-Jewish lineage, he trained as a physicist and geographer but became interested in anthropology while conducting fieldwork on Baffin Island. His early work resulted in the publication of a monograph simply titled, *The Central Eskimo*.¹¹⁴ From there, he became interested in the cultures of the Pacific Northwest. At the World Columbian Exposition, Boas collected bodily measurements of indigenous people from virtually every region in North America. Boas's study of Shoshonean and Siouan tribes based on these measurements took years to publish. The data collected for the Sioux (Dakota) represented the measurements of 1,431 individuals,

¹¹¹ In 1890, for instance, the *Chicago Daily* ran an article that noted advances in geology and archaeology that not only pushed back the arrival of early humans, but also of glacial epochs. The article specifically references remains, “The discoveries of prehistoric remains on the Pacific coast, and especially in British Columbia, finished completely the last chance at a reasonable contention by the adherents of the older view [of a young earth theory].” In other words, the World's Columbian Exposition did not introduce many fairgoers to the idea that the earth was old, evidence indicated that humans had evolved over thousands – if not millions of years, and that discoveries of human remains in North America indicated a very ancient human occupation in the Americas. See “Antiquity of the Race,” *Chicago Daily*, August 2, 1890, 13.

¹¹² On the display of Indians of Peru at the World Columbian Exposition, the *New York Times* noted of the efforts, “He [the organizer of the exhibit] has also made arrangements to take to Chicago a band of the wildest and most barbarous Indians in Peru, and has secured for them a great quantity of the native costumes and dresses, which will make an attractive display.” “Peru at the World's Fair,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1892, 6.

¹¹³ Letter from Franz Boas to John Wesley Powell, September 21, 1892. Records of Bureau of American Ethnology, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. In this letter, Boas informs Powell, the head of the BAE, that he will no longer be working at Clark University due to ongoing conflicts between the faculty and administration. Boas continues, “I shall go to Chicago this winter in order to work up the exhibit from Canada and in Physical Anthropology for the World's Fair. This work will probably keep me occupied probably until next autumn.”

¹¹⁴ Franz Boas, *The Central Eskimo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1888 and 1964).

186 of whom were children. Workers gathering the data at the fairgrounds noted skin color, hair color and type, lip shape, ear location, and the development of facial hair before measuring bone structure. Anthropologists, looking back at their assessment of the data in 1920, would conclude that the data clearly represented the racial features of a single tribal group. Despite this, it was argued that the geographical location of the Sioux, spread throughout a massive swath of the Great Plains, allowed for the mixing of racial characteristics through inter-breeding and tribal mixing.¹¹⁵ Anthropologist Louis Robert Sullivan offered a possible explanation, “Among anthropologists who seek to explain the diversity of the American Indian physically by proposing two migrations, the one of a short, short-headed type and the other of a tall, long-headed type, the Sioux are usually pointed to as the results of intermixture of these two types.”¹¹⁶ Despite the collection of a massive amount of data and nearly thirty years of study, anthropologists still struggled to articulate an exact understanding of the development of racial characteristics in North America and around the world.¹¹⁷

By the time of the fair, Boas was already experienced in collecting human remains. During fieldwork in British Columbia only a few years before the fair, he had personally collected the skulls of dozens of Northwest Coast Indians, offering them for sale at \$5 a skull and \$20 for each complete skeleton. Shipping them into the United States under falsified invoices, he attempted to sell them to the American Museum of Natural History, where he later worked as a curator. In 1887, Boas had successfully sold several crania from the Pacific Northwest to the Army Medical Museum, for prices ranging from \$2.50 to \$5.00.¹¹⁸ Boas lamented around the same time that, “It is most unpleasant work to steal bones from a grave, but what is the use, someone has to do it...” Despite his bemoaning of the nature of the work, Boas would argue vehemently in favor of the overall utility of collecting skeletal remains in order to understand and teach about issues of race. When he first viewed the actual exhibits of the World Columbian Exposition that he had helped to plan, he expressed dismay over the fact that the skulls in his collection were relegated into a small glass case in the corner of the fairgrounds, where they were “likely to be overlooked by nine out of every ten visitors.”¹¹⁹

Popular the anthropology displays complemented exhibits featuring recent discoveries from the cliff dwellings of the American Southwest. Audiences had not only read about the mummified remains in newspapers, they were also learning of the ancient mysteries of the American West through an expanding literature. Ranging from romantic accounts of ancient history to informational guidebooks, these works helped develop a broad cultural awareness of fascinating discoveries taking place in the region. Audiences were drawn to the fair, at least in part, based on the accounts of ancient and mysterious

¹¹⁵ Robert Louis Sullivan, *The Anthropometry of the Siouan Tribes* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1920).

¹¹⁶ Sullivan, *The Anthropometry of the Siouan Tribes*, 96.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Franz Boas to W.H. Holmes, December 1, 1904. Records of the Bureau of American Ethnology. Series 1, Correspondence, Letters Received, Franz Boas, 1889-1909, Box 264. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Franz Boas to John S. Billings, May 6, 1887. National Anthropological Archives, Army Medical Museum Records. Reel 2, AMM #2443-2445.

¹¹⁸ National Anthropological Archives, Army Medical Museum Records. Reel 2, AMM #2443-2445.

¹¹⁹ David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000): 59-60.

places of the world—with the opportunity to view actual artifacts and genuine human remains from these places. Adolph F. Bandelier, previously appointed by the AAAS to explore the ruins of the American Southwest, published a bestselling, fictionalized account of the history of the region, *The Delight Makers*, in 1890. Though the book was not well received by critics, its popularity worked to broaden awareness of the pre-history of the region.¹²⁰ Other popular literature included *Some Strange Corners of Our Country*, a work of travel boosterism for the region by Charles F. Lummis¹²¹ and *The Land of the Cliff Dweller*,¹²² a popular history by F.H. Chapin that also appeared in 1892.¹²³ Taken together, these works fueled interest in both the contemporary and ancient American Indians in the region—attracting audiences especially to see the American mummies whenever they were displayed at fairs first made arrived at museums in cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco.

The Wetherill brothers, who had continued to excavate in the West, sold a collection of about 1,000 specimens filling forty-two boxes to C. D. Hazzard of the H.J. Smith Exploring Company. Hazzard moved the entire collection to Chicago and exhibited it at the fair as a replica cliff dwelling. Further artifacts were displayed in a replica “mountain”—which, though being closer in resemblance to an overgrown papier-mâché hill, attracted audiences who were not originally intending to tour the replica cliff dwellings to view parts of the collection. Following the fair, the collection was loaned to the University of Pennsylvania.¹²⁴ A few years later, donors purchased the collection, splitting it between the University of Pennsylvania and the University of California.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Bandelier wrote in the preface to his lengthy novel that the story was, “the result of eight years spent in ethnological and archaeological study among the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico.” He added, “I have hoped to make the ‘Truth about the Pueblo Indians’ more accessible and perhaps more acceptable to the public in general.” F.W. Hodge, of the Smithsonian Institution, authored the Preface to the Second Edition and describes the popular reception of the book. Adolf F. Bandelier, *The Delight Makers* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, Second Edition, 1918), V-Viii.

¹²¹ Lummis goes so far as to lament that it had grown more fashionable for scribes in the United States to write about Africa than North America. This trend, he argued, was making the Bushmen better known to the average citizen of the United States than American Indians. He hoped his work would capture the imagination of popular audiences and draw them to unknown corners of the continent. Charles Fletcher Lummis, *Some Strange Corners of Our Country: The Wonderland of the Southwest* (New York: The De Vinne Press, 1892).

¹²² Frederick H. Chapin, *The Land of the Cliff-Dwellers* (Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, W.B. Clarke and Company, 1892).

¹²³ A brief account of all of these works also appears in Lee, “The Origins of the Antiquities Act,” 22.

¹²⁴ After a brief loan of the collection to the University of Pennsylvania, the collection was purchased for a total of \$14,500 – an immense sum for the late nineteenth century. Letter from C.D. Hazzard to William Pepper. January 30, 1896. University Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Folder: Hazzard – Hearst Collection Correspondence. Box: 24. Administrative Records, Curatorial, American Section, Collectors and Collections Gratacos – Hazzard/Hearst.

¹²⁵ For an overview on the purchase, see Memorandum. *Understanding the Wetherill and Wilmarth Collections at the Colorado Historical Society*, Pete Dobemeier (June 14, 2002): 2. Archival records documenting the transaction are housed in the University Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania. See, University Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Folder: Hazzard – Hearst Collection Correspondence. Box: 24. Administrative Records, Curatorial, American Section, Collectors and Collections Gratacos – Hazzard/Hearst. It might be noted that of the collection of human remains in the Hazzard collection, only three sets of mummified remains, were submitted to the University of California. The remainder of the collection of human remains continued to be housed at the University of Pennsylvania. It is interesting to consider that the remains eventually deposited at the University of

Hazzard's collections included human remains representing, at minimum, eighty-six different individuals. The remains ranged from complete mummies to small pieces of preserved flesh and tissue discovered in caves. The collection also included bone fragments and bleached skeletons found throughout the arid climate of the American Southwest. Human remains represented slightly less than ten percent of the collection Hazzard brought to Chicago, yet they were the most noteworthy part of the private collection.¹²⁶ Visitors to the displays would have encountered a series of mysterious bundles in which, hidden from view, were mummies of infants wrapped in cradleboards. The adult mummies were even more dramatic. A series of adult mummies, many of them with dark hair, dried skin, and exposed teeth, would have undoubtedly captured attention. The mummification process left the bodies dried and appearing almost emaciated - leaving toenails, ribs, and hand bones exposed; wrappings had blended with skin and dust. The mummified bodies remained in varied states of preservation, many appearing nearly gruesome and of masked humanity. Where possible, exhibitors pulled away the matting that covered the mummies to expose remains to audiences.¹²⁷ Hazzard, who had fallen ill during the fair, decided to divest himself of the collections following the exposition, particularly as their immense popularity ensured that he would be able to find a buyer.¹²⁸ Frank Hamilton Cushing, a highly regarded anthropologist affiliated with the Bureau of American Ethnology, estimated that the collection was one of the most important available to illustrate the ancient history of the American Southwest. Cushing noted, in particular, the relatively exceptional state of preservation of the collection, and he argued that the great variety of objects could teach scholars about the spiritual, artistic,

California would have been excavated from their original location, moved to Denver, shipped to Chicago, placed on display, then shipped to Philadelphia, catalogued, and then shipped to San Francisco (then the location of the University of California Museum of Anthropology). All of this would have occurred between the 1880s and 1901. See, Memorandum. The Hazzard Collection of Cliff-Dweller Material. Folder: Hazzard-Hearst Collection, list of objects given to Berkeley, 1901. Box: 25. Administrative Records, Curatorial, American Section, Collectors and Collections Hazzard / Hearst. University Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

¹²⁶ Human remains account for 86 catalogue numbers in the Hazzard collection. The total number of objects in the collections varies widely throughout published and archival documents. It seems likely that Hazzard inflated the number of objects in the collection to make it seem more dramatic and valuable. Museum officials, on the other hand, probably provided a more accurate count of around 1,000 total objects in the collection. Catalogue. "Group A. Consisting of Human Remains," University Museum Archives, Museum of Pennsylvania. Folder: Hazzard Catalogue; McCloyd-Graham Collection, 1892. Box 24. Administrative Records, Curatorial, American Section. Collectors and Collections Gratacos – Hazzard/Hearst.

¹²⁷ Unpublished manuscript. Floyd W. Sharrock, "The Hazzard Collection." University Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Box: 26: Administrative Records. Curatorial, American Section. Collectors and Collections. Folder: Hazzard-Hearst Collection.

¹²⁸ Hazzard's associates solicited a buyer as the fair came to a conclusion. Hazzard and his associate noted in their letter to the director of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania that they planned to write to the Smithsonian Institution, Field Museum, Peabody Museum, and the American Museum of Natural History. Hazzard's associates likely named these rival institutions as a technique to drum up a sense of competition and raise interest in the collection. Letter from Hector Alliot to Stewart Culin, May 14, 1894. University Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Folder: Hazzard – Hearst Collection Correspondence. Box: 24. Administrative Records, Curatorial, American Section, Collectors and Collections Gratacos – Hazzard/Hearst.

and everyday life of the Ancient Pueblos.¹²⁹ Adding to the value of the collection, of course, was the series of naturally mummified bodies, many of them still wrapped in original burial materials.

In addition to the full reconstruction of a cliff dwelling crafted entirely with the Hazzard Collection in mind,¹³⁰ workers for the World Columbian Exposition built the “largest artificial mountain ever constructed” to display the material collected by the Wetherill brothers for the State of Colorado. Visitors walked through a large entrance and were faced with a full-scale representation of the “craggy vastnesses of which many of the finest cliff dwellings” were found. Culminating the walk through a reconstruction of the canyons of southwest Colorado, visitors entered the most provocative portion of the exhibition, which featured “some thousands of examples of the weapons, cooking utensils, implements and mummified remains of this pre-historic peoples.”¹³¹

One volume documenting the various exhibitions and buildings of the fairgrounds described in some detail the displays organized by private corporations or individual entrepreneurs, most of them hoping to sell their “personal collections,” at the end of the exposition. A caption underneath a photograph of men and women walking through a reconstructed mountain at the opening of the exhibition reads, “The visitor was introduced to a large exhibit of the mummified remains and domestic relics of the Cliff-Dwellings, the oldest semi-civilization of the Western Continent.” It continued by describing the exhibition as, “so skillfully arranged that the visitor to the display seemed to be standing in the very midst of the real ruins, and shaking hands, as it were, with the dusty remains of a people who played their part in the drama of the world more than a thousand years ago.”¹³² Human remains were becoming increasingly central in emerging fantasies about the prehistoric past of North America. Without fail, however, race was used as the central qualifier in communicating the significance of these bodies—their stories of a distant and exotic past essentially made for an intriguing setting for racial storylines.

The display of cliff dwellings at the 1893 Columbian World Exposition was so popular that it was replicated, on an even larger scale, at future international expositions. Before reappearing at major international expositions, however, the Cliff Dwellers were placed on display in a new exhibit of the Hazzard collection at the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. Ten mummies were the central attraction: “Naturally,” one newspaper read, “the most interesting portions of the collection to the average visitor

¹²⁹ Memorandum. “Statement in regard to Mr. Hazard’s (sic) Collection, made by Mr. Cushing, the Ethnologist, at Washington,” Folder: Hazzard-Hearst Collection. Box: 26. Administrative Records, Curatorial, American Section, Collectors and Collections Heye Collection. University Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

¹³⁰ Additional information about the creation and display of the Wetherill and Wilmarth Collections can be found in another Colorado Historical Society memorandum. Memorandum. Richard H. Wilshusen, “Archaeological Ceramics Collections at the Colorado Historical Society: Their Past Histories and Future Uses in Exhibits, Research, and Instruction,” (February, 2004). Bridget Ambler, curator of material culture at the Colorado Historical Society, was kind enough to share this document with me.

¹³¹ John Joseph Flinn, *Official Guide to the World’s Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: The Columbian Guide Company, 1893), 58.

¹³² J.W. Buel, *The Magic City: A Massive Portfolio of Original Photographic Views of the Great World’s Fair and Its Treasures of Art, Including a Vivid Representation of the Famous Midway Plaisance / With Graphic Descriptions by America’s Brilliant Historical and Descriptive Writer J.W.* (St Louis: Historical Publishing Company, 1894).

are the exhumed bodies of the wonderful people themselves.”¹³³ One newspaper imagined that the mummies were, in fact, “Hold[ing] a Reception” at the opening of the exhibition.¹³⁴ Despite having been advised that, “[The mummies] are not pretty things to look at,” large audiences poured through the galleries, many of them no doubt already familiar with the collections displayed so prominently in Chicago.¹³⁵ The media in Philadelphia was immediately captivated by the exhibition, promoting the relics of the Cliff Dwellers as evidence of the “contributions of the history of the American race, and the story of a new Egypt—a new Babylonia,” And continuing that the story of the Cliff Dwellers “was unfolded here in America, to take its place beside and confirm the Peruvian record of the early life of man on this continent (sic).”¹³⁶ Other local newspapers suggested that “Many prolonged visits will be required in the Museum to enable one to before even moderately familiar with all the manifestations of primitive life and industry displayed in the collection.”¹³⁷ By the 1904 fair, the exhibits of Cliff Dwellings, placed alongside living individuals from the Hopi and Zuni tribes, were so abundant that the gallery was described as being capable of “form[ing] a complete Exposition in itself.”¹³⁸ By 1904, massive audiences in Chicago, Philadelphia, and St. Louis had viewed mummified remains discovered in the American Southwest. Visitors at museums and fairs were presented with mysterious and grandiose narratives about ancient history surrounding presentations of American mummies, but the lingering issue of race and racial classification surrounded these stories at every turn. The public was invited to view the remains and fantasize about the past, comparing the sometimes grisly sight of a naturally mummified corpse to their own humanity and contemplating the past of the American continents. Scholars and scientists, too, recognized the significance of these newly acquired collections, especially the American mummies brought together initially for display at world’s fairs. From there, permanent transfer to museums would

¹³³ “With Western Mummies.” Newspaper Clipping. Record, November 10, 1895. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1. Newspapers across Philadelphia were in agreement on this point, see, “Primitive Civilizations: The Great Exhibition at the University of Pennsylvania and its Wonderful Light on the Past.” Newspaper Clipping. *Phil. Times*, November 10, 1895. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1. See also, “The Cliff Dwellers,” *Public Ledger*, November 8, 1895. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1.

¹³⁴ Newspaper Clipping. “A Show Over 2000 Years Old.” *Phil. Times*, November 9, 1895. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1.

¹³⁵ “Some part of the wonderful tale of aboriginal life told by the Hazzard collection of objects from the cliff-dwellers of Colorado, which had just been arranged for public inspection, was interpreted to a large and delighted audience, which assembled in the library building of the University of Pennsylvania, yesterday afternoon . . .” Newspaper Clipping. *Phil. Press*. November 9, 1895. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1. Several months later, it was reported that the collection, “has attracted much attention, and has been visited by residents of nearly every State in the Union.” Newspaper Clipping. *Phil. Public Ledg*. January 30, 1896. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1.

¹³⁶ “Cliff Dweller and His Relics.” Newspaper Clipping. *Phil. Ev. Tel*. November 8, 1895. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1.

¹³⁷ “Cliff Dweller and His Relics.” Newspaper Clipping. *Phil. Ev. Tel*. November 8, 1895. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1. See also, “The Cliff Dwellers.” *Public Ledger*, November 8, 1895. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1.

¹³⁸ This quote comes from St. Louis exhibitor W. Maurice Tobin, as quoted in, Nancy J. Parezo, and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007): 246.

contribute to the gradual growth of museum collections of remains. Exhibits displayed at fairs held in the United States between 1893-1904 alone resulted in human remains being sent to museums in San Francisco, Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver, and Washington. Competing collections appeared to be changing just as rapidly as the ideas that surrounded them.

From Army Medical Museum to the Smithsonian

Following the transfer of the Army Medical Museum collections to the Smithsonian Institution in 1897, Smithsonian administrators proposed an internal, institutional reorganization into three separate departments; anthropology, biology, and geology. Each department was under the supervision of a Head Curator. Curators sought out new collections that represented the established or emerging fields of their discipline, while also seeking to hire new curators to serve as caretakers for existing collections. The anthropology department, in particular, rapidly attempted to reassess existing collections into an intellectual framework that could guide the development of new collections. The museum's annual report described the state of the anthropology department:

There are a number of sections that have not yet been assigned to any division, remaining for the present under the direct supervision of the head curator. Moreover, the classification of material and the division of work among the various members of the present staff, so far as it has progressed, is largely tentative, owing to the staff being composed of specialists in limited portions of the field of anthropology; this necessitates a somewhat arbitrary classification and organization. As the various branches of the work develop, and increase is made in the number of curators, reclassification of material and readjustment of the force will gradually lead to satisfactory and permanent organization.¹³⁹

As the Smithsonian defined departments and acquired collections, it intended to shape and grow academic disciplines by acquiring the raw materials that would buttress future research. This goal neatly complemented the idea that certain collections, including human remains, were a limited and valuable resource. Even if the exact intellectual meanings for these materials were unclear, collections like skeletal remains needed to be urgently acquired now in order to unlock key ideas about race and history, ideas deemed central for future generations of scholars. The anthropology department at the Smithsonian, in particular, had managed to bring together a large collection from a wide range of sources around the globe. In 1898, the department proudly declared that it had acquired 1,441 separate accessions, containing upward of 450,000 individual specimens.¹⁴⁰ In other words, in that single year the Smithsonian's anthropology collections acquired enough material to establish what might have made another respectable museum. The massive growth in the collection is still more impressive, given the fact that the museum points to a "meagerness of funds" as having handicapped its efforts in obtaining certain specimens. Further, the Smithsonian Institution as a whole

¹³⁹ United States National Museum, Annual Report for the year ending June 30, 1898. 3-4.

¹⁴⁰ United States National Museum, Annual Report for the year ending June 30, 1898. 7.

experienced a dip in attendance after the outbreak of the Spanish-American War—a decline also no doubt exacerbated by the increasing fears of the influenza virus.¹⁴¹

A major part of the astonishing growth of the Smithsonian’s collections was the acquisition of a significant collection of human remains. The Army Medical Museum, having chosen to permanently divest itself of the systematical classification of races, began packing up many of the thousands of bones in their collection for shipment across the capital. Ultimately the Smithsonian received “a collection of 2,206 human crania, representing mainly the Indian tribes, ancient and modern, of North America.”¹⁴² At that moment, physical anthropology was still an ill-defined field, tied together by a large and diverse body of scholars and quasi-intellectuals interested in race theory, and a smattering of scholars and amateurs interested in studying the ancient cultures of the world. Nevertheless, this moment was a major turning point, prompting the nation’s largest museum to make a decision on their level of commitment to physical anthropology as a discipline and the practice of collecting human remains for evidence.

Little record remains of the actual events of the day Smithsonian curator William Henry Holmes visited the Army Medical Museum and made the verbal request to transfer the remains over to the Smithsonian, but we do know how the collections were utilized and imagined once they made the transition to their new home. In 1903, Aleš Hrdlička, a Czech-born anthropologist, became the first curator of physical anthropology. One of seven children, Hrdlička and his family migrated to New York when he was thirteen years old. A stubborn, yet sharp intellectual force, he rose to new heights as he arrived at the national museum—just as it had acquired a collection of skulls and bones from around the world. Following his arrival in Washington, Hrdlička became a critical figure in the formation of physical anthropology in the United States. The Smithsonian, under his leadership, would become a central hub around which numerous other collections of human remains would gravitate. Despite his intellectual influence in the field, Hrdlička’s behavior was often interpreted as cold and sometimes even combative. His presence seemed to fuel sentiments of competition for collections and control over their interpretation. A voracious writer and defender of his particular methodologies, he not only had access to one of the largest collections in the country, he was granted first access to view many of the most important skeletons and fossils in museum collections abroad whenever he traveled.

In his leadership capacity, Hrdlička eventually founded the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* and, given his position on both the journal and at the Smithsonian, he commanded much of the discipline of physical anthropology and the study of race and history through the study of human remains. His drive to collect and organize skeletons was based on his theories about race; Hrdlička adopted the racial classification scheme of the nineteenth century authority Georges Cuvier. Following Cuvier, Hrdlička extended the idea that there existed three main stems of mankind—white, black, and yellow brown. Beyond that simple division—the racial tree of humanity was confusing and unclear. Responding to the desire to understand and classify particular “sub racial” units, museums collected and classified—hoping that repeated measurements would reveal

¹⁴¹ United States National Museum, Annual Report for the year ending June 30, 1898. 4-24.

¹⁴² United States National Museum, Annual Report for the year ending June 30, 1898. 4.

patters in the racial stems of mankind.¹⁴³ Alongside Earnest Albert Hooten at Harvard, Hrdlička was the most important influence in the professionalization of the field of physical anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century.

Hrdlička came into his position with the benefit of a newly acquired collection from the Army Medical Museum, one that had grown to include specimens from around the world and was the envy of many young anthropology departments. Hrdlička and the Smithsonian benefited from the existence of large and diverse bone rooms filled with skeletons from around the world, the single-minded and controversial scholar would lead the bone empire toward new, and unforeseen, heights.

Hrdlička gained experience working in the Department of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History before taking on the role of curator at the Smithsonian. Before that, he spent time utilizing his medical degree, working in an asylum for the insane in New York State. Early in his career, Hrdlička possessed dark hair and deep-set dark eyes. As his hair grayed and his face became marked by the deeper lines of age, he seemed only to become more stubborn in his positions and many in the field viewed him as a curmudgeon. Hrdlička, following his European, French-centered training, spent his career downplaying the importance of genetics and emphasized morphological characteristics of human beings. Although he had proved central to the overall growth of the field—and was the most important figure in shaping the practice of collecting skeletal remains for museums in the United States—toward the end of his career, the field seemed to pass him by. Hrdlička had high demands for both his employees and other scholars and his frequent challenges to their attitudes and ideas were sometimes viewed as arrogance. For a time, he was a member of the American Eugenics Society and worked with a number of the most significant eugenicists in the United States, tying the field together with the newly materializing discipline of physical anthropology. For all his faults and commitments to shortsighted ideas, Hrdlička had a knack for collecting, measuring, observing, and organizing human bones. Overall, he generally encouraged the growth of American physical anthropology and morphological studies of both living humans and collections of human remains housed in museums.¹⁴⁴ His legacy is not beyond reproach, however, and his complex views toward race and evolution have since been roundly criticized. In a private letter written during the midst of Hrdlička's career, one cultural anthropologist would describe him as “never [having] produced scientific work above the level of mediocrity.”¹⁴⁵ Others, certainly including many in the field of emerging discipline of physical anthropology, disagreed. Regardless of personal opinions of Hrdlička, however, many scientists and amateurs proved willing to submit boxes of skeletons to the Smithsonian to add to their studies.

¹⁴³ Robert Oppenheim, “Revisiting Hrdlička and Boas: Asymmetries of Race and Anti-Imperialism in Interwar Anthropology,” *American Anthropologist* 112, Issue 1: 92-94.

¹⁴⁴ Details on Hrdlička's influence on the American anthropological community and his contribution to the decline of scientific racism can be found in Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 97-100.

¹⁴⁵ This quote, and also the use of the word, “megalomaniac” can be found in a letter written by Robert Lowie in reference to Hrdlička's possible candidacy on the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association. Letter from Robert Lowie to Clark Wissler, November 8, 1920. Papers of Robert Lowie. U.C. Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Manuscripts Collections. Folder: Lowie, Robert, Outgoing, 1916-1922. Box 1.

Upon his arrival to the Smithsonian, Hrdlička quickly began a project, on a global and multifaceted scale, to collect and study human remains from around the globe, doing so using almost any means necessary to secure their acquisition for the museum. This research program, however, could only mark the very beginning of a professionalization of the field. Very few scholars in the United States were yet trained in the young field of physical anthropology. Most scholars of this era who engaged in questions surrounding racial science of physical anthropology trained in either medicine or biology. Interestingly, although Hrdlička did much to advance the field of physical anthropology, he continued to maintain that the best training for physical anthropologists was in medicine, even as the two fields seemingly drifted apart over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. In Europe, Hrdlička's influence would be compared to one of his mentors, French anthropologist Paul Broca (1824-1880), who developed centers for physical anthropology in Paris. Hrdlička, who received training with Broca in France, hoped to emulate such institutions in the United States, with the Smithsonian forming the most important site for teaching and research in the field.¹⁴⁶ Beyond institution building—if the races of mankind were to be understood on the axis of white, black, and yellow brown—the United States in the late nineteenth century seemed to be the ideal testing ground to prove and better comprehend such an assumption.

Racial Theory at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century

Driving the collecting of human remains was an evolving set of theories regarding race in both science and popular culture in the United States. As evolutionary theories came to dislodge and replace older ideas about polygenesis and monogenesis, racial classification theories became more complex. Although Darwinian evolution had come to dominate the natural sciences by the turn of the century, anthropologists like Hrdlička and his British contemporary, Sir Arthur Keith, viewed the dominant theory of Darwinian natural selection as problematic.¹⁴⁷ French anthropologists who had guided much of the thinking in physical anthropology over the previous fifty years had largely aligned their views with the French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), who had devised a theory of evolution that, for a time, competed with Darwin for preeminence in continental Europe. The dominant strain in French anthropology by the second half of the nineteenth century revolved around polygenesis, Lamarckian frameworks for human evolution, and thereby the appearances of the various races of mankind.¹⁴⁸ The early reception of Darwinian theory in the United States was actually far less contentious than in France, and many scientists in the United States worked to advance a more secular evolutionary theory. Despite the general movement away from the polygenesis/monogenesis dichotomy, the question of what ideas would buttress racial classification theories remained unanswered. In the decades that followed the Civil War to the turn of the century, an untold number of wide-ranging racial classification schemes were published in books and journals in the United States; some of these schemes were supported by research conducted upon collections of human remains, while many were based purely on speculation. Many scholars who collected, measured, and observed human remains

¹⁴⁶ On Hrdlička's responses to French and German influences, see both Spencer, ed. *A History of American Physical Anthropology*, 5-6 and 14-17.

¹⁴⁷ Brace, "The Roots of the Race Concept," 16-17.

¹⁴⁸ Brace, "The Roots of the Race Concept," 21.

avoided these debates entirely, content instead to create charts and graphs without fully extrapolating their data into pragmatic theories about race.

In the United States, debates about race soon centered upon the discourse surrounding the effect of the environment on shaping the modern races of mankind. To what extent, anthropologists came to wonder, did the wilderness of North America shape American Indians since their arrival on the continent? Scholars also debated the long-term implication of European and African presence in the United States. Through the measurement and collection of skulls, some argued for the stability of races. Those with positivist leanings argued that these stable races could be arranged within consistent taxonomies of races. Others came to the position that while representative examples of races may have existed at one time, the gradual intermixture of cultures and populations would continue to confuse the stability of races.

Two seminal figures in the field of anthropology, Hrdlička and Franz Boas, agreed that the environment had a direct impact on the human body. As evidence, both scholars would directly explore the human body, particularly considering how the bodies of living immigrants had changed over several generations and, significantly, how the bodies of American Indians may have changed since their arrival in the New World. The two would arrive at different conclusions that would shape much of the discourse in anthropology over the next generation. For a time in the early twentieth century, both figures worked to build collections of human remains through opportunistic acquisitions of skeletons for museum collections and systematic measurements of living individuals.

Franz Boas and Physical Anthropology

In 1899, Boas published an article in *American Anthropologist* titled simply, “Recent Criticisms of Physical Anthropology.” Boas had, by this point, positioned himself as a key leader in the field of American anthropology. As noted above, he had also actively collected human remains, once even going so far as to use a photographer to distract local natives while he pillaged graves.¹⁴⁹ Despite this background, Boas was hardly just another profiteering grave robber; he possessed a serious intellect and was genuinely interested in the problems of race and culture in a wide variety of contexts. Boas was a critical player in the rise of museum anthropology, but his relationship with the museum as an institution had become somewhat strained, leading to his eventual departure from the American Museum of Natural History for Columbia University.

In the *American Anthropologist* article, Boas actively defended his research against those criticisms, already apparent before the turn-of-the-century, that the utility of the discipline of physical anthropology was minimal and the process of gathering information about body measurements was fundamentally flawed by a lack of clarity in racial theory. Boas defended the field of physical anthropology overall; his article begins with an explanation as to why anthropologists were interested in skeletal materials at all. He writes:

One of the principal reasons that led to a more detailed study of the skeleton and to a tendency to lay the greatest stress upon characteristics of the skeleton, was the ease with which material of this kind could be obtained. Visitors to distant countries are likely to bring home skeletons

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, *Skull Wars*, 59.

and parts of skeletons, while not much opportunity is given for a thorough examination of a considerable number of individuals of foreign races. The difficulty of obtaining material relating to the anatomy of the soft parts of the body has had the effect that this portion of the description of the anatomy of man has received very slight attention. In comparatively few cases have we had opportunity to make a thorough study of the characteristics of the soft parts of the body of individuals belonging to foreign races.¹⁵⁰

Skeletal material, in other words, was in large part collected out of convenience and assumed stability of form. Boas continues his article by arguing that skeletal evidence allowed anthropologists the opportunity to understand not just the living races of mankind, but also long-extinct races and populations. Although Boas does acknowledge the desire within the discipline to study pre-history through human remains, he primarily emphasizes the need to utilize physical anthropology to understand race; his article underscores the aspiration to understand racial groups rather than individual specimens. This is important, he argues, because though the discipline of physical anthropology had been critiqued for the inconsistency of individual measurements, the overall consistency of what were argued to be clear groupings points to the existence of a number of races of mankind. For Boas, like other scholars of the period, the study of prehistory was less important on its own accord than it was vis-à-vis the desire to understand the existent races of man.

Where Boas began to break from many of his contemporaries was in his resistance to *strict* schemes of racial classification. Boas believed that while understanding racial relationships might prove to be possible, strict racial classification was only an imagined reality. Individual bodies, he noted, might be shaped by their surrounding environment and through various cultural practices. Boas argued, “Each social unit consists of a series of individuals whose bodily form depends on their ancestry and their environment.”¹⁵¹ Boas’ environmental determinism reflected something of his overall theoretical framework for the development of human culture as well as the human body.

Although Boas believed that heredity exerted greater influence than environment in the shaping of the human body, he argued that the evidence was incomplete. More measurements would need to be taken, and more remains would need to be collected before an answer to the question could be fully articulated. “The statistical study of types will,” Boas noted, “lead to an understanding of the blood relationships between types.”¹⁵² Boas concluded that only by gathering more information about the diversity of the human form, together with the complete study of cultural habits and language, would keys emerge to unlock the secrets of humanity.

By the early 1910s, Boas’s studies exploring the effects of inheritance and environment on immigrant populations pushed him to intensify his attacks on racial classification. The course of his ideas eventually influenced the entire field of

¹⁵⁰ Franz Boas, “Some Recent Criticisms of Physical Anthropology,” *American Anthropologist* 1, No. 1. (1899), 98.

¹⁵¹ Boas, “Some Recent Criticisms of Physical Anthropology,” 100.

¹⁵² Boas, “Some Recent Criticisms of Physical Anthropology,” 106.

anthropology. At this early stage, however, Boas's uncertainty with the meanings of early measurements and collections simply pushed the field to gather more data and more bones. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Boas would reflect on the problems inherent to the existing theories on race and culture, fundamentally undermining a myriad of poorly defined, yet dominant theories that had inspired early collecting of human remains.

While both Boas and Hrdlička were advocates for environmental determinism, the two disagreed on how quickly the environment influenced the human body. Hrdlička, therefore, was more willing to put races into strict typological schemes as Boas' vision of race became increasingly fluid. As Boas increasingly turned his attention to questions of culture and anthropological theory, Hrdlička began turning his gaze deeper into human history.¹⁵³ Whereas Boas departed the museum setting for the university, Hrdlička stayed at the Smithsonian for several more decades, only ending his tenure at the museum at his own death. Boas's emphasis within anthropology shifted intellectually away from questions regarding the human form, but Hrdlička's obsession with the quest to draw ideas from the bones of the dead only seemed to deepen. Driven by questions of science, unmitigated ego, and widespread fascination with race, bone rooms grew at an unparalleled rate.

Early Management and Procurement of Human Remains Collections

By 1900, museum professionals had developed various systems for organizing collections of human remains. Theories surrounding the study of race, gender, anthropology, intelligence, and medicine all directly influenced the practical problems faced by museums in storing and organizing their collections of human remains. Debates within each of these questions, and the degree to which certain scholars emphasized some qualifiers over others, occasionally even caused heated discussions. Seemingly inconsequential details—including certain minor measurements of the skull or whether certain catalogues of collections should identify the known medical history of the deceased—were considered critical to some scholars while simply irrelevant to others. Generally, human remains collections were conceived as providing research opportunities in areas such as comparative anatomy, anthropometry, morphology, pathology, kinetics, and taxonomy, among others. Complicating this process were the ultimate goals of such varied research programs; scholars aimed to answer questions about race, medicine, physics, chemistry, biology, evolution and development, anthropology, and, increasingly, human prehistory. With such an assortment of questions came the need for more and more data to make sense of the implications drawn from humans remains collections. Although many of the competing theories about race and evolution that had taken hold in the middle of the nineteenth century were short-lived, they inspired an all-out flurry of collecting that influenced all branches of anthropology in the United States. Despite the influence of multiple waves of racial classification theories, human remains were largely organized and collected around the basic tenants of racial group and sex. In 1900, Hrdlička published an article in *The American Naturalist* explaining his own system for organizing remains:

¹⁵³ Frank Spencer, *Ecce Homo: An Annotated Bibliographic History of Physical Anthropology* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986): 308.

. . . for anthropological and zoölogical collections of bones, probably the best general rule is to keep, in appropriate series, all the bones of each skeleton together, minus the skull. Each bone should bear the number of the skeleton. The skulls of the same tribe of people or species of animal are kept together, heading the series. Each distinct group of skulls and skeletons in a collection is divided and arranged in at least three groups: the children or young, and grown individuals, separated into males and females. In large series the embryos, adolescents, and very old may be advantageously separated from the others.¹⁵⁴

Hrdlička continued, “The anthropological collection as a whole is arranged on the basis of race and type, and further subdivided according to geographical distribution.”¹⁵⁵ Individual variation within racial groups, including such factors as gender and age, were subverted by the emphasis on racial type.

With the growing desire to obtain human remains came obvious obstacles of procuring such commodities. At the turn of the century these efforts often went hand-in-hand with burgeoning strategies for museum exhibition. As Hrdlička was busy organizing and numbering his skeletons, the AMNH in New York was completing a series of new exhibits intended to “illustrate the different types of the human race.”¹⁵⁶ While publications like Hrdlička’s manual on collecting and organizing human skeletons did little to raise the overall awareness of the project to collect and interpret bones in the museum, exhibitions like those planned for the AMNH and world’s fairs in the first decade of the twentieth century, worked to broadcast the nature of the project to a diverse audience.

Collecting the Living and Dead at the St. Louis World’s Fair, 1904

Efforts to display *living* humans at museums and fairs in the late nineteenth century proved largely to be a success for the organizers of such exhibitions. While these types of exhibitions were not cheap—due to the fact that “living” displays of indigenous peoples needed to be transported, housed, cared for medically, and fed—they attracted a significant amount of attention from fairgoers and media alike. Although earlier efforts to display the living had taken place in the United States fairs, the display of living indigenous people was most prominent at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. Intended to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 continued the tradition of popular displays of ethnographic material culture and live human exhibits intended for large audiences. The fair, which encompassed over 1,240 acres, built on earlier ideas for “living exhibits,” which dated back to the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. In 1876, Congress balked at the proposed price tag for an exhibition bringing together American Indian individuals from around North America, but private commercial endeavors routinely stepped into the fairgrounds, cashing in by inviting or coaxing native people to serve as living exhibits.

¹⁵⁴ Ales Hrdlička, “Arrangement and Preservation of Large Collection of Human Bones for Purpose of Investigation,” *American Naturalist* 34, No. 397 (1900): 9-10.

¹⁵⁵ Hrdlička, “Arrangement and Preservation of Large Collection of Human Bones,” 10.

¹⁵⁶ “New Relics and Fossils: Accessions to the Natural History Museum,” *New York Tribune*, October 28, 1900, 1.

Fairs held in Europe demonstrated both enormous success and deep interest in the living displays of natives, providing an example for later fairs in the United States to follow.¹⁵⁷

While some commercial endeavors proved successful, attempts to gather representatives of American Indian cultures for fairs in the United States produced only mixed results, profit wise. Billed as the final opportunity to view dying races firsthand, the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition was promoted as the “Last Great Congress of the Red Man.” What was envisioned as a massive gathering of Native Americans from around the continent resulted in only a modest gathering of four hundred individuals from the Plains and Southwest. Fair organizers would attempt a similar gathering in 1901 at an exposition in Buffalo.¹⁵⁸ By 1904, therefore, the concept of displaying the exotic bodies of living individuals from around the globe was firmly entrenched in the minds of fair organizers, even if past efforts remained dubious—and occasionally disastrous. Those organizing the Saint Louis fair, however, were more successful in their planning and execution of creating living displays, and the exposition featured displays of indigenous people from around the globe, or “living fossils,” as examples of mankind’s evolutionary past.¹⁵⁹ Unlike earlier exhibits, viewers—and importantly, visitors from various racial and ethnic backgrounds—abounded. Evolution was a topic of display to a moderate degree, but the underlying idea that tied together displays of the body was race. Savage races of mankind were indeed viewed as “living fossils” but the basis around which these groups were organized was a belief in the overall stability of racial categories. Living people were popularly understood to be “living fossils” in the sense that they represented a particular stage of racial development. It was no strenuous mental leap to assume that the white Americans and Europeans who viewed the savages were racially superior to the indigenous or tribal people they observed on the fairgrounds. Indeed, anthropologists continued to uphold the idea of the stability of these races, and many had put forward the argument that certain races were inherently superior to others.

With the arrival of indigenous people from around the globe, it was inevitable that accident, disease, or foul play would lead to the death of people far away from their homeland. In 1904, the Smithsonian’s new curator of physical anthropology, Aleš Hrdlička, was determined to take advantage of such unfortunate inevitabilities. Whereas anthropologists working at the 1893 exposition in Chicago had collected mainly anthropometric measurements of human bodies, Hrdlička believed that the 1904 fair might result in opportunities to collect human remains. Hrdlička had proven to be an opportunist in the past, once working with Franz Boas to collect and study the remains from a group of six Eskimo brought to New York City for what was intended to be a temporary display of the mysterious individuals of the world’s northernmost culture.¹⁶⁰ Hrdlička himself had worked to help orchestrate some of the Smithsonian displays for the

¹⁵⁷ The success of living exhibits at the 1883 Amsterdam International Colonial Exposition and the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris set the stage for massive displays of indigenous people in the ensuing decades. Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 49.

¹⁶⁰ The narrative of the acquisition of Eskimo remains by Hrdlička and Boas for the American Museum of Natural History is particularly heart wrenching. When confronted by both the media and decedents of the Eskimo collected the museum covered up the truth of the acquisition and even organized a fake burial of remains. Kenn Harper, *Give Me My Father’s Body: The Life of Minik the New York Eskimo* (South Royalton: Steerforth Press, 1986): 91-97.

St. Louis fair, and he decided it would be wise to make a prolonged visit to the fairgrounds. Upon his arrival, he worked to collect the brains and skeletons of indigenous people who were not so fortunate to return to their homeland alive following the conclusion of the fair - deaths largely due to various communicable diseases. Hrdlička performed numerous autopsies while visiting the fair, and managed to collect over two hundred specimens, all of which he sent to the Smithsonian. He also made numerous facial casts and photographs of the individuals compromising the living exhibitions of the fair.¹⁶¹ Taking advantage of these opportunities, coupled with ongoing support from museum administrators, allowed the Smithsonian's bone collections to grow to unparalleled size.

Conclusion

While human remains arrived at museums through the rapidly professionalizing fields of archaeology and physical anthropology, it is important not to overstate the role of the emerging academic discipline in the growth of these kinds of museum collections. Medical officers, amateur collectors, looters, pothunters, and treasure seekers often worked over many of the same sites later studied by professional archaeologists and anthropologists. Although seemingly divergent groups, they were ultimately connected by the fact that the many of their collections would eventually be deposited in shared collections at permanent museums. In fact, this transition into permanent museums was occurring only as the field of physical anthropology—still centered on racial classification theories—was starting to emerge as a legitimate discipline in the United States.

Despite lacking a systematic strategy for collecting human remains for medical or natural history museums, the project of scientifically organizing and classifying the races of mankind through bones became popularly understood. Due at least in part to the display of human remains at the turn of the century, Americans were becoming familiar with a scientific concept of race. Major exhibits at fairs and museum, works of literature, and media attention published the efforts of museums to collect skeletons and encouraged amateur collectors to gather skulls. Unlike when collecting or looting art or rare burial goods, collectors of human remains never found a consistently viable market for skeletons removed from the ground; although their fantasies of huge payouts from major museums rarely became reality, many of the skeletons and mummies collected by relic hunters often eventually did arrive at museums. These remains frequently arrived at museums with limited provenance information, confounding contemporary efforts to study or repatriate these collections. These privately-collected materials were complemented by remains collected by professionals like Boas and Hrdlička. Despite their previous collaboration, the two were gradually arriving at competing ideas about the meaning of these remains for the study of race. In the ensuing decades, Boas would increasingly come to challenge the concept of racial typology. Although Hrdlička was not without criticism for the manner in which many racialist ideas came to be promoted, he never joined the wave of anthropologists that became known as “Boasian antiracialists.” As the events in Europe would come to take an increasingly dark turn, Boas and some of his contemporaries began lobbying increasingly staunch criticisms toward the intellectual concept of race. In the late nineteenth century, however, the two united in the project to

¹⁶¹ Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 319-323.

collect and interpret human remains, though the shared desire for bones did not make for an entirely affable relationship. Once friends and collaborators, the two would increasingly move apart and grow critical of their competing theories. Not only theoretical in nature, the discomfort in their relationship would extend to a rivalry over the control of human bones in museum collections themselves.¹⁶²

The media glorified discoveries of rare skeletons made by both professionals and amateurs. Hundreds of articles detailed their exploits in the field and encouraged the public to view human remains firsthand in temporary displays. Exhibits featuring the naturally mummified remains of Cliff Dwellers, in particular, captivated the popular imagination and drove visitors to exhibitions. Following these collections' outrageously successful display on the fairgrounds of international expositions, museums developed their own exhibitions featuring mummified remains of the American Southwest as a prime attraction. A mix of private and public enterprises brought exhibitions of human remains together to popularize a tapestry of scientific and pseudo-scientific ideas about race and, to a lesser extent, narratives about human history. The age of private displays of human remains at international expositions was short-lived and many of the bones and mummies were ultimately sold or donated to museums. Meanwhile, as mummified remains of the Cliff Dwellers captured popular attention, other human remains thought to reflect existing races of mankind were quietly arriving at museums from the American West and around the globe.

When Hrdlička arrived at the Smithsonian in 1903, he noted that he would need the help of several types of people to acquire new collections. In an internal letter, he first lists physicians in Washington D.C., specifically those "who have charge of the morgue." He also was quick to note the role of the Army, Navy, and Indian service agents in the acquisition of existing national collections of remains. Similarly, Hrdlička cited the role of "Missionaries and Consuls," exchanges with other museums, and his own work as an archaeologist. He fully expected this kind of regular, but piecemeal pipeline of skeleton collecting to continue.¹⁶³ Despite some stated reservations about acquiring looted remains, museums expected this blend of professional and amateur attainment of skeletons to continue. Proving to be an accurate assumption for the time being, individuals enthused to collect human remains would later turn over many of their private collections to museums like the Smithsonian.

In 1904, Hrdlička published a brief guide for collecting and preserving human remains. The guide was primarily aimed at other museum professionals around the country and the globe, but it was also intended to encourage the development of private collections, which would later result in donations of specimens.¹⁶⁴ Hrdlička's guide appeared in the tradition of older articles that appeared in magazines for scientific elites throughout Europe.¹⁶⁵ Hrdlička's new guide detailed practices of collecting and

¹⁶² In this dissertation, I focus on where Boas and Hrdlička came to differ in terms of their collecting, researching, and interpreting human remains. Other scholars have ably described how the two men arrived at asymmetrical ideas about race. Oppenheim, *Revisiting Hrdlička and Boas*, 92-103.

¹⁶³ Aleš Hrdlička to William Henry Holmes, May 29, 1903. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁶⁴ Ales Hrdlička, *Directions for Collecting Information and Specimens for Physical Anthropology* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904).

¹⁶⁵ Historian Helen MacDonald points, in particular, to Joseph Barnard Davis' 1853 article, "Hints for Collecting and Preserving the Bones of Ancient Skulls," published in *Gentleman's Magazine* in Britain.

preserving human remains while, importantly, reinforcing his conception of the ultimate research utility of such a collection. The guide starts with clear instructions for dividing human remains collections into three general categories, “the whites and other civilized peoples,” “[t]hose among primitive peoples,” and “[t]hose of extinct peoples and early man.”¹⁶⁶ Over the course of the ensuing decades, Hrdlička would witness the rise and fall of the significance of the first two categories while observing and contributing to the continual growth of the study of ancient man. In the very early years of the century, the division of whites and other races thought to be more primitive defined and dominated the field of physical anthropology. Hrdlička’s obsession to collect and organize the remains of races from around the globe meant that the Smithsonian was eager to accept donations from a wide and diverse range of colonial collectors around the world.

As the examples in this chapter demonstrate, anthropometric measurements, archaeological collections including naturally mummified bodies, and the recently deceased collected from morgues and world’s fairs added to museum collections around the United States. Museums housed the bones themselves, but they also housed the data, artifacts, and the scientists most important to the comparative study of man or the science of racial classification. Scholars believed these events brought them one step closer to understanding fundamental problems about race and history while they simultaneously oversaw the construction of exhibitions on subjects intended to teach the public about the same topics. One of the most captivating aspects of these impressive events for most visitors, in addition to the amazements of technological advancements displayed at fairs, were the live “savages” from other, sometimes quite distant parts of the globe. Displays of human remains, particularly of the mummified bodies of Egypt and the American Southwest, worked to both capture the attention of the overly-stimulated fairgoer, and worked to reshape popular conceptions about race and human history. The public in the United States was eager to learn more about the mysterious bodies displayed at the fair, and many began turning to museums that started to house and display these same remains permanently.

The experience of the Army Medical Museum and the reorganization of the Smithsonian indicate many prominent figures in medicine and anthropology in the United States attempting to define the bodies on museum shelves. Scholars working on behalf of the Army were also trying to understand how these bodies could be shaped by the new kinds of technology developed during the era, both for the purposes of saving them through medicine and destroying them through new weaponry. While advances in medical technology—like the invention of the x-ray—made many of the Army Medical Museum’s collections obsolete,¹⁶⁷ anthropologists still maintained that important questions surrounding race were only just beginning to come into focus, thus making the non-pathological collection donated to the Smithsonian more important and controversial for the next generation of scientists. With the arrival of Aleš Hrdlička to the Smithsonian, the next generation would be left chasing the frustratingly illusive questions of race and history well into the future. The debates he engaged in following his arrival at the

Heather MacDonald, *Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 102.

¹⁶⁶ Hrdlička, *Directions for Collecting*, 8.

¹⁶⁷ Rhode and Connor, “A Repository for Bottled Monsters,” 177.

Smithsonian were not only unresolved, they would be given new life in the ensuing decades.

Chapter 2—Salvaging Race and Remains: Collecting, Documenting, and Legislating Bones in the Early 20th Century

Rains fell hard in northern Minnesota throughout September 1918. Frances Densmore, fifty-one years old, professionally dressed and serious-minded, was working with a Chippewa band in the area, recording their songs and language. As her work with the tribe was nearing an end, receding water above a dam washed away the side of a bank and exposed a number of long-forgotten relics. Densmore knew little about archaeology, but she believed the findings “seemed too interesting an opportunity to slight.”¹⁶⁸ Besides, “The material was being picked up rapidly by those who would never make any use of it.” Bones were strewn among burial relics, exposed by the heavy rain. This was Densmore’s first experience collecting human remains, but her belief that the materials needed salvaging for those who would actually *make use* of them caused her to react quickly.¹⁶⁹ As the rain continued to fall, she implored a local man to help collect the remains as quickly as possible. Later, another young boy would give her several pieces of skull fragments he found at the same site. Although she believed the bones found might be valuable, she believed the skull to be most significant. Even the ethnomusicologist was aware that the skull possessed clues regarding the race of the deceased.¹⁷⁰ She sent the bones, along with the pottery fragments discovered nearby, to the Smithsonian.¹⁷¹ It is unclear how the local Chippewa might have reacted to the natural exposure of bones and burial goods but Densmore’s letters lay bare her understanding of the bones of Native Americans as tools for science, a frame seemingly unknown to others who may have collected bones for some other various purposes. Like Densmore, a wide array of anthropologists and amateurs similarly reacted to discoveries of bones or mummified bodies, shipping them to major museums like the Smithsonian or one of the many smaller regional or university museums. Many amateur collectors possessed only a vague knowledge of why exactly museums would collect human remains; they simply collected them and sent them to museums. Densmore, like a surprising number of anthropologists not normally remembered for collecting bones, maintained only marginally clearer understanding human remains’ use to science. Nevertheless, the perceived value of these artifacts drove their continued collection. The pattern of occasional, accidental, and unorganized collecting pushed museum collections to greatly expand. The trend of collecting human remains expanded well beyond professionals who sent discoveries to museums for preservation, study, and display. Indeed, the problem of looting from important archaeological sites, including those with important skeletons and mummies

¹⁶⁸ Frances Densmore to Aleš Hrdlička. September 12, 1918. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁶⁹ Frances Densmore to Aleš Hrdlička. September 12, 1918. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷⁰ Frances Densmore to Aleš Hrdlička, January 7, 1918. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Given the dates of the other letters that appear to be related to this same incident, I suspect that this letter is misdated “1918” instead of “1919.”

¹⁷¹ In her typed and expanded diaries written in 1944, Densmore notes, “Sept. 7 Went from Red Lake to Bemidji (Thence to Bena, and out on the region about 10 miles where some old graves had been washed out by the lowering of Winneb. Dam. Gathered bones, bits of pottery, and secured 1 or 2 skulls). Manuscript, “Chronology of the study and presentation of Indian music from 1893 to 1944” Frances. Densmore, Papers of Frances Densmore, MS 4250, Folders 1-6: Diaries to Letters Received. Box 1. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

found throughout the American West, pushed the federal government to take action to prevent damage of historical sites and landmarks.

Weeks after her initial discovery, Densmore would write to the museum “with some anxiety,” curious about the fate of the remains. She wondered if the remains had safely arrived, but was also inquiring if they were of any value to the museum, hoping that they might document and preserve a secret of race or the past. Densmore believed important pieces of knowledge were at stake at that moment in time; evidence about race and human history may have washed away had she not acted to save the rain-soaked bones.¹⁷² After some delay, Aleš Hrdlička, Curator of Physical Anthropology at the Smithsonian, responded. Hrdlička, buried deep in his laboratory within the US National Museum, appreciated the anthropologists and amateurs who sent packages of bones to the Smithsonian on occasion though he was also often wary of the claims of significance and stories ascribed to the bones of Native American “chiefs” and “warriors” that frequently turned up in his office. Accidental discoveries of human remains were common, especially as farmers tilled new fields and explorers mapped new territory throughout the American West. The rapidly increasing number of boxes sent from scholars, scientists, and self-proclaimed colonial adventurers meant that Hrdlička could only respond briefly to each sender. These remains, he remarked to Densmore, “while too fragmentary to be of any anthropological importance . . . show a number of artifacts which will well justify their preservation.”¹⁷³ The long bones, he would later explain to Densmore, had been repeatedly punctured by a sharp object, which broke them down to the marrow. Hrdlička believed the American Indians who buried them, hoping to release any evil power embedded inside, intentionally shattered the bones.¹⁷⁴ The Smithsonian carefully wrote catalogue numbers on each bone and filed them away deep within the museum. Although Hrdlička seemed to have no immediate plans to study the remains, another scholar, it was presumed, might find the remains to be scientifically significant at some future, unknown date.

