From Savage to Negro

Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954

Lee D. Baker
CHAPTER 2

The Ascension of Anthropology as Social Darwinism

The rise of academic anthropology in the United States occurred in the late 1880s and was concurrent with the rise of American imperialism and the institutionalization of racial segregation and disfranchisement. And like the anthropology that bolstered proslavery forces during the antebellum period, professional anthropology bolstered Jim Crow and imperial conquests during the 1890s. Before the 1880s the study of anthropology—or ethnology, as it was also called—tended to be an ancillary interest of naturalists and a romantic pastime for physicians interested in the so-called races of mankind. As discussed in the previous chapter, Samuel Morton, Josiah Nott, and Louis Agassiz contributed to the first school of American anthropology during the mid-nineteenth century, but these so-called men of science were not professional anthropologists employed by museums or departments of anthropology. Anthropology moved from the margins of natural history into the center of the academy when other areas of natural history emerged as specific disciplines.

Following the Civil War, universities and government agencies quickly established departments of geography, physics, and geology when the proliferation of industries like railroads, steel, and mining demanded new technology. Capitalists began to extol the virtues of science because it was the backbone for the development of technology, so important to the material ends of industrial development.

Industrializing America also needed to explain the calamities created by unbridled westward, overseas, and industrial expansion. Although expansion created wealth and prosperity for some, it contributed to conditions that fostered rampant child labor, infectious disease, and desperate poverty. As well, this period saw a sharp increase in lynchings and the decimation of Native American lives and land. The daily experience of squalid conditions and sheer terror made many Americans realize the contradictions between industrial capitalism and the democratic ideals of equality, freedom, and justice for all. Legislators, university boards, and magazine moguls found it useful to explain this ideological crisis in terms of a natural hierarchy of class and race caused by a struggle for existence wherein the fittest individuals or races advanced while the inferior became eclipsed.

Professional anthropology emerged in the midst of this crisis, and the people who used anthropology to justify racism, in turn, provided the institutional foundations for the field. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, college departments, professional organizations, and specialized journals were established for anthropology. The study of “primitive races of mankind” became comparable to geology and physics. These institutional apparatuses, along with powerful representatives in the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), prestigious universities, and the Smithsonian Institution, gave anthropology its academic credentials as a discipline in the United States. The budding discipline gained power and prestige because ethnologists articulated theory and research that resonated with the dominant discourse on race.

The Laws of Science and the Law of the Land

In January 1896 Daniel G. Brinton, the president of the AAAS and the first professor of anthropology in the United States, wrote in *Popular Science Monthly* that “the black, the brown and the red races differ anatomically so much from the white . . . that even with equal cerebral capacity they never could rival its results by equal efforts.” In April of the same year John Wesley Powell, the first director of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) at the Smithsonian Institution, concurred with Brinton when he lectured at the U.S. National Museum
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(USNM). Powell explained that "the laws of evolution do not produce kinds of men but grades of men; and human evolution is intellectual, not physical. . . . All men have pleasures, some more, some less; all men have welfare, some more, some less; all men have justice, some more, some less."7

Three weeks later, at the opposite end of the National Mall, Melville Fuller, the chancellor of the Smithsonian Institution and the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, joined the Court's majority opinion in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which stated that "if one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane."8 The Supreme Court constitutionalized segregation by grounding its rationale on notions of racial inferiority informed by Social Darwinism.9

Tenets of Social Darwinism emerged as important themes for the legal, scientific, and business communities—serving to glue one to the other.10 Although ideas of racial inferiority and social evolution were not new to the United States, Social Darwinist ideas became increasingly dominant because they were viewed as scientific in an era when science reigned supreme. Early advocates of Social Darwinist (or, technically more accurate, Spencerian) thought retooled certain ideas of the Enlightenment for an industrializing society. Herbert Spencer, one of its chief proponents, grafted Thomas Hobbes's notion that the state of nature was a state of war—each individual taking what it could—onto Adam Smith's system of perfect liberty, later known as laissez-faire economics.11 After Darwin's *Origin of Species* appeared, Social Darwinists blurred the idea of natural selection to scrutinize society and culture.12

Proponents of Social Darwinism believed that it was morally wrong for the government and charity organizations to provide public education, public health, or a minimum wage because these efforts only contributed to the artificial preservation of the weak.13 A cross section of people, from politicians to world's fair organizers, White preachers to Black leaders, were influenced by this unique combination of social theory, and each used variations to explain inequalities in terms of the natural order of society. John D. Rockefeller even explained to a Sunday school class: "The American beauty rose can be produced . . . only by sacrificing early buds which grow around it."14

Two trajectories or planks emerged within Social Darwinian rhetoric in the United States. One emphasized the personal or individual struggle for existence; the other, racial and cultural evolution. The racial plank demarcated a hierarchy of races beginning with the inferior savage and culminating with the civilized citizen. The class plank presumed that the poor were biologically unfit to struggle for existence. Turn-of-the-century ethnologists took on the racial plank as their particular charge and played an important role in extending it.15 And it was the racial plank that emerged as a means of reconciling animosity between the North and the South.

During the 1890s, ideas of Social Darwinism and racial inferiority were explicitly incorporated into political efforts to reunify the nation.16 By 1896 the old ideas about Manifest Destiny, industrial progress, and racial inferiority (enlivened by Social Darwinism) served as an ideological cement that was able to form capitalist development, imperialism, scientific progress, racism, and the law into a rock-solid edifice within U.S. society. Social Darwinian ideas helped explain inequality in America, but Herbert Spencer's voluminous writings gave it scientific authority.

