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Object Lessons: The Hampton University Sheppard Collection of African Art

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the History of Art and Architecture

By

Mallory Ellen Sharp

Committee in charge:

Professor Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, Chair

Professor Swati Chattopadhyay

Professor Amy Buono

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The dissertation of Mallory Ellen Sharp is approved.

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Swati Chattopadhyay

_____

Amy Buono

_____

Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, Committee Chair

March 2024

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VITA OF MALLORY ELLEN SHARP
March 2024

EDUCATION
Doctor of Philosophy in the History of Art and Architecture, University of California, Santa Barbara, March 2024
Master of Art in Art History, Indiana University, Bloomington, November 2014
Bachelor of Arts in History, Harding University, May 2012 (magna cum laude)

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT
Curatorial Assistant, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis, Tennessee, April 2019-December 2020
Teaching Assistant, University of California at Santa Barbara, Fall 2015—Summer 2018
Associate Instructor, Indiana University, 2013-2014

PUBLICATIONS
Exhibition review, *Black Artists in America: From Civil Rights to the Bicentennial, Art Inquiries,* forthcoming Winter 2024-2025.

Catalogue entry contributor for *Dixon Gallery and Gardens: Paintings, Sculpture, Works on Paper*. Memphis: Dixon Gallery and Gardens, 2021.

"All the World's Futures: Globalization of Contemporary African Art at the 2015 Venice Biennale." *Critical Interventions Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture* 10, no. 1 (July 2016): 28-42.

Book review, Christa Clarke's *African Art in the Barnes Foundation*, *CAA Reviews*, June 2016, http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2777.

"Charlotte Brontë's Timeliness in *Jane Eyre*." *Tenor of Our Times* I (Spring 2012): 1-13.

AWARDS AND OFFICES
Art History Graduate Student Association Co-Chair, UCSB, 2017-2018
Professional Development co-chair, UCSB, 2015-2017
Friends of Art Travel Award, Indiana University, awarded November 2013
Indiana University Graduate Art History Association, Head of Publicity Committee for graduate symposium, member August 2012-May 2013
Vice President, Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society, 2011-2012
Honors College, Harding University, 2008-1012
Dean's List, Harding University, 2008-2012

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation evaluates the William Sheppard Collection of African Art at Hampton University. Assembled by Sheppard, a Black missionary to the Congo from 1890 to 1910, this collection comprises the oldest example of Kuba art in the United States and among the oldest intentionally assembled collections of African art outside of that continent. Unlike African artworks that were displayed in predominantly white institutional contexts, the Sheppard Collection is noteworthy for its early acquisition by an institution with a majority Black audience: the campus museum of the Hampton Institute, a historically Black college. The first primary audience for Sheppard's exceptional collection of African art were students of the Hampton Institute. In that singular context, the works from the Sheppard Collection functioned as object lessons, a type of visual pedagogy that encouraged learning based on observation and experience from direct contact with an object or work of art. This teaching method presupposed a connection between the material world and moral development. Therefore, this dissertation argues that the Sheppard Collection constituted a visible and tangible basis for African Americans to establish a cultural connection to Africa, resonating with the contemporaneous intellectual pursuit of African Americans. *Object Lessons: The*

Hampton University Sheppard Collection of African Art approaches the Sheppard Collection from a diasporic lens. Locating William Sheppard and the Sheppard Collection within African diaspora frameworks, I evaluate the implications of artworks in the Sheppard Collection for the analysis of race and representation in the United States, and the utilization of the Hampton collection in performance and pedagogy.

Through analyses of dramatic performance, collections histories, photography, and the paradigms and protocols of museum display, this dissertation contributes to knowledge of the African diaspora, Atlantic world relations, art at historically Black colleges and the history of modern art and architecture. In the context of a historically Black college, the artworks of the Sheppard Collection took on different meanings from their original contexts. Like the African peoples who were forcibly enslaved and relocated to various places around the Atlantic, these cultural objects carry histories and memories with them. I analyze the Sheppard Collection according to this paradigm and evaluate its artworks as cultural objects that perform diaspora over centuries of Atlantic world relations.

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INTRODUCTION

Hampton University, a historically Black college founded in 1868 in the coastal town of Hampton, Virginia, houses one of the first collections of African art in the United States.[1] The foundation of this important collection was established with the school's purchase of Hampton alumnus William Henry Sheppard's collection in 1911. Sheppard was a missionary and over the course of his twenty-year tenure as a Presbyterian missionary in the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, he meticulously assembled a vast collection of art. Upon his retirement from the mission field, the Hampton Institute purchased Sheppard's collection for their campus museum. Sheppard's is the first collection of Kuba art in the United States and among the first American collections of African art of any kind.[2] Apart from the prestige of the collection itself, Sheppard's position as an African American missionary to Africa and his tireless advocacy for African human rights makes the Sheppard Collection a provocative example of the African diaspora/African relations.

With the Sheppard Collection of African art as its focus, this dissertation contributes to knowledge of the African diaspora, Atlantic world relations, and the history of modern art and architecture through analyses of dramatic performance, collections histories, deployment of photography, and the paradigms and protocols of museum display. During the time period in question, if works of African cultural patrimony were attributed any value apart from their

[1] The school was founded as the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868. Though often referred to as the Hampton Institute, the school did not formally change its name until 1930. In 1984 the Hampton Institute became Hampton University.

[2] The Kuba Kingdom flourished from the 17th to the 19th centuries in the southwestern region of what is today the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The kingdom was multiethnic. Though the term 'Kuba art' refers to arts of this kingdom, it often includes works created by neighboring groups whose style is similar. The kingdom survives to the present, but is much less powerful than when Sheppard encountered it. See Jan Vansina, "Kuba iii", Grove Dictionary of Art Online, https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T048147,accessed 5 June 2018; Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 1978.

status as products of colonial plunder, they were most often seen as relevant or consequential only in relation to the fascination they held for the European *avant garde*.[3] I argue that the Sheppard Collection represents something different. Distinct from African artworks that transitioned to mainly white institutional contexts, I emphasize the singularity of collection's relatively early date of arrival to an institution with a majority Black audience. In that context the works from the Sheppard Collection functioned as object lessons, a visual pedagogy that encouraged learning based on observation and experience from direct contact with an object. Containing over 400 works of art from peoples of the Congo, I assert that the Sheppard Collection constituted a visible and tangible basis for African Americans to establish a cultural connection to Africa, resonating with the contemporaneous intellectual pursuit of African Americans.

Sources

The key archival research for this dissertation was conducted at Hampton University (hereafter, Hampton). As the site of the Sheppard Collection of African Art, the Hampton University Museum Archives house the materials related to Hampton's procurement of the collection. Additionally, the archives contain papers related to pedagogy, museum history, and Christian missions. Hampton's is one of two archives, along with the Presbyterian Historical Society of Philadelphia, that contain William Sheppard's personal papers and correspondence. His field notes on the artworks and cultural objects that he sold to Hampton both provide a valuable ethnographic history that provides and a glimpse into how Sheppard personally regarded the components of his collection, and in some cases how he came to

[3] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," *The Massachusetts Review* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 24.

possess them. The Cora Mae Folsom Papers are another valuable collection of archival materials. Folsom was the Hampton Museum's first curator and her records and correspondence are instructive regarding the disposition of the Sheppard Collection, the ways that Hampton faculty incorporated the cultural objects into their teaching, and it also includes secondhand accounts of how Hampton students engaged and viewed the collection.

Hampton's publication, *Southern Workman* (1872–1939), a monthly magazine dedicated to "nonpolitical interracial respect and understanding" is an essential resource for this project. It was edited by white faculty, but typeset, printed, and bound by Black and Native American students at Hampton. It enjoyed a large audience among African Americans as well as moderate whites.[4] *Southern Workman* contains a myriad of articles about William Sheppard as well as his occasional published correspondence. It is through this magazine that we can readily track Sheppard's hopes for his Kuba collection in addition to his spiritual motivations. Issues published prior to 1895 are accessible only on Hampton University's campus.

The William H. Sheppard papers at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia are the second site of Sheppard's personal archival materials. It is here that the valuable collection of Sheppard's original photographs and photography albums from his time in the Congo are housed. While Sheppard's papers and photographs are the most important material for my purposes, the Presbyterian Historical Archives additionally houses papers from the American Presbyterian Congo Mission that add historical context.

[4] John David Smith, "*Southern Workman*" in *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Paul Finkelman and Cary D. Wintz. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 365.

Finally, the works of art that Sheppard collected form another important archive. His collection numbers around 400 objects created by Kuba and Kuba-affiliated peoples. Sheppard assembled a diverse array of artworks from everyday domestic tools to elaborate regalia to create an exemplary collection of art from Central Africa. Examples include textiles, weaponry, religious material, household wares, and emblems of power and prestige. The works of his collection are mostly precolonial from the nineteenth century, but the oldest item dates to the seventeenth century.

Literature Review

While Sheppard is not an unknown historical figure, scholars have mostly written about him from a biographical perspective. The two significant studies of Sheppard's life are *William Sheppard: Congo's African American Livingstone* (2002) by William E. Phipps and Pagan Kennedy's *Black Livingstone* (2002). The reference to David Livingstone in both titles reveals the problematic tendency to validate Sheppard's accomplishments only in relation to those of white colonialist explorers. These biographical studies acknowledge but are not concerned with analyzing Sheppard's extensive collecting practices.

Because it was collected by an African American who actually resided on the continent, rather than being procured through colonial plunder, the Sheppard Collection challenges established narratives regarding the collecting of African art. Despite this, it has received infrequent attention in comparison to other African art collections of similar size and importance. In her 2013 article, "African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde," Yaëlle Biro argues that the earliest example of African art "to have reached America for its aesthetic appeal" was a Yaka *biteki* figure that was brought to the United States by artist and collector

Max Weber in 1909.[5] Even if Biro's claim is correct, the *biteki* figure was not part of any public display until at least 1914. Thus the Hampton Museum's acquisition and installation of Sheppard's collection in 1911 predates the exhibition of Weber's sculpture. Additionally, there are documented examples of William Sheppard's traveling throughout the United States presenting lectures illustrated with artworks from his collection during his furlough periods which precede the 1909 date as well.[6] Sheppard's statements about Kuba artworks in his collection consistently tout their aesthetic qualities and elevate them above ethnographic curiosity.[7] Biro makes another dubious argument when she claims that beginning in 1919 the University of Pennsylvania's art museum was the first American institution to "purchase African art for its aesthetic qualities and not solely as the last remaining ethnographic records of disappearing societies."[8] Her argument is not only incorrect, but it also significantly marginalizes early collections at African American institutions, such as Hampton. When Hampton purchased the Sheppard Collection in 1911, the collection was celebrated in *Southern Workman* for its "rare and interesting articles with a decided *artistic* as well as ethnic value."[9] Such a description suggests that the Kuba artworks were not simply taken to be ethnographic exemplars but were also valued for their beauty and craftsmanship.

[5] Yaëlle Biro, "African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde." *African Arts* Vol. 46, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 89.

[6] Sheppard traveled to Hampton, among other places, on his first furlough to the United States in 1892. His presentation of a Kuba *ikul* as part of his speaking engagements is recorded in Sheppard, "Into the Heart of Africa," *Southern Workman* 22 (1893): 185.

[7] See Sheppard's article from 1892 as perhaps the earliest dated example of this. "Into the Heart of Africa," *Southern Workman* 22 (1893): 185.

[8] Biro, 95.

[9] "Museum Additions," *Southern Workman* 40 (July 1911): 448.

That Sheppard's is the first collection assembled by an African American for a Black audience in the United States is an uncontested claim. Even so, the Sheppard Collection is regrettably understudied. There are a few notable publications on the collection, but these only scratch the surface of contextualizing its significance. The same four scholars have written nearly every piece of literature dedicated to the collection, often in cooperation with each other, meaning that the collection has not been examined from divergent angles. However, these scholars have performed valuable research and function as the primary interlocutors of the Sheppard Collection up to this point. The earliest scholarly publication pertaining to the collection appeared in the catalogue for the important 1988 exhibition *Art/Artifact: African Art from Anthropology Collections*. Curated by Susan Vogel, the exhibition essentially concerned the artificiality of museum installations dedicated to African art. It tackled questions concerning how Europeans and Americans have classified and understood African objects and material culture that their original creators might not have even considered to be art. Several works of art from the Sheppard collection formed part of the exhibition, perhaps exposing these objects to their largest audience to date. As part of the exhibition display, the curators created a replica of Hampton's "curiosity room", based on a photograph of the museum space taken in 1905. *Art/Artifact* was highly influential for its examination of the roles of curator, museum, collecting, and display of African art. The exhibition continues to be referenced even today, more than thirty years after its run. Mary Lou Hultgren and Jeanne Ziedler, at that time the curator and director of the Hampton Museum respectively, contributed an essay to the catalogue concerning the Sheppard collection. The authors introduce the origins of the Hampton Museum and situate the

Sheppard collection as the "nucleus" of the museum's collection of African art.[10] The authors also introduce Cora Mae Folsom, the museum's first curator who served in that role from 1903 to 1922 and who would have been the first individual other than Sheppard to catalogue the collection.

In 1993, Hultgren and Ziedler, along with art historians David Binkley and Patricia Darish, published *A Taste for the Beautiful: Zairian Art from the Hampton University Museum*, a slim volume dedicated to ninety objects from the Sheppard collection. As far as the objects themselves are concerned, this is the most significant piece of literature on the Sheppard Collection, even though the book does not delve deeply into the history of the collection or of Sheppard himself. The majority of the book is dedicated to photographs of the objects in the collection, and when available, the authors included Sheppard's own description of the object.

The Scramble for Art in Central Africa, an edited volume by Enid Schildkraut and Curtis Keim, is the most relevant analysis of the earliest collections of art from Central Africa. In addition to informing the larger context of collecting art from Central Africa, Binkley and Darish contributed an essay on Kuba art that focuses on the collections of William Sheppard (ca. 1892) and the Hungarian ethnographer Emil Torday (ca. 1908).[11]

The most recent scholarship on the Sheppard collection, a 2011 essay from former curator of the Hampton Museum Mary Lou Hultgren, was written over a decade ago. This

[10] Mary Lou Hultgren and Jeanne Ziedler, "'Things African Prove to be the Favorite Theme': The African Collection at Hampton University." *Art/Artifact: African Art from Anthropology Collections*. (New York: Center for African Art, 1988), 98.

[11] David Binkley and Patricia Darish. "'Enlightened but in darkness': Interpretations of Kuba art and culture at the turn of the twentieth century" in *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, edited by Enid Schildkraut and Curtis Keim. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37-62.

essay builds on the earlier one she wrote together with Jeanne Zieldler for *Art/Artifact*, providing a brief history of the African objects within the art collection of Hampton University. She dedicates the majority of space to the Sheppard collection but references the small number of African objects collected prior to Sheppard's and a brief note on the works acquired up to the time of publication. Hultgren situates the collection within the larger pedagogical program of Hampton. She argues that the objects were curated to enhance cross-cultural understanding and provide insight into the "distinctive heritage" of African Americans.[12] Despite her claims Hultgren does not provide significant evidence to support her argument that the collection was widely used in teaching or to describe *how* the collection was used. These publications are valuable but rather introductory, which is why a more exacting study is needed.

A number of art historical studies of early modern Europe, the Americas, and Africa examine the role of missionaries but few analyze the relationship between missionaries and art collecting in the modern era. Despite the arguments of historians of religion that African American missionaries should be viewed within the context of the African diaspora, there has been little consideration of potential missionary influence on the production of artworks and cultural objects in Africa in the modern era or how objects collected by missionaries may have affected European and American audiences. David Killingray charts what he defines as the "trans-Atlantic traffic" of Black missionary activity from the 1780s to the 1920s, noting that Black Americans traveled to Africa and a number of their African protégés came to the

[12] Mary Lou Hultgren, "Roots and Limbs: The African Art Collection at Hampton University Museum," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, edited by Kathleen Berzock and Christa Clarke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 44.

United States for education.[13] Hampton's network included both students and alumni who were among those who traveled to Africa as well as Africans who studied in the United States.

African American missions to Africa are part of the "back-to-Africa" framework that emerged in the early 19th century and gained popularity during the Reconstruction. Serving as missionaries fulfilled a Christian command to spread the gospel, as well as bringing African Americans into closer contact with their ancestral home. Racial discrimination in the Americas also contributed to relocations to Africa. Rather than integration, some white Americans saw repatriating freed slaves to Africa as a solution to the conundrum of the United States' large, newly emancipated, Black population.[14]

The increase in African American missionary activity coincided with European colonial-imperialist expansion into the continent.[15] The senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church expressed concern for the relationship between missionary activity and colonialism in Africa, calling it "African Methodist imperialism."[16] In 1884, *The Times* of London used the term "scramble" to describe the intense jockeying between European nations for a stake in Africa set off by the Berlin Conference (1884-85).[17] In rapid succession, nearly the whole of the continent was partitioned into European colonies. This

[13] David Killingray, "The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s-1920s." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33 (February 2003): 4.

[14] For more information on this phenomenon, see Lisa Lindsay's *Atlantic Bonds: A Nineteenth-Century Odyssey from America to Africa* (2016). Another popular belief of the period was that blacks were better suited to work in African climates and more resistant to tropical diseases than whites. See also Killingray, 9.

[15] Killingray, 17.

[16] Killingray, 14.

[17] Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: The White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876-1912* (New York: Random House, 1991), xxv.

dissertation is primarily concerned with the colonial entity of the Congo Free State (1885-1908), the personal territory of King Leopold II, which was ruled separately from Belgium. It was in this burgeoning colonial context that Sheppard ministered to the Kuba and collected their artwork. It is thus important to consider the role of missionaries and the scope of their influence beyond religious conversion. Missionaries saw themselves as both evangelists and scholar-scientists.[18] Their scientific practices were amateur relative to today's standards but missionaries contributed heavily to the body of knowledge on Africa and were some of the earliest suppliers of African art and cultural objects to American museums.

In this regard, I examine a contemporaneous Christian-themed theatrical performance inspired by Sheppard's collection. This pageant, performed by Hampton students, is reminiscent of performances and tableaux at world's fairs and exhibitions but it more closely resembles the phenomenon of missionary pageants. There are two important studies that have contributed to my understanding of missionary expositions and pageants. The first is Annie Coombes's *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Edwardian England* (1994). Coombes describes how African art played a crucial role at these missionary exhibitions. Unlike the example at Hampton, in England these pageants were performed by white men and women dressed in African attire. Coombes argues that because of the wide attendance at such exhibitions, the missionary occupied a crucial role in the complex network of interests that cultivated an image of an Africa in need of salvation.[19]

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[18] Maxwell, 905.

[19] For an early modern comparison, see Cécile Fromont, *Images on a Mission in Early Modern Kongo and Angola* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022).

The second important work on missionary expositions is that of Erin L. Hasinoff whose book, *Faith in Objects: American Missionary Expositions in the Early Twentieth Century* (2011), interrogates missionary expositions in the United States. Hasinoff argues that missionary expositions created material worlds that were essential to linking missions abroad to their home communities.[20] Her work elucidates critical elements of the missionary project, such as its civilizing mission, and explains the missionary incorporation of material objects, and occasionally artworks, as visual accompaniments to their teachings. In a similar vein, my dissertation is a study of one missionary's collection of art in order to understand how its location at a historically Black institution represents a particular protocol of display that inspired both performative and scholarly participation.

Literature on the art collections of historically Black institutions is very limited. In nearly every case, the scholarship either takes the form of an exhibition catalogue or focuses exclusively on American and African American art rather than African art. The most important work about collections of art at HBCUs is *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art at Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (1999). This catalogue accompanied a traveling exhibition of art from the collections of six schools: Clark Atlanta, Fisk, Hampton, Howard, North Carolina Central and Tuskegee. The introduction by Kinshasa Holman Conwill provides a brief overview of the history of art collections in historically Black institutions and relays their importance as repositories of African American memory and heritage. This catalogue and accompanying exhibition were designed to introduce the larger American public to little-known art collections at HBCUs and therefore does not go into great detail. The exhibition itself focused exclusively on African American art, despite the fact that a few

[20] Hasinoff, 13.

of these schools also hold collections of African art. My dissertation reinserts African art into the discourse of HBCU art collections.

My analysis is restricted to works of African art collected during Sheppard's lifetime. These artworks are most often labeled "traditional" African art. Analogous works of art were impactful to European modern artists, therefore rendering art such as what we find in Sheppard's collection relevant to the discourse of modern art in general. Only recently has the relationship between modern artists from Africa and historically Black colleges begun to be considered. The American Federation for the Arts and Fisk University Galleries organized the exhibition *African Modernism in America, 1947-1967*, which ran from the fall of 2022 to the spring of 2024. The exhibition opened at the Fisk University Galleries in Nashville, Tennessee, and traveled to the Kemper Museum in Saint Louis, Missouri, the Phillips Collection in Washington, D. C., and the Taft Museum of Art in Cincinnati, Ohio. The exhibition examined the relationship between modern African artists and American patrons and cultural institutions. *African Modernism in America*, and its accompanying catalogue, is perhaps the first major traveling exhibition to explore these themes. The catalogue includes an essay by Nikoo Paydar dedicated to the African art collection and exhibitions at Fisk University between 1947 and 1967.[21] The exhibition did important work in in recognizing the relationship between HBCUs and modern African art and artists.

Research Methodology

[21] Nikoo Paydar, "African Art at Fisk University: Charles S. Johnson, Aaron Douglas, and David C. Driskell," in *African Modernism in America*, edited by Perrin M. Lathrop. (New York: American Federation of Art, 2022): 63-73.

I argue that this project, the study of a collection of African art and its context, the collecting practices of an African American man and its acquisition by a historically Black college in the American South, is best analyzed from the perspective of African diaspora art history. The term "diaspora" comes from the Greek language meaning "to sow" or "to scatter." The term *African* diaspora is used to refer to the violent displacement of African peoples as the result of transatlantic racial slavery.[22] Issues of race, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism are thus central to studies of the African diaspora.

As a subset of analysis of the larger African diaspora, my project is situated within the field of Atlantic world relations discourse. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* is one of the most impactful publications in this field. Gilroy used the titular concept as a new framework for thinking about Black peoples, their histories and cultures and how these might be treated discursively.[23] His theories provided a new category devoid of national constraints and his metaphorical choice of the "Atlantic" treats the diaspora as a space unto itself as well as one that connects the Americas with Europe and Africa. His emphasis on the interactive and the transcultural nature of this connection provides a framework through which I investigate how the Sheppard collection narrates the relationships between Africa and its diaspora. At nearly thirty years old, scholars have criticized *The Black Atlantic* for being both too broad and too narrow but few deny its importance as one of the most generative texts on the subject of the

[22] Krista Thompson, "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States." *Art Journal* 70, no. 3 (2011): 8. While there have been at least three other earlier African diasporas, as in the sense of a massive dispersal or movement of people around the African continent, most scholars invoke the term to refer to the period beginning with the race-based slavery dispersal of Africans in the fifteenth century.

[23] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-4.

African diaspora. Historians of all types who look at the African diaspora continue to contend with Gilroy's arguments.

In her incisive historiographical essay, "A Sidelong Glance: the Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States," Krista Thompson argues that "Western art history and any histories of art concerned with issues of modernization, modernism, globalization, nationalism, colonization, cultural mixing, and movement can be more fully understood through consideration of the African diaspora."[24] Following Thompson's argument, I contend that African diaspora art history is not just a field or a categorization along geographical or temporal lines, but also a theoretical armature through which to read works of art and their histories. Using the diasporic lens provides a new way of seeing William Sheppard and his collecting and missionary practices, as well as a new way to contextualize the Sheppard Collection and its setting at the Hampton Museum.

The idea that African artworks may perform diaspora is central to my understanding of the Sheppard Collection. The concept of performing diaspora is taken from John Peffer's 2005 article "Notes on African Art, History, and Diasporas Within" in which the author, building on Igor Kopytoff's influential essay, "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process" (1986), proposes that we analyze works of art as "surrogate bodies" with biographies that perform as "sites of cultural mediation" between people.[25] Peffer describes the movement of works of art as more than just the material or physical movement of objects from place to place. Rather, he argues that in their relocation, these

[24] Thompson, 29.

[25] John Peffer, "Notes on African Art, History, and Diasporas Within," *African Arts* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 70-77, 95-96.

works of art perform diaspora through imagery and asserts that ideas are embodied in their very forms.[26] In addition to thinking about what it might mean for the art of the Sheppard Collection to perform diaspora, I want to consider what it means for Sheppard himself in his practice as a transnational agent of diaspora and African relations.

Locating Sheppard in African diaspora analytics deepens our understanding of Sheppard as a Black American man whose missionary occupation enabled his transnational status.[27] Atlantic historian Laura Putnam argues that researching the history of the Atlantic world is particularly well suited to methods of microhistorical inquiry.[28] This kind of analysis is appropriate for Sheppard's biography. As a missionary, he played a "crucial and contradictory role at key junctures of the Atlantic system."[29] Following Putnam's model, I adopt this microlevel approach, parsing Sheppard's individual archive to answer broader questions about the figures who were part of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century African diaspora.

Locating Sheppard and the Sheppard Collection within the African diaspora and specifically within the Atlantic world, I evaluate the connection between the artworks as objects and their implication for analysis of race and representation, and the utilization of the Hampton collection in performance and pedagogy. I explore what Africa as a geographical

[26] Peffer, "Notes on African Art, History, and Diasporas Within," 74.

[27] Supporting a diasporic understanding of missionary activity, historian David Maxwell describes Christian missions as some of the earliest transnational organizations, connecting communities across the globe. David Maxwell, "The Missionary Movement in African and World History: Mission Sources and Religious Encounter," *The Historical Journal* 58, no. 4 (2015): 902.

[28] Laura Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 616.

[29] Putnam, 619.

context, and the *idea* of Africa as a historical imaginary meant to this particular African American community. The 1890s to the 1920s, a time often referred to as the American Progressive Era but more accurately described as the post-civil war Reconstruction era, was a fraught time for African Americans. It saw the undoing of much of the progress made for Black enfranchisement in the immediate period after slavery's end. For some African Americans it became important to engage with the ancestral continent as a source of history and belonging.[30]

Unlike most projects that focus on similar works of art in colonial, imperial, and above all *white* contexts, this dissertation analyzes how African artworks and cultural objects moved into specific *African American* collections and contexts. The temporal scope of the study begins with Sheppard's arrival to the Belgian Congo in 1890, traces the arc of his missionary career into the early twentieth century, coinciding with the time period in which he built his collection, interrogates Hampton's procurement of his collection in 1911, illuminates the collection's use in the following decades and its subsequent relationship to the formation other early twentieth-century collections of art at historically Black colleges.

While African diaspora art histories are usually focused on objects, performances, and practices that were created in a space that is geographically separate from Africa, John Peffer has argued for "a consideration of all African objects from the perspective of diaspora."[31] Following Peffer's logic, an African object may be viewed as a diaspora itself due to its movement between and across distinct cultural histories and geographical

[30] See V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), and V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

[31] John Peffer, "Africa's Diaspora of Images." *Third Text* 19, no. 4 (July 2005): 339.

locations. In treating African artworks and cultural objects as signifiers of intra-African and Atlantic world relations, it follows that emphasizing the movement of African objects from local to foreign contexts allows us to consider these artworks as a parallel to the historical movement of African peoples.[32] Like the African peoples who were forcibly enslaved and relocated to various places around the Atlantic, these cultural objects carry histories and memories with them. In their new settings and display as artworks, they take on new meanings. Peffer's argument for the treatment of African artworks through a diasporic lens centers this relocation as a key point of analysis. I analyze the Sheppard Collection according to this paradigm and evaluate its artworks as cultural objects that perform diaspora over centuries of Atlantic world relations. This enables me to trace the physical and ideological changes they underwent as they passed from their original context into Sheppard's personal collection, and finally to the Hampton Museum. These artworks are what Peffer refers to as "placeholders" between the objects' African histories and their new locations and audiences outside of Africa. Diasporic analytic foregrounds the cultural history of these objects, narrates their origins and their assembly by an African American missionary, and interrogates their encounter with an African American student body. Their material existence negates the American tendency to treat American Blacks as a people without history. To study Atlantic world relations is to critically engage with the constructs and denials of history perpetuated by those who orchestrated the forced dispersal of people from the African continent, and who were invested in their effacement from historical narratives and archives. Such constraints have obscured and temporally distanced many African Americans from their history and relationship to Africa.

[32] Peffer, "Africa's Diaspora of Images", 340.

My objective is to provide a nuanced perspective for a project that straddles African, American, and African diasporic concerns, especially in how these factor into the production of historical narratives. In this regard, I find the writings of Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Saidiya Hartman particularly useful and influential for this project. Trouillot invokes the concept of history's artifice and the concomitant erasure and silencing of certain peoples. In his important book, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Trouillot argues that the production of narratives about the past involve uneven distributions of power and illustrate the unequal access that different groups and individuals have to the means of such production.[33] This dissertation aims to be attentive to the historical silences that plague the many "subaltern others the West has created for itself."[34] Trouillot also argues that the United States perpetuation of racism is not simply the legacy of slavery but a modern phenomenon that is continuously renewed at the hands of white people.[35] This phenomenon impacts the shaping of history, memory, and the creation of archives.

Racial inflections permeate the historical narratives of this project and inform how I read the archives. It is crucial to understand that Sheppard was marked by his skin color whether he was in his home state of Virginia or in the missionary field in the Congo. We cannot ignore race as a significant factor when we look at the arc of his life including his decision to leave the United States, the creation of his archive and his relationships with the Kuba people. As I analyze the archives relevant to my project, I am mindful of Saidiya Hartman's argument that there is "no historical document that is not interested, selective, or a

[33] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xxiii.

[34] Trouillot, 7.

[35] Trouillot, 18-19.

vehicle of power and domination."[36] Like Trouillot, Hartman is especially interested in the production of historical narratives and narrative silences. Her methodology is an incisive model for "read[ing] the archive against the grain" and drawing out profound conclusions, particularly about race, from accounts of everyday mundane occurrences.[37] Following Hartman's model, this dissertation actively probes the underlying racial complexities present in Sheppard's writings, photographic record, and the assemblage of his collection.