While Densmore was not an archaeologist, she believed it her responsibility to both collect the remains *and* submit them to the Smithsonian.¹⁷⁵ Generations of likeminded Euro-Americans assumed that Native Americans were rapidly disappearing, and the main tenant of “salvage anthropology” was to collect and record American Indian culture and race. The scholars aspired to “salvage” whatever might be preserved, from pottery to linguistic data to human bones. Speaking to the importance of building a physical collection of human remains, Hrdlička wrote to his supervisor, “If it is urgent to gather data on the language, religion, and customs of people who are disappearing, it is surely quite as urgent to secure a physical record of the same groups, records which will

¹⁷² Frances Densmore to Aleš Hrdlička, October 14, 1918. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷³ Aleš Hrdlička to Frances Densmore, October 18, 1918. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷⁴ Aleš Hrdlička to Frances Densmore, January 14, 1919. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷⁵ Densmore’s diaries confirm she was in northern Minnesota in September 1918, but contain little additional information. Densmore, Frances. *Diary of Frances Densmore, January-December, 1918*. Papers of Frances Densmore, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

always remain the most substantial criterion of their classification.”¹⁷⁶ If the races were vanishing, it was argued, so too was the racial record held in their bones.

Not all anthropologists of this era considered themselves to be salvage anthropologists, but the manner in which many in the anthropological community collected and gathered materials in this period was deeply influenced by the desire to preserve all they could of peoples that they believed were disappearing, rather than constantly changing and adapting. The campaign to preserve and collect was viewed as a *race against time*; bone empires benefited from this powerful sentiment by conceptualizing indigenous and ancient bodies as a limited and scientifically valuable resource. For some, this framework encouraged the idea that rare discoveries of human remains—whether they be found strewn across a riverbank in Minnesota or deep inside an Australian cave—were potentially valuable additions to growing collections. It might be argued that salvage anthropology was less a theoretical approach to the discipline than an absence of theory. Indeed, the concept of salvaging a dying set of American Indian cultures stretched so far beyond the small community of anthropologists, it is difficult to treat the efforts as strictly an anthropological practice or even intellectual framework alone. Instead, the movement to “salvage” cultural and racial data through preservation of art, material culture, linguistic information, physical measurements, and even skeletons extended beyond intellectual circles. The broad range of amateur collectors who submitted material to museums in this period suggests an extensive, yet vague, understanding of the museum’s desire to collect certain specimens of vanishing peoples.

This was not just a popular notion, however, as scholars working around the world were influenced by this idea of conceptualizing primitive peoples around the world as rapidly succumbing to the onslaught of Western modernity. Just as scientists were becoming more interested in preserving the culture and bodies of supposedly disappearing races, the public was eager to embrace displays of their material culture and skeletons. The notion of vanishing “races” of modern man helped distill the less dominant notion of ancient, extinct races of man—mysterious groups that left behind architectural (read: archaeological) mysteries as well as confounding mummies and skeletons. The result was not only an increasingly large set of collections to fill the bone rooms of museums in the United States, the movement also pressed for a series of new ideas and legislative developments governing the acquisition and display of the human body.

To a degree, Densmore’s experience is typical; during the first half of the twentieth century, skeletons were regularly sent to major museums in the United States. Shipments came from around the globe and most were readily accepted, causing the size of collections to balloon steadily throughout the early twentieth century. This period was perhaps the apex of collection building in the United States, taken in terms of pure volume of accessions added to museum shelves. The American Antiquities Act of 1906 proved to be a critical moment, facilitating a shift away from amateur ransacking of archaeological sites toward the work of professional archaeologists who preserved historical sites of national importance. Despite this seemingly critical turning point, this chapter demonstrates that looters, amateur collectors, tourists, and tenuously connected

¹⁷⁶ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, October 3, 1913. Aleš Hrdlička Papers, National Anthropological Archives.

professionals continued to freely collect, study, and display human remains well after the passage of the American Antiquities Act of 1906. The American Antiquities Act created, at best, a weak and permeable shield around remains situated on federally owned lands. Nevertheless, the law created the first federal guidelines governing the collecting of human remains and antiquities in the key parts of United States and its territories. As such, it came to provide a legal framework that eventually regulated the acquisition of thousands of human remains discovered in large sections of the United States. The law began to establish a precedent for the legal acquisition of archaeological material—including human remains—and it worked to discourage looting through fines.

Following the passage of the American Antiquities Act, scientists working with human remains also began an organic and gradual intellectual shift. Before the 1910s, most scientists working with human remains were interested mainly in racial science. Simply stated, race so completely dominated popular and scholarly discourse surrounding remains that even discoveries of very ancient, fossilized remains were expected to be framed within racial understandings of mankind. Whenever an unusual body was found, curious minds in the United States constantly wondered how it might be understood in racial terms—*ancestry* and *racial history* were closely linked. While select figures in both the scientific community and in the public maintained an interest in human origins before that decade, it was not until a series of major discoveries around the globe occurred in the 1920s and 1930s that the interest in human evolution and prehistory expanded. During the early part of the twentieth century, the study of human evolution centered largely upon the evolution of the races, with much of the work clearly demonstrating a racist underpinning veiled in the language of scientific authority.

These seemingly divergent themes—the collection and display of human remains by amateur archaeologists and the course of the scientific shift from racial classification theories to human history—were intimately connected by the actual practice of collecting, studying, and displaying human bodies. This period provided a series of key turning points that would change the way human remains held in museums were collected, organized, and interpreted. As the American Antiquities Act gradually influenced the way human remains were collected in the field, scientists used remains to test existing theories on the subject of race and also began using bodies more intensely as tools to explore ideas about human history. At the same time, scholars internally debated the place of eugenics and scientific racism in the study of their collections. Before they could truly begin hashing out these later debates, however, scholars were making key decisions on how early human remains collections would be organized in growing museums—mostly in cities and university towns along the east coast. The leader in the field, the Smithsonian Institution, was among the first to publicly try to tackle the problem of organizing human bones into clear categories for science. At the start of the twentieth century, the act of organizing bones on museum shelves represented something of a physical articulation of attempts to articulate a science of classifying mankind.

An Early State of Disarray

In 1903, as scholars and government officials were busy lobbying the Antiquities Act before Congress, Aleš Hrdlička arrived at the Bureau of American Ethnology. Not only was he given purview over an already substantial collection of human remains transferred from the Army Medical Museum, he was offered laboratory and office space

to begin his work.¹⁷⁷ The collection he was assigned to curate was impressive, but its physical disarray echoed the intellectual uncertainty surrounding the study of human remains. Overall, however, Hrdlička was impressed with the collections at the Smithsonian, though he noted that despite the wealth of American Indian crania the museum lacked significant collections of European-American or African-American remains. If the most critical question facing American anthropology of the very early twentieth century was the unique racial mixture of the Americas, it was perceived as logical to collect all kinds of skeletons and not just those of indigenous peoples.

Hrdlička, seldom without strong opinion, sought to acquire more collections related to the peopling of North America, but his priority for the collection upon his arrival was the comparative study of race. In 1903 he noted, “The problems of the utmost interest in physical anthropology in this country concern the course of development in the negro and Indian children.” Of equal personal interest to Hrdlička were the third-generation children of American immigrants, whom he hoped to use for a case study examining how adapting to the environment of the American continent affected human anatomical development.¹⁷⁸ One year later, in his published guide instructing outside researchers and potential donors how to best collect and preserve human remains, he noted that these kinds of collections were intended to study the “variations in the human body and all its parts . . . particularly the differences of such variations in the races, tribes, families, and other well-defined groups of humanity.”¹⁷⁹ Despite the increasingly vocal calls for the preservation of antiquities of the period, the guide said little regarding ethics of collecting human bodies. The primary problem for museums of the period was not the ethical acquisition of remains, but the priority of what to collect and how best to store any bodies procured. These were not just simple questions of storage—though best methods for long-term storage of bones were discussed in some depth—the manner in which bones were preserved and organized also represented classificatory frameworks ascribed by scientists. The age of skeletons held some presumed significance—but the *racial origins* of collections was of the utmost importance in keeping bone rooms organized.

The top priority of many museums concerned with physical anthropology and comparative anatomy was to collect human remains for permanent collections. Measurements of the living were useful, but the bodies of the dead were easier to study and restudy as required. This was especially important given the fact that anthropologists and anatomists had distinctive measurement techniques and utilized different tools, and therefore data was challenging to share or compare. At times, this was even a point of heated contention amongst museum scientists. Hrdlička wrote in his introductory guide to the collections:

The living are examined, measured, photographed, and cast, either in laboratories or in the field; but dead bodies or any parts of them can be studied or prepared for study, demonstration, or exhibition only in

¹⁷⁷ W.H. Holmes to Aleš Hrdlička, April 30, 1903. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷⁸ Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, May 29, 1903. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷⁹ Ales Hrdlička, *Directions for Collecting Information and Specimens for Physical Anthropology* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904): 5.

laboratories specially fitted for the purpose. They must be gathered from hospitals, morgues, and dissecting rooms; cleaned, catalogued, and numbered; and then properly stored for preservation, reference, or further investigation. It is plain that such materials can be utilized profitably only in large institutions which can furnish and maintain laboratories, give proper care to the material, and have space for exhibition and storage.¹⁸⁰

Most skeletal remains added to museum collections in the United States arrived from the field, collected somewhere along a blurred spectrum between early archaeology and grave robbing. Rather than promoting the collection of recently dissected bodies at the expense of archaeology, Hrdlička hoped to promote a global, systematic collection of human remains that represented the global diversity of mankind.¹⁸¹ Other remains deposited in natural history museums were collected by physicians and professors following dissections at medical schools, however this subset of remains more commonly ended up in medical museums.

In late 1905, a young anthropologist named Samuel A. Barrett, a scholar who would rise to prominence studying the ethnography of California Indians and directing the Milwaukee Public Museum, came across a burial ground along the Putah Creek in Northern California. He reported upon discovering the site that, “owing to the more recent relic hunters’ visits to this site, there is at present evidently very little to be found in the way of scientific materials.” Looters had walked away from the site with beads, arrowheads, or whatever other ornaments—of either real or perceived value—they could find. Nevertheless, Barrett noted, “Little or no attention has ever been paid by anyone evidently to the taking of skeletons or parts of the skeletons, although there are reported two or three skulls now in the possession of white people of the vicinity.” He concluded, that, “Usually, however, the bones have either been cast aside on the surface or have been thrown back promiscuously into the pits as dug.”¹⁸² Barrett, like many other young scholars working to collect all kinds of objects for museums, sent three cases of human bones to the museum at the University of California. His experience, like Densmore’s less than a decade later, was quite typical. Scholars connected to museums were well aware at the turn of the century exactly which museums were actively collecting, and indeed in some cases competing, the valuable scientific resources that were rare human skeletons. Racialized perceptions of living populations—cast either as primitive or vanishing—contributed significantly to the perceived value of associated human remains in terms of both behind-the-scenes research and planned exhibitions. Those working in the field, therefore, would collect and submit remains to museums, even if they were only loosely affiliated with the project of building bone empires. Looters quite often made this work problematic, tearing apart graves hurriedly—gathering what seemed to be the most valuable objects, often for the black market. Skulls or other pieces of skeletons were quite commonly collected as relics—and though they rarely possessed anywhere close to the monetary value of looters’ soaring imaginations, looters often took them anyway. Museums have long possessed policies of avoiding the acquisition of looted material;

¹⁸⁰ Hrdlička, *Directions for Collecting*, 6.

¹⁸¹ Hrdlička, *Directions for Collecting*, 7.

¹⁸² Memorandum. “Excavation of Indian Burial Grounds Near Winters on Putah Creek,” December 20 and 21, 1905. Photocopy of original. Accession File No. 194. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. 4-5.

however, the provenance information—or the documentation of each museum object dating back to its original creator (in this case the deceased)—was sparse. Occasionally, looters were, in fact, brazen enough to detail the narratives of their episodes of grave robbing, and often museums of both natural history and medicine simply accepted these specimens regardless. Skeletons occasionally took a circuitous and even sometimes mysterious route to the bone room.

Hrdlička's views on collection priorities grew from his positions on anthropological methodology. Collections of human remains, he maintained, were valued for their ability to provide scientists with a large and relatively stable library for observation. He added, however, that bone rooms should *not* serve as pools for *statistical* analysis, deriding such results as overly complex. Certainly, Hrdlička collected data and measurements from both human remains in museums and the living subjects he used for a series of physical measurements now known as *anthropometry*. His version of the science entailed collecting only the simplest of data, though others invented and lobbied for more complex and detailed measurements to be taken from living indigenous people willing to sit down long enough to have the shape of their heads measured and re-measured—such use of more complex statistical methods was, in Hrdlička's view, pedantic and unnecessary.¹⁸³ Others added additional layers of theoretical sophistication into their ideas of racial classification, but the Smithsonian's most prominent scientist in the field routinely rejected them. Despite criticism of certain racial theories, the Smithsonian was eager to draw fundamental observations from them. Skulls, in particular, Hrdlička argued “preserve the zoological as well as the racial characteristics of the individual, and also the general form and size of by far the most important human organ, the brain.”¹⁸⁴ Skulls, unlike certain other parts of the human skeleton, were also sturdy and withstood many of the destructive challenges of nature that led to the decay or destruction of soft tissue. Even in the final stages of bodily decay, under certain conditions, a well-preserved skull and even tufts of hair can withstand the many destructive natural forces that can wreak havoc on flesh, connective tissue, and muscle. The most important feature of the skull—indeed, the one around which everything in the bone room was organized—was its *racial* origin.

Upon his arrival at the Smithsonian, Hrdlička proposed a policy of small and varied exhibits, generally reflecting his ideas for the organization and storage of the collection as a whole. The proposed displays were intended to show both normal and abnormal human variation, and the scientist sought to display bones of both white and non-white individuals, with a particular focus upon crania of American Indians. Native American skeletons were by far the richest portions of the collection. Hrdlička also proposed an exhibit space where scientists working in a laboratory, examining both human remains and ethnological objects, would carry on their research in front of the public. Finally, Hrdlička wrote dense scientific papers for distribution to visitors as they viewed exhibits.¹⁸⁵ Hrdlička's ideas about exhibition were, in many ways, an extension of his

¹⁸³ A useful discussion of Hrdlička's views on statistical analysis can be found in Juliet Marie Burba, “Whence Came the American Indians?” *American Anthropologists and the Origins Question, 1880-1935* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Minnesota, 2006): 103-109.

¹⁸⁴ Hrdlička, *Directions for Collecting*, 8.

¹⁸⁵ Aleš Hrdlička to William Henry Holmes, August 26, 1903. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. See also the final copy of the letter; Aleš Hrdlička to

arguments about the purpose of human remains collections and physical anthropology more generally. Although many of Hrdlička's proposals for displays never came to fruition, his position as the curator of the largest collection of remains granted him influence in shaping outside exhibitions. Furthermore, the organization of behind-the-scenes storage and care that involved discussion of the best methods for display point to underlying theories about the utility for human skeletal remains in the understanding of race. Despite Hrdlička's failure to immediately see these proposals forward to actual Smithsonian exhibits, the proposals point to the centrality of race in the array of ideas justifying the significance of this collection. Theories about racial classification at the turn of the century, in other words, were mapped onto human remains collections both behind the scenes and in major proposals for exhibition.

The first set of displays proposed by Hrdlička for the Smithsonian compared humans with other mammals. This was followed by a brief display on human evolution that featured "Representation in casts or charts of what is known in this respect." Exactly how Hrdlička might have chosen to display his ideas about human evolution remained unclear, however; the limited space he wanted for this section suggests his lack of concern with the subject compared to other subjects. Moving quickly from evolution, the displays that followed featured human bone specimens that showed human growth and development from child to adult. This was followed by cases showing then-current ideas on racial difference illustrated through the display of human brains and skeletons, as well as photographs of living individuals and other specimens. The displays closed with examples of deformed bodies and a series on bodily modifications, such as tattooing or piercing.¹⁸⁶

Hrdlička's initial plans for displays at the Smithsonian reflected exhibition preferences during the second half of the nineteenth century—displays on racial and biological differences between human populations—while downplaying the use (or potential use) of remains for the study of evolution or prehistory. The proposed displays also featured representative selections of the human remains already in Smithsonian collections—a modest collection of human brains and skeletons intended to represent the races of mankind as understood through racial classification theories of the era. Race took precedence over prehistory, despite Hrdlička's own growing interest in the question of the peopling of the Americas. Simply stated, race remained the dominant paradigm through which museum collections of human remains were understood at the turn of the century. This was true both in the practice of physically organizing and arranging the collection, as well as in the imagination of curators hoping for major new exhibitions. The Smithsonian struggled to find funding for the ambitious exhibitions Hrdlička contemplated, but museum leaders continued to encourage him to acquire new collections within the framework of possible future exhibitions. Ironically, despite his enormous influence in organizing, researching, and displaying human remains around the country, Hrdlička never convinced administrators at the Smithsonian Institution to fulfill his plans

William Henry Holmes, August 27, 1903. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁸⁶ Memorandum. Physical Anthropology. Undated. Probably around July 1904. This memorandum appears to have been enclosed with a letter written by Otis T. Mason on July 9, 1904. Mason credits Aleš Hrdlička as the author of the enclosure, but no date or signature is found on the document itself. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

for a complete display on the science of mankind.

By 1906, the Smithsonian's burgeoning collection of human remains was in disarray. Instead of doing new fieldwork, Hrdlička begrudgingly started reorganizing the already sizable collection of bodies at the museum. By the end of his project of recataloguing, Hrdlička counted parts from about 8,000 skeletons in the collection. The museum also maintained a small but growing collection of human brains, as well as a vast number animal specimens collected for comparative purposes.¹⁸⁷ The foundation for systematic expansion had been laid.

American Antiquities Act, 1906

Long before the end of the nineteenth century, researchers understood that discoveries of significant human remains were managed poorly on a national scale. In 1887, when Washington Matthews of the United States Army took over an expedition for legendary anthropologist and adventurer Frank Hamilton Cushing after he fell ill, Matthews was horrified to observe the state of important human remains littered throughout the American West. One account notes that, “[Matthews] found that no attention had been paid to the collection or preservation of human bones, which were extremely fragile, crumbling to dust upon a touch, and which had been thrown about and trampled under foot by curious visitors, so that but little remained of value from the work which had been previously done.”¹⁸⁸ Matthews took for granted the importance of certain remains, knowing even better than most anthropologists of his era the intellectual desires for skeletons—especially those of American Indians—for comparative anatomy or racial science. Since the majority of Anglo-Americans accepted the idea that the American Indian was, in fact, vanishing, it is unsurprising that Matthews was horrified to find naturally decaying skeletons—bones upended and exposed by looters—left to dust outside of the protection of the museum.

Many other scientists in the United States, too, had grown increasingly concerned about looting from historic sites around the country, specifically those in the American West.¹⁸⁹ The rediscovery of a vast number of striking archaeological sites in the American Southwest caused a stir in both the academic community and amongst a group of writers who wrote for the wide public audiences.¹⁹⁰ The territory of the United States, many were starting to realize, had a deep and rich history extending centuries before European contact. New discoveries in the American West, then, proved central to the

¹⁸⁷ Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report. 1907. 45.

¹⁸⁸ Following the discovery of the remains, those that could be preserved and shipped to the Army Medical Museum were added to the collections in Washington D.C. Washington Matthews, J.L. Wortman, and John S. Billings, “The Human Bones of the Hemenway Collection in the United States Army Medical Museum at Washington,” in *Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences* VI (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893): 141-142.

¹⁸⁹ At virtually the same moment that Washington Matthews was recounting his visits to monuments in the American West, the American Association for the Advancement of Science appointed a small committee, “to memorialize to Congress to take the necessary steps for the preservation of archaeologie (sic) monuments on the public's lands of the United States.” Letter from W.H. Petter to Alice C. Fletcher, August 1887. Papers of Alice Fletcher & Francis La Flesche. Box 7. Folder: Preservation of Antiquities 1887-1907. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁹⁰ I would like to credit Lars Krutak of the Smithsonian Institution for advancing my thinking about the role of certain popular authors in shaping American consciousness on archaeology and prehistory in the American Southwest.

study of the ancient history of the Americas. The relics of that history, it was argued, should be preserved for future generations of Americans, despite the fact that the artifacts they were hoping to preserve were of a supposedly *primitive* race—the American Indian. Despite these relics’ significance to the study of ancient history, a reality that scholars were in some ways surprisingly slow to recognize, nearly every utterance of the mystery of these discoveries included some discussion of the *racial* history of these discoveries. Seemingly, whenever a skeleton appeared in the American West—especially in the context of other archaeological materials—scholars and members of the public were immediately curious about the race of the deceased. Advances in dating techniques provided insights as to the relative age of the remains, but popular announcements of discoveries were prone to wild speculations. The narratives that scholars, journalists, and a handful of popular authors espoused were based on a range of fantasies and scientific realities. Occasionally, these authors specifically utilized remains as tools to enforce or reinforce a number of scientific certainties and dramatized mysteries based on typecast discoveries of grotesque, dusty bodies. Race, simply stated, was a human quality that lived beyond our death and was evidenced in our bones and mummified tissues. These ideas fit within the mainstream of American science and public culture of the era, and narratives of ancient skeletons and grizzly mummified remains certainly made for compelling reading material.

Early versions of the American Antiquities Act struggled to articulate the place of the national museum, the Smithsonian Institution, as the guardian for antiquities of national significance, versus other museums around the country. Earlier drafts of the bill would have had a major impact on state and local museums—whose modest bone rooms were allowed to grow—which in some states became official repositories for accidental discoveries of historic and prehistoric remains. Beyond the issue of certain museums as official repositories for archaeological remains, the exact mechanism for proper treatment of discoveries was unclear. While Hrdlička envisioned the Smithsonian as becoming a leader in the collection and study of human remains, he never lobbied Congress to designate the museum as an official repository for discoveries of bodies on archaeological sites on a national scale. Although Hrdlička probably never wielded enough influence successfully recommend otherwise, this indirectly allowed for bone rooms at other natural history and anthropology museums—including those in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia—to continue to grow as archaeologists and private individuals continued to submit their own discoveries of skeletons from archaeological sites to museum collections.

By the middle of the 1890s, newspaper editorials started to echo professional calls for the preservation of antiquities. An editorial appearing in the *New York Herald* in 1896 argued that “ignorant relic hunters” were clearly to blame for the destruction of antiquities, and that only congressional action could save rapidly vanishing sites. The article urgently informed the reader, “All these invaluable possessions are fast disappearing, simply for lack of proper legislation to protect them.” As proof, a growing tourist market had created a demand for ancient artifacts and works of art, which were easily bought and sold throughout the American West. If the government failed to act, the

editorial warned, American heritage in the form of “our heirlooms from the American aborigines” would be unstudied and forever lost.¹⁹¹

In 1904, Franz Boas, then working for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, wrote a letter to Alice Fletcher, an American ethnologist who became active in the movement to preserve antiquities, writing letters of support even while working in the field. She wrote to Boas, “I understand that the bill lodging the control over all Indian remains in the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution has been introduced . . . I understand that the bill was dead before it was introduced, but we do not want to take any chances.”¹⁹² For Boas, as with others concerned with the impending legislation, “remains” and “antiquities” included everything from massive stone monuments to the smallest arrowhead. These terms *also* represented archaeological human remains found on public lands. The mission of collecting human remains both synchronized with and actually advanced the arguments of those lobbying for the American Antiquities Act. While Boas was certainly in favor of preserving these discoveries and subjecting them to professional, archaeological scrutiny, he was fervently opposed to the idea that the Smithsonian would be declared official repository of all archaeological skeletal remains discovered on public lands in the US. Advocates in favor of legislating burial mounds, cliff dwellings, and other discoveries believed to possess historical significance on public lands represented museums in New York, Washington, as well as anthropologists writing from the field. The chorus was strong and in 1906 an American Antiquities Act was finally passed by Congress and signed into law by Theodore Roosevelt.

For over a generation before the passing of the American Antiquities Act, looters, amateur archaeologists, and tourists had collected archaeological material from ancient sites in the American Southwest. The market for antiquities formed a series of steady streams for museums in the United States. Artifacts in private collections were frequently donated to museums (later generations often failed to possess the esoteric drive for collecting mummies or skulls for display above the fireplace). With the rediscovery of Mesa Verde—a vast and complex series of stone structures in Colorado—the Wetherill brothers marked the most prominent of a series of finds in the late nineteenth century American West.¹⁹³ Major discoveries at places like Mesa Verde, which would soon become a national park, became examples punctuating the countless other smaller incidents of the removal and sale of artifacts—including human remains—occurring at the same time in the United States. Starting around the turn of the century, archaeological sites in the American West became popular tourist destinations, drawing hordes of elites from the east coast and even a few curious travelers from Europe.¹⁹⁴ Whereas a generation of elites in the United States had visited museums and fairs to view the striking remnants of ancient North American civilizations, the expansion of the railroad

¹⁹¹ Newspaper Clipping. “Relics are Vanishing,” *New York Herald*, December 20, 1896. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Newsclippings, 1889-1981. Reel 1.

¹⁹² Letter from Franz Boas to Alice C. Fletcher, February 15, 1904. Papers of Alice Fletcher & Francis La Flesche. Box 7. Folder: Preservation of Antiquities 1887-1907. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁹³ For more on the role of the Wetherill brothers discovery of Mesa Verde and its role in the creation of both federal and state legislation, see Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice*, 99-100.

¹⁹⁴ Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998): 113-142.

allowed a new generation of tourists to see the West firsthand. Many individuals simply could not resist the temptation to take an ancient artifact home with them as a souvenir, including human remains found in American West. Displays of skulls were commonplace in rural homesteads—a symbol of life, death, and the exotic Native American or pioneer history. Collecting and displaying skulls found on farmsteads seemed almost fitting, for many would-be collectors. The media and works of popular fiction popularized the notion of the West as a site for long-forgotten civilizations, cowboys, pioneers, and Native Americans.¹⁹⁵

In 1905, a feature article in the *Los Angeles Herald* proclaimed: “[the Southwest] has made a lasting impression on all students, for it is to them what Egypt and its ruins are to Europe. A land of antiquity, rich with the remains of an almost forgotten past. A land enveloped in a cloak of dust with which kindly nature has hermetically sealed her treasures.”¹⁹⁶ This sense of mysticism about the treasures hidden in the American West helped fuel museum desires to rescue human remains from that “cloak of dust,” and professional associations responded by forming committees to push for the passage of an act to prevent further looting from important sites.¹⁹⁷

By 1906, Congress finally moved to take firm action. The final version of the bill legally protected antiquities found on lands held in public domain and instituted penalties through fines. Subsequently, lands that possessed important archaeological, paleontological, or historical material were eligible to become national monuments, thus providing federal protection against damage. This protection, however, was limited. Archaeological *objects*, rather than human remains, were the priority made explicit in the language of bill. Several versions of the bill had worked their way through the House and Senate, with some versions even providing for the specific protection of “any aboriginal structure or grave on the public lands of the United States.”¹⁹⁸ Although the work of professional organizations and the early draft proposals viewed by Congress pointed to “cemeteries, graves, [and] mounds,”¹⁹⁹ the final version of the bill notably fails to identify graves and cemeteries specifically. Before the twentieth century, the language of preservation often lumped together human remains and archaeological objects under this term, making equivalent, in practice, the preservation of stone tools and naturally mummified remains. Not only was the language left vague, without a robust service physically protecting the sites—such as the National Park Service does today—the law initially provided only an easily penetrated shield around historically significant sites.

Early in the development of the American Antiquities Act, Congress turned to experts. According to the official Smithsonian report, William Henry Holmes, the chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology:

¹⁹⁵ Works of fiction too, influenced the notion of a mystic and distant past in the American West. Perhaps the best known example of this genre was *The Delight Makers* by Adolph F.A. Bandelier originally published in 1883. The book was successful with both the public and the scientific community. For more on how these works of fiction and the career of Edgar Hewett fit in the growth of archaeological tourism, see Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*, 1998.

¹⁹⁶ “Restoring the Mummies of the Cliff Dwellers,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 2, 1905, 1.

¹⁹⁷ Lee, “The Origins of the Antiquities Act,” 29.

¹⁹⁸ “Bill Passed by the U.S. Senate on April 27, 1904.” Papers of Alice Fletcher & Francis La Flesche. Box 7. Folder: Preservation of Antiquities 1887-1907. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁹⁹ Lee, “The Origins of the Antiquities Act,” 29.

was called upon to assist in formulating the uniform rules and regulations required by the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, and War in carrying out the provisions of the law for the preservation of antiquities, to pass upon various applications for permits to explore among the antiquities of the public domain, and to furnish data needful in the selection of archaeological sites to be set aside as national monuments.²⁰⁰

Holmes, in turn, supported the efforts of an archaeologist from New Mexico named Edgar Lee Hewett.²⁰¹ Ideas about collecting and research relevant to the Smithsonian's anthropological collections therefore flowed directly from the museum to Capitol Hill, informing the final specifications of the bill.

In 1904, Hewett, a scholar skilled at working with government officials, bureaucrats, and scientists alike, launched a review of the American Indian antiquities of the American West.²⁰² Hewett's lobbying included letter writing and the publication of pamphlets that was circulated to concerned anthropologists and archaeologists (including those working in the field like Alice Fletcher), as well as to politicians in Washington.²⁰³ His work advised Congress of the various problems related to preservation in the region and helped shape the final language of the bill.²⁰⁴ Hewett worked to navigate tensions between the Office of the Interior and the Smithsonian Institution as the two agencies maintained contesting visions over the nature of the bill.²⁰⁵ Congressional reports on the proposed bill detailed:

It provides that any person who shall appropriate, excavate, injure, or destroy any historic or prehistoric ruin or monument, or any object of antiquity, situated on lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States without having . . . permission . . . shall, upon conviction be

²⁰⁰ Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report. 1907, 48-49.

²⁰¹ Raymond Harris Thompson, "Edgar Lee Hewett and the Politics of Archaeology," in David Harmon, et al. eds. *The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2006): 38.

²⁰² I do not intend to portray Hewett's efforts as singular. As the movement to protect American antiquities gained momentum, his efforts were supported by committees under the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Archaeological Institute of America, and the American Anthropological Association. Papers of Alice Fletcher & Francis La Flesche. Box 7. Folder: Preservation of Antiquities 1887-1907. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁰³ One aspect of Hewett's urgent call to action was the destruction of burial mounds by vandals and collectors. Edgar Lee Hewett, "Historic and Prehistoric Ruins of the Southwest and Their Preservation. Unknown Date," Unknown Publisher. 5. Copy deposited in Papers of Alice Fletcher & Francis La Flesche. Box 7. Folder: Preservation of Antiquities 1887-1907. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁰⁴ Hewett was widely known as a talented teacher, and at least one scholar that his pedagogical skills made him unique in terms of archaeologists of the American Southwest. These skills, combined with a talent for political lobbying and his background in archaeology, put him in an ideal position to lobby for the preservation of American antiquities. James Snead, *Ruins and Rivals: The Making of Southwest Archaeology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001): 77.

²⁰⁵ Lee, "The Origins of the Antiquities Act," 31. See also, Thompson, "Edgar Lee Hewett and the Politics of Archaeology," 35-47.

fined in a sum of not more than \$500 or be imprisoned for a period of not more than ninety days . . .²⁰⁶

The language of the bill points to the preservation of “antiquities,” but it was leveraged in practice by Theodore Roosevelt to protect sites of both historic and *environmental* significance. Between 1906 and 1908, historic sites including Montezuma Castle in Arizona, Chaco Canyon, and the Gila Cliff Dwellings in New Mexico were approved for protection under the act. Over the same span of time, Devil’s Tower in Wyoming, the Muir Woods in California, and the Grand Canyon in Arizona—all sites known for their spectacular environmental significance—became national monuments under the same provisions.²⁰⁷ When the discovery of ancient or mysterious bodies resulted in their high profile removal to museums for further study and display, the story had the unintended consequence of lifting environmental preservation efforts in the American West. The organic political connection between federal governance of ancient graves and environmental preservation efforts went almost completely unnoticed as these events took place.

After the passage of the law in 1906, Congress appropriated \$3,000 for two years for the “excavation, repair, and preservation”²⁰⁸ of the Casa Grande Ruin in Arizona. Several other ancient monuments in the Southwest soon followed. The allotment for actual protection of historical sites and monuments was grossly inadequate—but it was a start; Congress would gradually appropriate more funds to protect and preserve public lands of environmental and historical significance. In subsequent decades, the National Park Service would both build its own collections of materials—including human remains—discovered on federal lands. Museums, and archaeologists working on their behalf, now needed to apply for permits to collect archaeological material—including human remains—from federally owned sites. While the laws worked to protect sites from looting, they generally did not prohibit scientists and explorers who wished to deposit their discoveries at museums of natural history or anthropology.

Within a decade of the passage of the Act, the United States Railroad Administration, the National Parks Service, and the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad began jointly publishing maps and pamphlets promoting tourism to the recently preserved archaeological sites of the American Southwest. A promotional pamphlet published by the National Park Service sometime after 1916 features an introductory quote from the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin Knight Lane. Lane assured the potential visitor that “Uncle Sam asks you to be his guest,” and that the parks were “the playgrounds of the people.” Following this was a more complete description of the sites around Mesa Verde National Park, including a series of photographs and maps of the park intended to orient visitors geographically. (The stills brought together for the promotional pamphlet were taken by George L. Beam, a noted Southwestern photographer.) The last photograph in the collection featured a human skull and a series of long bones surrounded by a group of twelve impeccably preserved ancient clay jars. The caption notes the rarity of the almost

²⁰⁶ Congressional Record, 59th Congress, 1st Session, May 17-June 8, 1906, Vol. 40, Part 8, 7331.

²⁰⁷ David Harmon, et. al. eds. *The Antiquities Act*, 288

²⁰⁸ Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report, 1907. P. 53.

perfectly preserved jars, but does not mention the human skeletons, featured prominently in the promotional photography.²⁰⁹

Although the American Antiquities Act was vague in terms of its legal guidance for the treatment of human remains found on archaeological sites, it did represent a step in the direction of the professionalization of archaeology in the United States. Just as Hrdlička was organizing his existing collections for human remains, legislators were establishing rules for antiquities as they were to be collected in the field. The American Antiquities Act not only had direct and obvious consequences for archaeology in North America, it also enacted a series of far less obvious consequences in terms of general environmental and historical preservation in the American West. The popular presentation of rare and ancient skeletal remains—by scientists, government agencies, and the media—played a significant role in shaping ideas about attempts to collect bodies for race and human history in this era.

Pitldown Man

Contributing to the significance of the decade of the 1910s for prehistoric archaeology was the discovery of what was purported to be a major transitional fossil in the small village of Pitldown, England. The discovery of a large human-like cranium with an ape-like jaw was immediately cited by experts in the United Kingdom as a major breakthrough. Among the scientists who came to view the discovery as authentic included Sir Arthur Keith—a man who would soon train several leading American physical anthropologists. Echoes emanated throughout museum halls in the United States as details of the discovery gradually moved across the Atlantic Ocean. The popular press on both sides of the Atlantic era framed prehistoric archaeology of the era as a dramatic hunt for a “missing-link” and came to embrace Pitldown Man within a simplistic portrait of human evolution. From very early on, some scientists were skeptical of the find, which was attributed to a previously little-known archaeologist named Charles Dawson. Though it would not be learned until much later, Dawson, who personally benefited greatly from the celebrity gained by the supposed discovery, had forged several of his earlier archaeological finds. British scientists, as well as the broader public both in Britain and the United States, were comfortable with claims that man had evolved in Britain, as opposed to the existing competing claims for Asian or African origins—Pitldown Man was quite literally touted as “the first Englishman.” The specimen also conveniently fit the existing notion of the development of the human brain, with a larger brain cavity alongside vestigial primitive teeth.²¹⁰ Curators in the United States were impatiently

²⁰⁹ This particular pamphlet appears to have been sent to William H. Holmes at the Smithsonian Institution and was preserved in the Smithsonian Institution’s Department of Anthropology Records. The pamphlet describes finds at or around the site during the 1916 field season. A number of Beam’s original photographs are preserved at the Denver Public Library. See also, Pamphlet. “Mesa Verde National Park Colorado,” *United States Railroad Administration, National Park Service*. No date. Records of the Department of Anthropology. United States National Museum / National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Folder: Habitations: Cliff Dwellings. Box 18. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²¹⁰ The literature surrounding Pitldown Man is extensive and has grown significantly in the past few years. A classic account of the hoax and the various players involved in its discovery and subsequent study is Ronald Millar, *The Pitldown Men* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972). More recent accounts include what is perhaps the best and most complete account of the hoax, Frank Spencer, *Pitldown: A Scientific Forgery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). See also, Joseph Weiner, *The Pitldown Forgery: The Classic*

hoping to learn more about the finds, but requests to learn more in advance of publication were generally denied by the scientists in Britain who controlled access to the actual skull, which was kept in a secure vault at the Museum of Natural History in London. Museums in the United States were continually frustrated, yet excited and interested in, news of significant finds like Piltdown Man. News of major discoveries might change the nature of planned exhibitions at museums in cities like New York, Chicago, and Washington. Uncertainty plagued museums, as it was typically quite difficult to determine the validity of the claims made by foreign scientists without any opportunity to actually view the evidence. Scientists in the United States thirsted for good casts and wanted to view skeletons first hand on visits to European museums.

Over the course of the decades that followed, a lively and heated international debate over the validity of Piltdown Man raged, with several leading British scientists, in agreement with Sir Arthur Keith, holding that the find was authentic. Word of the discovery reached scientists in the United States some time later, and Hrdlička wrote eagerly to Keith in 1912, “We are reading in the Journals references to some wonderful new find of ancient man in England. Will you kindly inform me in a few words what there is to these reports?”²¹¹ In an essay that appeared one year later in the Smithsonian’s Annual Report for 1913, Hrdlička offered his own view of what was then being referred to as “Eoanthropus Dawsoni.” He described the find as, “A somewhat problematical as yet but deeply interesting find of ancient human skeletal remains [that] has recently come to light in England.”²¹² By the time Hrdlička’s essay appeared, Piltdown Man was said to have been moved to the British Museum in London, where further studies were underway. In his essay, Hrdlička repeated extensive narratives recounting the story of the discovery of the specimen provided by the first men who studied the find. He then summarized his uncertain conclusions regarding discovery:

Regrettably, at the time of the writer’s visit in England, in the spring of 1912, the specimen was not yet available for examination by outsiders, and so no original opinion can be given concerning its status. It represents doubtless one of the most interesting finds relating to man’s antiquity, though seemingly the last word had not yet been said as to its date and especially as to the physical characteristics of the being it stands for.²¹³

The fossil was actually an elaborate hoax, featuring the head of a modern human and the jaw of young chimpanzee. The bones were stained to match and to give the appearance of patina and earthen worn age. Scientists in both Europe and the United States came to doubt its validity as early as the mid-1910s, although the find was still being portrayed as a legitimate discovery in some exhibitions in the United States decades later. The denial Hrdlička received after his request for access to Piltdown was

Account of the Most Famous and Successful Hoax in Science (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Finally, see Ann Gibbons, *The First Human: The Race to Discover our Earliest Ancestors* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007): 31-32.

²¹¹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to A. Keith, November 30, 1912. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²¹² Ales Hrdlička, “The Most Ancient Skeletal Remains of Man,” in the Annual Report for the Smithsonian Institution 1913, 501.

²¹³ Hrdlička, “The Most Ancient Skeletal Remains of Man,” 509.

common. A lack of transparency led to a general dearth of clear and accurate information about the bones in the scholarly community. Many years later, in reflecting on the manner in which the remains were studied, at least one physical anthropologist commented that much of the misinformation about the find resulted from the fact that very few scholars were granted access to the original fossils when they were first announced. He wrote, “My opinion is that if more people had seen the originals sooner the fake would have been recognized.”²¹⁴

While most scholars have studied the influence of the fraud on the anthropological community in Britain, it also affected museums and anthropologists in the United States. Finds of purported antiquity faced growing skepticism, and scholars demanded more open and transparent information about human remains in museum collections. Regardless of the fraud, widespread comment on the supposed find fostered greater overall interest in the subject of human evolution during prehistory. Typical of the era, reaction to Piltdown Man was also heavily racialized and even nationalized. Placing origins for human evolution in Britain opened up the inference that the English people were somehow more evolved than Africans or Asians, temporarily thought to have comparatively more recent “advances” of human evolution. Such popular misinterpretation of Darwinian theory led to a willingness to accept the fossil as genuine. Despite the misinformation that lingered in the United States, the discovery did have the effect of piquing the interest of both scholars and the public on both sides of the Atlantic as to major discoveries of very ancient remains.

World War I and “War opportunity”

The outbreak of war in the early twentieth century created numerous problems for the professionalization of collecting and researching human remains. Wartime, however, also created opportunities to collect human remains. Throughout the nineteenth century, scholars utilized war to collect human remains across North America. Samuel George Morton’s collection of skulls included crania collected in the wake the Battle of Lake Okeechobee (1837) of the Seminole War in Florida, as well as the Mexican American War (1846-1848).²¹⁵ Later, through the Civil War and the ensuing Indian Wars, medical doctors leveraged conflicts to build collections at the Army Medical Museum. As the outbreak of the First World War became imminent, shipments of remains from Europe slowed and nearly halted during the war itself, and scholars who had previously been allowed access to original materials in European museums were now forced to remain at home.

Those involved in the planning of the anthropological exhibitions at the 1915 San Diego world’s fair (discussed in depth in a following chapter), to provide an example, anticipated potential problems brought on by wartime in the planning stages for the fair. Aleš Hrdlička wrote to archaeologist Edgar Hewett, “The terrible conditions in Europe I am very much afraid will interfere with us, though to what extent I am not able to say.”²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Letter from Sherwood Washburn to Frank Spencer, November 11, 1987. Folder: Washburn, Sherwood L. Papers of Frank Spencer. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Series II. Piltdown. Box 7.

²¹⁵ Renschler and Mongre, “The Samuel George Morton Cranial Collection,” 32.

²¹⁶ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Edgar Hewett, July 30, 1914. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

By August of 1914, Hrdlička noted in letters related to the planning of the fair, “The European war, I am now very apprehensive, will strike us heavily.”²¹⁷ Indeed, the once-steady flow of remains arriving at museums in the US from abroad temporarily slowed during the war.

Despite these problems, the outbreak of the First World War also created numerous, and largely unexpected, opportunities for those interested in collecting remains. The Smithsonian, in particular, started to receive an increased number of offers for *sale* of specimens from Europe. Hrdlička, in fact, referred to the offer of eight gorilla skulls at the pre-war price of a single skull, as “another rare War opportunity.”²¹⁸ Throughout the course of the conflict, Smithsonian staff members were asked to contribute to the war effort in a number of ways. In particular, curatorial staff provided the government and military with information perceived to be important to fighting overseas.²¹⁹ The division of physical anthropology, in particular, “furnished a large amount of information on racial questions,” to the National Research Council and the Army and Navy Intelligence Bureaus.²²⁰

The massive effort undertaken by large armies to dig trenches during the European war would also uncover artifacts and examples of archaeological remains. Hrdlička wrote to his supervisor, Holmes, to explain the need to contact the Army to provide detailed instructions—a protocol for soldiers accidentally uncovering ancient skeletons. Hrdlička wrote:

France was a home of Early man throughout a large part of the period of his evolution. In many parts of France archaeological and skeletal remains of ancient men have been discovered, and many doubtless lie yet in the soil. It will not be long before our Army will be making many trenches and dugouts in France, and it is more than probably that during this work more or less ancient human remains will be repeatedly discovered. Such discoveries have already been made in the trenches by the French themselves, by the English and also by the Germans. As the scientific value of the objects recovered may be very great, it seems indicated that proper steps be taken for their preservation.²²¹

Hrdlička suggested that Army Officers be made aware of the fact that their activities may uncover skeletons of prehistoric significance. He suggests that discoveries might go to

²¹⁷ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Edgar Hewett, August 4, 1914. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²¹⁸ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes. January 9, 1917. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²¹⁹ Although this passage highlights the manner in which the Smithsonian Institution was involved in the war effort during the First World War, the museum’s war efforts during the Second World War were much larger and more formally organized.

²²⁰ Smithsonian Institution Annual Report for 1918. P. 26.

²²¹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to William H. Holmes. September 22, 1917. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives.

the French Government, or the Smithsonian. Later adding to his letter, he scratched in pencil, “The main thing is to save them for science.”²²²

The war presented an opportunity for the acquisition of new human remains and new animal skeletons for comparative purposes, but it also presented an opportunity for new anthropometric measurements. Hrdlička frequently called upon the army to measure the bodies of incoming recruits for science, recording the simple information about the body and heritage to complement studies of stable collections of human remains. Hrdlička would eventually train Army Officers to conduct exact measurements of incoming recruits and soldiers who were sent to hospitals.²²³

Despite political upheaval and travel restrictions, museums in the United States, unlike their European counterparts, largely benefited from the outbreak of World War I. Museums in the United States, again quite unlike their European counterparts, did not experience the full effects of the economic and material devastation and chaos of war. Despite a lack of funds, scholars of human remains in cities such as New York and Washington were generally afforded quiet and peaceful study of their collections. Nevertheless, thoughts of young men digging trenches and discovering significant skeletal remains kept scientists awake at night, wondering about the fate of important discoveries for the understanding of race and history in light of the destructive fighting.

The Matter of Ishi’s Brain

Just a few years before the United States would enter the war, anthropologists, historians, and the public were captivated by a story appearing out of California. In August of 1911, a Yahi Indian man was discovered by a group of butchers near the town of Oroville. The man was emaciated and visibly confused. Not knowing what to do with the man (a “wild” Indian had not been encountered for years) the townspeople contacted the local sheriff who brought him to the nearby jail. Eventually, anthropologist Alfred Kroeber of the University of California, Berkeley was contacted to identify the man. Kroeber had been a student of Franz Boas at Columbia before settling in California. Both Kroeber and his former mentor trained a large number of influential anthropologists over the course of the ensuing decades, deeply influencing the field through scholarly publications and widely used textbooks.²²⁴ Anthropologists training under Kroeber were given a broad anthropological education—including linguistics, ethnography, archaeology, and physical anthropology—yet the vast majority of his students would engage in research related to the ethnography of California Indians. Despite his typically professional and emotionally removed nature, students and faculty in California found Kroeber a capable intellectual leader, many even mimicking his trademark beard, which came to a clean point at the chin. Kroeber was generally a calm, thoughtful intellectual

²²² Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to William H. Holmes. September 22, 1917. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives.

²²³ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to William H. Homes, April 9, 1918. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives.

²²⁴ Alfred Kroeber’s widely used introductory textbook included sections of fossil man, prehistory, and race. His textbook was expanded in a major new edition two decades later—but both Kroeber and his mentor Boas largely encouraged their students to begin their careers in anthropology with a broad overview of the field—including a careful study of fossil man, prehistory, and the existing racial classification theories of the era. A.L. Kroeber, *Anthropology: Race, Language, Culture, Psychology, Prehistory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948).

who remained engaged in the necessary campus affairs, though occasionally irritated by the legendary Berkeley bureaucracy. Interested in the claim of a discovery of a “wild man” in California, Kroeber traveled to Oroville and attempted to speak with the man using pieces of other California Indian languages. Eventually, the man was determined to be Yahí, and he was called Ishi, which means simply “man” in the Yana language. Kroeber had him brought to the University of California Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco, where he cared for and studied Ishi as he continued to mentor, teach, and curate in the same building.²²⁵ Scholars and, especially, members of the media—immediately pondered the implications of the discovery of the “last wild Indian” for scientific studies of race and primitive man.

Most anthropologists and historians of the American West today are familiar with the story of Ishi—America’s last “wild” Indian—and attempts to interpret the meaning of his life have been both numerous and diverse in their conclusions. The story of Ishi’s physical remains were intimately linked to the framework of collecting human remains to study race. Ishi’s “discovery” and subsequent death took place when scholars were actively trying to record every scrap of information about indigenous races, attempting to preserve words, traditions, and—when that time came to its natural end—cadavers.

Born around 1860, Ishi lived with a small band of his tribe that managed to escape the attention of surrounding whites migrating by the hundreds of thousands to California. Over time, Ishi’s band dwindled until he was the final remaining member. He continued to conceal himself until 1911. Almost immediately after Ishi was “discovered” in Northern California, those interested in the history and culture of the American Indian began studying him, trying to salvage every scrap of information about his culture through interviews, questions, and slow but amusing dialogue. Residing at the University of California Museum of Anthropology, Ishi appeared to have a rather content life following his “discovery.” Ishi even became friends with a medical doctor at a nearby medical college, and the two frequently practiced archery in the lawn between the museum and the hospital. His celebrity and affable personality became the fodder of tabloid media and he became well known around San Francisco. Although he periodically toured the medical school’s facilities and was fascinated by surgery, he possessed a strong, culturally based revulsion to the bodies of the dead. Photographs of him appear either strong and silent, depicted in a long tradition of the conceptualization of the “noble Indian,” or smiling happily with his new life and friends.

In 1916, while Kroeber was traveling abroad, Ishi died of tuberculosis. Staff at the University of California had written to the anthropologist, notifying him of Ishi’s imminent death and Kroeber responded by demanding that no autopsy be conducted. Because of Ishi’s complex attitudes toward the bodies of the dead, Kroeber instructed his

²²⁵ The literature surrounding Ishi is vast and the meaning of his narrative has been hotly disputed over the course of the last decade. The classical account, solidifying Ishi’s place in both the history of anthropology and the history of California is Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961). Theodora Kroeber, Alfred Kroeber’s second wife, wrote about Ishi on numerous occasions. She was joined in editing a volume about his life by archaeologist Robert Heizer. Robert F. Heizer, and Theodora Kroeber eds., *Ishi: The Last Yahí, A Documentary History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). The matter was revisited by Alfred Kroeber’s sons in their work Karl Kroeber and Clifton Kroeber, eds. *Ishi in Three Centuries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003). Most recently, Douglas Cazauz Sackman, *Wild Men: Ishi and Kroeber in the Wilderness of Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

staff, “We propose to stand by our friends. If there is any talk of the interests of the science, then say for me that science can go to hell.”²²⁶ The letter, however, arrived after an autopsy had already been conducted. When Kroeber arrived back in Berkeley, he returned to the news that while Ishi’s body had been cremated in accordance with his wishes, the brain had been preserved. Though the University of California Museum of Anthropology possessed a collection of skeletal remains and mummies, it did not maintain a brain collection. Kroeber eventually decided to contact officials at the Smithsonian.

Scholars dispute Kroeber’s rationale for sending the brain to the Smithsonian, rather than reburying it. Anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes speculates that, “Kroeber’s behaviour was an act of disordered mourning. Grief can be expressed in a myriad of inchoate and displayed ways ranging from denial and avoidance, as in the Yahi taboo on speaking the names of the dead to the insistence that the death and loss experience is a minor one . . .” She further notes that Kroeber avoided discussing Ishi following his death and that the subject of Ishi caused Kroeber a great deal of psychological pain.²²⁷

While Kroeber may have wished to distance himself from the bodily remains of his friend for emotional reasons, the rationale for the donation of the brain to the Smithsonian was also clearly academic. When the Smithsonian learned of Kroeber’s interest in submitting the brain of the well-known California Indian to their growing brain collection, officials were enthusiastic. What particularly excited them was the prospect of acquiring the brain of an individual about whom so much was already known through efforts to salvage his culture, through ethnography, before his ultimate demise. Ideas linking the development of the brain and cultural habits were still prevalent, and Hrdlička, then curator of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian, noted with keen interest that Ishi’s case was special, as he had been studied during his life by a number of highly regarded anthropologists.

Hrdlička had studied the anatomy of the brains of indigenous peoples before, and published an account of an autopsy of a brain of an adult male Eskimo named Kishu in the journal *American Anthropologist*. Kishu, like the California Indian Ishi, had succumbed to tuberculosis while in the care of anthropologists and medical professionals.²²⁸ Kishu had perished in New York City at Bellevue Hospital, after being measured, photographed, and displayed during his own life at the American Museum of Natural History.²²⁹ By the time of Hrdlička’s writing in 1901, Kishu’s brain had been added to the anatomy collections at Columbia University.²³⁰ Hrdlička happened to be in

²²⁶ The story of Ishi’s death, his autopsy, the whereabouts of his brain, and the subsequent process of its repatriation is chronicled in Orin Starn, *Ishi’s Brain: In Search of America’s Last ‘Wild’ Indian* (New York: Norton, 2004): 28. Starn’s book was especially important in that it reopened a wave of new investigation into Ishi’s remains. The quote was originally written in a letter on March 24, 1916. The quote is again used in Sackman, *Wild Men: Ishi and Kroeber in the Wilderness of Modern America*: 279.

²²⁷ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “Ishi’s Brain, Ishi’s Ashes: Anthropology and Genocide,” *Anthropology Today*, 17, No. 1 (2001): 16.

²²⁸ This narrative is also discussed in Sackman, *Wild Men*, 70-75.

²²⁹ Several other Eskimo from Smith Sound had been brought to New York City in 1896 and nearly all of them had died of tuberculosis by 1901. Like Kishu, their bodies were then autopsied and particular attention had been given to the study of their brains. See, Ales Hrdlička, “An Eskimo Brain,” *American Anthropologist* 3, No. 3 (1901): 454.

²³⁰ Hrdlička, “An Eskimo Brain,” 486.

New York City at the time, and he was given the opportunity to examine the brain alongside other medical professionals in the area. Hrdlička concluded that Kishu's measurements did not make him "racially exceptional." He fit within a perceived racial typology when his body was compared with other individuals from the same region. Hrdlička compared Kishu's brain to whites, arguing that certain parts of the brain were more or less developed than the average white male.²³¹ On the whole, however, Hrdlička noted that "this Eskimo brain is heavier and larger than the average brain of white men of similar stature."²³² Whereas earlier studies of human remains had focused their attention on the capacity and shape of the skull, Hrdlička was starting to put forward the argument that one might compare the differences of "the brain in different individuals and especially in different races."²³³ If Kroeber wanted to divest himself of Ishi's brain for a combination of personal and intellectual reasons, submitting the brain to the Smithsonian Institution must have seemed like a reasonable action. Hrdlička had moved to the Smithsonian Institution in 1903, and his reputation for studying and collecting brains, in addition to a much larger collection of skeletal materials, no doubt followed him to Washington D.C.²³⁴

A series of letters exchanged between December 1916 and January 1917 between Aleš Hrdlička, the curator of physical anthropology, William Henry Holmes, the head of the Smithsonian's anthropology department, and Alfred Kroeber point to previously unknown nuances in the existing Ishi narrative. In writing to Hrdlička, Kroeber stated plainly, "I find that at Ishi's death last spring his brain was removed and preserved. There is no one here who can put it to scientific use. If you wish it, I shall be glad to deposit it in the National Museum Collection." Kroeber's argument points to the underlying understanding of the nature of bone empires—certain collections were stronger in particular areas than others. Although Kroeber's museum was embarking on the construction of the largest human skeletal collection in North America west of the Mississippi, the strength of the materials was to be skeletons from California and the Great Basin, along with a smattering of mummified remains from the American Southwest. Hrdlička quickly responded to Kroeber, expressing his enthusiasm that the brain might come to the Smithsonian. Ishi's brain added to the museum's growing collection of human brains, which by this time already stood at over 200.²³⁵ On December 20, 1916, Aleš Hrdlička first wrote to his supervisor, William H. Holmes on the subject of Ishi. The two were close colleagues and frequently corresponded about official matters. Hrdlička wrote simply:

²³¹ Hrdlička, "An Eskimo Brain," 456.

