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Where Did Red Go?

Lewis Henry Morgan's Evolutionary Inheritance
and U.S. Racial Imagination

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BEFORE W. E. B. DU BOIS STATED IN 1903 THAT “THE PROBLEM OF THE Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (1968, 23, 41), the hegemonic model of racialization in the United States was comprised of red, white, and black. Du Bois’s “color-line,” Steven Conn states, reflects the “disappearance” of red from U.S. racial imagination (2004, 1). Although Du Bois conceptualized the “color-line” in global terms, embracing the “relation of the darker to the lighter races” in Asia, Africa, America and “the islands of the sea” (1968, 23), his emphasis on the United States inscribed the black/white divide as a national binary. This shift occurred in the representational realm of national narrative. The “color-line” model was no more accurate than its red/white/black predecessor, since both are reductive interpretations of complex exclusionary realities. And Native Americans did not disappear, but rather had a marked demographic recovery during the twentieth

century (Dippie 1982). But whereas the tripartite model has become an object of historical reflection, echoes of the “color-line” continue to reverberate and require critiques in U.S. discussions of race.¹

This essay provides a partial explanation for the transformation of the U.S. racial imagination from a tripartite to a binary model through the works of a once-prominent ethnologist, Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–81). Lawyer, railroad investor, and minor politician, Morgan—dubbed “the father of American anthropology”—was a member of the National Academy of Sciences, served as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and inaugurated research in what has become the anthropological field of kinship studies. During the last few decades, Morgan’s work has been discussed mainly in relation to early studies of Native American cultures (Bieder 1986; Deloria 1998; Michaelsen 1999); kinship studies (Trautmann 1987; 2001; Feeley-Harnik 1999); Marxism (Shaw 1984); and evolutionist anthropology (Kuper 1988). However, its contribution to U.S. racialization on a larger scale has yet to be analyzed. I revisit Morgan’s work not because it is valid, but because, ironically and regrettably, its ideological import has proven remarkably enduring.

Morgan’s theory of cultural evolution relied on an elaborate conceptualization of inheritance, through which he envisioned the putative “disappearance” of the red category from the national racial imagination. In this process, he reformulated past and present Native American existence as the patrimony of a white United States. In contrast with many discussions of evolution and race, Morgan’s formulation of inheritance was not founded on blood, but rather on property. It thus requires us to rethink race not only in terms of biology, but in those of cultural appropriation as well. Even though the evolutionism that enabled this theory of inheritance was later debunked, the role of inheritance in the shaping of U.S.-Native American relations has remained an implicit yet prevalent concept in U.S. national discourse. This paradoxical endurance of a refuted theory has structured U.S.-Native American relations in legal practice, museum exhibitions, and popular culture. The immediate ideological effect of this conceptualization of inheritance was the reframing of colonization and nation building within a natural, inevitable, scientifically-valid order. Even when cultural

evolutionism lost its scientific prominence to competing theories of cultural relativism, the enduring concept of inheritance kept this order largely intact. This essay explains the shift from a tripartite racial model to a binary one as the simultaneous appropriation of Native American cultures into, and the exclusion of African American culture from, national culture. The former process meant that red was no longer perceived as an independent category that had to be distinguished from white; the latter meant that white and black had to remain mutually exclusive.

This analysis contributes to theorizations of “translation” (Cheyfitz 1997), “playing Indian” (Deloria 1998), and “going native” (Huhndorf 2001) by rethinking racialization as a project that used national narrative, enlightenment theories of progress, and evolutionism to produce a particular form of determinist history. By historicizing these epistemological processes, I hope to enhance rather than marginalize the material historical conditions through which red “disappeared” as a visible category and the white/black binary was consolidated. Through military campaigns against Native American nations, their containment in reservations, and the fragmentation of their lands, the United States attempted to deprive Native Americans of sovereign nationhoods. At the same time, the “color-line” separating African American citizens from white ones was inscribed legally through *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Immigration and naturalization policies helped adjust the new black/white binary to new circumstances and prevent the proliferation of national racial categories by limiting immigration from East Asia and broadening the white category (Jacobson 1998). This history accounts for the erosion of the red category, but it does not explain the epistemological foundations of this erosion.

Morgan wasn’t the first to entertain the fantasy of inheritance in which colonial and U.S. culture is nourished by consuming Native American cultures, but he was the first to turn this fantasy into a persuasive, influential scientific theory whose conceptual import has yet to be completely discarded. Earlier articulations of this fantasy include comparisons between Native Americans and the Picts (the imagined ancient ancestors of the British) (Lemay 1978, 201–3), and Pocahontas’s christening as Rebecca—the biblical mother of the red Esau, who sold his birthright to his younger twin

brother Jacob (Genesis 25:23–34)—which symbolized both the nonviolent dispossession of the red person by the newcomer and a Christian amalgamation of red and English people.² Morgan provided new, influential frames for old questions.³ His concept of evolutionary inheritance is a key to the consolidation of ethnology as a project that interpreted and constructed racialization within a scientific discourse of nation building. I begin by tracing the role of race in Morgan’s cultural evolutionism, and considering the divergent positions he assigns to white U.S. citizens, Native Americans, and Africans. Next, I examine Morgan’s conceptualizations of inheritance, family, and hospitality as key factors in the “disappearance” of red and its appropriation into white national discourse. I conclude by discussing the ironic endurance of Morgan’s legacy, despite the refutation of his work in anthropological literature. The focus of this last section zooms out of Morgan’s works as I analyze the endurance of his thought by examining late twentieth-century legislation in relation to anthropological museums. This historical fast-forwarding demonstrates the significance of Morgan’s contribution to anthropological practice long after his death.