Significance

This project importantly situates Hampton's collection of African art within the United States as the first collection of its kind, whose creation predates other significant collections and exhibitions. Alfred Stieglitz did not organize *Statuary in Wood by African Savages: the Root of Modern Art* until 1914, and even then the exhibition's title effectively cancels out its celebration of the art by referring to African artists as savages. Albert Barnes did not begin to acquire his monumental African collection until 1922.[38] Hampton's acquisition of Sheppard's collection in the year 1911 indicates that young African Americans were among the first people in the United States to encounter African art as part of a dedicated collection in a museum setting. Unlike other early American collectors, Sheppard assembled his own collection throughout the course of his twenty-year residency in the Congo while wealthy Americans like Stieglitz, Barnes, and others procured theirs through a network of

[36] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America,* rev. ed. (New York: Norton and Company, 2022), 15.

[37] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 14.

[38] See Christa Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art Nègre and the Harlem Renaissance* (Philadelphia: Skira Rizzoli, 2015) and https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2012/african-art.

middlemen, never once setting foot in Africa themselves. Unlike European and other American collectors who did not travel to Africa, Sheppard witnessed the functional, spiritual, and agentive qualities of the cultural patrimony he acquired. Having viewed the artworks he collected in their original context, Sheppard would have understood his collection on a deeper level than many other individuals.

My dissertation is therefore located at the nexus of African American history, African art history, and European imperialism, as a particular study of Atlantic world relations. As such, it entails a triangulation of ideas, bodies, and objects – in this case, artworks – and their movement(s) across the Atlantic. While scholars of the diaspora have not neglected the study of cultural objects, their focus is typically on objects, artwork, and performances that originated outside of Africa but were created by peoples of African descent. What makes my project distinct is the close analysis of artworks *created in* Africa and the tracing of their transformations as they traversed the Black Atlantic into an African American context of collection and display. The movement of these cultural objects to the United States and the role they played in an African American setting is what makes this dissertation a unique diasporic study. Analyzing these African artworks from the perspective of Atlantic world relations opens up the possibility of studying other examples of African art (i.e. art with origins on the African continent) as part of the cultural formations that shaped the African diaspora.

Finally, my dissertation is significant for the time period on which it focuses. With few exceptions, studies of the African diaspora have concentrated either on practices or works created near the beginning of the diaspora, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *or* on works and performances in the contemporary period. Because my study is situated in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it focuses on the crucial moment in which ideas about the nature of the African diaspora were being formed in the context of new and emergent Atlantic world relationships. European colonialism was nearing its apex, and American imperial interests in the continent began to emerge.[39] This was a period of massive looting of African art and cultural patrimony, that moved these objects into new contexts and placed them in front of new audiences. At the same time, some Black Americans were exploring a relocation to the continent for religious or other motivations, putting them into contact with Africans. Certain Africans sought educational opportunities in the United States and Europe. And as this complicated network began to form, sowing Black Americans and Africans throughout the world, the Hampton Museum was still among the only museum spaces that Black Americans in the South were permitted to visit. This fact underscores the importance of the museum during this time period.[40] The Sheppard Collection at Hampton provided its students and the general African American public a space to interrogate issues of diaspora, cultural heritage, and modernity.

Organization of the Dissertation

[39] Stanley Shaloff, *Reform in Leopold's Congo* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1970),18. United States Senator John Morgan, who is discussed at length in Chapter 2, supported Sheppard and Lapsley's missionary efforts because he hoped that thought if the missionaries were successful they could establish a market for American goods in Africa, For a general discussion of American imperialist interests in the Congo, see George Shepperson, "The Centennial of the West African Conference of Berlin, 1884-1885," *Phylon* 46, no. 1 (1985): 37-48.

[40] There were some exceptions, particularly for public, temporary exhibitions. 1921 Hampton Museum Annual Report, Cora Folsom Collection, Annual Reports/Historical Information, 24, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, Virginia.

This dissertation comprises an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter 1 examines a 1913 pageant performed by students at Hampton. The performance, an exploration of Hampton's involvement with missionaries on the African continent, was staged just two years after Sheppard's collection arrived at the campus museum. The pageant serves as an entrée to a number of visual and thematic elements that reverberate through the remainder of the dissertation. I argue that the pageant is representative of the impact of evangelical missions on African American perceptions of Africa, and African American education. Despite the judgmental portrayal of African religion, such performances invoked race pride. Chapter 2 explores the extraordinary biography of the missionary and art collector William Henry Sheppard. In this chapter I examine nineteenth-century Protestant missionary practice in Africa, Sheppard's noteworthy position as an African American missionary, and the formation of his important collection of Central African art. Sheppard's biography provides a particular example of the complicated matrix of the Black Atlantic and nuances of the relationship between race, colonialism, and African diaspora identities. Chapter 3 explores photography and its relationship to Sheppard's missionary activities, the creation of his archive, and presentation of his collection of art. Looking at Sheppard as the subject of photographs, whether in the United States or in the Congo, I analyze how photography was utilized to convey ideas about status, race, and masculinity. I also examine photography of the Sheppard collection itself and how the medium was harnessed to convey ideologies about the collection, Africa, and missionary practice. Chapter 4 evaluates the relationship between Hampton as an educational institution and as a repository for a growing collection of African and African American art. I examine the pedagogical implications of the Sheppard Collection's role in the larger Hampton campus and explore the connections and tensions

between Black intellectual thought and historically Black institutions during the period and how this informed attitudes toward the Sheppard collection. In the Chapter 5 I examine how the Hampton Institute, as the first historically Black institution to house a museum of art on its campus may have influenced the practices of other schools such as Fisk and Howard. I foreground the Hampton Museum and its collection of African art as an important paradigm of emergent collecting practices for both African and African American art that reshapes histories of African art collecting in general.

CHAPTER ONE
Pageants, Pedagogy, and African Art at Hampton University

In 1913, a group of students at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia, participated in a folklore pageant as part of the 45th anniversary celebration of the founding of their institution (Figs. 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3). Dressed in African costumes, the students delivered a performance that made tacit connections between Christianity, education, civilization, art and material culture, placing Hampton at the center of these issues. The pageant chronicled the transformation of an African village through its conversion to Christianity at the hands of white missionaries, presenting Western education and infrastructure as the ultimate signifiers of civility. The students were first introduced to a significant collection of African art and material culture through the school's acquisition of Kuba art two years prior from an alumnus, the missionary William H. Sheppard. This performance is representative of the way that evangelical missions impacted African American higher education and African American perceptions of Africa.

The American Missionary Association (AMA) was a Protestant abolitionist group that contributed to the founding of many historically Black colleges, including Hampton. Hampton students and alumni, like Black Americans with strong ties to the church, considered it their duty to intervene on behalf of Africans.[41] The Hampton anniversary pageant portrayed Hampton as a catalyst for change in Africa through programs meant to transform the continent from a backward place of "savagery" to a haven of "civilization." Following Diana Taylor's argument that performances "generate, record, and transmit

[41] Jeannette Jones, *In Search of Brightest Africa: Reimagining the Dark Continent in American Culture*, 1884-1936 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 9.

knowledge", I argue the Hampton pageant merits a closer look.[42] The performance defies simplistic interpretations, but it elucidates complex systems of power that were often manifested in Black performance during this period. The pageant performance is thus representative of Hampton's interest in African culture and how African art became integral to the institution's pedagogy. It highlights certain behaviors and patterns that missionaries wished to correct even as they desired to preserve or acquire the cultural heritage they deemed to be valuable. The pageant celebrated the uniquely American translation of the colonial project as lived out through missions, both abroad and among Black Americans. As such, the play is an entrée into the transnational dimensions and diasporic focus of this dissertation.

In 1911, just two years before the anniversary pageant, Hampton purchased 150 objects from Sheppard's collection from the Congo Free State (present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo).[43] This established the Sheppard Collection as the first collection of Kuba art in the United States and one of the first American collections of African art in general. Sheppard has been credited as the first foreigner to enter the Kuba capital and his sojourn there predates the invasion of Belgian colonialists and other Western collectors who have received far more recognition than he has.[44] From the time he procured the first pieces, Sheppard intended for his collection to eventually come to Hampton where it would add to

[42] See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 21.

[43] "Museum Additions," *Southern Workman* 40, no. 6 (July 1911): 448. The museum acquired additional works from the Sheppard collection in 1915, 1923, 1984, and 1991. Today the collection numbers around 400 objects.

[44] Two widely recognized academics who visited the Kubalands include German ethnographer and archaeologist Leo Frobenius (1873-1938), who first came to the Kasai of the Congo in 1904, and Hungarian anthropologist Emil Torday (1875-1931), who first visited the region in 1907. Note that Sheppard was the first of these three to spend time in the area.

the museum's existing collection of art and cultural artifacts. Almost certainly due to his race, his biography and accomplishments have been largely overlooked until the last few decades.[45]

Reading the Pageant through Text and Images

The folklore pageant's memory is preserved in the archives of Hampton University in a printed program that marks its first performance as March 22, 1913.[46] In addition to the program, there is a short description of the performance found in an issue of the *Southern Workman*. Another issue provides a second longer account of the performance's staging as part of the 45th anniversary celebration of the Hampton Institute's founding, including a small number of photographs taken at the second performance. [47] I analyze the pageant from these texts from the *Southern Workman*, the printed playbill of the performance, and these photographic images.

As mentioned earlier, the pageant staged an encounter between Africans and European missionaries in an African village. One photograph captures the setting: an outdoor elevated stage outfitted with thatched roof dwellings, fixing the location of the pageant's subjects not in Virginia, but in distant Africa (Fig. 1.2). Several baskets, bowls, and other daily wares are grouped across the stage floor while an assortment of animal skins and textiles are piled in the foreground. The student-actors are outfitted in African costumes

[45] Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 152.

[46] "For Unkulunku's Sake" program. Hampton University Archives, Hampton, VA.

[47] "Mission-Study Play" *Southern Workman* 42 (May 1913): 318. The anniversary performance took place on April 24th of the same year. For a record of the anniversary performance, see J.E. Davis, "Scenes at a Hampton Anniversary," *Southern Workman* 42 (June 1913): 347-49. The author of the May 1913 article says the performance was improved upon and performed again for the anniversary festivities.

suggestive of traditional bark cloth wrappers; whether these were real or imitations is unclear. Many of the actors are festooned with necklaces and bracelets. Most strikingly, other images reveal that ten of the students bear shields and spears while their faces are painted with swirls of paint that stand out against their dark skin (Figs. 1.2 and 1.3). Both the attire of the student-actors and the decoration that makes up the set demonstrate awareness of African visual and material culture that was likely informed by African artworks and cultural objects in the Hampton Museum's collection. However, a notation in the program indicates that this play was intended to represent a Zulu setting that also required culturally specific items procured through a loan from Reverend C. W. Kilbon of Springfield, Missouri.[48]

The *Southern Workman* articles outline how in the first scene in which the audience is introduced to the African village setting. The village is designated with the Afrikaans term "kraal."[49] In the center of the scene an enthroned king, designated by his royal attire, is surrounded by a group of women, who the author describes as "obsequious wives." The king is construed as "greedily" eating the food prepared for him, when suddenly in bursts a group of his "warriors" carrying a message of threats made by neighboring villages. After requiring allegiance from each warrior, the king then "sends them on the warpath." The author explains that the idea of impending violence delights the party who dance around the king with great enthusiasm before departing on their mission. Already the author's choice of words to describe the African setting and characters reveals a mistrust of African culture and disdain for many of their traditions. The king is called "greedy", his wives are referred to as

[48] "For Unkulunku's Sake". Pageant program. Hampton University Archives, Hampton, VA.

[49] J.E. Davis, "Scenes at a Hampton Anniversary," *Southern Workman* 42 (June 1913): 347. This terminology makes sense when we learn from the March 22nd program that the items were lent by a missionary to the Zulu peoples.

derogatorily servile, and there is an emphasis placed on how the king's attendants were stimulated by impending violence.

The next scene is described like a morality tale. A man of the village sneaks into a woman's home to steal her bracelets. When the woman discovers jewelry missing, a "witch-doctor" is called upon to divine the thief's identity. The article identifies the African student actor playing the "witch-doctor" to be "related to a real witch-doctor and hence most realistic when it comes to costumes and fetiches [sic]."[50] When the perpetrator is determined to be among the king's warriors, the assembled group announces plans to execute the culprit. The plot is stalled as a group of white traders interrupt. This scene concludes with the white men offering alcohol and western-style clothing to the amusement of the "simple natives."[51]

The next scene, as shown in the photographic vignette, opens with the "witch-doctor" tending to the wounds of an ailing warrior (Fig. 1.3). After his remedies prove unsuccessful, the "witch-doctor" proposes the sacrifice of the king's son in order to save the life of the warrior. At the precise moment that the king agrees to the sacrifice, a courier bursts in carrying news of a white man, distinguished as "good" in contrast to the aforementioned white traders. The author implies that through the use of western medicines, the newcomer heals the dying man. After saving the life of the warrior, the white man earns the respect of the Africans. He then shares the Christian gospel message and informs the group of a "Christ-like school" for "their people" in the United States. The king is so intrigued by the description of Hampton that he proposes to enroll his son as a student.

[50] Davis, 348.

[51] Davis, 349.

While there are no photographs of the play's conclusion, the *Southern Workman* report shares that the final moments of the play reveal a transformed village. The traditional African characteristics of the setting have been replaced with architectural features that mimic Euro-American residences, suggesting that these new dwellings represent an improvement over the original African construction. A description of one of these new homes as a "neat white cottage covered with vines" echoes an earlier description in the article of the ivy and rose-covered buildings on Hampton's campus.[52] The author notes that a single "neatly-clothed" wife remains, replacing the earlier noted multiple wives of the king. The "witch-doctor" is now called a "bonesetter" and the king himself is dressed in a recognizable Hampton uniform coat. The king announces that the whole village will be further reformed when his son returns with classmates to "found a little Hampton in Africa."[53] The pageant's conclusion implies that Hampton's students will bring civilization to Africa in the same manner that Christianity brought civilization to this fictional space.

The pageant represents the complicated intellectual and cultural climate of Hampton. For one, the play was performed before a multi-racial audience of Black students and alumni, white faculty and other white supporters in the American South at a time when few integrated performances took place. The play's subject matter engages with primitivism, modernism, identity, and power. Writing about the 1930s, Stephanie Batiste argues that in "instance after instance…Black performance appropriates and manifests modern imperialist representation. This engagement poses the question of how African Americans identified

[52] Davis, 344.

[53] Davis, 347-49.

with the nation and with power as second-class citizens in the United States."[54] Her description considers how African Americans negotiated their fraught position in the early twentieth century—technically emancipated from slavery but not granted equal rights—through performances that reinforce imperialist notions. Performances, such as the Hampton pageant, "represent consent and complicity in American national identity even as performers and performances also express disidentification with national identity in the critique of racism and exclusion."[55] As such, we can read the Hampton pageant as a space that represents "the articulation of more complicated formations of identity, including equality, resistance, superiority, Black particularity, and diaspora."[56]

The only visual record of the 1913 Hampton Pageant are the photographs published in the *Southern Workman* (Figs. 1.2 and 1.3).[57] This select number of images can be mined to reveal information about Hampton and its attendant ideological projects by reading the photographs against Black performance practices from this period and as precursors to similar performances during the Harlem Renaissance.

In considering the Hampton pageant as representative of an ideological project, I examine it as example of what Stephanie Batiste refers to as the "imagination and enactment of Black diaspora" in African American performance. When Batiste describes this "imagination and enactment," she is writing about African American performances that were informed by ethnographic and anthropological research in Black cultures outside of the

[54] Stephanie Leigh Batiste, *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in African American Performance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

[55] Batiste, 4-5.

[56] Batiste, 4.

[57] The name of the photographer is not identified.

United States. In the performances she interrogates, particularly those of anthropologist and performer Katherine Dunham, Batiste argues that "the worlds imagined often presented a fictionalized, abstracted, and simplified Black culture." Despite this, the performances demonstrated an investment in aesthetic authenticity "in representations' of form and narrative detail, as well as in the history and substance of Black cultures in the western hemisphere."[58]

The performers in the Hampton pageant present a simplified representation of Africa and Christian missions but the visual record reveals a sophisticated level of commitment to detail in the costumes and props.[59] While written descriptions of the pageant are occasionally derogatory with respect to the African people, it is evident from the photographs that the art and the costumes were viewed more favorably than African social customs. The inclusion of authentic works of art represented an investment in learning about the cultural production of Africa. Complicating this, clothing was also used as a marker of civilization in the pageant. The description of the king's transition from traditional Zulu attire to a Euro-American wardrobe, complete with Hampton uniform coat, is given noteworthy mention in the June 1913 article. The significance of his new attire symbolized the king's inward transformation that coincided with the conclusion of the performance. In the same way that Sheppard's polished Victorian uniform was a point of distinction for himself in the many images of the

[58] Batiste, 165.

[59] One of the *Southern Workman* articles says that "the fact that the principal actors were native Africans, born and bred under the old conditions, gave an added interest to the play." "Mission-Study Play" *Southern Workman* 42 (May 1913): 318. The actor who played the king was a South African Zulu student named Mandikane Cele.

missionary alongside the Africans he ministered to, the king's change of clothing signaled his embrace of western ideals and by extension, western ideals about civility and masculinity.[60]

It is impossible to determine why certain photographs were chosen for the *Southern Workman* article but the choice to include a photograph that depicts the witchdoctor is a notable one (Fig. 1.3). It was common practice for missionaries to concentrate the strongest criticisms of Africans and their indigenous religious practices on the figure of the witchdoctor. In focusing on these individuals, rather than the whole society, missionaries could characterize their proselytes as blameless wayward children who were manipulated by devious medicine men. This served both to create a more sympathetic image of the pagan African, as well as to present missionaries as benevolent actors who offered solutions based on Christian principles rather than using what they perceived to be the witchdoctors' fear-based tactics.[61] Sheppard's reserved his harshest judgments of Kuba culture for their witchdoctors' practice of trial by poison.[62] This is consistent with what occurs during this pageant. The missionary's interruption of the witchdoctor's ritual is arguably the climax of the play.

Despite a growing number of Black evangelicals on the African continent for about twenty years after Hampton's pageant in 1913, the omission of a Black missionary character in a pageant at a school for Black students underscores Sheppard's precarious and unusual situation, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2. The Southern Presbyterian

[60] See Fig. 3.6, the photograph of Sheppard and Maxamalinge in contrasting European and Kuba fashions.

[61] See Annie Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

[62] William Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1917), 82, 92-93. Writing about his converts, Sheppard stated that "the witch doctor's business is fast passing away, the people come to the missionaries for treatment," 152.

Church initially only allowed Sheppard to serve as a missionary because he accompanied a white one.[63] The inclusion of a white missionary character exemplifies the complexities of African American higher education, especially where Hampton was concerned. The pageant suggests that African Americans could do important work in Africa but must be trained and supervised by white Americans, in the same way that Hampton's students were. Further, the performance might be understood as a mode of instruction that implicitly told students to conform, while at the same time it told donors that the school (and by extension the missionaries) does the necessary work for unifying and civilizing America's Black population, as well as helping to foster civilization in Africa.

For Hampton therefore, education was not just about literacy or trades but about a total adoption of a new way of life. In the instance of the pageant, we see African-style clothing replaced with Euro-American garments, multiple wives become one wife, and local architecture westernized. But perhaps most significantly, local knowledge is replaced with Western knowledge. This assimilation is consistent with the logic of colonialism, which seeks to reshape the colonized in the image of the colonizer. Through the example of the Hampton pageant, we see the erasure of the violence of colonialism, the displacement of one religion in favor of another, of one way of life in favor of another, and rejection of indigenous knowledge systems in favor of "scientific" ones.

The pageant is not the only instance at Hampton in which the idea of a "before-and-after" is used to present Hampton as a catalyst for change. In 1900, the school hired photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston to create a series of "choreographed tableaux" that showcased the progress of African Americans, particularly students of Hampton, in the post-

[63] Hochschild, 152.

Civil War American South.[64] A *Southern Workman* article described the series of photographs, which were importantly included in the American Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900, as follows:

> It is part of the plan of the exhibit to contrast the new life among the Negroes and Indians with the old, and then show how Hampton has helped to produce the change. The old time one-room cabin and the old mule with his rope harness, just tickling the ground with a rusty plough will be contrasted with the comfortable home of the Hampton graduate, the model barn, and the team of strong horses making a deep furrow with a heavy plough.[65]

A pair of Johnston's images reveal exactly what the quotation describes (Figs. 1.4 And 1.5). In *The Old Folks at Home* an elderly Black couple sits to eat a meal. Their home is devoid of any decorative trinkets; everything in the image is utilitarian. The fireplace behind the couple served to warm the one room cabin as well as provided the means for cooking their meal. This photograph was intended to contrast with a photograph titled *A Hampton Graduate at Home* (Fig. 1. 5). In this photograph, a man and his wife sit across from each other at a cloth-draped table; between them sit three neatly-dressed children. In contrast to *The Old Folks at Home*, the Hampton graduate and his family are dressed in the finest Victorian garb. A painting hangs on the wall above a piano and through an open doorway a staircase leading to another floor is visible, suggesting a spacious and opulent home. The transformative power of a Hampton education was meant to be evident in the comparison

[64] Sarah Hermanson Meister, "Learning the Meaning of Things in *Frances Benjamin Johnston: The Hampton Album*, ed. Sarah Hermanson Meister (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2019), 7-23.

[65] Untitled article, *Southern Workman* 29, no. 1 (January 1900): 8. African American social scientist and philosopher W. E. B. DuBois assembled the photographs for the American Negro Exhibit. See Library of Congress, "African American Photographs Assembled for 1900 Paris Exposition https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/anedub/dubois.html (accessed Feb, 19, 2024).

enunciated in the series of images.[66] Such images worked in tandem with the pageant's notion of a civilizing mission to frame Hampton's educational policies as promoting a total adoption of a new way of life both for its African American students and the Africans they might encounter in the course of missionary or professional careers.

The Collection, The School, and the Mission

In the early 20th century, the colonial invasion of Africa affected emergent African American political thought. Many Black Americans empathized with Africans in protest of their own political situation of being forced position into second-class citizenry.[67] These concerns led to varied responses and levels of engagement with the continent, but a significant development was an increased interest in establishing Christian missions in Africa. After enslavement, missionaries were among the first Black Americans to come into direct contact with Africa, establishing important transnational and diasporic connections. Significantly, such contact resulted in the exchange of valuable ethnographic information as well as art and cultural objects. Hampton's relationship to this process is reflected in the missionary activities of William Sheppard.

The Hampton Museum was created in 1868, the same year that the school was founded. As the first museum founded at any historically Black college, it was also the first American museum to collect African American art. The Hampton Museum is the proud trustee of the oldest collection of African American art in the world, dating to their 1894

[66] Frances Benjamin Johnston's photographs, often referred to as The Hampton Album, have been the subject of study in two exhibitions at MoMA, one in 1966 and another in 2019. Carrie Mae Weems created a series of works in response to the album in 2000, called *The Hampton Project*.

[67] Jones, 11.

acquisition of two paintings by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937), including the remarkable genre scene, *The Banjo Lesson* (1893).[68] By the l890s, the museum had amassed a small but notable collection of African art. The date of Hampton's first African art acquisition is unknown, but we assume a start date of the 1870s as records from an 1879 fire on campus report the loss of unspecified African artworks.[69] Of the surviving acquisitions, the earliest was collected in 1880 when Hampton graduate Ackrel E. White donated a headdress, neck ornament, and cloth from his mission field in present-day Sierra Leone.[70] This established a precedent among Hampton alumni who served as Protestant missionaries to sell or donate cultural objects to the Hampton Museum. It is these missionary-collected objects that formed the backbone of the African collection that still exists at Hampton today. The most significant missionary and collector among these alumni was William Sheppard.

Because of the social and financial barriers that Black Americans faced following Emancipation, it was and is significant for an African American to have established a collection of art in 1890s. Sheppard not only collected a large number of objects, but he also assembled the first example of a systematic collection of Kuba art outside of the region in which it was created.[71] Besides the early date in which he began collecting, it is key that Sheppard's collection was intended to supplement African American education. He chose

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[68] See Museum.hampton.edu/collections.cfm, Accessed 11 March 2017. Both paintings were purchased and donated to the school by a white trustee, Robert C. Ogden.

[69] 1921 Hampton Museum Annual Report, Cora Folsom Collection, Annual Reports/Historical Information, 24, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, Virginia.

[70] See Hultgren, 45.

[71] Sheppard visited the Kuba capital Nsheng in 1892. This is the point at which he started collecting Kuba art. This predates the first exhibition to display Kuba art in Europe at the 1897 Brussels International Exposition at the Colonial Palace. The Kuba objects in Brussels are now part of the collection of the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren. See Elisabeth Cameron, "Coming to Terms with Heritage: Kuba Ndop and the Art School of Nsheng."*African Arts* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 33.

examples of art that could be incorporated into academic object lessons and instill a sense of pride in the students' African heritage.

Unlike other early collectors of Kuba cultural objects who visited the area for only weeks at a time (if at all), Sheppard lived among the Kuba for twenty years, becoming fluent in their language and other dialects of the region. The timing of his residence places him as an eye witness to the dramatic political and social changes and horrific abuses that colonialism brought to the area.[72] Sheppard lived among the Kuba prior to the Belgian infiltration of the region and the establishment of the rubber trade and its subsequent humanitarian crisis. He witnessed the region's transition from Leopold II's Congo Free State to a colony of Belgium in 1908, and was still a resident in 1910 when an official colonial administrative post was established in the Kasai region where his mission was located. These facts render Sheppard an important historical figure, both as a collector of artworks and as a participant observer who documented these rapid changes.

In its entirety, the Sheppard collection contains approximately 400 objects created by Kuba and Kuba-affiliated peoples, ranging from everyday tools to objects of cultural prestige. Sheppard's intentional collecting of a wide variety of items, which differed from the practice of other early Kuba collectors, stemmed from his desire to create a vivid picture of the Kuba way of life for those who would never travel to Africa. He believed that nothing else could convey a more complete sense of Kuba culture to a Western audience.[73] The

[72] David Binkley, *A Taste for the Beautiful: Zairian Art from the Hampton University Museum* (Hampton University Press, 1993), 31. See also Jan Vansina, *The Children of Woot: A History of the Kuba Peoples* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 3, 211, 218. Vansina, the foremost scholar of Kuba peoples has credited Sheppard for both his valuable ethnographic work and his art collection.

[73] Binkley, *A Taste for the Beautiful*, 32.

collection includes a large number of carved wooden objects, textiles, masks, weapons, and divination tools (Figs. 1.6 and 1.7).

Apart from daily ware, Sheppard acquired objects created for royal contexts. Among the regal objects Sheppard acquired, one of the most significant is a seventeenth-century *ikul*, a ceremonial sword presented to Sheppard by the Kuba *nyim* (king), Kot aMbweeky II (sometimes called Kwet aMbweky), on the fourth day of his visit to the Kuba capital, Nsheng (Fig. 1.8). The *ikul* consists of an intricately carved wooden handle with a rounded hilt and a symmetrical, leaf-shaped blade. *Ikul* are generally around the same size and shape, but each has its own unique patterning. The Sheppard example's intricate designs are formed by inlaid copper and iron. Kuba tradition holds that Shyaam aMbul aNgoong, the most revered Kuba king and founder of the Kuba-Bushong dynasty, instituted the *ikul* form as a symbol of peace in opposition to other lethal blades.[74] Representations of these knives are a prominent feature of *ndop*, the royal sculptures that are one of the most recognizable forms of Kuba visual culture. *Ikul* were purely ceremonial in function, symbolizing peace and the elite status of the men who carried them. After Kot aMbweeky accepted Sheppard into his court, he presented the *ikul* to him as a gesture of friendship and a welcome sign.[75] Sheppard recalled that Kot aMbweeky told him that the knife had been passed down through seven generations. This makes the knife probably the oldest object of the Sheppard collection and indeed one of the oldest artworks from Central Africa in a museum collection.[76]

[74] Jan Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 60.

[75] *Ikul* were symbolically worn by titled Kuba men. The *nyim* may have also presented Sheppard with the ikul as a way to bestow special status upon him.

[76] William H. Sheppard, "Into the Heart of Africa", *Southern Workman* 22, no. 12 (December 1893): 185.

Other fine examples of Kuba culture that Sheppard collected are a number of masks. The *mukenga* from the Sheppard Collection is a brilliant example of a mask that is associated with a secret men's organization. Sheppard indicated that one of three officials in the society would wear such a mask during the initiation of new members into the group.[77] Its visual elements, including an elephant-like trunk, cowrie shells, and leopard skin, signal wealth and status (Fig. 1.9). The Sheppard collection also includes a number of objects related to warfare, including a shield from the Ngala peoples that resembles some of the props in the Hampton pageant (Fig. 1.10). Sheppard brought back a number of fine, elaborately patterned Kuba textiles made from raffia and barkcloth, demonstrating some of the most recognizable examples of Kuba art. As documented in a photograph from the 1920s, these textiles would later be studied by Hampton students in domestic science courses. (Figs. 1.11 and 1.12). A 1920s photograph of Hampton students and a teacher studying textiles from the Sheppard collection introduces the turn-of-the-century concept of the object lesson (Fig. 1.12), a visual pedagogy that encourages learning based on observation and experience that brings students into direct contact with relevant objects. At the turn of the 20th century, this method of instruction was popular in education, religious teaching, and in some American museums.[78]

Sheppard began assembling his collection nearly twenty years before it came to Hampton but we know from his correspondence with Hampton's founder that he specially

[77] William H. Sheppard's field notes quoted in *A Taste for the Beautiful*, 56.