Herbert Spencer, America's Social Darwinist (1820–1903)

Herbert Spencer hailed from England, where Henry Ward Beecher adeptly wrote to him, observing that "the peculiar condition of American society has made your writings far more fruitful and quickening here than in Europe."17 Spencer sold more than 300,000 copies of his books in the United States alone—a number unprecedented for nonfiction literature.18

The principal tenet of Spencer's synthetic philosophy was the organic analogy, an analogy drawn between biological organisms and society. The principles of biology, he argued, could be applied to society. Even before Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Spencer had worked out the basic elements for evolution. It was Spencer, not Darwin, who furnished the two famous phrases that became associated with the notion of evolution: "survival of the fittest" and "the struggle for existence." Spencer not only applied a biological analogy to society but also incorporated laws of astronomy, physics, geology, and psychology into a comprehensive scheme governed by something he called "the persistence of force."

The universe, as Spencer envisioned it, evolved from a state of homo-
gencity to one of heterogeneity. He argued that different scientific fields only explored certain facets of the evolutionary process. For example, astronomy and geology are distinct sciences, “but Geology is nothing more than a chapter continuing in detail one part of a history that was once wholly astronomic.” Likewise, sociology and psychology are extensions of biology, which are extensions of geology, astronomy, and physics.

Spencer devoted much of his attention to the evolution of human faculties, linking and ranking intellectual, social, and biological attributes. Minds, bodies, and social institutions (such as families and governments) thus fit neatly into an evolutionary framework. As he suggested, “Intellectual evolution, as it goes on in the human race [goes] along with social evolution, of which it is at once a cause and a consequence.” Within this evolutionary hierarchy, the most inferior were the savages; the next up the ladder were the semi-civilized, and finally we reached the civilized men.

Spencer applied this line of thought in “The Comparative Psychology of Man” (1876), presented to the London Anthropological Institute and circulated in the United States by Popular Science Monthly. In it, Spencer confidently ranked and ordered racial-cultural groups while detailing his familiar argument about the natural progress of societies. The labels he assigned to different people were concoctions of religions, continents, races, or languages, and he argued that anthropologists should thus prove whether his hierarchy was consistently maintained throughout all orders of races, from the lowest to the highest, “whether, say, the Australian differs in this respect from the Hindoo, as much as the Hindoo does from the European.”

This address revealed three particularly racist themes that were reproduced and canonized within U.S. anthropology. First, Spencer identified the “orders of races” by language, religion, or continent. This is important because race, language, culture, nationality, ethnicity, and so forth were all viewed as one and the same in Spencer’s racial and cultural scheme. Second, Spencer asserted, with the conviction of a scientific law, that racial-cultural inferiority and superiority exist. For example, he advised the London Anthropological Institute to prove just how much inferiority there was based on his evolutionary assumptions.

Finally, Spencer took his place in the long line of philosophers and scholars to scientifically affirm the association of black with evil, savagery, and brutishness, thus recapitulating the widely held idea that the lighter races are superior to the darker ones. These themes were subsequently reproduced in the mass media as science, integrated into domestic and foreign policy, and appropriated by White supremacist demagogues. They were not successfully challenged until the United States entered World War II.

Anthropological Social Darwinists

As anthropology emerged in the United States as a discipline in the late nineteenth century, only a handful of ethnologists were influential in shaping it. The most influential were John Wesley Powell the research leader, Frederic Ward Putnam the museum builder, and Daniel G. Brinton the academician. Between 1889 and 1898 each held the presidency of the AAAS, then the most powerful scientific organization in the United States. Although none of these ethnologists was a strict Social Darwinist in the Spencerian tradition, each was an evolutionist advancing ideas of the superiority and inferiority of particular races when Social Darwinism was a dominant ideology in the United States.

The discipline of anthropology in 1896 was being carved out of various sciences and studies. The scope of the new discipline varied. Powell envisioned it as encompassing just about everything including somatology, esthetology, sociology, philology, and sophiology. The most significant scholars in the development of the field called themselves ethnologists, but for some time no real consensus existed as to what constituted ethnology. Brinton perhaps best captured the aim of the new science. Ethnology was to “compare dispassionately all the acts and arts of man, his philosophies and religions, his social schemes and personal plans, weighing and analyzing them, separating the local and temporal in them from the permanent and general, explaining the former by the conditions of time and place and the latter to the category of qualities which make up the oneness of humanity.”

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CHAPTER 3

Anthropology in American Popular Culture

Here physical type, heredity, blood, culture, nation, personality, intelligence, and achievement are all stirred together to make the omelet which is the popular conception of “race.”

M. F. Ashley Montagu, 1962

Chapter 2 has demonstrated how the anthropology produced by the first ethnologists reproduced ideas of race and culture consistent with Social Darwinism, racial segregation, and global expansion. I want to emphasize that I am focusing on the intersections between the formation of anthropology and processes of racial formation by exploring how the “fathers of anthropology” established the discipline in part by reproducing and reinforcing popular ideas about racial inferiority. In return, ethnologists received both tacit and direct institutional support. For example, the way Brinton shifted his research focus from linguistics to the evolution of the races, the way Powell supported explicitly racist scholars, and the way Putnam popularized anthropology each, in a sense, “paid off” and contributed to the institutional foundations of the field.

Turn-of-the-century anthropological science not only responded but also intensified the signification of U.S. racial categories. In this chapter, I attempt to identify the historically specific roles anthropology played in the complex social processes that foster racial inequality by demonstrating how politicians, world’s fair organizers, and media magnates inserted the ethnological sciences into legislation, popular culture, and foreign and domestic policies.