²³² Hrdlička, "An Eskimo Brain," 484.

²³³ Hrdlička, "An Eskimo Brain," 488.

²³⁴ This argument is echoed in Sackman, *Wild Men*, 263.

²³⁵ A brief recounting of this narrative is told in Hurst, *Skull Wars*, 220-221. Hurst Thomas postulates that Kroeber may have sent Ishi's brain to the Smithsonian in order to cement his relationship with Hrdlička. Given the long standing professional relationship between the two men, however, it is equally likely that Kroeber simply wanted to be rid of an object of little scientific use to his institution. Alternatively, Kroeber may have been emotionally bothered by the permanent reminder that he failed to keep an unspoken promise to his old friend Ishi, who, given his culture's attitudes toward death, would clearly not have wanted an autopsy. It might be added that the Smithsonian's collection of human brains would again increase in size just a few years later, when, in 1921, the museum received a private collection from a medical doctor in Washington D.C. Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1921, 30-31.

Prof. A.L. Kroeber of the University of California has kindly offered us, as you will see from the accompanying correspondence, the brain of Ishi, the last survivor of a trip (sic) of California Indians. I beg to recommend that direction be sent to him for shipping this specimen by express at our expense. I have already given him instructions as to packing.²³⁶

Several weeks later, Kroeber responded to Hrdlička's official letter of acceptance, asking for instruction as to how, exactly, to ship Ishi's brain. Skeletal remains were one thing, but a soggy ball of flesh and blood were quite another. Kroeber, having been trained as an anthropologist in this era, was certainly familiar with skeletal material, but soft-tissue remains were generally unfamiliar to scholars not trained in medicine. Hrdlička, trained as a medical doctor and having already built a collection of over 200 brains, was intimately familiar with methods for packing and preserving soft tissue. He responded to Kroeber in some detail, referring to the additional instructions he hoped Holmes would provide:

As to the shipping of Ishi's brain, you will receive in a day or two a communication which will give the exact directions. The brain should be packed in plenty of absorbent cotton saturated with the liquid in which it is preserved, and the whole should be enclosed in a piece of oiled cloth or oiled paper. The package should then be laid in a moderate sized box with a good layer of soft excelsior all around it. In that way it will doubtless reach us in good condition.²³⁷

In a final step intended to transfer ownership of Ishi's brain from Alfred Kroeber and the University of California Museum of Anthropology to the Smithsonian Institution, Kroeber wrote to the Assistant Secretary of the national museum: "Replying to your favor of December 30 I would state that we are shipping you the brain of Ishi per your directions, express, consigned to the United States National Museum. The packing follows the directions of Dr. Hrdlička."²³⁸

Though those few lines alone would have been enough to transfer the title of Ishi's remains from the University of California to the Smithsonian Institution, Kroeber was a museum professional and an avid collector of anthropological material.²³⁹ As such, he was intimately familiar with the problem of provenance. Many of the objects in his own museum, including a number of the skeletal remains in the University of California's growing collection, lacked associated provenance information. This lack of provenance information was a problem shared by other museums around the country, nearly all of which possessed objects collected before the supposed "professionalization" of the discipline, which encouraged anthropologists to carefully record the origin of the objects

²³⁶ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes. December 20, 1916. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²³⁷ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Alfred Kroeber, December 20, 1916. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²³⁸ Letter from Alfred Kroeber to R. Rathbun (Assistant Secretary, Smithsonian Institution), January 5, 1917. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²³⁹ For more on Kroeber as a museum professional, see Ira Jacknis, "Alfred Kroeber as Museum Anthropologist," *Museum Anthropology*, (17) No. 2: 27-32.

they collected for museums. Despite the fact that it was taken for granted that natural history museums collected both bones and baskets, most donors frequently turned over specimens without much additional information. The fact that many objects were catalogued with little associated data led to problems, frequently, in attempting to conduct modern science on collections. Kroeber understandably, then, added the following information to his letter:

I add the following for your records: Ishi belonged to the southern most of four divisions of the Yana stock in north-central California. In lieu of a proper tribal name we are adopting the designation Yahi for the group in publications concerning them; this being Ishi's word for people. The habitat of the group was on Mill and Deer Creeks, Tehama County. The tribe was virtually exterminated about 1865 by the settlers. Four or five survivors maintained a precarious existence in the hills from that time until 1906 when they were rediscovered by accident. During the following three years they all perished except Ishi, who toward the end of August, 1911 was found near Oroville in Butte County where he had wandered from his native territory. From that time until his death, March 23, 1916, he lived at the University of California Anthropological Museum. The cause of his death was tuberculosis. I estimated his age at the time of death at 55 years. Most medical men who have examined him are inclined to put the figure somewhat lower. I have a few bodily measurements of Ishi, which I shall forward to Dr. Hrdlička.²⁴⁰

Kroeber was not entirely silent on the subject of Ishi following his friend's death in 1916. In his professional writings, Kroeber was very rarely given to emotion, so his use of purely "scientific" language is hardly surprising. Although the drive behind his submission of Ishi's brain to the Smithsonian may have been due in part to an emotional response to his friend's death, it is clear that Kroeber came to the realization that if Ishi's brain had already been removed from the rest of his earthly remains, it should be deposited into a collection where it was likely to be most utilized. The University of California was not as renowned for its collection of human brains as was the Smithsonian, and the logical thing to do, therefore, was to offer the brain to Hrdlička. Science, as it turned out, didn't go to hell, as Kroeber initially wished it to. The vision the Smithsonian maintained for the use of the brain collection, detailing scientific information about race through the detailed observation and study of body parts—including the brain—speaks to the power of the idea that bodies belonged in museums in order to more fully understand the races of mankind. Despite the pervasive nature of this idea, the moment of rapidly collecting, observing, and displaying bodies around the central tenant of racial classification was reaching its crest. Ishi not only represented the last of his tribe, he also represents the near-conclusion of a moment of creating physical

²⁴⁰ Letter from Alfred Kroeber to R. Rathbun (Assistant Secretary, Smithsonian Institution), January 5, 1917. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

anthropology collections in natural history museums primarily for the goal of improving scientific understandings of racial classifications.

Skeletons and the Study of Prehistoric Man in the Americas

As museums continued to acquire remains intended for the comparative study of race, scholars began to turn at least some of their attention to more historical questions; an interest in studying the bones of the ancient dead was growing to a place of increased centrality in physical anthropology in both the United States and abroad. New discoveries, many genuine announcements of findings of skeletons, complemented the growing desire among scientists who sought a “missing link” among the bones of the prehistoric dead. Hrdlička, in explaining his desire to exchange remains with a museum in Siberia, noted that he was, “at present, occupied with investigations of the physical variations which exists between the Siberian and the American natives, and [he] was surprised by the numerous resemblances between the two peoples by our collections.”²⁴¹

The importance of the question of how people arrived in the Americas would increase in importance for numerous scholars between 1910-1920.²⁴² Although directly related to the attempts to preserve and compare race—as witnessed in the ideas that surrounded the preservation of Ishi’s brain—scholars were increasingly adopting the lens of *prehistory* in order to interpret human remains. By 1914, Hrdlička considered discovering the origins of American Indians “the most important task in American Anthropology.”²⁴³ Hrdlička, had, in fact, been brought to the Smithsonian largely to address the question of how long humans had occupied North America. William Henry Holmes, the leader of the Smithsonian’s Department of Anthropology, worked to persuade him that humans did not have a long history on the continent, and thus searching for fossilized skeletons of a much deeper origin would be fruitless.²⁴⁴ Hrdlička based his assumptions about the relatively recent arrival of humans in North America on his first-hand comparisons with prehistoric remains in Europe. T. Dale Stewart later recalled of Hrdlička in his oral history, “He’d seen all the remains of ancient men in the Old World and was well aware that the old ones over there were very different, very primitive looking, and he had seen nothing in his experience here to . . . lead him to believe that there was anything but the Indian type in America.”²⁴⁵

Hrdlička did not fully separate the task of understanding how humans arrived in North America from the existing project of racial classification. American Indians were a distinct racial type to be understood historically—an idea that some scholars termed *racial history*—an idea that would come into greater vogue in ensuing decades. Hrdlička explained in a letter that research of the most pressing importance was to come from Asia, but “Research of more local importance which, however, as our classification of the Indian types and subtypes, becomes more and more necessary, is the physical

²⁴¹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to William H. Holmes. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives. November 1, 1912.

²⁴² Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report 1912, 12.

²⁴³ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to William H. Holmes. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives. June 17, 1914.

²⁴⁴ T. Dale Stewart, interviewed by Pamela M. Henson, Oral History Project Interviews, Archives and Special Collections of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. January-May 1975, 33-34.

²⁴⁵ T. Dale Stewart, interviewed by Pamela M. Henson, Smithsonian Institution, 34.

examination of the rapidly disappearing full-blood remains of a number of U.S. tribes.”²⁴⁶ Scholars therefore should look to Siberia, Alaska, and the American West for answers, and priority would be given to attempts to collect skeletons from these regions.

Hrdlička viewed prehistory and the evolution of man as global questions (with certain regions expected to reveal the most exciting and unique results). Collecting and researching specimens from Europe and Asia as well as those from the Americas were thought to be crucial in attempts to address pressing questions of racial history.²⁴⁷ Collections brought together from North America alone would not suffice in understanding the peopling of the Americas. In 1913, for instance, the Smithsonian noted the arrival of new skeletal collections from Mongolia as especially significant—implying that these remains could potentially be useful for studying this major question in future research along these lines. Perhaps only coincidence, but more likely a signal of how the museum viewed the newly acquired set of remains, the Smithsonian mentioned the acquisition of the Mongolian skeletons in its annual report immediately following the announcement of the most important acquisition of the year, the Star-Spangled Banner.²⁴⁸ As these connected themes—the search for racial history and the construction of racial classification theories—grew into prominence simultaneously in the early decades of the twentieth century, old tensions over how best to organize and maintain physical anthropology collections were being addressed in new ways.

“Entirely in Storage”

Museum curators, collectors, and colonial explorers who shipped remains back to museums in the early decades of the twentieth century often maintained grandiose ideas for future exhibitions as they collected.²⁴⁹ Fantasies of museum displays centering on racial history struggled to become reality, and the focus of ongoing debates surrounding the physical practice of curating such remains continued to center upon best practices for museum organization more generally. Remains not currently being researched or exhibited had to be stored, preserved, and organized according to the dominant anthropological theories of the day. Grouping and organizing a wildly diverse collection of bodies, bones, and body parts became an enormous challenge—and one that echoed debates about how to understand the remains in the first place.

Research was actually built into exhibitions in other, less obvious ways as well. In 1911, when noting that his next project would focus on living and ancient Pueblo Indians, Hrdlička explained that he would need comparative measurements of “white native Americans, preferably those of the third generation, between 28 and 50 years of age.” Although he was surrounded on a daily basis by the living examples of European

²⁴⁶ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to William H. Holmes, Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, October 11, 1916.

²⁴⁷ In one annual report for the Smithsonian, for instance, the museum notes that Hrdlička is studying both the origins of North American Indians and the antiquity of man in Europe. Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report 1912, 11-12.

²⁴⁸ Annual Report for the Smithsonian Institution 1913, 28.

²⁴⁹ In 1910, for example, when pondering the value of a collection of available Peruvian skulls, Aleš Hrdlička explained to W.H. Holmes that the specimens, “present many grades of artificial deformation which makes them specially desirable for the purposes of exhibition and comparison.” Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes. December 8, 1910. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Americans, Hrdlička seems to have, ironically, experienced unexpected difficulty in finding a satisfactory number of whites willing to sit in order to have their skulls measured. If the process of measuring skulls were to be a part of the Smithsonian's exhibitions, Hrdlička postulated, then perhaps people would be more willing to be measured. While he may not have known it at the time, removing himself from the process of actually measuring museum visitors was likely a good idea, if the desired result were a greater number of volunteers—Hrdlička's gruff approach to scientists, members of the public, and life in general may have contributed to a general reticence to sitting anywhere near the curmudgeon while he was wielding metal calipers. Hrdlička stated, "There are many visitors every day to the National Museum. If a proper notice were placed in a prominent place in the two buildings, calling the attention of the visitors to our need in the above respect, I believe that a number would be induced to permit me to take the measurements."²⁵⁰ If only visitors knew that they were contributing to *science*, it was argued, they would be happy to contribute to ongoing racial research.

While the Smithsonian was working toward displaying human remains under the auspices of physical anthropology, not all museums of the era had the space, resources, or desire to display their existing collections of remains. In 1918, Alfred Kroeber of the University of California, Berkeley wrote to Aleš Hrdlička explaining simply, "We have no special exhibit relating to Physical Anthropology." While the remains he curated might go on display when relevant to other displays on ethnology or archaeology, Kroeber noted that remains were not *central* to any displays at his museum, which was then based in San Francisco, across the bay from the Berkeley campus. Instead, he wrote, "Our collection of Physical Anthropology is entirely in storage." This was not to say that remains were some how off-limits. As the curator of a research museum, he notes, "With the exception of the Egyptian material, it is all accessible to students."²⁵¹ Regular museum exhibition during the era, therefore, played a limited, if critical, role in the development of physical anthropology. Although scholars like Kroeber had little success in creating permanent displays on lessons of race or human history drawn from skeletal collections, the collections continued to grow and it was assumed that productive research, and eventual periodic display, would continue to result from the existence of the collections.

Acquiring remains illicitly

As the study of remains became both more organized and professionalized, museums continued to acquire remains haphazardly and opportunistically. Although many remains were acquired through archaeological fieldwork, much of which conformed to the new American Antiquities Act, numerous remains continued to be acquired in defiance of legal or cultural laws. Understanding the complex origins of these collections is critical in fully comprehending their use for science and anthropology. Although the majority of remains collected by Hrdlička were acquired from archaeological excavations, he did acquire some specimens through purchase. Remains acquired from overseas frequently continued to echo the nefarious collecting practices of

²⁵⁰ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes. September 23, 1911. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁵¹ Letter from Alfred Kroeber to Aleš Hrdlička, March 1, 1918. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

the Army Medical Museum decades before. Occasionally, remains might be sent to the Smithsonian from a vague source in a foreign country with only brief or incomplete descriptions of the origin of the skeleton. Although not considered ideal, these skeletons were regularly accepted by museums with physical anthropology collections.

During his travels collecting remains for the Panama-California Exposition (discussed in depth in a later chapter), local representatives in Peru helped Hrdlička acquire over sixty skulls. Hrdlička gladly greased the palms of local representatives for their trouble. Several months later, a Peruvian official who had personally assisted Hrdlička reported several drawers of museum specimens as missing. Hrdlička promised to return any skeletal materials he acquired bearing any markings from other museums (there were none, of course). Hrdlička was suspicious that the Peruvians were preparing to accuse him of stealing, describing one minister as “jealous of my success.” Hrdlička added that that he felt “glad to be rid of [him]” after the first portion of his stay in Peru.²⁵² His conclusion was that the local minister was both corrupt and jealous. It was not surprising that Hrdlička encountered this sort of problem, having explained to his supervisor at the fair just days following the above incident, “There are in Peru two or three first-class archaeological collections, which could be bought and I think, on the quiet, exported.”²⁵³

While Hrdlička frequently rubbed others the wrong way, he was remarkably successful at acquiring skeletons from all kinds of sources around the globe. The Smithsonian’s physical anthropology collections continued to grow—even if scholars were now forced to confront the dual studies of race and history drawn from the remains. Curators willingly bent their own ethical standards for collections when navigating the treacherous bureaucracies that prevented them from removing remains for science. Taken from a different perspective, however, while local government officials occasionally displayed instances of systematic corruption, local indigenous groups were often powerless to stop the ransacking of graves. The archaeologists and physical anthropologists may have followed the looters—but for some, the result was the same. Burials and grave goods were critical materials for archaeological studies, yet at the same time they were clearly sacred to most ancestral groups.

Despite increased legislation, the market for the trade in human remains did not entirely cease over the ensuing decades. When anthropologist T. Dale Stewart traveled to Peru, returning on behalf of the Smithsonian years later in 1941, he wrote to Hrdlička about many of the same corrupt actors involved with the trafficking of burial goods who were encountered by Hrdlička decades earlier. Immediately recognizing the name of the same inspector, Hrdlička responded, “He doubtless has hidden many a good thing for eventual disposal to a good bidder.” The Smithsonian, however, was not necessarily always outbid for collections of human remains in other countries. Despite his mistrust of Peruvian officials, he asked Stewart, “I wonder if you couldn’t get him to give a price of

²⁵² Details of the missing skeletal material, the purchase of remains in Peru, and Hrdlička’s claims about his work with Peruvian officials can be found in a small set of correspondence. See, Letter from Otto Holstein to Aleš Hrdlička, March 15, 1913. Box 106. Folder: Correspondence. Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Otto Holstein, May 9, 1913. Box 106. Folder: Correspondence. Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to H. Clay Howard, United States Minister, Lima Peru, May 9, 1913. Box 106. Folder: Correspondence. And, Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Julio C. Tello, May 9, 1913. Box 106. Folder: Correspondence.

²⁵³ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Edgar L. Hewett, May 21, 1913. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

the skull with a gold plate—try confidentially anyway and let me know.”²⁵⁴ Museums undoubtedly far preferred to acquire skeletons or mummies from a known, professional—preferably those with academic degrees working on behalf of recognizable institutions such as major national museums. Nevertheless, when skeletons became available through opportunities of war, corruption, and global politics, museums of the early twentieth century were often fairly quick to react to the circumstances at hand, sometimes acquiring thousands of remains for study.

When remains were collected through legal means, a letter of introduction was presented to local government officials from the Smithsonian. As the United States National Museum was located in the nation’s capital, embassies of nearly every country were available for consult regarding additional letters of introduction or permits. These letters were intended to make the collection of remains both legal and unfettered by locals.²⁵⁵ It is unclear, however, how often collectors working on behalf of museums might show or translate the actual letter to local indigenous people on the ground before collecting human remains. Over the ensuing decades, collectors would be forced to confront changing ethical and legal guidelines for acquiring the remains they desired for their collections. At the time, however, such acquisitions were viewed as a benefit to science, as they served to relatively unproblematically diversify the scope of bone empires at major museums across the country.

Playing Archaeologist

Collectors in North America who normally concerned themselves with gathering language data or samples of material culture were noticeably influenced by scholars who collected and studied human remains. Several scholars typically remembered as ethnographers or linguists sporadically collected skeletons for natural history museums—these scholars were well aware of the growing field of physical anthropology, even if they did not directly participate in field. Frances Densmore, broadly considered the “mother” of ethnomusicology, was an avid collector and recorder of American Indian songs and poetry.²⁵⁶ While historians have long recognized Densmore’s historical contributions to the study of language and music, archival evidence shows that she also contributed a collection of pottery and, more notably, human remains, to the Smithsonian. Recent narratives of the history of anthropology have portrayed a handful of individuals, including Franz Boas, Aleš Hrdlička, George Dorsey, and Alfred Kroeber, as the *primary* collectors of human remains for museums in the United States. Indeed, these individuals, working with archaeologists and anthropologists from around the globe, contributed to the growth of museum collections of physical anthropology in numerous and striking ways. Moving away from collections reflecting ideas in physical anthropology, other historical figures in the anthropological community, including Frances Densmore, Alice Fletcher, and John P. Harrington, have often been portrayed as outside of the colonial appropriation of human remains, instead seen as trending toward more sympathetic, if at

²⁵⁴ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to T.D. Stewart, March 29, 1941. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁵⁵ Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, November 21, 1919. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁵⁶ Basic biographical information about Densmore can be found in Ute Gacs, et. al. eds. *Women Anthropologists: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988): 51-58.

times less “scientific” portrayals of native cultures.²⁵⁷ While this was certainly the case in their published ethnographic writings, all three of these figures typically associated with ethnography contributed small collections of human remains to museums in the United States. Amateur collectors and donors, too, contributed collections of human remains to museums on an opportunistic basis. The idea that skeletons could contribute to science and anthropology was a deep and powerful idea that was recognized by practitioners—professional and otherwise—of all types of anthropology and archaeology. While the focus of their own studies were often not placed on of race or human history, these ethnographers undoubtedly contributed to growing collections of human remains at museums. Frequently, they understood their assistance as contributing to general scientific understandings of racial history, even if they only held a limited understanding of the implications of the theories arising from physical anthropology of the era. Bones and bodies, simply stated, were productively placed in the natural history museum and held in the same collections, albeit somewhat tenuously, as arrowheads, canoes, and baskets. Although many in the public might not be familiar with the activities taking place within bone rooms, scholars who worked with museums, even in a very limited way, were, in fact, aware that skeletons of indigenous peoples could be productively placed in the museum. The idea of the bone room, in other words, had expanded well beyond the scientists who spent their careers working in them.

Had Densmore simply collected available remains and submitted them to the Smithsonian, historians might be able to read the event as a part of her larger project of hoping to collect and preserve everything related to American Indian culture. Her eager follow-up letters to Hrdlička, however, indicate that this was more than a simple “salvage” project to Densmore. In her letters, Densmore’s tone reflects a genuine personal interest in the significance of the remains. Certainly, all kinds of collectors working on behalf of museums opportunistically gathered materials believed to be valuable; however, the collection of human remains by individuals who were typically concerned with material culture or language implicates the broad reach of the practice within the anthropological community throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While these scholars were primarily concerned with the supposedly rapid disappearance of material culture and language, many were open to collecting—and submitting to museums—human remains of the same indigenous populations they studied. The idea that these were vanishing *races* of mankind was powerful, if ill-defined. Despite complex or limited understandings of the overall project of collecting, researching, and displaying human remains, the general idea that museums were repositories for certain kinds of skeletons was well known throughout the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. This pervasive idea resulted in the very real action of placing bones or mummified bodies into shipping containers, labeled with the addresses of major museums of natural history, anthropology, and to a lesser extent medicine—a patchwork process of building bone empires through opportunistic acquisition.

Alice Fletcher, a noted ethnologist, was one of the most important early women in American anthropology. Like Densmore, her notoriety stemmed from her ongoing (even

²⁵⁷ The division between Alice Fletcher and the Boasian anthropologists is drawn by David Hurst Thomas, in particular. While the division he draws is certainly accurate in many ways, the conceptualization of some scholars as outside of the colonialist use of human remains collecting has proven to be misleading if not inaccurate. See Thomas, *Skull Wars*.

physically demanding) fieldwork with indigenous peoples across the United States. While she spent some of her early career studying archaeology under the tutelage of Frederick Ward Putnam at Harvard, she is best remembered for her ethnographic work with the Omaha that spanned a forty-year period. In 1884, however, when she was asked by Putnam to collect measurements of living individuals as well as of skeletal material from the field, a practice more commonly associated with physical anthropology than ethnography, she readily obliged. In a letter written on March 20 of that year, she wrote:

A little north of here is the old burial site of the Omaha people called the hill of graves. This is now owned by white people. I know personally some of the owners & will be allowed to put a laborer to digging in these graves for the skulls and skeletons & any other articles found with the body. I cannot tell how many I could secure & forward to you but I think quite a number of skulls & etc. of . . . Omahas.²⁵⁸

If the letters and her detailed description of burial mounds were any indication, Fletcher showed an aptitude for collecting bodies even if it was not in her regular purview as an anthropologist. Fletcher added that in connection with the collection of skeletal material, she might be able to acquire a few photographs of nearby American Indians, together with information about their exact lineage. She added, however, “It is not easy to get at the people for such things but owing to my peculiar work now in progress I have a hold I can never get again most likely.”²⁵⁹ Collecting human remains and measurements of the living in order to assist other scientists in projects to understand race and human history, she believed, came secondary to her work on the cultural habits of the Omaha. Although this incident certainly does not represent a long-standing, systematic process of collecting human remains for museums, it demonstrates that Fletcher did collect human remains for other anthropologists interested in observing and arranging them in cluttered bone rooms. Furthermore, the request that she do so indicates the general acceptance of such a practice.

Despite the overarching influence of the idea that certain skeletons belonged in the museum, many museum leaders concerned with anthropology and culture maintained little desire to compete with already formidable bone empires in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington. Certainly, when Ishi’s brain was collected by the University of California it was determined that the unique specimen was better suited for the Smithsonian. On the other hand, museums like that at the University of California were eager to acquire most kinds of skeletal collections, thinking they could contribute to training and research in physical anthropology through bones rather than brains. Some museums simply chose not to develop collections for physical anthropology and therefore turned over discoveries of indigenous human remains to the proprietors of bone rooms at

²⁵⁸ I wish to thank Joanna Scherer, Curator Emeritus, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, for directing me to this particular letter. Scherer is an indefatigable scholar of Fletcher and she was kind enough to pass along this citation when she learned of my project. Letter from Alice Fletcher to F. W. Putnam, March 20, 1884. Harvard University Archives. Peabody Museum General Correspondence. UAV 677.38 Box 5: “1884 C-F” letters.

²⁵⁹ This quotation again comes from the above letter. Letter from Alice Fletcher to F. W. Putnam, March 20, 1884. Harvard University Archives. Peabody Museum General Correspondence. UAV 677.38 Box 5: “1884 C-F” letters.

other institutions. In 1914, after discovering 68 skeletons in the Delaware River Valley, George Gustav Heye, founder of the Heye Museum in New York, wrote to Aleš Hrdlička requesting that he write a brief article about the skeletons. Heye noted, “I feel the only place to deposit specimens of this kind is with you and if the National Museum have (sic) not already too many skeletons from that region, I would be most glad to donate the entire lot to your Institution.”²⁶⁰ The Heye Museum, which would much later become the core collections of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, chose not to accession human remains collections for their own museum. Simply stated, smaller museums such as the Heye were simply too busy building their own empires to worry about bones, and instead occasionally submitted discoveries of skeletons to the museums with bone rooms. Hrdlička responded simply to Heye, “As to our need of skeletal material, it is still a very great one.”²⁶¹ Later, Hrdlička assured Heye, “though the specimens may be few in number, they will be of value.”²⁶²

In the early 1920s, John P. Harrington, a linguist affiliated with the Bureau of American Ethnology, also briefly conducted archaeological fieldwork in California. Harrington was as much renowned for his brilliance in the field of linguistics as he was for his hoarding of linguistic data in his solitary office. Piles of notes were left untouched following extensive visits to the field. Slow to publish his discoveries in his own field, Harrington was notorious for territorially guarding the topics of his ongoing research in the anthropological community. Harrington, like so many other anthropologists of the era, occasionally collected skeletal material while in the field examining local languages and culture. He also occasionally sent boxes of bones to the museums.

Following the discovery of a pair of skulls at a site near Santa Barbara, Harrington submitted the remains to Kroeber at the University of California. Kroeber, trained broadly in linguistics, physical anthropology, and cultural anthropology, periodically assisted scholars like Harrington in the identification of materials, including skeletal remains, from the region of his expertise—California. Kroeber explained to Harrington that the remains were potentially “proto-Chumash”—an ancestor of a modern tribe of California Indians—and that the combined evidence of the associated artifact with the shape and size of the skulls confirmed this suspicion. Kroeber wrote, “Comparison of the measurements of your skulls with the measured Chumash skulls confirms my first impression that your two individuals fall within the limits of the Chumash type.”²⁶³

Harrington, like Densmore and Heye, was not trained extensively in archaeology or physical anthropology. Nevertheless, such individuals within the larger anthropological community knew that human remains, especially remains of indigenous

²⁶⁰ Letter from George G. Heye to Aleš Hrdlička, July 29, 1914. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁶¹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to George G. Heye, July 30, 1914. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁶² Hrdlička notes that the collection possesses several interesting traits. In Hrdlička’s estimation, they possessed intentional deformation of the head. Also, some of the females belonged to differing tribes. Finally, one of the specimens appeared to be a large, white male. Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to George G. Heye, March 2, 1915. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁶³ Letter from Alfred Kroeber to John P. Harrington, November 7, 1923. Reel 6. Correspondence. Papers of John P. Harrington. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

peoples, were potentially scientifically valuable. In each example, those who discovered the remains turned to another scholar more experienced in studying human remains—a scholar who happened to be affiliated with an expanding repository for remains in the form of a bone room at a museum. The three examples also point to the overriding desire to determine the exact race or tribal group represented by each set of remains and an effort to preserve remains for future generations of scientists in the face of what were believed to be rapidly disappearing archaeological and ethnographic sources. Despite the shared goals of preservation and racial definition shared by the non-archaeologists collecting human remains, these goals did not necessarily align with the desires of physical anthropologists, who were intent on constructing overarching theories of race and human history as they raced to gather remains for their bone rooms. These three examples all took place as theories of racial classification were on their ebb in the United States, and occurred as the physical anthropology community in the United States was finding itself increasingly concerned with questions about human history—such as the peopling of the Americas. News stories on Ishi and Piltdown Man may have further underscored the idea that scientists from museums were interested in studying the human body—but scientists and amateurs in the field were already well aware of bone rooms—despite an overall lack of *display* of bodies during this period.

In the correspondence related to the skeletal remains that he later turned over to the Smithsonian, Heye thanks Hrdlička for giving the bones “proper care and accommodation.”²⁶⁴ The language of salvage, preservation, and appropriate care for human remains was shared by anthropologists and museum leaders working in a variety of fields, indicating a common professional conceptualization of the rationale for acquiring and maintaining collections. Human remains, specifically those believed to be American Indian, were considered best collected from their place of burial and preserved at a museum for research and possible future display. The shared function of teaching scientists and broader public, while being preserved for future generations, was compelling enough to drive the construction of bone empires through the uncertainty of their exact utility for studies on race or human history. The manner in which this professional relationship extended beyond those primarily concerned with physical anthropology demonstrates the pervasiveness of this idea within the broader anthropological community. This broadly accepted paradigm lasted well into the twentieth century and collections for select museums—including both the Smithsonian and the University of California, Berkeley—grew with particular rapidity.

Determining the Value of Remains

One challenge facing museum professionals in the early twentieth century was how to determine the value of objects when negotiating exchanges between museums and individuals. In physical anthropology, specifically, museums periodically exchanged specimens with other institutions based on perceived redundancies, or strengths within collections. Numerous examples of skulls, while valuable for comparative studies championed by racial scientists, were less valuable in showing the range of human diversity through exhibition, where typically only one or two examples from each group was needed to achieve the desired effect. Discussing a possible exchange with a museum

²⁶⁴ Letter from George G. Heye to Aleš Hrdlička, July 31, 1914. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

in South America, Hrdlička explained, “A fair rate of exchange would be a skull for a skull, where crania alone are concerned, and two to three American skulls for each Kaffir skeleton according to its completeness and condition.”²⁶⁵ When a similar opportunity arose to obtain skeletal material from a museum in Siberia, Hrdlička proposed that the Smithsonian’s Peruvian crania, “or first class busts of our aborigines,” be exchanged for “well identified crania and bones of the Siberian natives.”²⁶⁶ It was unusual, but also a very real intellectual activity to judge the value of one set of bones against another. A similar opportunity for exchange arose in 1920, when Hrdlička visited Japan. After negotiating with Japanese officials he proposed that twenty complete Japanese skeletons be exchanged for “a set of deformed crania and a few other things which we can easily spare.”²⁶⁷ Museums determined the relative worth of human remains and material objects for value in exchange based on three major factors—their rarity, utility for science in terms of either racial classification or human history, and their worth for display in imagined future or current exhibitions. For Hrdlička in the early years of the twentieth century, remains with some significance for the study of race were prized. Skeletons showing clear evidence of racial origin, or those considered to be the purest racially—unfettered by interbreeding with other groups—were considered the most valuable for science. Gradually, his personal interest in the history of the peopling of the Americas would assume a greater share of his interest and thus human remains that could provide evidence for the origins of American Indians became increasingly valued in exchanges. In the early decades of the twentieth century, with racial science at its apex in the United States and scientists increasingly turning to human remains to address questions about human history and evolutions, bone rooms appeared to be assuming an increasingly central—if shifting—role in the future of American science.

In 1927, physical anthropologist Henry Field began a letter to a fellow curator at the Field Museum of Natural History, “Just a note to say how pleased I am that you have 20 Eskimo skeletons! I hope you will bring back as many as you can because you know how empty those Cabinets are at the Eskimo end.”²⁶⁸ A common understanding of human remains as objects of scientific value had wholly permeated throughout the anthropological community. This common understanding that human remains might contribute to racial theory and knowledge of prehistory reached across disciplinary lines and allowed bone empires to grow with striking rapidity. The value of skeletons, though sometimes dictated by their utility for understanding such questions as the ancient arrival of people in the Americas, was most often calculated by their centrality in racial classification schemes. This reality, however, was about to undergo a major shift. In the early years of the twentieth century, museums, like the Field Museum and the Smithsonian, hoped to feature bone rooms that reflected the entirety of racial diversity in their specimen drawers. Cabinets began to not only fill, “at the Eskimo end,” but also to gradually start representing evidence from throughout time, as well.

²⁶⁵ Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, December 10, 1910. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁶⁶ Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, November 1, 1912. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁶⁷ Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, May 26, 1920. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁶⁸ Letter from Henry Field to William Duncan Strong, December 12, 1927. Papers of William Duncan Strong. Box 6. Folder: FER-FL. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Eugenics, The Old Americans, And Brains on Display

The Smithsonian also entered the fray in the discourse surrounding eugenics and hygiene.²⁶⁹ Unlike many of the, at times, more dominant theories in physical anthropology—eugenic ideas were displayed remarkably prominently at museums and fairs, in large part due to the efforts of eugenicists in advocating such theories. These displays sometimes even included notable, if modest, displays of human remains pulled from bone rooms. In 1912, with the looming arrival of the Congress of Hygiene and Demography, the museum planned a temporary exhibit for the visiting Congress. In describing the scope of his planned exhibit, Hrdlička repeated his overall interest in the subject of eugenics and racial mixing, stating his wish to compare Americans of three or more generations—referred to as “thoroughbred American[s]”—to the offspring of “regular intermarriages between the Indians and the whites.”²⁷⁰ In addition to the intellectual connections drawn by curatorial staff between the study of race and the field of eugenics through text on exhibit panels, the Smithsonian also seemed eager to display a small portion of their growing collections of human bodies. Up to that time, these mummies and skeletons had previously been awarded little exhibition space at the national museum.

For a time, the studies of racial classification, prehistory, human evolution, and what was termed “hygiene and demography” shared the stage for those in anthropology who were interested in conducting research on the human body. A mere two weeks before the opening of the series of interdepartmental exhibits on eugenics at the Smithsonian, Hrdlička and scholars Charles Peabody and George Grant MacCurdy traveled to Geneva to the Fourteenth International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology to represent both the Smithsonian and the United States.²⁷¹ At the Smithsonian, the new exhibit examined race as its central theme, in large part because eugenicist organizations were pushing for these types of display. Smithsonian scientists and scholars were, of course, sympathetic to desires to utilize the expanding collections of human remains in this vein; however, they were also recognizing potential uses for the bones as tools for other kinds of research—ideas less interesting to the eugenicists.

As it unfolded in the United States, the relationship between eugenics and physical anthropology briefly grew to be symbiotic. In 1926, Hrdlička was contacted by the American Eugenics Society (AES), which was keen to add to its list of individuals available to lecture to eager audiences.²⁷² Hrdlička responded by noting that he did not lecture on the subject of eugenics specifically, but his other lectures on the study of

²⁶⁹ Eugenics, hygiene, and demography were all complex and constantly shifting terms over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. For scholars of anthropology, these terms applied to the study of heredity and for some, leveraging a growing understanding of biology to attempt to shape human populations. On the surface, these ideas could be interpreted as somewhat benign. A key group of extreme thinkers, however, pushed the eugenics movement towards a more sinister belief in an ability to shape populations based on perceive notions of inherent advantages or disadvantages due to inherited characteristics. This included the belief that certain minority populations, or races, might be slowly bred out of larger populations.

²⁷⁰ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, March 21, 1912. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁷¹ Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1913, 23.

²⁷² Letter from Leon F. Whitney to Aleš Hrdlička, March 31, 1926. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

physical anthropology would be of great interest to the same groups.²⁷³ Hrdlička, as the most prominent physical anthropologist in the United States, possessed a significant relationship to the field of eugenics through the International Congress of Eugenics (ICE) and the American Eugenics Society (AES). He had also allowed John H. Kellogg, the founder of the Race Betterment Society, to join the board of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*. Kellogg, a wealthy industrialist, subsequently funded the early efforts of the journal.²⁷⁴ The connections to eugenics ran deep, in part due to the fact that the organizations offered funding for exhibition and publication. Although many scientists, like Hrdlička, were skeptical of some of the claims and activities of the most prominent eugenicists in the United States and Europe, they were eager to display and write about what they believed were neglected collections of skeletons in their museums. If museums like the Smithsonian refused to display bones and mummified remains directly, scientists could perhaps find support from outside organizations that were eager to highlight racial difference through science.

By late 1921, Hrdlička was working closely with the International Congress of Eugenics to organize displays at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York. The Congress met at the AMNH, hosting displays in addition to featuring the presentation of dozens of scientific papers from scholars from both the United States and Europe.²⁷⁵ At the opening ceremonies for the Congress, Henry Fairfield Osborn, a curator and prolific author from the museum, stated grandly, “I doubt if there has ever been a moment in the world’s history when an international conference on race character and betterment has been more important than the present.”²⁷⁶ Osborn argued that the papers and exhibitions would demonstrate the stability of the races of mankind, with all of their “vices” and “virtues.”²⁷⁷ Despite signs of an apparent shift toward research centered on evolution and prehistory—race was still a hot commodity.

The exhibits displayed at the museum in time for the Congress were largely based on Hrdlička’s research comparing the physical features of recent immigrants and Europeans to the features of third and fourth generation citizens of the United States. He ultimately presented his work in *The Old Americans*, published in 1925. The book argued that little change had occurred in the physical structure of Americans over the course of a few generations, but maintained that certain physical characteristics of North Americans would continue to differentiate from those of Europeans over time. Further, the book posited that those who had made it through the hardship of the immigration process were most likely “rather above than below the average in sturdiness and energy.”²⁷⁸ Hrdlička notes that many had come to the belief that a distinctive type of American Southerner, American Westerner, and American Youth existed, with various geographical areas advancing the belief that their own regional environment and generational culture crafted

²⁷³ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Leon F. Whitney, April 3, 1926. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁷⁴ Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, 93.

²⁷⁵ The papers read before the congress were compiled in two published volumes. *Eugenics, Genetics and the Family*. Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress of Eugenics. Vol. 1. (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Company, 1923). And *Eugenics in Race and State*. Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress of Eugenics. Vol. II. (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins Company, 1923).

²⁷⁶ *Eugenics, Genetics and the Family*. 1.

²⁷⁷ *Eugenics, Genetics and the Family*. 2.

²⁷⁸ Ales Hrdlička, *The Old Americans* (New York: Arno Press) Reprint. (1970): 1.

special forms of American robustness. He continues, “Suggestions have even been advanced that the American type is approaching that of the American Indian; the idea being presumably that since American environment produced the Indian—which in reality it has not done or not fully—it would in due time shape other people s here to similar mold.”²⁷⁹ Certainly, many of these ideas had existed in some form for centuries, but much of Hrdlička’s argument was directed against a claim made by Franz Boas, who studied recent immigrants and argued that physical features changed based on environment with striking rapidity.²⁸⁰ Scholarly differences, in addition to what might be described as mutual stubbornness and irritability, led the two men to become increasingly distant and cold. As theories of culture increasingly consumed Boas’ attention, and with a busy schedule of public speaking and training of students, Hrdlička became increasingly more isolated and firmly ensconced within the professionalizing subfield of physical anthropology. Anthropology of the era, in other words, continued to wrestle internally over the interpretations of anthropometric measurements and human remains. These debates were, at times, deeply influenced by prominent eugenicists who funded exhibits and cited the findings of American anthropologists who generally supported their racialist ideas.

Hrdlička, based his conclusions on the changing American body, detailed through measurements made between 1910 and 1924 of thousands of living humans and sets of human remains. He ultimately argued for the overall stability of racial characteristics while noting the changing nature of bodies in the United States over several generations.²⁸¹ The basic tenets of the ideas being put forward by Hrdlička and Boas regarding the American body mirrored ideas of American exceptionalism that were contemporaneously emerging in other disciplines. Boas, however, leveraged his results to argue *against* the general stability of races, noting instead the influence of the American environment after just a few short generations. Nevertheless, the two were in agreement that *something* was taking place to change the nature of the body in the United States. At stake was the ability to place races into sturdy categories; if human races were constantly shifting and changing, scholars wondered if it would be possible to understand their “original” form after several generations of intermixing. These ideas of racial mixing and changing pressed scholars to collect as many “original,” or “racially pure” skeletons as possible—prized both for their age and due to the belief that racial mixing had contaminated older physical forms—thus clouding what had been clearer racial lines. These same ideas also strengthened intellectual ties with the eugenics movement.

The exhibition resulting from Hrdlička’s work on “the Old Americans” at the AMNH filled an alcove in (somewhat ironically) Darwin Hall at the museum.²⁸² Through the alcove, visitors walked past seven cases of displays. The displays began with a series

²⁷⁹ Hrdlička, *The Old Americans*, 3.

²⁸⁰ Franz Boas, *Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912).

²⁸¹ Hrdlička labored on the book for years, writing to Arthur Keith, “I really gave ‘The Old Americans’ the best that was in me.” Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Arthur Keith, January 9, 1926. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁸² A description of the exhibition can be found in an undated memo, probably created around the time of the closing of the exhibit. Undated Memo. Correspondence. Folder: International Congress of Eugenics. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. This memorandum is presumably written by Aleš Hrdlička to the organizers of the exhibition in 1921.

of brain casts. The brain of a gibbon, orangutan, chimpanzee, and gorilla were compared to the brains of several humans from differing races. The brains were intended to show “extremes of variation under normal conditions in brain evolution.” Following the display of brains, the variations of specific skeletal parts were compared in a series of five cases. Ribs, sternums, and femurs were lined up alongside numerous other bones, again intending to show normal human variation. From there, visitors would engage with a series of cases demonstrating the concept of reversion, or the return of a specific characteristic to a previously possessed ancestral form. One collection, in particular, featured a collection of American Indian skulls under the flat, glass cases. Viewed from above, visitors were instructed to observe in the skulls of Native Americans “the persistence to this day of Neanderthaloid forms and other primitive features.” Ideas about evolution, presented in this context, largely buttressed the idea that human races arose from earlier ancestors and might be understood, at least in part, on the observables of more or less “advanced” characteristics.

Importantly, the exhibition closed with a series of displays on the subject of heredity. To demonstrate this concept to eugenicists, Hrdlička designed a case featuring a collection of skulls from Pre-Columbian Peruvian Indians. The collection originated from a single locality and the crania were all absent an auditory apparatus on the right side of their skulls. This was a prehistoric example, but the remains were displayed in the context of a genetic lesson on heredity. The final two cases focused directly on Hrdlička’s measurements of so-called “Old Americans.” They featured a comparative study of hair color and “a large chart showing the results of measurements and tests.”²⁸³ Most eugenicists of the era would have found the information presented in the displays compelling, but perhaps not entirely satisfying. Though the displays pointed directly to the notions of American Indian primitivism and white superiority, they appear to have hesitated in crafting any sort of stark claims about inherent ability of particular races. Rather, claims for white supremacy were supported only indirectly and masked with a language of scientific authority and certainty.

A few years after designing displays for the American Museum of Natural History and the International Congress of Eugenics, Hrdlička articulated the belief that, “Eugenics in the future will be one of the fundamental subjects in all schools.”²⁸⁴ Hrdlička was certainly not alone in his interest in eugenics. In 1926, the American Eugenics Society listed dozens of pre-eminent individuals including professors, university presidents, clergy and medical doctors.²⁸⁵ This momentary visibility for eugenics, and its connection to the practice of collecting and displaying human remains, was in reality short-lived. In the decades that followed, a growing interest in human evolution and prehistory would take this practice in new direction, but a racist interest in science and classification theories of mankind momentarily fueled research and display of human remains in various settings.

²⁸³ Undated Memo. Correspondence. Folder: International Congress of Eugenics. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. This memorandum is presumably written by Aleš Hrdlička to the organizers of the exhibition in 1921.

²⁸⁴ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Leon F. Whitney. Letter is undated, but was probably written in September 1927. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁸⁵ Report of the President of the American Eugenics Society, Inc. June 26, 1926. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Conclusion

By the 1910s and 1920s, important scholars in the United States, including Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber, were already disputing the validity of race as a legitimate concept. In the context of the Americas, race seemed an unstable reality, quickly complicated by the interbreeding of human societies interacting on the continent for centuries. These critiques stemmed from both changing social theories as well as scientific ideas that clashed with existing racial tenets of classification. Rather than fully engage with these debates, many scholars argued that anthropologists should instead concern themselves with the idea of culture, as opposed to the concept of race. While the number of anthropologists that would fall into the mold of Boasian anthropology grew throughout the first half of the twentieth century, many scholars continued to collect remains under the broad assumption that their collection and salvage would somehow be important for the study of race. Indeed, as the rate of procurement and measurement of collections increased, many seemed to have believed that the potential for unlocking secrets about race was much greater than ever actually achieved. Most skeletons stayed trapped away in bone rooms, behind the scenes at a few major museums, for generations, subjected to few occasional displays and rare bouts of observation and study.

Despite the growth of collections of human remains during the early portion of the twentieth century, museum professionals slowed their efforts to place remains on display during this period.²⁸⁶ Collections of remains grew in places like Washington, Chicago, and San Francisco, but were mostly held in storage, accessible to students and researchers but unavailable and virtually unknown to the typical museumgoer. This was due in part to the continued growth of interest in the display of material culture and natural history collections, which filled museum display cases to the brim. Museum leaders generally abided by the grandiose visions of physical anthropologists only when outside funding, sometimes from eugenicist organizations, became available. Though scholars of this period maintained an interest in collection and research related to human evolution, the North American continent was believed to be a more productive test-ground for the subject of race, a concept dominating the scholarship in physical anthropology throughout much of the early portion of the twentieth century. Scholars, scientists, and amateurs traveling around the world were keenly aware of museums as sites for preserving certain kinds of skeletons—and that the bodies of indigenous or non-white peoples were considered especially useful tools for the advancement of science.

Periodically, the popular media chronicled discoveries of human remains. These accounts were often dramatized to the point of fiction, prompting one anthropologist to describe a newspaper article that described the discovery of several prehistoric skulls in

²⁸⁶ In speaking in particular about collections from the American Southwest, George H. Pepper, the director of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania noted that when the Hazzard collections were acquired for his museums following the Columbian World Exposition—these kinds of collections were unique. By 1908, he noted that collections of antiquities from the American Southwest were commonplace in museums across the United States. He wrote, “I think that the price paid was about \$4,000; [actually \$14,500] if this was the figure it certainly was all that the collection is worth. At that time there was little of this class of material represented in Museum collections but now almost every Museum had a good showing.” Letter from George H. Pepper to George B. Gordon, October 7, 1908. University Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania. Box: 24. Administrative Records, Curatorial, American Section, Collectors and Collections Gratacos—Hazzard/Hearst. Folder: Hazzard—Hearst Collection Correspondence.

California as containing “statements . . . about as idiotic as newspaper accounts usually are.” The same anthropologist even continued by arguing that, “Indeed, I think that such newspaper stuff does a good deal more harm than good.”²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, newspaper accounts of dramatic displays of recently discovered or acquired human remains brought visitors to museums and fairs in droves, and they demonstrated legitimacy and attention to those scholars concerned with collecting remains. While the very early years of the twentieth century were somewhat quiet in terms of overall display of physical anthropological or medical specimens when compared to earlier and later decades, the cresting interest in racial classification and the growing interest in human history helped museums develop a foundation for later public display.

Although the practice of collecting and measuring human bodies was never a central component of the careers of scholars and travelers like Densmore, Fletcher, or Harrington, all three did collect human remains on behalf of bone empires, which readily added the remains to their collections. The sharp division historians have drawn between the more heroic and sympathetic ethnologist, fighting for Indian rights, drawn against the portrait of the evil “bone collector,” proves to be an inaccurate division. The sentiment of urgency to collect human remains was felt by a wide range of scholars, amateur collectors, and donors, all around the United States. Importantly, these individuals brought the practice of collecting bodies around the globe and forced new legislation. Despite this productive system of acquisition and study of remains in the United States, an increasingly international field, as well as a series of new discoveries, started to shift the balance of many ideas held by anthropologists concerned with the human body over the next quarter century.

²⁸⁷ Letter from F.W. Hodge to John P. Harrington, March 28, 1924. Reel 6. Correspondence. Papers of John P. Harrington. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Chapter 3—The Mütter Museum: The Medical Body on Display

During the nineteenth century, in both the United States and Europe medical museums appeared in urban centers and university towns.²⁸⁸ Often affiliated with hospitals or medical schools, collections became tools for teaching students about various conditions not typically seen during hospital rounds. Specimens in medical collections transformed body parts into teaching objects that presented lessons in human anatomy.²⁸⁹ Bodies and body parts, showing common or rare pathologies, were preserved with varying degrees of success through assorted methods of drying and chemistry to prevent the natural decay of the human corpse.²⁹⁰ Preserved specimens of actual human remains, in addition to growing collections of casts and models, could be passed around a classroom or placed under glass and easily exhibited.²⁹¹ Unlike a textbook drawing or a photograph, medical specimens could be experienced in three dimensions, allowing the student better comprehension of the condition. Dissections, while an important part of medical education, were often messy and cumbersome procedures, especially when conducted by clumsy and inexperienced students. Furthermore, examples of particular pathologies could not always be repeatedly secured for a new class of medical students to dissect—another frequent problem in medical education during the nineteenth century. Medical specimens, on the other hand, could be isolated, cleaned, and preserved for future students or the layperson in exhibitions. For a time, collecting and preserving human remains for permanent storage and display seemed a next logical step in the process of professionalizing and modernizing medicine in the United States and Europe.

Despite the apparently logical (and widely accepted) rationale supporting the rise of medical museums in the United States, the medical community struggled to articulate an exact role for these museums in their practice. Organizers of the museums collected and displayed the wide range of natural human variation, as well as highly unusual examples of bodily self-manipulation and disease. Museums with abnormal medical specimens, models, and human remains also appealed to the morbid interests of the

²⁸⁸ Many of these museums have since disappeared, but a handful remain open to this day. In the United States, these museums include the Mütter Museum, the Army Medical Museum (now the National Museum of Health and Medicine), the Warren Anatomical Museum of the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard Medical School (founded 1847), and the Indiana Medical History Museum (founded 1895). These museums, especially the Mütter Museum – a part of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, mimicked the much older anatomical displays at the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

²⁸⁹ The available literature on the history of medical museums in the United States is limited. One of the complete works, to date, examining the place of medical museums in the history of medical research and education is, McLeary, “Science in a Bottle,” 2001. McLeary argues that the existing literature inaccurately places the history of the medical museum alongside the history of dime museums and freakshows. Further, she offers a possible explanation for the lack of a historical literature on medical museums – the surprising lack of archival documentation of these once numerous institutions. See especially McLeary, “Science in a Bottle,” 2001, 10-13.

²⁹⁰ Obvious disadvantages have long been inherent to either drying or preserving a specimen in liquid. Drying most kinds of soft tissue change the overall shape and texture of the specimen, while most kinds of liquids use for preservation of soft tissue, while maintaining the overall size and shape of most specimens, change the color of the sample. In light of these obvious problems, it is easy to see why collectors were eager to skeletal materials that were easy to preserve, and once dried and cleaned, typically maintained their shape, texture, and size over long periods. In comparison to the obvious defects of either drying or fluid preservation, models possessed an obvious appeal.

²⁹¹ McLeary, “Science in a Bottle,” 2001, 5.

public. Eventually, the role that these museums assumed in the education of medical professionals was replaced by a role geared more toward public health and the satisfaction of macabre curiosities.²⁹² As they became increasingly open to the public, medical displays subverted dominant forms of Victorian norms by placing bodies, body parts, or particular diseases that might have been considered inappropriate for public display into a more socially acceptable context. Notably, medical museums also acquired skeletons of humans and animals in order to teach medical students and the public about race and evolution. The subjects of race and human history—central to anthropologists working at natural history museums—only appeared as passing interests of collecting or exhibiting and at medical museums. Nevertheless, medical museums contributed to the discourse surrounding racial typology and human evolution in subtle, but critical ways. Medical museums offer an important point of comparison and departure to the professionalizing departments of museum anthropology in natural history museums. Both were influenced by many of the same contexts of American society and culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—yet medical museums and natural history museums differed in collecting human remains in ways that become clear upon closer examination.

Medical museums tended to frame human remains as evidence of particular medical conditions—contextualized within the medical history of the individual during life. Anthropologists, too, were occasionally concerned with ancient surgery, disease, or pathology, but the primary focus of those working in natural history was somewhat distinct from that of curators in medical museums. Anthropologists were more concerned with race and cultural history than with exact medical procedures. Most physicians only vaguely understood the increasingly complex theories of racial classification developing in anthropology. Despite these distinctions, the result was frequently similar when the caretakers of medical museums, like their counterparts in natural history museums, collected boxes full of skulls, skeletons, and other assorted body parts. Although not the main thread of the research at most medical museums, race and prehistory occasionally became preoccupations for scientists concerned with anatomy and medicine.

Medical displays and exhibits appeared in a variety of forms and sizes in the United States throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the largest and best known medical museums in the United States—the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—is the central case study in this chapter. Though such specimens were often marginalized in medical museum collecting, over time medical museums such as the Mütter Museum *did* occasionally acquire specimens determined to be racially or historically significant. This chapter examines the influence of ideas about race and history in medical museums, arguing that the practice of collecting human remains with the intellectual intent to represent discourses in racial classification and human prehistory were not confined to natural history and anthropology museums alone.

The Army Medical Museum (AMM), discussed in previous chapters, focused much of its early collecting on pathological conditions created by battlefield conditions and comparative racial studies. Medical museums like the AMM waxed and waned in their emphasis on acquiring skeletons to explore the races of mankind. This was based not only on the opportunistic collecting habits of museums of the era, it was also based on the interests of the museum leaders. At the turn of the century, museums were still

²⁹² As noted in the body of this chapter, the Army Medical Museum opened its doors to the public much earlier than the Mütter Museum.

sorting out where each skeleton might best be stored for science. In 1897, when the AMM divested itself of all non-pathological remains, the institution that received them, the Smithsonian, started a new division of physical anthropology for the primary purpose of addressing the question of race in comparative terms. The AMM, on the other hand, shifted its emphasis to samples of pathologies treatable by modern medicine. As this chapter demonstrates, however, medical museums did not totally divest themselves of the race question.