[78] Erin L. Hasinoff, *Faith in Objects: American Missionary Expositions in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 74-80. This pedagogy was pioneered by Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1847) and was incredibly influential in a variety of educational arenas. Of importance in this regard is George Brown Goode, a museum administrator at the Smithsonian. In 1891 he argued that the museum should adopt the object lesson as its primary means of educating its audience. See George Brown Goode, "The Museums of the Future." Annual Report of the National Museum. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 1891), 427.

chose pieces for his collection with educational intent for the students.[79] In contrast to the haphazard documentation of his European contemporaries, Sheppard kept detailed records of the function and practices associated with each work of art and cultural object, further suggesting that he hoped this information would be conveyed to young men and women who viewed the artworks. Prior to Hampton's purchase of his collection, Sheppard utilized many of the cultural objects for his own lectures and demonstrations. He presented these pieces to legitimize his encounter with the Kuba, to provide a point of visual interest for his audience, and likely to encourage donations to his mission.[80]

Sheppard's practices laid the groundwork for many years of hands-on interaction with his collection by Hampton students and arguably inspired some of the school's pedagogical and fundraising practices. Just as Sheppard intended, there are records of teachers and students interacting with the collection. As well as providing visually stimulating material for Hampton students, the collection provided teachers with tangible examples that allowed for cross-cultural comparisons between the traditional arts of Africa and those in the United States.[81] The museum's first curator, Cora Mae Folsom, wrote that she believed it was important for the students be exposed to the "skillful and artistic work" of Sheppard's collection. Writing in 1917, Folsom argued that interaction with African art would engender

[79] W. H. Sheppard to Gen S. C. Armstrong, Stanley Pool Africa, September 1, 1890. *Southern Workman*, Vol. 20 (March 1891): 168.

[80] David A. Binkley and Patricia Darish, "'Enlightened but in darkness': Interpretations of Kuba art and culture at the turn of the twentieth century" in *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, edited by Enid Schildkraut and Curtis Keim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49.

[81] Peabody, Francis Greenwood. *Education for Life: The Story of Hampton Institute*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1919, 116, 119.

"race pride" as well as provide a "clearer and broader idea of geography and history, agriculture and the trades than [students] could get from books alone."[82]

Race pride was a major issue given the conditions under which Hampton students received their education. Prior to the American Civil War (1860–65), historians estimate that only twenty-eight Black Americans had graduated from American colleges.[83] While attendance at institutions of higher learning was far less common among Americans in general in the antebellum era, it was extremely rare for Black Americans to gain admittance to American universities. It was more common for both Black and white Americans to receive education through apprenticeships and self-study, and though difficult to estimate, a disproportionately larger number of white Americans had access to this avenue. What is more pertinent is that many southern states prohibited their Black population from learning to read or write, let alone obtain formal education. These reasons necessitated establishing schools expressly for the education of African Americans after Emancipation. These institutions later came to be collectively known as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU).[84]

Like other HBCUs established during Reconstruction (1863-1877), Hampton was founded primarily to educate the formerly enslaved. In 1866, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a

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[82] Cora Mae Folsom to Dr. Paul H. Hanus, 19 May 1917, Museum Reports 1916-1923, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, Virginia. With respect to the time period, it is of particular interest that Folsom was a woman.

[83] Frank Bowles and Frank A. DeCosta, *Between Two Worlds: A Profile of Negro Higher Education* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1971), 25-26.

[84] The term "historically black college or university" refers to an institution of higher education with the intent to educate a student body made up primarily of African Americans that was founded in the United States prior to 1964.

former Union brigadier general of a troop of Black soldiers, was appointed superintendent of the Freedmen's Bureau for the 9th District of Virginia. With funds donated by the American Missionary Association, Armstrong established the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in the coastal town of Hampton, Virginia. The school opened for instruction in 1868.[85]

In addition to providing practical education, spiritual instruction was very important to the founders of Hampton. The school's origins are closely linked with Christian missions. For instance, Hampton's first president, General S. C. Armstrong, was raised as the son of missionaries to Hawaii. Grant money received from the American Missionary Association (AMA) funded the school's establishment. The AMA was a Protestant group founded in 1846 as an organization with both abolitionist goals and missionary ambitions.[86] After the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and even more so after the end of the Civil War, the AMA enthusiastically established educational institutions, of which Hampton was one. Upon the 50th anniversary of Hampton, Francis Greenwood Peabody wrote, "It should be realized, in the first place, that Hampton is essentially a spiritual enterprise, conceived as a form of missionary service…"[87] This principle resulted in a large number of Hampton's alumni deciding to work as missionaries.

In this period, Black missionaries, particularly those associated with industrial schools like Hampton, were dependent upon the support and concomitant supervision of white Christians to enable their mission and to continue their presence in Africa. The

[85] F. Erik Brooks and Glenn L Starks, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 46.

[86] Killingray, 15.

[87] Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Education for Life: The Story of Hampton Institute*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1919), xii.

majority of African American missionaries were sponsored by white agencies, as was the case with Sheppard.[88] Supported by the still not integrated Southern Presbyterian Church, Sheppard spent twenty years in the Kasai region of the Congo from 1890-1910. Sheppard and Samuel Norvell Lapsley, a white minister, co-founded the American Presbyterian Congo Mission (APCM) at Luebo. When Lapsley suddenly died just two years after their arrival, Sheppard found himself in the foremost leadership position of the APCM, an office he was originally denied on the basis of race.[89]

The Great Awakening of the 1740s marked a period of renewed religious interest, sparking a rise in white evangelism to enslaved Africans in the Americas, as well as the birth of the modern Protestant missionary movement. This is usually cited as the origin of American interest in evangelical foreign missions. As early as the 1780s, Africans of the diaspora served as missionaries on both sides of the Atlantic.[90] This group was exclusively Protestant, English-speaking, and focused their mission toward their own communities or toward Africa.[91]

This historical context forms a larger backdrop to the Hampton pageant. Hampton's student-performers were not passive. They were more than vessels used to convey a message

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[88] Killingray, 8.

[89] Harold G. Cureau, "William H. Sheppard: Missionary to the Congo, and Collector of African Art." *The Journal of Negro History* 67, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 340-41.

[90] There are earlier examples of Christianity in the Atlantic world. Portuguese Catholic missionaries first visited the Kingdom of the Kongo in 1483. From this period until the 19th century the Kongo practiced Christianity and this facilitated the kingdom's extensive Atlantic world relations. See Cécile Fromont's *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of the Kongo* (2014).

[91] Killingray 3,4. For a thorough account on the conversion of the enslaved in the New World, see James Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. Reprint, 2004).

about civilization wrought through imperialism. Numerous written accounts demonstrate that the students enjoyed interacting with African art as a means of connection to their African heritage, instilling in them a sense of pride in their race.[92] In theory, by performing plays that explored African culture, the students were able to gain a deeper understanding of the aesthetic value of their ancestral heritage. The opportunity to learn from African art firsthand seems to have not been lost on Hampton's students. The Hampton pageant renders visible a complex network of interests that is paralleled in the life of William Sheppard whose art collection would go on to play a critical role in Hampton's pedagogy.

[92] See for instance, Cora Mae Folsom's comments in her museum annual reports. "To the Negro it is a great aid to respect of race to find their ancestors capable of the taste and skill exhibited by the articles that have come from the hand of African men and women…The boys and girls find great interest in this really fine exhibit." Cora M. Folsom, Annual Report, 1912, HUA.

CHAPTER TWO
William Henry Sheppard: Missionary, Collector, Anticolonial Activist

"I always wanted to live in Africa. I felt that I would be happy here, and so I am," wrote William Henry Sheppard to a friend in the United States.[93] The contentment that Sheppard found must have been related to the comparative liberty he experienced in the Congo contrasted with African American disenfranchisement in the Jim Crow-era United States. There were few opportunities for educated Black men at the turn of the twentieth century, especially in the American South where Sheppard was born and came of age.[94] In contrast, he was a person of considerable importance in Africa where his missionary career unfolded. For twenty years, Sheppard lived and worked among the people of the Congo. He learned their languages and tried to Christianize them; he condemned certain cultural and religious practices while he celebrated their artistry, and he advocated for their protection in the face of the encroaching rubber regime and colonial rule.

Sheppard lived an impressive life in the midst of great social and political upheaval and change both in the United States and in the Congo. In this chapter I situate the activities and personality of the missionary into the larger context of African missions in the late nineteenth century by tracing Sheppard's life from the United States to the Belgian Congo and back again.[95] With a biographical sketch of Sheppard's early life and education, the chapter introduces the perilous place that African Americans occupied in the postbellum

[93] W. H. Sheppard to S. H. Henkel, January 5, 1892. William H. Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Archives, RG457, Box 1, Folder 1.

[94] Benedict Carton, "From Hampton 'Into the Heart of Africa': How Faith in God and Folklore Turned Congo Missionary William Sheppard into a Pioneering Ethnologist" *History in Africa* 36 (2009): 67.

[95] This chapter is inspired by Laura Putnam's microhistorical approach to figures of the Atlantic world. In looking at Sheppard's individual biography, I attempt to understand the role of missionaries in anticolonial activism.

southern United States. I describe the racial complexities of the Presbyterian faith to which Sheppard subscribed and how these particularities would affect his mission. I discuss his career with the American Presbyterian Congo Mission, his introduction to the Kuba peoples, and the origins of his important collection of art. I establish Sheppard's role in exposing the Belgian atrocities in the Congo rubber trade. Finally, the chapter concludes with Hampton's accessioning of the William H. Sheppard Collection of Art.

Sheppard's Early Life and Education

In March of 1865, just a month before the end of the American Civil War, William Henry Sheppard was born in Waynesboro, Virginia, a small town on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. Sheppard's father, William Sheppard Sr., was presumably born enslaved, though his status at the time of William's birth is not clear. There are no records similar to the one referencing Sheppard's mother that suggest that his father was born free, and some materials published during his lifetime describe the younger Sheppard as the "son of a slave."[96] The discrepancy over Sheppard's heritage is one of the many ways that this project must "grapple with the power and the authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor."[97] It seems most likely that William Sheppard Sr. was born into slavery but freed by the time he married Sheppard's mother.[98] William Sheppard Jr.'s mother, Sarah Frances

[96] *Boston Herald*, October 17, 1909.

[97] Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), xiii.

[98] On the eve of the Civil War, about 44 percent of Virginia's black population were free, the second highest only after the state of Maryland. "Free Blacks During the Civil War," https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/free-blacks-during-the-civil-war/, accessed April 12, 2022.

"Fannie" Sheppard (née Martin), was registered as a "dark mulatto" who was born free in 1837.[99] Because of the 1705 Virginia Code specified that "all children shall be bond or free, according to the condition of their mother," William was also born a free person.[100]

Though slavery was newly (and nominally) outlawed, race relations were tense in this immediate postbellum period and continued to worsen into Sheppard's adulthood. Saidiya Hartman argues that racial slavery was "transformed rather than annulled."[101] There was no dramatic distinction between slavery and emancipation. Recalling his childhood in his memoir, Sheppard wrote that the white people of Waynesboro "were always very kind to us—as they were to all the colored people."[102] Out of necessity for personal safety as well as for strategic motivations, African Americans learned to be savvy in how they spoke publicly to and about whites.[103] Despite his statements about the kindness of the white community, we must remember that Sheppard, writing in 1917, needed to be cautious in how he addressed his largely white audience. He was born into precarious circumstances in which African Americans were afforded few, if any, physical or legal protections.

Sheppard's father was a barber and his mother was a "bath maid" for a spa that served a wealthy clientele. As such they were considered middle-class for African Americans during

[99] Nelson County (Va.) Register of Free Negroes and Civil War Claims, 1853-1867. Nelson County (Va.) Reel 50, Entry 9/27/1858.

[100] "An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves" (1705) Virginia General Assembly. William Waller Hening, ed. The Statutes At Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, Volume 3 (Philadelphia: R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823): 460.

[101] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 11.

[102] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 15.

[103] Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Ideas about White People, 1830 – 1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 152.

the period. [104] Sheppard's upbringing was characterized by frequent interactions with both white and Black members of his community. William Sheppard Sr. served white and Black customers in his barbershop, which regularly brought their family into interracial contact. Additionally, Sheppard Sr. served as a sexton for the local Presbyterian Church of which the family were devout members.

The First Presbyterian Church of Waynesboro was an interracial congregation during Sheppard's youth. Despite belonging to a larger multiracial congregation, African American congregants were commonly restricted to separate seating sections or to different worship services altogether. Stanley Shaloff argues that for services to have been fully integrated would have been an acknowledgment of equality with Black parishioners that white churchgoers were not yet willing to recognize.[105] Still, Sheppard shared fond memories of the congregation and traced his missionary ambitions to an early childhood memory of a white woman telling him that she prayed for him and hoped that he would "go to Africa as a missionary."[106] This comment planted a seed in the young Sheppard, who marked this conversation as the first time he had ever heard of Africa.

Sheppard received the benefit of the postbellum establishment of schools for African Americans from childhood into adulthood. He attended a primary school for "colored children" in Waynesboro where he learned to read and write at an early age. Both economic factors and racial prejudices of the period led to the truncation of his early formal education. Sheppard worked odd jobs as a child to supplement his family's income, eventually leaving

[104] John G. Turner, "A Black-White Missionary on the Imperial Stage: William H. Sheppard and Middle-Class Black Manhood." *Journal of Southern Religion* 9 (2006): https://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume9/Turner.htm#_ftn6.

[105] Shaloff, 14.

[106] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 16.

Waynesboro when he was eleven or twelve for the nearby town of Staunton where he worked as a stable boy for a dentist. The dentist, S. H. Henkel, and his wife provided food, instruction, and lodging in exchange for Sheppard's help with household chores. He maintained a relationship with the Henkel family for the rest of his life.

Sheppard must have understood from his young age that education was the key to his advancement among his own people and to achieve recognition, if not respect, from whites. As a young teenager he worked as a waiter, saving his earnings to enroll in higher education.[107] He would ultimately advance his education through two different schools that today we know as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). First, the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (now Hampton University), and second the Tuscaloosa Theological Institute (now Stillman College).

Sheppard enrolled at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia in1880. Hampton was the first school of its kind in Virginia to provide education beyond the elementary level for emancipated Black men and women. Founded by General S. C. Armstrong in conjunction with the American Missionary Association (AMA), the goal of Hampton was to teach students agricultural and mechanical skills alongside academic subjects. In this way, the students were able to earn the funds to finance their educations.[108] The program was rigorous: Sheppard worked for ten hours a day—his first year on the farm, his second in the bakery—and attended classes for two hours in the evenings on every day except Sunday.[109] For the first year of Sheppard's studies, Booker T. Washington, himself a

[107] Pagan Kennedy, *Black Livingstone: A True Tale of Adventure in Nineteenth Century Congo* (New York: Viking, 2002), 10.

[108] Robert Francis Engs, *Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, 1861-1890* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1979), 144.

[109] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo,* 17.

graduate of Hampton in 1875, was the principal of the night school.[110] Sheppard spoke fondly of his two years as a student at Hampton and maintained close relationships with the administrators, particularly with Armstrong and his successor, the Presbyterian minister Dr. H. B. Frissell.[111]

Upon completing his studies at Hampton, Sheppard applied to the Tuscaloosa Theological Institute. He recalled being asked by both the Waynesboro presbytery and the faculty at the Theological Institute: '"If you are called upon to be a missionary in Africa, would you go?"' Sheppard "heartily" assented.[112] Sheppard spent three years studying at the Theological Institute. During his time in Tuscaloosa he engaged in missionary work around the town, dedicating time to "visiting and praying with the sick" members of the Black community.[113]

Sheppard and Presbyterian Missions to Africa in the late Nineteenth Century

Following the end of the American civil war, many Southern politicians were in favor of relocating African Americans to the African continent as a way to address the "problem" of a Black population that could no longer legally be kept subservient through the institution of slavery.[114] Various religious groups entertained sponsoring relocations to Africa. As far back

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[110] Phipps, 7. Later, writing about the atrocities in the Congo that Sheppard helped to publicize, Washington said that he knew Sheppard "slightly" from his tenure at Hampton. See "Cruelty in the Congo Country." *The Outlook*, October 8, 1904, 377.

[111] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 17.

[112] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 18.

[113] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 18.

[114] Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 152.

as 1818, the Presbyterian Church considered expatriating freed slaves to Africa. In their view, this would both address the growing population of freed Blacks (to whom they were unwilling to grant greater legal and civil rights) and enforce their evangelical creed to spread Christianity to other parts of the globe. In 1861, Southern Presbyteries separated from the Presbyterian Church in the North over the issue of slavery, forming the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. By 1865 this rift solidified and the group became the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), sometimes referred to as the Southern Presbyterians.[115] In 1865 the PCUS voted to begin recruiting "missionaries from among the African race on this continent, who may bear the Gospel of the grace of God to the homes of their ancestors."[116] William Sheppard and his family belonged to the increasingly dwindling number of Black Americans who were affiliated with the PCUS.[117] For most leaders of the PCUS the fate of and ministration to the Black population in the United States "bore no relation to the commandment to spread the gospel of Christ" in Africa.[118] This fact is key when considering the length of time that it took for Sheppard to be instated as missionary to Africa.

The above varied and conflicting interests enabled a small, but intellectually significant, number of African Americans to relocate to the continent of their ancestors. In William Sheppard's case, the Presbyterian church's desire to Christianize Africa, American

[115] Sylvia M. Jacobs "The Historical Role of Afro-Americans in American Missionary Efforts in Africa" in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa* edited by Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 11-12. The "northern" and "southern" churches did not reconcile until 1983. I use the terms "Southern Presbyterian Church" and "PCUS" interchangeably.

[116] Shaloff, 15.

[117] Shaloff, 14.

[118] Shaloff, 13.

colonial ambitions and perhaps even white supremacist motivations led to his instatement as a missionary in the Congo Free State. After completing his studies in Tuscaloosa, Sheppard was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. Over the next few years, he served as pastor for Black churches in Montgomery, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia. By the time Sheppard entered the ministry, there were few Black parishioners of the Southern Presbyterian denomination. Many African Americans had left the segregated church to organize their own congregations. In 1861 when the Southern Presbyterians split off from their northern counterpart, there were an estimated 14,000 African American worshippers. By 1892, this number had dwindled to just 1300.[119]

Beginning in 1887 Sheppard, still serving as a minister in Atlanta, began applying to the Presbyterian Foreign Missions Board for a post in Africa. Despite the church's professed interest in sending African American missionaries to Africa, the board denied Sheppard's repeated requests. Still, Sheppard continued working for the PCUS denomination, declining offers to go to Africa from Northern Presbyterian and Baptist churches. He traveled to Baltimore to meet with the Missions Board, hoping that his credentials could not be ignored upon meeting him in person. The board assured Sheppard that his qualifications were more than adequate but they simply would not support his mission work without a competent white counterpart. Finally in June of 1889 Samuel Norvell Lapsley of Anniston, Alabama expressed interest and willingness to join Sheppard in establishing a Presbyterian mission in Central Africa.[120] And thus Lapsley, the son of former slaveholders, and Sheppard, the son of a former slave, established the American Presbyterian Congo Mission together. The pair

[119] Shaloff, 14.

[120] See Shaloff, 17 and Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 18.

were instructed to "proceed without delay to the Congo."[121] In a surprising turn considering their reluctance to offer Sheppard the post, the two missionaries were to be "coequals" and paid the same salary for their services.[122]

Sheppard and Lapsley set sail for the Congo in February of 1890. They spent some weeks in London making preparations for the three-week journey from Europe to the Congo. London was considered the premiere destination for stocking up on supplies and outfitting oneself for a journey to Africa and it was here where Sheppard purchased the linen suits and the pith helmet that would appear atop his head in many photographs.[123] Sheppard remained in London while Lapsley stopped over in Brussels for an audience with King Leopold II. Sheppard was excluded from the meeting on account of his race.[124]

The pair next traveled to Rotterdam and finally to Harwich in Holland, where they boarded the Dutch ship the *Afrikaan* and sailed to the Congo. Lapsley and Sheppard arrived at Banana Point on the Congo River on May 10, 1890.[125] It took them nearly a year to reach their ultimate destination in the Kasai region where they founded the first PCUS mission station at Luebo in 1891. With this Lapsley and Sheppard formally established the American Presbyterian Congo Mission (APCM), the first Presbyterian mission station in Africa, and

[121] *The Missionary* 23 (February 1890): 54. It seems to have been Lapsley who coined the name American Presbyterian Congo Mission (APCM). "Samuel Lapsley to the Executive Board of Missions, PCUS, April 22, 1890" published in *The Missionary* 23 (July 1890): 254.

[122] Phipps, 13. Sheppard and Lapsley initially each received an annual salary of $500, about $17,050 in 2024.

[123] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo,* 20.

[124] Phipps, 17-18.

[125] Shaloff, 21.

William Henry Sheppard thus became the first Black American missionary to work in the Congo.[126]

Other Motivations

Some of the Congo mission's strongest supporters were neither Presbyterian nor concerned with evangelism but rather individuals interested in maintaining white supremacy and gaining capitalist profit. Among them was Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama (interestingly, Lapsley's father's former law partner) who offered encouragement to the pair of young evangelists in hopes that an established mission in the Congo would encourage Black Americans to leave the United States for Africa.[127] Writing mere months after Sheppard and Lapsley were dispatched to the Congo, Morgan said:

> It is the presence of seven or eight millions of negroes in this country and the friction caused by their political power and their social aspirations, and not the fact that they were recently in slavery, that agitates and distresses the people of both races. *If they were not in the United States, there would be peace and harmony among the people*.[128] (emphasis mine)

Further elaborating his distaste for African American "political power," Morgan writes, "[Their political power] can never make their presence in this country, which has

[126] The Presbyterian Church was not the first to enter the Congo Free State. When Lapsley and Sheppard arrived, there were a few well-established missions in the territory, including American (American Baptist Missionary Union) and English Baptist (Congo-Balolo Mission) missions. The first black American to serve as a missionary to Africa was Lott Cary (1780–1828). Cary founded the first Baptist church in Liberia, Providence Baptist Church of Monrovia, in 1822. He also briefly served as governor of Liberia from August of 1828 until his death that November.

[127] Shaloff, 18.

[128] John T. Morgan, "The Race Question in the United States," *The Arena* 2, no. 10 (September 1890): 387.

always been a cause of dissension, welcome to white people."[129] Perhaps most damning of all, Morgan addressed his contempt of African Americans as if it should be apparent to everyone. "The inferiority of the negro race, as compared with the white race, is so essentially true, and so obvious that, to assume it in argument, cannot be justly attributed to prejudice."[130] This blatant racist was one of the APCM's greatest early champions.

Despite any gestures of goodwill toward African Americans or efforts to assist Sheppard and Lapsley in raising funds for their mission, above all Morgan desired to rid the United States of its Black population. His opinion piece emphasized his fear of and distaste for a "commingling" of the races, by which he meant both interracial marriages and general fraternization of whites with Blacks. Morgan vocalized the expatriation of African Americans to the Congo for a number of years, with some scholars arguing that it was from the senator that Samuel Lapsley became interested in the locale.[131] Morgan seized the opportunity to promote the Black missionary Sheppard, anticipating that other African Americans would desire to follow him to their ancestral home.

Morgan's ideas for repatriation were not original. The American Colonization Society (ACS), founded as the Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America in 1816, was created to encourage the emigration of free African Americans to Africa.[132] The

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[129] Morgan, 398.

[130] Morgan, 390

[131] Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 23.

[132] Tom W. Schick, "Rhetoric and Reality: Colonization and Afro-American Missionaries in Early Nineteenth-Century Liberia," in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 45. The importation of Africans was prohibited in 1808. As much as to slow the number of newly-enslaved persons being brought into the United States, we should consider the desire to lessen the number of enslaved persons out of concern for the political power they might come to wield.

organization's white (and mostly southern) leadership saw the colonization of Africa by free Blacks as a convenient solution to managing the growing African American population. Some of the members, particularly those who were clergy, saw colonization as a preferable alternative to enslavement, without having to extend equal rights to African Americans in the United States. As an additional benefit, essentially every colonist would be considered a missionary who might convert Africa's "heathen" population.[133] The ACS was the impetus behind the African American settler colonies in West Africa that would eventually be unified as the Republic of Liberia. While there were notable exceptions, the society was generally opposed by both free Blacks and white abolitionists, leading historians to question whether the free Blacks who founded Liberia did so of their own free will or through the society's coercion.[134] Though not formally dissolved, the ACS was not as dominant during Sheppard's missionary tenure as they had been in previous decades. Even so many white Americans shared their views espousing "control and domination of the free Black population, and the persistent production of Blackness as abject, threatening, servile, dangerous, dependent, irrational, and polluting."[135]

The American Presbyterian Congo Mission

For the first several weeks after their arrival, Sheppard and Lapsley stayed at a mission station outside the town of Matadi, about 180 miles inland. Matadi was the terminus of Lower Congo navigation and the starting point of the new, though not yet complete, Matadi-

[133] Shick, 46. Some members of the ACS hoped that this would encourage enslavers to emancipate the enslaved to the new colony.

[134] Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832–1912) is the key figure here. Born in the Danish West Indies, Blyden, an ordained Presbyterian minister, emigrated to Liberia. He argued that for black people of the diaspora to return to Africa was ordained by God for the purpose of saving souls on the continent. See Schick, 47.

[135] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 203.

Kinshasa railway. From this location the duo assembled porters and the necessary supplies to circumnavigate the lower Congo River rapids as they traveled on foot further inland. The PCUS Executive Board of Missions specified that the pair should choose a mission site according to four criteria: "sufficiently separated from other missions to give it a thoroughly independent work," as well as in a "healthful locality, probably in the highlands, removed from the coast," yet located close to a supply base, and finally serving a large enough population to "constitute a good mission field."[136] Discussing their plans with the American and English Baptist missionaries there, Sheppard and Lapsley decided to establish their station along the Kasai River.[137]

After months of following the Congo and Kasai rivers mostly on foot, Sheppard and Lapsley arrived at Luebo on the Lulua River in the Kasai region on April 21, 1891. It was at Luebo, one thousand miles from the Atlantic coast, where they established their mission. At the time of their arrival, the Kasai was among the most remote and "tenuously held" of the twelve districts which made up the Congo Free State.[138] The region was most easily reached by river travel, which was not always convenient or reliable due to changes in weather, further contributing to its isolation. Stanley Shaloff estimates that there no more than 950 Europeans or Americans in the entire Congo at this time period.[139]

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[136] "Our Mission to Africa" *The Missionary* 24 (March 1890): 88.

[137] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 24-26. King Leopold II also recommend the Kasai region to Lapsley during their private conversations. See Lapsley's letter to the Executive Board of Missions quoted in *The Missionary* 23 (August 1890): 284. "About my location. He recommended the Kasai. 'I would advise—I would ask you not to go to the Ubangi yet; we cannot protect you if you go so far from our stations.'"

[138] Shaloff, 26.

[139] Shaloff, 26.

Initially Sheppard and Lapsley focused their evangelical efforts on the population living near to their station, an ethnic group known as the Kete. They began to learn and the Tshikete language, which did not have a written alphabet. [140] Sheppard writes that "[they] went into the town and with pencil and book in hand pointed at objects" in order to learn to communicate.[141] While both men learned the language, Sheppard seems to have been the more skilled linguist of the two.

Soon after settling in Luebo, Sheppard and Lapsley encountered Kuba rubber and ivory traders in the town of Bena Kasenga where they had come to sell their wares.[142] Sheppard referred to them as "quite a different class of people" from the Kete.[143] The area of the Kasai where the missionaries lived and worked bordered the region that was home to these people, members of the Kuba Kingdom, that flourished from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The kingdrom was located at the heart of modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo, bordered by the Kasai, Lulua, and Sankuru rivers. Over the course of three hundred years, the dominant Bushong people subjugated a number of other groups and established their king (*nyim*) as head of state, compelling other chiefdoms to pay tribute to the *nyim*. As such the Kuba Kingdom was a confederation of nineteen different ethnic groups, including several smaller Bushong-speaking communities and other groups, such as

[140] Eventually the APCM shifted their focus to the Luba and Lulua peoples and with it a focus on the Tshiluba language, also called Luba-Kasai language.

[141] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 63.

[142] Shaloff, 33.

[143] Sheppard, "Into the Heart of Africa", 183. Shaloff argues that one of the reasons that Sheppard and Lapsley were less impressed by the Kete peoples was because of their lack of interest in Christianity. See Shaloff, 28.

the Kete, Ngongo, and Ngeede.[144] Kuba is the name given them by their Luba neighbors to the south and it was adopted by the Europeans to refer to all of the inhabitants of the kingdom.[145] When Sheppard and his contemporaries used the term "Bakuba," they are usually referring to the Bushong people. Sheppard seems to have understood the ethnic distinctions of the region for he regarded the Kete, the primary group who lived in and around the mission station at Luebo, as a distinct culture despite that group's membership in the Kuba principality.

The young missionaries forged a relationship built on mutual respect and describe each other warmly in their writings. Lapsley described Sheppard as "a most handy fellow" and "really a man of unusual graces and strong points of character."[146] Writing about how grateful he was for their friendship, Lapsley called his companion Sheppard "a treasure."[147] The partnership was cut short by Lapsley's unexpected death. Sheppard had remained in the Kasai while Lapsley traveled to Boma, the capital of the Congo Free State, on mission business. While he was away, Samuel Lapsley unexpectedly died from a "bilious hematuric fever" in March of 1892 at the age of twenty-six.[148] He had been in the Congo for less than two years.

Lapsley's passing placed Sheppard in an unexpected position of power at the mission station. Because he was Black, the PCUS did not wish for Sheppard to be their sole

[144] Shaloff, 36. The diversity of the kingdom accounts for the confusion of many observers like Sheppard and his contemporaries.

[145] Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 4.

[146] Lapsley, 94.

[147] Lapsley, 82.

[148] S.C. Gordon to W.H. Sheppard, March 29, 1892. Quoted in Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 84.

representative of the Congo mission. The board moved to locate other white individuals to join him.[149] Having not yet won a single convert at the time of Lapsley's death, the Executive Committee probably considered terminating the mission. Ernest Stache of the Société Anonyme Belge (SAB) contacted the committee and urged them to leave Sheppard in his post, emphasizing his popularity and facility with the local languages.[150] The PCUS relented and Sheppard remained the chief missionary at the APCM until Reverend William McCutcheon Morrison arrived in 1897.[151] By that time, Sheppard had acquired years' worth of local knowledge, language, customs, and culture that would take the newcomers quite a bit of time to learn. This fact assured Sheppard's continued prominent role and importance to the mission throughout his tenure.

Lapsley and Sheppard both shared a dream to convert the Kuba to Christianity. According to Sheppard's writings, he became even more determined to forge meaningful relationships with the Kuba after Lapsley's death. For Sheppard, gaining the blessing of their supreme ruler was the key to creating Kuba Christians. Shaloff argues that nearly every

[149] Shaloff, 31.