ANTHROPOLOGY IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

When anthropology became an academic discipline, there were two areas of popular culture in which its scientific authority became particularly important: world’s fairs and widely circulated magazines. Both were suffused with images and narratives that affirmed ideas about the racial inferiority of people of color.

The World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago—1893

The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition was framed by prosperity for the rich and violence against the poor. During that year New England alone produced more manufactured goods per capita than any other country in the world. The United States had surpassed every country in steel manufacturing, oil refinement, meatpacking, and the extraction of gold, silver, coal, and iron. The country led the world in the number of telephones and incandescent lights, as well as in miles of telegraph wire. There was not, however, peace and prosperity for all. In May 1893 the National Cordage Company failed, and the ensuing financial panic created thousands of business insolvencies, hundreds of bank closures, scores of railroad bankruptcies, and record high unemployment with record low reserves of gold in the national treasury. The year also brought a realignment of political power. With Grover Cleveland winning the bid for the presidency, Democrats seized control of the executive and legislative branches of the government for the first time since before the Civil War. The November elections that ushered the Democrats to Washington was a miscarriage of participatory democracy because the measures for enforcing the Fifteenth Amendment had been repealed. African Americans in the South witnessed wholesale disfranchisement accompanied by routine lynchings. During the year proceeding the fair, 1892, fifteen election-related murders took place during state elections in Georgia, and riots erupted at polls in Virginia and North Carolina. In the North, conflicts between striking union members and Pinkerton sheriffs resulted in deaths at Homestead and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

In a brilliant and pointed analysis, Robert Rydell has documented how U.S. world’s fairs trumpeted the ideals of political and financial leaders between the end of Reconstruction and the United States’ entry into World War I. Large corporations, as well as state, federal, and foreign governments, underwrote the many commissions and
delegations that promoted and organized the events. Fair organizers presented to more than a million visitors an optimistic view of the world in the wake of financial depressions and outbursts of class and race warfare.

The 1893 fair depicted the ascendancy of the United States among the world powers and the self-confidence and optimism of the country, which its White citizens believed to be the most advanced in history. Ideas of racial and cultural superiority and inferiority were reified by the architecture and physical layout of the expansive exposition. The exteriors of the large beaux-arts edifices were painted ivory. The White City, as the fair was designated, was the crowning achievement of this civilization. The latest in architectural styles and military hardware was exhibited, along with the newest mining and agricultural technologies, to demonstrate American cultural and industrial progress. The emphasis on hard science, high art, and exacting technology evidenced the material progress of American civilization and the progress of the civilized mind.

Across the river from the White City and segregated from the practical exhibits were the entertainments along the Midway Plaisance, where visitors could experience the thrills and chills of the Ferris wheel, the hootchy-kootchy, Dr. Welch's tangy grape juice, and the villages of the savage. Under the direction of Frederic W. Putnam, the Midway was a lattice of exotic, erotic, and wondrous excitement. Putnam sanctioned a blend of familiar forms of entertainment with ethnology in an attempt to popularize anthropology. The end result was a mile-long midway that fused the honky-tonk bar with the freak, minstrel, and Wild West show to form a "practical study of ethnography." Segregating the living ethnological exhibits into a dark ghetto away from the White City was symbolically important. The accomplishments of the civilized mind—art, architecture, and technology—were counterposed to ignorance, dirt, smells, and brown bodies. As Rydell points out, the White City and the Midway were not antithetical constructs. The depiction of the non-White world as savage and the White world as civilized were "two sides of the same coin—a coin minted in the tradition of American racism, in which the forbidden desires of whites were projected onto dark-skinned peoples, who consequently had to be degraded so white purity could be maintained."3

The 1893 exposition is generally recognized for its contributions to urban planning and innovative technology. But equally important, the fair introduced the American public to a new anthropology and its old evolutionary ideas about race. The popularity of the Midway transformed the ethnological exhibits along its course—and in the Anthropological Building—into vehicles of popular culture that shaped concepts of racial inferiority by framing them in an evolutionary hierarchy. The Smithsonian's William H. Dall reported to The Nation that the Midway constituted an "anthropological collection hitherto unequalled and hereafter not likely to be surpassed." Curators displayed skulls and measurements of all races in the laboratory housed in the Anthropological Building. But visitors who questioned what constituted the epitome of the civilized race were directed to "the well-known statues of the Harvard boy and [Radcliffe] girl." As Dall explained, "these [statues] attract a constant stream of visitors, and are generally acknowledged to form one of the most instructive exhibits in the [Anthropological] building."4

The living ethnological exhibits were arranged in an obvious evolutionary hierarchy that resonated with many White Americans' seemingly intuitive understanding of racial inferiority. The darker races were at the bottom of the midway and the lighter races at the top—closer to the White City. As Otis T. Mason reported to the Smithsonian Institution, "from the rude human habitations about the Anthropological Building to the results of co-operative architectural dreams which constituted the White City, was a long way on the road of evolution."5