Medical Museum Foundations—Lost Limbs, Phantom Limbs, and Rare Specimens

The College of Physicians of Philadelphia, which oversees the Mütter Museum, was founded as a private medical society in 1787. Years later, in the 1840s, the College established a permanent pathology collection.²⁹³ Shortly after establishing the first collections, Fellows of the College came forward to donate their own private collections, acquired during their own respective tenures as physicians. These doctors donated, in the words of one historian, “gallstones, monsters, and plaster casts of one condition or another.”²⁹⁴ Despite the early success the museum demonstrated in acquiring medical instruments and specimens, interest in the collection amongst the Fellows soon declined. In 1858, a professor from the Jefferson Medical College, Thomas Dent Mütter (1811-1859), reinvigorated the collection with donation of 1,344 artifacts and \$30,000 endowment. Mütter was ill, and he wanted his personal collection of medical photographs and specimens that he had amassed to be available to medical students and physicians for professional education.²⁹⁵ The donated collection included bones, wet preparations, and casts, as well as a number of paintings.²⁹⁶

The Mütter Museum opened a new building in 1863, just one year after the founding of the Army Medical Museum. Initially, the public was not allowed to view the growing pathological collection in Philadelphia, it was reserved only for Fellows of the College. In 1867, the Anatomy Act of Pennsylvania allowed medical schools and societies in the Philadelphia region (including the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, which governed the Mütter Museum) easier, and legal, access to human cadavers for dissection and even permanent preservation as medical specimens.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ Historians of science, medicine, and anatomy have reported that a comparatively small archive exists for either the Mütter Museum or the College of Physicians. Historian Whitfield J. Bell Jr. lamented in 1987, “Of personal correspondence regrettably little seems to have survived,” noting, “but, then, as the College was a local institution and the Fellows regularly saw one another on Spruce and Pine Streets, it is unlikely that they would have discussed College business in private letters.” This chapter, is somewhat of an effort in recovery history. In reconstructing the history of researching and displaying the medical body at this particular institution, I rely heavily on limited curatorial records, newspaper reports, and published records of the College. See, Whitfield J. Bell, Jr. *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia: A Bicentennial History* (Canton: Science History Publications, 1987): Viii.

²⁹⁴ Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 115.

²⁹⁵ Several valuable accounts of the formation of the Mütter Museum have appeared over the course of the previous decade. Especially useful for the above details are the following works. Laura Lindgren, ed. *Mütter Museum, Historical Medical Photographs*, 2007. Gretchen Worden, *The Mütter Museum: Of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* (New York: Blast Books, 2002). Nancy Moses, *In the Lost Museum: Buried Treasures and the Stories They Tell* (Plymouth: Alta Mira Press, 2008): 61-64. *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 9 (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1887): clxxiv-clxxiv.

²⁹⁶ Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 1987: 118.

²⁹⁷ For the anatomy act see Appendix A, “History of the Anatomy Act of Pennsylvania,” in Suzanne M. Shultz, *Body Snatching: The Robbing of Graves for the Education of Physicians in Early Nineteenth*

After the Civil War, medical museums gradually moved from specialist institutions reserved for the medical elite to sites intended for the diffusion of knowledge regarding public health. By 1883, the President of College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Alfred Stillé, argued that,

The day is passing when it is any longer necessary to hold a dark screen between physicians and educated laymen, and the better the world shall learn what are the aims and the achievements of a physician's life, the sooner will be dispelled the prejudices that antagonize the medical profession and the delusions under which the public became the victims of error and of fraud.²⁹⁸

Just as physicians in the US military were asked to contribute skeletal material to the AMM, physicians affiliated with the College of Physicians of Philadelphia were asked to donate relevant material collected during the course of medical work.

Over the ensuing decades, the Mütter Museum, imitating the practices of medical museums in Europe, collected and exhibited unusual pathological specimens. Like the Army Medical Museum, the Mütter Museum collected a number of large collections of crania; however, the main focus of the early displays was to educate medical students and physicians about human diseases rarely seen in most medical offices.²⁹⁹ Medical students might learn about the effects of a disease by passing around and carefully examining a human skull of an individual afflicted with the ailment during life. Over the course of the first few decades of existence, however, the Mütter Museum's audiences were limited, with collections only periodically shown to Fellows or small groups of medical students.

Similarly, the Army Medical Museum's earliest collections mostly languished in storage. When the AMM moved to Ford's Theater in 1866, it reported that the utility of the collections became clear almost immediately when museum officials began experimenting with regular exhibitions. The Surgeon General stated that civilian and military medical professionals consulted the collections, "weekly and almost daily."³⁰⁰ Officials for the Army found the use of the collections by medical professionals to be encouraging, especially in light of the fact that efforts to create an Army Medical School were stymied throughout most of the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁰¹ Having

Century America (Forbes William, Smith. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2005): 111-116. The discourse around the use of living organisms for medical studies, known as the Vivisection Debates, were not nearly as sharp in the United States as they were in Europe. Nevertheless, the debate surrounding the appropriate use of the body, both living and dead, for medical dissection was present in the United States and it lingered for decades following the passage of anatomy acts. For an example see George Hamilton, "Thoughts Upon Vivisection, with Reference to Its Restriction by Legislative Action," in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 5 (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1881): 103-119.

²⁹⁸ Alfred Stillé, "Remarks Made by the President," in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 6 (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1883): xliii-xliv.

²⁹⁹ Laura Lindgren, a curator at the Mütter Museum, notes that the practice of displaying various medical conditions grew out of a long history of medical illustration. The practice of painting the human form eventually gave rise to the medical illustration, which soon influenced the practice of medical photography. Lindgren, *Mütter Museum, Historical Medical Photographs*, 2007: 14.

³⁰⁰ As quoted in, Robert S. Henry, *The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology: Its First Century 1862-1962* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General Department of the Army, 1964): 56.

³⁰¹ As quoted in, Henry, *The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology*, 1964: 28.

opened in the midst of the Civil War, the Army Medical Museum was also consulted by unique visitors: soldiers who had lost their own limbs during the war. A veteran named J.F. Allen, for instance, recounted his story of finding his own arm, amputated in the Civil War, preserved and on display in the medical museum. Journalists who reported on these types of narrative were generally amazed, not only by the display of the bodies of the dead, but also by the occasional connection of museum skeletons to the living. The documentation the museum possessed detailing how a limb had been acquired—an effort to understand the medical history of the individual—could actually help veterans, in certain instances, prove to government agencies that they had been active in their service during the Civil War and should therefore qualify for benefits. One physician described the individuals who came to view their lost body parts as, “officers and soldiers who had lost a limb by amputation,” who would come to the museum, “to look up its resting place, in some sense its last resting place.”³⁰²

Narratives of soldiers who lost limbs and their ties to medical museums even assumed a place in fiction. In 1866, S. Weir Mitchell, a physician and prominent Fellow of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, wrote a short story about a young Army surgeon named George Dedlow. Mitchell’s stature in the medical community was solid following the Civil War, and he is best remembered as the creator of the “rest-cure” for female patients suffering from neurasthenia.³⁰³ He also dabbled in fiction, including authoring *The Case of George Dedlow*, a short story that elegantly examines a soldier’s loss of identity following the removal of his limbs during the war, and ties this displacement of identity to the rise of the medical museum. Dedlow had joined the infantry during the Civil War and, through a series of unfortunate events, lost all four of his limbs through amputation. The graphic story goes into detail, explaining how each limb was lost through enemy action or infection, providing a firsthand account of the grueling removal of limbs without anesthesia. The story, in a sense, provides a detailed background of the medical history of Dedlow’s limbs. The appearance of the fictional account of surgical amputation from the perspective of the patient was the first recorded reference to the phenomenon of *phantom limb*—an occurrence following amputation where the patient continues to feel sensation in the lost body part. In the story, Dedlow is eventually transferred to a hospital in Philadelphia intended to aid soldiers who lost limbs during the war—based on an actual clinic which Mitchell had helped to organize during the conflict—and the account reaches its dramatic climax when the protagonist is asked to take part in a séance. Around a circle of soldiers participating in the séance, the spiritual medium receives a message of a pair of numbers. Spirits communicate through the medium a series of museum catalogue numbers, spoken before the group; “UNITED STATES ARMY MEDICAL MUSEUM, Nos. 3486, 3487.” Dedlow exclaims in response, “Good gracious . . . They are *my legs—my legs!*” Dedlow then recounts, to the astonishment of everyone in the room, that he was briefly able to walk across the room using his invisible legs that the medium had summoned from the museum in spirit. Gradually, however, the power of the invisible, reanimated legs began to fade and

³⁰² As quoted in, Henry, *The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology*, 1964: 56.

³⁰³ Kammen, *Digging up the Dead*, 2010: 114.

Dedlow slowly sank to the floor—once again a shadow of a man without the use of his limbs.³⁰⁴

The Army Medical Museum, around the time of the publication of Mitchell's story, was quickly starting to attract tourists from the broader American public, outside of the circle of professional physicians. The desire to view lost limbs, deformed abnormalities, and the skeletons of races from around the world all proved to be captivating draws for popular audiences. Journalistic accounts of the museum in this period point to the possible metaphysical meditations on life and death that a visitor might engage in while walking through the modestly sized galleries. Physicians, on the other hand, worried that visitors would be drawn to medical museums hoping only to view macabre abnormalities or grotesque deformations. Whatever their motivation for entering the galleries, visitors from off the street easily soon outnumbered professional visitors hoping to consult or research the collections. Reading about the Army Medical Museum in captivating stories like *The Case of George Dedlow*, the public was encouraged to tie together an appeal for the bizarre with a curiosity regarding modernizing medical science. The medical history of patients like the fictional George Dedlow could be viewed through their exhibition in medical museums, their stories preserved in dusty museum catalogues.

Medical museum exhibitions expanded upon the much older practice of medical illustration. Although the illustration—and later the medical photograph—were easier to disseminate, physical examples of specimens were viewed as a valuable complement to medical instruction. Medical photographs and exhibitions of actual specimens, unlike illustrations and paintings, were viewed as more objective conveyers of truth; similarly, wax models were considered to be stable, consistent, alternatives to actual human remains. While the medical illustration or photograph could capture the essence of a particular medical condition, medical museums were founded upon the assumption that the physical record of medical conditions was a more powerful and accurate pedagogical tool. Medical tools, wax models, and illustrations might add significantly to collections, but specimens of human flesh and bone were the most critical aspect of the medical museum collection.³⁰⁵

Medical Displays and World's Fairs

In order to understand the context for the acquisitions and displays of the Mütter Museum, a broader background for the display of medical ideas in the United States is necessary. Between 1876 and 1904, the United States hosted a series of major international expositions where human remains prominently displayed advances in medical science. While many of the skeletons displayed at world's fairs were displayed under the guise of the emerging field of anthropology, the changing nature of medicine in the United States, spanning from the Gilded Age to the Progressive Era, encouraged additional displays on the subject of medical health. New discoveries in anesthesia, prosthetics, and public health were touted, and public medical exhibitions stood nearby the displays created by medical corporations, many of them unveiling new products to

³⁰⁴ Originally published in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1866, the text was republished in an expanded volume of fiction. S. Weir Mitchell, *The Autobiography of a Quack and the Case of George Dedlow* (New York: The Century Company, 1900).

³⁰⁵ Lindgren, *Mütter Museum, Historical Medical Photographs* (New York: Blast Books, 2007): 22.

fairgoers. Historian Julie K. Brown has traced the development of these displays, arguing that they contributed to a broader cultural conception of individual and national health that emerged as the United States, especially between 1876-1904. In addition to presenting novel ideas about health and hygiene, exposition organizers highlighted new urban sanitation systems.³⁰⁶ The era was also marked with a marked growth in eugenics—the notion that the human species could be improved through selective breeding. At the same moment, a broadly conceived notion of hygiene and public health emerged in major urban centers, encouraged in the United States by both public and private organizations that had learned from their counterparts in Europe.³⁰⁷ All of these ideas came to bear both on the global stage of international expositions and in public health campaigns and exhibits of a wide variety and size.³⁰⁸

In 1876, at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, an enormous twenty-one acre facility—the Main Building of the Exposition—was dedicated to the topic of health. Within this large building, a visitor found fifty-two individual exhibitors displaying commercially available medical products, prosthetic limbs, and surgical devices.³⁰⁹ One display, organized by Adam Politzer, professor of otology at the University of Vienna caught the particular attention of the curators of the nearby Mütter Museum. Politzer had created successful displays for the 1867 exposition in Paris; in Philadelphia, he designed a display of dissections “illustrating normal and pathological anatomy of the human ear.”³¹⁰ A curator from the Mütter Museum purchased the collection for the considerable sum of eight hundred dollars.³¹¹ The fine print of the transaction, however, designated that the cost of the collection was not for the specimens of human ears itself, which Politzer had acquired from his own patients, but rather a fee for the custom mounts of the specimens.³¹² This particular detail of the acquisition points to lingering questions surrounding the ethics of acquiring human remains in the wake of changing anatomy laws.

The World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 featured an even larger and more diverse series of medical displays. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the massive fair featured numerous displays of human remains in various contexts, all presented as evidence in advance of scientific arguments. Recently discovered mummies from the American Southwest attracted the attention of an audience who had read extensively about the rediscovery of Cliff Dwellings, but had yet to view them firsthand. Displays of recent finds from the American Southwest were both public and private, for-profit, enterprises—creating a striking mixture of displays methods, seemingly borrowing at times from the circus-like atmosphere of P.T. Barnum’s museum and the rapidly professionalizing nature of nineteenth century museum anthropology. The

³⁰⁶ Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 1-5.

³⁰⁷ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in the Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³⁰⁸ An example of the kinds of public health campaigns, one which combined both major and minor exhibitions, together with literature campaigns, is the sex education efforts of the federal government in the United States. See, Alexandra M. Lord, *Condom Nation: The U.S. Government’s Sex Education Campaign from World War I to the Internet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2010).

³⁰⁹ Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 25-26.

³¹⁰ Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 26.

³¹¹ Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 26-27.

³¹² Brown includes this information in a footnote. Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 220.

anthropology building at the fair featured small displays on physical anthropology, mainly on the heavily racialized practice of anthropometry, or the study of the shape of the bodies of the living. Adding to the mixture of anthropological, or pseudo-anthropological, displays of human remains, separate exhibitors who hoped to display *medical* ideas at the World Columbian Exposition utilized human remains as well. Medical products, which had been placed in the manufacturing section of the 1876 Centennial exposition were moved to the Liberal Arts Department in Chicago. While many of the displays were intended to function as advertisements aimed at medical professionals visiting the fairgrounds, other displays were geared toward the lay-visitor.³¹³ The Army Medical Department sponsored a small exhibit featuring eighty bone sections that demonstrated the effect of bullet wound ballistics on the human body. As noted earlier, the AMM had started to shift its focus away from collecting large numbers of skeletal remains (notably including the comparative anatomy section transferred to the Smithsonian) toward soft-tissue samples cataloguing evidence of communicable diseases. In their small exhibit case at the World's Columbian Exposition, examples of bullet wounds on human bones were both prominent and striking, but images of bacteria and other soft-tissue samples lined the walls behind the case. Notably missing from the AMM displays were studies centering on “comparative anatomy”—or the comparative study of race—that had been awarded a prominent place in the early collections of the museum.³¹⁴

At the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904, as Aleš Hrdlička of the Smithsonian busied himself measuring living visitors and collecting the remains of unfortunate indigenous peoples who had died at the fair, exhibitors were displaying a number of pathology and anatomy galleries. State health departments were encouraged to contribute exhibitions to the fairgrounds, many of which focused on the management of public health crises, one example being tuberculosis. (Anthropologists too, were concerned with tuberculosis, yet they framed the disease in terms of the supposed decline of the American Indian.³¹⁵ In the medical displays at the 1904 fair, the disease was presented with little or no emphasis on race.) The physician and anatomy displays also featured materials brought together from a number of hospitals, laboratories, and private collections. Just as in 1893, collections from the Army Medical Museum were featured prominently in the 1904 fair. These displays included, in the words of a recent historian of the medical displays at the fair, “dissections of all parts of the human body, parallel dissections of the lower animals, and beautifully mounted pathological specimens of diseased conditions of the human body.”³¹⁶ An estimated 800 visitors per day, or around a total of 144,900 visitors, toured the medical displays at the Saint Louis fair; it was assumed that many were either physicians or dentists.³¹⁷

Medical exhibits at international expositions held between 1876-1904, as historian Julie K. Brown has ably demonstrated, grew in both size and sophistication. While certain exhibits did indeed hint at ideas about race, gender, or prehistory in small ways, these themes were noticeably absent in most medical exhibits. Other exhibitions—

³¹³ Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 60-64.

³¹⁴ Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 80-81.

³¹⁵ Ales Hrdlička, *Tuberculosis Among Certain Indian Tribes of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office. Smithsonian Institution: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1909) Bulletin 42.

³¹⁶ Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 178-179.

³¹⁷ Brown, *Health and Medicine on Display*, 2009: 180-181.

specifically those of anthropology or others more focused on eugenic ideas patented under the notion of “hygiene”—pointed more directly to ideas related to racial classification. Displays focused on medicine at international expositions had two important features in common with natural history museums and permanent medical museums. First, the displays at world’s fairs often featured material loaned to the fairgrounds from permanent museums. Additionally, while these fairs did embrace the use of models and casts, nothing was seen to be as compelling or captivating to audiences of professionals as were displays of actual human remains.

Acquiring Bodies for Medicine

Chang and Eng Bunker were born conjoined at the torso in 1811. Originating in Siam (now Thailand), the term *Siamese Twins* was coined to describe the pair as they toured the globe as a curiosity—the term would follow them their entire lives. Originally displayed as a minor sideshow oddity, the two brothers eventually supported themselves through a successful enterprise exhibiting the unusual condition that afflicted them. The two emigrated from Thailand to the United States in 1829 at the age of eighteen and died just a few hours apart in 1874.³¹⁸ Eng, who the autopsy described as the “more excitable” of the twins, had become an alcoholic, and the physicians were curious as to how his drinking would affect their conjoined bodies. During the course of their lives, men of medicine had also grown curious about the band of tissue that connected them—debating whether or not it would be even possible to successfully separate the brothers. When Chang died quietly in his sleep one evening Eng’s fate was sealed, he too would soon die.

Once the pair died, some controversy ensued over the proper treatment of their bodies.³¹⁹ Fifteen days after their death, their bodies arrived at Mütter Museum, where an autopsy was performed by a group of physicians as over one hundred Fellows of the College looked on.³²⁰ The *New York Times* covered the story of their arrival in Philadelphia on the front page of the newspaper. While the *Times* considered the story significant enough subject for a front-page article; the condition of their bodies caused the paper to warn against any desire among readers to see them first hand, stating, “The twins were not lovely in life, and in death their appearance is repulsive. Every ugly feature and uncultivated type seemed to have been made more strongly marked by the hand of death.” The reporter added, “Thousands of people are burning with curiosity to view them. To all such I would say, ‘Do not do so. They are not desirable objects of reminiscence.’”³²¹ According to the autopsy report, no embalming procedure had taken place on their body.³²² In life, the twins had been portrayed as a mysterious and exotic medical mystery; in death, they were viewed as a repulsive, yet valuable foreign specimen.

Over two days, as their bodies began to decay, several plaster casts of the twins were made and the tissue that connected them in life was preserved in death. The

³¹⁸ Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 1987: 133-135.

³¹⁹ Transactions of the College. See, Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia 1. (Philadelphia: College of Physicians of Philadelphia, 1875): 4-5.

³²⁰ Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 1987: 134. The autopsy is also the subject of an edition of the Transactions of the College. See, Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia 1 (Philadelphia: College of Physicians of Philadelphia, 1875).

³²¹ *New York Times*, “Chang and Eng,” (February 11, 1874): 1.

³²² Transactions of the College, 1875, 5.

physicians who attended the autopsy finally had an opportunity to view each part of the unusual band that connected the brothers, as layers of blood and tissue was slowly wiped and peeled away.³²³ Their bodies were also photographed and illustrated as the fellows examined them in detail. Viewed in life as something of a sideshow curiosity, a portion of their mortal remains were placed on display in the Mütter Museum, utilized in teaching both professional and popular audiences about conjoined twins. The case of Chang and Eng, unlike the vast majority of specimens acquired by medical museums, was marked with celebrity status (it was rumored that police surrounded the building the night of their arrival in order to avoid foul play).³²⁴ Despite the unusually high profile nature of the case, the acquisition of the specimen was typical in that their bodies were used for the basis of casts or models following an autopsy, and a small portion of their remains were preserved and designated as a “specimen.” The performative nature of their race presented during life was displaced by medical curiosity upon their death. Demand for medical information was so great that the publication of their autopsy report caused some controversy between the College and several rival medical journals.³²⁵ Writers, and the audiences that soon streamed into the museum to tour the displayed connective tissue and casts, seemed simultaneously drawn to Chang and Eng’s condition, as well as their racial exotic otherness.

In the late nineteenth century, cities along the eastern seaboard passed a series of anatomy acts that allowed for the legal acquisition of cadavers to specific medical institutions. Despite legal protections allowing certain medical schools the acquisition of remains, the demand for cadavers in 1879 already stood at over 5,000 per year, and legal means of acquiring human bodies—mainly through almshouses and prisons—was outpaced by the demand for bodies, with body snatching continuing for a number of years.³²⁶ On the other hand, medical specimens already treated or preserved and intended for the teaching of medical students, also called *preparations*, could be purchased with relative ease. In 1877, after viewing the skeleton of a man estimated to have died between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-four, the Mütter Museum decided to purchase the remains. The skeleton was that of an exceptionally large individual, approximately 7’6” tall, and the remains were briefly on display at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia before being transferred to the Mütter Museum at a cost of \$50. The skeleton had been prepared by a professional purveyor of anatomical specimens, who had entrepreneurially sold specimens to museums and schools. The purveyor offered the skeleton for sale, under the specific condition that no questions were to be asked regarding the exact identity of the deceased. Usually, when no medical history could be offered of the specimen, medical museums found them to be less desirable. The highly unusual size of the giant, however, made the skeleton too hard to pass up. The so-called *Mütter American Giant*, was of keen interest to the museum, which utilized the skeleton in creating displays about pathology resulting in unusual size.³²⁷ To an even greater

³²³ In addition to the autopsy report itself, medical journals reported on the autopsy given to Chang and Eng or the “monster” at the museum. See, “The Siamese Twins,” *The British Medical Journal* 1 No. 689 (1874): 359-363.

³²⁴ “Chang and Eng,” *New York Times* (February 11, 1874): 1.

³²⁵ Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 1987: 136.

³²⁶ Hight, “Body Snatching & Grave Robbing: Bodies for Science,” 2005: 424-425.

³²⁷ The skeleton of the giant has been displayed next to the remains of a woman named Mary Ashberry, a woman with Achondroplastic Dwarfism. Ashberry, who stood a 3’6” tall, provided a striking contrast with

extent than in the case of the *Siamese Twins*—Chang and Eng—the medical display of the giant skeleton deemphasized the ancestral background of the man. While natural history museums might occasionally acquire uniquely large or small human skeletons, for instance, their main goals were to collect racially or historically—not in terms of medical anomalies. Certainly, pathologies were collected by anthropologists, but the acquisition and presentation of the *Mütter American Giant* is clearly unique to the medical museum.

Specimens came to the Mütter Museum, via the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, through a number of avenues.³²⁸ The most common of these was the donation of materials from private individuals—typically medical doctors who had chosen to turn over a specimen that they had preserved themselves. In particular, the Mütter Museum solicited donations from Fellows of the College. Periodically, specimens were prepared by physicians with the museum in mind.³²⁹ When physicians associated with the College traveled to Europe, they were frequently allotted funds from the museum to purchase particularly prized models and specimens, an approach echoed by natural history museums during the first half of the twentieth century.³³⁰ Adding to this kind of donation was the periodic and formalized donation of specimens, library materials, and photographs given to the museum by medical associations throughout the country.³³¹ Although the original funds bequeathed by Thomas Dent Mütter were provided with the intention of constructing a new building for the museum, collections were purchased from the trust throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

At the turn of the century, the College of Physicians of Philadelphia made a point to remind its Fellows that it was interested in obtaining new specimens for the collections. The museum had been able to acquire a number of rare or special specimens, but the administrators of the museum were starting to come to the belief that individual specimens, “when classed with similar ones and studied in groups large enough [might] admit of comparison as to the points of variation from, or conformity to a prevailing type.”³³² The philosophy driving acquisitions—that a greater number of specimens could help in the systematic classification of different types of pathology—echoed the taxonomic drive amongst the scholars who supervised natural history museum

the massive skeleton of the giant. Warden, *The Mütter Museum*, 2002: 10 and 183-184. See also, Ella N. Wade, “A Curator’s Story of the Mütter Museum and College Collections,” in *Transactions and Studies of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 42, No. 2. (1974): 126.

³²⁸ One archival document, in particular, provides a snapshot of medical museum collecting between about 1849-1851. College of Physicians of Philadelphia – Office of the Curator. Museum Catalogue [1849-1851?]. CPP 7/0001-01. Acc. 1991-106.

³²⁹ In 1911, for example, Joseph Tunis, a physician, described in detail his method for preserving a collection of sections of human heads. He had prepared the sections for the Mütter Museum. The sections were photographed, labeled, and utilized extensively in lantern slides for teaching demonstrations. Joseph P. Tunis, “Description of a Series of Frontal and Sagittal Sections of the Adult Human Head Recently Acquired by the Mütter Museum,” in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Third Series* 33 (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1911): 363-365.

³³⁰ Ella N. Wade, “A Curator’s Story of the Mütter Museum and College Collections,” 1974: 122-123.

³³¹ The Mütter Museum, for example, maintained long-standing relationship with the American Surgical Association (ASA). The ASA, over the course of the twentieth century, donated a large series of portrait photographs of their members, and subsequently revisited these photographs that the Mütter Museum preserved. Letter from Joseph McFarland to Walter Estell Lee, April 24, 1942 Curatorial Files. Folder: American Surgical Association. Mütter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

³³² Hayes D. Agnew, “Annual Address of the President,” in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 12 (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1890): xxviii.

collections. Medical museums were clear in their increasing desire to classify examples of pathologies, but only occasionally collected *racially*, hoping to help advance the science of racial classification, still growing in many anatomical and anthropological circles of the era.

Displaying Medical Bodies

By the close of the nineteenth century, the Mütter Museum's collection had grown to the point that its modest exhibition spaces were tightly cramped. The layout of the museum was attractive to visitors, but curatorial staff worried about the preservation of the collections within exhibit cases.³³³ As the collections intended for display grew, not all members of the College were in universal agreement regarding the utility of the museum. In February of 1885, the President of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, J.M. Da Costa, expressed some frustration about the fact that funds dedicated to the College were intended for the acquisition, study, and display of medical specimens. Instead of creating an ever-larger medical museum, he argued that funds should be diverted toward the creation of a laboratory for histology and pathological research. Throughout much of the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, some members of the College of Physicians continually argued that funds would be better spent on research or professional activities of the Fellows rather than on the maintenance of a medical museum. The terms of Mütter's bequest, however, were clear.

Only a few years after Da Costa's critique of the value of the museum collection, a new president of the College, D. Hayes Agnew reported his own impressions of the use of the medical museum. He wrote that, "It is gratifying to know that medical students from the different teaching bodies of the city are beginning to avail themselves of the advantages of the very large, varied and instructive collection which our museum contains."³³⁴ The Fellows of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia were split as to the utility of possessing and displaying a medical collection. This tension frustrated early efforts to craft complete exhibitions. Nevertheless, the museum continued to acquire and display medical specimens, providing context that would allow for the education of physicians and medical students.

By the arrival of the twentieth century, interest in the Mütter Museum had expanded to the point where it became desirable to host temporary and visiting exhibitions in the adjacent halls. Specimens on display in permanent galleries were relabeled and reorganized in the opening years of the century in an attempt to clearly mark each specimen. With specimens placed under glass cases, they were easily accessible to qualified visitors and could be temporarily removed from their cases to be utilized in a demonstration.³³⁵ Periodically, medical specimens were removed from exhibit cases and utilized to illustrate lectures delivered before the Fellows and various medical society meetings held in the same building.³³⁶ Before moving into a new

³³³ Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 1987, 206.

³³⁴ Hayes D. Agnew, "Annual Address of the President," in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 11 (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1889): xxx.

³³⁵ "Appendix, Abstract for the Report of the Committee on the Mütter Museum, 1902," in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 24 (Philadelphia: Published by the College, 1902): 321-322.

³³⁶ James Cornelius Wilson, "Annual Address of the President," in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 38 (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1916): 7.

building, the museum comprised just three small gallery spaces.³³⁷ In 1904, the same year the Saint Louis exposition featured massive medical and anthropological sections devoted to the human body, the Mütter Museum reported that over one thousand medical students visited the small galleries, touring the display cases with their instructors from nearby medical colleges.³³⁸ Attendance in the expanded museum galleries would gradually increase over the next several months. The medical students reported to the curators that the “oral lessons were highly prized.” While visiting the galleries and observing the demonstrations of their professors, the museum reported that, “The behavior of these visiting students has been faultless. Perfect order has always been maintained, and not a specimen has been injured or lost.”³³⁹ Medical students, their professors, and the museum had come to an informal agreement: students could view the rare and useful collections of specimens firsthand, if they behaved in an appropriate manner while touring the galleries.

At the start of the First World War, exhibition halls at the Mütter Museum were receiving a slightly more diverse array of visitors. Fellows of the College remained the most common, but other respected members of the medical community were also invited to tour the galleries. Though objects remained labeled in complex medical terminology, members of the “laity” were allowed to tour the galleries on occasion. For those involved in the operation of the museum, it was a point of pride that the audience for the galleries was increasingly national and international.³⁴⁰

Despite the fact that the Mütter Museum became increasingly open to the public, the small galleries of the museum hosted a comparatively small number of visitors in relation to natural history museums, and thus had only a moderate influence on popular American culture. (Though museum staff complained that the small book intended to register visitors was frequently left unsigned, so the number of total visitors to the galleries was difficult to assess.) The museum claimed that the number of visitors increased grew in terms of geographic diversity, yet the number of confirmed visitors for the first full year following First World War totaled only about one hundred and sixty visitors.³⁴¹ By the end of the Second World War, this number would increase to over six hundred—a larger, yet still modest, annual sum.³⁴² These confirmed figures still paled in comparison to the estimated totals; however, it is likely that a larger number of uncounted visitors toured the galleries.

Displays of specimens consisting of human bodies or body parts in medical museums were in certain ways not wholly unlike displays of human remains in natural history museums, yet medical museum exhibition halls possessed several notable traits

³³⁷ “Appendix, Abstract of the Report of the Committee on the Mütter Museum, 1903,” in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*. 25. (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1903): 179.

³³⁸ “Appendix: Abstract of the Report of the Committee on the Mütter Museum, 1904.” in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 26 (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1904): 305.

³³⁹ “Appendix: Abstract of the Report of the Committee on the Mütter Museum, 1905,” in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Printed for the College 27): 231.

³⁴⁰ “There have also been numerous visits to the Museum by Fellows of the College, as well as by other members of the profession and laity residing in this Commonwealth and in various parts of this, and of foreign countries.” “Report on the Committee on the Mütter Museum,” in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 36 (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1914): 370.

³⁴¹ “Report of the Committee on Mütter Museum for 1920,” in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 42 (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1920): 452.

³⁴² “Annual Reports of the Committees of the Mütter Museum and College Collections,” in *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 12 (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1945): 149.

that made them unique. At the Mütter Museum at the turn of the century, specimens could still be easily removed from their display case in order to be used for close examination in teaching demonstrations. Natural history museum exhibitions, on the other hand, had a greater sense of permanence and were not typically intended for handling. Throughout the opening decades of the twentieth century, the Mütter Museum, unlike the Army Medical Museum, was still primarily geared toward medical students and physicians. Not only were museums of natural history drawing a much larger audience than did the Mütter Museum, the audiences of major metropolitan museums were more diverse. Despite these differences, medical museums and natural history museums still shared a number of aims, and these shared goals led both to cooperation and competition.

Tension and Cooperation between Museums

For a brief moment in the closing decades of the late nineteenth century, several museums and medical colleges began attempts to create comprehensive collections of human skeletal remains on a more global scale. Increasingly important in broader American culture—racial theories—including eugenics and even the lingering influence of phrenology—encouraged physicians to submit skulls to medical museums. While these museums represented different constituencies and possessed slightly different goals, their collections also overlapped, leading to both competition and opportunities for cooperation. While a competitive sentiment between natural history museums had precedent, the Army Medical Museum and Mütter Museum generally worked together by frequently exchanging duplicate collections. The Mütter Museum, in particular, frequently requested from the AMM examples of pathological specimens showing the effect of bullet wounds on the human body. Meanwhile, the Army Medical Museum submitted ethnological material it had acquired to the Smithsonian Institution. Despite the general sense of cooperation between these three institutions, there exist examples where museums became territorial. A request made by the Mütter Museum for duplicate crania collections in the Smithsonian was denied; curators at the Smithsonian rationalized their decision by arguing that duplicate specimens of the kind in question should be sent to a region with a dearth of human remains collections—not to a city like Philadelphia, which had become a national leader in both medicine, and collections of medical specimens.³⁴³ As part of the effort to build comprehensive collection the Smithsonian was unwilling to part with valuable skeletons, at least not without some sort of compensation.

An early interest in racial classification did not entirely prevent the Smithsonian Institution from collecting human remains that showed evidence of pathological conditions or medical practice. On the contrary, collections reflecting these conditions would become increasingly important to natural history collections as the twentieth century wore on, but only when these collections were in historical contexts. As anthropologists became increasingly interested in human history, various forms of body modification and surgery became desirable to collect. Between the late nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth century, however, natural history museums engaged in collecting human remains were often occupied by the large scale project to record and classify the “pure” races of mankind, as well as human remains which reflected the mixing of different racial groups. Skulls that had been modified, therefore, were of less

³⁴³ Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 150.

value than those exhibiting natural characteristics. For many natural history museums, then, collecting the bodies of individuals whose remains reflected a pathological condition assumed secondary importance until much later. Whereas medical museums sought out these types of collections from hospitals and morgues, natural history museums only opportunistically collected human remains possessing pathological characteristics from the graves and cemeteries they exhumed.³⁴⁴

Race and Human History in the Medical Museum

The Mütter Museum, mirroring other museums throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, purchased select specimens while relying heavily on donations to build their collections. While the bulk of the collections focused ongoing interest in human health and medicine, other acquisitions pointed to the prevailing concern with race and human history existing throughout the period. Earlier museum exhibits had helped spread the notion that races could be understood through racial typologies, and the exhibition of skeletons demonstrated the museum's role in this process to the American public. A skeleton, or parts of the skeleton, could be studied or displayed in a variety of ways and the rhetoric that surrounded its acquisition reflected these varied desires. Further, the collections that arrived at the museum often reflected the variety of interests of a physician, or the common practice of opportunistic collecting among the educated elites that was taking place throughout Europe and the United States. Three years before purchasing Adam Politzer's collection of auditory apparatus displayed at the international exposition in Philadelphia, the Mütter Museum purchased seventy skulls from Joseph Hyrtl, a physician from Vienna, that were intended to reflect, "all the tribes of Eastern Europe."³⁴⁵ Inscribed on the skulls was the name of the individual, his or her age at death, cause of death, occupation, and religion. Unlike other scholars collecting skulls during the same period, Hyrtl interpreted his collection as evidence for the incredible variation within ethnic groups—as opposed to other skull collections that were interpreted as reflecting the stability and of racial groups. Steeped in his Roman Catholic worldview, Hyrtl believed that while the external features of mankind responded to environmental conditions, man's mind followed a consistent Divine plan. The relationship between the skull and intellectual ability, therefore, was completely random.³⁴⁶ These conclusions were certainly different from those who had studied earlier skull collections, such as Samuel George Morton. Hyrtl wrote of his collection, "Such a collection will never again be brought together. It is easier to get the skulls of Islanders of the Pacific, than those of Moslim, Jews, and all the semisavage tribes of the Balkan & Karpathien valleys. Risking his life, the gravestealer must be largely bribed."³⁴⁷

In addition to collecting skulls reflecting racial classification ideas of the era, medical museums actively collected examples of human remains and artifacts reflecting prehistoric or historical examples of surgery or body modification. Race and the study of

³⁴⁴ Ales Hrdlička indicates this point when he argues that scholars concerning themselves with anthropometry should, "avoid the inclusion of any individuals who may have been affected by some pathological condition sufficiently to suffer a material alteration in their measurements." Ales Hrdlička, *Anthropometry* (Philadelphia: The Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, 1920): 46.

³⁴⁵ As quoted in Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 1987: 150-151.

³⁴⁶ Gretchen Worden, "The Hyrtl Skull Collection," in *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 17. (1995): 107.

³⁴⁷ As quoted in, Worden, "The Hyrtl Skull Collection," 102.

human history, then, were not simply confined to those scholars working in physical anthropology. In fact, when provided with opportunities to collect specimens thought to illustrate ideas about comparative anatomy, race, or human history, the physicians who contributed to the Mütter Museum eagerly jumped at the chance. Medical museums displayed specimens of animals under the guise of comparative anatomy, but the transitional fossils between various species of human ancestors—gradually appearing in natural history museums—were conspicuously absent.

At the close of the nineteenth century, a small collection of ancient skulls from Peru demonstrating evidence of surgery would confuse the distinctions between institutions concerned with medicine and anthropology. In 1894, the College of Physicians of Philadelphia wrote to the Bureau of American Ethnology regarding a cranial collection that the government wished to discard. The Bureau responded by to the request by informing the College that the skulls had already been donated to other museums and scholars.³⁴⁸ Although the skulls were thought to be representative of the ancient history of the Americas, they were also of value to those interested in the history of medicine. This was certainly not always the case. Numerous examples of modern medical oddities, such as the *Mütter American Giant*, were of little interest to most scholars of anthropology. Nevertheless, there were occasions, as with the ancient Peruvian skulls that showed evidence of surgery, where medical museums and physical anthropologists made competing bids on collections. The Mütter Museum eventually acquired and displayed a series of casts of another set of ancient Peruvian skulls demonstrating evidence of surgery.³⁴⁹

Although the exact date of the donation is unclear, S. Weir Mitchell (1829-1914) gifted his personal collection of sixty American Indian skulls to the Mütter Museum.³⁵⁰ Mitchell was a frequent donor to the museum, having been elected a fellow of the College and serving as the institution's president on two occasions. The collection of Native American crania donated to the Mütter Museum by Mitchell had passed between several physicians, probably in the late nineteenth century, before arriving in Philadelphia.³⁵¹ Most of the skulls were collected from graves in Illinois, with a handful of crania coming from other locations in the region, including Missouri and Wisconsin. Many of the crania gathered by the physicians possessed some "deformity," which is the likely reason that these particular skulls found themselves in the knapsacks of nearby medical doctors. The supposed deformation of the skulls was created by the native practice of cradleboarding their young, gently and gradually molding the skull as the

³⁴⁸ Letter from W.J. McGee to Guy Hinsdale, February 14, 1894. Folder: Muiz Collection of Trephined Skulls – Correspondence. Curatorial Files. Mütter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

³⁴⁹ A photograph and brief description of the casts can be found in Worden, *The Mütter Museum*, 2002: 93.

³⁵⁰ Although the memorandum in the file is undated, clues provided by the text point to the acquisition of the collection of crania as taking place between 1892-1914. The text of the memorandum cites Rudolph Virchow's *Crania Ethnica America*, first published in 1892 and the donor of the collection, S. Weir Mitchell, died in 1914. "Indian Skulls from Burial Mounds in Illinois, near St. Louis, Missouri and Geneva Lake, Wisconsin. Sixty Indian Skulls Deposited by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell." Memorandum. Undated. Curatorial Files. Folder: Indian Skull Collection. Mütter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia. 1006.200-1006.247.

³⁵¹ Gretchen Worden, who was serving as the director of the Mütter Museum, estimated the date of this particular acquisition to be the late nineteenth century. This would be consistent with the date I have estimated for the related memorandum Letter from Gretchen Worden to Dave Grignon, July 9, 1999. Curatorial Files. Folder: Indian Material. Mütter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

child grows. By the end of the century, scientists who studied the practice had finally realized that such deformities did not pass hereditarily; the scientists had finally pegged the cradleboard as the cause of the oddly shaped skulls in certain tribes. Nevertheless, the exact reason for the flattening of the skull was for a time a matter of debate, and both the medical science and anthropology of the era actively sought to differentiate between the effects of cultural practices and heredity on the human body. Further expanding on the conclusions drawn from the practice, the curators at the Mütter Museum argued in a memorandum that the development of the cultural practice of cradleboarding could shed light on the prehistory of North America. The memorandum reads, “It is found that the old North American or South American skulls are not deformed; the conclusion is that Indian mothers did not adopt the method of carrying children which brings about the unintentional cranial deformities, until after the American race had lived upon this continent for a long time.” The scholars researching the skull collection also concluded after a review of their collections and the available literature, “the American race appeared first in America, at a time when man was developed much higher in Europe than at the oldest time we can trace him there.”³⁵² A collection of crania, once brought to a medical museum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, then, could be interpreted in several ways. The collection had clear implications, the physicians believed, for studies on the subjects of culture, heredity, race, and human prehistory. Race certainly remained the dominant factor in how the museum understood the collections, but narratives beyond simple medical histories were occasionally allowed to creep in, influenced by natural history museums like the Smithsonian in Washington and anthropology museums like the University Museum right in Philadelphia. Ideas about race were filtered through letters, correspondence, and shared conferences, and encouraged the acquisition of certain types of skeletons. While medical narratives dominated much of the museum, anthropological narratives of racial classification, cultural habits understood through ethnography, and human history all occasionally crept into medical museum displays.

In 1933, the Mütter Museum joined numerous other natural history museums in displaying a cast of the forged Piltdown Man (discussed in the previous chapter). The specimen was displayed prominently as an example of human evolution and morphology. Though the specimen was a cast—and a hoax—the museum’s choice to display Piltdown Man points to the continued confluence of human evolution and medicine throughout the twentieth century. As noted later in this dissertation, these connections were not always strong, but for visitors to the Mütter Museum, Piltdown Man was viewed as evidence of human evolution.³⁵³

Throughout the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the Mütter Museum encouraged serious-minded medical and historical research on its collections. This did not, however, deter a considerable number of inquiries from interested amateur researchers or members of the public. Noteworthy pieces of the collection, such as the museum’s small section of John Wilkes Booth’s thorax, attracted a wide range of

³⁵² “Indian Skulls from Burial Mounds in Illinois, near St. Louis, Missouri and Geneva Lake, Wisconsin. Sixty Indian Skulls Deposited by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell.” Memorandum. Undated. Curatorial Files. Folder: Indian Skull Collection. Mütter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

³⁵³ Wade, “A Curator’s Story of the Mütter Museum,” 125.

research questions throughout the twentieth century.³⁵⁴ Medical museums typically avoided displaying specimens from significant figures in recent history in fear of the creation of saint-like reliquaries, but these specimens did often find their way into the collection; the Mütter Museum was interested in collecting specimens of important figures in recent history if they demonstrated some sort of interest to pathology. In addition to fragments of the earthly remains of Booth, the museum collected specimens from Grover Cleveland as well as a specimen from the body of Charles J. Guiteau, the assassin of James A. Garfield. While the specimens collected by the Mütter Museum were intended to represent some sort of medical pathology on the surface, the museum eventually embraced utilizing these specimens as important to the history of the United States in efforts to add to the appeal of the museum. The famed conjoined twins, Chang and Eng, for example, continued to appeal to medical specialists, the public, and individuals interested in seemingly exotic history, all for over a century after their death.

The medical body in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, once removed from the hospital, morgue, or grave, transformed its meaning into one or several of many different intellectual or cultural markers. When brought to a medical museum, a Native American body showing evidence of deformity became significant to studies of race, heredity, and human prehistory. In many ways, these interests represent the transfusion of ideas flowing between disciplines in an array of museums of the period.

The Mütter Museum, the Public, and Medical Professionals at the Turn of the Century

In 1900, when the American Medical Association (AMA) met in Atlantic City, New Jersey, many participants in the meeting traveled the one and a half hour train ride to Philadelphia. Philadelphia was the home to fifty hospitals and dispensaries, but the main attraction of the city was the Mütter Museum. Visitors from the AMA toured the modest exhibit halls, where they viewed rare examples of diseased and malformed body parts. An article detailing their visit in the *British Medical Journal* noted that the medical students and doctors were joined in their curiosity by members of the public. During one evening, the museum was opened to “entertain” both the visitors to the AMA and the public. The journal noted of the evening, “The interest shown by the laymen in these matters was more than an ample return for the great trouble taken by the College authorities in arranging the evening.” It was clear, in other words that the lower classes, women, and the less educated took something away from the exhibition, in addition to the learned eye of the physicians. “Retrospectively,” the physicians concluded, “the lesson of the whole matter is that by such methods the lay people can be brought to a much readier and more wholesome appreciation of the aims of the medical profession.”³⁵⁵

Reports documenting the nature of the opening ceremonies of the new College of Physicians of Philadelphia illustrate the character of the medical profession at the turn of the century. Speakers predicted that, “the new building was destined to witness great things. It would endure to see the end of many diseases of which men now thought with anticipatory dread, and it would endure to witness the passing away of much quackery.”³⁵⁶ Andrew Carnegie, the industrialist and philanthropist, had personally

³⁵⁴ Curatorial Files. Folder: Booth.Mütter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

³⁵⁵ The *British Medical Journal* 2 (Philadelphia: 1900): 198.

³⁵⁶ “The College of Physicians of Philadelphia,” *The British Medical Journal* 2, No. 2554 (1909): 1703.

donated \$100,000 toward the construction of the new facility.³⁵⁷ The donation was in line with a massive series of donations made by Carnegie that led to the construction of new libraries across the country. Whereas many of Carnegie's libraries were founded for the broader public, the library and museum housed in the new College of Physicians of Philadelphia building was still intended primarily for specialists with concern for public health.

W.W. Keen, a highly regarded professor from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia at the time of the opening of the new building, wrote an extended report on the nature of the new facility. Much of Keen's report, again published in the *British Medical Journal*, focused on the valuable medical library housed in the building. Keen added a few lines on the nature of the museum, as well, however, pointing to the desired use of the displays. Keen wrote: "Nowhere can the medical visitor to Philadelphia spend a more peaceable or more instructive hour than in our new building amidst its books and specimens."³⁵⁸ When the new building opened, four rooms, making up about 3,500 square feet of floor space, were dedicated to museum galleries. The galleries were intended to be inviting and instructive to medical professionals, but Keen added that the building was, "open to all the non-medical public who may wish to investigate any subject in which they may have some special interest."³⁵⁹ The opening of the museum to the public proved to be a turning point for the institution, eager visitors continually proved the earlier assumptions of the curators to be inaccurate.

Those leading the Mütter Museum were in agreement with Keen's assessment that the move to the new facility would make the collections more accessible. Practically speaking, the new exhibit halls were on the ground floor, meaning that visitors no longer had to climb a long series of stairs in order to reach the museum.³⁶⁰ Ironically, the opening of the new galleries allowed the museum an opportunity to reorganize the museum exhibitions, bringing the museum into a modern era that never occurred; instead, the use of medical museum specimens drastically declined in professional use. Many small medical museums shut their doors, destroying their collections or shipping them to other museums. The Mütter Museum, meanwhile, only became increasingly popular attraction for visitors—and the public continues to be fascinated, confounded, and educated by these collections.

Conclusion

The legacy of medical museums is decidedly unique in terms of museums in the United States. Modern technologies have largely rendered the very concept of medical collections obsolete in terms of their use for educating medical professionals. While these museums were founded with the intention of teaching doctors, they have, in some ways, become public curios of the macabre. Despite the best efforts of nineteenth century curatorial staff, the museum never became the center for research they envisioned. One historian simply argued that, "Despite [the] efforts [of the curators] . . . few persons

³⁵⁷ "The College of Physicians of Philadelphia," 1703.

³⁵⁸ W.W. Keen, "The College of Physicians of Philadelphia: Its Library and Its New Building," *The British Medical Journal* 2, No. 2546 (1909): 1161-1163.

³⁵⁹ Keen, "The College of Physicians of Philadelphia," 1163.

³⁶⁰ "Appendix: Abstract of the Report of the Committee on the Mütter Museum, 1908," in *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1908): 242.

visited the museum; none of the local professors used it in his teaching; and some Fellows dismissed it scornfully as something that survived and grew only because it had an endowed income that could not be diverted to more urgently useful projects.”³⁶¹ More recently, another museum specialist recently described the Mütter Museum as, “Philadelphia’s strangest museum.”³⁶² The history of medical museums in the United States, however, allows us to make more sense of this supposed oddity and gives us a more complex picture than that offered by the disgruntled Fellows who dismissed the museum as a failed attempt at constructing a medical research center. Subtly, the museum contributed to a range of ideas in American culture about the human body. Although these collections, as they pertained to racial classification or prehistory, never ascended to the prominence of natural history museums, they reflected the theories of medical collectors to an audience that ranged from physicians to members of the public.

Medical museums originated around the period of the Civil War intended to serve as engines for the creation of knowledge amongst medical students. Over the course of the ensuing decades, as ideas revolving around public health and hygiene became a matter of public consciousness, medical museums increasingly became a part of the cultural landscape. At the same time, medical museums adopted a goal to promote the methods of the medical community—separating them from quack doctors who promised simple cures in patent medicines. Medical displays, however, were not simply confined to the museum; they were also featured prominently at international expositions. Developments in anthropology—namely the growing study of race via cranial studies, and the study of ancient medicine in the Americas—also occasionally influenced displays and collecting patterns of medical museums.

Although medical displays utilized human remains as tools following the Second World War, new public health concerns dramatically changed the nature of the education.³⁶³ Scattered displays and modestly sized medical museums had failed to fully communicate crucial public health ideas to mass audiences. Nevertheless, the collection of human remains had come to serve a variety of constituencies. Today, the challenges threatening the relevancy of the medical museum seem in certain ways less contentious than do critique directed toward museum collections more firmly ensconced in the study of indigenous peoples. Exhibitions on medical history built on the strength of the collection and while occasional controversy surrounded the display of medical bodies, the challenges brought forward were less vehement than later challenges brought against the display of vast numbers of indigenous remains in the bone rooms of natural history museums.

Today, the Mütter Museum maintains a collection of about 20,000 objects.³⁶⁴ Between the mid 1980s and 2007, the Mütter Museum’s attendance ballooned from about 5,000 annual visitors to more than 60,000 visitors per year.³⁶⁵ Clearly, visitors are still “burning with curiosity” to view medical oddities, just as they were in 1874 when Chang and Eng arrived at the museum for an autopsy. Over the course of past few decades, the

³⁶¹ Bell, *The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 151.

³⁶² Moses, *In the Lost Museum*, 59.

³⁶³ Competing sex education campaigns in the U.S., for example, generally relied on curriculum development, temporary displays, and mass mailings. Medical museums are conspicuously absent in post-war public health campaigns. See Lord, *Condom Nation*.

³⁶⁴ Lindgren, *Mütter Museum*, 14.

³⁶⁵ Lindgren, *Mütter Museum*, 13.

Mütter Museum has assumed an increasingly significant place in the study of the history of medical science, delicately attempting to reshape aspects of a public-health mission while also becoming an active historical research center. Human remains continue to be prominently displayed, and they still draw a respectable audience to the modestly sized institution.

Unlike medical photographs or textbooks, medical museums and the clinical display of patients before medical students or professional societies were limited by both time and space. Medical photographs or textbooks could be circulated to physicians away from major urban centers, whereas the physical space of the museum was limited to those physicians either visiting or training in Philadelphia.³⁶⁶ Despite this, however, the medical museum did not become obsolete and forgotten overnight. Medical students and the public maintained a level of curiosity regarding the specimens on display at the Mütter Museum, and they continued to visit exhibition halls.

Even as medical museums increasingly became vehicles for presentations of public health, the spotlight on the display of human remains in the United States would shift dramatically away from medical displays and toward an exhibit hall constructed for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, California. Although the modest medical displays of bodies featured at the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia would have been remarkable to the average visitor and pragmatic to the medical professional, the displays planned for San Diego were to be quite unlike anything audiences in the United States had ever seen.

³⁶⁶ Lindgren, *Mütter Museum*, 22.

Chapter 4—The Story of Man Through the Ages: Artistry, Anthropology, and Scientific Certainty on Display

In 1915, shortly after the completion of the Panama Canal, two major expositions opened within weeks of one another in California; San Francisco hosted the Panama-Pacific Exposition and San Diego featured the Panama-California Exposition. The San Francisco fair, both larger and federally sponsored, attracted nearly nineteen million people. San Diego lost the competition to host the official fair, but nevertheless created an event that attracted a crowd of over three and a half million. Two fairs on the edge of the North American continent stood a world apart, both geographically and culturally, from the outbreak of war in Europe. The fairs were bright, featuring buildings bathed in warm colors and nostalgic portraits of California history.³⁶⁷ For many elites in the United States, world's fairs temporarily replaced the Grand Tour of Europe as the Continent became engulfed in war.

One of the main attractions to the San Diego fairgrounds, and one of the displays that would have the most lingering influence on American ideas and culture, was a major exhibit on the science of man. The exhibition ultimately resulted in the creation of a new museum, but its greatest significance for the collection and display of human remains was the manner in which it treated themes of race and history. Much of the exhibit focused on racial classification theories that dominated physical anthropology in the United States. Almost bursting into the exhibition were dramatic and emerging examples of the human past, both in terms of the evolution and prehistory of the modern human. These themes were presented through a new intertwining *narrative* of artistry, human drama, and actual human skeletons. If the narrative drama surrounding human evolution had the makings of a compelling story, the scientism that dominated the remainder of the exhibition was presented in almost total isolation, lacking any real context or true narrative. The displays on the subject of race and human evolution at the Panama-California Exposition, soon to be the founding collection for the San Diego Museum of Man, were, at the time, the most complete exhibition on the natural history of mankind ever to be shown in public.³⁶⁸ The founders and early observers of the displays and resulting museum would credit the physical anthropology collections, consisting of a unique collection of skeletons and mummified remains, as a lasting legacy of the fair.

³⁶⁷ Robert Rydell offers both basic information about the two fairs as well as compelling analysis about their impact and meaning. In summarizing the size and scope of the fairs, I have relied heavily on his chapter on the California fairs in his classic account of world's fairs in the United States. Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). In addition to this classic account of the fairs, a more recent and specific exploration can be found in Matthew F. Bokovoy, *The San Diego World's Fairs and Southwestern Memory, 1880-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005). Bokovoy discusses the physical anthropology displays in particular in his third chapter, 87-113. Bokovoy relies heavily on published primary and secondary accounts of the fair, including archival materials from the San Diego Historical Society. In this chapter, I rely on published primary and secondary accounts as well as the records of the Smithsonian Institution, which preserved the majority of the original archival material related to the development of the exhibition.

³⁶⁸ "These exhibits were in preparation for over three years. They are original and much more comprehensive than any previous exhibits in this line, either here or abroad." See, "Preparation of Exhibits Illustrating the Natural History of Man," in *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, 65. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1916): 55

Also significant was the introduction of artistic narrative into the representation of human evolution—a technique that would become increasingly central for museums in the United States, especially since they lacked the original prehistoric or paleoanthropological specimens of Europe, Asia, or Africa. New discoveries and increased scientific emphasis on prehistory and evolution would push curators to enrich the storytelling behind expanding exhibits. Natural history museums were already in the midst of a major transition, moving from Victorian Era displays of endless rows of glass cases to more creative methods that embraced contextualizing narratives. In the case of displays of human remains in museums of the United States, the *Story of Man Through the Ages* marked the start of a shift in exhibit methods—a legacy for display that we still present today.