[150] Ernest Stache to the Board of World Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, August 2, 1892.

[151] Before McCutcheon's arrival, Sheppard was not entirely alone. While Lapsley was away, Sheppard had been joined by the Scotsman George D. Adamson and his wife in April of 1892. In May of 1893, while Sheppard was on leave in the United States, the Reverends Arthur Rowbotham and DeWitt Clinton Snyder and their wives joined the APCM in May 1893. Due to illness and death, none of these six individuals would remain at the APCM past 1896. Sheppard married Lucy Gantt in 1894 while on furlough and she returned with him to Luebo in October of 1894. Sheppard recruited three African American missionaries while on leave in the United States: Reverend H.P. Hawkins, a graduate of Stillman College, and Lillian Thomas and Maria Fearing, graduates of Talledega. William Morrison and his wife arrived May 7, 1897, along with the Reverend Samuel Phillips Verner. Morrison was the more prominent of the two and appears more often in the literature about the APCM. See Shaloff 30-31, 38-41. Verner is notorious for his involvement in the racist and predatory scheme of bringing the pygmy Ota Benga to the United States where he was housed at the Central Park Zoo. See Pamala Newkirk, "Ota Benga in the Archives: Unmaking Myths, Mapping Resistance in the Margins of History," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 38/39 (November 2016): 168-173.

success and failure that Sheppard experienced during his two decades as a missionary was connected in some way to his evangelical commitment to the Kuba.[152]

Meeting the Kuba

The Kete who lived near the mission station at Luebo informed Sheppard that the Kuba *nyim* (king) had forbidden the entrance of foreigners into his territory, and especially his capital, on pain of death. Despite their warnings, Sheppard was determined to make this journey in honor of Lapsley.[153] Sheppard recalled that his former partner had spoken with some European traders who had unsuccessfully sought the location of the Kuba capital for nine years. Accompanied by nine men from Luebo, Sheppard journeyed on foot for several weeks. He devised a clever plan to ascertain the closely-guarded secret location of the capital. Sheppard and his Kete guides traveled north from one market town to the next. While at the market, they would inquire as to the location of the next closest market into the suspected general direction of the capital (north and east). By doing this, Sheppard was able to edge nearer and nearer to Nsheng. Unlike others who attempted to find the capital, Sheppard had the advantage of speaking the Kuba language.[154] Perhaps his black skin, a notable difference from other foreigners, was an additional asset.

As Sheppard neared the capital, the Kuba he encountered were increasingly wary of divulging its location. They cited death threats from the king should anyone reveal his whereabouts. Still Sheppard persisted in on his way to the capital. He followed a caravan of

[152] Shaloff, 33.

[153] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 87.

[154] Sheppard, "Into the Heart of Africa," 184.

ivory traders until he came very close to Nsheng where he was apprehended by a Kuba chief. Learning of Sheppard's approach, the *nyim* sent one of his sons to meet Sheppard and warn him to turn back. Instead the *nyim*'s son, named Toen-zaide, was impressed with Sheppard's ability to speak the Kuba language and facilitated his welcome into the capital as *Bope Mekabe,* a Kuba ancestor.[155]

The Origins of the Sheppard Collection

As the first outsider to enter Nsheng, Sheppard's observations about the Kuba and their capital city are incredibly valuable. These includes his descriptions of the artistic achievements of the Kuba that he did not (and in some cases, could not) add to his own collection. For more than one hundred miles around the Kuba kingdom, no other major kingdom existed. This certainly accounted for Sheppard's astonishment upon reaching the capital.[156] Writing about their craftsmanship, Sheppard observed that the Kuba's "knowledge of weaving, embroidery, wood carving, and smelting was the highest in equatorial Africa."[157]

The Bushong ruled the entire Kuba kingdom from the capital of Nsheng, a planned urban settlement that was oriented on a downstream-upstream axis in relation to two rivers which flowed east-west.[158] Living arrangements were organized according to status based on the downstream-upstream system, with the king occupying an enclosed royal palace at the

[155] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo,* 100-101, and Shaloff, 33-34. There is some confusion as to who Sheppard was really believed to be by the Kuba. Vansina has suggested that Kot aMbweeky knew who Sheppard really was, but wanted to use Sheppard to learn what he could about the encroaching European presence. See note 9 in Shaloff, 45.

[156] Vansina, *Children of Woot,* 7.

[157] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo,* 137.

[158] Europeans called it Mushenge.

most prestigious downstream area.[159] Sheppard noted that the city was laid out in "perfect blocks" and that the streets were named and organized around a grid system.[160]

Sheppard was impressed by the entrance into the Kuba *nyim*'s compound. "Massive artistically carved pillars of mahogany" and walls adorned with "smoothly woven mats like thick wallpaper" made up the interior.[161] Possibly based on the belief that he was a resurrected ancestor of the royal family, Kot aMbweeky II welcomed Sheppard into the royal complex. This is probably why the *nyim* decided to present Sheppard with a valuable example of cultural patrimony in the *ikul* (Fig. 1.8). By virtue of the frequency with which he references it in subsequent writings and lectures, the ceremonial knife presented to Sheppard by the *nyim* was the artwork in his collection that he most prized, or at the very least the object that he considered the most significant and valuable. Based on Sheppard's timeline of his four-month stay in the capital, the *ikul* would also have been the first of many Kuba artworks that Sheppard would acquire directly from Nsheng. *Ikul* were familiar insignia among titled Kuba men and Sheppard added a few more examples of these knives to his collection over the years. However this particular *ikul* was presented to him personally by the king as a gesture of friendship and loyalty. Its portability meant that Sheppard easily carried the knife with him and presented it during his lectures.

Sheppard described four ebony statues of former kings that were arranged on an elevated space of honor in the king's compound. These statues, which today we know to be

[159] Vansina, *Being Colonized*, 46. When Sheppard visited Nsheng in 1892, there seemed to be no comparable urban settlement anywhere else in the Congo.

[160] Sheppard, "Into the Heart of Africa", 185.

[161] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 112.

ndop, were "highly prized and regarded as sacred."[162] From Sheppard's detailed description of two of the statues (he does not elaborate on the other two that he saw), scholars have been able to determine precisely which two *ndop* he encountered. He recorded that one of the *ndop* represented Shyaam, who holds "something like a checkerboard," acknowledging the board game *lyeel* (Fig. 2.1). [163] Shyaam is said to have chosen the *lyeel* as his personal symbol (*ibol*) because his reign initiated a period of peace and prosperity that allowed for leisure in the kingdom.[164] Sheppard describes a second *ndop* as accompanied by an anvil, a nod to that *nyim*'s love of blacksmithing (Fig. 2.2). [165] This symbol is associated with Mbo Pelyeeng. Kuba sculptors created one statue for each ruler. *Ndop* were considered to be a kind of double of the king they represented and therefore revered as sacred. They were carved from the wood of the *Crossopterix febrifuga*, the most suitable and durable carving wood in the area, and polished to a high sheen. All *ndop* are characterized by their comportment: being generally less than two feet tall, the Kuba king figures are seated in a cross-legged position atop a decorative base and usually hold a ceremonial knife (*ikul*), much like the one Sheppard was presented, in their left hand. Their facial expressions are serene and dignified.[166] The likenesses are very similar, distinguished from one another by the emblem attached to the base and seated in front of the figure rather than individualized physical features. Though not

[162] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 112. In fact there are six or seven *ndop* that were likely in Nsheng during Sheppard's visit, and it is not clear why he saw only four. See Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 213, and p. 358-59, note 8.

[163] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 112. Sheppard refers to Shyaam in this case as "King Xamba Bulngunga".

[164] Cameron, 28.

[165] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 112.

[166] Jean Rosenwald, "Kuba King Figures," *African Arts* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 26.

certain, scholars allege that the statues Sheppard observed were likely carved by the same artist, or at least came from the same atelier.[167] Additional research suggests that the statues that Sheppard observed were most likely carved in the eighteenth century.[168]

We can confirm that all of the statues that Sheppard saw belong to Western museum collections today, and that this came to be before 1913.[169] Emil Torday collected the *ndop* traced to the king's compound during his Congo expedition of 1907 to 1909. It is worth noting that there are no Kuba king figures in the Sheppard Collection. Perhaps he did not acquire any out of respect for their sacredness to the Kuba. It should be emphasized that when Sheppard first entered Nsheng, the Kuba living in this area had had very little contact with the Belgians to this point and no outsider had ever entered the capital city.[170] This means that Sheppard's first visit in the summer of 1892 took place at a crucial moment in Kuba culture. Many changes occurred in the years between Sheppard and Torday's visits. For one, the political power of the Bushong had been substantially weakened as the Belgians pushed further into their territory and began to coopt their labor. In his book, *On the Trail of the Bushong*, Torday details how he came to possess the Shyaam *ndop*. Torday noted the nyim's concerns for the safety of the statues and his awareness that the Belgians might

[167] Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 214. This is not to suggest that all identified surviving ndop were created by the same hand or even from the same workshop. Stylistic differences exist that suggest multiple artists, but for the purposes of this dissertation I am referencing only those that Sheppard saw.

[168] Rosenwald, 31.

[169] Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 213. Vansina credits Fagg with the 1913 date. See William Buller Fagg, *Art of Central Africa: Tribal masks and sculpture* (London: Collins in association with UNESCO, 1967), 17-18. Fagg argues that the tourist industry entered the area around 1913 at which point imitations were made for the tourist market that did not possess sacred value.

[170] The Bushong were definitely aware of the encroaching Belgians and other European powers. This is likely part of the reason why the location of the capital was guarded so closely. Other peoples affiliated with the Kuba kingdom (such as the Kete) had more interactions with foreigners than did the Bushong.

confiscate or destroy the *ndop* at any moment. After assuring him of the safety of the British Museum and convincing the king that it should be seen and appreciated the world over, Torday claims that the king was "quite willing to give me the statue," but that the Great Council needed to give their consent before the king would agree to part with the *ndop*. "There was never such lavish bribery, so much coaxing, such abject flattery," he wrote of the case he made before the Council. [171] Torday's sycophancy was rewarded with the statue (and others) that today is housed in the British Museum. Binkley and Darish caution against regarding the Kuba as passive agents in the collecting process.[172] Looting and pillaging definitely took place, but occasionally the transfer of objects was more complicated. Relevant to current issues regarding repatriation of African cultural patrimony, Torday suggested that the Kuba chiefs were persuaded to give their *ndop* to Torday for safekeeping in the British Museum.

While his collection of prestigious statuary was nonexistent, Sheppard obtained a significant number of valuable Kuba textiles. Among the Kuba, textiles were not merely prized for aesthetic beauty but also valued for the demanding and time-intensive process of their construction. The Kuba are perhaps best known for their raffia textiles, which are either embroidered or constructed as a pile cloth, with a texture similar to velvet. At the end of the nineteenth century, only the Kuba practiced this technique.

The fabrication of raffia cloth is labor intensive and involves the interdependent work of men and women at different stages of the process. The cultivation of the raffia palm and

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[171] Emil Torday, *On the Trail of the Bushongo: an account of a remarkable and hitherto unknown African people, their origin, art, high social and political organization and culture, derived from the personal experience amongst them* (London: Seeley Service and Co., 1925), 149-51.

[172] Binkley and Darish, *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, 4.

the weaving of the cloth is the exclusive domain of men. Using untwisted single lengths of raffia fiber, the weaver creates the cloth on a single-heddle loom. This stage of the process can yield a 26 by 28-inch piece of cloth in an afternoon. This process results in a stiff, coarse textured piece of fabric that will undergo further transformation depending on its intended use. The fabrication of the cloth into wearable clothing is largely gender-specific; women will assemble and embellish skirts for women and men make and decorate skirts for men. Both men and women use embroidery stitches, appliqué and reverse-appliqué, patchwork, and dyeing (including stitch-dyeing and tie-dyeing), but only women practice the decorative techniques of openwork and cut-pile. Raffia weaving and the fabrication and decoration of clothing were not relegated to specific persons or artists; every adult was expected to take part in its production. [173]

The cloth was greatly valued by the Kuba because of its labor-intensive making process and the amount of time it took to complete a single textile.[174] The more elaborate the pattern, the greater labor expended, and the greatest technical skill exhibited in a pattern of raffia cloth, the more valuable a cloth would be.[175] Over two hundred decorative patterns have been identified and named in the surface decoration of these textiles. The decorated textiles were considered a tangible form of wealth that everyone wanted to accumulate.[176] Sheppard briefly described the process of the creating the "very remarkable cloth" to his

[173] Patricia Darish, "Dressing for the Next Life: Raffia Textile Production and Use Among the Kuba of Zaire", In *Cloth and Human Experience*, edited by Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 121, 123. See also Monni Adams, "Kuba Embroidered Cloth". *African Arts* 12/1, Nov., 1978: 24-39+106-107.

[174] Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 219.

[175] Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 222.

[176] Darish, 123.

alma mater in an article:

> "The long leaves are broken off and the heart of the leaves torn out; they are then combed into shreds or strings and woven into form by a hand-loom. This foundation is then worked in designs with a needle and palm thread, a small, sharp knife being used to clip off the tufts. They do not mark the design but the keep the pattern in their heads."[177]

Sheppard observed the processes by which the Kuba dyed the threads to achieve different colors, namely red, black, and yellow, to render the different designs. He acknowledged the remarkable patterns in the textiles he collected and described a few examples whose sources of inspiration he knew. He was aware that the Kuba drew inspiration from the world around them, citing lighting (*N'jesset*), snake (*tooln*), the sides of their houses (*Mbula*), *lyeel*, and leopard skin (*N'co*) patterns.[178]

There is some evidence that raffia cloth was used as a currency at various points in Kuba history before being replaced by the cowrie shell.[179] In the nineteenth century, decorated raffia cloth was presented to the *nyim* as tribute from other Kuba villages.[180] The most elaborately decorated textiles appeared most often in the context of special ceremonies, especially funerals. The deceased would be wrapped in the textile and subsequently buried with it.[181] Sheppard was very fond of Kuba textiles and frequently employed them in his lectures on furlough. The textiles of the Sheppard Collection were among the most photographed, suggesting that not only did Sheppard find them beautiful, but he could

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[177] William Sheppard, "African Superstitions and Handicrafts", *Southern Workman* 50, no. 9 (September 1921): 407-408.

[178] Sheppard, "African Superstitions and Handicrafts," 408.

[179] Darish, 127.

[180] Binkley, *A Taste for the Beautiful*, 93.

[181] Darish, 131.

encourage appreciation from audiences who were unfamiliar with the Kuba without having to detail their function and purpose. Compared to other artworks in the Sheppard collection, the textiles perhaps did not require as much explanation in order to appreciate their technical excellence and aesthetic beauty.

After a four-month stay at the Kuba capital Nsheng, Sheppard returned to his mission base with a trove of artwork. Of this newly amassed collection he wrote, "my men moved single file forward loaded down with Bakuba curios, cloth, rugs, masks, mats, hats, cups, and plenty of food."[182] One of the legacies of Sheppard's, as well as Torday's, discourse and collecting practices is the emphasis on Kuba royal traditions at the expense of other examples of Kuba artist traditions. While there are dozens of distinct ethnic groups that might be considered Kuba, the culture of the Bushong present at the capital of Nsheng has maintained the greatest level of interest for scholars of Kuba arts.[183] Sheppard appreciated and collected art from other Kuba groups, as did Torday, but there is no question that he elevated the art of the Bushong above all others.

Since Sheppard's time, scholars have considered the art of the Kuba to be among the greatest artistic traditions of the continent. Kuba arts are included in virtually every survey text of African art. It is notable that the origins of interest in Kuba art date to Sheppard's lifetime. The most reputable elements of Kuba arts are their sculpture, their sumptuous, highly-patterned textiles, and their decorative treatment of even the most ordinary daily wares.[184] Jan Vansina has used the term *horror vacui*, a fear of empty spaces, to describe this

[182] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 138.

[183] Binkley and Darish, *Kuba*, 55.

[184] Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 211.

characteristic of Kuba art.[185] Elaborate geometric patterns cover the surfaces of nearly every feature of Kuba life, whether ceremonial, functional, or decorative. Sheppard recognized this phenomena, stating, "The natives of Africa have a decided taste for the beautiful. They decorate everything."[186] Sheppard was so taken by the Kuba quality of life, technological advancement, and above all, artistry, that he was notably the first person to suggest a link between the Kuba and Pharaonic Egypt.[187]

Although Sheppard is often left out of art historical accounts, scholars of Kuba arts mark Sheppard's visit to the Kasai region in 1890 as the beginning of intentional Western collecting in the region.[188] Both his and Lapsley's accounts confirm that Sheppard began to collect artwork from nearly the very beginning of his arrival to the Congo. Lapsley made a note in his diary that "Sheppard got two exceedingly fine pipes, the stems large and two feet long, the mouth-piece the drumstick of a big rooster, I think. The bowls and stems are finely carved. The bowl of one is a fine head, the ears, eyes, mouth, and hair very finely done."[189] (Fig. 2.3). Among the first items that Sheppard recorded himself were "six beautifully carved ebony drinking cups" that he purchased along the path to Nsheng.[190] His description of the vessels is consistent with what we know of the Kuba traditional of intricate pattern motifs bestowed upon vessels for eating and drinking and utensils for food preparation.

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[185] Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 222.

[186] Sheppard, "African Superstitions and Handicrafts": 401.

[187] "'What has made the Bakuba so superior do you think?' 'I don't know. Perhaps they got their civilization from the Egyptians—or the Egyptians theirs from the Bakuba (!)'", Sheppard, "Into the Heart of Africa," *Southern Workman* 22: 187. Vansina credits Sheppard as the first to make this connection in Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 3.

[188] Schildkrout and Keim, 7. Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 3.

[189] Lapsley, 161.

[190] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 96.

While Sheppard respected Kuba culture and admired their art, his primary concern was for their conversion to Christianity. It was his sincere hope to return to Nsheng to establish a mission in the Kuba capital. By the time the APCM had the personnel and resources to do so, Kot aMbweeky II had died and was subsequently replaced by a new *nyim*, Mishaape, in 1896. In Mishaape's view, Sheppard was an associate of the previous king, and therefore considered an ally of other Bushong who were rival claimants to his throne. For this reason, Sheppard's friendship with Kot aMbweeky II would continue to haunt his relationships with successive *nyimi* during his time in the Congo. Mishappe would not allow Sheppard and his colleague Morrison into the capital and so the two established a "temporary" mission station at nearby Ibanc in 1897.[191] Mishaape eventually softened his stance toward the missionaries, and even summoned Sheppard for a meeting just outside of the capital in April of 1899. The *nyim* hoped that Sheppard and Morrison would be able to intercede on their behalf or help them to expel the Belgians who continued to press further into Kuba territory.[192] At that point the missionaries declined to help, but only a few years hence Sheppard and Morrison would become heavily involved in a colonial dispute.

Sheppard as Eyewitness to Major Historical Events

Over the course of Sheppard's tenure in the Congo, King Leopold II further entrenched his stake in the colony. He established his strong grip through the extraction of natural resources of the Congo, declaring a State monopoly on the collection and distribution of rubber and

[191] Vansina, *Being Colonized*, 66-68. The station at Ibanc would prove not to be temporary. The Presbyterians ultimately never established a mission base inside Nsheng. Sheppard would be allowed to enter the capital again at least twice more during his time in the Congo (in 1903 and 1904), see Shaloff, 158-162.

[192] Shaloff, 158-162.

ivory. In service of this monopoly, Leopold quickly became notorious for his exploitation of the Congolese population.[193] At first, the APCM heard only rumors of abuse and maltreatment of the indigenous population but as time passed news of Leopold's corrupt rubber trade and subsequent terrorism inched closer to the headquarters of the APCM.

Events of 1899 brought these injustices into strong focus for Sheppard and the other APCM missionaries based in Luebo and Ibanc. A number of refugees flooded into Ibanc, seeking shelter from a raid led by a group called the Zappo Zaps. The Zappo Zaps were a Songye people with a centuries-long reputation as mercenaries. Leopold's state agents recruited the Zappo Zaps and other native armies to a military enforcement agency known as the *Force Publique*. The *Force Publique* was tasked with enforcing the collection of rubber in such high amounts that the people struggled to meet the demands. Reluctantly, for he knew and feared the Zappo Zaps, Sheppard traveled into the bush to investigate the raids. In narrowing in on Sheppard's personal documentation of the events that occurred, we begin to understand the capacity of the missionary as an anticolonial informant.[194] In his diary he wrote that he quickly encountered destruction, chaos, and the stench of death everywhere. A number of villages were entirely destroyed and burned, with few living people remaining. Sheppard subsequently encountered an armed group of the raiding party, some sixteen Zappo Zap men. Fortunately for Sheppard, one man of the raiding party recognized the missionary and ensured his safety. Sheppard interviewed the group, questioning the extent of the devastation and the motivation behind the massacre. The Zappo Zaps openly revealed to Sheppard that the raids were committed in service of rubber collection for the State. One of

[193] Shaloff, 107-109; Hochschild, 71; Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 74, 230.

[194] Here I am following Laura Putnam's directive to study the "dense documentation" left by missionaries in the Atlantic world in order to answer larger questions about the diaspora. See Putnam, 619.

them told Sheppard that they "have received no rubber, the people refuse to pay."[195] It is important to note that while these crimes had been carried out by one group of Congolese against another, it was Belgian colonial officials acting on behalf of King Leopold II who sanctioned and ordered the violence.

Sheppard counted forty-one bodies and a pile of eighty-one severed right hands. The Zappo Zaps collected the severed hands as proof to the state that they had fulfilled their raid.[196] As a post-script to his diary entry, Sheppard added that on his way back to Ibanc, "every now and then you smell the awful stench of the wounded."[197]

When Sheppard shared his devastating findings with his colleagues, they were horrified. Acting quickly, William Morrison delivered Sheppard's report to State officials in Luluabourg. Morrison desired swift justice. He hoped that state officials would punish the Zappo Zap for their violence and that perhaps even the *chef de zone,* the Belgian government official over the Kasai region, would be punished as well.[198] Instead of reckoning with the violence, the State conducted a thoroughly biased investigation of the Zappo Zap Raid.[199] Instead of trusting Sheppard's and Morrison's reports, the State based their findings on the testimony of a Belgian Catholic priest. It was the priest's contention that Sheppard and

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[195] William Sheppard diary, 14 September 1899, William Sheppard Papers, RG 497, Presbyterian Historical Archives.

[196] Because the State feared a rebellion and mistrusted the Congolese people they employed, the collection of right hands was specifically intended to account for every bullet the State provided to their mercenaries. The right hand was the standard of proof. Some accounts claim that if a bullet was used in hunting or for some other purpose, that a right hand would be taken from a living person. Hochschild, 165.

[197] William Sheppard diary, 14 September 1899, William Sheppard Papers, RG 497, Presbyterian Historical Archives.

[198] Shaloff, 78-79. The chef de zone of the Kasai was named DuFour.

[199] The Zappo Zap Raid is sometimes called the Pyang Massacre, named for the Pyang region in which the events took place.

Morrison fabricated the unseemly details of their observations.[200] The protestant missionaries were outraged by the way the Belgians had dismissed and even covered up these accounts.

The state-sanctioned dismissal of Sheppard's testimony galvanized the APCM, who from this point forward assumed the task of revealing to the world the abuses of the Belgian colonizers and their agents. Primarily through the efforts and testimonies of Morrison and Sheppard, from 1900 onward the APCM contributed support to growing Congo reform movements in England and the United States. Believing their efforts would resonate with Christians and humanitarians alike, the APCM sent Sheppard's report to European and American publications. Partly owing to Sheppard's report, the British journalist Edmund Morel was spurred to create the Congo Reform Association. Morel would continue to refer to Sheppard's description over the years as he sought to build support for the movement.[201] Sheppard's account garnered the missionary a great deal of attention and his words were widely circulated. Even Mark Twain quoted a portion of Sheppard's statement in his anti-Leopold pamphlet and political satire *King Leopold's Soliloquy* of 1905.[202] Sheppard's testimony against the Belgian rubber regime garnered him greater accolades and more widespread attention than any deed he ever performed in missionary service.

Despite humanitarian efforts, conditions in the Congo deteriorated rapidly as the exploitative rubber industry continued to bring great wealth to King Leopold. Despite the

[200] "L'affaire des Zappo-Zappo," *Le Congo Belge* 5, no.12 (15 June 1900): 140-42. Father Emeri Cambier explicitly declared the testimony of the Protestant ministers to be false and said he had witnessed no such violence during his decade-long tenure in the Congo. Shaloff refutes Cambier's testimony point by point, but the most egregious fact of all remains that Cambier was not in the Congo, but was away in Belgium, when the raid occurred; therefore he did not witness the atrocities.

[201] E.D. Morel, "The Congo State and Its Trusts." *West Africa Mail*, 15 May 1903.

[202] Mark Twain, *King Leopold's Soliloquy; a defense of his Congo rule* (Boston: P.R. Warren, 1905), 21-22.

proximity of the Zappo Zap raid to the mission base, the APCM's immediate area remained largely unscathed for the next several years. But in 1906, Leopold ordered an end to the competitive rubber commerce in the Kasai, forcing all of the rubber companies to combine into the singular Compagnie du Kasai. The forced consolidation of businesses resulted in immediate increased demand for rubber harvests along with lower wages for the native workers. This meant that members of the APCM's direct vicinity began to be personally affected by the rubber demand. [203]

A November 28, 1906 political cartoon in the popular British publication *Punch* depicts the emotional climate of the travesties of the rubber regime in Leopold's Congo (Fig. 2.4). In the cartoon, titled "In the Rubber Coils," artist Linley Sambourne illustrates a Congolese man whose limbs and torso are entwined by a snake. The snake's long body coils around the man, while its head is poised to strike. However, the head is not that of an actual snake, but a sinister depiction of the visage of King Leopold II of Belgium. In the background, a Congolese woman holding tightly to her baby is fleeing the scene. The cartoon is captioned "Scene—The Belgian Congo 'Free' State." The message of the cartoon is clear. Just as this strange serpent is squeezing the life out of the man, Leopold has tightened his grip on the colony, extracting natural resources at the expense of a great physical toll on its people, including women and children. Sambourne puns on the name of the colony (at this time still called the Belgian Congo *Free* State), referencing at once the coils that bind the man in the cartoon and call into question the nature of the freedom of being a colonized subject.

[203] Shaloff, 107-108. Prior to 1906, Leopold had allowed free trade to flourish the Kasai region.

Nearly a decade after he first reported on the Zappo Zap raid, Sheppard once again entered conversations about the evils of the Leopold regime when he wrote an editorial in the *Kassai Herald* in January 1908. This edition of the APCM newsletter was dedicated to criticism of King Leopold's colonial government. Sheppard and Morrison called out the injustices that were being done in the name of the rubber industry in previous newsletters, but Sheppard's January 1908 editorial led the Compagnie du Kasai to sue both he and Morrison for libel. By 1908, Sheppard had lived in the Congo for over fifteen years. He had known the Kuba for nearly as long. In his report, Sheppard describes the degradation of the Kuba villages, homes, and livelihood over the past few years, marking the stark changes among "these magnificent people." Sheppard attributed their dire circumstances to the "armed sentries of chartered trading companies who force the men and women to spend most of their days and nights in the forest making rubber, and the price they receive is so meager they cannot live upon it."[204]

It did not matter that Sheppard never explicitly named the Compagnie du Kasai, they were still outraged by Sheppard's article, Morrison's publication of it, and the persistent denouncement of the rubber regime by the Protestant missionaries. The incensed Compagnie demanded a retraction of the article. The missionaries refused to comply. Sheppard's article was republished by Edmund Morel in England alongside photos of atrocities against the Kuba people (Fig. 2.5). The Compagnie du Kasai accused both men of libel, demanding thirty thousand francs in damages from Sheppard and fifty thousand francs from Morrison.[205]

[204] W.H. Sheppard, "From the Bakuba Country." *Kassai Herald* January 1, 1908: 12, 15.

[205] Morrison's fine was larger because he had expanded upon Sheppard's original claims and written letters to Company and State officials that ultimately became public. See Shaloff, 115.

The trial took place in September and October of 1909 at Leopoldville (Kinshasa) and received significant publicity in the United States and Europe. The Compagnie du Kasai hoped that a conviction would vindicate their rubber business and justify Belgium's colonial claim to the rest of the world. A photograph of the missionaries accompanied by thirteen men from the Kasai who were prepared to testify on their behalf reveals a confident Sheppard (Fig. 2.6). Outfitted in pristine, all white attire, and with a proud posture, the eye is drawn to Sheppard above any other in the image with his chest puffed and his left hand proudly perched on his hip. A trace of an easy smile matches his assertive gaze as his eyes fix directly on the photographer. Sheppard's posture conveys his resolve that his words would triumph over Compagnie's protestations in the legal proceedings.

After an expedient trial, Sheppard and Morrison were acquitted on October 4, 1909.[206] While the Presbyterians were relieved not to suffer the consequences that a conviction would have meant, their victory did little long-term damage the Compagnie du Kasai's reputation. The Compagnie lost the case because they were unable to prove that Sheppard's and Morrison's assertions were directed at their business specifically and not because the missionaries' claims of wrongdoing were validated.[207] Sheppard received praise in the press upon the conclusion of the trial, with the Boston Herald headlines declaring Sheppard the "AMERICAN NEGRO HERO OF CONGO" and the "FIRST TO INFORM WORLD OF CONGO ABUSES."[208] The trial's verdict did not bring an end to the cruelty of

[206] Details of the acquittal are contained in a letter from William Handley to the State Department, October 19, 1909, quoted in Shaloff, 125.

[207] Shaloff, 125. Sheppard was exonerated because his report referred only to "armed sentries" and did not specifically equate the individuals he referenced to the Compagnie.

[208] *Boston Herald*, October 17, 1909.

the rubber system but the publicity of the trial encouraged investigations into the working conditions surrounding rubber harvesting and collection.