Julian Hawthorne, writing for a special Columbian Exposition edition of Cosmopolitan, detailed how the Department of Ethnology de-humanized people of color by providing him a conveyance to frolic up and down the evolutionary ladder while "playing" with "the elements" from which the civilized races developed: "The catalogue calls [it] 'Department M.—Ethnology. Isolated Exhibits—Midway Plaisance. Group 176,' this I say, I call the 'World as Plaything.' Here are the elements out of which the human part of the planet has been developed; it is all within the compass of a day's stroll; . . . Roughly speaking, you have before you the civilized, the half-civilized and the savage worlds to choose from—or rather, to take one after the other."7 Hawthorne gleefully guided Cosmopolitan readers through a wild trek down the evolutionary ladder, quipping, "[L]et us have done with Europe and try a cycle of Cathay. Beyond the great wheel, as to spatial distance, and who can tell how many thousands years away from us to appearance, modes of life and traditions, is the [African] Dahomey village."8

Fair organizers presented the racial plank of Social Darwinism in an entertaining and simple framework. The ethnological exhibits provided easy answers for many Americans who were groping for ways to explain
the violent chaos that erupted at the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, race and labor riots in 1892, terrorizing lynch mobs, and reports that African Americans composed the most criminal element in society. There was "no doubt that the Dahomans [were] more closely allied with the cruel and superstitious practices of savagery than any other country represented in [the] Midway."19 John Eastman issued a stern warning to all visitors that these Africans were dangerous. He forewarned them "the women are as fierce if not fiercer than the men and all of them have to be watched day and night for fear they may use their spears for other purposes than a barbaric embellishment of their dances."11 The stern warning reinforced many Americans' fears that African Americans could not be trusted and were naturally predisposed to immoral and criminal behavior and thus kept away from White people through segregation. Edward B. McDowell, writing for Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly, made the connection explicit:

Sixty-nine of them are here in all their barbaric ugliness, blacker than buried midnight and as degraded as the animals which prowl the jungles of their dark land. It is impossible to conceive of a notch lower in the human scale than the Amazon, or female Dahomey warrior, represents. . . . Dancing around a pole on which is perched a human skull, or images of reptiles, lizards and other crawling things, their incantations make the night hideous. . . . In these wild people we can easily detect many characteristics of the American negro.12

While the evolutionary scheme of the Midway supported the belief that physical and moral characteristics were one and the same, it also reinforced the belief that slavery created a thin veneer of civilized characteristics for American Negroes. Lurking behind the veneer was the savage from Africa, incapable of morality and civilized behavior and predisposed to crime. The Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso explained this as "the greatest obstacle to the negro's progress": "For notwithstanding that garb and the habits of the white man may have given him a veneer of modern civilization, he is still to often indifferent to and careless of the lives of others; and he betrays that lack of the sentiment of pity, commonly observed among savage races, which causes them to regard homicide as a mere incident, and as glorious in case it is the outcome of revenge."13

Frederick Starr, a new assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, echoed Lombroso by linking criminal behavior and morality to the evolution of the savage mind.14 In Starr's view, Negroes were only half a step ahead of their savage brethren, and because American Negroes possessed the same morals as their savage brethren, they were naturally predisposed to criminal activity. Starr was adamant that "Race characteristics are physical, mental, [and] moral."15 As a University of Chicago professor, Starr patiently explained to the readers of Dial magazine the "facts" of African American criminality. "Study of criminality in the two races gives astonishing results. Of the total prisoners in the United States in 1890, nearly 30 per cent were colored; the negro, however forms but 11 per cent of the population. . . . Conditions of life and bad social opportunities cannot be urged in excuse. In Chicago the conditions of life for Italians, Poles, and Russians are fully as bad as for the blacks, but their criminality is much less. The difference is racial."16

Although anthropology gave scientific justification for old ideas of racial inferiority, it was a new science for many visitors to the fair. The term anthropology was in many respects first introduced to the American public during this exposition.17 Fair organizers drew on the growing authority and prestige of anthropological theories about natural and social progress to make ideas of America's progress more persuasive.18 The budding discipline of anthropology also drew on the popular exposure and prestige associated with the fair. According to Dall, because of "the active exploration instituted by the Directors of the Exposition into matters connected with American anthropology, it is probable that this department of science will permanently profit by the anniversary thus celebrated to a greater extent than any other line of research."19

While anthropology bathed in the public prestige at the fair, Putnam attracted controversy and adversaries. Several Native American associations took issue with his vision. In the early planning stages of the exposition an amiable agreement had been struck between the U.S. Department of the Interior and Department M of exposition. It was agreed that Department M would erect "strictly scientific" representations of the primitive conditions of indigenous life. The Indian Bureau of the Department of the Interior would display the education and citizenship of modern Indians. However, Emma Sickles, chair of the Indian Committee of the Universal Peace Union, protested against the ethnological displays and tried to derail Putnam's efforts.

Sickles played a key role in passing a federal appropriations bill for the fair; in return, she was given a political appointment in Department M, over objections levied by Putnam. She attempted to persuade the staff of Department M that it should represent the process of civilization among Native Americans. As a result, Putnam fired her for
insubordination. She immediately sent officials at the fair a resolution drafted by the Indian Committee of the Universal Peace Union which stated: "In the interests of the preservation of the peace and the progress of civilization I do hereby protest against the presentation of low and degrading phases of Indian Life." She would not quit and relentlessly attacked Putnam and the fair in the press. For example, on October 8, 1893, the *New York Times* published one of her scathing editorials:

> Every effort has been put forth to make the Indian exhibit mislead the American people. It has been used to work up sentiment against the Indian by showing that he is either savage or can be educated only by government agencies. This would strengthen the power of everything that has been "working" against the Indians for years. Every means was used to keep the self-civilized Indians out of the Fair. The Indian agents and their backers knew well that if the civilized Indians got a representation in the Fair the public would wake up to the capabilities of the Indians for self-government and realize that all they needed was to be left alone.