Anthropological presentations at fairs and expositions in the United States up to this point had typically focused mainly on material culture, repeatedly serving as an opportunity for bringing together massive numbers of archaeological and ethnographic objects for temporary display. Often, these newly acquired collections were packed up after the fair, and museums around the world vied for the opportunity to purchase the best collections when the fair concluded. Occasionally, as in Chicago years before the San Diego exhibits emerged in Balboa Park, expositions in the United States were utilized as opportunities to create new museums. Previous fairs in Europe too, such as Paris (1878) and Dresden (1911), had included popular exhibitions on “Man,” while the World’s Columbian Exposition (Chicago, 1893) highlighted the growing field of anthropometry.³⁶⁹ The fair in San Diego was the first to put human remains and representations of science drawn from the study of human remains at center stage. Indeed, this fair’s anthropology exhibit became the main attraction of the fair—apart from its striking Spanish Colonial style architecture and lush fairgrounds. Racial science explained the human differences on display in San Diego,³⁷⁰ and the study of the human body taught visitors how scientists arrived at racial characterizations. The exhibit embedded ideas about human evolution and prehistory in the displays, topics that had received comparatively little attention in previous exhibitions. While the exhibit did present a range of individual variations within populations or “races,” the main theme of the exhibition was demonstrating racial typologies based on research taking place in museum collections of human remains. The exact details of racial theory accepted by museums in the United States continued to shift, but positivist scientists largely accepted that human races were distinct and determinable. Visitors walking through the exhibit hall learned how studies of human remains, combined with the anthropometry of the living, shaped ideas about humankind. The exhibit postulated boldly that new discoveries were upending existing ideas about evolution. The displays also showed dramatic examples of Pre-Columbian skeletal remains that captivated those who viewed them.

³⁶⁹ Unpublished Manuscript, “The Division of Physical Anthropology at the Panama-California Expos, San Diego,” Correspondence 1912-1915. San Diego Exposition. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. This document, reprinted in numerous versions throughout archival materials, was eventually published as a catalogue and as the following article Ales Hrdlička, “An Exhibit in Physical Anthropology,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 1, No. 7. (1915): 407-410. The exhibit catalogue was published as Ales Hrdlička, *A Descriptive Catalog of the Section of Physical Anthropology Panama-California Exposition 1915* (San Diego: National Views Company, 1915).

³⁷⁰ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 219.

Ultimately, however, while the exhibit was determined by many to be a resounding success in terms of shaping popular thought through the lens of physical anthropology, it clung to the supposedly scientifically rigid racial classification theories developed in bone rooms across the United States. While the displays were influential in crafting those displays that followed in later decades, many of the ideas presented about race science seemed quickly outdated.

The exhibition hall, *The Story of Man Through the Ages*, featured dramatic displays of human remains, complemented by artistic works portraying the racial diversity of mankind in terms of “racial classification.”³⁷¹ The Panama-California exhibit differed from previous displays in two significant ways. First, the displays introduced many new ideas of human evolution at the start of the exhibition, a topic largely ignored or unknown by creators of earlier displays. The second manner this display differed from earlier exhibits on man was its transparent reliance on the study of the human body. *The Story of Man Through the Ages* brought together ideas and examples drawn from thousands of specimens collected from around the globe and worked to blend three major topics—evolution, prehistory, and race. Despite the seemingly modernized collection practices informing the presentation, the displays in San Diego actually stood in contrast to a growing relativism—or notions about racial and cultural equality of mankind—in the anthropological community that moved toward the idea that differing cultures are equal in complexity/sophistication, rather than seeing them as moving along a ladder from primitive to civilized.³⁷² Influenced as much by Lamarck as Darwin, art dramatized the evolution of man, emphasizing the growing size of the brain cavity and mankind’s increasing talent for making tools. As ideas about the equality of cultures entered the discipline, positivist ideas regarding racial classification were pushed to the verge of collapse. Anthropological exhibitions, such as the one in San Diego, that centered on human remains continued to separate and classify the races of mankind. The scholars mounting the exhibition remained convinced that new discoveries related to the study of human evolution contributed to understanding the modern human species, particularly the emergence of racial difference.

Crafting Exhibitions for San Diego

Edgar Hewett, an archaeologist of growing prominence in the American Southwest, was hired by fair organizers to craft exhibitions on archaeology and ethnology for the San Diego fair. Hewett had a reputation as an effective and clear teacher, and was known for successfully lobbying for the American Antiquities Act a decade earlier. His skills as an effective communicator and academic politician made him ideally suited to lead the effort to create displays for the fair.³⁷³ While many admired Hewett’s ability to advocate for archaeology politically, some resented his growing stature in the field and envied his leadership position in San Diego. Hewett, for his own part, distrusted his colleagues in San Diego and turned to his counterparts at the Smithsonian for help

³⁷¹Representing what was perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the exhibit, due to a lack of funds, Hrdlička did eventually publish a catalogue of the exhibit. Hrdlička, *A Descriptive Catalog*.

³⁷² A comparison of the ideas found in the *Science of Man Building* with those brought forward by Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, and others can be found in Sackman, *Wild Men*, 262-265.

³⁷³ Snead, *Ruins and Rivals*, 77.

organizing the exhibition. Hewett hoped that the fair could serve as an opportunity to build a new museum from the ground up—a museum that he might someday lead.

Soon after being hired to organize an exhibit, Hewett made contact with William Henry Holmes and Aleš Hrdlička.³⁷⁴ Enjoying a generous budget stemming mainly from San Diego boosters, Hewett worked with the Smithsonian curators to complete a plan for the exhibitions at the beginning of 1912. In March, the Smithsonian officially agreed to a plan that allotted \$27,000 of Hewett's budget for the preparation of an exhibition in physical anthropology.³⁷⁵ Another \$5,000 was allotted to Holmes, who agreed to use the funds to craft displays on the "mining and quarrying industries and the stone working of the American tribes."³⁷⁶ The Smithsonian had routinely mounted exhibitions for American archaeology and ethnology on this scale, but the amounts dedicated for displays in *physical anthropology* were unprecedented.

The National Museum's rationale for such an agreement was clear. Previous fairs reported increasing public interest in the comparative study of the human body, and the Smithsonian had the expertise and experience to guide such displays. The fair also presented an opportunity to gather more remains for its growing bone empire, as the budget included funds for travel to regions of the globe underrepresented in Smithsonian collections. The Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Charles D. Walcott, wrote Hrdlička that, "your work in this connection will afford an important opportunity to promote the interests of the National Museum."³⁷⁷ Holmes, the quietly clever and dignified scholar who now served as the Head Curator of the Department of Anthropology, wholeheartedly agreed with this idea. Holmes wrote the Smithsonian administration, "It is my feeling, that if carried out, the work planned will not only prove of great importance to the Exposition but that it will be of very especial benefit to the National Museum." Holmes continued, "I am anxious to see Doctor Hrdlička and his Division stand at the head of this branch in America and for that matter in the world, for the study of the race and race interests, must, I believe, grow to much greater importance in the near future."³⁷⁸ Although Hrdlička would eventually collect valuable information on human evolution and prehistory, Smithsonian participation in the exhibition was initially couched in terms of racial science.

A memorandum sent to the museum's Assistant Secretary marked the advantages for the Smithsonian of contributing to the fair. In articulating these, Hrdlička listed the

³⁷⁴ Hewett had worked with Holmes and Hrdlička while working at the Bureau of American Ethnology in an unsalaried position while he lobbied for the creation of the American Antiquities Act. James Snead, *Ruins and Rivals: The Making of Southwest Archaeology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001): 77.

³⁷⁵ Letter from C.D. Walcott to Aleš Hrdlička, March 30, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 5: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California Jan-March, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁷⁶ Letter from C.D. Walcott to W.H. Holmes, March 30, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 5: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California Jan-March, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁷⁷ Letter from C.D. Walcott to Aleš Hrdlička, March 30, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 5: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California Jan-March, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁷⁸ Letter from W.H. Holmes to Richard Rathbun, March 27, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 5: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California Jan-March, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

acquisition of new skeletal material as the most critical element of the plan. Hrdlička argued that participation in the fair would result in:

Additions of highly desirable skeletal material from regions and races which are but poorly or not at all represented in our collections. This material will greatly enhance the study and also the exhibitions value of our collections, and there are no means in sight of acquiring it otherwise.³⁷⁹

Just days after the Smithsonian's approval of participating in the San Diego fair, planning for an expedition to St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, began. Two scholars, working for both the museum and the fair, were to take photographs and collect valuable linguistic data. One scholar was also assigned the additional task of bringing back a "collection of skeletal material."³⁸⁰ With that assignment, the process of building a new museum of man for the city of San Diego, based centrally upon the research and display of human remains, began. Unlike in the Smithsonian and within anthropology more generally, where physical anthropologists of the era believed their science was being marginalized, the study of human remains was to be central in the new museum in San Diego.

The early plans for the displays were both broad and vague. Plans included sections on "the Evolution of Culture" and "the Native Races of America," in addition to "the Physical Evolution of Man."³⁸¹ Hrdlička was successful in gathering a large and growing collection of bones for the Smithsonian, but he failed to convince museum leaders to set aside the funding required to create new physical anthropology displays. Hrdlička also failed to convince fair organizers for the St. Louis Exposition in 1904 to create large-scale displays of any kind on the subject of physical anthropology.³⁸² The opportunity to create displays at the San Diego fair that could teach large audiences about the science of man, almost completely guided by his own model, greatly appealed to Hrdlička and his large ego. He took over the assignment of collecting material for the fair, and his obsessive ambition pushed him to plan for displays of a massive, global scale.

Collecting Bodies to Display

Early in the planning stages of the fair, it was agreed that the bulk of the skeletal material that Hrdlička collected would become the property of the Smithsonian Institution, with a smaller allotment to remain in San Diego for the new museum, following the fair.³⁸³ This framework for distributing collections followed the standard

³⁷⁹ Memorandum, "Advantages to the National Museum," Aleš Hrdlička. Attached to Letter from W.H. Holmes to Richard Rathbun, January 31, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 5: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California Jan-March, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁸⁰ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, March 29, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 5: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California Jan-March, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁸¹ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 220.

³⁸² Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 221.

³⁸³ Letter from D.C. Collier to Charles D. Wolcott, January 24, 1912. Correspondence 1912-1915. San Diego Exposition. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

that the Smithsonian hoped to adopt for all future collections: the National Museum obtaining the best or most desirable specimens, with representative (or duplicate) selections of materials sent to other locations—in this instance the San Diego fair and later the museum in the same city. Hrdlička first hired a pair of modelers to create busts to illustrate racial types in different parts the globe. Artists were chosen to closely followed the direction of scientists in the creation models of men and women of particular races or of distant human ancestors. Scientists instructed artists to depict individuals based on exact measurements of living humans or skeletal remains. Hrdlička then hired anthropologists to collect skeletal material from central and southern Europe. Another anatomist, Philip Newton from Georgetown University, traveled to the Philippines, specifically charged with the task of collecting Negrito remains. Newton's expedition, supervised and supported in part by the United States Army,³⁸⁴ resulted in the desecration of a large number of graves that were dug open to collect materials for display in San Diego.³⁸⁵ Judged simply in terms of acquisition of remains, the expedition was considered a resounding success. Acquisitions of remains from around the world were not without challenges, however, both from the outbreak of confusing international conflict and resistance from local governments.

Hrdlička himself undertook an incredible series of expeditions, collecting in Europe before traveling to Siberia, Mongolia, and then Peru.³⁸⁶ Boxes of materials, most filled to the brim with human remains, poured into the Smithsonian Institution throughout the duration of Hrdlička's extended travels. Before his departure abroad, however, Hrdlička's planned Siberian expedition to collect skeletal materials and measurements encountered roadblocks. Upon learning of his planned expedition, the Foreign Office of St. Petersburg informed the Smithsonian that the plan could not be approved until more detailed itineraries were submitted.³⁸⁷ Eventually, working with the State Department, Hrdlička gained access to Siberia. This experience was not an isolated one; in the early years of the twentieth century, governments around the globe were increasingly protective of antiquities found on their soil. Growing nationalistic concerns fueled legislation to protect antiquities, keeping the best antiquities, relics, and remains for national museums and only allowing certain material to be sent abroad. Hrdlička,

³⁸⁴ The United States founded Civil Government in the Philippines in 1901 and until the administration of Woodrow Wilson, the US controlled nearly all official affairs in the country. On the ground, this meant that those working on behalf of museums and fairs in the country were given protection and military supervision, though this did not fully prevent danger from disease or backlash from indigenous peoples when attempting to collect skeletons. In the case of Philip Newton, the U.S. Army offered to transport Newton and his collections to and from the Philippines, however, the Smithsonian ultimately decided to send Newton himself on a commercial ship. Newton's collections, however, were cared for by the U.S. Army. Letter from C.D. Walcott to Quartermaster General, U.S. Army, May 21, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 6: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California April-June, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives. On the decision to send Newton himself on a commercial ship, see Letter from C.D. Walcott to the Assistant Secretary of War. May 4, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 6: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California April-June, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁸⁵ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 221.

³⁸⁶ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 221.

³⁸⁷ Letter from Unknown Author to Charles D. Walcott, June 14, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 6: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California April-June, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

however, distinguished between the value of antiquities and the scientific value of human remains. Hrdlička wrote of his plans for exploring Peru, “The object of my visit will be restricted to observations on the living and collections of skeletal material. There will be no excavations for or collection of antiquities.”³⁸⁸ Whereas antiquities could be sold on the art market, he argued that human remains held little value outside of studies on race, prehistory, or medicine. In this context, Hrdlička viewed, the value of the body was almost solely in its use as a scientific or teaching instrument (this said, he was not above inquiring about the price of collections of remains). The term *antiquities* had at various times been utilized to describe both artifacts and human remains; Hrdlička distinguished skeletons and mummies as separate *specimens* valued only as objects for science.

Other scholars were also faced with increasing obstacles to collecting. Hiram Bingham, the Yale archaeologist credited with discovering Machu Picchu in 1911, two years later wrote to William Henry Holmes about the changing conditions for removing archaeological materials from South America. Bingham, who was thought to have tried to establish an academic monopoly for Yale University in Peru, told Holmes that he believed Hrdlička was going to face new challenges in Peru during his planned expedition. Bingham wrote, “He is going to have, I am afraid, considerable difficulty in getting permission to investigate graves and export bones.” He continued:

Although the material which he is after is of no particular value to the Peruvians, and although they would not know what to do with it if they had it, the very fact that he is willing to come such a long distance, and spend money in securing it, is sufficient proof to them that the material that he is after is material that they ought to keep in the Country.³⁸⁹

Although Bingham and other archaeologists of the era were often willing to work within the confines of new international regulations, they typically despised the notion of asking permission to work on materials that host nations seemed uninterested in either studying scientifically or preserving. Though archived records suggest that archaeologists of this period seldom considered indigenous rights to control the remains of their ancestors, archaeologists did gradually come to respect national regulations regarding the ownership of antiquities. Skeletons stood apart, scientists continued to plea, arguing that a lack of value on the black market meant their only value as objects were as scientific specimens.

Scholars interested in human remains and ancient antiquities had reason for concern, though the problems were often far different from what they had anticipated. What Hrdlička found when he arrived in Peru was shocking. Ancient cemeteries had been ransacked and looted. Artifacts were removed and littered across the surface of the ground. Looters had unturned thousands of graves from ancient cemetery sites in the search for gold and relics. Thousands of ancient human bones were simply tossed aside, left to bleach in the hot sun. With the graves unturned, and bones lying on the surface of

³⁸⁸ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, April 27, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 6: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California April-June, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁸⁹ Letter from Hiram Bingham to W.H. Holmes, January 7, 1913. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 8: Exposition: Panama-California Expo. San Diego, Calif., 1913. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

the ground, Hrdlička was able to collect an unprecedented number of pre-Columbian crania. The circumstances also afforded him the opportunity to quickly find and collect rare examples of skeletons showing evidence of disease, trauma, and surgery that had been uncovered and left behind by looters who were primarily interested in artifacts that could be sold on the illicit art market.³⁹⁰

Hrdlička's interest in Alaska, Siberia, and China was due in large part to his interest in the history of the peopling of the Americas. He observed that among the people of the parts of Asia he planned to explore, "are found physical types in every respect identical with the American Indian." Simply stated, American Indians appeared to share certain physical features with people in Asia. He continued that, "the object of my trip is to trace, in a preliminary way, the remnants of the stock of people from which in all probability the American race branched off, a problem which is becoming one of the most important subjects of research in American anthropology."³⁹¹ Hrdlička's interest in Peru had a slightly different rationale. In writing to the State Department, Smithsonian Secretary Charles D. Walcott explained of his intentions, "The main purposes of his studies and collection will be to ascertain the distribution of various physical types of man in Peru, and the study of the diseases to which these native populations were subject before their contact with the Spaniards."³⁹² Despite his fears to the contrary, the Peruvian government welcomed Hrdlička's collecting of human remains for the exhibition.³⁹³ At the time, the claim that scientific expeditions were only interested in human remains worked to assuage certain governments, especially colonial governments who were largely uninterested in indigenous attitudes towards death and burial. Despite being granted formal access to collect skeletons in Peru, Hrdlička told the *New York Times* that "the opportunities for getting prehistoric skeletons in the rich burial grounds and ruins of that country will have practically vanished four or five years hence." The difficulties that scientists in the United States faced in collecting these remains would no doubt allow looters to ravage the ancient burials, the paper reported.³⁹⁴

Despite some setbacks, the Smithsonian largely considered Hrdlička's global expeditions to collect human remains a success. In Europe, he examined a large number of the most significant ancient human remains that had been placed in museums, a claim

³⁹⁰ Hrdlička built a collection of over one thousand pathologic specimens, turning the collection over to the city of San Diego. In 1980, the San Diego Museum of Man published a catalogue of Hrdlička's original paleopathology collection. Spencer L. Rogers notes, "Dr. Hrdlička traveled to Peru and found that no excavation was needed as most of the ancient cemeteries had been despoiled by artifact hunters. Skulls and bones littered the surface of the sites. Because of this, he was able to examine an immense number of specimens and to make a selective collection in a relatively short time. The disadvantage of this was the lack of cultural association and disassociation of the bones." See, Spencer L. Rogers, "Forward" in Rose A. Tyson and Elizabeth Dyer S. Alcauskas, eds. *Catalogue of the Hrdlička Paleopathology Collection* (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Man, 1980), Vii.

³⁹¹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, April 27, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 6: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California April-June, 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁹² Letter from C.D. Walcott to the Secretary of State, May 9, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 7: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California July-Dec. 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁹³ Letter from Justo Perez Figuerola to The First Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Relations. June 21, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 7: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California July-Dec. 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁹⁴ "Notes and Gleanings," *New York Times*, February 15, 1914, C4.

that no other American could make at that time.³⁹⁵ He used the opportunity to have new casts, or detailed replicas, made. Hrdlička noted, “these casts will supplement our collections which are already richer in this line than any other on this continent.” Although foreign museums could request original skeletons to be cast at any time, there was no guarantee as to the ability of the museum to create a detailed, and accurate, copy. By making casts of skeletons in European museums himself, Hrdlička believed that the Smithsonian could ensure the accuracy of the casts in various comparative studies. Casts were considered easily measured and could be used repeatedly for study. A student might view the cast of a rare fossil whose original might be housed in a museum thousands of miles away, comparing it against the actual skeletons in the bone rooms of the Smithsonian. In addition to casts, Hrdlička’s travels in Europe yielded a collection of artistic representations of ancient human forms in plaster, as well as a modest new collection of ape skulls and skeletons. These too might be judged against the many thousands of human skeletons already in the collection. Before concluding his work in Europe, the curator organized excavations in Bohemia and the Ukraine, which resulted in the collection of early historic and prehistoric material then very rare in the United States. Copies of the casts and renderings were sent to Washington and San Diego, building the Smithsonian collections while also preparing for the exhibition. Meanwhile, remains from Newton’s expedition to the Philippines added to the continued stream of bones arriving at the Smithsonian.

Later in the summer of 1912, Hrdlička left for Russia and Mongolia, where he both collected and scouted regions for previously unknown collections of remains. In Mongolia for example, Hrdlička leveraged the assistance of “the Russians and some Cossacks” to gather 215 skulls of Mongolians and 15 skulls and a single complete skeleton of Buraites. The majority of these collections would eventually be deposited in the United States National Museum; however, curators would first select certain materials for display at the Panama-California Exposition.

Casts and artistic renderings of ancient man were valued, but Hrdlička argued that from the bones collected in Asia he gathered hard data to test another idea. The most significant science stemming from observation of modern human remains from Eastern Asia, it was argued, was the comparison of Asian physical types to modern day American Indians.³⁹⁶ The Smithsonian wanted to test the idea that ancient man had crossed the Bering Strait land bridge to the Americas. In order to test this idea, the museum wanted to compare Asian populations to the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The museum therefore desired thousands of skeletons from all across Asia. These skeletons from Asia could then be compared to the already massive collections the museum possessed from the Americas. Evidence collected by Hrdlička during his efforts to collect material for the Panama-California Exposition would largely drive his subsequent efforts to describe the relations between the populations of Eastern Asia and the Americas. This included

³⁹⁵ Hrdlička noted that his request to view the bones of *Pithecanthropus erectus*, or Java Man, was denied, and that this was occurring “to everybody.”

³⁹⁶ Hrdlička’s account of the above occurrences appears in a letter written to W.H. Holmes, the longstanding Head Curator in the Department of Anthropology. In a lengthy thirteen-page report, Hrdlička describes both his success and his struggles in obtaining new information and collections. Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, October 19, 1912. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 7: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, California July-Dec. 1912. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Hrdlička's controversial claim of a relatively recent arrival of American Indians in North America. In this case, as in numerous others, the impetus to collect provided by a new exhibition resulted in permanent collections important for future research.

Upon Hrdlička's return to the Smithsonian, he busied himself with organizing a series of expeditions supervised mainly by individuals he had recently met in Europe. Expeditions to British East Africa, Australia and South Africa were hastily planned, however, all three were eventually cancelled. The slated leader of the initial expedition to British East Africa fell ill and the appropriate paperwork for the Australian expedition failed to be processed in time to make the expedition possible.³⁹⁷ Plans were again changed when a young scholar Hrdlička met in Prague named Adalbert Schück, agreed to collect in South Africa and British East Africa. The plan allowed for Schück to collect skeletal materials and take photographs of indigenous communities in Africa, with the hope that new pygmy material would directly add to the science of classifying contemporary African Americans in the United States.³⁹⁸ Upon hearing of the outbreak of war, Schück reported to government officials in British East Africa, presenting his papers and letter of introduction from the Smithsonian. Schück, a native of what was then Austria, was treated as a suspected spy and arrested.³⁹⁹ Eventually, he was allowed to leave the country, but he was not permitted to ship what he had already found to Washington.⁴⁰⁰ Although the hardships encountered by Schück in collecting human remains abroad were not entirely representative, they do point to various challenges experienced by anthropologists hoping to collect human remains for research and display in the United States, especially those working abroad at the outset of the war.

Constructing Race and History

Hrdlička described *The Story of Man through the Ages* as an effort to “bring together a comprehensive, instructive and harmonious exhibit relating to the natural history of man.”⁴⁰¹ Despite the title, a narrative *story* of human evolution was only embraced to a rudimentary extent—apparent primarily through the vehicle of artistic reconstructions of man's earlier ancestors. Although the vast majority of visitors would not have understood it as such, the exhibition was essentially a demonstration of the many scientific facts the Smithsonian believed it could draw from its growing human remains collections, as well as the collections of the fossils and bones of human ancestors housed in museums abroad. Significantly, a reliance on artistic representation of human remains would work to introduce new forms of narrative into exhibits on the subject of human evolution—a major turning point in how museums in the United States

³⁹⁷ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, September 12, 1913. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 8: Expositions: Panama California Exposition San Diego, Calif. 1913. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁹⁸ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, January 31, 1914. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 9: Exposition: Panama-California Exposition 1914-1916. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

³⁹⁹ Letter from A. Schück to Aleš Hrdlička, September 9, 1914. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 9: Exposition: Panama-California Exposition 1914-1916. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

⁴⁰⁰ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, October 6, 1914. Office of the Secretary Records, 1880-1929. Record Unit 45, Box 22. Folder 9: Exposition: Panama-California Exposition 1914-1916. Smithsonian Institution Archives.

⁴⁰¹ Hrdlička, “An Exhibit in Physical Anthropology,” 408.

represented human evolution. Subtle introductions of bronze busts and the human story of evolution notwithstanding, the major feature of this exhibit was the display of a large number of human skeletons and mummies—representing just a portion of the entire number of remains added to permanent bone rooms in San Diego and Washington. Taken together, artistic recreations, casts, and actual human remains in the exhibit were intended to promote and advance the science of physical anthropology as a discipline. Some journalists tried to advance dramatized, almost fictionalized, accounts of humanity based on the bones displayed in San Diego, but the narrative surrounding man's evolution and development into supposedly distinct races was far from explicitly presented. The organization of the exhibit reflected the changing features of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian, and elsewhere, around the age of the First World War; displays that ultimately debuted in San Diego were in a centrally located part of the fairgrounds. Opening rooms featured natural light streaming in from windows above onto the bronzes and bones.

The first of these rooms, generally following the original plan for the building, was filled with a working anthropological laboratory,⁴⁰² library, and desks that could be converted into a podium for lectures. Lecturers spoke on subjects ranging from anthropometry to evolution, mirroring the subjects of the four rooms that followed. Visitors to the fair could observe an anthropologist taking cranial measurements of a volunteer or explaining various scientific instruments. The conclusion of a lecture might inform the visitor of the significance of the whole exhibition in understanding mankind. Hrdlička's implicit arguments espoused individual variation within constructed racial groupings, though at the same time the exhibition posited the evolutionary development of particular racial groupings. Visitors learned that racial types had evolved over time from very distant common ancestors. Individual variation, as interesting as it may have been, was subverted by overarching theories of racial classification as Hrdlička developed his exhibitions to support the idea that, while evolutionary change occurred, it did so *within* racial groups, not across them. Lectures and demonstrations in the opening room introduced many of these ideas to visitors before they entered the main galleries. Though carefully avoiding positioning certain races as more evolutionarily advanced than others, the exhibition seemingly argued that certain racial groups maintained some primitive features. Instead of presenting a clear narrative arc on racial history, the exhibit focused instead of identifying races; the human body, it was shown, just as with animals, could be neatly identified, organized, and classified as a specimen. Instead of detailing the relationship between the peoples of Asia and the Americas through the story of the journey of modern humans across the Bering Strait, the exhibit hinted to their close relationship by comparing the features of their bodies.

As visitors moved into the second room, they found displays on the subject of human evolution. Natural light poured down from the ceiling. In the center of the room were a series of ten dramatic busts. The busts were something of an experiment. Although artists and scientists had worked together for centuries to create detailed illustrations of natural history specimens, accurate illustration of scientific ideas related to

⁴⁰² When the Exposition opened, the laboratory was a working laboratory, as planned. Workers found the room to be excruciatingly hot, however, and it possessed little air circulation. Letter from Edgar Hewett to Aleš Hrdlička, July 31, 1915. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

physical anthropology seemed to lag behind. When displaying ideas drawn from bone rooms, early exhibitors instead relied heavily on the actual remains themselves to convey the ideas behind the exhibition; casts and detailed scientific illustrations only occasionally stood in for authentic specimens. Artists and journalists with little scientific training or actual knowledge of recent discoveries popularized the simplistic notion of the “missing link,” in both the United States and Europe. With new bones gradually emerging from Europe, Asia, and Africa it was becoming easier to get lost in the complex web of human prehistory. In order for these discoveries to be communicated effectively, visitors needed a *story* to latch on to—something to identify with on a human level. The series busts in the second room, in a manner quite unlike previous exhibitions of ideas drawn from human remains, worked to draw out a particular *narrative* of human evolution as told through bones. The earliest of the figures possessed simian-like features—including one bust of a mother dramatically protecting her small child. Many of the statues, including some of the busts intended to represent our earliest known ancestors, included replica tools. The eyes of one bust casually look toward the visitor, even as the statue features a recently killed pig resting over his shoulder. The latter busts looked increasingly human-like, with ascribed features appearing both dignified and strong. Man was portrayed as undeniably *advancing* throughout the ages. Standing upright, wearing decorative jewelry, clothing, and possessing in advanced tools of stone and wood.

Sitting below rows of simple wooden rafters in the temporary fair building, the exhibit introduced visitors to a very basic narrative of human evolution. The story of man’s rise and prehistory told not just in casts, but also through vivid sculpture. What seemed new, in this exhibit, was the translation of the ideas from bones into art. The artistic skill demonstrated by the sculptures was not exceptional, yet some the sculptures were effective in lending a living quality to some of our most recent human ancestors. Although charts and maps hung on the walls, gently tilting forward toward the visitor, the information behind sculpture was limited. While the charts and maps intended to contextualize the discovery of original remains, the exhibit did little to actually contextualize the lived existence of each of the species. Any narrative of human evolution offered in the room was stunted by its incomplete nature, a void that future exhibit designers would seek to fill in teaching even larger audiences about human history.

In addition to the busts that provided the human narrative behind human evolution, visitors to this exhibition encountered other new types of displays. For the very first time, museum visitors in the United States viewed exact replicas, or casts, of the skeletons of prehistoric humans. Many of these replicas had been recently cast for the fair by European museums that possessed the originals. Combining the casts with the busts was clearly intended to give the visitor a greater sense of the science of physical anthropology through the use of artistic representations of human ancestors. The exhibition’s catalogue emphasized that scientific enterprise had advanced over the course of the past thirty years, reading, “Skull after skull as well as other bones of the skeleton have been discovered, and under conditions which enable men of science to establish their great age beyond a reasonable doubt.”⁴⁰³ These artistically created busts, then, were framed by the science of collecting and studying bones.

⁴⁰³ Hrdlička, *A Descriptive Catalog*, 7.

Significantly, the exhibition instructed visitors that the primitive features one might observe in the reconstruction of our human ancestors might also be found in certain *living* human populations. The exhibition did not imply which human populations were primitive and which were more advanced, yet one might imagine the direction that such statements led the majority of visitors of the era. Visitors could view large maps showing where the original specimens were discovered and charts were displayed showing how archaeologists estimated the specimens' ages based on the context in which they were found. Illustrations of ancient man lined the walls, and benches were spread throughout for visitors to rest and ponder the long course of human evolution. In the center of the second room was a dramatic set of ten busts, displaying in vivid detail, at eye-level, the artistic reconstructions of various species of human ancestors. Belgian artist Louis Mascré (1871-1927) crafted the busts, supervised by museum scientist, Aimé Rutot (1847-1933). It is unclear the extent to which Hrdlička, Macre, and Rutot influenced each sculpture, however, the reminder that scientists and artists were *collaborating* was repeated throughout writings on the busts. Also central to the creation of the sculptures was the modeling of human ancestors from Europe and Asia based on studies drawn from human remains housed in museums. One description of the busts noted that, "These models are constructed from the actual skeletal remains, and the decorations and implements are exact reproductions of those found with the bones."⁴⁰⁴ In some sense, the exhibit made the connection between these statues and original human remains more clear than in outlining their connection to particular narratives of evolution. The sculptures showed hominid figures crafting tools, carrying animal prey, and gazing off as if in the early stages of human thought.⁴⁰⁵ Hrdlička promoted the busts as, "striking and interesting." Concluding the displays in the second room was a series of crania of contemporary primates, moving from the lemur to an example of modern man.⁴⁰⁶ Visitors walked through the center of the room to view the sculptures before examining replica skeletons and skulls filling the cases at the other end of the room.

The third room introduced visitors to a scientific perspective on a familiar idea: aging. The subject of human aging, even more so than the subject of evolution, was heavily racialized in *The Story of Man Through the Ages*. The room was, in fact, an exploration of comparative racial theories of North America. Statues of human busts—exact copies of human bodies from the chest to the top of the head—lined three separate groups of cases. Frozen in time, these busts were presented less as a life narrative than as representative specimens of life stages within particular race. The busts were separated by race and gender, and then arranged from youngest to eldest. Each of the three sets contained a total of thirty busts—fifteen males and fifteen females. The "Old Americans," or "thoroughbred" whites occupying the continent for three or more generations were compared to American Indians, who were represented by a line of small statues and busts depicting Sioux individuals from birth to old age.⁴⁰⁷ In one set of cases

⁴⁰⁴ William Templeton Johnson, "San Diego: The Panama-California Exposition and the changing Peoples of the Great Southwest," *The Survey* 34 No. 14 (July 3, 1915), 307. Vertical File. Archives of the San Diego Museum of Man.

⁴⁰⁵ "Preparation of Exhibits Illustrating the Natural History of Man," 55-56.

⁴⁰⁶ Hrdlička, "An Exhibit in Physical Anthropology," 409.

⁴⁰⁷ Hrdlička favored the term "Old Americans," to describe Caucasians whose families had been in North America for at least three generations. Periodically, he also used the term "thoroughbred," though he often places the latter term in quotes. Hrdlička described the busts on one occasion using the following terms,

the individual Dakota were intended to represent the vast and diverse range of American Indians across North America, and their hair and facial features changed from one end of the case to the other. Each figure possessed a serious and straightforward expression, as though permanently focused on the visitors that walked by. A third series representing “the full-blood American negro” completed the room and included a bust of a woman thought to be 114 years old.⁴⁰⁸ The Smithsonian boasted of the display, “These series, which required two and one-half years of strenuous preparation, form a unique exhibit, for nothing of similar nature has ever been attempted in this or any other country.”⁴⁰⁹ Visitors would likely have noticed the subtle differences between individuals of the same age, but their grouping by race underscored racial classification as the basis of the room. These busts represented more than just individuals, they represented the American Indian as a whole, progressing, like all races, inevitably into old age, decline, and death. Science—so it seemed, was not without a morbid dose of reality.

Visitors were intended to engage with a theme throughout their examination of the busts of various races across a life span. Though the aging process seemed to be similar across racial spectrums, the exhibition emphasized that, “while remarkably alike in all parts of the inhabited globe, [the busts] show nevertheless racial and environmental variations.” The portion of the exhibition most firmly embedded in ideas of racial classification emphasized something of human unity while simultaneously privileging the notion that races varied widely based on ancestry and environment.⁴¹⁰ Writers who toured the exhibition read the displays as either showing similarities in the aging process or providing reason to believe that humans vary wildly across a racial spectrum.⁴¹¹ One magazine article returned to the study of the skeleton and living body as the basis for these conclusions, “The variations between the so-called white, black and yellow races, is very marked both in facial characteristics and bone structure; and the vast differences between Indian, Eskimo, Mongolian, Negro and other peoples are shown by means of casts taken from life.”⁴¹² Evidence for essential racial difference was understood to be in our very bones—evidence that could be used to organize race, throughout each stage of life and influenced subtly by environment and individual ancestry.

Entering the fourth room, the exhibit’s emphasis on race continued as visitors viewed directly the whole of the science of racial classification. Walls were filled with 200 photographs intended to provide “racial portraits” of people from around the globe. Over one hundred facial casts filled glass cases, including a collection of facial masks of Bushmen, considered “especially rare and valuable.”⁴¹³ Artistically crafted busts

“[the busts] are three series of true-to-nature busts, showing by definite age-stages, from birth onward and in both sexes, the three principal races of this country, namely, the ‘thoroughbred’ white American (for at least three generations in this continent on each parental side), the Indian, and the full-blood American negro.” Smithsonian Annual Report, 1915, 11.

⁴⁰⁸ The Smithsonian noted, “The utmost care was exercised in ascertaining the age, particularly among the negro and Indian.” “Preparation of Exhibits Illustrating the Natural History of Man,” 59.

⁴⁰⁹ “Preparation of Exhibits Illustrating the Natural History of Man,” 56-59.

⁴¹⁰ Ales Hrdlička, “The Division of Physical Anthropology at the Panama-California Expos., San Diego” Unpublished Manuscript. Correspondence 1912-1915. San Diego Exposition. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. 23.

⁴¹¹ Completing the displays in this room was a case comparing brains, skulls, and other bones at various stages in human aging. Hrdlička, “An Exhibit in Physical Anthropology,” 409-410.

⁴¹² Johnson, “San Diego: The Panama-California Exposition,” 307.

⁴¹³ Hrdlička, “An Exhibit in Physical Anthropology,” 410.

surrounded the room, with male and female individuals representing the whole of several groups from around the world.⁴¹⁴ The busts in the room were created by an Austrian artist named Frank Micka,⁴¹⁵ Micka had earlier immigrated to the United States, and Hrdlička described him as “one of the best modelers in this country.” Micka was indeed an above average artist, but his background as a Czech national influenced Hrdlička’s high opinion of him as an artist and illustrator of scientific facts. The busts included some detail, including hints of skin tones and the traditional clothing of the groups the sculptures were intended to represent. Nevertheless, each pair of busts was more or less presented in distinct isolation—standing alone for massive populations of humanity. Hrdlička continued by describing the casts Micka produced as being “actual casts of the face and body of the several subjects with the help of careful measurements.” This resulted in what Hrdlička believed to be “accurate racial records, the value of which will increase with time.”⁴¹⁶ Hrdlička’s use of the phrase “racial records” is revealing as it provides insight into Hrdlička’s belief that the development of collections—including mummified and skeletal remains, as well as casts and sculptures based on detailed measurements—resulted in a virtual snapshot of global racial anatomy at a time when he feared certain racial groups were quickly vanishing. Racial mixing, genocide, disease, and environment all might play subtle, yet critical roles in shaping the human body, yet these barely registered as themes in this exhibition.

The final room was the most grisly. At first glance, the room almost appears to be a systematically organized mass grave. Unlike the burial grounds of their origin, however, these bones—mostly skulls—were laid out in patterns in flat top glass cases. A series of charts and maps circled the room, illustrating in vivid detail the most common causes of death for humans in different areas of the globe, but the primary focus of the room were the skeletons recently brought to the United States from Peru by Hrdlička himself. Examples of disease were “illustrated extensively” with actual human remains from the Americas. The center of the room contained a series of flat top cases containing, “Many hundreds of original specimens, derived principally from the pre-Columbian cemeteries of Peru, show[ing] an extensive range of injuries and diseases, such as have left their marks on the bones.” Indeed, the vast majority of the remains on display featured obvious and dramatic fractures, cuts, or the slow decay of some awful disease. The curators who organized the displays believed that visitors would find this series of cases to be of great interest, due in part to the fact that some of the individuals had actually recovered from horrific injuries or from disease that afflicted them during life. In a report describing the final layout of the exhibition, the Smithsonian specifically noted a series of sixty skulls illustrating pre-Columbian surgical techniques.⁴¹⁷ Skulls that showed evidence of trepanation might have horrified visitors while at the same time attracted a morbid curiosity tied to an interest in the prehistoric and the exotic.⁴¹⁸ A

⁴¹⁴ “Preparation of Exhibits Illustrating the Natural History of Man,” 59.

⁴¹⁵ When he was hired, Micka was working under a sculptor in New York. Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, March 21, 1912. Correspondence 1912-1915. San Diego Exposition. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴¹⁶ Hrdlička, “The Division of Physical Anthropology at the Panama-California Expos, San Diego,” 12-13.

⁴¹⁷ It might be noted that a smaller collection of Peruvian skulls showing evidence of trepanation was exhibited in 1893 at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Following the fair, the private collection was transferred to the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia, where it remains on display today.

⁴¹⁸ “Preparation of Exhibits Illustrating the Natural History of Man,” 59.

further description of the exhibition dryly stated, “The people fought with clubs, maces, and slings, and the resulting wounds of the head, if not fatal, left generally impressions of bone, which must have given rise to serious symptoms.”⁴¹⁹ Even to the untrained eye, the smashed, deformed, or partially healed bones quite likely proved captivating, especially in a time where professional mortuary services and health care were increasingly separating the average person from death and dying. Recognizing the compelling nature of the displays, Hrdlička wrote, “In many instances the injuries are very interesting, both from their extent and the extraordinary powers of recuperation shown in the healing; while among the diseases shown on the bones there are some that find no, or but little, parallel among the white man or even the Indian of to-day.”⁴²⁰ Skeletons included examples of syphilis, osteoarthritis, fractures, dislocations, and natural mummification.⁴²¹ Syphilis, thought to be particularly interesting to the visitor as it was a familiar disease, had a gruesome effect on the body, leaving visible scarring, deformation, and deterioration on the bones of the individual who suffered from the disease in ancient times.

While ideas about both race and prehistory were apparent throughout the displays, the notion that humanity had evolved into distinct races was a recurrent theme throughout the entire exhibit. Aging, appearance, and ability were directly tied to race, and the natural history of mankind, or the science of physical anthropology, held the key to understanding the varieties of human difference. Though racial difference was a familiar idea to the public in the United States in the middle of the 1910s, the opportunity to view rare casts and actual human remains brought to it a heretofore unseen level of attention. Individual variation, aging, and the effect of cultural manipulation may have an effect on the *body*, but race remained the all-important category through which physical anthropologists defined *humanity*. Although the exhibition had opened with the beginnings of a story, the narrative faded as the exhibition moved into the comparative study of race for the two largest rooms of the exhibition. Despite flawed presentation and even in the dizzying context of the fair, the exhibit attracted a large audience—and plans to create a new Museum of Man remained in place.

Reaction to Displays

As visitors strolled through displays in San Diego, Aleš Hrdlička received a series of letters from Theodore Roosevelt, curious about the archaeological finds shown to him when he was traveling in South America. Roosevelt had written asking for details regarding the peopling of the American continents.⁴²² Impressed by the interest of the former president, Hrdlička’s response sheds light on his thoughts about the visitors to *his* galleries across the country in San Diego. Hrdlička wrote Roosevelt, “Such healthy,

⁴¹⁹ Hrdlička, “The Division of Physical Anthropology at the Panama-California Expos, San Diego” 37.

⁴²⁰ Smithsonian Annual Report, 1915, 12.

⁴²¹ In the 1970s, the San Diego Museum of Man received a grant from the National Science Foundation to make the original collections organized by Ales Hrdlička more accessible to the scholars and the public. Fliers advertising new publications intended for both teaching and research were distributed to museums and professionals, including the staff at the Mütter Museum. Flier, “Paleopathology for Teaching and Research.” Sent from the San Diego Museum of Man to Elizabeth Moyer, No Date. Folder: Bones. Curatorial Files. Mütter Museum, College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

⁴²² Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Aleš Hrdlička, March 1, 1915. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

critical interest you are taking in the subject of man's antiquity on this continent is a genuine encouragement. What we usually meet with, and that even on the part of intelligent people, is either a blind acceptance or prejudiced inapproachability."⁴²³ Hrdlička hoped that citizens of the United States, by learning more about the history of the human body, would reconsider what might be dogmatic beliefs they clung to about the nature of humankind. He hoped that visitors would absorb some of his complex ideas about racial and individual variation and consider the role of race within the story of evolution. The exhibit in San Diego argued that skeletons represented scientific facts, and these could be isolated and presented in more lifelike form through art. Man had evolved into distinct races that, while constantly changing due to subtle and ill-defined environmental and social factors, was stable enough to be represented, with individual types representing the whole of entire populations.

An ongoing series of newspaper articles in the *San Diego Union* featured an article spotlighting the Science of Man exhibition. Written by James W. Wilkinson of the San Diego Normal School, the article introduced readers to the exhibition's importance in the understanding of emerging ideas regarding human evolution. The article begins, "To fully appreciate the importance of the exhibit in the Science of Man exhibition, one must bring with him a lively imagination and attempt to visualize the conditions under which primitive man must have struggled." Indeed, in order to understand the story of human history, evolution, and modern day variation visitors to *The Story of Man through the Ages* were expected to tie together the relatively isolated scientific facts into a more "alive" rendition, primarily through the power of imagination and fantasy. In the article, potential visitors were provided some background as to the importance of the displays about human ancestors. The final displays at the Science of Man exhibition lacked a clearly eugenic message, yet visitors were not stopped from stretching subtle arguments of the exhibition to popular eugenic ideas. Along the lines of eugenic thought, Wilkinson interpreted the exhibition as demonstrating that:

The inevitable result of the spread of the doctrine of evolution will be that man will strive more and more to control the forces of nature and make them work for his lasting welfare. There will be an enlightened program favoring courageously the survival of the fittest human and the gradual development of a sturdy public opinion that will refuse to tolerate industrial and social conditions that tend toward the debasement and deterioration of the race.⁴²⁴

Museum visitors inevitably draw their own conclusions from what they observe, and these conclusions are not necessarily identical with objectives of the curatorial staff. Wilkerson, as was often true of journalists, used his own imagination to draw out a story from the specimens. In the ensuing decades, museums and anthropologists would increasingly adapt similarly dramatic renditions of man's evolution and racial history. In

⁴²³ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Theodore Roosevelt, March 4, 1915. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴²⁴ Newspaper Clipping. James W. Wilkinson, "Exposition Excursions, Number Fourteen, Man's Evolution," *San Diego Union*, May 16 (probably 1915). Correspondence 1912-1915. San Diego Exposition. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

the 1915 San Diego displays a lack of clear narrative assured that visitors who strolled through the exhibition, viewing first the stages of mankind's evolution—later entering rooms that focused on racial classification and ultimately pre-Columbian skeletons—would blend isolated ideas in a potentially confounding and inaccurate manner. Despite the captivating nature of the human remains being presented, the exhibit lacked clear themes or ideas for visitors to latch onto. Notably, although Hrdlička did recognize the importance of individual variation within races in his exhibit catalogue,⁴²⁵ most visitors to the display might likely see how busts of racial groups were consistently segregated and thus leave the exhibition with the notion that racial typology remained the central tenet in the study of physical anthropology in the United States. Indeed, the bodies of individuals portrayed through art and bones were offered as specimens representing larger groups of populations. Visitors might assume that the study of ancient and recent human remains, combined with the measurements of the living, provided straightforward information about the development of humanity. Stretching these arguments to a conclusion that included particular ideas about race and eugenic “fitness” involved no great leap. Although both individual variation and the environment were put forward as significant factors shaping our bodies, race was consistently portrayed as the most important factor that defined physical characteristics. Throughout the displays, but especially in the sections where actual human remains appeared, it was evident that without direct study of human remains and the bodies of the living, no “science of man” was possible.

Both prominent public figures and museum professionals responded positively to *The Story of Man Through the Ages*. George Gustav Heye, the wealthy patron and founder of the Museum of the American Indian in New York City, visited the Panama-California Exposition and wrote Hrdlička afterwards, “It, without doubt, is the finest showing of physical [a]nthropology that has yet been given to the public.” He specifically praised the visual representation of complex ideas.⁴²⁶ Heye’s comments centered on the style of presentation, but he also commended the overall accessibility of complex scientific ideas about race and evolution, noting that even small children were able to learn from the exhibit. Hrdlička replied, “Though not perfect, [the displays] represent really more than has ever been attempted in these lines either in this country or abroad.”⁴²⁷ Some time after viewing the exhibitions, Heye was moved to jumpstart the work of the Department of Physical Anthropology within his own museum. In announcing the decision he wrote, “It is realized that, while the creation of a Department of Physical Anthropology is a scientific need, although a complicated task, it will be our endeavor to meet all the modern demands of that science . . .”⁴²⁸ Heye would ultimately experience only limited success in founding a tradition of physical anthropology at his

⁴²⁵ Hrdlička, *A Descriptive Catalog*, 11.

⁴²⁶ Letter from George G. Heye to Aleš Hrdlička, October 26, 1915. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. The manner in which complex ideas about race and evolution were broken down was also complimented by Charles Mayo, one of the founding physicians of the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. See, Letter from Edgar Hewett to Aleš Hrdlička, April 25, 1915. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴²⁷ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to George G. Heye, November 2, 1915. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴²⁸ Letter from George G. Heye to Aleš Hrdlička, Undated. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

museum in New York. His primary concern had always been material culture collection—and it remained so even after being influenced by the exhibit in San Diego. Nevertheless, his decision to aggressively collect human remains after viewing the exhibition in San Diego demonstrates the remarkable, yet easily forgotten, influence of these displays.

Walter Hough, an anthropologist at the Smithsonian, noted in an unpublished manuscript that, “The exposition at San Diego is of great import to the progress of anthropology in California. There will remain in California at the close of this exposition a permanent collection relating to man that has not been excelled in this country . . .”⁴²⁹ Hough’s claims, of course, were bloated with the hyperbole of world’s fair enthusiasm. According to Hough, the development of the collections had implications not only for the science of anthropology, but for the progress of the entirety of culture. The science of collecting and studying skeletons, in other words, represented a major advancement in human civilization. California, at this time, was still considered by many easterners to be a dusty outpost on the edge of the continent, still young in terms of research and cultural production. He wrote, “There is being built up on the west coast a people of general culture who are appreciative and receptive of the researches of science. . . . It augurs well for the science of anthropology here that it has a public that aids the extension of its activities—a public that demands and can assimilate its result in science.” Hough observed that the exhibit was influencing ideas and culture in the region, and indeed, the *San Diego Union* enthused that, “These wonderful collections are to remain as a future asset to our community and will become the nucleus for a great civic museum.”⁴³⁰ Hough’s predictions were, in fact, largely accurate and, as we will see in the chapters that follow, the exhibition shaped how ideas regarding race and human history were presented in later exhibits in other regions of the United States. Additionally, *The Story of Man Through the Ages* did prove to be the foundation for a lasting museum, an institution that would withstand the demolition of most of the original fairgrounds and its later conversion to a temporary military base during World War II.

Some anthropologists, however, had serious reservations about aspects of the exhibition. Scholars were in almost complete agreement that the fair had brought together the most important displays surrounding race and human prehistory available in the United States, but not everyone agreed with interpretation of the materials presented, especially in terms of the development of racial groups throughout time. Throughout their respective careers, Hrdlička and Franz Boas frequently disagreed, though the two strong-willed individuals did, at times, manage to cooperate on specific projects. Boas dismissed Hrdlička’s notion of the progress of civilization, arguing instead for a more relative perspective on the development of culture. Alfred Kroeber, a Boas student teaching at the University of California, sent a postcard to Hrdlička from the fairgrounds but chose not to engage with Hrdlička on the matter of “stages” of civilization were presented.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Walter Hough, Unpublished manuscript. “History co-worker with anthropology,” Records of the Department of Anthropology, United States National Museum/National Museum of Natural History. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Folder: Manuscripts—Unpublished. Box 25-B.

⁴³⁰ Newspaper Clipping. Joseph C. Thompson, “Savage Surgeons Fix Skulls: Crude Surgical Instruments Collected,” *San Diego Union*, April 11, 1915. Correspondence 1912-1915. San Diego Exposition. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴³¹ Sackman, *Wild Men*, 262-265.

Arguments that depicted modern man as evolving through various stages from savagery to the pinnacle of civilization were coming under increasing scrutiny from anthropologists. Boas and Kroeber increasingly moved away from their own studies on human remains—continuing to recognize its importance as a subfield—instead emphasizing work on ethnography, linguistics, and advancing theories in the field while teaching a vast number of influential students. Physical anthropologists, meanwhile, were torn as to how to depict and classify the modern races—a subject that would become increasingly problematic in the ensuing decades. As the issue of racial science became increasingly fraught toward the middle of the century, narratives surrounding human evolution and prehistory would come to play an increasingly important role in the exhibitions staged by natural history museums in the United States. Future exhibitions on the subject of racial classification and human evolution would respond directly to the displays appearing in San Diego in 1915. Small reminders of the exhibition, including a number of the original busts of man’s ancestors displayed early in the displays, remain in the galleries of the San Diego Museum of Man—now heavily contextualized with panels detailing their relationship to the origin of the museum.

Conclusion

Hrdlička himself was critical of the displays he created in San Diego. He noted the “untoward circumstances” that prevented him from fully realizing his vision, in particular the events surrounding the outbreak of World War I,⁴³² though he allowed that he might be the only person who would ever notice these deficiencies.⁴³³ His displays on physical anthropology had broken new ground, introducing visitors to new concepts and ideas. Visitors witnessed, for the very first time in the United States, artistic representations and casts based upon skeletal remains found in museum collections from Europe. They were also introduced to the notion that science could explain the effects of aging, individual variation, and race on the body through scientific facts and a sparse, ill-defined narrative of human evolution throughout time. Moreover, the displays related to physical anthropology were striking in their visual diversity.⁴³⁴ Busts and casts of human bodies, including those of prehistoric remains from Europe, were complemented by extensive maps and charts. At the end of the exhibition, visitors encountered a large display of human remains, something rarely exhibited on this scale in museums of the era. The display of diseased or injured prehistoric human remains, in particular, was unusual. Finally, visitors viewed a large series of artistic busts representing Hrdlička’s principal ideas on evolution, aging, and race.

⁴³² In the published catalogue of the exhibition, Hrdlička assures the visitor that, “these deficiencies, of which only the Preparator will be fully conscious, have already been partly compensated for and will further be done away with during the course of the Exposition.” Hrdlička, *A Descriptive Catalog*, 5.

⁴³³ Hrdlička, “The Division of Physical Anthropology at the Panama-California Expos,” 7.

⁴³⁴ Historian Constance Areson Clark has documented how visual representations of evolution permeated society in the twentieth century United States. Whereas many in the United States proved to be trusting of science during the aftermath of the First World War, the decade of the 1920s was associated with a host of challenges to evolutionary concepts, evidence, she suggests of an overriding fear of the modernity. The use of visual illustration of evolutionary concepts at the 1915 fair and the many positive reactions to the displays, provides a direct example of the popular acceptance of scientific ideas in the era of the First World War. Constance Areson Clark, *God—Or Gorilla: Images of Evolution in the Jazz Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

Although the displays of *The Story of Man Through the Ages* at the Panama-California Exposition are largely forgotten in the annals of the history of museums and the history of anthropology, they provided a precedent on which later exhibitions surrounding race and prehistory would be based and work to build upon. The exhibition, in fact, would be heavily discussed by museum professionals and anthropologists years later when increasingly significant exhibitions wrestling with the subjects of race and prehistory would be introduced at later world's fairs and permanent museum galleries. Museum curators struggled to move away from the presentation of bones as scientific objects, increasingly trying to grab hold of engaging narratives with which to teach the public. The images and art originally produced for the exhibition would even be directly reproduced in future exhibitions and publications on the topic of race and prehistory.⁴³⁵ The methods with which these displays dealt with racial classification provide a useful marker for both the thinking of anthropologists of this particular moment and how, exactly, visitors to museums and fairs were being educated on the subjects displayed. The human remains occasionally faded to the background of these exhibits—yet some displays, such as those in San Diego, made explicit to the visitor the relationship between the development of ideas and the bone rooms behind the scenes. Indeed, San Diego had become a new outpost in the Smithsonian's growing bone empire. As new exhibitions were being developed elsewhere, however, scientific and cultural understandings of race and history were gradually changing. Although later exhibitions turned to *The Story of Man Through the Ages* for guidance, later exhibits embraced new methods and were heavily influenced by changing ideas derived from newer studies on collections of human remains, as well as a strengthening narrative describing human history.

⁴³⁵ In a later chapter, I detail how the 1915 *Story of Man Through the Ages* exhibition influenced museum curator Henry Field in his creation of the 1933 Hall of Prehistoric Man at the Field Museum in Chicago. Henry Farifield Osborn, a museum curator from the American Museum of Natural History, also used the production of the new images for a major publication. In his 1925 bestseller *Men of the Old Stone Age*, he borrowed images of busts originally produced by Rutot for the Panama-California International exposition. Historian Constance Clark does not note the fact that Rutot created the same busts for the 1915 exposition, but the statues are clearly reproduced from the originals created for *The Story of Man Through the Ages* for the San Diego exposition. Clark, *God or Gorilla*, 197.