A few years after the trial, the Compagnie lost its monopoly on the rubber trade in the Kasai. The pressure to collect rubber gradually subsided and the livelihood of the Kasai peoples improved. In the meantime, Belgium annexed the Congo Free State on November 15, 1908, taking over its administration from Leopold and establishing the Belgian Congo.[209] Belgium maintained its hold on the colony for nearly fifty more years. The metropole continued to exploit the colony and its subjects throughout that time. Leopold's regime and the Belgian colonial officials who followed enacted a policy of burning State archives that might be incriminating, both in Brussels and in the colony. Further obscuring the past, the colonizers wrote the textbooks for Congolese school children that intentionally silenced the bloody history of the rubber regime.[210] Credit is due to the missionaries for their role in raising awareness to the suffering and exploitation of the Congo under Leopold.[211] The attention that Sheppard, and another Black American, the historian George Washington Williams, brought to the abuses in the Congo began to shape African American perceptions of European exploitation in Africa. [212] Sheppard spoke at the annual meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in January 1919. He argued for the

[209] For reformers, it was preferable to have the Congo ruled by Belgium rather than as the private fief of Leopold. There was hardly any discussion of the rule of the Congo being handed over to its own people. Leopold did not give up the Congo easily. Belgium agreed to assume Leopold's debts, pay for the construction of some of his projects in Belgium, and finally to pay Leopold 50 million francs for the Congo. This money was extracted from the Congo itself rather than paid by Belgian taxpayers. See Hochschild, 257-259.

[210] Hochschild, 294, 299.

[211] Shaloff, 126-127.

[212] George Shepperson, "Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism." *The Journal of African History*1, no. 2 (1960): 305-306.

humanity and civilization of the people of the Congo and criticized the greed and terror of the Belgian rubber regime.[213] Early treatises of Pan-African scholars also referenced Sheppard's activism, bolstering my earlier definition of the missionary as a notable figure in African diaspora/Africa relations.[214]

Return to the United States: Positions and Complications

Sheppard was recognized by contemporaneous sources as a "fearless fighter for human rights" for his part in raising awareness to the injustices done to the people of the Congo.[215] The Compagnie du Kasai v. Morrison and Sheppard trial of 1909 was to be one of the last major events of Sheppard's twenty-year Congo residency. Just two months after the trial's conclusion, Sheppard and his wife Lucy decided to return to the United States permanently. In a letter to the APCM in December of 1909, Sheppard cited his poor health and "family matters" as the major determining factors for the family's decision to the leave. [216] The Sheppard family returned to Staunton, Virginia at the end of 1909 but Sheppard continued to speak and write about his time in the Congo until his death in 1927.

Sheppard lived a life fraught with contradictions. As a missionary to the Congo he was a proponent of American Christian civilization, which "retained at its core the idea of

[213] See "Summary of Address of Dr. William Henry Sheppard" in *Africa in the World Democracy: addresses delivered at the annual meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, January 6, 1919, at Carnegie Hall* (New York: NAACP, 1919), 25-26.

[214] See Samuel Barrett, *A Plea for Unity Among American Negroes and Negroes of the World* (Cedar Falls, Iowa: Woolverton, 1926), 65. "It is a pleasure to know tho, [sic] that an American Negro missionary, Rev. Dr. Shepherd [sic], was the one who did the greatest work to bring these deplorable conditions to the attention of the civilized world."

[215] Sheppard, "African Supersitions and Handicrafts": 401.

[216] Minutes of the APCM, December 2, 1909, 55-56.

black inferiority."[217] Many white Americans viewed Africa as a "dark continent" in need of salvation and consistently reminded African Americans that Africa was their ancestral homeland. Serving as a missionary allowed Sheppard to draw a distinction between himself as a "civilized person" and his "uncivilized" African communicants.[218] In the Congo, Sheppard achieved status in a way that he was not permitted in the United States. The missionary profession was highly esteemed among both white and Black Americans, placing Sheppard in a relatively prestigious position. Serving in Africa, he escaped much of the racial prejudice that he would have faced in the United States. He received a salary equal to that of a white missionary, and was consistently addressed as "Mr." or "Reverend" when few respectful titles were granted to African Americans in his home country.[219]

It is apparent from Sheppard's own writings that as much as he may have drawn connections to Africa as the home of his ancestors that he did not quite regard the "natives" as his equals. Sheppard's repeated usage of the terms "dark" and "darkness" to describe both the space of the Congo as well as the population reflects Western ethnocentrism of the period, through which the terms carried negative connotations.[220] Similarly, his comments about Kuba life and manners sometimes contradicted his obvious admiration for their culture. For example, writing about his first interaction with Congolese royalty, Sheppard noted,

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[217] Donald F. Roth, "The 'Black Man's Burden': The Racial Background of Afro-American Missionaries and Africa," in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 32.

[218] Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), Williams, 94.

[219] Williams, 94.

[220] Williams, 105. See also Sheppard's statement "I am certainly happy in the country of my forefathers; glad to be in this heathen land to preach Christ to dying thousands." Letter from Rev. W.H. Sheppard, May 17, 1890 printed in *The Missionary* 23 (September 1890): 355.

"The king has not learned to wear pants, hat, or shoes yet" while heaping praise on the sophistication of Kuba raffia textiles in other missives.[221] In fact, Sheppard's status was complicated and confusing even to the "natives." Lapsley recounted that the people referred to him as "Mundéle Ndom", the "black white man."[222]

Some scholars speculate that Sheppard's desire to go to Africa was because he longed to escape the racial prejudices he encountered in the United States, but for a man who published frequently, Sheppard is silent about racial issues in his home country.[223] Despite the fact that he championed human rights by revealing the Belgian atrocities in the Congo, he was reinserted into established Jim Crow segregation when he returned home. In his biography of Sheppard, William E. Phipps writes about the recollections of an elderly white woman who remembered meeting the missionary when she was a young girl. She remarked that Sheppard was "such a good darky; when he returned from Africa he remembered his place and came to the back door."[224] In a similar incident, Sheppard was invited to a dinner at the home of a prominent Waynesboro family after he retired from the Congo. While the white members of the dinner party sat in the dining room, Sheppard was seated on an adjacent back porch where he responded to questions about his time in Africa through an open window.[225] This anecdote reveals the stark contrast between the status Sheppard achieved in the Congo and the rigid, racist segregationist policies he was forced to conform

[221] Letter from Rev. W.H. Sheppard, May 17, 1890 printed in *The Missionary* 23 (September 1890): 355.

[222] Letter from S. N. Lapsley to Aunt Elsie, August 19, 1891, published in Lapsley, 83.

[223] Williams, 94.

[224] Phipps, xii.

[225] Phipps, xii.

to in the American South. Sheppard did not discuss this incident, or anything similar, in any of his writings. In fact, Sheppard seldom addressed race at all.[226] It is difficult to know how the missionary felt about complying with Jim Crow laws when Black agitation for civil rights often proved fatal. Despite such treatment, Sheppard continued to be a notable and much sought-after speaker on the Christian missionary experience in Africa, remaining an African American figure of some international repute during his lifetime.

The Collection comes to Hampton, 1911

Mere months into his time in the Congo Free State, Sheppard wrote a letter to General Armstrong, then president of Hampton University stating, "I have many spears, knives, idols, etc., saving them for the curiosity room at Hampton."[227] This statement corroborates his intent to collect examples of African art from the beginning of his mission. Upon his return to the United States, Sheppard successfully brokered the sale of his African art collection to Hampton University. With this purchase, the museum at Hampton Institute became the first home to an extensive collection of Kuba art in the United States, if not of African art in general. In a letter dated June 5, 1911 to Dr. H. B. Frissell, second president of Hampton, Sheppard writes, "I want also to thank you, more than I can express in the letter, for your great kindness in buying my African Collection."[228] Sheppard was paid around $500 dollars

[226] Sheppard largely limited written discussions of his Blackness to descriptions of his affinity for the people of the Congo. A notable exception was Sheppard's explanation of his initial hesitancy to involve himself in anticolonial activism: "Being a colored man, I would not be understood criticizing a white government before white people." See fellow missionary Lachlan Vass's account of Sheppard's hesitation, Lachlan Vass to Henry Hawkins, June 21, 1905, quoted in Kennedy, 161.

[227] W.H. Sheppard to Gen. S.C. Armstrong, September 1, 1890, in *Southern Workman* 20, no. 3 (March 1891): 168.

[228] W.H. Sheppard to Dr. H.B. Frissell, June 5, 1911. Hampton University Archives, William H. Sheppard Collection, Box 3.

for the first 150 works of art from his collection, and additional pieces would be purchased over the years.[229] The Sheppard Collection quickly became a point of pride for the Institute, as well as a source of inspiration for the students. The works of art, described as "beautiful in design and texture" were said to give "one a new idea of the ancestors of the American Negro and are of especial interest to their descendants."[230]

In subsequent years, Sheppard devoted his time to cataloguing his collection for the museum.[231] An article in the *Southern Workman* noted:

> That he and his wife could have made such an exhaustive collection is nothing short of miraculous, for it meets not only the requirements of ethnologists, but those of the artist as well. Already it has been used by scientists to establish the origin of the culture of the Bakuba tribe, and has been made available recently in the decorations and cover of Mrs. Burlin's book, *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent*.[232]

At Hampton, the Sheppard Collection would enter a new phase of diasporic existence. Though most of these works of art had been removed from their original contexts for a number of years, Hampton's purchase of these works of art cemented a new status for them as key elements of a realignment of African American attitudes towards Africa.

[229] Hultgren and Ziedler, *A Taste for the Beautiful*, 23. In 2021, this amounts to about $17,050 in 2024. https://westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi?money=500&first=1911&final=2021.

[230] "Museum Additions," *Southern Workman* 40, no. 6 (July 1911): 448.

[231] H.B. Frissell, "Forty-seventh Annual Report of the Principal: The Museum," *Southern Workman* 44, no 5. (May 1915): 290.

[232] "Hampton's African Collection," *Southern Workman* 50, no 9 (September 1921): 388.

CHAPTER THREE
Photographing Black Aspiration: Imaging Sheppard and His Collection

In a circa 1900 photograph, the missionary William Sheppard aims a hunting rifle toward the sky as a group of Congolese men stand by looking on (Fig. 3.1). Sheppard's crisp white clothing and pith helmet stand out brightly against the muted tones in the rest of the black and white photograph. His sturdy boots stand in contrast to his barefoot companions. A small tent with a hanging gas lantern stands to the right of the group while in the background a number of leopard skins, strongly associated with royal regalia of Central Africa, have been hung to dry along a wooden structure. As one of hundreds of photographs in Sheppard's archive, this image offers a window into Sheppard's twenty-year residency in the Congo. I argue that these photographs represent Sheppard's intentionally crafted archive that offers some idea of his personality and aspirations through particular photographic representations of himself.

In this chapter I discuss the role of photography as it pertains to William Sheppard, his collection and the context surrounding the time period of its acquisition, and his personal archive. I provide a brief introduction to Black photography during this time period with a particular focus on African American aspiration. Citing photographs of William Sheppard, I argue for the centrality of photography as a means of conveying ideologies of self-fashioning and aspiration to power. Next, I analyze photographs of the Sheppard Collection during the years immediately following its acquisition. I consider what these photographs and the uses of their imagery reveal about the ideological projects that surrounded the Sheppard Collection and how such thoughts exemplify emergent understandings about African art.

Photographs of William Sheppard

Since Adam Hochschild's praise of Sheppard in his important 1998 book *King Leopold's Ghost,* Sheppard has become a subject of greater interest. Two biographies of Sheppard were published shortly after in 2002, Pagan Kennedy's *Black Livingstone* and William Phipps's *William Sheppard: Congo's African American Livingstone*. Sheppard's art collection has also received brief but significant scholarly treatment by a few art historians, as I discuss in earlier chapters. One of the sources of Sheppard's life and work that remains understudied are the archival collection of his photographs. Sheppard's photographs are digitized and readily available for analysis via the Presbyterian Historical Society of Philadelphia's digital platform.[233] In this section, I argue that these photographs, particularly images of Sheppard himself, communicate various ideologies through Sheppard's self-imaging as well as demonstrate the missionary's commitment to crafting and narrating his own archive.

The African American orator and abolitionist Frederick Douglass said of photography, "What was once the exclusive luxury of the rich and great is now within reach of all."[234] By the end of the nineteenth century, photographic techniques had become much more accessible to a general population, rendering the technology to create personal photographs widely available and sought after. For African Americans, photography became a key tool for creating new positive portrayals of themselves to counter centuries of negative

[233]William H. Sheppard Papers. https://digital.history.pcusa.org/islandora/object/islandora%3Awhsheppard?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=6e29793e7656d5e59328&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0&f%5B0%5D=mods_physicalDescription_form_ms%3A%22photographs%22to

[234] Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress: An Address Delivered in Boston, Massachusetts on December 3, 1861" *The Frederick Douglass Papers Project.* Available on line at https://frederickdouglasspapersproject.com/s/digitaledition/item/9106

imagery controlled by whites.[235] It is true in certain instances that photography was used to further repressive agendas and racist scientific typology. These negative aspects of photography have been discussed by many as important considerations in a visual analysis of Black photography.[236] However, in the last twenty years historians have begun to look more closely at these early photographs as archival documents that serve to counteract contemporary literary and political written records that excluded Black perspectives and perpetuated racist thinking. I argue that Sheppard's photographs provide an example of the promise and possibility of taking image-making into one's own hands. They illustrate the way that "nineteenth- and early-twentieth century African Americans…*used* the new technology of photography to chart and change and enjoy new social positions and political identities."[237]

Writing about the seminal American Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900, Deborah Willis argues that for African Americans photography was a major tool in the fight against negative representations. Photography provided an opportunity to craft an alternative view of the Black subject as well as shape one's sense of self.[238] Likewise social historian Douglas Daniels has argued that "for understanding the self-image of Blacks, photographs

[235] Free African Americans gained access to photography at the same time as white Americans, very shortly after the daguerreotype was invented in 1839. For more information on the earliest years of African American photography see Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).

[236] Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, "Introduction," in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, edited by Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 3-4. For an example of the repressive potential of photography, see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive." *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64.

[237] Wallace and Smith, 4.

[238] Deborah Willis, "The Sociologist's Eye: W. E. B. DuBois and the Paris Exposition," in *A Small Nation of People: W. E. B. DuBois and African American Portraits of Progress*, The Library of Congress, (Washington, D. C.: The Library of Congress, 2003), 55.

are especially useful when they are approved by the subjects because they find the likenesses flattering."[239] In photographs of Sheppard, we see his changing tastes for what he finds to be "flattering" as he moves from the United States to the Congo and back again. Among the earliest surviving photographs of Sheppard is a formal studio portrait of him as a young man shortly after he took up his missionary post upon the occasion of his inauguration as a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society of London in 1893 (Fig. 3.2). Sheppard was the first Black man to achieve this designation and this serious portrait equals the gravity of that moment. The studio portrait captures Sheppard's full figure as he stands before a low faux-stone wall.[240] Behind Sheppard hangs a painted backdrop featuring classical architecture. The young Sheppard is dressed in Victorian finery: a dark double-breasted coat over a starched white shirt and neat trousers. He gazes toward his right, eyes not meeting the camera. His expression is modest but confident. The full-length portrait and landscape background are reminiscent of the type of painted portraiture that, though reserved for those with the means to pay for such extravagances, had existed for centuries.[241] In terms of Sheppard's identity and sense of self, there is much to glean from this photograph. Sheppard clearly appreciated the image of himself that this photograph cultivated: erudite, learned, refined, and adventurous. Proof of Sheppard's satisfaction with this particular photograph is the fact that

[239] Douglas Daniels quoted in Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), xvii.

[240] Architectural props were often used in studio photography to keep subjects from moving too much while their likeness was captured. See Cheryl Finley, "No More Auction Block for Me!" in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, edited by Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 340.

[241] In coming across it by happenstance, I was struck by the similarities of pose and backdrop between Sheppard's portrait and Richard Evans's 1816 painting of Henri Christophe, King of Haiti. See Richard Evans, *Henri Christophe, King of Haiti*, c. 1816, oil on canvas. 34 ¼ x 25 ½ inches.

he had it reproduced in the form of a calling card that he could share with friends and acquaintances (Fig. 3.3).

Many years later, a 1917 portrait of Sheppard harbors many clues about how the missionary saw himself (Fig 3.4). By this date Sheppard had retired from his missionary work in the Congo and returned to the United States. Sheppard embarked on speaking tours and traveled the country talking about his time in the Congo. He eventually settled down in Louisville, Kentucky where he served as a minister at the Hancock Street Presbyterian Church. This seated portrait appeared in multiple publications but notably appeared as the author's photo inside of Sheppard's 1917 memoir *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*. Here more than twenty years older than the previously discussed studio portrait, Sheppard appears relaxed and confident. He is dressed in a starched suit and seated in a wicker chair with an elaborately woven armrest. Though it might not be the case, the craftsmanship of the chair suggests exotic origins that remind the portrait's viewer that Sheppard spent many years in the Congo.[242] He holds a book in his left hand, suggesting his learnedness. Sheppard is seated in a wicker chair This half-length seated portrait has much in common with a photograph of another Hampton luminary, Booker T. Washington (Fig. 3.5). The similarity in the two portraits suggests a photographic tradition of Black intellectuals holding reading materials as they repose in an easy seated posture. The inclusion of reading materials is important when we consider that prior to emancipation, Blacks were forbidden to read and write.

Perhaps more significant to our understanding of the personality of Sheppard are the photographs of Sheppard while he lived in the Congo. There is a much larger body of

[242] The chair in an accompanying portrait of Sheppard's wife, Lucy, strongly resembles a "peacock" chair. That type of chair would many years later become associated with Black portraiture, despite its origins as a product of colonial trade.

photographs of Sheppard from this period than any other in his life. From this we can gather that Sheppard enthusiastically pursued the visual documentation of his twenty years in the Congo. The large number of photographs of himself reveal a man who was interested in creating a trail of physical documentation of his life and work, and hence creating an archive. Sheppard's engagement with photography is worthy of analysis in light of the way that the medium became a tool to counter centuries of Black Americans' unequal access to archival production.

Invented around the middle of the nineteenth century, photography became increasingly accessible and available as the twentieth century drew near. George Eastman's Kodak made photography and image making possible in a way that had not ever been available to untrained individuals. Sheppard most likely brought with him to the Congo a Kodak model #1 camera that was invented by George Eastman in 1888. The box-shaped camera required no technical expertise; the amateur photographer could simply press a button to capture an image. Anyone with the camera could take spontaneous pictures in a way that had not been possible before.[243] By the time Sheppard took his photographs in the Congo, he was using a newer Kodak box camera, a precursor to the Instamatic. That 1898 model of Kodak that Sheppard used was considered the first easy-to-use camera.[244] While Sheppard occasionally included photographs in his correspondence with friends in the United States, he wrote very little about the technical aspects of the photographs he took. He did mention in one letter that **"**our photographic material is not very good, it soon goes bad out here." [245]

[243] Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*, 3rd ed. (London: Pearson, 2011) 168-169.

[244] Kennedy, 142.

[245] William Sheppard to Dr. Henkel, April 5, 1904. William H. Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Archives, RG457, Box One Folder One.

Despite whatever shortcomings he felt about his photographic equipment, Sheppard left behind hundreds of photographs from his time in the Congo that are incredibly valuable to our understanding of the missionary. By taking copious photographs and preserving them for years to come, I argue that Sheppard exercised what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls "archival power," the ability to determine what is worthy of record and research.[246] Trouillot argues that the making of archives is one of the junctures at which silences enter the process of historical production.[247] Following his logic, I contend that Sheppard's use of photographic documentation was the missionary's way of making his own archive. Whether this was intentional or how successful his methods were is another matter. However, the hundreds of photographs that Sheppard left behind leave a bounty of material to sift through and parse for information about him.

As an educated Black American missionary living in Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, Sheppard is a complex example of the racial strife within African American identity DuBois so eloquently wrote about. He was a product of the Victorian Age in which identifying as "civilized" was key. The desire was twofold for a Black man such as Sheppard, who claimed civilization both through education and as a reaction "to racist stereotypes of Black 'savagery'."[248] Mission work enabled Sheppard to position himself as the epitome of refinement, distinct from other Black Americans who lacked his education and status as well as distinct from Africans who lacked Western civilization. In the Congo Sheppard was free to ascend to leadership positions not available to him in the United States.

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[246] Trouillot, 99.

[247] Trouillot, 26.

[248] Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 94.

The photographs of Sheppard illustrate his enjoyment of the range of opportunities open to him and the recognition he achieved as a missionary.[249] They support Stephanie Batiste's assertion that disempowerment as a result of racial oppression (in the United States) did not keep African Americans from "imagining or enacting themselves as empowered subjects."[250] These snapshots often appear candid and indeed they are far less formal when compared with studio photography. It is important to remember, however, that Sheppard was the author as well as the subject of these photographs. Sheppard chose what and how to photograph himself, making his self-presentation especially important.

Sartorial choices played a major role in Sheppard's self-positioning as a person of status and power. Perhaps the most overt difference in the Congo photographs of Sheppard and those taken in the United States and Europe is his change of dress. Photographs indicate that while he lived in the Congo Sheppard's preferred dress was that of a "great white hunter." [251] He dressed entirely in white linen and cotton and donned a pith helmet, clothing that is strongly associated with the garb of European colonial officials. In nearly every photograph of Sheppard found in his archives he maintained this style of white clothing while he was a resident of the Congo. The contrast between Sheppard's Blackness and the white clothing he adhered to recalls Joseph Conrad's lines from *Heart of Darkness*, where Marlowe the narrator notices a Congolese man wearing European-style clothing: "It looked startling around his black neck—this bit of white thread from beyond the seas."[252] Coincidentally, Conrad and Sheppard arrived to the Congo in the very same year.

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[249] Walter L. Williams, 94.

[250] Batiste, 3-4.

[251] Walter L. Williams, 94.

[252] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899; repr., London: Penguin Classics, 2007), 20.

The acquisition of "tropical clothing" suited to the African climate was among the first undertakings of missionaries and colonial officials before departing to the colonies.[253] Sheppard was no exception. He recounted his shopping excursion in London: "After exchanging most of our American money for cowrie shells, beads, salt and brass wire—these were our future currency—we purchased flour, sugar, butter and lard; also thin linen clothing and helmets for the sun."[254] These sartorial elements contributed to an empowered identity reserved for Western visitors to tropical climes, from government agents to explorers to missionaries. Few illustrations or photographs of Europeans or Americans in tropical climates lack this most ubiquitous symbol of the colonial subculture. The pith helmet, a double-layered hat with ventilated space, originated with British colonials and was particularly designed to fulfill Victorian medical specifications for protection from the sun and other tropical maladies.[255] Jiat-Hwee Chang and Anthony D. King argue that the pith helmet is an articulation of tropical architecture applied to the intimate scale of the human body.[256] Though its origins are practical in nature, the pith helmet became symbolic of a daring, adventuresome masculinity wrought through colonial exploration in a "dangerous" and unfamiliar environment.[257]

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[253] Ryan Johnson, "European Cloth and Tropical Skin: Clothing Material and British Ideas of Health and Hygiene in Tropical Climates," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 530-560.

[254] Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 20.

[255] See Johnson.

[256] Jiat-Hwee Chang and Anthony D. King, "Towards a genealogy of tropical architecture: Historical fragments of power-knowledge, built environment, and climate in British colonial territories," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 32 (2011): 291.

[257] Women also wore pith helmets and similar feminized versions of all-white attire. Nevertheless, the sun-helmet is more strongly associated with a particular type of masculinity.

Manhood and Race

Sheppard's courageous spirit and athletic propensity are readily identifiable in photographs of him in the mission field. John G. Turner has argued that mission work in Africa figured prominently in Sheppard's public image of "robust manhood" and masculinity.[258] We see this born out in photographs of Sheppard where he represents himself as thoroughly masculine. A motif among both written accounts and photographs of Sheppard in his archive are his feats of strength and bravery. We have no reason to doubt Sheppard's bravery and athletic prowess as these details are corroborated in both his own accounts and those of his missionary peers. Writing to his friend Dr. Henkel about his earliest experiences in the Congo, Sheppard says "I am called 'enfuman gailer'…the king of huntsmen. I generally give them plenty beefsteak when I kill a hippo."[259]

In one photograph (Fig. 3.6), Sheppard poses after an antelope hunt. In his right hand he holds a shotgun and with his left hand he grasps the ankles of his dead prey. Much like in the photograph which opened this chapter, a flayed leopard skin hangs in the background. Sheppard does not recount any stories of hunting leopards but the prevalence of leopard skins in his photography suggests that perhaps he did. He certainly recognized the leopard as the symbol of the *nyim*'s royal authority.[260] Considering the rigor of this activity, Sheppard's

[258] John G. Turner, "A 'Black-White' Missionary on the Imperial Stage: William H. Sheppard and Middle-Class Black Manhood," *Journal of Southern Religion* 9 (2006): https://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume9/Turner.htm#_ftn54, accessed September 22, 2022.

[259] William Sheppard to Dr. Henkel, January 5, 1892. William H. Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Archives, RG457, Box One, Folder One.

[260] Suzanne Preston Blier, "Kongo and Kuba: The Art of Rulership Display," in *Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form* (2012; repr., London: Laurence King Publishing, 1998), 204. Leopard skins were an important part of the *nyim*'s royal attire. As the most dangerous creature of the forest, the leopard symbolized the royal authority and military might of the king. Sheppard might have hunted leopards to provide their skins as gifts to the *Nyim*.

white linen ensemble is surprisingly unsullied. Sheppard is flanked by two Congolese men holding spears. While the other men confidently lock eyes with the camera, Sheppard, standing a head taller than both men, gazes to his right with a calm, confident expression.

Benedict Carton argues that Sheppard's enthusiasm for hunting was not simply to satisfy his thirst for adventure, but was part of a cunning strategy to gain reciprocity with his community. By proffering game, Sheppard secured his position as a "big man" and capable provider. This allowed him to form friendships with merchants and traders in Kubaland, who could vouch for him to the Kuba elite. [261] For example, Sheppard recounted the tale of one of his hippopotamus hunts during a lecture to the Hampton Institute:

> I waded out breast deep, shot one with my rifle, and our people called out to the men, Come, here is meat for you. They dragged it ashore, and the villagers came down-men, women, babies and children—and feasted and carried home the meat. So they became at once our friends.[262]

Another photograph depicts Sheppard grinning while holding a shotgun and standing over an outstretched dead snake (Fig. 3.7). The missionary wears his customary white ensemble topped with a pith helmet, and stands alongside his wife, Lucy, and another missionary, Annie Taylor. Behind the three missionaries is a crowd of Congolese people, some of whom are wearing traditional dress while others wear western clothing. In such examples, photography provided visual evidence that Sheppard really did perform these daring actions.

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[261] Benedict Carton, "From Hampton 'Into the Heart of Africa': How Faith in God and Folklore Turned Congo Missionary William Sheppard into a Pioneering Ethnologist," *History in Africa 36* (2009): 75.

[262] William Sheppard, "Into the Heart of Africa," *Southern Workman* (December 1893): 183.

In a photograph of Sheppard and Maxamalinge, son of Kot aMbweeky II, the missionary stands confidently shoulder to shoulder with Kuba royalty (Fig. 3.8). The attire of the two men could not be more different. Sheppard is outfitted in his usual European finery: pristine white suit, white shoes, and white pith helmet. Maxamalinge is dressed in fine Kuba regalia: elaborate raffia cloth, cowrie shells, intricate bracelets and anklets, and a headdress topped with special bird feathers indicating his elite status and titles. Through his dress each man represents the ideals of masculinity for his respective culture.

Clothing was therefore an important element in establishing masculinity, as well as an inflection of Sheppard's particular Congo persona. Both in his diary and in his letters home, his companion Samuel Lapsley recorded his observation that the Kete referred to Sheppard as "Mundele Ndombe", the Black white man. He clarifies that ndombe means "Black" and mundele means "man with clothes," "but it is the usual word for white men, as none but white men wear clothes."[263] On its face it is significant that Sheppard seemed to defy easy racialization, especially in Africa. We can further extrapolate from these linguistic designations that clothing was an important marker of status for the Kete as well as for Sheppard's and Lapsley's presentation of themselves. Though Sheppard had the similar dark skin of the Congolese people, his cultural background, signified by his dress, served to distinguish him as an outsider. The moniker "Mundele Ndombe" is thus a marker of Sheppard's embodiment of diaspora.

[263] Lapsley, 108. Lapsley meant that the Kuba didn't wear western clothing. They were certainly well-dressed according to Kuba customs, given the high praise of Kuba textiles in Sheppard's documents.

It is impossible to divorce Sheppard's performances of manhood from the time period in which he lived; race was a significant factor in that category as well as in every other aspect of his life. Sheppard occupied a unique position in that he performed an empowered, commanding masculine identity while in the Congo but he was relegated to a non-threatening, subservient status when he was in the United States. There was therefore significant tension between his status in the Congo and his status in the United States.

In the Congo, Sheppard and Lapsley quickly seem to have dispensed with the racial etiquette to which they were accustomed at home. The two men worked, lived, dined, and worshipped together during their time together before Lapsley's passing. Their experiences in a foreign land seemed to create a bond between the two men that would likely not have been possible in the United States. So blurred were the Jim Crow boundaries that had shaped both men's upbringings that Lapsley even referred to Sheppard as "white" in a diary entry, though this appears to be a way to distinguish Sheppard from the Africans.[264] Still, this slippage in designation is noteworthy as a particular inflection of Sheppard's peculiar diasporic experience. Sheppard was a Black man in a Black country, but he was still very much not an African. Frantz Fanon wrote that "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."[265] Sheppard's experience reflects Fanon's understanding that being Black meant something different in the United States and Europe than it did in majority Black societies in the Caribbean and Africa. Not only did this phenomenon apply to Sheppard's own experience as a Black man, it also affected how white

[264] Samuel Norvell Lapsley, *Life and Letters of Samuel Norvell Lapsley*, 192.

[265] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 110.

people interacted with Sheppard. His race was understood in different and perhaps more complicated terms in the Congo.

Gail Bederman argues that the concepts of gender and race became increasingly intertwined at the turn of the twentieth century. African American men recognized that one way to assert the power they were denied on the basis of race was through the articulation of their gender.[266] Because of the prevalent belief among white Americans that "racially primitive" men lacked the capacity to be manly, some Black men strove to distinguish themselves as manly according to the same patterns as white men. Sheppard wrote about Hampton's white founder General S. C. Armstrong as the "ideal of manhood", praising "his erect carriage, deep, penetrating eyes, pleasant smiles, and kindly disposition."[267] When we consider that the link between civilization and manliness was understood to be inherently white, we observe Sheppard's self-fashioning according to white standards in order to distinguish himself from the Africans he lived among.