Native Americans were not the only Americans who were denied access to demonstrating their "progress." African American leaders demanded fair and equitable representation, but they too were rebuffed.

No Progress—No Negroses

Although the fair was dubbed the White City, the African American press dubbed it "the great American white elephant," or "the white American's World's Fair." To ensure equitable representation of Negroses' "progress," Black leaders repeatedly asked for administrative appointments. To stem their pressure, fair organizers appointed a number of token African American commissioners with no real power.

Frederick Douglass, the dean of African American affairs, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the prolific antilynching crusader, were compelled to explain to international visitors why African Americans were "studiously kept out of representation in any official capacity and [only] given menial places." They envisioned printing a pamphlet written in German, Spanish, and French to explain their position. They secured enough funds to publish *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* in English, but they did not have enough money to print the foreign-language editions. They did, however, manage to print the introduction to the pamphlet in several different languages. The lack of African American representation and the degrading image of Africans left Frederick Douglass to conclude that exposition managers evidently wanted the Negro American to be represented only by the "barbaric rites" of Africans "brought there to act the monkey."

As a concession for jettisoning plans for Negro exhibits, the fair organizers suggested that one day in August be set aside as Colored Jubilee Day. Many African Americans were already infuriated by the discrimination, and the idea of a "Nigger day" was not tolerable. Douglass seized the opportunity at the Jubilee Day to deliver a major address to vindicate the progress made by African Americans despite injustice, violence, and persecution. He also lambasted fair organizers who fostered the belief "that our small participation in the World's Columbian Exposition is due either to our ignorance or to our want of public spirit." "Why in Heaven's name," he appealed, do you "crush down the race that grasped the saber and helped make the nation one and the exposition possible?"

Fair organizers drew a particular social blueprint for the throngs of visitors. This blueprint becomes unmistakable if one juxtaposes Frederick Douglass and Emma Sickle's appeals for the recognition of progress among people of color with the Department of Anthropology's evolutionary scheme. The fair organizers eclipsed the progress of African Americans and Native Americans while Frederick Ward Putnam attempted to reveal how thin the veneer of progress actually was by showcasing the Negroses' savage brethren in an exotic, immoral, and ghettoized Midway Plaisance.

Two years later, the representation of African Americans in Atlanta at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition gave rise to a new form of African American leadership. At the Atlanta exposition Booker T. Washington gave a speech that initiated his meteoric rise to power. As with Putnam and anthropology, Washington used the Cotton States Exposition as a platform to popularize his agenda—industrial education and accommodating White supremacy as a means to "uplift" the race. Washington framed his agenda for African Americans with concepts of cultural and racial progress that were also consistent with ideas of Social Darwinism. As a result, he won the praise of both Democrat and Republican interests and helped articulate these notions across racial lines.
Booker T. Washington and the Cotton States and International Exposition—1895

In 1881 Washington founded and built Tuskegee Institute, a training school for African Americans that emphasized the virtues of hard work, thrift, and industry (Figure 6). In 1895 he was asked to deliver the opening address at the Cotton States Exposition. The address catapulted him to international prominence, and for the next twenty years, until his death in 1915, no other African American commanded comparable power and influence.26

The largely White exposition audience was concerned with finding sources of inexpensive labor and new markets for industrial and agricultural products; Washington, however, was concerned with finding more philanthropic support for Tuskegee Institute.27 In his speech he suggested that Negroes could help the United States progress if they "learned to dignify and glorify common labor and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life."28 He also warned Negroes not to migrate North because in the South "the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world."29 Members of the White race could help U.S. progress, Washington surmised, if they utilized Negro labor instead of immigrant workers "of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits . . . [because the Negro, after all, has] without strikes and labor wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth."30 Washington did not challenge segregation statutes and disfranchisement, and he even suggested "in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."31

Washington's so-called Atlanta compromise provided important African American support for racial segregation and disfranchisement.32 Without compunction, he couched his arguments in ways consistent with Social Darwinist ideas. Typical of Washington's many public statements was his allegation that "a race, like an individual, must pay for everything it gets—the price of beginning at the bottom of the social scale and gradually working up by natural processes to the highest civilization."33 He continued for years along these same rhetorical lines, knowing that it was an effective way to gain support for his vision of Negro uplift.

A number of ethnological and anthropological exhibits were displayed at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition (1895), the Tennessee Centennial Exposition in Nashville (1897), the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha (1898), and the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo (1901), but none matched the Midway of Chicago. Not until a decade after the Columbian Exposition was the scale and centrality of living ethnological exhibits surpassed.

The Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St. Louis—1904

The St. Louis fair was pitched as the largest the world had ever seen—nearly double that of Chicago. After a decade of constricting monopolies, the Spanish-American War, and periodic depressions, the overarching theme the fair organizers promoted was still unbridled
American progress—but not for the Negro. African Americans were systematically erased from the representation of American industrial and cultural progress. Every effort to represent African American achievements at the fair was thwarted, save for one or two exhibits by Black colleges. Emmett J. Scott noted this in the Voice of the Negro, "as at Chicago where the African Dahomey Village, with its exquisite inhabitants, was the sole representation of the Negro people, so at St. Louis, ... 'A Southern Plantation,' showing Negro life before the War of the Rebellion, is all there is to let the world know we are in existence."34

St. Louis, Missouri, was the Jim Crow South. The cosmopolitan tenor of the fair did nothing to stem the provincial customs and laws of segregation. Negroes were constantly "being turned away by concessionaires, sometimes courteously, sometimes with the brutal statement, 'we do not serve 'niggers' here.'"35