Chapter 5—The Rise and Fall of Scientific Racism and the Changing Meaning of Museum Remains

In 1936, W. Montague Cobb, an African-American physical anthropologist, published an account of his work at the historically black college, Howard University.⁴³⁶ His book, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology of Howard University, 1932-1936*, was well received by other scholars engaged in the study of the human body. Biologist Raymond Pearl echoed the opinions of other scholars when he described Cobb's work as, "This account is withal so straightforward, so modest, so unselfish, and so intelligent as to win instant sympathy and admiration for its author's clear-headedness and philosophical soundness." Pearl argued that the new laboratory at Howard University should "be encouraged and supported, both from within and from without the institution."⁴³⁷ Howard University of the 1930s was an important center for African American intellectuals. A circle of significant scholars at Howard, including Cobb in the College of Medicine, emphasized racial equality over notions of cultural relativism. These scholars gradually became increasingly engaged in the African American civil rights movement while also training the next generation of activists, lawyers, and scientists.⁴³⁸ Cobb engaged with those in the medical community as often as he worked with physical anthropologists. His work placed him in the dissecting room as well as the bone rooms of natural history museums.

Cobb joined the faculty of Howard University in 1932. Having received his training in medicine and anthropology, he followed the model for physical anthropologists of the era, though unlike others, Cobb spent the majority of his career affiliated with a medical school rather than a natural history museum or anthropology department within a university. Nevertheless, Cobb eagerly sought out bone rooms across the country in order to find evidence to support his ideas. Later, while working to train both medical students in gross anatomy and anthropology students in comparative anatomy and evolution, Cobb built a collection of over seven hundred skeletons for Howard University. Cobb acquired the majority of these human skeletons from the cadavers dissected in his human anatomy laboratory.⁴³⁹ Steadily gaining respect in the anthropological community, Cobb was elected president of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists in 1958. Throughout his career, Cobb managed to leverage his standing in the broader scientific community to promote racial equality. Cobb also served as president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

⁴³⁶ Circulated widely throughout the medical and anthropological communities of the era, this book is challenging to find today. A copy of the work can be found in the W. Montague Cobb Papers at Howard University. Montague Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology: 1932-1936* (Washington D.C., 1936). W. Montague Cobb Papers, Box 30; Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴³⁷ Book Review Reprint. Raymond Pearl, Reprinted from the *Journal of Negro History*, October, 1936. W. Montague Cobb Papers, Box 34, Folder: Writings by Cobb—Reprints Book Reviews; Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴³⁸ An important work documenting Howard University's influence on law, anthropology, and the construction of race is, Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, 176-179. Baker notes that Cobb was joined on the faculty by the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, the economist, Abram L. Harris, and the philosopher Alain Locke.

⁴³⁹ Spencer, *A History of Physical Anthropology*, 288.

(NAACP) from 1976-1982.⁴⁴⁰ Having received his training in an era when most African-Americans were denied equal access to faculty appointments at most universities, he was the only prominent African American scholar in the physical anthropology community. His influence in the anthropological and medical community was extraordinarily vast, and he authored over 1,100 publications and trained over 6,000 students in anatomy.⁴⁴¹ Cobb was especially prolific with editorials condemning unequal medical treatment for African-Americans.

In his 1936 monograph describing the facilities available at Howard University, Cobb tied together the disciplines of anatomy and physical anthropology, detailing the medical school curriculum alongside a program for teaching physical anthropology and human evolution. Aleš Hrdlička, who had continued to argue in favor of general medical education for physical anthropologists, applauded his efforts, explaining to Cobb, “You have a rare chance for the development of a department which will be a model for Universities for colored people elsewhere in the country.” Hrdlička continued by articulating his opinion of the value in bridging disciplines in the modern university, “And you have done wisely in associating anatomy with physical anthropology, for the latter is in a large measure merely advanced comparative human anatomy, and aide the student to become acquainted with human variations, with which he will everywhere be confronted after he leaves college.”⁴⁴² In Hrdlička’s view, in other words, educated individuals should be able to understand the concept of race on a physical level.

Hrdlička’s reaction to Cobb is striking in light of the fact that, a little over a decade earlier, Hrdlička directly stated his opinion that “black people represent a mental potentiality, say, only 80 percent of the average white people.”⁴⁴³ While Hrdlička’s opinions on the subject of racial intelligence likely shifted somewhat over the course of the ensuing decade, it is also possible that this comment rested on belief that individuals within any racial group were capable of high scholastic achievement. Regardless of the origins of Hrdlička’s remark, the conclusions drawn by the two scholars should not be thought to be identical. Whereas Cobb’s research, based heavily on his work with collections of human remains, continued to point to physical similarities between races, Hrdlička had built a career on differentiating and classifying them. Others scholars, despite being heavily critiqued, claimed that the entirety of the history of human achievement could be tied directly to features of anatomy. The primary evidence, central to these studies, was in the collections of human remains stored in bone rooms that had been growing since the Civil War.

⁴⁴⁰ Cobb’s collection of personal photographs even features snapshots of him attending various events at the White House. These photographs feature Cobb alongside Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. See, W. Montague Cobb Papers, Box 79. Photos—Framed. Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Also, see W. Montague Cobb Papers, Box 77. Photos. Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁴¹ For more biographical information on W. Montague Cobb, see Lesley M. Rankin-Hill, and Michael L. Blakey, “W. Montague Cobb (1904-1990): Physical Anthropologist, Anatomist, and Activist,” *American Anthropologist* 96, No. 1 (1994): 74-96.

⁴⁴² Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to W. Montague Cobb, April 9, 1936. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence, Cattell-Commerce Dept. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁴³ As quoted in Oppenheim, “Revisiting Hrdlička and Boas,” 98. This quote was recorded while Hrdlička was serving as a witness at a Congressional hearing on immigration.

Numerous studies pinpoint the fall of scientific racism as occurring between 1920 and 1945. Historian Richard King argues that intellectuals and scientific elites during this period largely discredited the concepts of race, racial difference, and racial hierarchy.⁴⁴⁴ Historian Alexandra Minna Stern argues that eugenics and scientific racism became increasingly linked to the politics of the National Socialist party in Germany, despite the divergent landscapes of science in Europe and the United States. Journalists, politicians, and some scientists linked the scientific racism of scholars in the United States directly to the dark philosophies of the Nazis, pushing the race concept further out of the mainstream in many scientific fields.⁴⁴⁵ Students of physical anthropology, including Franz Boas and W. Montague Cobb played an important role in the demise of racial science, and yet the transition from supporting racial classification to arguing against it amongst those studying human bodies was never complete nor entirely decisive. Unlike earlier, white scholars, Cobb based his scholarship on the direct examination of human remains collections and broke down strict forms of racial classification, which he viewed as both inaccurate and a form of scientific racism.⁴⁴⁶ Scholars of medicine and physical anthropology wrestled with the meaning of these transitions in light of a lengthy history of collecting human remains for museum and university collections. These tensions were on display in both publications and in museum exhibitions. Many sought to hold on to older forms of racial classification while others gradually shifted their attention to other questions entirely. While scholars such as Cobb promoted the study of physical anthropology through the collection and display of human remains, others, like Boas and his students, shifted away from measuring bones and bodies and toward a more theoretical study of the concept of culture.⁴⁴⁷ Boasian anthropology, which promoted cultural relativism, would become the dominant conviction in the field throughout the middle portion of the twentieth century in the United States, though other anthropologists, such as Carleton S. Coon at Harvard University, did write popular books that promoted ideas of racial hierarchy well into the 1960s.⁴⁴⁸ Human remains collections both informed these studies and were influenced by the ensuing discourse surrounding the validity of their claims.

Human prehistory was a component of studies of human remains long before the 1920s. The shift from a race-centered study of human remains to a prehistory- and

⁴⁴⁴ Richard H. King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940-1970* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004): 1.

⁴⁴⁵ Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults & Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005): 3.

⁴⁴⁶ A summary of Cobb's career and influence within the anthropological community can be found in, Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, 184-186. Despite Baker's emphasis on Cobb and the Howard Circle, I would maintain that Cobb's role in the history of physical anthropology, medicine, and civil rights has been underemphasized.

⁴⁴⁷ It might be noted that while Boasian scholars like Alfred Kroeber shifted emphasis away from studying human remains, they still supervised growing collections of human remains in museums. Kroeber, as the curator of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley (today the Hearst Museum of Anthropology) supervised a collection of human remains well on its way to becoming the largest collection of human remains in a museum of anthropology on the West Coast. While many of the remains were accessioned by other scholars working in the museum, including Edward Gifford and Robert Heizer, Kroeber's de-emphasis of racial classification in his own work did not prevent him from allowing this work to continue at the museum he supervised.

⁴⁴⁸ Carleton S. Coon, *The Origin of Races* (New York: Knopf, 1962).

population-centered study of the same materials took place sporadically. Once these shifts started taking place, the work of those focusing primarily on racial classification began to be viewed as outside of the mainstream of American anthropological thought. This chapter seeks to explore the slow decline of racial classification as a scientific and intellectual concept, as reflected by scholars concerned with human remains. In particular, this chapter explores how scholars who were previously concerned with collecting human remains to justify racial classification schemes shifted away from this line of study. Whereas displays on eugenics were prevalent at fairs and museums in the early years of the twentieth century, such displays were removed from plans for future exhibitions, replaced by a growing emphasis on human history. The growing centrality of human history in studies emerging from bone rooms, and the exhibitions that grew from these studies, will continue to be traced in the following chapter. The shift away from racial classification gradually created a tension in the longstanding practice of collecting and interpreting museum collections of human remains. At the start of this chapter, in the early 1920s, museums were organizing human remains by race or geographic region, rather than by age. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, though, museums began to shift emphasis away from race as the main defining category for human remains collections. Exhibitions, mirroring the manner in which anthropologists conceived of the remains, gradually began to emphasize human history alongside studies of race.

American Museum of Natural History

Sometime around the dawn of the 1920s, Clark Wissler penned a brief description of the physical anthropology collections at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Wissler's manuscript provides some notion of how collections were being brought together and studied during this period at what was then one of the largest museums in the country. The document begins by noting that the collections of the AMNH contained over 2,100 human crania. The enormous number of crania is reflective of several factors. First, building on a myriad of traditions ranging from phrenology to medicine and anthropology, scientists continued to believe that the human skull held clues to answering questions about race and human history.⁴⁴⁹ Skulls were also more durable and easily transported than other parts of the body; smaller, more fragile bones, although still prized for museum collections, were often lost, broken, or sometimes even simply discarded. Two large collections made up a sizeable portion of the total number of crania at the museum; Eskimo crania accounted for 350 items in the of the total collection, and nearly another 250 were brought to New York from the American Southwest.

Apart from those of North America, the largest number of human skulls at the AMNH originated from South America, with an additional 600 crania from Bolivia and Peru and another 350 from Mexico. The museum featured a smattering of remains from other regions around the world, listing, "2 Pygmies, 3 Australians, 2 Japanese, and 1 New Zealander." Of note is the fact that the categories Wissler provides in his manuscript reflect both distinctions of race and modern nation states. Although race had been the defining factor driving the actual collecting of human remains for the previous fifty years,

⁴⁴⁹ This topic is discussed in depth in my earlier chapters; however, the best source on this tradition is Fabian, *The Skull Collectors*, 2010.

remains were sometimes classified internally by region or geography, and increasingly so with the passing decades and changing scientific and intellectual milieu.

Though Aleš Hrdlička had visited the museum to study the crania of the Eskimo, Wissler notes that, at that time, the vast majority of the cranial collections in New York remained unstudied.⁴⁵⁰ Wissler's description did not identify any mummified remains from Egypt, though collectors from the United States and Europe were still actively buying, and subsequently donating, mummies that were either looted or legally purchased. Though the manuscript hints to the prehistoric nature of some of the remains, it briefly organizes them by region or race rather than making any sort of claim about the age of the specimens. Within a decade of the circulation of the memorandum, however, the emphasis of many major museums in describing their human remains collections changed. Race was the major qualifier for human remains at the dawn of the 1920s, but reinvigorated interest in human prehistory reshaped how remains were conceptualized in museum collections in the United States in later years. Mirroring the emphasis on race found in the AMNH's description of its own collections was work in the field of anthropometry.

Anthropometry and Measuring Race

In 1920, Hrdlička published a detailed volume providing instruction on the subject of anthropometry, which he defined as, “the conventional art or system of measuring the human body and its parts.”⁴⁵¹ Although this term was typically applied to measurement of the living, in his book, Hrdlička included instructions for measuring skeletal material. Above all else, Hrdlička privileged the standardization of measurements and thus the presumed elimination of personal bias from the science.⁴⁵² According to Hrdlička, measurements of the human body were useful for industry, art, the military, medicine, “Detection of bodily defects,” the identification of criminals, eugenics, and general scientific investigation.⁴⁵³ The fact that bodily measurements were perceived as being so useful to a variety of fields created the drawback Hrdlička rued: that of having vastly different systems for measuring and interpreting the body. At heart, Hrdlička indicated, anthropometry was about the development of complex systems for understanding human physical appearance and behavior. For Hrdlička, as well as numerous other scholars at this moment, the shape of the skull, though not as indicative of human behavior as earlier phrenologist or criminologists believed, could teach scientists about certain aspects of intelligence and behavior. Evidence collected from an untold number of expeditions—where indigenous peoples were measured and re-measured—filled the notebooks of numerous anthropologists based in both museums and universities. Complementing the measurements collected from outside the territory of the United States were those collected from indigenous peoples who visited world's fairs or major cities, where anthropologists were eagerly waiting to measure their bodies. Despite the thousands of measurements collected from the living throughout the late nineteenth

⁴⁵⁰ Unpublished manuscript. Clark Wissler, “Anthropological Collections in the American Museum of Natural History.” Undated. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence: Wineman-W3. Folder: Wissler, Clark. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Although this document is undated, it appears to have been written about 1920.

⁴⁵¹ Hrdlička, *Anthropometry*, 7.

⁴⁵² Hrdlička, *Anthropometry*, 7.

⁴⁵³ Hrdlička, *Anthropometry*, 8.

and early twentieth century, scholars continued to believe that the most accurate and lasting baseline for these types of calculations would stem from work with the human remains stored in bone rooms.

The system that became standard in the field of anthropometry valued consistency, precision, and simplicity. Researchers needed large amounts of data from every part of the globe. In order to acquire the data, groups of trained practitioners could gather consistent measurements and publish them for future research. The First World War, Hrdlička repeatedly noted throughout his career, created a number of opportunities to collect general measurements of human bodies, including thousands of measurements of soldiers, which he presumed would be useful in future studies. While these opportunities to collect on a truly massive scale were not fully realized at the time, they provided a number of lessons for similar opportunities that might arise in the future. Compared to the practice of collecting human remains from gravesites that were sometimes physically guarded and generally regarded by local peoples as sacred, measurements of the living were collected with ease.

When selecting living subjects or skeletons to measure, Hrdlička argued that the most significant factor to consider was simple—race. He wrote, “In the study of any human group the value of the data—all other things being equal—will be directly proportionate to the purity of the group.”⁴⁵⁴ The “purity” of any racial group, he elaborated, could only be determined through consistent measurements and interviews with the living to determine familial heritage. This information, it was concluded, would help determine the racial heritage of skeletons being measured in museum collections. Age, sex, and medical history were also recorded, in addition to information about the subject’s social status, occupation, and “environmental distinctions.”⁴⁵⁵

Hrdlička classified the mixture of races to his audience interested in anthropometry as occurring in two different forms—that which occurred between tribes but within larger racial groups, and that which occurred with the mixture of blood between differing racial groups. Hrdlička notes that evidence of admixture between tribes—but within races—could hardly be determined without associated family history. Mixture between the major racial groups (considered at the time to be white, black, and yellow-brown) was thought to be more easily determined through measurements and observations alone.⁴⁵⁶ The desire to collect anthropometric measurements reflected the task of clarifying these determinations.

Scholars who worked with skeletons, as opposed to the living, did gain several advantages. Hrdlička described the study of skeletal remains as “a particularly attractive field, for we deal here with specimens that are not masked by other tissues, that can be handled cleanly and easily, and that are mostly and completely at our disposal for reference or additional observation.”⁴⁵⁷ Though Hrdlička disparaged the anthropological obsession with the human skull, he recognized the utility of the crania to understanding the entire human body.⁴⁵⁸ Unlike a living subject, the bones of the dead always refuse to answer direct questions regarding such things as family history, and thus information

⁴⁵⁴ Hrdlicka, *Anthropometry*, 42.

⁴⁵⁵ Hrdlicka, *Anthropometry*, 42.

⁴⁵⁶ Hrdlicka, *Anthropometry*, 44.

⁴⁵⁷ Hrdlicka, *Anthropometry*, 89.

⁴⁵⁸ Hrdlicka, *Anthropometry*, 89.

understood as providing clues to racial history was lost. While some skeletal material arrived at museums with archaeological information that provided some information about ancestry, many skeletons arrived with only very limited information about its acquisition. Nevertheless, Hrdlička argued that even without a family history or contextual archaeological information, the race of the subject might still be determined through measurement and comparison with existing data. He wrote, “Recognition of distinct racial types in a collection, demands especially careful procedure. The skull of a typical White, a typical Negro, a typical Eskimo, or a typical American Indian, may be readily and reliably identified, wherever found by the expert student; and in a smaller measure this is also true of some other parts of the skeleton.”⁴⁵⁹ Just as with the bodies of the living, Hrdlička noted that the skeletons of individuals possessing mixed ancestry were harder to identify. He wrote:

But when it comes to a recognition of crania or bones of mixed-bloods, or of closely related racial types, we face considerable uncertainties. The safest rule in all cases is for the observer to set aside from his series any skull or skeleton concerning the anthropological identity of which he is in serious doubt. He will bear in mind, of course, that among all peoples there exists in every feature a wide range of normal variation.⁴⁶⁰

Despite the apparent certainty of racial groups, scholars were forced to recognize the fact that human remains across all racial groups reflected a wide variety of features. Coupled with concerns about increasing mixture between racial groups, some indications were already showing that the basis of systems of racial classification systems possessed serious flaws.

Instructions given to scholars interested in anthropometry in the early 1920s focused primarily on racial classification. In his writings on the subject, Hrdlička focused largely on measurements of the living. Skeletal remains, on the other hand, held certain clear advantages for the anthropologist. Consistent and complete sets of data, reflecting the diverse range of ages and genders within what were considered “pure” and “mixed” racial groups were actively sought. Bodily measurements of the living were seen to be complementary, providing information about the bodies of the dead. Just as with Wissler’s description of the skeletal collections in New York, Hrdlička’s guide to anthropometric measurements emphasizes race over the age of the human remains being measured. Measurements of the living were to be collected, stored, and published alongside collections of human remains. The measurements of the living, as well as the remains of the dead, were thought to speak to the understanding of humankind. Instead of addressing questions about human history and ancestry, however, these types of materials, up to the early 1930s, were primarily understood as contributing to knowledge of race. What was at one point a seemingly singular emphasis on race, however, started to gradually change amongst scholars collecting bones for museums in the United States.

⁴⁵⁹ Hrdlicka, *Anthropometry*, 101.

⁴⁶⁰ Hrdlicka, *Anthropometry*, 101.

American School in France for Prehistoric Studies

In July 1921, several American students began work at the American School in France for Prehistoric Studies (ASFPS).⁴⁶¹ The newly created school served several functions. The first was to find new specimens related to the prehistory of Europe, including archaeological material such as stone implements or animal bones. Once new specimens were found the group investigated their significance by comparing the specimens to available collections at museums in the region. Once the group completed their excavations, finds were split between museums in France and the United States. The study of prehistory was thus intimately linked to the nationalistic politics that marked Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Museums in Germany, France, and Britain competed for material culture artifacts, in addition to human remains, racing to build the largest and most encyclopedic record of man and the natural world. The British Museum and the Musée de l'Homme (a name translating to "Museum of Man"), like the Smithsonian Institution or the Field Museum of Natural History, rapidly collected both human remains and archaeological antiquities. Although the rise of archaeology and anthropology followed a particular, complex history, a common thread was the sporadic participation of American museums and their staff in the collecting of prehistoric artifacts in Europe. Europeans had been collecting ancient artifacts for centuries, but the study of ancient man on the continent became increasingly professionalized and wrapped up in political projects of nation building in the nineteenth century.⁴⁶² Although the rise of ancient history was wrapped up in abstract, nationalistic competition between countries, museums, scientists, students and explorers from the United States were often invited to participate in excavations. Students like those in the American School of Prehistoric Studies paid tuition and were eager to help collect prehistoric artifacts, shipping them to museums within the European nation in which they were found, and sometimes sending duplicate objects back to museums in the United States. Henry Field, who would later play a major role in the development and display of physical anthropology collections in the United States, claimed to have found his first prehistoric artifact in Europe at age six, after his mother was remarried to a man with a 2,000 acre estate in the countryside of Leicestershire, England.⁴⁶³ The rise of prehistoric studies in Europe would gradually continue to influence the course of studies in the United States, including those linked directly to the study and display of human remains. Although the gravity of the focus of physical anthropology in the United States would gradually shift to deeper studies of human ancestors, mainly in Africa and Asia, the study

⁴⁶¹ George Grant MacCurdy, "The First Season's Work of the School in France for Prehistoric Studies" *American Anthropologist* 24, No. 1 (1922): 61-71.

⁴⁶² A vast literature exists on the subject of the rise of museums in Europe, but especially Britain, Germany, and France. Two examples of this literature, includes, Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians, and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Glenn H. Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007). For a general overview of this the early development of a field of prehistory, see Donald R. Kelley, "The Rise of Prehistory," *Journal of World History* 14, No. 1. (2003): 17-36.

⁴⁶³ Ed Yastrow, and Stephen E. Nash, "Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development, 1926-1941," in *Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893-2002*. Stephen E. Nash and Gary M. Feinman, eds. (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 2003): 127.

of prehistory in Europe was, for a time, critically important to the history of human remains collections in the United States.

The ASFPS viewed itself as fighting both looters and Mother Nature, both of which undermined efforts to preserve evidence of prehistoric man. An article summarizing the work of the school reads, “museums are the stations in which specially prepared sections of the relic-bearing deposits are protected from ruthless hands as well as from the elements, and will ever remain to tell the story of how man lived and how long he lived before the dawn of history.”⁴⁶⁴ The school also proclaimed itself as serving a new function in American archaeology, described by the director of the program in his comments on program activities: “They were undertaken in the spirit of the pioneer, who has no precedents to break and none to observe.”⁴⁶⁵ The ASFPS, while certainly not the first official effort in obtaining prehistoric material for museums in the United States, signals something of an official movement toward prehistory in American archaeology.

In the summer of 1923, Aleš Hrdlička served as the school’s director, though he was hesitant to take on the task of organizing and maintaining the field school. Hrdlička, as might be expected, instructed the students to read background literature on both general prehistory as well as his work on ancient skeletal remains.⁴⁶⁶ In addition to expanding the school’s interest into the realm of human remains, Hrdlička also hoped to expand the school geographically to other parts of Europe. This decision, however, was unpopular amongst other scholars involved with the school. Charles Peabody, curator of European Archaeology at the Peabody Museum in Harvard, was led to comment on Hrdlička’s plans, “I am sorry he has departed so far from the ideas of those of us who founded the School. It is hardly the ‘School in France.’”⁴⁶⁷ Hrdlička’s intentions of geographical expansion were pedagogical; however, in addition to having the students read about the use of skeletal remains in the understanding of prehistory, Hrdlička brought the students to a field site where Neanderthal remains had been discovered.⁴⁶⁸ Hrdlička argued, and the committee that supported the school eventually agreed that, “the School ought to broaden our and give the American students the very best possible,” which Hrdlička explained, “should include an initial firsthand knowledge of the most important site (sic) and discoveries of Early Man in Western and Central Europe.”⁴⁶⁹ It would be inaccurate to describe collecting of prehistoric remains in Europe as totally separate from the project of nation building in the United States, but this history was more directly tied into nationalistic competition between the museums of Europe. The professionalization of prehistory in Europe, however, influenced the course of museums in the United States and encouraged scholars to look for clues about humanity in the

⁴⁶⁴ MacCurdy, “The First Season’s Work of the School in France for Prehistoric Studies,” 63-65.

⁴⁶⁵ MacCurdy, “The First Season’s Work of the School in France for Prehistoric Studies,” 71.

⁴⁶⁶ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to E.B. Renaud, May 14, 1923. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Hrdlička suggests to Renaud, a professor at the University of Denver, that students prepare for the summer by reading Hrdlička’s publication from the Smithsonian series, “The Most Ancient Skeletal Remains of Man.”

⁴⁶⁷ Letter from Charles Peabody to George MacCurdy, May 18, 1923. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁶⁸ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to G. Steinmann, May 28, 1923. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁶⁹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Charles Peabody, June 13, 1923. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

bones of the dead from across all of history. Although they were not without flaw, having been tied to complex projects of nationalism and imperialism, studies in prehistory stole attention away from the racial classification theories built upon the study of the remains of the ancient dead and the measurement of the living.

Human Remains and Ancient History

Just as scholars interested in collecting, studying, and displaying human remains were becoming increasingly active in the collection of materials for the study of prehistory, they were starting to lobby other scholars interested in archaeology and ancient history to collect remains. In writing to the esteemed Egyptologist James H. Breasted of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, Hrdlička expressed his concern about the fate of remains found on those archaeological expeditions concerned mainly with ancient history. Hrdlička stated that he could not help but think of the skeletal material that the Oriental Institute would inevitably uncover while conducting archaeological investigations. He wrote that he hoped that archaeological work, “of the Institute will be attended by a saving, as far as possible, of the precious skeletal material that may be discovered,” and continued, “for neither the archaeology nor the anthropology of the Near East can ever be well understood without a study of ample skeletal remains of the people.”⁴⁷⁰ Just like the World War and various international expositions, a series of new archaeological expeditions to the Near East provided opportunities to collect skeletal remains. The study of ancient history, to be sure, was tied into the construction of nationalistic projects like the study of prehistory, but the growing emphasis on the study of human remains within the study of ancient world cultures also pointed to burgeoning questions about human history more generally. The question of race certainly did not escape the equation, as scholars who studied ancient skeletons—stretching back to Samuel George Morton—continually turned to ancient remains for clues about the supposed solidification of racial characteristics. Furthermore, observers in the United States very often tied ancient remains, like those from Ancient Egypt, to particular biblical narratives, thus increasing their popular appeal. As the fields of physical anthropology and archaeology continued to professionalize in the United States, ancient remains displayed at museums and fairs were less often tied to particular stories from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Museums in the United States during this period were especially active in collecting Classical or Old World archaeological material. Professional collecting of material from present day sites around ancient Babylonia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome was fueled by an existing familiarity and fascination with these regions. Professional archaeological associations allowed museums in both the United States and Europe to fund expeditions and in return receive a portion of the materials discovered. Outpacing the professional collecting of classical archaeological materials were the private donations of wealthy patrons. When not purchasing objects on their trips around the world, wealthy patrons of museums in both the United States and Europe frequently funded archaeological expeditions, hoping to fill their favorite museums with priceless artifacts from various parts of the globe. These material donations frequently included mummies from Egypt, which became popular attractions for museums that displayed

⁴⁷⁰ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to James Henry Breasted, June 19, 1922. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence, Bohemian Circle-Breuil. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

them. Many in the United States were familiar with ancient Egypt due to its centrality in Biblical narratives, and the opportunity to view the preserved body of an ancient Egyptian proved to be alluring. Museums, in turn, were encouraged to display donated mummies due to both their widespread appeal and the widespread expectation that there would be one on display at museums of science, history, and natural history. The practice became so ubiquitous, in fact, that one museum curator was later prompted to reflect that no self-respecting museum was without a mummy from ancient Egypt.⁴⁷¹ Although these remains may have been exhibited and observed with an Orientalist, racialized appeal, their primary draw in the early twentieth century was their direct connection to the ancient history was more often found in Judeo-Christian narratives.

Roland B. Dixon and Racial History

Despite the growing interest in prehistoric archaeology in the United States, race continued to be dominant in physical anthropology of the first quarter of the twentieth century. Roland B. Dixon, an anthropologist at Harvard, published many of his ideas in a controversial volume titled *The Racial History of Man*, in 1923.⁴⁷² The reception of the book was lukewarm, at best. Dixon wrote to Hrdlička, “I know that I can hardly expect that it will have a very favorable reception, for you will, I am sure, regard the method as wholly indefensible. I beg, however, that you will regard it as an honest effort to try to bring together in one single field of view, a terribly complex subject.”⁴⁷³ Hrdlička replied with a blend of American metaphors, “As to the book, all that I can say is that if you have spilled the milk you will have to take your medicine.”⁴⁷⁴ Following the publication of *The Racial History of Man* and the publication of a major catalogue of the Smithsonian’s human crania collections, Dixon and Hrdlička traded blows in a series of letters and harsh reviews.⁴⁷⁵ In particular, the two argued over the validity of certain measurements of remains. Details in methodological approach, while seemingly trifling points, held major implications for the two men in terms of how racial categories were to be developed. If they could not agree on the manner in which crania of different races were compared, for example, the influence of their respective work would be hampered. Not only did they argue over methodological details such as measurements, the two argued over the nature of Hrdlička’s control over the Smithsonian’s collection of remains. Dixon accused the Smithsonian of “withholding from students important data which were actually in your hands.”⁴⁷⁶ In responding to Dixon’s nasty reviews and letters, Hrdlička wrote curtly, “I know that revenge is sweet, but you are an inordinately ungrateful and greedy lot, all of

⁴⁷¹ Samuel J. Redman, “What Self Respecting Museum is Without One?: Collecting the Old World at the Science Museum of Minnesota, 1914-1988.” *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archive Professionals* 1 No. 4 (2005): 309-328.

⁴⁷² Roland B. Dixon, *The Racial History of Man* (New York: Scribner, 1923).

⁴⁷³ Letter from Roland B. Dixon to Aleš Hrdlička, March 10, 1923. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁷⁴ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Roland B. Dixon, March 19, 1923. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁷⁵ Ales Hrdlička, *Catalogue of Human Crania in the United States National Museum Collections* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924).

⁴⁷⁶ Letter from Roland B. Dixon to Aleš Hrdlička, February 18, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

you. Also, most unreasonable.”⁴⁷⁷ The race to acquire remains from around the world—a process that had previously manifested itself in terms of seemingly friendly, scholarly competition—had become a rivalry over bone rooms in museums across the United States that suddenly took a hostile, and quite personal, turn.

The root of Dixon’s and Hrdlička’s disagreements was centered primarily on two major points. Intellectually, they argued over which skeletal measurements were most useful in differentiating various populations. Certain measurements, each individual argued, were more useful and stable in the comparative study of race, while others were virtually useless due to fluctuations or lack of stability within groups; these disagreements point to some of the flaws scholars would later use to critique the overall methodology of physical anthropologists. Further, Dixon argued that Hrdlička mishandled his position as the curator of the nation’s largest collection of skeletal material. Dixon wrote to Hrdlička, “You are, in a relation to the collections in your charge, not a private individual. You are a trustee for scientists everywhere. You have no right to follow your individual opinions in regard to what you shall publish.” Dixon continued by arguing that the data Hrdlička must make available to other scholars should be as complete as possible, “It is your duty to afford to others the most complete information possible, when you publish an official catalog of the national collections.”⁴⁷⁸ That key measurements were missing from the Smithsonian catalogue rendered the volume entirely useless as a scholarly resource. Although other scholars hesitated to say so directly in correspondence and publications, the tone of Dixon’s comments echoes the widespread unrest over Hrdlička’s restrictive management of the supposedly national collection. This type of unrest cut across numerous institutions and professional relationships, manifesting itself in the form of personal rivalries like Hrdlička and Dixon’s, fueled in part by the sentiment of competition between different institutions over the collection, display, and interpretation of human remains. Underlying the idealistic arguments for academic freedom or access to collections were the very real sentiments of institutional and scholarly competition over human remains. These rivalries had certainly emerged in Peru years earlier when Yale attempted to claim scientific rights over natural history and archaeological collections—including human remains—and they arose again as Harvard and the Smithsonian hashed out methods for studying skeletons. Throughout all of these debates, collections of skeletal remains were conceptualized as scientific objects, rather than the bodies of the dead, a fact that seemed to barely be referenced at all.

Some weeks later, Hrdlička wrote to Dixon asking that he explain which measurements, specifically, he hoped to see included in the Smithsonian’s catalogue. Dixon sent a letter, now in a much calmer and more measured tone, arguing that the Smithsonian’s official catalogue of crania should include several new measurements. Dixon was sensitive to the notion that adding space for new tables containing measurements might be a challenge. Dixon indicated his opinion that space for these new measurements might be acquired by relegating the existing space in the catalogue that noted the origin of the crania to a footnote. Descriptions of deformities too, could be

⁴⁷⁷ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Roland B. Dixon, February 21, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁷⁸ Letter from Roland B. Dixon to Aleš Hrdlička, February 26, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

abbreviated to regain space. Clearly, Dixon clung to the belief that, above all, measurements of crania would be useful for the comparative study of race.⁴⁷⁹ For him, the exact archaeological provenance and the nature of various deformities were simply afterthoughts for the development of racial classification theories. Hrdlička would eventually agree to include several of these requested measurements in future catalogues, but reminded Dixon he could simply write to ask for more specific details about each crania.⁴⁸⁰ Despite these eventual compromises, the perception remained that Hrdlička was highly guarded in his curation of the Smithsonian's collections. Leaders at Harvard, as elsewhere, periodically indicated that they desired greater access to these collections in order to advance competing ideas about race and history.

Not only did *The Racial History of Man* fuel arguments between Hrdlička and Dixon about curatorial control and ownership of data, the manuscript was used by other scholars to support several major critiques of racial theory, one of which was put forth by Franz Boas. Boas began his own critique of the book by detailing the role of standardized measurements in the field of physical anthropology and the study of the ancient history of mankind. Whereas previous scholars relied mainly on observation of physical characteristics, Boas argued that modern scholars attempted to quantify these differences through careful, scientific measurement. Boas wrote, "Professor Dixon's attempt to unravel the racial history of man runs counter to this whole development." Dixon's book argues that the physical features of the eight races of mankind remain relatively stable over the course of time, an argument that many scholars of the period were rejecting increasingly emphatically. According to Dixon, humans were thus immune from environmental influences—an argument that scholars like Boas tore apart based on their understanding of evolutionary theory of the period. Though Boas did argue, "It is, of course, true that the human races have intermarried to such an extent that the attempt to find a pure race anywhere is futile," he continued that, "Notwithstanding this fact, we ought not to overlook the similarity of the phenomenon to the analogous variability of plants and animals which occur over extended area." Boas was also attuned to subtle claims of racial superiority made in Dixon's argument. Dixon argued that the history of human achievement might be understood singularly through the study of anatomical form. Boas argued that, like human culture, the human form had changed gradually over time. The emerging evidence, according to Boas and many of his later followers, suggested that races could no longer be conceptualized as belonging to unchanging racial categories. He therefore replied to Dixon's competing notion of racial stability directly, arguing, "If it were valid, then at different periods it would justify entirely different views." In Boas' view, cultures ebbed and flowed in terms of relative strength and achievement, and not along lines of strict morphological characterization. Boas further implied that scholars like Dixon largely changed their tune depending on context, their arguments shifting from discussing the overall racial superiority of whites to critical responses to claims of racial superiority emerging in Germany.⁴⁸¹ The concept that Dixon

⁴⁷⁹ Letter from Roland B. Dixon to Aleš Hrdlička, March 19, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁸⁰ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Roland B. Dixon, March 20, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁸¹ Franz Boas, "Review of *The Racial History of Man* by Roland B. Dixon," *Science* 57, No. 1481 (1923): 587-590.

proposed meshed well with the popular eugenic theories of the moment, but scholars like Boas and Hrdlička were seemingly too busy critiquing other aspects of the volume to take note of that fact. Instead, Boas critiqued the notion of racial stability while Hrdlička derided Dixon's methodological approach to the study of human bones.

The concept of "racial history" was not new when Dixon utilized the term for his book. Some of the backlash, in fact, arose from Dixon's willingness to conflate the various terminologies, theories, and methodologies of prehistoric archaeology with those of the study of race. Many scholars clearly believed that these arenas were rightly starting to move along differing courses by this time. Dixon's ideas, in fact, were in some sense closer to ideas postulated earlier in the century. Thomas Wilson, a Smithsonian curator who specialized in prehistoric archaeology, described the early germination of racial history in an undated and unpublished manuscript. Wilson, who died in 1902 (placing the origin of the manuscript at least twenty years prior to the publication of Dixon's *The Racial History of Man*), described the relationship between the study of race and prehistory in simplistic detail. Wilson wrote, "Any comprehensive study of the races of man should begin with his origin, if only to give a resume of the theories advances." Wilson, in his earlier work, then turned to a series of questions that scholars of Dixon's generation would have found outdated, including the question of polygenesis against the concept of monogenesis that was central to the debates about race in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸² As the majority of scholars pushed back against the overall concept of racial history, older methodological approaches to the study of race that utilized the discipline of prehistoric archaeology as a major tool were still in existence. Despite the barrage of critique, echoes of the racial classification theories of the turn of the century were seemingly revisited in the pages of significant works published decades into the twentieth century. Although these debates may have centered on the intellectual interpretation of evidence drawn from bone rooms regarding racial history, these were also firmly ensconced in the institutional competition continually appearing between museums in the United States during this period.

Early Growth of Physical Anthropology in Universities

By the mid-1920s, physical anthropology was growing in universities in the United States. Fay Cooper-Cole, the founder of the anthropology department at the University of Chicago, reported to Hrdlička in 1926 that students of physical anthropology were making particular strides within his department. "The interest here is keen," wrote Cole, who viewed Hrdlička as a leader of the field. Cole hoped that Hrdlička might visit the campus of the University of Chicago, explaining, "we are anxious to have our students meet the leaders in American anthropology."⁴⁸³ Cole had spent time working at the Field Museum of Natural History before leaving for a job at Northwestern University, followed by a permanent appointment at the University of Chicago. While a professor at Chicago, Cole's prominence within American

⁴⁸² Unpublished Manuscript. No Date. Thomas Wilson, "The Antiquity of Man in its Relation to the Peopling of America. A Study of Prehistoric Anthropology." Records of the Department of Anthropology. Division of Ethnology. Manuscript and Pamphlet File. Folder: Antiquity America—Wilson. Box: 85-A. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁸³ Letter from Fay Cooper-Cole to Aleš Hrdlička, October 31, 1926. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence, Cattell-Commerce Dept. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

anthropology grew. By 1925, he was asked to testify as an expert witness in the notorious Scopes “Monkey Trial.” Cole, knowledgeable in both religion and human evolution, would go on to maintain a cordial relationship with both attorneys from the famous trial concerning the teaching of evolution in public schools, Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan. Like other academics who began teaching physical anthropology within departments of anthropology, Cole taught students at the university before sending them to study human remains firsthand in museum collections.⁴⁸⁴ Although the growth of physical anthropology in American universities was apparent, it was stunted by some lingering confusion regarding qualifications for the field. Physical anthropologists of the era were trained disparately, in either medical schools or in departments of anthropology. Just as debates were emerging regarding the standardization of measurements of skeletal remains, scholars were also arguing over what served as qualification for future scholars conducting research in the field. The struggle to determine how best to train future generations of physical anthropologists worked to hinder the early development of professional organizations and societies, while at the same time informing the ongoing definition of the field. The early growth of physical anthropology in universities like Chicago, depended in no small part on the availability of human remains collections for study. For a time, faculty and graduate students from the University of Chicago were to rely heavily on the skeletal remains in the bone room at the Field Museum for their research.

Race and Runners

During the 1932 Olympics, the 100-meter dash witnessed a dramatic finish. A pair of runners, Ralph Metcalf and Eddie Tolan, sprinted to the front of the group and lunged towards the tape, crossing the finish line at virtually the same instant. The pair of runners, both of them African-American, would win gold in both the 100 and 200 meter dashes, setting new Olympic records in the events. Ed Gordon, another African-American, won the gold medal in the broad jump. For many white spectators, it seemed that as soon as African Americans were allowed to participate in Olympic events they began to dominate the competition. In the early 1930s, this seemed especially true in sprinting and long jumping competitions. Witnessing African American competitors dominate the global competition caused certain spectators to ponder whether or not African Americans possessed some sort of unique physical advantage. Although the achievements of African Americans in athletics were seemingly unrelated to intellectual and cultural trends in physical anthropology, they reignited popular debates about racial difference in both Europe and the United States. W. Montague Cobb, the African American physical anthropologist at Howard University, responded directly to the preponderance of these ideas in a popular and influential article titled, “Race and Runners” which appeared in *The Journal of Health and Physical Education* in 1936.

⁴⁸⁴ Though Cole is primarily remembered for his studies in cultural anthropology, he did have several students who entered the field of physical anthropology. One of Cole’s students included Wilton M. Krogman, who would become a prominent anthropologist in his own right. Krogman studied with Cole at Chicago before being instructed to study the human remains collections at the Field Museum of Natural History and Case Western Reserve University (the Hamann-Todd Osteological Collection, which was eventually turned over to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History).

In his article, aimed somewhat at a popular audience, Cobb argued that these kinds of questions were by no means new. In the 1910s, Finnish dominance over other nationalities in long distance running caused spectators to ask questions about the nature of Finnish physique and culture. Scholars of the period asked similar questions regarding whether the physical or cultural characteristics of Finns helped them to compete in a particular sport. In order to address questions of racial difference and athletic capability, Cobb examined several athletes, including the famed sprinter Jesse Owens. Cobb came to the conclusion that while these *individual* athletes certainly possessed unique physical attributes, allowing them to run faster and jump higher than the average person, these characteristics were not *racially* unique. In fact, an examination of the calf muscles in Jesse Owens revealed numerous characteristics that Cobb identified as Caucasoid rather than Negroid.

Cobb concluded that, “The physiques of champion Negro and white sprinters in general and of Jesse Owens in particular reveal nothing to indicate that Negroid physical characters are anatomically concerned with the present dominance of Negro athletes in national competition in the short dashes and the broad jump.” In fact, he continued, “There is not a single physical characteristic which all the Negro stars in question have in common which would definitely identify them as Negroes.”⁴⁸⁵ Despite the seemingly trivial nature of the question—whether or not racial characteristics influenced the ability of certain individuals to excel at sport—the outcome of the debate was telling, as it opposed not only popular belief but also the lingering tendency toward racial classification in the sciences. The semi-popular nature of this debate points to the continued, broad influence of ideas of racial difference stemming from physical characteristics that was shared among citizens as well as in the halls of academe. Cobb used his extensive experience studying human anatomy—especially his experience working with human remains—using the debate as an opportunity to refute the very validity of racial categories.

The Physical Constitution of the American Negro

Two years following his publication on the physical characteristics of African American athletes, Cobb wrote a lengthy article exploring current understandings of the physical makeup of people of African descent more generally. Cobb’s study was based both on anthropometric work with living populations of African Americans, as well as extensive work with skeletal remains in museums and universities. In the opening lines of his work, Cobb cites a survey of human remains collections at American institutions, revealing that, “the bulk of such material consists of skeletal remains, most of which are American Indian. But 5 per cent are American Negro.”⁴⁸⁶ Early on in the work, Cobb cites Hrdlička, who previously argued that the understanding of the physical makeup of the American Negro was limited, at best. A comprehensive survey of anthropometric

⁴⁸⁵ Reprint. Montague W. Cobb, “Race and Runners,” *The Journal of Health and Physical Education*. Vol. VII, No. 1. January 1936. W. Montague Cobb Papers, Box 34, Folder: Writings by Cobb—R; Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁸⁶ Cobb specifically points to the collections at Western Reserve University and Washington University, though he was certainly familiar with the collections at the Smithsonian Institution as well. Reprint. Montague W. Cobb, “The Physical Constitution of the American Negro.” *Journal of Negro Education*, July, 1934. Pp. 340-388. W. Montague Cobb Papers, Box 34, Folder: Writings by Cobb—The Physical Constitution-Pu; Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. 340.

research on African-Americans revealed a mere six studies at the time of Cobb's writing. Further justifying his work, Cobb notes that "Existing social conditions excite a particular interest in the nature and significance of the distinguishing features of the American Negro."⁴⁸⁷ The nature of Cobb's writings, which at times paired social dynamics with personal conclusions about race, underscores some of his motivations. Nevertheless, conclusions were tied to careful measurement and quantification of data, and his colleagues in the physical anthropological community clearly respected that Cobb's work was based on the supposedly "hard" evidence of actual collections of human remains and detailed measurements of the living. Within the small community of serious scholars routinely working with these collections, it would have been clear that Cobb was basing his argument on a deep and extensive record of close examination of remains of African Americans. Cobb, by this time, had already supervised the dissection and removal of skeletons from countless cadavers. Although certain scholars took issue with his argument, it was virtually impossible to take issue with the depth of his experience.

In summarizing the work of scholars who examined human remains, Cobb points to numerous disagreements on the nature of the skeletons of individuals of African descent. Part of the problem was that only a limited number of remains were available for scholars to examine; when compared to the larger collections of American Indians, the number of remains of individuals of African descent appeared almost paltry. While the collection at Case Western Reserve University possessed 800 skeletons of "American Negroes" and the collection at Washington University maintained a collection of 550 complete skeletons of African Americans, the collections were still comparatively small samples sizes, especially when put in the context of being charged with answering questions about such vast topics as race or human prehistory. Scholars working with these collections revealed different measurements than Hrdlička, who himself had surveyed a collection of 56 "full blood" black skulls and 122 skulls from West, East, and South Africa.⁴⁸⁸ When skeletal collections were successfully compared, however, the supposedly strict lines of racial classification were increasingly blurred, rather than coming into greater focus.

Hrdlička, in his earlier study of the collections of skeletons of African descent, argued that the remains showed a preponderance of a premature fusion of the sagittal suture of the skull. Scholars working with the larger collections at Washington University and Western Reserve University failed to see a similar trend, and Cobb argued that "the incidence of premature union of the sagittal suture seems unwarranted." Though Hrdlička's study of a particular part of the development of the skull did not appear to point directly to a racist conclusion of inferiority, it did continue the long held scientific trend of supporting claims of racial difference. These subtle differences, it was assumed, differentiated various races enough to make the construction of different racial categories possible. Like in his smaller study of living African American athletes, Cobb continued to emphasize the commonalities among races when examining collections of human remains. Though certainly aware of particular racial differences between bodies, Cobb's work deemphasized and critiqued the prevailing notions of racial classification, and was supported through the direct examination of the human body.⁴⁸⁹ In the conclusion of his

⁴⁸⁷ Cobb, "The Physical Constitution of the American Negro," 340.

⁴⁸⁸ Cobb, "The Physical Constitution of the American Negro," 374.

⁴⁸⁹ Cobb, "The Physical Constitution of the American Negro." 374-375.

major survey of African-American physical characteristics, Cobb remarked, “The evidence now available shows clearly that racial characters are largely variations of form which have no distinct functional survival value in modern civilization.”⁴⁹⁰ This was a bold and compelling statement for the era in which it appeared. Though Cobb concluded that racial differences might indeed exist and continue to be classified,⁴⁹¹ he felt these differences held no relevant meaning for modernity. Although it was certainly not clear at the time, Cobb’s work would serve as something of a bellwether for trends to come, as new generations of physical anthropologists would work to further break down heretofore dominant ideas about the existence of particular races that were thought to be scientifically classifiable through the detailed study of the human body. Although the notion that race, as defined by skeletal characteristics, possessed little or no meaning for modern civilization it was a compelling and thrilling scientific notion to some—importantly, however, it left the future direction of scholarship surrounding human remains collections in museums to an uncertain future.

Race, Age, and Human Origins Research in the AAPA

Despite the disturbing context of scientific racism abroad during the 1930s and 1940s, of which the anthropological community in the United States was well aware, human remains continued to be used in comparative studies of race. Many scholars, in fact, did not share the misgivings possessed by Boas or Cobb regarding the project of developing strict and unmoving definitions of race. Demonstrative of this is the early history of the American Association of Physical Anthropology (AAPA)—a history dominated by anatomists. The first meeting of the AAPA, in fact, featured nineteen of the total twenty-nine papers given by anatomists.⁴⁹² The preponderance of anatomist reflected a continued, if at times uncomfortable, marriage between the fields of anthropology and anatomy. The lingering centrality of questions surrounding racial classification dominated the early history of the association, although it would gradually give way to questions regarding human history as Cobb, Boas and others attacked the very notion that races could be strictly categorized.

The Third Annual Meeting of the AAPA, which took place in 1932, demonstrates the longevity of the study of race within the discipline. The papers presented at the Smithsonian Institution—the site of the conference—included, “The Nose of the American Negro,” “The Relations of the Sciatic Nerve to the Piriformis Muscle in American Whites and Negroes,” and “Dermatoglyphics in Shoshoni Arapaho Indians.”⁴⁹³ In 1935, papers on similar subjects—including a study of Blackfoot craniology, a general

⁴⁹⁰ Cobb, “The Physical Constitution of the American Negro,” 387.

⁴⁹¹ Despite this tendency, Cobb did sometimes argue against the validity of race as an intellectual concept. In an article published in 1939, he wrote, “Against this distant and hopeful day when race will be a historical phase, others less auspicious must be anticipated.” Reprint. Montague W. Cobb, “The Negro as a Biological Element in the American Population,” *Journal of Negro Education*, July, 1939. 347. W. Montague Cobb Papers, Box 34, Folder: Writings by Cobb—N.M.A.-Negro; Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴⁹² T.D. Stewart, “The Growth of American Physical Anthropology between 1925 and 1975,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 48, No. 3. (1975): 198-199.

⁴⁹³ Program of the Third Annual Meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists held at the Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C. March 21-23, 1932. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

study on the anatomy of “the American Negro,” and a paper on “The Plasticity of the Japanese Physical Type”—were presented alongside papers on human evolution. Papers comparing the anatomy of humans to that of primates were presented alongside a paper entitled, “The Roles of Undeviating Evolution and Transformation in the Origin of Man.”⁴⁹⁴ While the interest in human prehistory and evolutionary approaches at this conference anticipates future developments, the field was still, at this time, dominated by studies of comparative race. Many of these studies, both those presented by anatomists and anthropologists, were based heavily upon research in bone rooms of museums across the country.

During the 1930s, a large number of scholars became increasingly interested in human growth and aging. The desire to understand aging came from a number of basic problems in both anthropology and archaeology. Knowing how human bodies age, specifically the aging process experienced by human bones and teeth, was thought to be useful for informing studies on diet and nutrition, as well as providing archaeologists and anthropologists with data for calculating the age of fossils or remains discovered on archaeological sites. Similarly, archaeologists who encountered human remains were also eager for clues regarding the respective ages of the skeletons they discovered upon the historical time of death. In 1936, the American Association of Physical Anthropologists heard papers on, “Changes in the Dimensions and Form of the Face with Age,” and “Developmental changes in Facial Features.”⁴⁹⁵

By the mid-to-late 1930s, human origins research had gradually ensconced itself into physical anthropology research in the United States. In 1937, Robert Broom of the Transvaal Museum of South Africa traveled to the annual meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists to deliver a paper on new research related to the discovery of a distant human ancestor, *Australopithecus afarensis*. Broom’s discovery would vault him into a leadership position in the international anthropological community, and his presence in the United States was part of an ongoing, gradual shift away from those who focused more strictly on race toward those who were making impressive discoveries in places like Africa and Asia.

In the same year, scholars presented papers that were more critical than in years past of comparative racial anatomy and the study of fragmentary human remains. Papers presenting racial classifications or the analysis of racial types continued to be presented; however, it was in organizations such as the AAPS where scholars from both museums and universities who were interested in comparative racial anatomy, human growth and diet patterns, and human origins and prehistory temporarily struck a balance.⁴⁹⁶ This balance would eventually tilt in favor of studies of human ancestry, but, for the moment, the two lines of study struck a somewhat uneasy accord. Bone rooms in major natural history museums and smaller medical museums around the country were unusually

⁴⁹⁴ Final Program of the Annual Meeting of American Association of Physical Anthropologists held at the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, Philadelphia, April 25-27, 1935. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁹⁵ Final Program of Annual Meeting, American Association of Physical Anthropologists, April 30-May 2, 1936 held at the Institute of Human Relations, Yale University. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁹⁶ Final Program of the Annual Meeting, American association of Physical Anthropologists, April 8-10, 1937 held at Faculty Club Harvard University. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

active, hosting scholars who were asking a wide range of large questions about humanity. Despite the increased attention paid to skeletal remains to answer a variety of questions, the limitations of research on human remains remained unclear.

The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology at Howard University

W. Montague Cobb, in the introduction to his important monograph chronicling his career up to 1936, began by explaining to his audience, “These pages are a record of an attempt to keep the faith.”⁴⁹⁷ While Cobb enjoyed the start of a successful career in medicine, he witnessed many of the numerous challenges facing those African Americans who attempted to enter into medicine and anthropology during this era. Lingering Jim Crow policies and racist attitudes led to the denial of job applications and fellowships, and discouragement from attending academic or professional meetings in many cities. Yet at Howard University, one of the nation’s oldest historically black colleges, scholars like Cobb enjoyed the freedom to craft rapidly professionalizing departments, shaping curricula and organizing research programs. In 1932, Cobb was assigned the task of developing a program for the teaching of gross anatomy and physical anthropology at Howard’s medical school, “the assumption being that this work would enable the Department as a whole to conform to the highest standard of medical education.”⁴⁹⁸ Cobb attempted to model the department after the established program at Case Western Reserve University, where he had spent time as a fellow working with their collections.⁴⁹⁹ Cobb’s work and career, too, were increasingly supported by a growing network of scientists in Washington who shared intellectual concerns in anatomy, race, and physical anthropology.

In developing the anatomical collections for Howard, Cobb built upon existing collections. Older collections had been brought together by Daniel Smith Lamb, who acquired a large number of teaching models, mammal skeletons, preserved dissections, and a series of osteological specimens that had been subject to gunshot trauma. Lamb worked as a faculty member at Howard from 1873 to 1923, and when Cobb was first offered a chance to survey his collections, he encountered a striking sensation. Cobb wrote, “As I enthusiastically noted the scope of his interest, the meticulous attention to detail and the vision of future needs which specimen after specimen in surviving dust-covered boxes revealed, his purposes seemed so plainly evident that I felt I was reading his original thoughts.”⁵⁰⁰ Cobb’s notion that he was reading the thoughts of the deceased scholar through an examination of the collection of human remains is telling, and points to the lingering notion of these collections as both intellectually and physically constructed by determined individuals working at institutions around the country. By exploring the nature of collections, Cobb seemingly contends, the ideas and motivations

⁴⁹⁷ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 1.

⁴⁹⁸ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 2.

⁴⁹⁹ Cobb describes the collection at the Hamann Museum of Comparative Anatomy and Anthropology as possessing, “the largest and best documented collection of human remains to be found anywhere, in addition to large and comprehensive mammalian collections.” The Hamann collection eventually became the basis for a museum of comparative anatomy. Following the Second World War, the collection was subsequently transferred to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, where it is today known as the Todd-Hamann Collection. It remains one of the largest collections of human remains in the world.

⁵⁰⁰ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 3.

behind the drive to collect, research, and display human remains could be better understood.