While manliness might be understood to encompass physical strength and athleticism–and the Victorians made room for this, too–the idea of being manly went hand in hand with civility. Because discourses of civilization constructed manliness as both cultural and racial, it was believed that Black men could never attain perfect manliness because their ancestors had not biologically evolved to that point.[268] At the same time that Sheppard was grappling with these issues on another continent, other African Americans directly addressed

[266] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 21.

[267] William Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 17.

[268] Bederman, 29. Even issues of class tended to be racially coded during this period.

these issues in the United States. In a tenacious rebuttal to the discourse of civilization as inherently white, Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells published a widely circulated pamphlet on the occasion of the World's Columbian Exposition. In their treatise *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* the pair developed a version of civilization that denied the implicit connection between skin color and advancement.[269] Douglas, Wells, and the other contributing authors of *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* argued that in contrast to the exclusionary and racist practices of whites, African American progress in the few decades post slavery was the ultimate signifier of cultural prosperity and civilization.[270]

Photography and the Mission

Sheppard appears much more relaxed in his Congo photographs than in those taken in the United States or Europe and we must note that not every photograph was a display of manhood or a statement of power. In one image, Sheppard plays the banjo for a group of onlookers (Fig. 3.9). The missionary is still dressed in his all-white finery but his facial expression radiates joy and ease. Like Sheppard wrote in so many of his letters home, the photograph confirms his contentment with his African home. His audience of Congolese youths pay Sheppard eager attention. It is noteworthy that while many of the children are dressed in traditional African clothing, a number of the group are clad in western attire.

[269] Bederman, 39-40. Douglass and Wells concluded that the exclusion of African Americans from the White City at the Columbia Exposition demonstrated white barbarism. See *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*, edited by Ida B. Wells (Chicago, 1893).

[270] Especially see I. Garland Penn, "The Progress of the Afro-American Since Emancipation," in *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*, 40-62, edited by Ida B. Wells (Chicago, 1893).

Notably, a young man stands in attention wearing a cardigan over a button-down shirt and tie, giving him the look of a prep school attendee. This individual's exact identity is unclear, but his dress suggests he is most likely a Christian convert or a student at the Bible Training School.[271]

The combination of photographs taken by missionaries like Sheppard coupled with oral and written records helped to create the image of an Africa in need of transformation. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, few people questioned the authenticity of the photograph image. Belief in the veracity of the images and curiosity for exotic peoples made a significant impact upon western audiences, and Christian congregations at home were no exception. [272] In his study of missionary photography in Africa, T. Jack Thompson argues that missionary photography generally served one of two purposes: to show certain aspects of missionary work, particularly the "transformative power" of missions on African converts, or to present images of Africans who were not yet under missionary influence and to contrast their appearance with those of the converts. [273]

In an example of the aid that missionaries could provide to Africans, Sheppard is shown in one photograph extracting a tooth from a Kuba man (Fig. 3.10) He is surrounded by other Kuba onlookers, who appear impressed by this talent. In a 1904 letter to his dentist-friend, Dr. H.S. Henkel, Sheppard enclosed a copy of this photograph, or one similar,

[271] The American Presbyterian Congo Mission established a Bible Training School. No distinction was made between religious and secular education. The primary goal of educating the local community was to gain communicants to become members of the church. In 1908, 17, 484 students attended the day school and 32, 075 attended Sunday school. See Shaloff, 58.

[272] T. Jack Thompson, *Light on Darkness? Missionary Photography in Africa in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 2.

[273] T. Jack Thompson, 13.

writing, “the other picture gives you an idea of my pulling teeth. I have relieved many [a] aching jaw, thanks indeed to your kind teaching.” [274] The implication here is clear: in addition to spiritual salvation, a missionary like Sheppard could provide physical comforts and medical attention that western audiences believed were lacking in the Congo.

Another way that missionaries used photography from the field was to illustrate picture postcards and other inspirational cards. Beginning in the 1890s, these printed materials were distributed throughout Europe and the United States by missionary agencies as a kind of marketing tool. Similar to the way that missionaries visited churches in their home countries while on furlough to speak about their missions, illustrated literature such as picture postcards accomplished the same goal when they arrived at church or mailbox of a Christian home. These widely distributed photographs allowed American Christians a glimpse into what missions abroad were really like. [275] In one such example from Sheppard’s archive, the missionary is the central figure surrounded by a group of Congolese people in a small photographic image that tops an inspirational card titled “Never Say Die” (Fig. 3.11) Sheppard is dressed in his canonical white suit, though his head is covered with a smaller hat instead of a sun helmet. He has a broad smile across his face and with his right index finger he points toward the sky, suggesting that he gestures toward the heavens. Directly to Sheppard’s left stands a young Congolese man who the card informs us is named Chibamba, who is credited with “interposing” on Sheppard’s behalf during the Pianga Massacre of

[274] William Sheppard to Dr. Henkel, April 5, 1904. William H. Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Archives, RG457, Box One, Folder One.

[275] Kathryn T. Long, “‘Cameras 'never lie’: The Role of Photography in Telling the Story of American Evangelical Missions” *Church History*, Vol. 72 Issue 4 (December 2003): 834-835.

1899.[276] The postcard features Chibamba prominently alongside the missionary as an example of the people in the Congo who have been friends to the missionaries and suggest them worthy of salvation. The connection to the "cannibal raid" would provoke an emotional response in the American who received the card that might translate to a financial donation to the APCM. Both the shape of the card and the text upon it suggest that the card was intended as a bookmark for the Bible. It was captioned "Waste no tears upon the blotted record of lost years, but turn the leaf and smile. Oh, smile to see the fair white pages that remain for thee."[277] This photograph of the missionary situated on a piece of paper designed for personal use promoted Sheppard's missionary efforts even when he was not there personally to vouch for himself.

By the time of the Pianga Massacre, missionaries had also begun to use photography to provide proof of atrocities against Africans. Photographic evidence countered colonial efforts to silence the record of the massacres. While a large number of Sheppard's photographs, both those of Sheppard and those taken by Sheppard, are preserved in his archives, apparently very few of his photographs of the Belgian atrocities have survived. Only "a few grainy pictures" of the Pianga attack are at the Presbyterian Heritage Center in Montreat, North Carolina.[278] Historical records support that Sheppard's Kodak images of

[276] Sheppard wrote about Chibamba (sometimes spelled Chebamba) in his diary from September 1899. Sheppard encountered the man, a member of the Zappo Zap raiding party, while seeking out the cause of the violence in the area. Because Chibamba had previously met and liked Sheppard, his scouting party was not attacked by the raiders. It was Chibamba who led Sheppard to a number of villages so that the missionary could chronicle the extent of the destruction. William Sheppard diary, 14 September 1899, Presbyterian Historical Archives.

[277] The uncredited quotation is taken from the Ella Wheeler Wilcox poem, "Resolve." Ella Wheeler Wilcox, *Poems of Passion*, 1883.

[278] Carton, 70, 72.

Belgian atrocities were sent to Edmund Morel in England, but their descriptions do not match the surviving photographs. The Congo Reformation Association published pamphlets and literature rely instead on the photographs of the British missionary Alice Harris. The elision of the atrocity photographs from Sheppard's archive is suspect. Carton suggests that the photographs may have been intentionally destroyed after being entered into the court record at the libel trial of 1909. A benign alternative explanation is that the images have yet to be uncovered in some private archival collection. [279] An example of a photograph of a young woman with a chain around her neck is included in the Presbyterian Historical Archives (Fig. 3.12). Its handwritten caption tells us that she was rescued by Sheppard from "cannibals."

Carton has argued that Sheppard's biographers have given too much attention to his bravado, masculinity, and adventurous exploits at the expense of recounting his many contributions to ethnography.[280] Perhaps because of his religiosity, and by extension the desire to correct certain cultural behaviors that came into conflict with Christianity, Sheppard's written accounts and careful documentation of Kuba culture have not given been their due. It is significant that Jan Vansina, widely considered the foremost western scholar of Kuba culture, acknowledges his debt to Sheppard's findings.[281] Perhaps Sheppard's most significant contributions to the field of ethnography, as well as to the history of art, is his collection of art.

[279] Carton, 71, 72. In various archives some of Alice Harris's photographs are erroneously attributed to Sheppard. We do know that Sheppard took photographs that were entered into the libel trial court record but why they are lost is a mystery.

[280] Carton, 80.

[281] For Vansina's commentary on Sheppard's contributions to Kuba history, see Vansina, *Children of Woot*, 3, 43, 49, 50.

Photographing the Collection

The influx of non-western art from the colonies, or in this case, the mission field, considerably affected the development of modern art. Photography was the tool through which many audiences were exposed to non-western works of art for the first time. The photographic portrayal of these objects served to disseminate images of African art to a larger audience. Wendy Grossman has argued that photography transformed the way that African art was understood in order to translate their meaning from artifact to art for Western audiences.[282] More specifically, Elizabeth Edwards contends that historically the very conventions employed in the photography of art objects is "integral to their influence as images, in affecting the perception not only of the object itself, but also of the cultures in which they originated."[283] Grossman and Edwards' arguments are central to my analysis of early photography of the Sheppard Collection.

One early example of the photographed artworks in Sheppard's collection appears on a missionary postcard (Fig. 3.13). The date on the card's verso suggests this photograph was taken around 1898. The picture postcard presents four ebony drinking cups carved by a Kuba artist. In an elegantly posed photograph, the four drinking vessels are evenly spaced, well-lit and tastefully arranged on a flat surface. The cups are photographed almost as if they are artistic sculptures to contemplate, rather functional tools used for drinking. The image is accompanied by a short descriptive caption stating "Cups carved out of ebony by untaught

[282] Wendy Grossman, "From Ethnographic Object to Modernist Icon: Photographs of African and Oceanic Sculpture and the Rhetoric of the Image," *Visual Resources* 23, no. 4 (2007): 291-336. Grossman subsequently curated an exhibition, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens*, and authored an accompanying catalogue. See Wendy Grossman, Man, Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens (Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, MN: International Art and Artists, Distributed by University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[283] Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 52.

Bakuba natives—Central Africa." The inclusion of photographs of cultural production on the missionary postcard carried a message that suggested to its audience that the Kuba of Central Africa were capable creators of remarkable examples of art and material culture. Lest we give the missionaries too much credit for their recognition of Kuba arts, the postcard still describes the Kuba as "untaught." The Kuba absolutely had a system of teaching and training in the visual arts, so the choice of the word "untaught" reveals a value judgment about the lack of European-style school training.[284]

With the exception of the missionary postcard, early photographs of Sheppard's collection, particularly those images taken whilst the artworks were still in his possession and in the immediate aftermath of the Hampton Museum's purchase of said objects in 1911, differ from later photographs. In these earliest images, the objects are grouped together with little regard to their function or relationship to one another and photographed as an assemblage (Fig. 3.14). In discussing this type of photographic treatment, Grossman claims that such cluttered photographs were replicated in the way that these types of collections would have been displayed during this period.[285] In this early image of some of the objects of the Sheppard collection, a white sheet has been laid to provide a neutral backdrop to a documentary image. A Kuba textile hangs in the background and a number of objects are arranged in a flat formation in the foreground. Among the artworks in the photograph are a few examples of weaponry, including an axe made by Songye peoples and two ceremonial *ikul*; examples of regalia and personal adornment, including a cowrie shell belt, cowrie shell

[284] These types of assessment of Kuba artistry are consistent with other observations from the period. The closest contemporary counterpoint is found in For descriptions of Kuba art from Belgian colonial officials, see Lieutenant Th. Masui, *Guide de la section de l'Etat indépendent du Congo à l'Exposition de Bruxelles-Tervuren en 1897* (Brussels: Imprimeire Veuve Monnom).

[285] Wendy Grossman, 293.

hat, and raffia hat and hat pin; two small sculptural figures (possibly divination implements); and a mask. In this photograph it is difficult to determine any details, particularly those finely carved ones that we would expect to find on the wooden objects. In these earlier examples, the photographer has emphasized the presentation of a wide array of artistic practices and breadth of a collection, and less about revealing artistic skill, creativity, and craftsmanship.

This type of photograph is consistent with the trophy-style conventions of display and photography of non-Western objects and contexts during this period. A trophy mode of display originated with sixteenth and seventeenth-century decorative forms of storing weaponry but by the nineteenth century it was being used both in museum displays and for photographing cultural objects from various non-western groups. This type of photography, like its attendant museum display, emphasized a massing of objects parallel to conventions of big-game and trophy display.[286] A wide number of exotic animals or weaponry, or works of art in the Sheppard Collection's case, could declare power at a minimum and make a statement of conquest at its most fearsome. Collecting and conquering occurred concurrently during colonization.[287] Such displays definitively linked the amassing of large collections of art and cultural patrimony to the conquest of the people from whom they were taken.

In 1920, around ten years after Hampton's acquisition, a much different approach can be seen in photographs of the Sheppard Collection. It is around this date that we also learn the identity of one of the collection's most prolific early photographers. Leigh Richmond Miner (1864-1935), was a Hampton professor who worked in the Art Department from 1898

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[286] Edwards, 66-67.

[287] For an example, see Zoë Strother's discussion of the Musée du Congo at Tervuren, Zoë Strother, "Looking for Africa in Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik," African Arts* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 12-14.

to 1933. In this series of images Miner's arrangement captures the sculptural qualities of the Kuba artworks (Fig.s 3.15 – 3.18). One photograph depicts "Lukenga's drinking cup" and a "Bakuba sentry" (Fig. 3.15).[288] The body of the drinking cup has been carved with anthropomorphic features. The lower portion of the vessel is incised with intricate geometric patterns that are familiar across all types of Kuba works of art. With this cup, the sensuous textures and undulating markings serve as adornments encircling a shapely neck. The photographer captures the face of the cup in profile, to accentuate the three-dimensionality of the well-modeled facial features. The countenance exudes the same calm that we associate with other anthropomorphic Kuba sculptures. This serene expression lends the cup a dignified and timeless quality befitting a king's implements. Two elegantly-carved ram's horns swirl back from the figure's brow to cleverly separate into the two handles of the drinking cup. Aside from Sheppard's attribution of the cup to the king, it is these horns which indicate the cup belongs to the royal lineage as sheep were the exclusive domain of the *nyim* and his family.[289] Today, the Kuba's sculptural tradition of beautiful drinking vessels is well-established, but Sheppard was one of the first to document the Kuba cups he acquired.

> His servant kneels before His Highness, holding the cup with both hands. The servant takes a sip of the contents (palm wine), then presents it to the King… The cup is made of mahogany and the face on it seems to verify their tradition that many, many years ago they came from a far-away place (Egypt?). [290]

The finest vessels, such as this example, were reserved for the Kuba elite. Others drank from less elaborate though still exquisitely rendered and highly patterned cups such as

[288] "Lukenga" is the Luba term for the Kuba ruler (*nyim*). We can assume this cup belonged to Kot aMbweeky II as this is the *nyim* with whom Sheppard formed the closest relationship.

[289] Binkley and Darish, *Kuba* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2009), 25.

[290] Sheppard, "African Superstitions and Handicrafts": 403-04.

those in Fig. 3.13.

In these examples, Miner has shot the images from a close-up vantage, removing all sense of scale and framing the works against stark white backdrops. The vantage point and lighting accentuate facets of the carvings and the polish of the wood. Miner's photographs enable the viewer to appreciate the subtleties and the character of the pieces that one might expect to see in person, as well as to depict the objects as sculptural works of art.

In his influential 1924 essay, "A Note on African Art," Alain Locke describes his observations on the influence of African art in twentieth-century western societies. Tracing African art in museums from its position as "dusty trophies of imperialism" to "prizes of comparative ethnology" to "the sudden realization that here was an art object, intrinsically interesting and fine."[291] Locke goes on to describe how African art had grown to play an important role as "the cornerstone of a new and more universal aesthetic that has all but revolutionized the theory of art and considerably modified its practice."[292] We can observe how the way that views on African art had begun to change is reflected in the artful photographs of the Sheppard collection. These circa 1920 photographs have much in common with other photographs of African art from that period and as Grossman has argued, such changes in photographic representation of cultural objects paralleled the beginnings of a general shift in western views on African art.

Since the earliest years of photography's history, sculpture was a popular subject. Photographs of sculpture from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas tended to be subject to "anthropological methods" of representation, which is to say photographed in concert with a

[291] Alain Locke, "A Note on African Art," *Opportunity* 2 (May 1924): 134.

[292] Locke, 134.

number of other like objects, rather than the more artful treatment reserved for Western sculpture.[293] In some metropoles, by the 1910s non-western objects began to be photographed in a manner similar to object photography of Western sculpture, as is the case with a 1910 photograph of a brass memorial head of a Benin Kingdom Queen Mother found in the British Museum (Fig. 3.19). Following this shift in photographic practice, photographs such as the brass memorial head were reproduced for use in other contexts.[294]

Miner's modern-style photographs of the Sheppard Collection sculptures appearing in other literature coincide with this trend. The impetus for Miner's photographs was probably on the occasion of the 1920 publication *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent* (Fig. 3.20).[295] Miner's photographs accompanied an ethnographic compilation of oral history, song, and dance informed by two Hampton alumni, Mandikane Cele and Kamba Simango, in collaboration with ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis Burlin in their book *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent*. The "songs and tales" have little to do with the art from the Sheppard Collection but they served to validate the African identity of Cele and Simango. Their inclusion as the embellishment and illustrations for this publication suggest their acceptance as works of art. A contemporary review of *Songs and Tales* discusses the imagery, describing it as "most artistic" and representative of Hampton's "valuable African

[293] Grossman, 292-293.

[294] Grossman, 293.

[295] Natalie Curtis Burlin, Mandikane Cele, and Kamba Simango, *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1920).

collection."[296] Several of the photographs from *Songs and Tales* were reproduced in an issue of the *Southern Workman*.[297]

Miner's sleek imagery of the William Sheppard Collection that accompanies the book was likely informed by a few different sources. Aesthetically and formally, Miner's work echoes the photographic presentation of African sculpture by an anonymous photographer in Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik,* and similar photographs taken by Charles Sheeler for the Museum of Modern Art.[298] Wendy Grossman has described the *de rigeur* photographic style of African art as a presentation of masks and figures "as singular objects worthy of aesthetic contemplation, frequently seen in close-up views that invite reverie."[299] Like Sheeler and the anonymous photographer for *Negerplastik,* Miner photographed the works from the Sheppard Collection against a white background. The strong lighting emphasizes the surface textures of the wood.

In addition to the photographs he contributed to *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent,* Miner took scores of photographs of Hampton students, classrooms, and extracurricular activities. A faculty member of the Hampton Institute Camera Club, Miner

[296] Cora Mae Folsom, "Book Reviews: 'Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent'," in *Southern Workman* 50 (1921): 133-34.

[297] The monthly publication out of Hampton "enjoyed a wide readership among African Americans, moderate southern whites, and conservative northern philanthropists." John David Smith, "*Southern Workman*", 365.

[298] Charles Sheeler contributed the photography in his collaboration with Marius de Zayas in *African Negro Wood Sculpture* for the Museum of Modern Art in 1918. Other notable photographers of African art include Walker Evans 1933 photographs of African sculpture for the Museum of Modern Art. Evans's photographs did not reach a large audience until many years later. Man Ray notably produced photographs of African sculpture during this period but his images were much more experimental and stand apart from the other examples.

[299] Grossman, 296. Unlike the photography that appeared in *Negerplastik* and *African Negro Wood Sculpture* unaccompanied by captions, Miner's photographs provide attributions to the people of West Central Africa, and sometimes more specifically attributed to ethnic group (Kuba).

was the official campus photographer for a generation.[300] His photographs of Hampton's student activities are representative of the types of publications that were important and effective in elevating the profile of historically Black institutions and provided a useful tool for campaigning and fundraising.[301]

Importantly, Miner's photographs that appeared in *Songs and Tales* and in the *Southern Workman* publicized the Sheppard collection and exposed it to a wider audience. Unlike the subjects they documented, photographs of artworks are easily circulated. Given that the Sheppard Collection was (and is) housed in a museum on the campus of a historically Black college, photographs of the collection were able to be seen by a wider audience than had the ability view the collection in person.

Conclusion

In conclusion, William Sheppard used photography to represent his status as an educated Black man and able-bodied man with a striking presence and power. Through photographs of Sheppard, we see that he distinguished himself from the Congolese people and comported himself in an aspirational manner consistent with his white contemporaries while positing

[300] Ray Sapirstein, "Out From Behind the Mask, Paul Laurence Dunbar, the Hampton Institute Camera Club, and Photographic Performance of Identity," in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, edited by Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 168.

[301] Powell, *To Conserve a Legacy*, 112. For a discussion of Miner's images of Hampton's students, see Sarah Hermanson Meister, "Learning the Meaning of Things," in *Frances Benjamin Johnston: The Hampton Album*, ed. Sarah Hermanson Meister (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2019), 7-8. Miner's images of Hampton students and classrooms built on the earlier photographs that Frances Benjamin Johnston took. Johnston (1864-1962) photographed the students of Hampton for several weeks over the course of December 1899 and January 1900. The school commissioned Johnston to photograph their students in a series of images that were meant to illustrate Hampton's educational philosophy. Her 150 images would go on to be included as part of the American Negro Exhibit in the 1900 Paris Exposition. In recent years, Johnston's photographs have been criticized for the way that they seem to cater to a "white dream for Black people."

himself as a modern man. Sheppard also used photography as a tool to document his missionary work and his relationship to the peoples he encountered, especially deploying photography to create a counternarrative to official colonial records. Photography was Sheppard's primary means of creating his personal archive and preserving a record of himself.

Photography similarly played a role in the understanding of the Sheppard Collection. Images of the works of art that Sheppard procured lent themselves to various forms of literature, from postcards to ethnographic publications. Photography of sculpture in the Sheppard Collection in particular traces the emergence of the relationship between fine art photography and African sculpture that we see in other twentieth century examples. Photography helps to trace the changing understandings of African art in the twentieth century. In the next chapter, I consider the transition of the Sheppard Collection from its original collector to its new home at Hampton and place these artworks within the wider context of early twentieth century debates about race and education at Hampton.

CHAPTER FOUR
Engaging the Sheppard Collection: Art and Pedagogy at Hampton

In a photograph from around 1920, a class of women students at Hampton stands gathered around one of the finest examples of Kuba cloth from the Sheppard Collection (Fig. 4.1). The Sheppard Collection had belonged to the Hampton Museum for nearly a decade when this photograph was taken. In the center, an older white woman, presumably a teacher, has unfurled the long wrapper textile and the students closely study its intricate pattern and texture. To the left, a smaller grouping of students scrutinizes another exemplary bark cloth. In the background, a leopard pelt hangs against the glass of a window. The students and their teacher appear admiring, even transfixed, by the sumptuous cloths. Sheppard had gathered these textiles and sold them to Hampton for this very purpose: to aid in the instruction of Hampton's students.

In this chapter, I consider the role of pedagogy in the formation of Hampton's art collection and the role that the collection may have had in influencing the institution's broader educational aims. I begin by unpacking the history of Hampton as an educational institution. Next, I look at how this history affected the reception of the Sheppard Collection and the designs for its encounters with Hampton's students. I trace the initial reception of the objects and how its placement in the museum connected to the school's foundational mission and intellectual project. The goal of this chapter is to chart the collection's evolution and perception as it moved from Africa to the United States, embodying diaspora.[302] Through the lens of the Sheppard Collection, I evaluate the Hampton Institute as an intellectual space in which ideas about Africa and the African American were being formed end evolved over

[302] The idea that African artworks "perform diaspora" is from John Peffer, "Notes on African Art, History, and Diasporas Within," *African Arts* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 70-77, 95-96.

time. I also consider what the collection might teach us about early twentieth-century African American perceptions of Africa. The chapter concludes with a discussion of other important works in Hampton's collection of art, particularly work created by African Americans, and a conversation about significant Black artists who were products of a Hampton education.

Pedagogical Foundations: The Hampton Idea

The Hampton Institute was founded as part of a complex racial project. A brief background of the Institute's founder elucidates the complexity. As noted in Chapter 1, the Institute was founded by a white man named Samuel Chapman Armstrong (1839-1893) who, after graduating from Williams College in Massachusetts, volunteered to join the Union Army in 1860, accepting a commission as captain. He was promoted from major to colonel and by March of 1865 at the age of twenty-six was named brigadier general of the 9th Regiment of U. S. Colored Troops. At the war's end, his reputation led the Freedmen's Bureau to appoint Armstrong as superintendent of Virginia's tidewater region, headquartered in the small town of Hampton.[303] Armstrong's access to government and military resources enabled him to establish the coed normal and industrial school at Hampton. The school opened in 1868 with just two teachers and fifteen students but the fledgling establishment quickly grew.[304]

[303] Established by Congress on March 3, 1865, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, more commonly known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was responsible for the management and supervision of matters related to refugees, freedpersons, and lands seized or abandoned during the Civil War. The Bureau conducted daily operations in the former Confederate states, Washington, D.C., and the border states until it was abolished in 1872. See https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau, accessed December 12, 2022.

[304] Lee D. Baker, "Research, Reform, and Racial Uplift: The Mission of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society, 1893–1899," in *Excluded Ancestors, Inventible Traditions: Essays Toward a More Inclusive History of Anthropology*, History of Anthropology Volume 9, edited by Richard Handler (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 46-47.

General S. C. Armstrong was the child of American missionaries on the Hawaiian and Sandwich Islands. His father, Dr. Richard Armstrong, became an important figure in Hawaii during the nineteenth century, influential both as a missionary and in his capacity as an advisor to King Kamehameha III. Dr. Armstrong's greatest legacy was the creation of several missionary and government schools which bore his educational philosophy, a combination of moral and industrial education with the goal of "civilizing" the Hawaiian natives.[305] The elder Armstrong admonished Hawaiians as "a lazy people" whose status might be improved through industry. His solution for establishing a "Christian civilization" in Hawaii was to be achieved through the education of the youth. The goal of this education would be to train "the heart, the head, and the body at once."[306] By this mantra Dr. Armstrong meant to provide instruction in matters spiritual, intellectual, and manual/industrial. Dr. Armstrong was critical of many Hawaiian and used visible cultural markers, such as changes in dress and dwelling structures, to measure how they were progressing along the scale from savagery to civilization.[307] Still, Dr. Armstrong endeared himself even to King Kamehameha IV, a noted skeptic of missionaries, because of his knowledge of Hawaiian language, customs, and folklore.[308]

General Armstrong absorbed his father's philosophies and translated that project to Hampton. He credited his father's influence on his own educational philosophy when he

[305] Baker, 45.

[306] Baker, 45.

[307] For a comparative example, see William Glover's discussion of object lessons in colonial India. William Glover, "Objects, Models, and Exemplary Works: Educating Sentiment in Colonial India." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 3 (August 2005): 539-566.

[308] Baker, 46.

described his early designs for the school. Like his father before him, the younger Armstrong harbored a belief in the natural laziness of the newly freed Black population. Training Blacks in specialized trades served the dual function of providing a means to secure employment as well as impose discipline that would counter idleness. Armstrong believed that through such disciplinary training, the Black population could overcome these negative impulses. The idea that enslaved or colonized peoples were naturally lazy and needed white discipline and guidance was pervasive in Western discourse of this era.[309] Citing his father's experiences in Hawaii, Armstrong adopted a curriculum for Hampton's students that would counter such indolence by teaching them to read and write as well as training them in industries. Armstrong called the school's educational philosophy, a combination of industrial and moral training, the "Hampton Idea."

Hampton, along with the other schools founded by the American Missionary Association (AMA) in this era, was originally created under the auspices of training newly emancipated Blacks to be teachers who would in turn train other members of their race.[310] The students of Hampton were to be "not only good teachers but skilled workers."[311] Many scholars uncritically praise Armstrong for his charitability and his lifelong dedication to the Hampton Institute but he was a man of his time who espoused views of Black Americans that

[309] See Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 199. "Given their natural laziness and indolence, negroes and other native peoples were in dire need, it was said, of externally imposed discipline."

[310] Robert Francis Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 141-42.

[311] S. C. Armstrong, "From the Beginning" in *Memories of Old Hampton* (Hampton, VA: The Hampton Institute Press, 1909), 5. Armstrong described two different schools in Hawaii, one run by the government and one run by missionaries. Armstrong believed that the Hawaiians who were instructed at the missionary school which concentrated on a combination of manual labor and learning English became "solid men." The Hawaiians who were educated at the government school with more of an emphasis on a classical liberal arts curriculum were decried as frequently "disappointing."

were paternalistic at best and often racist. Though he fought for the freedom of Black Americans, Armstrong believed that the goal of the new school was "to make of them not accomplished scholars, but to build up character and manhood."[312] He did not think it necessary to provide educational opportunities that equaled opportunities at elite white institutions but he did believe it prudent to train African Americans to read and write, learn trade skills, and above all, to provide the necessary tools for Hampton's students to train other African Americans. For Armstrong, educating Black Americans was the key to their race's "acquisition of civilization."[313] Armstrong is not a singular example of a white patron of Black causes and supporter of African American advancement who held racist views. The Harlem Renaissance-era philanthropist William E. Harmon maintained similar beliefs in the explicit inferiority of Black people, but he thought that someone with his wealth and stature was in a privileged position to provide tools for advancement that would make them a stronger group of people.[314] Armstrong did something similar in an earlier generation. As historian Robert Francis Engs puts it, for Armstrong "the goal of educating the Black man was as much the preservation of existing society as the edification of the Negro."[315]

Within twenty-five years of the university's founding, some 800 Hampton graduates were teaching more than 100,000 Black students across the country.[316] This, in turn, led to debates among the Black intellectual elite about what kind of education students should

[312] Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 143.

[313] Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 143.

[314] See *Against the Odds: Artists of the Harlem Renaissance*, directed by Amber Edwards (1994; Alexandria, VA: PBS Video), 17:40- 18:31. https://youtu.be/AuV-sTH9vgM

[315] Engs, *Freedom's First Generation*, 144.

[316] Robert Francis Engs, *Educating the Disfranchised and Disinherited: Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Hampton Institute, 1839-1893*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 144.

receive at these institutions. Many of the ideas upon which Hampton was founded would play into later debates between Black intellectuals such as Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. Washington, an alumnus and one-time principal at Hampton, espoused many of Armstrong's philosophies, while Du Bois, an alumnus of Fisk University in Nashville, criticized Hampton's curricula for not being progressive enough.