W. S. Scarborough noted that Jim Crow statutes at the St. Louis fair applied only to African Americans: "There will be Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Hindoos, Italians, Cubans, Hawaiians, Filipinos, even down to the Negroes of the islands in the Pacific, in whom some wiseacres have thought to have discovered the missing link—all these will be received officially and entertained as others, no notice being taken of their presence in cars, on grounds, in cafes—in fact, anywhere, unless suspicion arises in the mind of some that they belong to the wonderfully mixed race that we call the American Negro."36 Scarborough sardonically concluded, "Such is the irony of the American situation."37

Like the Chicago exposition, the St. Louis fair used anthropology to depict the inferiority of people of color and demonstrate American ascendancy. Explicitly, the directors wanted to develop "a comprehensive anthropological exhibition" to depict "the barbarous and semi-barbarous peoples of the world, as nearly as possible in their ordinary and native environments." These were to contrast the Departments of Education, Art, Liberal Arts, and Applied Sciences. The juxtaposition was planned not only to exhibit how far Americans had progressed in industry and culture but also, and more important, to demonstrate the need to rescue America's newly acquired vassals from the vestiges of savagery.38 As a result, the Department of Anthropology emerged as a keystone in the most grandiose world's fair to date.

Defining Nationalism, Defending Imperialism

By 1904, Brinton and Powell had died and Putnam was spending his final years between Berkeley and Cambridge. There were four prominent ethnologists who had experience as world's fair organizers and could have assumed the job of organizing the Anthropology Department in St. Louis: Otis T. Mason and WJ McGee (Figure 7) at the BAE, Frederick Starr at the University of Chicago, and Franz Boas at Columbia University. Each of these leading ethnologists gained experience and most of their national notoriety by working as exhibit organizers at the expositions. The fair directors selected McGee. Not surprisingly, his elaborate vision of human progress was consistent with the organizers' optimism of a new century and view that foreign intervention would help to advance the "lesser races." While Americans witnessed the devastation, poverty, and unrest brought on by the so-called civilized races, McGee proposed that Americans were now at the cusp of the final culture grade: Enlightenment. This was the precise message the fair directors wanted to deliver.

McGee was not an anthropologist but a self-taught glacial geologist at the USGS. In less than a decade he emerged as an influential professional in anthropology. His entrée into anthropology came in 1893, when Powell resigned from the USGS under congressional pressure initiated by mining and timber lobbyists. McGee was Powell's protégé at the survey and resigned too. Powell did not, however, resign from his directorship at the BAE, and he hired McGee as his heir apparent.39 As BAE ethnologist-in-charge, McGee rose to power within Washington's scientific societies during the following decade, but his fiscal mismanagement and opportunistic style led to his downfall at the Smithsonian. In 1903 he was forced out of government science because of public controversy and an indictment leveled by a Smithsonian investigation. When the fair organizers gave McGee the nod, he welcomed the opportunity to maintain his stature in the field and, perhaps more important, the opportunity to fashion a national identity out of his idea of racial progress.

McGee's ideas regarding progress were detailed in two 1899 addresses. The first, "National Growth and National Character," was delivered to the National Geographic Society; the other, "The Trend of Human Progress," was delivered to the Washington Academy of
McGee asserted that the entire human race was progressing to the "culture grade" of "enlightenment," which he conveniently tacked onto the familiar savage-barbarian-civilized evolutionary scheme. Whites in the United States, he mused, had only achieved enlightenment "during recent decades," whereas Whites in Britain were beginning to experience "budded enlightenment." White Americans were on the "high road to human progress" and were the only ones to experience "full-blown enlightenment." Unfortunately, he remitted, the darker races were much farther behind and on a much slower trek.

McGee hung his argument regarding the converging evolution of all races on an analogy of tributaries that flow into one great stream. He argued that "if the racial lines towards progress were projected forward, they [would] converge in consanguineal union transcending tribal and racist distinctions; projected backward, they divergate to an indefinite number of confluent currents coming up from proto-human sources to successively merge in the great stream of living humanity." He was quick to note that inter racial union is often apparently injurious, generally of doubtful effect, only rarely of unquestionable benefit... [although the] mixture of white and black has produced a Frederick Douglass, a Booker T. Washington, a Blanche K. Bruce, a Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and other makers of progress in...
the most progressive nation. By far the greater part of the interracial matings have been illicit, and between the lower specimens of one or both lines of blood, so that the evil of miscegenation may well have been intensified.43

The system of racial classification that McGee proposed was confusing. To begin with, he did not clearly state whether he attempted to assign culture grades to races, tribes, or nations. Nor was it clear whether individuals, regardless of race, could advance to a higher culture grade. He was clear that “human activities form the best basis for the classification of human kind.” 44 He believed that the more complex the technology, the higher the culture grade. Racial classification, he insisted, was indexed by what he termed “activital products,” or technological innovations, and these “products” were predetermined by innate and/or acquired coordination. The evidence McGee chose to support this argument included his observation that

the yellow or red or black artisan draws his cutting tool toward his body, the white artisan pushes knife and saw and plane outward; . . . the less cultured scribe writes from the right, the more cultured toward the right; the plodding coolie plants his feet in the line of his path, the high-bred mandarin turns his toes outward at right angles to his front; the clumsy cook wipes the dish toward her and often drops the crockery, the deft dishwasher wipes outward and can be trusted with costly china.45