The collection that Cobb inherited was not without problems. In the years between Cobb's arrival at Howard and Lamb's retirement and death, some of the collections had either deteriorated or been lost during the move to a new facility in 1928.⁵⁰¹ Nevertheless, Cobb began his program for teaching and research at Howard with an existing collection of human and animal remains. Within a few years of his arrival at Howard, Cobb built on his knowledge of researching and displaying bodies, not only gathering literature from medical departments from around the globe, but also examining numerous museums as reference in crafting a plan for displaying human remains at Howard.⁵⁰² Ideas, in other words, were being disseminated through museum exhibitions as well as professional articles and monographs.

Within a few years, Cobb had worked with several faculty members to build an anatomy department that included a dissecting room, embalming room, and a morgue.⁵⁰³ Exhibit cases spread throughout the building displayed a mixture of models, charts, and bones from human cadavers. Actual remains included a display of long bones and a pair of cases containing a wide variety of human skulls.⁵⁰⁴ The exhibition was certainly more modest than the heavily funded displays like *The Story of Man Through the Ages* in San Diego (1915) or *The Hall of Mankind* in Chicago (1933), and it was intended for a different audience—medical students, as opposed to the broader public. Furthermore, the modest exhibit at Howard worked to break down existing schemes of racial classification more explicitly than did the earlier two examples, which largely underscored and tacitly promoted ideas of racial classification. All three of these exhibits, despite obvious difference in aims, utilized evidence drawn from human remains and anthropometry to build their underlying arguments.

The exhibitions affiliated with the Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology at Howard University were not intended for broad public consumption. Rather, they were intended to teach medical students who spent much of their time in the building. Cobb argued that exhibitions of this kind were a necessary and desirable component for teaching medical students. He wrote, "The advantage of association of a museum with an anatomical laboratory, today need no argument."⁵⁰⁵ Cobb noted that displays of this kind should include exhibits on human structure, growth and development, variation, prehistory, and phylogeny.⁵⁰⁶ Cobb further articulated the role of the museum within the department of anatomy by explaining the process through which remains are acquired. He explained, "If material is carefully and fully utilized, a museum

⁵⁰¹ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 3.

⁵⁰² Rather than taking a single tour of museums, Cobb describes his efforts along these lines as, "visits to other departments whenever possible." He specifically notes visiting Harvard, Columbia, Pennsylvania, McGill and New York and Washington Universities. Additionally, he explains that he visited Harvard's group of Natural History and Anthropological Museums, the Warren Anatomical Museum, the Boston Museum of Natural History, the American Museum of Natural History and the Field Museum of Natural History. Finally, Cobb notes his visits to a series of zoos including those in New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Chicago, and Baltimore. Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 7-8.

⁵⁰³ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 15-21.

⁵⁰⁴ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 45-48.

⁵⁰⁵ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 54.

⁵⁰⁶ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 54-55.

will inevitably result from the work of an anatomical laboratory.”⁵⁰⁷ Cadavers, in other words, would be given continued use as objects for teaching in museum displays following a careful dissection. After learning from the remains of the recently deceased about surgical techniques, bodies could be appropriated as tools for understanding another series of questions about race, aging, and pathology.

While Cobb did emphasize teaching medical students about human difference in terms of race and gender, strict forms of racial classification were clearly deemphasized in the small exhibitions. In both Cobb’s major text and his actual displays, the subject of racial difference is assigned roughly the same amount of space as sexual difference, a fact that earlier intellectuals crafting medical museums would have found striking. Despite the de-emphasis of racial classification, Cobb did note that one of the strengths of Howard’s collection of human remains was its number of African American specimens. Instead of addressing the nature of Jim Crow medicine during the time period in which he is writing, Cobb delicately describes the number of African American remains as a unique and positive feature of the collection, capable of drawing other researchers to Howard in order to study the remains.⁵⁰⁸

While Cobb’s text generally deemphasizes racial classification, which Cobb terms “racial anatomy,” the subject is not wholly ignored. In describing the overall research program of the department, Cobb articulates some of the existing problems in the field of racial anatomy, stating:

The study of racial anatomy has proceeded through the last century slowly but steadily like a stalwart in a storm. Always beset with influences which made for political bias, scientific method in this field has been hampered especially by the headline hunters of various groups interested in self-perpetuation, which have repeatedly snatched from students of human variation, unrefined data and immature conclusions for incorporation into their own ideology.⁵⁰⁹

Jumping from the subject of the study of racial variation within Howard’s research program, Cobb continues by addressing the lingering effects of racism and the “Negro Slave Trade” within the study of racial difference. Cobb writes:

In respect to the American Negro, it was peculiarly unfortunate that the commercial possibilities of the slave trade were becoming manifest at the very time when physical anthropology was emerging as a separate discipline in Europe, during the latter part of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At this time European knowledge of West African cultures was practically negligible.⁵¹⁰

Cobb continues by further linking the commercial slave trade to the rise of scientific racism:

⁵⁰⁷ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 54.

⁵⁰⁸ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 57-58.

⁵⁰⁹ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 74.

⁵¹⁰ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 74.

The three factors of commercial interest, ignorance and pride of conquest thus combined to create in the mid of the European civilization of the day an impression of biological inferiority as regarded the black man. There is little occasion for surprise that early physical anthropologists seemed to accept the concept of the stratification of human races, with the white race at the top, as biologically sound. Nor is it remarkable that there should have been instances where able men adduced anatomical evidence in support of this view, either because of sincere conviction, or, unconsciously, to furnish justification for a trade which currently represented powerful economic interests.⁵¹¹

Cobb's interest in downplaying anatomical racial difference was thus clear. He viewed himself as reacting to a historical context of scientific racism linked directly to the slave trade. Cobb continues his argument by pointing to several recent studies that worked to break down anatomical ideas of racial difference. Further, Cobb was unafraid to address the link between racial classification and the creation of a social stratification system designed to keep people of color from achieving the social, political, or economic status of whites. Specifically, he viewed these social patterns as continuing in some form from the slave trade to the present day, and the misguided and racist science of racial classification had only worked to uphold those existing social structures.⁵¹²

Hrdlička's Concerns about Eugenics

Hrdlička, who remained the preeminent physical anthropologist in the United States, became increasingly concerned with the direction of the field of eugenics by the early 1940s. Though he supported the fundamental idea of eugenics, he struggled with the manner in which it was implemented, often critiquing official documents of the American Eugenics Society, an organization to which he had maintained a loose affiliation. By 1940 he would write, "the whole field of Eugenics is not at present in a very good state."⁵¹³ Hrdlička elaborated, "The fault lies in the fact that there have been advanced, as dogmas, various opinions and claims, before they were fully elucidated and sustained by science."⁵¹⁴ Concluding his thoughts in a letter directly to the Secretary of the American Eugenics Society, Hrdlička wrote, "The subject has become the prey of popular writers, and also some scientific propagandists rather than researchers. It needs a lot of young blood of the best kind so that it may be reestablished as a thoroughly high-class scientific procedure."⁵¹⁵

Hrdlička's official departure from the eugenics movement came much later, and with a much softer tone than other many other anthropologists of his generation. Alfred Kroeber, for his part, had labeled eugenics "a joke," during a public lecture many years

⁵¹¹ Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 74-75.

⁵¹² Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*: 1932-1936, 74-78.

⁵¹³ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Rudolf C. Bertheau, January 25, 1940. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵¹⁴ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Rudolf C. Bertheau, January 25, 1940. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵¹⁵ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Rudolf C. Bertheau, January 25, 1940. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

earlier, in 1914.⁵¹⁶ Unlike Hrdlička and the eugenicists, cultural anthropologists of the early twentieth century, many of whom ascribed to the ideas of Franz Boas, rejected the very notion that heredity could determine innate ability; the goal of the anthropologist, they argued, was to document *culture*. The importance of these two major veins of anthropology cannot be understated; distinct groups of cultural and physical anthropologists had begun to emerge, and it would be on these poles that the field would ultimately be difficultly defined. At this time, however, the two groups worked alongside one another, albeit diverging intellectually as the years passed. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, many of the most fervent supporters of eugenics within the anthropological community were forced to face the realities of changing scientific and social theories against the dark backdrop of scientific racism emerging in Europe.

Despite the departure of a leader in the field of physical anthropology from the American Eugenics Society, the organization witnessed the continued presence of both physical anthropology and museums for some time following Hrdlička's departure. Harry Lionel Shapiro, who held leadership positions within the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* and worked at the American Museum of Natural History and Columbia University, served as the AES president from 1956-1963. During the period of Shapiro's leadership of the AES, African American physical anthropologist and Civil Rights Activist W. Montague Cobb even spent some time on the organization's Board of Directors. This said, Cobb did not appear to be active within the activities of the society and his motivations for joining the organization are unclear.⁵¹⁷

Conclusion

Between 1920 and the end of the Second World War, a variety of factors led to the crumbling of the scientific certainty that once buttressed schemes of racial classification. Bone rooms helped define the lines that supposedly divided the races of mankind, but further studies and changes in the scientific community were blurring what at one time seemed so clear. Well before the 1940s, most prominent physical anthropologists expressed concern with the eugenics movement. Racial classification was more and more understood to espouse inherently racist implications. The claim that human achievement could be tied directly to the human form was under steady fire. The study of prehistory and human origins, however, provided safer territory for many scholars, as these studies often appeared more removed from the obvious political and social implications of race. Fueling these debates were arguments drawn directly from studies of human remains collections themselves. In the United States, anthropologists like Cobb and Boas utilized new discoveries to dispute the continued claims of racial difference made by scholars like Hrdlička and Dixon. Many scholars collecting remains abroad turned their attention to questions of human evolution, subsequently influencing

⁵¹⁶ As quoted in, Sackman, *Wild Men*, 260-261. Franz Boas, like his student Kroeber, had directly attacked the eugenics movement in the early part of the twentieth century, but received surprisingly little attention on the subject at the time. Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, 106-107.

⁵¹⁷ Cobb was briefly on the Board of Directors of the AES in the early 1960s. W. Montague Cobb Papers, Box 13, Folder: American Eugenics Society Inc.; Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University. In his earlier work, Cobb described eugenics as "eugenical propaganda" as "so dangerously liable to react unfavorably on minority groups that this approach is best left alone." Cobb, *The Laboratory of Anatomy and Physical Anthropology*, 78.

the scientific discourse underway in the United States. Despite some shared agreement, these intellectuals disputed details surrounding measurements, methodology, and remains themselves. In spite of a declining emphasis on the study of race, many scholars viewed questions surrounding the subject as unresolved, thus requiring still more study of new remains. Infusing nearly all of these intellectual debates was an increasingly competitive drive to fill the bone rooms of museums in the United States with unique and valuable skeletal material from around the globe. Harvard and the Smithsonian became clear leaders in the field, but museums like the Field Museum, American Museum of Natural History, and the University of California Museum of Anthropology followed closely behind, each reflecting particular regional strengths based on the interests of curators.

Scholars of pre-history and human origins increasingly utilized collections of human remains throughout the decade of the 1940s—many times the exact collections used in decades earlier to investigate racial classification. The Second World War, like World War I, would have a major impact on the collecting of human remains, but in a strikingly different manner—one that in many ways was intellectual rather than opportunistic. Scholarship in physical anthropology in some ways mirrored the course of the field of cultural anthropology. Numerous cultural anthropologists, led by Franz Boas, were shifting the central focus of the discipline away from the study of race and toward the study of the concept of culture. Albeit in a slower transition, the study of physical anthropology, based heavily on research of human remains collections in museums, was shifting from studies centered on race to ideas revolving around human history.

Boas, reflecting on his recent campaign to shift the gravity of the discipline of anthropology away from the study of race, pointed to the growing global implications of studies in racial classification. In a letter appealing for grant funding, he wrote:

For a number of years I have been engaged in investigations relating to racial characteristics, particularly for the purpose of showing the lack of any scientific basis for the theories which are at present dominant in Germany. I dare say that largely owing to my investigations the general position of American scientists, who ten years ago were dominated by racial enthusiasts . . . has completely changed and that it is generally recognized that social factors are infinitely more important than any so-called racial hereditary characteristics. It will take time to have the general public understand this, but we are doing out very best to make our stand well known.⁵¹⁸

While Boas, and a number of scholars who followed his lead, began to reflect on the intellectual shifts of the past decade, they were faced with a history of collecting human remains that left an indelible mark on museums across the United States. In short, the collections only grew within many museums, but the questions they were presumed to answer had shifted. Exhibits created during the shift occurring in the decade that Boas describes in the above letter will be explored in the following chapter.

⁵¹⁸ Letter from Franz Boas to Lucius N. Littaer, March 13, 1940. Professional Correspondence of Franz Boas, American Philosophical Society. Microfilm copy at the National Anthropological Archives. Reel No. 43.

Chapter 6—Human Remains and the Emerging Study of the Human Prehistory

In 1933, forty years after the World’s Columbian Exposition, the city of Chicago hosted the Century of Progress International Exposition. Displays on race and prehistory were featured once again. This time, such exhibitions received more attention than they had at the 1893 fair in the same city, where comparative studies of race and material culture had dominated. Emerging in the exhibitions was an increasingly balanced emphasis on the comparative study of race alongside a growing project to utilize human remains as tools for understanding human history. Collections of human remains that previously languished in bone rooms were starting to become central to the exhibition strategies of museums, teaching visitors about both race and human evolution—themes that were often connected, but sometimes displayed quite distinctly. Anthropologists of the period were generally in agreement with Fay Cooper-Cole when he stated that he considered the return of the fair to Chicago to be “an unusual opportunity to present Anthropology to the general public.”⁵¹⁹ How best to make such public presentations, however, was a matter of debate. Voices from the academic community, like Cooper-Cole, sounded against the curators of museums and the dwindling number of entrepreneurs who hoped the display of their private collections would bring in a quick buck. Ultimately, the debates exposed a shift in the study and display of human remains in museums in the United States in the late 1920s and early 1930s, away from an effort to display modes of racial classification and toward an effort to blend racial categorization with the study of prehistoric man and human evolution. Before this time, ideas presented to the public about racial classification had been noncontroversial; however, with increased attention turning to concepts of human evolution in the mid-1920s—particularly with the Scopes Trial’s publicity—exhibitions displaying the controversial ideas of human history grew in terms of size, complexity, and scope, while at the same time garnering public interest.⁵²⁰

Cooper-Cole, a professor at the University of Chicago, led the drive to organize official anthropological displays for the fair. Unfortunately for Cooper-Cole, his displays were overshadowed by a pair of new permanent exhibitions at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. These competing exhibitions were organized by an energetic and well-connected curator of physical anthropology, Henry Field. Field had previously achieved some success displaying human remains and his exhibitions were heavily influenced by the displays organized by Hrdlička in San Diego for what would become the San Diego Museum of Man. Field hoped to expand on his earlier efforts to display skeletal remains by embracing Hrdlička’s methods for display while adding in his own unique flair for the dramatic. The Field Museum exhibits for the 1933 fair, bringing together contemporary ideas about race and history, represent a snapshot of ideas drawn from bone empires just before the decline of racial classification studies and before physical anthropology focused more heavily on history and ancestry.

Immediately before the fall of scientific racism, existing collections of human remains emerged as an important tool for studying the deep human past. Scholars

⁵¹⁹ Letter from Fay Cooper-Cole to Aleš Hrdlička, October 3, 1929. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence, Cattell-Commerce Dept. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵²⁰ A summary of the manner in which ideas about evolution were challenged and displayed through visual images can be found in Clark, *God—Or Gorilla*.

interested in studying human remains began to change their language from one centered on *race*, to a discourse in the language of *population*, *migration*, and *evolution*. Attempting to understand the complex nature of human diversity should not be used to create a ranking system for various human races, many began to argue, but should instead be used to unlock the mysteries of the human past. Not all thinkers were convinced by this line of thought, however, and certain anthropologists continued to promote traditional forms of racial science. Modern molecular genetics was, before the Second World War, only barely in its infancy, and scholars were unsure about the future of understanding lineage through new technologies.

This chapter argues that the “fall” of scientific racism in the United States remained largely incomplete and partial. In describing the climb of the Anglo-American male to the apex of human civilization, many sources of the era positioned the development of the European-American ideal in terms of both human evolution and historical progress.⁵²¹ Further, the public remained largely convinced that physical differences might point to inherent abilities or disabilities directly linked to race. This chapter explores how the study of human remains and the resultant ideas emerging from these studies reflected various intellectual trends emerging in the studies of race and prehistory from about 1930 through the conclusion of Second World War. This chapter also explores how displays, such as those that opened at the Century of Progress Fair of 1933, may have influenced public perception of these matters. This chapter does not intend to argue that the study of human remains was not important to the study of human evolution before the fall of scientific racism. Quite the contrary, as when Aleš Hrdlička published his guide for collecting human remains in 1904 he noted that the “skull and skeletal remains are the only physical remnants of man’s most ancient to his most recent predecessor; hence the only objects from which it may be hoped to trace the biological evolution of man and of his varieties.”⁵²² And yet, in 1904, the vast majority of studies that embraced research on collections of human remains were focused on the construction of racial typologies. The emergence of human evolution research associated with those studying human remains in the United States was gradual and for a time it shared the stage with racial classification studies. This chapter concludes as racial typology drifts further away from the mainstream in medicine and anthropology in the United States. Taking the place of these studies was an emerging series of academic publications, exhibitions, and media stories focusing on the use of human remains to answer questions about human history.

Finally, this chapter investigates an important claim made by physical anthropologist T. Dale Stewart in 1975. In an article published in *Anthropological Quarterly*, Stewart argued that physical anthropology—unlike ethnography, archaeology, and linguistics—remained firmly ensconced in the museum until the dawn of the 1940s.⁵²³ Other scholars, including George Stocking, Ira Jacknis, Neil Harris, and Steven Conn have argued that shifts away from object-based epistemology pushed anthropology

⁵²¹ For a lengthier meditation on this argument, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Bederman’s study concludes earlier chronologically than the 1933 fair, but the manner in which progress was viewed in terms of both evolution and history echoed throughout the ensuing decades.

⁵²² Hrdlička, *Directions for Collecting*, 8.

⁵²³ T.D. Stewart, “The Growth of American Physical Anthropology between 1925 and 1975,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 48, No. 3 (1975): 193-204.

from a museum-based discipline to one based mainly in the university.⁵²⁴ Following Stewart, the argument that physical anthropology remained a museum-based discipline until the 1940s, along with the impact of New Deal programs on museums in the United States, should further complicate the accepted notion of the “museum period.”

Magdalenian Girl

Although popular audiences had seen numerous representations of the human form as well as an untold number of human remains in museums and fairs before the mid-to-late 1920s, the vast majority of these displays focused on racial typing rather than the prehistory of man. In the late nineteenth century, as naturally mummified remains discovered in the American Southwest became popular for exhibitions, displays of human remains, even the very ancient, were heavily racialized. In previous chapters, I explored how the concept of “racial history” emerged as a form of blending these two previously competing uses for collections of human remains. Despite the existence of mummies in the American Southwest, as well as the emergence of new Pre-Columbian remains from around the Americas, scholars and the public at-large, continued to associate the very ancient with Europe, Egypt, and the Fertile Crescent of modern-day Iraq and Iran. Because these narratives were more closely associated with the rise of modern Western Civilization, the emphasis placed on the display of prehistoric bodies in the United States was less racialized. Casts of these finds existed in museums in the United States, but the originals rarely traveled outside of their countries of origin and exhibits about human evolution remained infrequent. New discoveries, coupled with a dramatic increase in debates about human evolution in the 1920s, would continue to bring both popular and scholarly attention toward research and display of ideas related to human evolution.⁵²⁵

In the 1920s, the debut of a prehistoric skeleton from France captured the imagination of the media in Chicago. The display was organized shortly after Henry Field at the Field Museum of Natural History acquired a nearly complete skeleton in southwestern France dubbed “Magdalenian Girl,” named after the so-called Magdalenian portion of the Upper Paleolithic period, about 15,000 years ago. Magdalenian Girl was smuggled from the Cap Blanc region in France during World War I, reportedly in a coffin disguised as containing the body of a fallen American soldier. The remains were transported to the American Museum of Natural History in New York before being sent to the Field Museum. Records indicate that the Field Museum agreed to purchase the remains for the price of \$12,000, but an official transaction never seems to have been finalized. Field subsequently acquired a projectile point he claimed to have been

⁵²⁴ This list is not intended to be exhaustive, rather it intends to demonstrate the breadth of this literature through a few significant examples. Some U.S. cultural historians began examining museums critically in the middle of the twentieth century, Neil Harris, *The Gilded Age Revisited: Boston and the Museum Movement*, *American Quarterly* 14, No. 4 (1962): 545-566. Included in a wave of new literature on museums was the work of George Stocking. See, Stocking, *Objects and Others* and Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*. Of the many historians of museums influenced by Stocking was Ira Jacknis. Critical to my own work are new case studies on the history of museum anthropology including, Jacknis, “Alfred Koreber at Museum Anthropologist,” 27-32. Steven Conn works to contextualizing the historical trajectory of natural history museums in Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*.

⁵²⁵ In her book about the visual representation of ideas about human evolution, Constance Areson Clark vividly recounts the popular challenges faced by the American Museum of Natural History, as they mounted their own displays on human evolution in the middle of the 1920s. Clark, *God or Gorilla*, 25-27.

discovered near Magdalenian Girl's remains. Before the skeleton went on display, he encouraged the local media to speculate on the nature of the death of "Miss Cro-Magnon." Perhaps the projectile point discovered near her body was used to kill her, the press vividly reported, and maybe this murder had occurred at the hands of a jealous lover. Archaeological evidence confirming any of these claims was limited at best. Nevertheless, when the remains went on display in the mid-1920s, the Field Museum smashed a single day attendance record as 22,000 spectators came to view her remains.⁵²⁶

New discoveries related to prehistory in Europe, combined with the rarity of the display of originals of these finds in the United States, fueled a desire to see representations of prehistory on display. Adding to those desires, the press elaborated on the popular imagination surrounding ancient remains—fantasies that often included sex, love, and tragic death. News of new discoveries traveled from Europe, and many in the United States were eager to see displays firsthand. Eventually, the creation of new displays from the late 1920s through the 1930s led the concept of prehistory to share the stage with displays on the subject of racial classification. Certainly, the showmanship that surrounded the display of Magdalenian Girl is reminiscent of the tradition of P. T. Barnum.⁵²⁷ Alongside a tradition of such exhibits installed at world's fairs, museums—the same sites that governed expanding bone empires—also worked to shape popular fantasies about the past through human remains. Over the course of the ensuing decade, however, those displays related to race and prehistory would grow nearly infinitely larger and more complex. An increasing number of displays on human evolution would continue to embrace the fantasies and imagination of crowds of visitors, but they also served another purpose—to the solidification of the museum's place within the scholarly discourse as many scholars in disciplines other than anthropology were abandoning museums for appointments at universities.

A Century of Progress

In the early stages of planning anthropological exhibitions for the 1933 World's Fair, competing interests became clear. Fay Cooper-Cole, who worked to found the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, hoped to enlist Aleš Hrdlička of the Smithsonian Institution to create displays under the auspices of the official fair exhibitions. Cooper-Cole wrote simply, "I am sure we are both agreed that Physical Anthropology should have an excellent exhibit and I want you to have charge of it." Problems became clear in 1931, however, when Cooper-Cole learned that the Field Museum of Natural History also wanted to open new anthropological exhibits coinciding with the fair; specifically, Cooper-Cole got wind that the Field Museum had already begun the process of planning new exhibits on race. Cooper-Cole was thus eager to start planning for the displays at the fair, which he believed to already be falling behind. Compounding his problems, he thought, were issues of clarity in terms of how the

⁵²⁶ Ed Yastrow and Stephen Nash, "Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development, 1926-1941," in *Curators, Collections, and Contexts*, 137.

⁵²⁷ P. T. Barnum had, in fact, proposed a somewhat reminiscent display of human remains in 1890. Barnum suggested that the mummified body of Ramses II could be acquired for a massive sum of one million dollars. Barnum, in an article that circulated to newspapers and periodicals around the country, proposed that the corpse be displayed for visitors to the World Columbian Exposition scheduled for three years later. Barnum died before the fair would come to Chicago and the body of Ramses II. "Barnum on the World's Fair," *Chicago Daily Tribune*. March 6, 1890, 9.

proposed fair exhibits would address race and prehistory; “Physical Anthropology should plan its exhibit,” he argued, “so as to cause a minimum of overlapping with pre-history.” Hrdlička had earlier proposed exhibitions following man from the early embryonic stage of life to old age, as well as an exhibit that would “follow man from his early types to the modern races.” These proposals proved intellectually problematic. The plans for the fair already included proposed displays on pathology under the auspices of a medical exhibit. Hrdlička eventually turned down Cooper-Cole’s offer to organize displays related to physical anthropology for the 1933 fair.⁵²⁸ The problems Fay Cooper-Cole encountered in constructing exhibitions for the 1933 fair were in many ways representative of problems encountered by the field of physical anthropology as a whole and others studying collections of human remains in the period. The lines between the study of evolution, medical pathology, and race had solidified in terms of disciplinary professionalization, and yet many of their ideas overlapped significantly.

Cooper-Cole was also working to make striking exhibitions from scratch against a backdrop of a city that featured a major natural history museum with already massive collections. By 1927, the Field Museum of Natural History already oversaw a storehouse of about 3,000 sets of human remains, the vast majority of which had never before been seen by the public.⁵²⁹ Further, while Cooper-Cole struggled to organize a vision from scratch, curators at the Field Museum had for several years desired the creation of a pair of exhibits on prehistory and race. Henry Field, who assumed the role of curator at the Field Museum following his doctoral work at Oxford University, was trained in the brief moment where race and prehistory held an almost equal standing in the field of anthropology.⁵³⁰ Henry Field worked and traveled tirelessly, promoting both his ideas and adventures to other scholars around the world. Field would eventually leave the world of museum anthropology to take a position in the federal government, and he never secured a place as a serious or important anthropological thinker. Nevertheless, during a brief period in the 1920s and 1930s, Field pushed displays of human remains or those based on the study of remains in new directions. Upon his arrival at the museum in Chicago, Field began working with other scholars both in the United States and abroad, collecting avidly with the desire to create specific displays on prehistory.⁵³¹ The occasion of the 1933 fair simply provided the impetus and opportunity for displaying these existing ideas.⁵³² Field worked to develop two major exhibits based largely on physical

⁵²⁸ Letter from Fay Cooper-Cole to Aleš Hrdlička, October 3, 1929. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence, Cattell-Commerce Dept. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵²⁹ Letter from Henry Field to Aleš Hrdlička, July 15, 1927, Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵³⁰ Field was a relative of Marshall Field, the founder of the Field Museum and the wealthy department store owner, and Stanley Field, the President of the museum at the time.

⁵³¹ “I am leaving today to sail for Europe . . . to collect for the Hall of Prehistoric Man—which is to be exhibited here in the Museum at some future date.” Field also notes that, by this point, the Field Museum had acquired about 3,000 total sets of human remains. Letter from Henry Field to Aleš Hrdlička, July 15, 1927, Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵³² Despite Field’s rise to curator at the Field Museum of Natural History, he never became highly regarded within the broader anthropological community. Though his writings contributed somewhat to the discipline of physical anthropology, it was rarely groundbreaking and many scholars suspected that his familial connections with Marshall Field (the department store owner and founder of the museum that bore his name) helped Henry Field in securing a position as curator. Field would eventually leave the museum to assume a role in the Navy during the Second World War. Mildred Trotter, a female anatomist and physical

anthropology, splitting the themes of race and prehistory, both of which opened in time for the 1933 Century of Progress fair.

The process of organizing the *Hall of Races of Mankind* was in some ways more complex than the development of the *Hall of Prehistoric Man*, but the development of the two exhibitions were connected in certain ways. Field decided that the best approach to creating the former exhibition was to begin with an extensive review of the available literature surrounding racial classification. In particular, the issue of exactly how *many* races to depict in the exhibit was an ongoing point of discussion. The head of the Department of Anthropology at the Field Museum, Berthold Laufer, suggested to Field that he travel to San Diego to examine the exhibitions organized earlier by Aleš Hrdlička. Field would ultimately travel to a number of different museums in California, but the museum founded on the work of Hrdlička and Hewitt was the most important in shaping his thinking about what the exhibitions in Chicago might become. Arriving in San Diego in 1930, Field would encounter a museum, at that time called simply the San Diego Museum, which had been born out of the Panama-California International Exposition exhibition's *Science of Man Building* that featured *The Story of Man Through the Ages*. The museum had changed locations since its founding, but it maintained many of the same displays, including the reconstructions by Aimé Rutot and the busts of the races of mankind modeled by Frank Micka. The museum also prominently featured collections of human remains, drawing audiences to the galleries until the museum grew into an independent institution.

Field was generally impressed with the displays and took extensive notes about the galleries—he even hired a watercolor artist to duplicate the color graphs during his stay in California.⁵³³ Noting that the displays were now somewhat outdated, he observed that the museum in San Diego remained one of the most complete exhibitions on either race or prehistory in existence. The content of the displays had shifted only slightly since its organization decades earlier, but the order of the galleries had been overhauled since the museum's opening. Field looked to push further the ideas contained in these halls in new exhibitions for the Field Museum in Chicago. In recounting his visit to the exhibitions at the San Diego Museum (today the San Diego Museum of Man) he wrote, "I obtained many new ideas and suggestions dealing with the exhibition of material relating to the races of the world, not only from an educational standpoint, but also from the point of view of the average intelligent museum visitor."⁵³⁴ But Field was not just impressed with the San Diego Museum's presentation on the subject of race, noting that "The series of prehistoric reconstructions . . . is fantastic in the extreme."

anthropologist who studied at Oxford during the same period as Henry Field, argued in her oral history that Field had everything handed to him, "on a silver platter." In particular, she resented the manner in which he was given his choice of research project while she was assigned a particular project by their advisors. Trotter seems to ascribe these events as being due in part to Field's namesake, as well as her unique position as a woman in the discipline of physical anthropology.

⁵³³ Yastrow and Nash, "Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development," 129-130. It might also be noted that the busts produced for the exhibition were reproduced in the bestselling publications on evolution by Henry Fairfield Osborn. Field, therefore, was not only in being influenced by the 1915 Story of Man Through the Ages exhibit at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego. Though historian Constance Clark does not recognize the busts as such, they are clearly reproductions of the busts created for the 1915 displays. Clark, *God or Gorilla*, 197.

⁵³⁴ Manuscript. Henry Field, "A Visit to Some California Museums March 15 to April 10, 1930." Papers of Henry Field. Field Museum of Natural History Archives.

Although Field believed the presentation of ideas about both race and prehistory were strong throughout the San Diego exhibit, he did critique certain aspects of the displays. Not only were many of the charts and graphs out of date, but he also found the artistic rendering of the races of mankind to be “poor” and the “facial expression” in the busts “almost entirely lacking in every case.” Field observed that the human remains displayed in the San Diego exhibitions were in certain ways very strong, but he criticized the displays for not including any of the associated flora and fauna with the pure presentation of anatomy. In Field’s view, the presentation of human remains, or casts of human remains, was not enough to fully convey ideas about human evolution and prehistory. Instead, remains or reconstructions of early man needed to be artistically depicted in the context of an appropriate setting. For museum curators and exhibit planners in Chicago, this would mean the creation of a new large-scale series of dioramas. Field wrote of the reconstructions in San Diego, “The method of showing casts of the human remains accompanied by restorations is excellent but the latter here are so poor that the resultant impressions are totally erroneous.” Despite the fact that museum visitors were generally receptive to exhibitions of human remains they were also recognized as capable tools in conveying ideas to audiences. Nevertheless, museum curators began insisting that exhibits of this kind utilize dioramas, attempting to reconstruct the body in different times and spaces through artistic and scientific sleight of hand. Field hoped Chicago might learn from the presentation of complex ideas about race and prehistory in the San Diego displays, while expanding on the ideas, updating them, and also working to improve the artistic rendering of complex ideas about both subjects.⁵³⁵

After his study of the literature and correspondence with leading anthropologists, Field first came to the idea that there existed 155 racial types before ultimately deciding that 164 racial types existed around the globe.⁵³⁶ In crafting the exhibitions for the 1915 San Diego Fair, Hrdlička emphasized the creation of a single, unbroken line of busts representing the racial diversity of mankind. In a letter to the organizer of the San Diego exhibitions, he argued that if the line of busts reproducing the upper bodies and faces of individuals from around the globe was interrupted by other displays “that would destroy all original sequence and change the beauty of the exhibits.”⁵³⁷ *The Hall of Races of Mankind* clearly modeled this approach, employing an unbroken line of full-sized sculptures and smaller busts, surrounded by clean, stark walls, thus forcing the visitor’s gaze to the details of each statue. Personally, however, Field believed that the artist he was preparing to hire to model the races of mankind for the exhibits in Chicago could out-do the artist had depicted the races of mankind for the new museum in San Diego, Frank Mika. Further, he believed that by creating more extensive dioramas that included reconstructions of early technology and the surrounding environment, the presentation of human prehistory would be more complete and better understood.

Henry Field had been a great admirer of Aleš Hrdlička and the Smithsonian for some time. In 1926, upon Field’s graduation from Oxford and before his arrival in Chicago, he briefly visited Washington D.C. and viewed the Smithsonian’s collections of

⁵³⁵ Field, “A Visit to Some California Museums March 15 to April 10, 1930.”

⁵³⁶ Yastrow and Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development,” 129-130.

⁵³⁷ Letter from Ales Hrdlcika to Edgar L. Hewett, July 6, 1914. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

human remains firsthand. Field paid close attention to the manner in which the national museum stored and organized the remains, noting, “Your methods of arrangement and indexes (sic) have been my admiration since leaving you and I shall certainly try to model my department along your lines.”⁵³⁸ Over the course of the next several years, Hrdlička would advise Field on the classification and storage, as well as on the subjects of research and display.⁵³⁹ When Field was finally ready to propose a layout for new exhibition spaces to his supervisors at the museum, he had clearly benefited from Hrdlička’s ideas regarding racial classification, management of human remains collections, and exhibitions.

To turn Field’s vision for an expansive exhibit on racial classification into a reality, the museum hired a talented artist named Malvina Hoffman to travel the world and create lifelike busts and full-sized bronzes depicting the agreed upon racial types. Hoffman was equally gifted in the art of sculpture and the art of the deal. After negotiating with Field Museum officials, Hoffman and Henry Field agreed that the exhibition would consist of 20 full-length bronzes, 27 busts, and 100 additional head figures. Hoffman was awarded an unprecedented contract of \$109,000 for her work and additional \$125,000 for her travel expenses.⁵⁴⁰

The Hall of Races of Mankind was hugely successful in terms of both attendance and popular reception. Visitors to the museum eagerly purchased enough copies of the exhibit’s catalogue to require the printing of several editions. The manner in which racial lines and categorizations were presented in the exhibition was strict, making the ideas generally accessible to a broader audience. In his preface to the exhibition catalogue, Berthold Laufer pointed to the exhibition’s emphasis of rigid racial types, “As a biological type our Negroes belong to the African or the black race and will always remain within this division; even intermarriage with whites will not modify their racial characteristics to any marked degree.”⁵⁴¹ The clarity of the exhibition, which presented solid and largely unchanging racial classifications represented by singular, or small groups of elegant statues, encouraged an understanding of the concept of race that fit well within American popular consciousness. Further, the exhibition blended the science of the study of the human form with the work of a talented artist, accomplishing an aesthetic rarely achieved by natural history museums in the United States before that point. Sir Arthur Keith, who served as Henry Field’s primary mentor and who penned the introduction to the exhibit catalogue, explained his view of the central problem museums had encountered in presenting the subject of race:

How can such a vast assortment of diverse individuals be given a true and effective representation in a museum? According to established precedent,

⁵³⁸ Letter from Henry Field to Aleš Hrdlička, September 29, 1926. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵³⁹ “I have just returned to Chicago and hasten to write to thank you for all of your helpful suggestions for the Hall of Physical Anthropology.” Letter from Henry Field to Aleš Hrdlička, January 10, 1930. Letter from Roland B. Dixon to Aleš Hrdlička, March 19, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁴⁰ Yastrow and Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development,” 130-131.

⁵⁴¹ Berthold Laufer, “Preface,” in *The Races of Mankind, Sculptures by Malvina Hoffman, An Introduction to Chauncey Keep Memorial Hall*, Henry Field (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, Third Edition, 1937): 4.

human skulls, skeletons, photographs, charts, casts, and models brought home from all lands fill the exhibition cases of such a hall in museums. And such collections no doubt prove of great value to professional students of anthropology, but exhibits of this nature are likely to repel rather than to attract visitors to the study of mankind.⁵⁴²

Although Keith does not mention the displays brought together for the Panama-California Exposition in 1915, he might just as well have been comparing the two exhibitions directly. Further, Keith's observation is unique in that it argues that members of the public were repelled by human remains—the evidence of repeated exhibitions for large audiences over the course of the previous six decades suggest otherwise. Nevertheless, Keith's notion that some members of the public were *repelled* by actual displays of human remains, yet *drawn* to artistic representations of conclusions drawn from the study of those remains, would become an important line of thinking over the ensuing decades. The exhibits brought together by Hrdlička and Hewett for the 1915 fair—and which served as reference and inspiration for Field's Chicago exhibits—were largely of the type that Keith describes: skulls, skeletons, charts, photographs, and cases. The layperson, Keith argued, found the study of the human skeleton to be repelling, while, in contrast, the white walls and strong, artistic bronze statues made the study of race attractive. This argument was far too simplistic. Visitors had been attracted to the display of human remains for generations. While the public may have shown some revulsion to the display of the body, they filled museum halls to see them since the middle of the nineteenth century. Even at the Field Museum, Keith's introduction forgets that the single day attendance record was set by visitors to the display of an ancient human skeleton. And yet, Keith's contention that the direct display of human remains would repel, rather than attract, visitors was a concept that, curiously, would continue to grow within anthropological and museum circles over the course of the following generations. Later resistance to display of human remains combined with the ethical challenges to exhibition of ancestral remains would essentially work together to remove most human remains from display altogether.⁵⁴³

The Hall of Races of Mankind was arranged both by racial type and geography. Mankind was at once a “well-defined uniform species” and also a species that might be rationally divided into groups. The evidence for the existence of these racial categories, it was explained in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, was based in the study of “the physical characters of the living person, and the anatomy of the skeleton.”⁵⁴⁴ Though detailed measurements of living humans and the close study of human remains provided the evidence on which the exhibition was based, it was clear that this evidence was not being presented in this particular hall. Here, visitors were free from being asked to engage with the skeletons that they might find abhorrent, instead viewing cleaner bronzes that were meant to represent the measurements of the living and the dead.

In his introductory remarks to *The Hall of Races of Mankind*, Sir Arthur Keith posed the question that if modern human types existed in ancient Egypt five thousand years ago, how could it be that humankind has changed at all over the course of history?

⁵⁴² Arthur Keith, “Introduction,” in *The Races of Mankind*, 7.

⁵⁴³ Field, *The Races of Mankind*, 8.

⁵⁴⁴ Field, *The Races of Mankind*, 13.

Keith responded, “I would ask my critics to go back 50,000 years, and see what then? The answer is given in Hall C at the Field museum, which was devoted to the Stone Age of the Old World. The prehistoric human types exhibited there differed profoundly from their modern representatives.”⁵⁴⁵ Once visitors observed contemporary human differences through artistic renderings, they might wonder how human beings had developed in such a manner. It was assumed that visitors would naturally turn their attention to an adjacent hall grounded in the concepts of human evolution and prehistory. Although the two halls were distinct, they were meant to address the lingering questions a curious visitor might have about mankind.⁵⁴⁶

The Hall of Prehistoric Man, ultimately, was based largely around a series of dioramas. Field utilized existing museum collections depicting Swiss Lake Dwellers that were acquired at the conclusion of the Columbian World Exposition, as well as authentic artifacts from the Lower Paleolithic from Africa and Asia that were utilized to complement models of *Homo erectus*. Neanderthal man, or *Homo neanderthalensis*, was depicted in what was then believed to be his accurate, hunched over stance. Models of human ancestors were not only displayed holding genuine artifacts, but the models also featured lifelike poses and actual human hair.⁵⁴⁷ A brief article in *The Science News-Letter* notes that while the dioramas were the focus of the exhibit, the displays did include “reproductions of important specimens of prehistoric human remains as well as some original skeletal material, and fossil specimens of the animals of each period.”⁵⁴⁸

Field, who was never averse to dramatic language, maintained that he had possessed a vision for the *Hall of Prehistoric Man* throughout much of his life. Upon the opening of the exhibit he stated, “The Hall of Prehistoric Man was all I had hoped it would be, as I had dreamt it since my sixteenth year. Here within the space of a half hour, walking past the eight dramatic and colorful dioramas, a visitor might read in true-to-life chapters the past quarter of a million years of Man’s history.”⁵⁴⁹ In his even more hyperbolic writings, Field maintained that he had possessed a vision for the Hall since his teenage years, yet professionally he recognized that his ideas were shaped by existing exhibitions on the subject of race and human history. Field was willing to admit that a cornerstone for the development of these ideas was the detailed study of human remains found in museum collections at Oxford and later in Washington and Chicago.

Despite Field’s tendency to inflate the importance of his own activities, both the popular and academic reaction to the opening of his displays were, in fact, positive. While the exhibit on race captured much of the popular and critical attention, the new displays on prehistory were significant in their own right. In particular, the continued display of the Cap Blanc skeleton, or Magdalenian Girl, was viewed as important for the museum; one article described the skeleton as “one of the most important archaeological

⁵⁴⁵ Field, *The Races of Mankind*, 10.

⁵⁴⁶ While some of the rhetoric embedded in *The Hall of Races of Mankind* did discuss human evolution, it was largely focused on the differences between human types. *The Hall of Prehistoric Man* was far more concerned with explaining concepts of human evolution over the course of time.

⁵⁴⁷ Yastrow and Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development,” 135-136.

⁵⁴⁸ “A Million Years of Man,” *The Science News-Letter* 24 No. 643 (1933): 85.

⁵⁴⁹ Henry Field, *On the Track of Man, Adventures of an Anthropologist* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1953). As quoted in Yastrow and Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development,” 136-137.

treasures in this country.”⁵⁵⁰ Authors detailing the creation of the prehistoric displays at the Field Museum described the dioramas as, “the finest restorations of prehistoric men ever made.”⁵⁵¹ And further, the exhibits were noted to be, “the most complete, accurate and interesting picture that present knowledge permits of the lives, cultures and physical characters of prehistoric races.”⁵⁵²

Compared to previous displays that stemmed from studies on human remains, the two Field Museum exhibitions that opened in 1933 were more balanced in their dual concerns with prehistory and racial classification. Despite the physical—and consequently intellectual—separation of the displays into different halls, popular newspaper accounts conflated the ideas of race and prehistoric man. Indeed, the museum hoped visitors would turn from one exhibition to the other *despite* the intellectual distinction of two separate exhibit halls. In describing the Field Museum’s diorama displaying reconstructions of a Cro-Magnon scene, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* stated, “The third scene represents Cro-Magnon men of a race which invaded Europe from Asia about 30,000 years ago who are believed to be the first direct progenitors of modern races.”⁵⁵³ Unanswered questions about what these supposed races became were only addressed in the adjacent hall.

Although the Field Museum’s exhibitions were largely a success, they were not without problems. The exhibit prominently featured a display on Piltdown Man, a fossil described earlier in this dissertation, which was later proven to be a hoax. Displays of Neanderthal man were based on early discoveries of *Homo neanderthalensis* remains that happened to be arthritic. The Piltdown Man displays were removed in the early 1950s, and the exhibition was updated in 1972 and again in 1985 before finally being dismantled in 1988.⁵⁵⁴

The opening of *The Hall of Prehistoric Man* and *The Hall of Races of Mankind* represents a snapshot of the ideas surrounding the subjects of race and prehistory in the early 1930s. Henry Field, despite his lack of depth as a scholar, developed an ability to leverage connections in both the United States and Europe to create two wildly popular and influential exhibitions. In studying the displays created for the Field Museum, it might be noted that few actual human remains were on display at the institution; indeed, part of the appeal of *The Hall of Races of Mankind* was its clean aesthetic of bright white walls set against beautiful bronze sculptures. And while *The Hall of Prehistoric Man* did display both actual human skeletal material and numerous casts, the increasing dependence on dioramas and reconstructions represented a break from the earlier displays of skulls and mummified remains.⁵⁵⁵ What the displays may have lacked in the macabre appeal of older displays, they made up for with general aesthetic improvements. The exhibitions brought together at the Field Museum in time for the 1933 World’s Fair are

⁵⁵⁰ “A Million Years of Man,” 85. Portions of this article (much of which may have simply been culled from a museum press-release) were also used in a similar article, entitled, “Evolution of Man Shown in Exhibits,” *The New York Times*, July 31, 1933, 15.

⁵⁵¹ “A Million Years of Man,” 87.

⁵⁵² “A Million Years of Man,” 87.

⁵⁵³ “Museum Tells Story of Man Before History,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 31, 1933, 13.

⁵⁵⁴ Yastrow and Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development,” 136-137.

⁵⁵⁵ In particular, the limited display of remains in these exhibitions might be contrasted to the displays from the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition and the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, both described in detail earlier in this dissertation.

demonstrative of the emergence of the study of human prehistory that largely arose from research on human remains. While scholars remained confident that human bodies could be classified into groups of different races, this theme began to share the spotlight with discoveries related to the study of human evolution.

Racial Classification, Exhibition, and the Public

Racial classification in the late 1920s and early 1930s did not always comprise complex series of charts, graphs, or meandering exhibitions highlighted by sophisticated artistic renderings of the races of mankind. Scholars were, in fact, willing to break down their ideas into more simplistic categories for the public. The manner in which these ideas about racial classification would reach their apex in the displays of the 1930s, however, is apparent in writings and correspondence between scholars and members of the public.

When Herman J. Doepner, a man from St. Paul, Minnesota, wrote to Aleš Hrdlička asking for “a detailed modern classification of the races of mankind,” he chose to add that he desired a list of books on the subject, and asked that the information provided be brief in order to “obviate much reading.”⁵⁵⁶ Hrdlička, who would typically reply to similar requests with lengthy, somewhat pedantic, bibliographic lists of writings on particular subjects, wrote a rather straightforward reply to Doepner. In his reply, Hrdlička laments, “There is no satisfactory recent publication which would give the classification of races according to our latest knowledge.” This said, he wrote, “But as a classification is rather simple, until we come to details, I will give it to you herewith.” Hrdlička explained:

We recognize today three main races or stems of mankind, which are: the White, the Yellow-brown, and the Black; with a secondary fourth group constituted by the Austalo-Tasmanians. The Whites in turn are divisible in main into the Nordic, Alpine, Mediterranean, Semitic, and Hamitic types. The Yellow-browns embrace the Mongoloids, Malays, and aboriginal Americans. The Blacks compromise the Negritos and Negrillo; the Negro proper; the Bushmen and Hottentos; and the Melanesian blacks. Besides which there are the mixed Polynesians, and other smaller groups.⁵⁵⁷

Hrdlička’s conceptualizations were important in framing the displays at the Field Museum concurrent with the Century of Progress Fair of 1933, though Henry Field would credit his own work, as well as the work of other scholars in anthropology. Scholars working with the Field Museum largely embraced these strict racial classification schemes, as described in the above passage on the exhibit, but they also embraced rhetoric concerning the “unity of mankind.” Specifically, the hall concluded with a massive bronze statue featuring men of three different races holding a towering

⁵⁵⁶ Letter from Herman J. Doepner to Aleš Hrdlička, April 9, 1927. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence. Folder: DI-DOR (Miscellaneous) 1903-40. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁵⁷ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Herman J. Doepner, May 24, 1927. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence. Folder: DI-DOR (Miscellaneous) 1903-40. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

globe. The modernist sculpture worked to classify and separate, while also underlining the related nature of the human family.⁵⁵⁸

Notwithstanding Fay Cooper-Cole's initial lack of success in creating displays for the fair, he was able to convince Harvard University's Peabody Museum to temporarily contribute a working anthropometry laboratory. Over the course of the fair, the laboratory acquired detailed measurements of around 3,500 visitors.⁵⁵⁹ Despite the overall decline of popularity of racial classification in the field of anthropology during the middle of the 1930s, the practice of anthropometric measurements constituted a significant aspect of both research *and* display of the period.

Just as museum displays began to focus on the unity of mankind, the world was starting to fracture. Earlier in 1933, Aleš Hrdlička wrote directly to Franklin Roosevelt on the subject of Japan. (Hrdlička had corresponded with Roosevelt earlier, while the latter served as the Assistant Secretary of the Navy.⁵⁶⁰ In 1933, when Roosevelt became President-elect, Hrdlička again wrote to address Japan.) Hrdlička, with his knowledge of global culture, believed himself to be in a special position to address the growing problems in the Pacific. He wrote, "I have endeavored, in particular, to learn as much as possible about the soul of the different peoples..." Hrdlička's trips to the field had brought him to Japan, Russia, and China. He believed that the differences between these nations were not, at their very core, due to racial differences. Instead, they arose from a series of political circumstances. Nevertheless, the manner in which Hrdlička attempts to describe Japan's political behaviors is rife with racist undertones. He wrote, "there has been arising an ever more threatening obstacle, which is Japan. Not the Japanese people, who have enough good in them, but that something utterly egotistic, tricky and ruthless to the weaker, which is the governing clique of that country." Hrdlička continued, "This power since fifty years is working steadily toward to exclusion of all and particularly the white man from the Pacific, toward the domination, by hook or crook, of all it can reach, and towards a reign backed by brute force and all other means, moral or immoral, over all eastern Asia and the whole great Ocean."⁵⁶¹ The contrasts appear striking to the contemporary reader. Just as museum exhibitions balanced the tension between racial types and human unity, scholars were questioning the political behavior of nations in scientific rhetoric in language laced with racism. In Europe and in Asia, the rise of extreme political regimes based much of their rhetoric and power on exploiting various racial and cultural tensions. Exhibitions in the United States, meanwhile, based on the research and display of human remains, continued a transition of display from galleries focused largely upon racial typing, to exhibitions that split a stage between the study of race and human history. The looming war would force scholars in the United States to face much more critically many of the tensions they attempted to balance in pre-war exhibitions.

⁵⁵⁸ Field, *The Races of Mankind*, 13.

⁵⁵⁹ Harvard University. Annual Report, 1932-1933, 301.

⁵⁶⁰ Letter from Franklin Roosevelt to Aleš Hrdlička, July 28, 1917. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁶¹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Franklin Roosevelt, February 25, 1933. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Collecting Human Ancestors

In 1925, while looking through a box of seemingly random rocks and fossils in South Africa, Australian-born anatomist Raymond Dart found the fossilized fragments of a small skull that had been discovered in a nearby quarry. Dart had been collecting fossils for several months, but the unusual find captured his attention. These fossils turned out to be important find; however, Dart, an anthropologist and anatomist, was criticized for his claims that the find represented an evolutionary link between contemporary humans and their distant ancestors. Dart's discovery consisted of the fossilized brain and crania of a distant human ancestor that he named Taung Child.⁵⁶² The discovery of a human ancestor was not the first since Neanderthal was discovered in the mid-nineteenth century. An obsessive Dutch anatomist working with colonial support, Eugène Dubois, discovered a fossilized skull known as "Java Man" in Indonesia in 1891, for instance. While Dubois' discovery attracted comparatively little attention during his lifetime because Java Man did not fit into preconceived notions of the "missing link," Dart's discovery quickly captivated audiences in both Europe and the United States.⁵⁶³ Aleš Hrdlička wrote to Dart one year later, in 1925, congratulating him on his find and expressing interest in publishing his account of the discovery, though Hrdlička assured Dart, "I presume that you will have no difficulty in its publication." Hrdlička moved quickly to reprint Dart's findings in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*. By the 1920s, Hrdlička had come to believe that further finds of significance would come from Africa, "I have no doubt but that now, since interest in finds of this nature has been so vivified, there will come to us many specimens of value from your continent."⁵⁶⁴

Africa, in the words of Dart, was "very young anthropologically." Though significant discoveries were being made on the continent, scholars had little in the way of resources; "we have great material," Dart wrote, "but we have little facility for securing it and consequently most of it is lost, and what is gathered is secured unscientifically." Dart invited American scholars to visit South Africa to contribute to the study of early man.⁵⁶⁵ Unfortunately, Dart was less adept at making the case that the evolution of the human species had primarily occurred in Africa, and scholars in the United States and Europe remained skeptical. Other scholars around the same period, including a Canadian physician named Davidson Black, made discoveries of different kinds of human ancestors that appeared to be much closer to modern humans than did Dart's primitive Taung child. Black made a series of discoveries in the 1920s, culminating with the discovery of a fossilized skull of *Homo erectus* in China that would come to be known as Peking Man. Both Black and Dart would eventually travel to England to make the case for the importance of their discoveries, and Black was much more effective in promoting Asia as a site for human origins than was Dart in his promotion of Africa.⁵⁶⁶ The focus on Black and Dart would leave other scholars, like Dubois, even further behind in their wake.

⁵⁶² For more on Dart's background and ideas, see Janette Deacon, "Obituary: Raymond Arthur Dart (1893-1988)" *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 45, No. 151 (1990): 60.

⁵⁶³ Gibbons, *The First Human*, 6.

⁵⁶⁴ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Raymond Dart, February 21, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁶⁵ Raymond Dart to Aleš Hrdlička, January 4, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁶⁶ Gibbons, *The First Human*, 35.

When Hrdlička and Dart began their correspondence, scholars in the United States remained divided as to the most important location for studying human evolution. When working outside of Europe or North America, scholars interested in researching or collecting human remains scoured the globe for fossils in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Discoveries of fossilized remains that were important to the understanding of human remains occurred throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In Asia, the discoveries of Java Man and Peking Man promoted the region as a possible location of a “missing link.” In Africa, the first example of a much more primitive-looking adult australopithecine was unearthed in 1936 by the paleoanthropologist Robert Broom. A decade earlier, a British team, Louis and Mary Leakey, began their work in eastern Africa in 1926. The Leakey family’s presence on the continent would continue into the next century, training new scientists and continually announcing new discoveries that would forcefully shift the focus of international paleoanthropology to Africa.

Despite the announcement of new discoveries, progress in the field of studying human evolution was slow.⁵⁶⁷ Before the 1950s and early 1960s, scholars in the United States and Europe could not agree on the continent that held the origin of human ancestors.⁵⁶⁸ Fossils discovered in Africa or Asia often took years to be unearthed and subsequently described to scholars in the United States and Europe. Scholars most commonly communicated new finds through letters and publications in their home countries, and scholars in Europe, the United States, Asia, and Africa worked to cobble together pieces of the complex story of human evolution through limited evidence spread throughout museums and universities thousands of miles apart. Replicas of fossil specimens, or casts, were created that duplicated the traits of important finds, but scholars complained that these casts were often too poorly crafted to be accurate representations of the originals. Illustrations of original fossils, too, helped scholars in the United States understand the growing fossil evidence, but, like casts, the accuracy of illustrations were dependent on the skill of the artist attempting to represent the original fossil.⁵⁶⁹ When the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1937, the institution hosted a symposium on early man. Reflecting the geographically scattered nature of the study of human prehistory, scholars from China, Java, South Africa, England, and Denmark were listed among the attendees. Materials promoting the symposium call for a response to the inherent problems of the study of early man prior to the Second World War:

Broadly speaking, the objective of the Symposium and the attendant activities is to focus scientific attention on the advances being made in research on Early Man throughout the world and by correlating all

⁵⁶⁷ A letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Davidson Black offers an example of the slow and incomplete nature of academic communication during this period. Despite the fact that they were frequent correspondents and often exchanged reprints, Hrdlička wrote to Black, “Every now and then during the last year or so we have heard of ‘marvellous’ (sic) discoveries of ancient man in Mongolia or north-western China. Please tell me what is in it.” Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Davidson Black, October 10, 1925. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence. Benes-Bogoras. Box 14. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁶⁸ Gibbons, *The First Human*, 25-28.