Hampton at the Center of Educational Debate

By the early twentieth century, debates about the relationship between education and the attainment of social equality became pronounced among the African American elite. The two most prominent voices – Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois – represented increasingly divergent viewpoints. While both of men generally agreed on matters of economic uplift and self-help and self-determination, they strongly disagreed on the means for achieving African American economic and social progress. Washington championed an accommodationist policy that urged Black Americans to accept the status quo for the time being and concentrate on elevating themselves through hard work and material prosperity, rather than pursue full social and legal equality with whites.[317] Du Bois criticized Washington's strategy as a model that would only serve to perpetuate white oppression. Instead, he believed that social equality and economic opportunities for African Americans could be secured only through gaining political rights.[318] The two men's philosophies affected their views on education as well. Washington believed an industrial educational

[317] Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003).

[318] Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to New Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 117.

model was more appropriate for Black students who would be trained in the vocational arts of teaching, sewing, carpentry, agriculture, and mechanics, rather than through a liberal arts education curriculum. [319]

Upon his death, Du Bois acknowledged the late Booker T. Washington as the "most distinguished man, white or black, who has come out of the south since the Civil War." In the same article, Du Bois also condemned Washington for bearing "a heavy responsibility for the consummation of Negro disenfranchisement, the decline of the Negro college and public school, and the firmer establishment of color caste in this land."[320] The Black intellectual elite bifurcated on this issue: Du Bois's supporters disliked the "conservative" orientation of Washington's strategies; Washington's followers in turn criticized Du Bois's views as overly radical.

The above debates were directly relevant to the way that Hampton students were educated. Like Black Americans in general, Hampton's alumni were not a homogenous body and likely many aligned themselves with Du Bois's perspective or found themselves somewhere in between the two philosophies.[321] However, the fact remains that Hampton was an institution with an overwhelmingly majority white faculty and zero Black representation on its board of directors during this period.[322] Hampton's students were most likely not in a

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[319] https://educationalrenaissance.com/2021/10/30/educating-to-transform-society-the-washington-dubois-debate/, accessed March 18, 2024. The school adhered to this model of education into the 1920s. By the 1950s the agricultural and trades courses were phased out.

[320] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Booker T. Washington," *The Crisis* 11, no. 2 (December 1915): 82.

[321] "Very few Hampton alumni became black militants, but few became fawning accommodationists either." Engs, *Educating the Disfranchised and Disinherited*, 143.

[322] Despite an interracial faculty, the administration remained exclusively white until the 1940s. The school did not have a Black president until 1949. See https://www.hamptonu.edu/about/history.cfm, accessed 15 March 2022.

position to speak freely if they held more progressive viewpoints. In that regard, Booker T. Washington's policies likely influenced or reinforced the industrial bent of the Hampton's curriculum.

Du Bois specifically criticized Hampton's pedagogical model in an editorial that he published in the journal *Crisis* in 1917. J. E. Davis (previously mentioned in Chapter 1 for her article on the Hampton pageant) wrote to Du Bois on the occasion of Hampton's fiftieth anniversary asking if he would share his thoughts on why some African Americans were opposed to Hampton's model of industrial education. Du Bois not only acquiesced to Ms. Davis's request, he also published his response in the *Crisis*, the NAACP's official publication.[323] Du Bois argued "We do not feel at present that Hampton is our school—on the contrary, we feel that she belongs to the white South and the reactionary North."[324] He recognized Hampton as probably "the best center for trade-teaching of Negroes in the United States," but stated that he and other educated African Americans held "some of [Hampton's] methods in grave distrust."[325] Du Bois, who believed in the idea of a "talented tenth", concurred with Washington that nine-tenths of Hampton's students needed only industrial education, but argued that for the one-tenth of students with particular academic aptitude were prevented from attaining a higher level of education on par with "the leading educational institutions of the United States" should they enroll at Hampton.[326] He further pointed out that Hampton had defended such choices by asserting that "the Negro does not

[323] Du Bois founded *The Crisis* in 1910.

[324] W. E. B. DuBois, "Editorial: Hampton," *The Crisis* 15, no. 1 (November 1917): 11.

[325] Du Bois, "Editorial: Hampton": 10.

[326] For discussion of the talented tenth as an ideology, see Carol Lynn Stewart, "Challenging Liberal Justice: The Talented Tenth Revisited," in Chester J. Fontenot and Mary Keller, eds., *Re-cognizing W.E.B. Du Bois in the Twenty-First Century* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 112-141.

need college training" and that if other institutions did not fit the Hampton model of study it is *they* that are in the wrong. Du Bois opined that because Black Americans from the South began their lives in such a disadvantaged position, they did not know their own educational capability and that rather than "sift" through this population of students and send particularly intelligent ones to institutions where they might obtain advanced educational degrees, Hampton did not seek to help such students.

Du Bois also took issue with what he perceived as Hampton's lack of support for and fellowship with other educational institutions for African Americans, as well as for the lack of Negro representation among the school's faculty and board of directors.[327] It was his belief that Hampton did not adequately listen to, represent, or allow for the voice of educated African Americans. Summarizing his thoughts, Du Bois wrote:

> I reiterate my respect for [Hampton]…but I insist that no school which deliberately curtails the training of the talented, refuses to guide her apter[*sic*] students to their greatest development, save in restricted lines, and not only gives her beneficiaries little or no voice in its control, but seems to harbor and encourage their enemies—no such school is reaching its greatest usefulness.[328]

How these competing intellectual views shaped the Hampton Museum and the students' interaction with the museum collection was not isolated from educational interests. In the same paragraph, Du Bois praised the Sheppard Collection for its beauty and role in "stimulating race pride," a celebration of African artistry, and the implication that these works could serve as inspiration for the students' own industrial projects.[329] There is at once

[327] Du Bois, "Editorial: Hampton," 11-12.

[328] Du Bois, "Editorial: Hampton," 12.

[329] Du Bois, "Editorial: Hampton," 12. Students at Hampton could take courses in careers such as carpentry and tailoring for which Kuba examples of wood sculpture and textiles held the potential for inspiration.

a celebration of African art in a way that anticipates the Harlem Renaissance and a tempering of this praise with criticism of its connection to training in the trades and industries. These principles are not inherently in conflict, but they do illustrate the friction of this debate over educational philosophies.

The Sheppard Collection in the Hampton Museum

The Sheppard Collection arrived on the campus of the Hampton Institute in the summer of 1911. There, the collection joined an already established collection of artworks, the majority of which represented Native Americans or the art of non-western peoples, with the earliest acquisition dating to the institution's founding in 1868. S. C. Armstrong encouraged "teaching by the most practical method", which for him included lessons that were accompanied by demonstrations with museum objects whenever possible.[330] Although Sheppard's were not the first African works of art to be added to the museum, the collection was quickly appreciated for its superior quality and breadth.

It was Armstrong himself who championed the idea of a Hampton Museum whose collection would be primarily used for the instructional edification of the student body. In part inspired by his own experience as the child of missionaries in Hawaii as well as the European tradition of collecting exotic wonders, Armstrong desired for Hampton to have its own permanent collection. Though Armstrong used the term "museum" from the beginning in his discussions of his intent for the collection, the original space that housed the museum

[330] Letter from Armstrong quoted in "'Things African Prove to be the Favorite Theme:' The African Collection at Hampton University," *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, by Susan Vogel et. al (New York: Prestel, 1989), 97. Originally found in S.C. Armstrong to Mrs. C.C. Armstrong, Hampton University Archives, n.d.

collection was called the "Curiosity Room." [331] This nineteenth-century term referred to a space for housing diverse collections of anthropological, zoological, and botanical specimens and its origins lie with the sixteenth-and-seventeenth-century tradition of *Wunderkammer* and *Kunstkammer* in Europe.[332] The Museum's foundational pieces came from non-western cultures. Armstrong solicited the first objects in the collection from his mother, asking her to send "curiosities of all kinds" from the Pacific. The museum's original location was in the Institute's main instruction building, the Academic Hall, which unfortunately burned down in 1879 and destroyed the majority of the early collection. After the fire, the museum reopened in Marshall Hall in 1882. The collection remained in that location until 1968 when it moved to the Academy Building. In 1997 the museum moved to its present location in the Huntington Building, originally the school's library.[333] Over the years, the collection became more specific in its efforts to establish a connection with its African American student body, seeking works of African origins to foster "race pride" in the students' ancestral cultures.[334] The earliest African acquisitions were acquired in 1880, including a neck ornament and a headdress from Sierra Leone, donated to the Museum by alumnus Akrel E. White, a missionary. By the time that Sheppard's Collection came to Hampton, additional examples in the Museum's African collection included natural history specimens and twenty-nine beaded

[331] Hultgren, 44.

[332] "Royal, noble, and bourgeois" European collections that fall under this nomenclature often contained examples of African art. See Ezio Bassani and Malcolm McLeod, "African Material in Early Collections," in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth-and-Seventeenth-Century Europe*, eds. Oliver Impey and Arthur Macgregor, 337-344 (1985; repr., London: House of Stratus, 2001).

[333] Hultgren, 45. For a timeline of the museum, see https://home.hamptonu.edu/msm/about-us/.

[334] Folsom, 1917.

Zulu objects.[335] A 1905 photograph of the Hampton Museum, then located in Marshall Hall, presents a cozy space with rugs and chairs oriented toward a great fireplace (Fig. 4.2). The walls are lined with wood and glass cabinetry containing examples of non-western art. Though difficult to discern from the photograph, a large number of the objects appear to be examples of Native American basketry.[336] Taken six years prior to accessioning the Sheppard Collection, this photograph gives an idea of how the space would have looked when the Kuba objects arrived.

In the year of the Sheppard Collection acquisition, Folsom noted how the museum was of great interest in general to the students of Hampton "many of whom have never seen so much as a department store, and are, of course, excluded from all southern white museums."[337] She would reiterate this point again six years later as the school made plans for a museum expansion, writing to a Hampton board member "all but Northern Museums are closed to Negroes, and for the students who come to the South and return to it, that form of education is denied. This has made it seem best to broaden as much as possible the scope of our effort in that direction here."[338] By 1918, the school was making plans to expand the museum. In May 1917, Folsom wrote that since moving to its present location in 1905, the collection "has rapidly increased in volume and value."[339]

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[335] Hultgren, 45.

[336] Hampton had a program for Native American students which ran from 1878-1923. The Native American students were educated separately from the African American students. See Engs, *Educating the Disfranchised and Disinherited*, 115-129.

[337] Cora Folsom Collection, Annual Reports and Museum Reports, 1911, HUA.

[338] Cora M. Folsom to Dr. Hanus, May 19, 1917, HUA.

[339] Cora M. Folsom to Dr. Hanus, May 19, 1917, HUA

Annie Coombes has written extensively about London's turn-of-the-century missionary societies' display of objects collected by missionaries, many of which were featured in prominent exhibitions. Some of these English missionaries worked in the Congo at the same time as Sheppard. As indicated by these (rather large) exhibitions, it is clear that British missionaries espoused a similar ideology to Sheppard with regard to the African art they acquired. In the same way that Sheppard described the Kuba as skilled makers and noble people to American audiences, British missionary exhibitions characterized the artistic production of their communicants using similar language. This indicates that a common thread among Protestant missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century was to underscore the talent and originality of the Africans as well as their humanity. We must bear in mind that though the presentation may have been similar, these missionary exhibitions espoused rather different ideologies from contemporary colonial exhibitions, where much more derogatory verbiage was used to refer to the same types of artworks.[340] Missionary exhibitions were an important way to draw in the interest of a larger public and to hopefully gain both emotional and financial support from visitors to these great displays.

Similar exhibitions did exist in the United States but there is no evidence to suggest Sheppard was involved with them.[341] However, Sheppard traveled throughout the United States while on furlough and carried artworks from his collection with him, as has been previously discussed. As a missionary to Africa, Sheppard could capitalize on both Christian evangelical sentiment, a general American interest in exoticism, and an African American

[340] Coombes, 161-186. Coombes cites the use of the word "artisan" as a particular departure from the terminology that was used at colonial exhibitions, who tended to refer to non-western artists as savages.

[341] See Hasinoff (2011).

interest in ancestral cultural heritage. Sheppard's race gave him the additional benefit of appeal to Black Christians, many of who were intrigued by the adventures and exploits of one of their own. These factors put Sheppard in a prime position for shaping understandings of Africa and African cultures, as well as circulating images of them.

Artworks in Transition

Sheppard's own practices with his art acquisitions established the formula for how his collection would be utilized by teachers at Hampton when it became part of the Hampton Museum. During his missionary furloughs and after he returned to the United States permanently in 1910, Sheppard traveled extensively on a lecture circuit. Before Hampton purchased his collection, contemporaneous accounts reveal that Sheppard frequently used examples from his collection as accompaniments to his lectures and to promote interest in African cultures. Sheppard's lectures incorporated his impressive examples of Kuba cultural patrimony not only as a way to authenticate his message, but also to provoke interest in the talent and creativity of his communicants and inspire his audiences. Sheppard's object lessons coincided with the pedagogical ideals of Swiss reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) whose educational philosophy, "Learning by head, hand, and heart," likely provided the inspiration for Armstrong's vision for Hampton.[342]

Pestalozzi's object theory proposed that observation, description, naming, and classification of objects was the best way to promote higher learning in children. In practice, an educator would present their students with an object or series of objects and ask

[342] Prior to marrying his father, Armstrong's mother Clarissa Chapman, was a teacher at the Pestalozzian Infant School in Brooklyn, New York. Hultgren, 58: footnote 6.

increasingly complex questions in order to move from the most basic to increasingly deeper levels of perception and understanding. A lesson would begin with encouraging students to carefully observe an object and then to prompt them to describe what they observed. Educators around the world employed Pestalozzi's object-lesson pedagogy with differing motivations.[343] While Pestalozzi encouraged the empirical observation of objects in order to teach about the natural world, British object lessons often taught about colonial commodities in order to instruct students, both implicitly and explicitly, that they belonged to a larger imperial world.[344] For instance, Parna Sengupta has demonstrated the way that Elizabeth Mayo's *Lessons on Objects* (1832) instructed British children about pepper plants from Southeast Asia in order to connect the "foreign-ness" and "exotic" qualities of the plant with the peoples and places of its origins.[345] Taking this further, William Glover argues that the object lesson posited a connection between the close observation of the material world and the moral development of the observer.[346]

Whether or not the teachers at Hampton explicitly invoked the object lessons of Pestalozzi and Mayo, it is credible to assume that Armstrong was influenced by this method of teaching through his missionary parents and desired to promote it at Hampton. Similarly, Hampton faculty were especially eager to embrace the Sheppard Collection, more than for their beauty or perceived usefulness in teaching, but because it was created by African

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[343] Parna Sengupta, "An Object Lesson in Colonial Pedagogy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 1 (January 2003): 96.

[344] Sengupta, 97.

[345] Sengupta, 96-121. See also Elizabeth Mayo, *Lessons on Objects, as Given to Children Between the Ages of Five and Eight, in a Pestalozzian School, At Cheam, Surrey*, 3rd ed. (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1832). Mayo's book was reprinted dozens of time and slightly altered versions were created for older children.

[346] Glover, 540.

"ancestors" of Hampton's student body. In her annual museum report from 1911, curator Cora Mae Folsom took note of the value of Sheppard's Collection for Hampton's students: "To the Negro it is a great aid to respect of race to find their ancestors capable of the taste and skill exhibited by the articles that have come from the hand of African men and women."[347] Folsom's reports and letters do not describe how she or other teachers might have specifically incorporated the Sheppard Collection into lessons, but she routinely invokes its importance for making connections with material and industrial pedagogy at Hampton as well as interest in the origins of the objects.

The works of the Sheppard Collection were fundamentally changed by their coming to the United States. At the most basic level, these objects had not all existed together in the same location (apart from the broad region of Central Africa) or been arranged together in one location until Sheppard assembled them and brought them to Hampton. In essence, their arrival to the Hampton Institute is one of example of the way these works of art embody the African diaspora. Their relocation to the curiosity room-turned-Hampton Museum brought the works of art together for the first time displayed alongside works from disparate parts of the globe and interacting with an audience to which they were foreign and new. While Sheppard's writings brim with descriptions of his fascination with the artistry and creativity of the Kuba, his accounts do not provide us with information about how the Kuba viewed their material culture. Susan Vogel argues that because during the precolonial period African creators did not usually claim their status as artists or use language to describe their works as art, coupled with the fact that their cultural production largely failed to correspond to Euro-American standards for art, most African objects were relegated to ethnographic collections

[347] Folsom, Museum Annual Report 1911, Hampton University Archives.

and anthropology museums when they were taken abroad.[348] While Sheppard carefully recorded the functions of the works of art he collected, his written descriptions could not convey the visual, experiential, and cultural contexts out of which the objects came.

By the time the objects in the Sheppard Collection came to be a part of Hampton's permanent collection, Hampton's "curiosity room" had begun to undergo a transformation of its own. For one, the space was no longer referred to as a curiosity room but was being called a museum. Though it differed little in terms of appearance and installation, the name change reflected the dynamic attitudes of its organizers. When Hampton acquired the Sheppard Collection, the institution was singular in its frequent references to the African collection as works of art rather than artifacts.

The debate over designating African cultural objects as art or artifacts was raging in Europe and the United States during the early 20th century, with much discussion on their coevality, or lack thereof, with Western contemporary practices. Art historian John Peffer has written about the way that African art has historically been, and in many ways continues to be, treated as temporarily undifferentiated and outside of time. While other fields of art historical inquiry are typically arranged around distinct eras and geographies, African art history has been relegated to the continental and largely stripped of meaningful temporal markers.[349] This has begun to change in twenty-first century scholarship, but temporal issues are often a barrier for those who are not historians of the art of Africa. Anachronisms originating from this issue were present in turn of the twentieth-century museums, such as

[348] Susan Vogel, "Introduction," *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, by Susan Vogel et. al (New York: Prestel, 1989), 13.

[349] Peffer, 70. See also Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

Hampton. The Sheppard Collection represents a range of historical periods of creation but the Museum did not emphasize this. While some of its objects were quite old, others were new and contemporaneous. Yet museum organizers continually refer to the Sheppard Collection as ancestral. Sheppard himself focused more on the contextual aspects of his collection and described the Kuba in the present tense. Still, even his writings reflect the tendency to consider Africa as a place out of time, stuck in the past; "living fossils," to borrow Vogel's term.[350]

The above contradiction between art that "has no history" and is also "relegated to the past" and thus referred to in the ethnographic present (out of time), and general conceptions of art in the Western tradition did not seem to affect Hampton's African American student body's implicit understanding that their "African ancestors were capable of much taste and skill."[351] In this regard, Cora Folsom's papers provide some evidence of how the Sheppard Collection was utilized by students and faculty at Hampton. In her annual reviews, Folsom tallied the number of times the museum space was used for a certain purpose. Her records indicate that each year the museum was used most frequently for Agricultural and Academic classes but we also see that she actively promoted instruction through direct contact with artworks in the Museum's collection. In her annual report from 1912, completed in the first year after the Sheppard acquisition, Folsom wrote, "Things African prove to be the favorite theme. The boys and the girls find great interest in this really fine exhibit…I open the cases and let them handle most of the objects while explaining them."[352] Likewise, female students

[350] Vogel, 13.

[351] Cora M. Folsom, Annual Report January 1, 1911, HUA.

[352] Cora M. Folsom, Annual Report, 1912, HUA.

in the Domestic Arts Department appear to have used the extensive collection for lessons in textiles as seen in the previously mentioned photograph of a group of students with Kuba bark cloth from the Sheppard Collection.

Beyond the Sheppard Collection: The Hampton Museum Collection Expands

At the same time that William Sheppard acquired his art collection in the Congo, Hampton established its own collection of African American art. Hampton's first acquisitions of African American art were a pair of paintings by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937) in 1894. The premiere African American artist of his time, Tanner trained with Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia and was the first Black artist to be admitted to the National Academy of Design in 1909. From 1893 until his death, Tanner lived in and around Paris. Of the two paintings acquired by the Hampton Museum, *The Banjo Lesson* is by far the greater appreciated and is considered one of the most important works in Tanner's oeuvre. Completed in 1893, the painting depicts an older Black man instructing a young Black child in the art of the banjo (Fig. 4.3).[353] The scene is tender and intimate, with the pair seated in a private space and deep in concentration. The soft light and feathery brushstrokes point to the influence of European impressionism on Tanner's work. David C. Driskell called *The Banjo Lesson* "a monumental work, not so much in size as its affirmation

[353] These two paintings were an 1894 gift to Hampton from Robert C. Ogden, a trustee of the board. The second painting is called *The Lion's Head*. Interestingly, Tanner was considered one of the great painters of lions during his time! The artist painted a wide variety of subject matter before he gained fame with *The Banjo Lesson*: these include landscapes, seascapes, paintings of animals, and religious subjects. He was extremely accomplished in all of areas.

of [Tanner's] mastery."[354] After these two earliest acquisitions, Hampton continued to add steadily to its collection of works by Black artists.

From February 7 to March 5, 1927, the New Art Circle Gallery in New York City held an exhibition of nearly 1,000 Central African artworks from the collection of Belgian diplomat Raoul Blondiau. The exhibition, the *Blondiau-Theatre Arts Collection of Primitive African Art*, was one of the earliest exhibitions of African art in the United States. Alain Locke was highly instrumental in securing the acquisition and exhibition of this collection. He wrote the foreword to the exhibition, expressing his wishes that the exhibition would inspire new generations of African American artists, stating that the exposure to African art would inspire Black Americans to "recapture the heritage of creative originality and to carry it to distinctive new achievements."[355] At the close of the exhibition, Hampton trustee George Foster Peabody secured the purchase of fifty objects for the Hampton Museum intended to complement the Sheppard Collection.[356]

Artist relationships

As the museum collection grew, the twentieth century saw Hampton become a place where the visual arts flourished. In 1939, Viktor Lowenfeld (1903-1960), a Jewish refugee and arts educator from Vienna, Austria arrived at Hampton's campus. Lowenfeld had studied at the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry where he learned of the influence that African art held

[354] David C. Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Art* (exhibition catalogue) (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), 50.

[355] Alain Locke quoted in *A Taste for the Beautiful: Zairian Art from the Hampton University Museum* (Hampton, VA: Hampton University Museum, 1993), 25. See also *Blondiau-Theatre Arts Collection of Primitive African Art Exhibition Catalogue* (New York, 1927).

[356] Hultgren, 49.

over European modernism. He had additional experience as director of an African art and ceramics museum in Vienna, so he was more familiar with African art than most during this period. As he taught directly from the Sheppard Collection, Lowenfeld's enthusiasm for African art was contagious to his students.[357]

Lowenfeld continued to be a catalyst for exciting developments in the arts at Hampton when he invited artists Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012) and Charles White (1918-1979) to Hampton University's campus in 1943. The pair, who were married at the time but later divorced, spent a brief but productive tenure as visiting instructors in the art department at Hampton. White, who had trained at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, created one of his most significant works, *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* (1943) during his time at the Hampton Institute (Fig. 4.4). The impressive mural, eleven feet by seventeen feet, was painted with egg tempera directly onto the plaster in Hampton's Clarke Hall. The painting, White's only mural painted in situ and not on canvas, celebrates the important contributions of Black Americans to the history of the United States. It featured the likenesses of important Black American figures, such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Denmark Vesey, and Hampton alum Booker T. Washington, among many others. His style reveals the influence of Mexican muralists, both ideologically in terms of his interest in political and historical content and visually, with their massive figures, condensed spaces, and teeming composition. John Biggers and Samella Lewis recalled working as student-assistants for White as he painted the mural, modeling for his figures and helping to crack eggs to form his tempera.[358] White's influence is particularly notable in Biggers' own murals.

[357] Hultgren, 50-51.

[358] Hampton recently received a $75,000 preservation grant from African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund for the mural's conservation. See https://home.hamptonu.edu/msm/2021/08/17/hampton-university-

Long before Elizabeth Catlett was recognized as one of the premiere Black artists of the twentieth century, the printmaker, painter, and sculptor worked for a brief time at the Hampton Institute. Catlett trained at Howard University with the influential artists James Porter, Loïs Mailou Jones, and James Lesesne Wells. In 1940 she earned an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa, becoming the first Black woman to attain an advanced degree from that university. She taught briefly at Dillard University, a historically Black college in New Orleans, where she began her decades-long mentorship of Samella Sanders Lewis. At Viktor Lowenfeld's invitation, Catlett and her then-husband Charles White spent six months teaching in Hampton's Art department in 1943. A Julius Rosenwald Fellowship facilitated Catlett's travels to Mexico City and began her association with the Taller de Gráfica Popular (People's Graphic Arts Workshop). As a part of that artists' collective, Catlett began working in linocut, the medium for which she is perhaps most recognized. There are over one hundred of Catlett's works on paper in the Hampton Museum's collection.[359] Among them are several examples from Catlett's *Negro Women Series* (the artist later renamed this series *Black Women Series*), including *I Have Special Reservations* (1946, printed later) (Fig. 4.5). The linocut is an excellent example of Catlett's technical prowess in the medium and her ability to powerfully communicate using sparse imagery. The composition is closely fixed on the central figure of a Black woman. The inner fitment overhead and rows of other seated Black people let the viewer know the woman is a passenger on a bus. With Catlett's inclusion of the sign in front of the subject that reads "Colored Only," we learn the artist's political

receives-75000-preservation-grant-to-sustain-historic-mural-housed-on-campus/, accessed 5 September, 2023.

[359] Kenneth G. Rodgers, "Elizabeth Catlett," in *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, edited by Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 181.

messaging. The "special reservations" of the work's title are a reference to the segregated seating of public transportation in the Jim Crow South. Catlett portrays the humanity and dignity of the bus passengers as she calls attention to the segregationist policies in the Jim Crow South. The Black woman appears steadfast and determined, not downtrodden or weak. Catlett's mastery of linocut is revealed through her ability to capture mood and expressiveness through incisive lines and black ink.

One of Lowenfeld's earliest pupils, John Thomas Biggers (1924-2001), enrolled at Hampton in 1941. Entering the school intending to become a plumber, an evening art class with Lowenfeld convinced Biggers to become an art major.[360] Lowenfeld's instruction alongside the Sheppard Collection encouraged his students to appreciate the great treasure held on their campus.[361] Studying under Lowenfeld, Biggers was exposed to the arts of Africa which provided fruitful inspiration throughout his career. Biggers left Hampton to serve in the Navy during World War II but resumed his education at Pennsylvania State University upon his return.[362] Biggers carried on the Hampton creed to educate other African Americans when in 1949, he founded the art department at Texas State University for Negroes (today Texas Southern University). He continued to teach there until his retirement in 1983. In 1957, Biggers was awarded a UNESCO grant to study in West Africa and he spent six months traveling in Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, and Dahomey (present-day Republic of Benin) during the decades when independence movements took hold of the African continent. Influenced by his trip to Africa, Biggers' work became the tool that he used to

[360] Powell and Reynolds, 178.

[361] Alvia J. Wardlaw, "John Biggers," in *African Modernism in America*, edited by Perrin Lathrop (New York: American Federation of Art, 2022), 100.

[362] Biggers followed mentor and teacher Viktor Lowenfeld to Penn State.

teach his students and colleagues about the importance of African arts and culture. He was known to encourage his students to research a historical subject and present the narrative visually. Many such works created under Biggers' tutelage explore themes of Africa and the diaspora.[363]

The Hampton Museum boasts a collection of over one hundred works from this prolific alumnus. *Old Man* (1945) is an example of the type of painting that Biggers executed as a student of Lowenfeld's at Hampton (Fig. 4.6). This early painting is one of a series that was inspired by a people that the artist encountered around his hometown of Gastonia, North Carolina. The titular old man with a silver-tipped hoary beard stoops over a cane. A few scraggly cotton blossoms grow upward. Though mostly rendered in dark hues, the canvas is rich with Biggers' subtle gradations of color and texture. *Old Man* incorporates none of the African symbols and motifs Biggers would become known for after his first trip to the continent. Still, this relatively small work foreshadows the same soulfulness and depth that Biggers is known for in his murals, the artform that that is most representative of his career as an artist.

Samella S. Lewis (1924-2022) graduated from the Hampton Institute in 1945 and earned a Ph.D. in Art History in 1951—the first Black woman to do so—from the Ohio State University. Lewis returned to teach at the Hampton Institute and later taught at the HBCUs Morgan State College and Florida A&M, and finally at Scripps College. Lewis wrote one of the first textbooks on African American art, *Art: African American* (1978), Supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Lewis founded the Los Angeles Museum of African American Art in 1976. That same year, she founded the journal *Black Art: An*

[363] Wardlaw, 100.

International Quarterly (now known as the *International Review of African American Art*), which is published out of her alma mater Hampton University.[364] Lewis is perhaps better known as an art historian but she was also an accomplished artist. Her works, mostly paintings and works on paper, are represented widely in museum collections, including at Hampton.

Lewis came to Hampton in 1943 at the encouragement of her mentor, Catlett, who had been her professor at Dillard University. Believing in her young student's aptitude, Catlett persuaded Lewis that she would receive more rigorous art instruction at Hampton.[365] Lewis's important early painting *Waterboy* (1944) is one such example of her work in Hampton's collection (Fig. 4.7). Completed the year after she arrived at Hampton, *Waterboy* is Lewis's first painting on canvas. The painting is inspired by Lewis's childhood summers visiting relatives in the Bayou region of Louisiana. She recalled that her relatives carried water in heavy buckets for daily personal use and that she too was assigned this tedious chore. Lewis did not complete the painting to fulfill a class assignment but rather worked late into the evenings in the school studio. Lowenfeld pushed her to not "muddy" the colors in the painting so Lewis opted to paint the work entirely with a palette knife.[366] The expression and color in this early work anticipate the experimentation and expressiveness to come in her long career.

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[364] Harrison Smith, "Samella Lewis, tireless champion of African American art, dies at 99," *The Washington Post*, May 31, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/obituaries/2022/05/31/artist-samella-lewis-dead/, accessed 5 September 2023.

[365] Jeanne Zeidler, "Samella Sanders Lewis" in *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, edited by Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 213.

[366] Zeidler, "Samella Sanders Lewis," 213.