McGee explained that two different evolutionary processes determined one’s coordination: cephalization and cheirization. He believed that cephalization was quite obvious and drew his evidence for it from the way in which the “human cranium has increased in capacity and changed in form from that of Pithecanthropus erectus to that of enlightened man; that arms and hands have shortened and acquired greatly increased amplitude of movement; that the jaws have condensed from prognathic type to the human form; [and] that the pelvis and leg bones have become better adapted to the erect attitude.”46 From this process of cephalization he concluded that cranial capacity has increased among all peoples and nations and decreased among none. But, he quickly retorted, “the records show that cranial capacity is correlated with culture-grade so closely that the relative status of the peoples and nations of the earth may be stated as justly in terms of brain-size as in any another way.”47

The amount of coordination was not contingent solely on cranial capacity. In McGee’s view it was correlated with and augmented by cheirization, which McGee explained in one rather lengthy sentence:

It is the process involved in manual training, both subconscious and purposeful; its mechanism appears in the wide range of action in the human hand as compared with the paw of the animal, and no less strikingly in the increasing range in manual capacity found in ascending the scale of human development from savagery to enlightenment; its effects are displayed in the better development of the forearm among white men than among yellow or black men; and its prevalence is shown in the hundred manifestations of manual dexterity among cultivated men to each half-dozen found among primitive men.48

Although the logic and examples that McGee used to make his arguments were somewhat confusing, he came dangerously close to positing ideas that could have challenged the racial plank of Social Darwinism. For instance, he delimited race from culture, or he classified people “in terms of what they do rather than by what they merely are.”49 By the nature of his argument, he also implicitly supported certain interracial unions. The way he circumvented these apparent contradictions enabled anthropology to champion American imperialism in the Pacific and defend Jim Crow in the South. McGee fashioned an anthropological version of the White man’s burden.

The logical extension of McGee’s idea of convergent human progress was racial equality; however, he mollified any question, even of its potential. He assured the readers of the American Anthropologist that “the progenitors of the white man must have been well past the critical point before the progenitors of the red and the black arose from the plane of bestiality to that of humanity.”50 The White man, he argued, had a special responsibility to these lesser races of the world because they were the only people to experience “full-blown enlightenment.” White Americans had to shoulder the White man’s burden and therefore were obligated to uplift the lesser races in the Pacific.

Considered as races, the peoples are evidently approaching community, partly through blending of blood, partly through the more rapid extinction of the lower races who lack the strong constitution (developed through generations of exercise) enjoyed by the higher races; so that the races of the continents are gradually uniting in lighter blend, and the burden of humanity is already in large measure the white man’s burden—for, viewing the human world as it is, white and strong are synonymous terms.51

The themes of the White man’s burden, America’s leadership into the new culture grade, and evolution as a product of technological advancement were consistent with the sense of nationalism and defense of im-
perialism that the organizers of the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition wanted to help foster.

McGee turned his theory into practice at the fair when he began to deploy various agents to bring savages and barbarians to St. Louis. He secured pygmies from Zaire, Patagonian giants from Argentina, primitive Ainu from Japan, and an assortment of Indians. These ethnological specimens complemented the U.S. government exhibit with more than 1,200 Filipinos. To carefully measure the ethnological specimens, McGee fashioned psychometric and anthropometric laboratories to calibrate the racial inferiority of people of color in terms of strength, endurance, sensitivity to temperature, touch, taste, and vision.52 Franz Boas and Clark Wissler from Columbia University, Aleš Hrdlička, the newly appointed director of physical anthropology at the USNM, and Frederick Starr from the University of Chicago all gave their approval and advice to the laboratories and exhibits.

Starr actually arranged for students to receive course credit at the University of Chicago for attending the fair. His class, appropriately titled "The Louisiana Purchase Exposition Class in Ethnology," was composed of talks, lectures and "direct work with material, living and not."53 During the decade between the Chicago fair and the St. Louis fair, the focus of the discipline moved from museum collections to university instruction.54 Not only did anthropology have scientific merit, it also had value as education.55

Party politics quickly engulfed the didactic value of the discipline. Both expansionist Republicans and protectionist Democrats used anthropological research to bolster their agendas.56 Their respective agendas were framed by a simple question: Does the Constitution follow the flag? Or, are the rights of people in U.S. territories protected under the Constitution? The protectionist Democrats argued that the Constitution must follow the flag. They looked at the nearly 1,200 Filipinos on the forty-seven-acre reservation on the fairgrounds as proof that they were naturally unfit to shoulder the responsibilities of citizenship and that, therefore, the United States should have protective tariffs and no protective tariffs. Senator G. G. Vest summed up this popular position: "The idea of conferring American citizenship upon the half-civilized, piratical, muck-running inhabitants of two thousand islands, seven thousand miles distant, in another hemisphere... is so absurd and indefensible that the expansionists are driven to the necessity of advocating the colonial system of Europe."57 Even though the Supreme Court ruled in some fourteen cases called the Insular Cases (1901-1904) that the Constitution does not follow the flag, the American people had to judge for themselves. President Theodore Roosevelt stepped in to help.58

In 1904 Roosevelt, who had assumed office after McKinley was assassinated, was waging his first presidential campaign. He had to convince the electorate that the United States should stay in the Philippines to help civilize the islands. His Democrat opponent was Alton B. Parker, a conservative federal judge from New York. The protectionist Democrats were about to insert a plank into the party's platform suggesting that Filipinos were "inherently unfit to be members of the American body politic," and the 1,200 Filipinos wearing native loincloths reinforced this plank.59

Roosevelt became embroiled in a controversy between anthropologists and the fair organizers that was extensively covered by the press. The president demanded that short trunks replace the native loincloths worn by the Igorots and the Negritos. The anthropologists protested the president's attempt at "over night civilization." Starr warned that forcing the savages to don western attire would compromise the scientific authenticity of the exhibit and might kill the natives. By forcing the Filipinos to wear traditional garb, the visitors would have perceived these savages as unable to progress toward civilization, which buttressed the Democrats' opposition to the occupation of the islands.