⁵⁶⁹ Hrdlička remarked, in 1924, that upon seeing a collection of original fossils collected by Eugene Dubois he was struck with how poorly the fossils had been represented by the casts he had been able to view and acquire in the United States. Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1924. 10.

pertinent information dealing with the broad but important subject, to enrich the scientific knowledge of results already obtained and to lay the foundation for a better correlated attack on the problem in the future.⁵⁷⁰

Along with representing geographically diverse scholars, the symposium was strikingly interdisciplinary in nature, featuring scholars from physical anthropology and archaeology, as well as geology and paleontology. The papers delivered at the symposium examined new discoveries related to the Folsom culture in North America, ideas about the Bering Strait land bridge, and a series of papers on new hominid discoveries in Africa and Asia.⁵⁷¹ The conference served as a snapshot of current research surrounding human prehistory and human evolution, but also provided a model for the direction of the field of physical anthropology, which was becoming increasingly interdisciplinary and taking a greater interest in the very distant past as opposed to the strict study of racial classification. Just four years after the opening of *The Hall of Races of Mankind* and the *Hall of Prehistoric Man* at the Field Museum in 1933, the balance displayed between the study of race and human history was rapidly shifting in the scholarly discourse.

One of the speakers at the symposium was a young scholar named Theodore McCown. The career of McCown, who would earn a doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley in 1939, was somewhat representative of the struggles facing scholars interested in human evolution during this period. McCown's story is also rather unusual in several respects. As McCown studied for his doctorate, he began working with an archaeologist and physical anthropologist in the United Kingdom, Sir Arthur Keith. Working with Keith, McCown collected and began to study a series of fossils from Mount Carmel in present day Israel. McCown battled increasing pressure to publish the results of his studies, and he began to suffer from bouts of depression that would plague him for the remainder of his career.

Following an extended stay in what was then Palestine, McCown brought a series of fossils collected at Mount Carmel to England. The fossils, reflecting a series of remains from the Stone Age Natufian culture, were firmly embedded in a nexus of hard limestone. McCown worked with his mentor, Keith, through the bitterly slow process of extracting the remains. Hrdlička, in the United States, regularly wrote to Keith enquiring about the team's progress and reminding them of the existence of *The American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, which Hrdlička viewed as an appropriate forum for the publication of the results of the ongoing studies of the Mount Carmel fossils.

In January of 1935, Keith wrote to Hrdlička optimistically assuring him that four people were working on the fossils and that the impending results were likely to add to the available literature on human history in the Middle East. He wrote, "They are strange folk the Carmelites, strange mixture: but the anatomical features of Neanderthal man

⁵⁷⁰ Letter from Edgar B. Howard to Henry B. Collins, Jr., December 31, 1936. Box 13. Incoming Letters Harper-Int. Folder: Holt-Huns. Papers of Henry B. Collins. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁷¹ Letter from Edgar B. Howard to Henry B. Collins, Jr., December 31, 1936. Box 13. Incoming Letters Harper-Int. Folder: Holt-Huns. Papers of Henry B. Collins. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

predominate.”⁵⁷² Hrdlička responded by assuring him, “I am glad to have your letter . . . and I am particularly happy to have the news that you are well and working on the remains from Palestine. It is a pity that such valuable things are so hard to get at and so imperfect but the results will, I hope, repay the drudgery.” Hinting at the lack of reliable information available in the scholarship on prehistoric human remains, Hrdlička added, “I have heard recently that the French have discovered two or three skeletons of a similar nature—you probably know more about it than we do here.”⁵⁷³

As the remains of more than thirteen individuals were painstakingly extracted from the limestone, it became increasingly clear that they possessed a complex series of traits representing a transition between older human forms and modern human beings.⁵⁷⁴ Several years after their initial correspondence about the Mount Carmel fossils, Aleš Hrdlička offered an entire issue of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* to Theodore McCown and Sir Arthur Keith. McCown would eventually utilize the results of his study in his doctoral dissertation. It is unclear to what extent the delay in his work was due to the difficulty of the extraction of the remains (both in terms of their removal from Palestine and from the limestone they were entombed in) versus the nature of his personality or mental condition. Though McCown’s own future research would have a rather limited impact on the development of the field of physical anthropology and research on human evolution, he was successful in training numerous scholars in these fields following his return to the University of California, Berkeley as a faculty member.⁵⁷⁵ Scholars continue to debate the place of McCown’s discoveries within the broader timeline of human evolution.⁵⁷⁶

By the outset of the International Symposium on Early Man in 1937, however, it was already clear that scholars like McCown were in the midst of a transition. At the symposium itself, comparatively younger scholars like McCown and Frank H.H. Roberts, Jr., were joined by older luminaries including Aleš Hrdlička, Eugene DuBois, and Robert Broom. Quite unlike earlier gatherings in North America, none of the thirty-six papers published in the proceedings of the symposium addressed the subject of race directly, instead focusing primarily on the study of human evolution through geology, climatology, anthropology, and archaeology. Although several papers reflected an ongoing interest in the archaeology and prehistory of North America, the papers overall explicated an increasingly global endeavor to understand a deep history of human evolution. Presented together with a small series of exhibitions in Philadelphia, the papers relied far more on Old World fossilized remains and artifacts than the more recent remains found in museum collections in the United States.⁵⁷⁷ In particular, a series of

⁵⁷² Letter from Arthur Keith to Aleš Hrdlička, January 30, 1935. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁷³ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Arthur Keith, February 11, 1935. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁷⁴ Letter from Sir Arthur Keith to Aleš Hrdlička, February 13, 1936. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁷⁵ Kenneth Kennedy, A.R. Brooks, T. Sheilagh, “Theodore D. McCown: A Perspective on a Physical Anthropologist,” *Current Anthropology* 25. No. 1 (1984): 99-103.

⁵⁷⁶ Milford Wolpoff and Rachel Caspari, *Race and Human Evolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997): 274-275.

⁵⁷⁷ George Grant MaCurdy, ed. *Early Man: As Depicted by Leading Authorities at the International Symposium The Academy of Natural Sciences Philadelphia, March 1937* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company London, 1937).

papers presented at the symposium clearly demonstrated the continuation of a shift that had been taking place in the study of North American history for over a decade—the discovery of artifacts pointing to a much deeper history of man’s occupation in the Americas than previously known.⁵⁷⁸

The Peopling of the Americas

In 1926, a discovery near Folsom, New Mexico would shift the discourse surrounding the arrival of modern humans in the Americas. One archaeologist, upon reflection thirty years later, stated that the discovery of artifacts “marked the beginning of a whole new field of archaeological research.”⁵⁷⁹ Similar artifacts began to emerge throughout North America. Just three years after the initial discovery of the Folsom culture, a series of beautifully crafted, fluted projectile points were discovered in Clovis, New Mexico, recognized as proving the existence of an even older culture in North America than was previously assumed.

Before a series of new discoveries in North America, headlined by the unearthing of new kinds of stone tools in Folsom and Clovis, evidence for early occupation in North America was strikingly meager. Representatives of the Smithsonian Institution—in particular Hrdlička and Holmes—recommended that scholars proceed with extreme caution in pushing back the date of human arrival in the Americas. Conversely, other scholars viewed the new stone tool discoveries as validating their ideas regarding an earlier arrival than heretofore thought of man in North America, and they actively sought ancient skeletal remains that would support their arguments.⁵⁸⁰

In 1927, J.D. Figgins, the director of the Colorado Museum of Natural History, described the available skeletal or archaeological evidence surrounding the question of North American occupation as “exceedingly meager.” In an article synthesizing the available materials, he elaborated by saying that the evidence was “far too scant to make possible intelligent comparisons and safely arrive at definite conclusions.”⁵⁸¹ Nevertheless, scholars continued to combine evidence from archaeology, physical anthropology, and geology to create an increasingly more complete picture of the arrival of mankind in North America. While the archaeological evidence for the occupation of man was being pushed further back through time by new discoveries, discoveries of human remains reflecting Paleo-Indian populations remained extremely limited before World War II.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁸ Papers authored by Ales Hrdlička, Herbert J. Spinden, Paul MacClintock, Ernst Antevs, Harold S. Gladwin, Kirk Bryan, and Frank H.H. Roberts Jr. all address the problem of the peopling of the Americas. Only Hrdlička does so through a direct examination of human remains. See George Grant MaCurdy, ed. *Early Man*.

⁵⁷⁹ This quote is from a speech Hannah Marie Wormington delivered to the Philadelphia Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in 1956. H.M. Wormington, “The Paleo-Indian.” Correspondence. Folder: Paleo-Indians. Box: 5. Papers of Hannah Marie Wormington. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. 1.

⁵⁸⁰ Burba, “*Whence Came the American Indians?*”

⁵⁸¹ Article reprint. J.D. Figgins, “*The Antiquity of Man in America,*” *Natural History* 27, No. 3 (1927): 229. Papers of Hannah Marie Wormington. Miscellaneous. Accomplishments-East High School. Folder: Earliest Man in America [News Clippings]. Box: 43. National Anthropological Archives. Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁸² “Although much has been learned about the implements of the Paleo-Indians we know little about the people who made them, for there has been a great dearth of ancient human bones.” H.M. Wormington, “The

In the wake of discoveries at Clovis and Folsom, a number of scholars turned their attention to Alaska, hoping to expand the “meager” evidence illuminating the process of the peopling of the Americas. For certain anthropologists, the Alaskan Eskimo preserved numerous secrets regarding the arrival of modern humans in North America, and the discovery of ancient human remains in the region were thought to provide an opportunity to explore certain questions in more depth. The bodies of the recent dead were evaluated side-by-side with ancient skeletons in the hopes of making some effective anatomical comparison. Following a research trip to Alaska in 1926, Hrdlička suggested that a new curator, Henry Bascom, travel north to research and collect human remains and archaeological material. Bascom found Alaska to be largely unexplored and unknown following the work of the nineteenth century naturalist Edward W. Nelson. Bascom stated in an oral history, “There had been no commercial exploitation of the Bering Sea areas whatsoever. (It was) a backwash. The people had not been described or visited almost since Nelson’s time forty-five years earlier. They were the most primitive Eskimos anywhere in the Arctic.”⁵⁸³ During Collins’ first year in Alaska, in 1927, he collected some skeletal material and acquired bodily measurements of the people in the region. Collins experienced a mixed record of success over the course of his first three field seasons. He managed to gather a small, but unique collection of human remains, yet his ideas surrounding prehistory of the region developed slowly, based on meager bits of archaeological evidence collected over shortened field seasons.⁵⁸⁴ Eventually, Collins’ work would shift away from physical anthropology and he would become one of the leading archaeologists to examine Alaskan and Canadian arctic prehistory. His early career trajectory, however, reflected the interests of both Hrdlička and the broader anthropological community of the era, seeking answers to the question of the arrival of modern humans in the Americas through the study of human remains in the Arctic.

In 1935, J.D. Figgins, the same archaeologist who described the available ancient skeletal evidence in North America as meager, would cause a stir by claiming that the discovery of a skull linked to Folsom sites was the impetus for naming a new species of human being. After receiving the remains from a local discoverer, Figgins brought them back to the Colorado Museum of Natural History. The remains included several parts of the skeleton, but scientists were mainly interested in the skull and the antiquity of the remains. After closely examining the shape of the skull, Figgins concluded that “the individual occupied a position intermediate between those of the primitive types of Europe and those of the modern races.” Figgins went so far as to declare the discovery a new species, *Homo novusmundus*. After traveling to Denver, Frank H.H. Roberts Jr. of the Bureau of American Ethnology convinced Figgins to allow him to take the skull back to the Smithsonian. Roberts showed the remains to Hrdlička, Stewarts, Collins, and the archaeologist F.M. Setzler. The scientists were in agreement that while the skull may have exhibited some “inferior” features, it displayed nothing to convince them that it was either “very primitive or un-American.” Scientists at the Smithsonian dismissed the claim

Paleo-Indian.” Correspondence. Folder: Paleo-Indians. Box: 5. Papers of Hannah Marie Wormington. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. 7.

⁵⁸³ Henry B. Collins interviewed by Anna E. Riggs. Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution. August 2, 1978. Henry B. Collins Papers. Box 1. Articles on Collins about his work, 1927-1982, undated. Folder: “An Oral History Interview with Dr. Henry B. Collins,” 2 August 1978. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. 6.

⁵⁸⁴ “An Oral History Interview with Dr. Henry B. Collins,” 7.

that the skull represented a new species as “fanciful and wholly unjustified.”⁵⁸⁵ Although the scientists who examined the remains were interested in the racial origin of the skeleton, their primary concern was to locate the remains historically. Its potential value, they believed, was in addressing a question about human prehistory—even if it meant declaring man as only having migrated to the Americas after the arrival of *Homo sapiens*. If remains were to be found representing new species of mankind, those remains would not be found in the Americas. Nevertheless, scientists did not consider the question of when human beings arrived in the Americas as settled. In fact, efforts to answer the question of the antiquity of man in the Americas only increased as the century progressed, following continued growth in archaeology and physical anthropology. Despite the centrality of ancient skeletal remains in attempts to answer these important questions, ethical issues regarding the practice of collecting the ancient dead in the Americas were starting to emerge.

Indigenous Pushback

In most cases, American Indians were adamant in their opposition to the desecration of graves by scientists hoping to acquire skeletal specimens. Early collectors sometimes noted feelings of danger⁵⁸⁶ and guilt⁵⁸⁷ in collecting from graves in the name of science. On the other hand, collectors interested in gathering human remains had not always felt obligated to keep secret their intentions of removing bones from burial sites. At the close of the 1920s, when Smithsonian archaeologist Henry Collins described his method for removing skeletal remains from ancient gravesites in Alaska, he noted that four local Eskimos even helped him dig, continually uncovering new graves. Once remains were found, Collins and another archaeologist would remove the bones from the ground and pack them to be shipped, apparently encountering no resistance from the indigenous workers they had hired.⁵⁸⁸

Reaction to the removal of human remains from a gravesite or an accidental burial was anything but uniform, and archaeologists had written and spoken of the inherent dangers of collecting bodies for decades; during the decade of the 1930s, however, the pushback of indigenous peoples against collecting human remains started to become visibly apparent in internal museum correspondence. In 1933, even after a proposed Smithsonian expedition secured additional funds from the Museum of the American

⁵⁸⁵ Frank H.H. Roberts, Jr. “New World Man,” *American Antiquity* 2, No. 3 (1937): 172-177.

⁵⁸⁶ At least one example from the Army Medical Museum collections points to the potential danger involved in collecting Native American human remains due to the possible violent reaction from nearby tribes. In one accession file, an Army surgeon who collected a skull of an Ogallala Sioux woman describes the event as taking place, “before the eyes of many Indian, who could see me in the distance,” he continues, “I had a lively adventure with it.” Perhaps for this reason, he notes, he kept the skull for several years before submitting it to the Army Medical Museum. Letter from G.P. Hachenberg to Army Medical Museum, October 20, 1879. AMM #2034, Army Medical Museum Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

⁵⁸⁷ David Hurst Thomas cites a letter from Franz Boas that appears to indicate some feelings of guilt or remorse in desecrating graves. The letter was written while Boas was gathering skulls in British Columbia. On June 6, 1888, he wrote, “someone had stolen all the skulls, but we found a complete skeleton without 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 . . .” As quoted in Thomas, *Skulls Wars*, 59

⁵⁸⁸ Papers of Henry B. Collins. Box: 51. Diaries 1924-1930. July 29, 1929. Folder: Alaska 1929—typescript and Carbon, 3/14-9/25. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Indian in New York City, Smithsonian officials cancelled a planned collecting expedition to the Aleutian Islands. Hrdlička was upset to the point of disgust at the rejection. He wrote in a letter, “one of the arguments raised against our fieldwork this year was that ‘such trips irritate the people’.”⁵⁸⁹ George Heye, the director of the Museum of the American Indian responded to Hrdlička’s letter, “I am truly sorry anybody in the world can be irritated by scientific work.”⁵⁹⁰ Many scholars of the period concerned with collecting bodies for science simply could not imagine weighing the religious, spiritual, or cultural rights of indigenous peoples against the goals of science.

The majority of scholars and private individuals working to collect human remains up to this point spent a majority of their time in the field working and collecting in distant lands considered—by them—to be on the fringes of mainstream culture. Collecting human bodies, often taking remains from cemetery sites and battlefields, “irritated” the locals for obvious reasons. The removal of remains without permission upset the religious and moral sensibilities of cultures around the globe. This sort of cultural conflict, between the white scientists hoping to gather remains for science and indigenous people hoping to protect their sacred gravesites, quickly became apparent to those supervising the growth of the Army Medical Museum following the Civil War. Later, these tensions became increasingly clear and obtaining remains in North America became an ever-greater challenge.

Indigenous resistance to the collection of human remains was not just occurring in North America. One year before Hrdlička’s rebuffed attempt to travel to the Aleutians to collect remains, another anthropologist, Melville J. Herskovitz, wrote to Hrdlička and described the difficulty in obtaining skeletal material in parts of Africa. Herskovitz wrote:

I am afraid I must disappoint you and tell you that I did not bring any skeletal material home from West Africa. I saw some marvelous collections of skulls that I itched to get but they were all in shrines. As a matter of fact, with the extent to which the ancestral cult is prevalent in West Africa, I seriously doubt whether skeletal material could be collected on the west coast without involving a general uprising of the native population.⁵⁹¹

Indigenous resistance, initially informal and laced with the threat of violence, would increasingly become organized and result in the creation of new legal protections. The first recorded successful repatriation effort in the United States took place in 1938, when a sacred bundle was returned to the Hidatsas.⁵⁹² Growing calls for the return of sacred objects and human remains would come to dominate much of the public discourse surrounding museum collections during the second half of the twentieth century. These ethical rejections, coupled with the lingering notion that the general public was repulsed by displays of human remains, removed all but a few displays of human remains from

⁵⁸⁹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to George G. Heye, May 29, 1933. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁹⁰ Letter from George Heye to Aleš Hrdlička, May 31, 1933. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁹¹ Letter from Melville J. Herskovitz to Aleš Hrdlička, December 8, 1932. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁹² Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice*.

museums in the United States throughout the second half of the twentieth century. By the conclusion of the Second World War, mummified remains from Egypt and Peru continued to draw museum visitors, but other types of mummified and skeletal remains, especially those from North America, were removed from exhibit.

T. Dale Stewart

T. Dale Stewart was born in 1901 in Delta, Pennsylvania. He began working for the Smithsonian in 1924, taking time away from the museum to earn an A.B. from George Washington University and an M.D. from Johns Hopkins University. Upon the receipt of his medical degree, Stewart was promoted from an Aide to an Assistant Curator of Physical Anthropology. He rose through the ranks to become Head Curator of the Anthropology Department by 1961 and served as the Director of the National Museum of Natural History from 1962 to 1965. Stewart was professional and at times formal, but he also possessed an affable and engaging personality. Over the course of his career, he brought in a number of students and encouraged visiting scholars to study the Smithsonian's collections, a marked shift from the guarded curation practiced by Hrdlička. Although Hrdlička would largely overshadow Stewart in academic achievement, Stewart's contrasting personality encouraged new kinds of innovation and scholarship. Hrdlička had been cold, dogged, and sharp tongued. Stewart, on the other hand, was unusually thoughtful and his critiques were rarely read as direct attacks. Stewart would become a prominent, and slightly senior, member of a new cohort of physical anthropologist in the United States who would come to change the field. These scholars included Marshall T. Newman (1911-1994), Sherwood Washburn (1911-2000), and John Lawrence Angel (1915-1986). While these scholars remained interested in certain questions surrounding race, much of their interest had moved from earlier schemes of racial classification to questions about the historical development of populations or races in different regions. Certain scholars within this cohort began abandoning questions of race altogether, instead turning their attention entirely to the development of human anatomy and evolution. Stewart officially retired from the Smithsonian in 1971, though he would remain active in anthropology for more than two decades. Unlike scholars who benefited from the legacy-building of graduate students working under their supervision, Stewart's influence in the field of physical anthropology came from his position of leadership supervising the collection of human remains at the Smithsonian—which continued to house the largest physical anthropology collection in the nation—along with his continued involvement in academic journals and professional organizations.⁵⁹³

Stewart had worked directly under Hrdlička as a temporary assistant before being encouraged by his supervisor to pursue a medical degree.⁵⁹⁴ Before Stewart entered

⁵⁹³ Two sources provide the background information on T. Dale Stewart in this paragraph. The first is a copy of his obituary, Eric Pace, "T. Dale Stewart Dies at 96; Anthropologist at Smithsonian," *New York Times*, October 30, 1997, 16. Also, detailed biographical information is included in Stewart's personal papers. Papers of T. Dale Stewart, Box 1, Biographical Material, Correspondence, Professional Publications, Box 1, Folder: Biographical Information. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁹⁴ T. Dale Stewart, interviewed by Pamela M. Henson, Oral History Project Interviews, Archives and Special Collections of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. January-May 1975, 9

medical school, too, Hrdlička sent him to collect skeletal materials in Nunivak Island in Alaska. Stewart recalled the summer in his oral history, “we would make treks across the island to abandoned villages and collect the dead around those villages and any cultural objects that we could find. It was a remarkable summer there.”⁵⁹⁵ Stewart’s fieldwork in Alaska represents a continuation of an established Smithsonian tradition of collecting human skeletal remains in Alaska. Upon his arrival at medical school, Stewart began studying under doctors also interested in physical anthropology.⁵⁹⁶

Stewart, unlike many others in the field of physical anthropology, worked well with his mentor, Hrdlička. Stewart recalled of Hrdlička, “I got along with him all right simply because I didn’t try to counter him. If he wanted things done certain ways I attempted to do them the way he wanted but would try insidiously to suggest ways of improving it.”⁵⁹⁷ Hrdlička would eventually grow to trust Stewart and he assisted him by organizing research projects, fieldwork, and arranging a leadership role at the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*. Stewart stepped into these responsibilities capably, and following Hrdlička’s death in 1943 he became increasingly central to physical anthropology in the United States.

Race, the Past, Human Blood, and Hair

Just as human remains collections in museums were modernizing and growing in size and scope in museums throughout the United States, researchers in physical anthropology and medicine were starting to turn some of their attention away from human bones and toward examples of soft tissue, blood, and hair. Years earlier, researchers at institutions like the Army Medical Museum shifted their emphasis from the “comparative anatomy” of racial classification toward the study of communicable disease; studying and collecting soft tissue was thought to provide information more pragmatic to the medical researcher interested in disease. Despite their utility, these types of human remains were much more challenging to preserve than were human bones, which typically sat untreated, for long periods, in a bone room with only a rudimentary level of climate control. While the Army Medical Museum worked in the late nineteenth century to purge their collections aimed at studies in racial classification, the Smithsonian, and numerous other museums interested in natural history, continued well into the twentieth century to maintain an active program in collecting remains from around the globe for the purpose of racial classification. As researchers in medicine were becoming increasingly concerned with soft tissue samples for the purpose of understanding disease, new work in physical anthropology started to focus on the same tissues, blood, and hair in order to understand lingering theories of racial classification. Advances in genetic research and the discovery of the double-helix would eventually open up countless new avenues for this sort of research, but even before the start of the Second World War medical museums advanced efforts to collect and catalogue hair and soft tissue samples. At the same time, many scholars were becoming increasingly concerned with the very ancient past. The hair and skin tissue of mummified remains, it was soon discovered, provided a particularly valuable resource with which scholars could learn about the very distant past. Taking lessons learned from the study of soft tissue

⁵⁹⁵ T. Dale Stewart oral history, 15.

⁵⁹⁶ T. Dale Stewart oral history, 9-10

⁵⁹⁷ T. Dale Stewart oral history, 31

samples related to contemporary health issues, scientists began collecting very ancient samples—examining tiny samples under the microscope to learn more about ancient bodies.

Some of the earliest signs of these shifts arrived through the work of an anatomist and physical anthropologist named Mildred Trotter (1899-1991). After training at Mount Holyoke College, Washington University in Saint Louis, and Oxford, Trotter returned to Washington University where she joined the faculty of the medical school. Trotter proved early on in her career to be a talented researcher, and she split her time between studying hair samples and studying the bones of the dead. She found working with human bones to be more interesting than work with human hair, but she quickly became an expert on the latter subject and published numerous papers comparing the hair of various races.⁵⁹⁸ Trotter attempted to construct a typological understanding of modern human hair, however, she also became interested in available hair samples from mummified remains. Museums in the United States had long maintained an interest in collecting mummies from both the United States and abroad, and many curators were quick to comply with requests for samples of mummified tissue. In particular, mummies from the American Southwest, Peru, and Egypt continued to be popular subjects for exhibition and the curators that maintained collections of mummified bodies eagerly promoted their study to researchers working outside their own institutions. Trotter, understanding the potential value of new methods in comparative hair research, eventually worked to examine numerous hair samples from human remains collections around the globe.

Trotter was careful to note that hair from mummified remains had been the subject of study before her own scholarship. Researchers from the Historical Society of Colorado, for example, grew interested in the comparative study of hair in the 1930s, and their research comparing both contemporary and historic tribes included studies of the hair of Ancient Puebloan mummies.⁵⁹⁹ Trotter's work built on earlier studies through advancing their scope as well as their technological and methodological sophistication. Embracing both the microscope and statistical methodologies, she worked to place the development of hair alongside the data available for the development of the skeleton. Between 1922 and 1973, Trotter published over twenty articles on the subject of hair. One article, published in 1943, would utilize ten scalp and hair samples from mummies housed in museums in Peru—T. Dale Stewart had personally collected the samples for Trotter from the Smithsonian's bone rooms. Trotter then carefully examined the fragile samples before publishing a description of them in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*. In the article, Trotter notes that the mummified hair subjected to study by scholars working in the United States had both lightened in color and dehydrated since death. Trotter concluded that while the hair of the Peruvian mummies she examined varied widely, they were similar enough to the hair samples of other American Indians, both living and very ancient, to maintain existing systems of racial classification.⁶⁰⁰ Trotter's studies, while continuing to emphasize schemes of racial classification well into

⁵⁹⁸ Basic biographical information and some detail about the course of Trotter's life and career can be found in her oral history. Mildred Trotter interviewed by Estelle Brodman, The Becker Medical Library, Washington University St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri. May 19, 1972 and May 23, 1972.

⁵⁹⁹ George Woodbury and Edna T. Woodbury, *Differences between certain of the North American Indian tribes as shown by a microscopical study of their head hair* (Denver: State Museum, 1932).

⁶⁰⁰ Mildred Trotter, "Hair from Paracas Indian Mummies," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 1. 1943, 69-75.

the 1940s, began to blend a pure interest in the study of contemporary race with a more historicized study of humankind.

By the 1940s, William C. Boyd, an immunochemist, argued that the understanding of blood type should be central to physical anthropology. Boyd studied the blood of living humans as well as trace samples from mummified bodies in museum collections.⁶⁰¹ Like many of his contemporaries, Boyd was growing interested in how historic and prehistoric populations might teach scholars about living populations. Alternatively, scholars of this period were also growing increasingly interested in understanding how living populations might hold keys to understanding prehistory.

Though some scholars found information emerging about blood type to be useful to the study of race, many anthropologists were skeptical of the manner in which finds were presented. In writing to Boyd, T.D. Stewart explained his mentor's position, "Dr. Hrdlička is doubtful about the value of some of the blood group data because of the factors of race and mixture and different serological techniques."⁶⁰² Boyd acknowledged these difficulties explaining that the existing research on blood type and race was "of very unequal merit."⁶⁰³ Hrdlička, on the other hand, found Boyd's work on blood type to be compelling and was willing to share mummified tissue samples from Egypt and the American Southwest, as well as an assortment of other soft tissues in the Smithsonian's collections, such as human brains and scalps.⁶⁰⁴

Nevertheless, museums were curious as to what sort of information might be learned from blood type studies of mummified tissues. When samples of human skin were first solicited by Boyd for his studies on ancient blood types, the Boston Museum of Art and the Smithsonian both sent samples from Ancient Egyptian mummies. Additionally, the samples from American Indian mummies from the American Southwest (referred to as the "Basket Makers") were first in line for study. Boyd wrote in a letter to Hrdlička, "It seems to me that these results are of some interest, especially that with the Basket Maker. It would be of interest to examine other Basket Makers to see if they too, differ from the other Indians."⁶⁰⁵

From the middle of the 1930s into the 1940s, medical doctors and anthropologists interested in studying human hair and human blood crafted an intersection between the study of racial classification and the study of history that paralleled the construction of new exhibitions on similar subjects. Though their research does not represent a wholesale, overnight, shift from the study of race to the study of prehistory, scholars began addressing the subject of prehistory and human evolution more fervently and their

⁶⁰¹ Letter from William C. Boyd to T.D. Stewart, October 19, 1942. Papers of T. Dale Stewart, Correspondence, ca. 1935-1961, Series 1, A-Boyd. Box 3. Folder: Boyd, William C. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁰² Letter from T.D. Stewart to William C. Boyd. September 26, 1939. Papers of T. Dale Stewart, Correspondence, ca. 1935-1961, Series 1, A-Boyd. Box 3. Folder: Boyd, William C. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁰³ Letter from William C. Boyd to T.D. Stewart. September 26, 1939. Papers of T. Dale Stewart, Correspondence, ca. 1935-1961, Series 1, A-Boyd. Box 3. Folder: Boyd, William C. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁰⁴ "I think a good deal of your work and wish you all possible success." Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to William C. Boyd, September 20, 1934. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence. Bohemian Circle-Breuil. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁰⁵ Letter from William C. Boyd to Aleš Hrdlička, February 1, 1934. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Correspondence, Bohemian Circle-Breuil. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

work was of deep interest to others in the field. The availability of mummified tissues stored in bone rooms in the United States from Peru, Egypt, and the American Southwest was a clear reflection of the history of collecting practices from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle third of the twentieth century. The history of collecting patterns, therefore, had a direct influence on the development of what was considered to be the more modern battery of scientific tests created for blood, tissue, and hair samples from ancient remains. The results of these studies had influence on understandings of both race and human history, but the shift between a pure interest in racial science to studies focusing on a deeper history was increasingly apparent.

Human Remains Collections, the University, and the Museum

In 1975, in an article examining the recent growth of physical anthropology, T.D. Stewart made the argument that, “unlike the rest of anthropology, physical anthropology moved from a museum phase into an academic phase around 1940 rather than in 1900.”⁶⁰⁶ Stewart begins his article by noting that the professional field of physical anthropology was quite small in the United States in the 1920s. By the middle of the 1970s, as Stewart described, the field was still based heavily on the direct examination of human remains, and was flourishing. Stewart attributed the growth of the field largely to one individual, Hrdlička, who was his mentor from the moment he arrived at the Smithsonian until Hrdlička’s death in 1943. Until the middle of the 1940s, few physical anthropology courses were available in universities in the United States, and what few physical anthropology curricula were available were centered upon small clusters of specialists.

Stewart’s narrative of the history of physical anthropology begins with his own arrival at the Smithsonian, working as Hrdlička’s assistant, in 1925—the same year Hrdlička ascended to the position of president of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). Stewart notes that the meeting of the AAA that same year featured 41 total papers, but 16 of those papers—or nearly 40%—were papers related to physical anthropology. The national meeting of anthropologists featured papers on topics of physical anthropology read by geneticist, anatomists, and individuals like Melville J. Herskovits and Franz Boas, both of whom are largely remembered as cultural anthropologists.

Despite Stewart’s claim for a continuance of museum-based physical anthropology, something of a shift toward the university had begun in the 1920s. By 1925, Stewart notes, of the eighteen Associate Editors of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, five were from medical schools, five were anthropology faculty at universities, four from endowed research organizations, and four from museums (and two of these were university-based museums).⁶⁰⁷ Stewart was responding to a portrait of museum anthropology drawn by Clark Wissler at the American Museum of Natural History. Wissler held a specific interest in the history of museum anthropology in the United States and had been a curator in New York for some time. Wissler based his

⁶⁰⁶ Stewart, “The Growth of American Physical Anthropology,” 193.

⁶⁰⁷ Stewart, “The Growth of American Physical Anthropology,” 196.

claims on the total number of acquisitions by his own anthropology department at the AMNH, rather than physical anthropology collections in particular.⁶⁰⁸

Others in the anthropological community would echo Stewart's argument that physical anthropology struggled to take hold within anthropology departments in universities before the Second World War. In 1934, following an address in which he stated his belief that physical anthropology remained outside the realm of university-based anthropology, Edgar Hewett received a critical reaction from Aleš Hrdlička. Hewett wrote in response:

I am confronted with the obligation of building a department of the science of man, in which Physical Anthropology should be a vital factor. With that in view, I have for the last two or three years been studying the Physical Anthropology work done in our American universities, and I have reached the conviction that for the most part it is puerile and profitless. I have not found a single university in which there is a clear statement of the inherent values of Physical Anthropology, or a clean cut statement of its application to the problems of modern life.⁶⁰⁹

Hewett, in working with Hrdlička on the Science of Man building for the 1915 Panama-California International Exhibition, had personally hoped that the displays would encourage universities to include physical anthropologists within their expanding anthropology departments. Hewett lamented nearly twenty years later, "How unfortunate that we could not have produced that convincing statement of the science of man in connection with a great educational institution."⁶¹⁰ Hrdlička, in responding to Hewett's lament, argued that failings in physical anthropology were not due to their own efforts in exhibition. Instead, they were due to others who misrepresented the science in public settings. Additionally, Hrdlička believed that "The biblical tenets are still very strong—and that even with many educated people, which results in many still looking on physical anthropology [as] something dangerous and even subversive." As to the failing of physical anthropology in the university, Hrdlička explained his belief that "The college people hesitate to give it due chance, both for personal reasons and for reasons of policy." Hrdlička continued his letter critiquing the address given by Hewett by underscoring the importance of training the next generation of scholars to work with human bodies, "Under [existing] conditions no one can wonder that the men who represent [physical anthropology] are so frequently amateurs, who are underinstructed, often biased, and following trivial if not destructive tendencies." Nevertheless, Hrdlička predicted, "A hundred years hence physical anthropology in this country shall have become thoroughly established."⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁸ Stewart, "The Growth of American Physical Anthropology," 202. Stewart cites, Clark Wissler, "The American Indian and the American Philosophical Society Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society" 86 (1943): 189-204.

⁶⁰⁹ Letter from Edgar Hewett to Aleš Hrdlička, October 16, 1934. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives.

⁶¹⁰ Letter from Edgar Hewett to Aleš Hrdlička, October 16, 1934. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶¹¹ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Edgar Hewett, October 22, 1934. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Confiding in other scholars just a few years later, however, Hrdlička's tone did not seem quite as confident. In a dense letter written to Sir Arthur Keith, a figure who remained pre-eminent in British science for decades, Hrdlička explained his view on the state of American anthropology. He echoed his view that the other branches of anthropology had shunned physical anthropology. He added, "In addition there has developed during the last 15 years a curious condition from which probably you do not suffer. This is the fact that a good many of our anatomists, under peculiar influences, lack medical preparation. They are just Ph.D's, and thus handicapped in relation to Anthropology."⁶¹² Hrdlička's estimation—that an increasing number of individuals concerned with human anatomy, evolution, human prehistory, and race were coming out of anthropology departments, as opposed to medical schools—was correct. By the time Hrdlička died in 1943, the use of human remains for the research and display had shifted away from scholars trained largely in medicine, toward those who completed doctoral work in anthropology.

In concluding his later analysis of the history of physical anthropology, T.D. Stewart argued that history of physical anthropology acquisitions at the Smithsonian ran somewhat counter to the existing notion of the "museum period." Hrdlička arrived at the Smithsonian only in 1900, he reminds the reader, and his vast collection was mainly acquired by the museum between Hrdlička's active years of collecting—between 1903 and 1943. Stewart writes, "Taking this into account, along with the events between 1930 and 1950 enumerated above, I am inclined to advance the dividing point between physical anthropology's museum and academic periods to the neighborhood of 1940."⁶¹³ Although it is impossible to truly pinpoint the transition of physical anthropology from a discipline based in museums to that of an academic field within universities, it was Stewart's impression that museum collections of human remains, built over the previous half-century, continued to be central to physical anthropology in the United States until at least the Second World War.

While Stewart was complimentary of Hrdlička's legacy in his writings near the time of his mentor's death, others in the scholarly community were not so complementary of the Czech-born scholar's influence. Writing many years later, Sherwood Washburn, a British-born scholar who worked to modernize the field of physical anthropology through comparative anatomy, argued that Hrdlička's influence has seriously waned in the academic community toward the end of his life. Washburn wrote of Hrdlička, "he very nearly killed physical anthropology." He continued, "By the time I was in college he was regarded as an old, disagreeable, fool."⁶¹⁴ Hrdlička had always been challenging to work with and many of his ideas were considered outdated by the middle of the 1930s. Nevertheless, Hrdlička held sway over one the largest and most complete collection of human remains in the country. Further, his influence had guided numerous scholars across the country and he helped construct the framework for building and organizing bone rooms around the world. Significantly, in his *New York Times* obituary, Hrdlička

⁶¹²Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to Arthur Keith, January 3, 1938. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶¹³ Stewart, "The Growth of American Physical Anthropology," 202-203.

⁶¹⁴ Letter from Sherwood Washburn to Frank Spencer, June 15, 1983. Papers of Frank Spencer, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Folder: Washburn, Sherwood. Series 1, Correspondence. Box 4.

was largely eulogized as a scholar of human evolution. The obituary states, “Forty years of measuring convinced Hrdlička that man sprang not from some anthropoid ape, as Darwin postulated, but from some vanished creature more human.” Despite some fairly egregiously broad and even inaccurate descriptions of the history of science and studies in evolution, Hrdlička’s obituary is telling in that it focused primarily on the aspects of his research focusing on humanity’s seemingly distant and mysterious past. “In these bones,” the obituary reads, “the secret of man’s problematical descent was to be read.” The memorial concludes:

Time alone can tell how much of Hrdlička’s case will stand. But there is no uncertainty about his place in physical anthropology. To fill that place is impossible. His successor must of necessity strike out for himself. Hrdlička could not have exhausted the possibilities in the mountain of material he collected, but he did exhaust them so far as our present knowledge of human evolution is concerned.⁶¹⁵

The *New York Times*’ conclusion—that human remains housed within the bone empires of museums in the United States would continue to inform our understanding of human evolution—was a powerful line of thought that persisted into the second half of the twentieth century. To this day, some scientists who work with medical and natural history museum collections of human remains are reticent to repatriate or rebury ancient remains, as they continue to yield discoveries with technological advances.

Much of the available literature on the history of museum anthropology continues to uphold the notion of a “museum period” or “museum age” in the United States. Such a period, however, has always proven difficult to define and the way in which scholars of physical anthropology contemplated the role of physical anthropology within the university and museum through the middle of the twentieth century complicates this notion even further. Scholars had hoped that the research and display of both living humans and human remains would inspire the addition of physical anthropology to the university in the United States, but until the Second World War such an occurrence would largely fail to take place. At the very least, the history of collecting human remains at major museums in the United States should complicate the existing notion of a museum period for museum anthropology in the United States.

Physical Anthropology - Still Anthropology?

Although physical anthropology remained one of the four major sub-fields of the discipline of anthropology, some felt their field was becoming increasingly isolated from a larger anthropological community seen to most often focus on the study of culture. Physical anthropologists increasingly relied on their own journals to disseminate new ideas and announce the discovery and acquisition of new specimens. In 1933, when a position opened up for the anthropology section of the National Academy of Sciences, Hrdlička lobbied that the position be filled by a physical anthropologist. Hrdlička noted the cooperation between physical anthropology and other disciplines, and reported that the field was “gradually forging its way to our Universities,” and yet there remained a perceived lack of disciplinary representation in various scientific and anthropological

⁶¹⁵ “Student of Man,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1943, 22.

organizations.⁶¹⁶ While other branches of anthropology had largely moved from the museum to the university, physical anthropology remained somewhat embedded in the museum, married to the collections of human remains that were so central to studies since the Civil War. Hrdlička, as the clear leader of the discipline, worried that his field might be left behind by the other branches of anthropology.⁶¹⁷ Despite his unwavering belief that physical anthropology was destined to grow, Hrdlička wrote contradicting opinions on the future of physical anthropology in universities in the United States.

Several prominent members of the cultural anthropological community viewed the course of the 1930s as a decade of little progress for physical anthropology. Some viewed the study of museum collections within the United States as old-fashioned, instead traveling abroad to study remains in places like Africa and Europe in a growing number of local museums. As cultural anthropologists moved away from object-based epistemology, physical anthropologists meanwhile were still immersed in studies of human remains. Melville J. Herskovits, the prominent anthropologist who built his career researching in Africa, hoped to reunite the sub-fields of anthropology, which he believed to be drifting apart. In a letter applauding T. Dale Stewart's efforts as the editor of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* he wrote:

It will be a pleasure to cooperate with you, either in doing an occasional review or perhaps, if it is possible these busy days and you be interested, in sending you a paper incorporating some observations I have been making over the past few years about the unity of anthropology, with particular reference to the problem of whether both physical and cultural anthropology cannot be mobilized to make for a better analysis of certain problems than either can achieve alone.⁶¹⁸

Physical anthropology, in Herskovits' view, had fallen upon "doldrums" over the course of the previous few years. Anthropologists, he argued, might be encouraged to address particular questions through a more unified, or interdisciplinary, approach. Herskovits was prompted to write to Stewart upon reading a recent editorial that appeared in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*.

The editorial, which appeared on the opening pages of a new series for the journal, announced the transition of the editorship from Hrdlička to Stewart. It read:

⁶¹⁶ Letter from Aleš Hrdlička to James H. Brested, October 19, 1933. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička.

Correspondence, Bohemian Circle-Breuil. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶¹⁷ The idea that there existed a need for cooperation in anthropology certainly did not start with Aleš Hrdlička in the 1930s. The significance of this rhetoric is perhaps most appropriately understood as a desire for physical anthropology not to be left behind by other branches of the field that were becoming increasingly centered upon university-based work. Fay Cooper-Cole, for instance, called upon the branches of anthropology to work together in a letter written to Hrdlička in 1926. "I feel that Anthropology is now in a position where co-operation of the workers is all that is needed to see our case materially advanced."

Letter from Fay Cooper-Cole to Aleš Hrdlička, December 7, 1926. Papers of Aleš Hrdlička.

Correspondence, Cattell-Commerce Dept. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶¹⁸ Letter from Melville J. Herskovits to T.D. Stewart, April 6, 1943. Papers of T. Dale Stewart.

Correspondence, ca. 1935-1961, Series 1, Gregory-Howell, Box 7. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Looking back over the 29 volumes of the Journal that have appeared since 1918, Doctor Hrdlička foresight and courage in initiating single handedly a publication in such a undeveloped field as physical anthropology, and especially during a world crisis, seem monumental. Not many visualized the vast materials waiting to be studied or realized the need for a medium in which to record the work waiting to be done.⁶¹⁹

The editorial explained the vast influence Hrdlička wielded in shaping the early development of the field of physical anthropology. As editor of the journal, and as “one of the few full-time physical anthropologists”⁶²⁰ in the entire nation, he influenced how human remains were catalogued, displayed, measured, and interpreted. Once the shift of editorship was finalized, T. Dale Stewart publicly recognized the opportunity to impose “liberalizing changes” in the field.⁶²¹ Reflecting broader changes in the discipline of physical anthropology, the editors of the journal hoped to diversify the scholarship, moving away from the skull measuring of craniometry (which did remain of special interest) toward a more complete study of the human body.

Changes in the study of physical anthropology did not, however, bear immediate recognition in the broader anthropological community. In 1945, when the journal *American Anthropologist* published a bibliography of recent publications in anthropology, the list included citations for recent work outside of the journal in ethnology and archaeology, but not in physical anthropology. T. Dale Stewart wrote to the editor of the journal, J. Alden Mason, who replied that the omission was merely an oversight; “physical anthropology is the phase of anthropology in which I am least interested and informed. I had never noticed the omission.”⁶²² Stewart, for his part, conceded that “everyone realizes that the *American Anthropologist* has specialized in the field of ethnology.”⁶²³ Nevertheless, the omission can be taken as clear evidence of physical anthropology’s somewhat wayward and disconnected position in the United States at the outset of World War II. The influence of the field, and especially studies of racial science, appeared to be waning both within the larger field of anthropology and within American intellectual and cultural life more generally.

That same year, as the Second World War ended, Sherwood Washburn wrote to William Duncan Strong expressing similar concerns about the fate of physical anthropology. Washburn, an anatomist, primatologist, and specialist in human evolution, wrote to Strong hoping to convince him to join the American Association of Physical Anthropologists. Strong, an anthropologist and archaeologist who never seriously studied human remains, seemed an unlikely candidate to join an academic association of physical anthropologists. Washburn assured him, “I really think that the Association is picking up a lot.” He added, “We’ve lots of anatomists in it. What we need now are

⁶¹⁹ “Editorial,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 1, No. 1 (1943): 1.

⁶²⁰ “Editorial,” 2.

⁶²¹ “Editorial,” 3.

⁶²² Letter from J. Alden Mason to T.D. Stewart, November 26, 1945. Papers of T. Dale Stewart. Biographical Material, Correspondence, Professional Publications. Box 1. Folder: Publications—Anthropology, *American Anthropologist*. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶²³ Letter from T.D. Stewart to J. Alden Mason, November 15, 1945. Papers of T. Dale Stewart. Biographical Material, Correspondence, Professional Publications. Box 1. Folder: Publications—Anthropology, *American Anthropologist*. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

anthropologists.”⁶²⁴ Despite the best efforts of scholars, anthropology was becoming an increasingly divided field—split into communities of specialists. Physical anthropology, long centered upon the research and display of collections of human remains in museums and medical schools, struggled to solidify an identity in the middle of the twentieth century. The era of rapid collection, publication, and display of human remains in museums, fairs, and medical schools that had consumed hundreds of anatomists, anthropologists, and medical doctors in the United States was ending. A new era in the study of human evolution, however, was just beginning.

Conclusion

In 1936, the emergence of New Deal funds and labor allowed the Smithsonian to partner with the Department of Interior and create a new radio program boldly called “The World is Yours.” The program’s reach grew slowly, but after two years the show boomed on the air through nearly 60 radio stations. By the end of its second year, the program received nearly a quarter of a million letters from individuals in the United States and from around the globe. The program officially began in July and, by mid-August, it aired an episode entitled “The Story of Man in America.” In November, an episode on “The Evolution of Life” hit the airwaves. Following that, the public listened to a program on “Early Man.” For what the program lacked in scientific detail and accuracy (even for the era in which it appeared), it attempted to make up for through dramatic language and vivid description. Despite deficiencies, the program brought the subject of human evolution and the study of fossilized remains to a massive audience. The radio program explained to listeners, “Within the last 50 years, through fortunate discoveries, science has been enriched by a number of very ancient fossils which cannot be identified positively either as human or precursor of human.” It continued, “The riddle of man’s past is unraveled by scientists just like any other major natural riddle, by starting with known facts in the present, and deducing the nature of the unknown from well authenticated remains of the past.”⁶²⁵ During the first two years of the radio program, which Smithsonian leaders believed to fit neatly into their mission of disseminating knowledge, the subject of race was notably absent. Instead of hearing ideas about racial typology, listeners heard ideas examining human evolution and prehistory.⁶²⁶ When listeners *were* finally presented a radio program on the topic of race, the show examined the concept of “Racial Equality,” rather than the supposedly scientific study of racial classification, which continued to fall out of favor. Although scholars of physical anthropology spent several generations researching and displaying collections of human remains for the purposes of comparative anatomy or racial classification, the communities they helped create became increasingly focused on human evolution. Certainly, an interest in comparative racial studies lingered for those concerned with researching and displaying human remains, but the major concentration of the discipline

⁶²⁴ Letter from S.L. Washburn to W.D. Strong, March 7, 1945. Papers of William Duncan Strong. Box: 15. Correspondence—Strong W.D.—Wei. Folder: W-WA. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶²⁵ Script, “Rise of Man,” November 8, 1936. The World Is Yours Radio Program. Smithsonian Institution Archives. Accession 06-152. Box 1. Some sources refer to this episode with the title, “Early Man,” while others refer to it as “Rise of Man.”

⁶²⁶ See, Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report, 1937. 19-21. And Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report, 1938. 9-10.

started to shift. Those entering the bone rooms possessed different goals than those of their predecessors, and the conclusions they drew from studying the dead were vastly different from those of similar scholars only a few generations before. Not only were discussions of racial typology disappearing from the public discourse of anthropology, but also artistic representation of ideas drawn from the study of human remains largely replaced the display of actual human bones in museum exhibitions in the United States. The hundreds of thousands of human remains held in major museums of the United States were largely relegated back to the bone rooms, behind the scenes.

In 1943, the same year as his death, Hrdlička reflected on the history of physical anthropology in the United States in a brief unpublished manuscript. At the conclusion of his brief essay, he turned his attention to the future of the discipline. He wrote, “A vast amount of [the work of physical anthropology] remains still to be done, both on skeletal materials and on the living.”⁶²⁷ Though Hrdlička was enthused by certain developments amongst the younger generation of physical anthropologists, he was reticent to see other developments introduced into the field that he had helped create. Hrdlička certainly could not have imagined the ways in which studies upon human remains would change over the course of the next half-century.⁶²⁸

Between the Civil War and the start of the twentieth century, those engaged in the study and collection of human remains were primarily interested in two subjects—medicine and racial classification. By the middle of the twentieth century, schemes of racial classification had started to give way to a growing study of the human past—in terms of both ancient history and the evolution of mankind. Although the scholars and institutions driven to collect, display, and study human remains were often very independent of one another, they worked together to construct massive holdings of human bodies and to subsequently interpret and display them to broader audiences. The broad intellectual transition witnessed by the discipline of physical anthropology was reflected by the depiction of human remains in exhibitions. In 1915, at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, the Science of Man Building introduced basic concepts of human evolution and human prehistory in the opening room of the exhibit, but the majority of the displays focused on ideas surrounding racial classification. By 1933, the Field Museum of Natural History opened a pair of exhibitions placing ideas of racial classification and human prehistory on nearly equal footing (at least in terms of the size and scope of new exhibit spaces). By 1941, when the Smithsonian Institution opened a new series of exhibits introducing the public to the broad scope of the many branches of the institution, it featured a display on physical anthropology that blended ideas of human evolution and comparative racial studies. All three of these exhibitions leveraged the use of human remains and reproductions of the human body to teach the public about shifting ideas in the scientific community. Without a doubt, the promotion of racial classification in museum exhibitions continued through the conclusion of the Second World War, but the major emphasis of most displays experienced a shift. The study of human remains,

⁶²⁷ Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Box 156. Manuscripts of Writings, 1941-1944. Folder: History of Physical Anthropology in the USA w/ Special Reference to Phila. 1943. 15.

⁶²⁸ Papers of Aleš Hrdlička. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Box 156. Manuscripts of Writings, 1941-1944. Folder: History of Physical Anthropology in the USA w/ Special Reference to Phila.

defined in large part by their collection and display at museums and fairs in the United States, witnessed a virtual gestalt shift over the course of half a century.

In a letter written many years after the conclusion of the Second World War, Sherwood Washburn, a prominent physical anthropologist, anatomist, and primatologist from the University of California, Berkeley, wrote that the very term “physical anthropology” was losing its resonance amongst both scholars and the public. He wrote simply, “Basically very few people are interested in physical anthropology. Human evolution is the area of interest.” As opposed to the declining value of the discipline of “physical anthropology,” the term “human evolution,” he argued, “is a phrase that communicates.”⁶²⁹ Washburn, himself, would join numerous anthropologists in the outright denial of race as a viable concept in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶³⁰ As scholars continued to leverage this growing interest in human evolution their work was bolstered by a series of high-profile discoveries in the field of paleoanthropology. Though many continued to study the remains stored in museums throughout the United States, the emphasis of their studies had clearly shifted. Only a few years before Washburn wrote his letter, another scholar examining the history of physical anthropology argued simply, “Human skeletal biology is moribund because of its long history of abuse by racial typologists and its largely descriptive nature.”⁶³¹ Due almost exclusively to the abuse of racial science, bone rooms sat silent, the argument went. The reality, of course, was more complex. Indigenous activism, the decline of physical anthropology within the broader field of anthropology, new discoveries in paleoanthropology on other continents, and a generational change all played a part in the generally weakening significance of bone rooms in museums in the United States immediately before World War II.

Major concepts in the study of human evolution also underwent a shift that would define research and display over the course of the twentieth century. In an introductory textbook published in 1945, M.F. Ashley Montague noted of the field, “we see that earlier notions of a linear evolution of man, conceptions which held that man progressively advanced in a straight line from an ape-like stage toward the stage of *Homo sapiens* were too simplified.”⁶³² Exhibitions created before the war—many of which directly linked race to a linear conceptualization of human evolution—seemed hopelessly out of date in the decades that followed. Although not all were in agreement with Montague’s progressive stance on race, the weight of the physical anthropological community gradually shifted in his direction.⁶³³ The field of physical anthropology would

⁶²⁹ Letter from Sherwood Washburn to Frank Spencer. June 15, 1983. Papers of Frank Spencer, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Folder: Washburn, Sherwood. Series 1, Correspondence. Box 4.

⁶³⁰ Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, 209-210.

⁶³¹ Russell H. Tuttle, “Five Decades of Physical Anthropology” *Science* 220. No. 4599. May 20, 1983, 832-834.

⁶³² Ashley M.F. Montague, *An Introduction to Physical Anthropology* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas): 103.

⁶³³ A prominent example of an anthropologist pointing to racial divisions was Earnest Hooton, who wrote, “Differences between Negroes and Whites, or between Mongolois and Whites or Negroes, are really much greater than ‘racial’ differences; they are almost, if not quite, sub-specific or specific differences. Races are properly physical subdivisions of these three great general groupings of modern man.” Despite the lingering prevalence of this idea, this type of argument was gradually sliding out of mainstream science. Earnest A. Hooton, *Apes, Men, and Morons* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1937): 128.

generally recover, following a gradual decline in the middle of the twentieth century, revived by new discoveries, new advances in science, and new generations of scholars. Nevertheless, the scientific consensus was that the purpose of human remains for anthropological and medical science had undergone a series of changes. It is also clear that physical anthropology, as a discipline, never reached some of the impossibly stratospheric heights predicted by its founders in the United States.

Although the human remains collected for museums and fairs themselves would essentially remain static, the ideas that surrounded them would continue to change for the next half-century, just as they had in the previous half-century. By the concluding decades of the twentieth century, it became clear that those interested in studying collections of human remains would be forced to wrestle with the realities of the legacy of scientific racism. Studies in racial classification continued to morph into related research that focused on ancestry and population, these areas of study often progressively working to subvert the very concept of race. New scientific fields, coupled with new discoveries in the anthropology, provided scholars interested in human prehistory and human evolution with growing bodies of evidence. Most notably, a series of challenges to the ethics of the display and research of human remains grew from sporadic instances of indigenous resistance to a more unified, multicultural, and global discourse that changed the very nature of the enterprise of collecting and displaying the human body. The recurring nature of the debates surrounding bone rooms in our intellectual and cultural history makes the history of bone empires especially significant.

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