Samella Lewis said that "Art is not a luxury as many people think. It is a necessity. It documents history—it helps educate people and stores knowledge for generations to come."[367] Lewis's statement connects the importance of art to education. Though the establishment of the Hampton Museum has roots in colonialist ideology, Black men and women became the primary audience for an increasingly important and expansive collection of art. Whilst forbidden access from other cultural spaces, Hampton's students were granted permission and even encouraged to interact with valuable works of art. In the next chapter I will consider how Hampton's reputation as a haven for Black arts may have served as an inspiration to other HBCUs.

[367] Samella Lewis quoted in Shantay Robinson, "Dr. Samella Lewis: The Godmother of African American Art," Black Art in America, February 7, 2022. https://www.blackartinamerica.com/blogs/news/dr-samella-lewis-the-godmother-of-african-american-art, accessed March 1, 2024.

CHAPTER FIVE
The Hampton Collection as Paradigm: Historically Black Colleges in the History of American Collecting

While this dissertation's focus is on the Sheppard Collection, this chapter highlights other important acquisitions of the Hampton Museum, which grew to encompass the work of African American and modern African artists. I consider what it means for Hampton's collection to be a primogenitor of art collections at historically Black colleges. In analyzing the holdings at Fisk and Howard universities, I argue that Hampton is a model precursor for the centrality of art to larger issues of pedagogy in African American education. Historically Black colleges and universities share deeply connected histories. As the original spaces in which Black Americans were educated, these schools have produced extraordinarily talented alumni who have gone on to educate students at other historically Black institutions and elsewhere. Over the course of the 150 or so years since Emancipation, HBCUs produced great artists, teachers, and thinkers who have shaped the trajectory of the visual arts in this country.

From the moment of their founding, HBCUs faced a monumental uphill battle against discrimination, lack of funding and resources, and administering to an undereducated population largely composed of the formerly enslaved. Arising from the least-privileged conditions, these institutions undoubtedly housed the most valuable troves of work by African Americans. Even as "mainstream" museums have begun to reach parity in their collections of work by Black artists, HBCU collections remain some of the world's premiere examples.[368] Given their astounding financial and political disadvantages, it cannot be

[368] Edmund Barry Gaither, "Our Commonwealth, Our Collections," in *The International Review of African American Art* 11, no. 4 (1994): 57.

overstated how remarkable it is that so many historically Black educational institutions boast such fine collections of art.

The Hampton Institute exemplifies the numerous institutions of higher learning established specifically for formally enslaved and free Blacks in the United States after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in 1863. Like Hampton, some of these other institutions established collections of art and campus museums. Most of this dissertation has concerned itself with Hampton's collection of African art but its museum was additionally the site of the first major publicly accessible collection of African American art. It is important that its campus held the only museum collection of African American art until Howard University opened its art gallery in 1928.[369]

Historically Black colleges collected works from Black artists before other American museums. In *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum*, Bridget Cooks argues that African American art began to enter museums in the twentieth century according to one of two methodologies.[370] The first methodology she presents is the anthropological model, which was similar to the way that African art entered Western museums. In such cases the work of Black artists was displayed to show their difference from mainstream, white artists. She also argues that there was a corrective approach, in which institutions began to show the work of Black artists as a way to introduce white audiences to overlooked Black artists. Cooks' research is important for examining the history of Black art

[369] Kinshasa Holman Conwill, "Introduction," *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities* edited by Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 11.

[370] Bridget R. Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011.

in museums, the history of its presentation, and public access to and interaction with it. Cooks does not pretend that the case studies she presents are the only such historically important ones, but she fails to consider that historically Black colleges were acquiring and exhibiting the work of Black artists long before other American museums.

The Harmon Foundation

A significant contributor to Hampton's growing collection of art was the school's relationship to the Harmon Foundation. The Harmon Foundation was created by real estate developer William E. Harmon in 1922 to promote "African American self-determination" and to recognize "outstanding individual achievement" in the arts among African Americans.[371] Hampton's association with the Foundation began in 1920s. The Foundation closed in 1967 and its collection was dispersed among a number of American institutions, including historically Black colleges. Hampton was one such institution and it acquired hundreds of works of art—paintings, sculptures, and works on paper— from the Foundation between 1967 and 1968.[372] Through this process the museum gained hundreds of works from key artists of the Harlem Renaissance such as Hale Woodruff (1900-1980), Archibald Motley, Jr. (1891-1981), Aaron Douglas (1899-1979), and modernists such as Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000).[373] Importantly, Hampton, along with Howard University, became the

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[371] Nicholas Miller, "The Harmon Foundation," January 9, 2023, Grove Art Online, https://doi-org.proxy.library.ucsb.edu/10.1093/oao/9781884446054.013.90000369395, accessed August 23, 2003.

[372] Jeanne Zeidler, "Hampton University Museum," in *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, edited by Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 23.

[373] These African artworks are chronicled in Perrin M. Lathrop, ed., *African Modernism in America*. New York: American Federation of Arts, 2022.

recipient of the Harmon Foundation's collections of modern African art. With the Harmon bequest, these two HBCUs agreed to exhibit "art that is going on in contemporary Africa."[374] The Foundation gave Hampton over 200 paintings, prints, and sculptures by more than forty modern African artists. Hampton's holdings now included works from influential artists such as the Ethiopian Alexander "Skunder" Boghossian (1937-2003), Nigerians Ben Enwonwu (1917-1994) and Lamidi Olonade Fakeye (1928-2009), and pioneer Black South African Gerard Sekoto (1913-1993), among many others.[375]

Skunder Boghossian's *Ghosts of the Atlantic Ocean* (1964) (Fig. 5.1) was one of the paintings the Harmon Foundation donated to the Hampton Museum in 1967. The painting is representative of Boghossian's abstract style and his complex visual palette. Black and white geometric patterns are repeated across the surface of the highly-textured work. Fragmented circular shapes evoke human and animal-like faces scattered across a turbulent blue sea. The title alludes to both the historic Middle Passage as well as Boghossian's own diasporic experience as an African expatriate. Boghossian is considered one of the foremost painters of modern Ethiopian art and has influenced generations of artists who have followed. The connections between the African continent and HBCUs continued to flourish well into the twentieth century: Boghossian took up a position as professor of painting at Howard University in Washington, D. C. in 1974 where he taught until his retirement in 2001.

Another notable painting that Hampton acquired from the Harmon Foundation is Ben Enwonwu's *Tête-à-tête* (1950) (Fig. 5.2). Enwonwu was the first African modern artist that

[374] Evelyn S. Brown quoted in Perrin M. Lathrop, " 'Art from Africa of Our Time': African Modernism in America, 1947-1967" in *African Modernism in America*, edited by Perrin M. Lathrop (New York: American Federation of Art, 2022): 33. Original letter from Evelyn S. Brown to George O. Talabi, June 7, 1967. George Talabi File, Box 98, Harmon Foundation Inc., Records, Library of Congress.

[375] Hampton received major gifts from the Harmon Foundation between 1967 and 1972.

the Harmon Foundation brought to the United States. This oil painting was one of two by the artist that Hampton loaned to one of the most important exhibitions in the history of modern and contemporary African art: *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa*, 1945-1994, curated by Okwui Enwezor in 2001. As part of the international exhibition, *Tête-à-tête* traveled to Munich, Berlin, Chicago, and New York.[376]

Along with its expanded holdings in modern African art, Hampton prioritized the addition of more works from artists of the Harlem Renaissance to the museum's collection, acquiring works by Loïs Mailou Jones (1905-1998) and Walter Ellison (1899-1977). The museum also has an important collection of nineteenth-century African American artists, including more works by Tanner as well those from Joshua Johnson (1763-1824), Robert S. Duncanson (1821-1872), Edward Mitchell Bannister (1828-1901), Charles Ethan Porter (1847-1923), and Grafton Tyler Brown (1841-1918).

Beyond Hampton: Collections at Fisk and Howard

Howard University in Washington, D. C., Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Hampton University were among the first American institutions to incorporate the study of African art, culture, and history into their educational programs. Along with Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia, these three universities are also generally acknowledged as the leading historically Black institutions with major art collections.[377]

[376] Hultgren, 55.

[377] See Richard J. Powell, "To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities," in *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, edited by Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 132.

Howard University in Washington, D. C. was founded in 1867. The earliest known gallery space at the university dates to 1870 and was known as the Historical Picture Gallery.[378] However, the university did not have any significant collecting or exhibition aspirations until the 1920s. Made possible with funds from a philanthropic donation, the Howard University Gallery of Art was established in 1928.[379] This was probably the first African American gallery that focused specifically on collecting and exhibiting the work of contemporary Black artists.[380] The gallery, which at that time was housed on the first floor of the newly renovated Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel, formally opened in April 1930 with a loan exhibition. The temporary exhibition proved a success, prompting Howard to move forward with plans to establish its own permanent collection. A proviso to collect significant works of art from contemporary artists "without reference to race, color, or creed," was among the institution's goals.[381]

The first two directors of the Howard University Gallery of Art were James V. Herring (1887-1969), the founder of Howard's art department, followed by James A. Porter (1905-1970), an art historian and critic on Howard's faculty.[382] Both artists themselves, these

[378] "About the Gallery of Art," https://finearts.howard.edu/about/gallery-art/about-gallery-art, accessed September 11, 2023.

[379] Mr. and Mrs. Avery Conley of Washington, D.C. provided the funds for the renovation of the Andrew Rankin Chapel which would house the first gallery of art. See "Howard University Gallery of Art" in *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, by Richard J. Powell, Jock Reynolds, et al (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 25.

[380] M.J. Hewitt, "Major Art Collections in Historically African American Institutions: An Interview with Richard A. Long," *The International Review of African American Art* 11, no. 4 (1994): 9.

[381] Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "Howard University Gallery of Art," in *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, edited by Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds, et al (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 24.

[382] Alain Locke, Howard University professor of philosophy, wrote extensively about Black art and therefore exerted a great deal of influence over a number of students in the art department of Howard. However, it is a misunderstanding that Locke had any direct role in the founding of the Howard Gallery of Art. "There was considerable antipathy between" Professor Locke and Professor Herring. See Richard A. Long quoted in M.J.

two men were had an incredible influence on the large number of students who passed through Howard's art department. Against the backdrop of segregated Washington, D.C., Herring founded the first Black privately owned and operated art gallery in the United States, the Barnett-Aden Gallery.[383] Herring assembled a stunning cast of art professors during his tenure, including Loïs Mailou Jones and his eventual successor, James A. Porter. David C. Driskell and Alma Thomas entered the art department as students while Herring was chair. He cultivated a remarkable space for artists to flourish following the "end" of the Harlem Renaissance and before the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s.[384]

Porter studied under Herring and grew to become an influential figure in African American art history. A 1927 graduate of Howard, Porter went on to study at Columbia University and the Art Students League in New York before returning to teach at Howard for over forty years. He was an accomplished artist in his own right, but his greatest legacy is his work as an educator, writer, and curator. Porter's book, *Modern Negro Art* (1943) was the first comprehensive study of African American art. Often described as the "Father of African American Art History," Porter's scholarship was the impetus for establishing the field of African American art history.[385] In the preface to his important study, Porter writes of his discovery of the "deliberate indifference" with which African American art and artists had

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Hewitt, "Major Art Collections in Historically African American Institutions: An Interview with Richard A. Long," *The International Review of African American Art* 11, no. 4 (1994): 9.

[383] Charles Henry Rowell, "Two Galleries, Engaging Art, Great Talents, and Challenging Minds." *Callaloo* 39, no. 5 (2016): 1165. The Barnett-Aden Gallery was operated by Herring and his partner Alonzo Aden. It operated on the first floor of their townhouse at 127 Randolph Street NW in the black middleclass neighborhood of Logan Circle in Washington, D. C. The gallery gradually declined after Aden's death in 1961. See also Sandra Fitzpatrick and Maria R. Goodwin, "A Guide to Black Washington: places of events of historical and cultural significance in the nation's capital (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990), 94-95.

[384] Rowell, "Two Galleries, Engaging Art, Great Talents, and Challenging Minds." 1164.

[385] Charles Henry Rowell, "James A. Porter: 1905-1970," *Callaloo* 39, no. 5 (2016): 1052.

been treated and his desire to prepare a thorough "critical and historical account of this interesting though long forgotten sidelight of American art."[386] Porter taught alongside Loïs Mailou Jones and James Lesesene Wells and mentored students who would go on to exert their own influence in the field, particularly David Driskell.

As was the case with other HBCUs, the gallery initially relied on alumni and friends of the university to donate works of art or consent to long term loans to meet the goals of this exhibition space. One of the first major works to enter the collection at the hands of donors such as these was Henry Ossawa Tanner's last completed work, *Return from the Crucifixion* (1937). One of the most significant donations to the museum was the estate of Dr. Alain Leroy Locke. After the renowned scholar, Howard's own professor of philosophy and the first African American Rhodes scholar passed away in 1954, his paintings, books, sculpture, and memorabilia were bequeathed to Howard University in 1955. The core of this collection includes some 300 pieces of African sculpture, including a very fine collection of goldweights.[387]

For this study perhaps the most relevant undertaking of the Howard University Gallery of Art and its art department was its role in promoting and exhibiting the work of modern African artists. In the United States, the critical reception and public interest in the work of modern African artists was chilly at best.[388] HBCUs played an important role in many of the earliest exhibitions of modern African art in the United States. In the mid-

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[386] James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (New York: Dryden Press, 1943), vi.

[387] Benjamin, 24.

[388] Sylvester Okwuodu Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu: The Making of an African Modernist* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 105.

twentieth century, there was little in interest in modern African art in the United States, which led to difficulty finding venues to showcase the work of some of Africa's most exciting young artists. Galleries and museums on HBCU campuses presented the perfect sites. Young Black students were eager to interact with the work of artists who looked like them from all over the globe.

The Harmon Foundation therefore figures prominently in the narrative of the relationship between African modernists and HBCUs, connecting emergent modern African artists such as Ben Enwonwu with African American and broader international audiences.. After successful exhibitions in Europe, the Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu desired to exhibit his work in the United States.[389] Enwonwu embarked on a tour of the United States in October and November of 1950 that was co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and the British Information Service. Coinciding with this tour, the Harmon Foundation arranged an exhibition of Enwonwu's work at Howard University and scheduled a series of lectures and events on the Howard campus and elsewhere in Washington, D. C., New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont. For Howard's exhibition, Mary Beattie Brady, director of the Harmon Foundation, partnered with Herring and Porter to bring the exhibition to life.[390] Brady hoped that Enwonwu's exhibition would encourage and inspire Howard's students to connect with "the modern cultural achievement of West Africa, as a bridge among living

[389] In an anecdote that further emphasizes the interconnectedness of HBCUs, Enwonwu wrote to Charles S. Johnson, the first Black president of Fisk to ask how he might go about exhibiting his work in the United States. It was Johnson who connected Enwonwu to Brady, among other influential figures of the American art scene. See Perrin M. Lathrop, "'Art from Africa of Our Time': African Modernism in America, 1947-1967" in *African Modernism in America*, edited by Perrin M. Lathrop (New York: American Federation of Art, 2022): 26.

[390] Lathrop, 26-27.

people in the world of today and not in the glass showcase field of the primitive."[391] Enwonwu's exhibition at Howard was considered a great success and was covered extensively, both by the Associated Negro Press, as well as mainstream American newspapers.[392] This press coverage represented the first time that a modern African artist received significant attention from the American media.[393] Howard University's association with such a noteworthy exhibition is therefore quite significant in the history of modern African art. Afterwards, Howard's support of modern African artists continued through its association with Ethiopian expatriate Alexander "Skunder" Boghossian who began his extended tenure in its art department in 1974.

Much like Hampton, the Fisk University art collection grew from early donations of "ethnographic" pieces of Native American and African cultures. Similarly, many of these objects were donated by missionaries returning from travels to the American West or the African continent. As early as 1876, *Harper's Weekly* commented on this collection that was then housed in the basement of the theology building, underscoring how connected these artworks were with missionary practice.[394]

Fisk's reputation as a bastion of the arts and particularly its connection to the arts of Africa and the African diaspora is mostly associated with three important figures in the

[391] Mary Beattie Brady quoted in Lathrop, 27. Originally in Letter from Mary Beattie Brady to Dr. Raymond F. Piper, January 25, 1951. Box 2, File 13, Harmon Foundation Papers, 1929–1994, Driskell Center Archives.

[392] See Ogbechie, 113-115 for a more detailed discussion of the Enwonwu's exhibition press coverage.

[393] Ogbechie, 115.

[394] *Harper's Weekly*, January 22, 1876, 73.

school's history, Charles S. Johnson, Aaron Douglas, and David Driskell.[395] Charles S. Johnson was the first Black president of Fisk, appointed to this position in 1946 after nearly twenty years of service to Fisk in other roles. Johnson was the founding editor of *Opportunity: The Journal of Negro Life,* the founder of the African Studies Department at Fisk in 1943, and cultivated a network that included the art collector Albert Barnes and the philosopher and collector Alain Locke.[396] Johnson, a sociologist by training, became interested in African politics as the end of World War II brought about increased decolonization. He had personally traveled to Africa and formed his own small art collection.[397] Johnson commissioned the renowned Harlem Renaissance artist Aaron Douglas to create a series of murals for the university library. The resulting murals, *The Symbolic Negro History Series,* were the first works by an African American artist to enter the school's collection in 1930 (Fig. 5.3).[398] Finally, it was under Johnson's presidency that the school received the Alfred Stieglitz Collection of art.

Aaron Douglas is the second pivotal figure in Fisk's storied relationship to the visual arts. Less than ten years after Douglas completed his mural commission, he returned to teach in the school's art department in 1937. Johnson later appointed Douglas as chair of the art department, a position the artist held from 1946 to his retirement in 1966. Douglas's

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[395] For recent scholarship on these men and their impact upon the Fisk University campus, see Nikoo Paydar "African Art at Fisk University: Charles S. Johnson, Aaron Douglas, and David Driskell" in *African Modernism in America*, edited by Perrin M. Lathrop (New York: American Federation of Art, 2022): 63-73.

[396] Paydar, 64.

[397] Aaron Douglas was known to teach with masks and other objects from Johnson's collection. See Donald F. Davis, "Aaron Douglas: Molder of Black Artists," *Journal of Negro History* 69, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 98.

[398] Kevin Grogan, "Fisk University Galleries and Collections," in *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, edited by Richard J. Powell and Jock Reynolds (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 20.

paintings have come to represent the quintessential aesthetic of the Harlem Renaissance. His allusions to African art of the past and present are a key component of his imagery. For Douglas, African art was a channel through which he could explore his own African American identity and heritage.[399] Many of his murals, including those at Fisk, incorporate both subtle and overt allusions to African art. Douglas first encountered African art in the 1920s through his friendships with other known figures of the Harlem Renaissance such as W. E. B. DuBois and Alain Locke, and his teacher, the German-born American artist Winold Reiss. He also encountered African art at the Brooklyn Museum and through his fellowship at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. Douglas championed the work of modern African artists such as Ben Enwonwu and worked with the Harmon Foundation to bring an exhibition of the Nigerian artist's work to Fisk in 1957.[400] Douglas cultivated relationships with other artists and patrons of the arts which would lead to the school expanding its collection of modern African art.[401]

Douglas's paintings tend to depict the scope of the African American experience, including an ancient African past, harrowing forced transatlantic migration, travails under enslavement, and hard-fought progress after emancipation. His signature style is characterized by the inclusion of visual motifs and shapes drawn from traditional African art, silhouetted figures, and Modernist flat planes of color. That Africa and Africanness are such an important part of Aaron Douglas's art, the work that is perhaps more strongly associated

[399] Paydar, 67.

[400] Paydar, 67.

[401] See Paydar, 68.

with the Harlem Renaissance than that of any other Black artist of the period, should not be ignored.

David C. Driskell succeeded Aaron Douglas as chair of the art department at Fisk in 1966 and remained there until 1977. Driskell was an artist, curator, and distinguished scholar of African and African diasporic art. Trained at Howard University by such influential figures as Loïs Mailou Jones, James V. Herring, and James A. Porter, Driskell was influential as both an artist and an art historian. Like Douglas before him, Driskell explored African themes in his work as an artist, particularly during his tenure at Fisk. Also like Douglas, he expanded the campus collection of historical and contemporary African art. His friendship with Mary Beattie Brady of the Harmon Foundation secured a major gift of modern African and American art to the Fisk Museum upon the Foundation's closure in 1967.[402] Driskell went on to curate exhibitions of African art at Fisk, including *Contemporary Trends in African Art* in 1968, *Contemporary Drawings of Africa: Elton C. Fax*, and *African Art: The Fisk University Collection* in 1970. As an educator, Driskell conducted classes in the museum galleries and encouraged students to study, sketch, and derive inspiration from the African works in the permanent collection in particular.[403] He also invited contemporary African artists to Fisk, including the Nigerian sculptor Lamidi Olonade Fakeye and Nigerian ceramic artist Ladi Kwali, both in 1972.[404] As an artist himself, Driskell reflected on the

[402] This collection was divided between Fisk and Hampton University. Hampton received 100 works of art.

[403] Monica Blackmun Visonà, "Agent Provacateur? The African Origin and American Life of a Statue from Côte d'Ivoire," *Art Bulletin* 94, no. 1 (March 2012): 121.

[404] Paydar, 70.

inspiration that he drew from African works of art in the permanent collection as well as those in exhibitions that traveled to the university.[405]

In more recent years, Fisk's affiliation with the arts has mostly been in relation to the flurry of legal activity surrounding the sale of its Alfred Stieglitz Collection. In 1949 the American artist Georgia O'Keeffe donated 101 works of art—including five African works—to Fisk University in memory of her deceased husband, the photographer and art dealer Alfred Stieglitz.[406] When asked why she chose to donate the important collection to the relatively small school in the segregated south, O'Keeffe responded, "I think it is a good thing to do at this time and I think it would please Stieglitz."[407] The collection encompasses a range of media and includes Modern American and European art as well as historical African art. O'Keeffe later wrote that "This part of the Stieglitz Collection goes to Fisk University that it may show that there are many ways of seeing and thinking, and possibly, through showing that there are many different ways, give someone confidence in his own way, which may be different, whatever its direction."[408]

[405] See Visonà, 121-23, and Paydar, 69.

[406] Stieglitz's collection was donated to five different institutions. Apart from Fisk, O'Keeffe donated the collection to the National Gallery of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

[407] *The New York Times Magazine*, December 1949. Many have speculated that the photographer Car Van Vechten, a close friend of the couple, encouraged the donation to Fisk. Van Vechten, though not uncontroversial, was a noted patron of Black artists. He was also a friend of Charles S. Johnson, the University's first Black president. See Richard J. Powell, "To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities," in *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, edited by Richard J. Powell, and Jock Reynolds et al (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 126.

[408] Georgia O'Keeffe in *The Alfred Stieglitz Collection for Fisk University* (Nashville: Fisk University Press, 1949) np.

The five African works of the Stieglitz Collection were on permanent display for the first twenty-five years of their Fisk residency.[409] A photograph from 1949 shows the newly installed collection on view in the Carl Van Vechten Gallery (Fig. 5.4). The photograph shows the Kota reliquary guardian figure (*Mbulu ngulu*) displayed in a prominent position, flanked by a color lithograph by Paul Cézanne and an oil painting attributed to Pablo Picasso.[410]

The Stieglitz Collection bequest to Fisk University provides an opportunity to point out the financial struggles that many historically Black colleges and institutions face. Caring for and displaying works of art is costly. By 2005, the Stieglitz Collection was no longer on permanent display at Fisk, or even housed on the premises at all.[411] Fisk's enrollment dwindled as elite colleges and universities who had for centuries been unwelcoming and even openly hostile to African Americans began to recruit them, causing an exodus of Black faculty to rich, mostly white universities. Educational parity is an important tenet of equality in this country, but lower enrollment has had its consequences for the educational institutions that were once the only available spaces to Black students.

Today Fisk and the Crystal Bridges Museum of Art in Bentonville, Arkansas co-own the Stieglitz Collection. Crystal Bridges purchased the collection for the price of $30 million dollars and shares ownership with the university. Per the agreement, the collection is rotated between the two institutions every two years.[412] The result of a complicated legal battle over

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[409] Monica Blackmun Visonà, "Agent Provacateur? The African Origin and American Life of a Statue from Côte d'Ivoire," *Art Bulletin* 94, no. 1 (March 2012): 121.

[410] A Baule portrait face mask (*Mblo*) and a Bete figure for a diviner are also visible in the image.

[411] The Stieglitz Collection was housed in storage at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville from 2005 to 2009.

Fisk's right to sell the collection, which O'Keeffe had asked Fisk never to do, the decision was not reached without controversy. Monica Blackmun Visoná noted that the African objects of Fisk's Stieglitz Collection received little to no attention from journalists during the legal predicament surrounding the sale. Because the Crystal Bridges Museum focuses on *American* art, the five African objects in the Stieglitz Collection are not often highlighted when on view there.

Analysis of the history of collecting, exhibiting, and teaching the visual arts at Hampton, Howard, and Fisk, reveals the extraordinary role that these institutions have played in preserving and presenting the work of Black artists in the United States. Education was considered key to the betterment of the country's Black population. Art, and student interaction with it, grew to occupy a central place in the educational programs at these institutions. Richard Powell has argued that several individuals over the course of the schools' histories have "acted as catalysts" to give the arts a particular role and focus.[413] It is this great number of individuals, from collectors and donors to artists and teachers, who have shaped the rich and valuable holdings of the collections at Hampton, Howard and Fisk. The galleries and museums that were affiliated with these Black colleges and universities were, until the mid to late 1960s, the most accessible exhibition venues for Black artists.[414]

[412] "Fisk University in New Bid to Gain Approval to Sell Art," ArtForum, October 12, 2010, https://www.artforum.com/news/-26599, accessed August 23, 2023.

[413] Powell, 126.

[414] Powell, 137.

CONCLUSION

The William Sheppard Collection of African art has been a point of pride for Hampton University since its acquisition in 1911. By positioning the Sheppard Collection as the earliest example of its kind in the United States, I challenged previously held beliefs about the evolution of African art collecting. That the oldest collection of Central African art in this country has been housed at a historically Black college for 113 years is a significant fact that destabilizes assumptions about the location of important centers of art in the country. It also positions Black students at a historically Black college among the first audiences to engage collections of African art in the modern era.

In the discussions carried in the chapters above, I considered what it means for a collection of African art to spark racial pride among African Americans and to inspire the students of a historically Black college. My arguments are premised upon the belief that in the transatlantic movement of its African cultural objects and bodies the Sheppard Collection embodies the African diaspora. I charted the narratives of the artworks in the collection from their Central African origins to Sheppard's adoption of them for the lecture circuit to the climactic role they played as object lessons for the students of Hampton.

The dissertation's opening analysis of a missionary-themed pageant at Hampton illustrated Black Americans' complicated feelings about and relationship to Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. While the play exhibits a critical assessment of African religious practices, the incorporation of authentic costumes and cultural artifacts suggests a kinship to African artistry. The performance of Hampton students interrogates the complexities of evangelical mission work and its complicity with colonialism and how such ideas were portrayed by Black Americans. In this regard it aligns with mission plays but it is also

consistent with contemporaneous Black performances that reveal a growing interest in African art and culture. The conflation of Christian missionary activity and cultural heritage yearnings, chronicled through the formation of his collection of Kuba art, grounds my biographical overview of Sheppard's time as a missionary to the Congo and established the historical context for his mission work. In taking a microhistorical approach to Sheppard's biography, I suggest that we are able to draw larger conclusions about the diversity of the lived experiences of Africans in the diaspora.

The importance of Sheppard's life and career to emergent discourses of African diaspora/Africa relations is reflected in his important collection of Kuba artworks and validated by Hampton's purchase of Sheppard's collection. In a manner of speaking, the Sheppard art collection and his photographs of his exploits in the Congo represent contiguous forms of archiving through which Sheppard challenged racist and colonialist ideas about black abilities and masculinity. In this regard, Sheppard harnessed the medium of photography to construct his own archive, to craft a respectable and aspirational self-presentation, and to draw attention to the human cost of colonialism. The photographs of the artworks in Sheppard's collection eloquently speak to these issues, from their representation as masses of objects to their later treatment as fine art sculptures. The photographic representations of the Sheppard Collection are thus important records that made visible changing perceptions of African art in the early twentieth century.

Similar changes are evident in the relationship between Hampton's pedagogical foundations and its engagements with the Sheppard Collection. The transformative pedagogy occasioned by Hampton's use of the collection as a basis of student instruction highlights the school's dedication to object-based learning and its capacity to inspire race pride. Hampton's

creative deployment of the Sheppard Collection in its curriculum, also inserted both into spirited intellectual debates about what roles institutions like Hampton should play in African American education during this period. As an important resource for African American education, it fulfilled Sheppard's own efforts to expand opportunities for racial uplift through his missionary work in the Atlantic world.

The Sheppard Collection and Hampton Museum in general also served as impetus for the development of similar art collections as part of a larger tradition of collecting at historically Black colleges and universities. As the oldest museum to form a dedicated collection of African and African American art, Hampton inspired other educational institutions to form similar collections of their own. Hampton was thus a model for collecting work from African American and African artists at time when few museums in the United States were doing so. Consequently, Hampton and other historically Black colleges became some of the most accessible venues for Black artists to show their work and museum spaces for Black Americans to visit. HBCUs also helped expand the canon of modern African art by collecting, promoting, and intellectually engaging with key artists from the African continent. The transcultural interaction thereby engendered is a significant, yet often marginalized, aspect of the history of modern and contemporary art.

Sheppard and his collection demonstrate the influence and agency of African Americans in shaping the discourse of African American/African relations at the turn of the twentieth century. Sheppard observed that "The natives of Africa have a decided taste for the beautiful."[415] Based upon his belief in their capacity to inspire, he collected all manner of Central African cultural objects and works of art for the benefit of the students at the

[415] Sheppard, "African Superstitions and Handicrafts," 401.

Hampton Institute. Sheppard's vision for the future of his collection was powerfully realized when mere months after Hampton purchased it, the curator wrote that for the students "things African prove to be the favorite theme."[416] The Sheppard Collection arrived to Hampton at a key moment in American history where it inspired pedagogy, performance, and

[416] Folsom, 1911, HUA.

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