Rydell has suggested that the Philippine Exposition Board evaded party politics by driving an ethnological wedge between the Igorots and the Negritos. The board arbitrarily placed the lighter-skinned Igorots on a rung above the dark-skinned Negritos. According to various official descriptions, the Negritos were "extremely low in intellect" and were on the way to extinction. To reinforce this notion, one of the Negritos was named "Missing Link." The Igorots were depicted as capable of attaining a state of civilized culture. Scientists, according to an official souvenir guide, "have declared that with the proper training they are susceptible of high stage of development, and, unlike the American Indian, will accept rather than defy the advancement of American Civilization."60

This ethnological wedge was not new. For a 1898 cover story, the *Scientific American* included a front-page montage of Filipinos in various states of civilization. Subtitles on the pictures ranged from "Savages of North Luzon, with Their Arms" to "Civilized Indians Pounding and Cleaning Rice, Luzon."61

Although the Negritos were remanded to a lower stage, the Pygmies
from Zaire were relegated to the lowest form of savagery. One of McGee's special agents was the missionary and explorer S. P. Verner. McGee charged Verner with collecting and returning an ethnological exhibit of Pygmies from Zaire. He executed this order and brought several Mbuti to the fair. The Pygmy exhibit was one of the most popular in the ethnological menagerie. After the fair, Verner befriended one of his wards, Ota Benga, on the journey back to Zaire. Benga, who had lost his family to ivory pillagers, convinced Verner not to leave him in Africa but to bring him back to the United States. Verner agreed, but he was in financial ruin and could not support Benga. When the two returned to the United States with no means, Verner decided to sell his "African collectibles—artifacts, beetles, monkeys, and implicitly his pygmy to the American Museum of Natural History in New York." Ota Benga actually lived in the museum as more or less a visitor. He roamed freely and unobtrusively throughout the museum but was eventually transported to the Bronx Zoological Gardens after a series of mis­haps. Initially he was just a live-in domestic worker at the zoo. Then, in a scheme to increase revenue, the director of the zoo displayed the thirty-seven-year-old Ota Benga in a cage with an orangutan. The sign above the cage read:

THE AFRICAN PYGMY, "OTA BENGA." AGE, 23 YEARS 
HEIGHT, 4 FEET 11 INCHES. WEIGHT, 103 POUNDS.
BROUGHT FROM THE KASAI RIVER,
CONGO FREE STATE, SOUTH CENTRAL AFRICA
BY DR. SAMUEL P. VERNER.
EXHIBITED EACH AFTERNOON DURING SEPTEMBER.

Thousands of people saw Ota Benga in the Bronx Zoo in September 1905. The New York Times ran articles posing questions like "Is it a man or monkey?" New York City's African American community vehemently protested and eventually ensured Ota Benga's release.

In 1905 a fine line was drawn between the zoological construction of animal and the ethnological construction of other. The line was thin because of the immense popularity and entertainment value of the ethnological exhibits at consecutive world's fairs. It was stretched even thinner by the authoritative anthropologists who consistently depicted a close affinity between African savages and their "primate brethren." The administrators at the Bronx Zoo crossed the line with impunity and without reservation.

The ethnological exhibits at the world's fairs of 1893 and 1904 provided "living proof" of racial inferiority by explicitly exhibiting a Social Darwinian evolutionary ladder for literally millions of fairgoers. The public's adoration of anthropology was due in part to the way its scientific authority resonated, converged, and reproduced popular ideas about race.

Images and Experts in the Illustrated Monthlies

Ideas of racial inferiority sustained saliency within the proliferating mass media. During the mid-to-late 1890s, there was an explosion of printed material of all kinds. It was driven by new technology, increased literacy, concern with market share, and the efficacy of advertising. Americans consumed muckraking and sensationalism along with social commentary and international affairs by buying record numbers of newspapers and new low-priced books. Of the vehicles of popular information, none experienced a more spectacular increase in sales and circulation than magazines. Prior to the 1890s, most magazines were literary, and all were marketed to affluent and well-educated audiences. The price of thirty-five cents assured that even middle-class Americans would not be privy to the cultured insights and literary digests of the moneyed elite. These magazines maintained a certain aloofness, unlike newspapers, which fostered a sense of urgency.

The entire genre changed during the 1890s. The price of the most popular magazines dropped to fifteen or even ten cents a copy, and circulations soared. Coverage of current events and social issues increased as the circulation grew. The North American Review, Century Magazine, and Forum were so-called high-brow magazines that had always addressed current events. The new middle-class readership demanded more timely topics from Harper's, the Atlantic Monthly, and Dial, which continued its focus on literature but increased its coverage of current events. During the 1890s, Popular Science Monthly's editors even included articles on current events—tackling social problems with science. Fifteen-cent monthlies, like the world's fairs, emerged as fin-de-siècle vehicles of popular culture that cemented the ideas and values of the nation's political, financial, and intellectual elite to the middle and working classes.

The inexpensive and newsworthy illustrated monthlies came into direct competition with newspapers. The low newsstand price and even