RACE AND EVOLUTION

During the twentieth century, race has become entangled with culture and ethnicity, which were cast either as its intimate relatives or its antonyms within debates about the roles of biology, tradition, lifestyle, and performance in identity formation.⁴ But in Morgan’s work, the noun “culture” is insignificant. The adjectives “cultural” and “ethnic” are synonyms, and both are subordinated to an evolutionary scheme. His usage of “race” reflects the noun’s divergent etymological sources: an earlier, Old Norse one, denoting running over a certain course, and a later one from the Romance languages, denoting the classification of groups by “common descent.”⁵ The Old Norse meaning no longer bears relevance to formulations of social distinctions, but in Morgan’s thought, these two aspects of race—running and descent—were intertwined. Race, in this context, is a complex concept that ties geographic origin to movement over a course in time. In his 1877 cultural evolution masterpiece *Ancient Society*, Morgan

portrays each race (common-descent group) as a distinct evolutionary link advancing in a progressive race (running) toward attaining and perfecting civilization.

This evolutionary scheme relied on Scottish enlightenment theories, which were “taught as textbook gospel in [nineteenth-century U.S.] colleges” (Pearce 1988, 89), and which divided humanity into a progressive succession of savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Morgan elaborated this plan of history by breaking savagery and barbarism into subdivisions (each of which constituted an “ethnic period”) and by mapping historical and contemporaneous human populations onto particular “periods.” Human history was the cumulative, teleological development from the lowest stage of savagery to civilization. Almost every racial or ethnic group (in the modern sense) had a fixed location on this progressive scale. Africans, as I will explain, were significantly excluded from this linear continuum. Different “ethnic periods” were distinguished by their respective arrays of institutional, technological, and epistemological features, according to which their locations on the scale of progress could be determined. Each “ethnic period” was also indebted to all preceding periods, whose achievements and experiences it enjoyed; thus, savagery “launched” the “human race” “upon its great career for the attainment of civilization” (Morgan 1985, 527), and in “the period of Barbarism,” the descendants of savages “wrought out” the “fruits” of their ancestors’ labors. The “civilized descendants” of both, Morgan writes, are “still perfecting” them (527). Progress is attained by the collective accumulation of property and its bequeathal by less developed “races” to more advanced ones. Morgan’s first book, *League of the Ho-de’-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (1851), provides an example of such inheritance: a trail between “the Hudson and lake Erie” had been “handed down from race to race” of Native Americans and eventually became the New York state turnpike (Morgan 1954, Vol 2, 94–95).⁶ Race here distinguishes not only Native Americans from white U.S. citizens; it also differentiates among Native American groups living in various historical periods.

Each “ethnic period”—a term that Morgan often used to differentiate among what was later termed various racial groups—reflects “a marked advance upon its predecessor . . . in the variety and amount of property”

(Morgan 1985, 525) so that property, its accumulation, and its transfer set evolution in motion. Several groups stand out in this scheme: Aboriginal “Australians and the greater part of Polynesians,” for example, represented, “when discovered,” the earliest extant “ethnological period,” which Morgan calls the “Middle Status of Savagery” (10).⁷ But most important are (white) U.S. citizens, Native Americans, and excluded Africans, whose respective functions are instrumental for grasping Morgan’s perception of race and its facilitation of the move from a tripartite to a binary model of national racialization.

WHITE, RED, AND THE EXCLUSION OF BLACK

Civilization—the product of cumulative inheritance—is nowhere more evident for Morgan than in the United States; the republic’s democratic institutions and national culture, he argues, are “perfecting” the “fruits” of preceding periods more significantly than any other society. Classified within the “Aryan family,” which “has proved its intrinsic superiority by gradually assuming the control of the earth,” the United States represents the apex of civilization because it alone has achieved the “overthrow of privileged classes,” as Morgan articulates the exceptionalist myth of the United States as an almost classless society (553, 551). The United States is also distinguished by its privileged proximity to former “ethnic periods” of its own, represented by Native American societies, portrayed as the ethnological object of study par excellence:

The Indian family of America, unlike any other existing family, exemplified the condition of mankind in three successive ethnical periods. In the undisturbed possession of a great continent, of common descent, and with homogenous institutions, they illustrated, when discovered, each of these conditions, and especially those of the Lower and Middle Status of barbarism, more elaborately and completely than any other portion of mankind. (16)

The privileged evolutionary position of the United States—its civilized progress and proximity to earlier cultural stages—turns its national culture into

a theater of racial inheritance. While the United States is at the forefront of civilization, the cultural evolution of Native Americans was “arrested” at an “ethnic period” that Morgan dubs the “middle status of barbarism” (539). Arrested development keeps Native Americans away from two institutions that Morgan associates exclusively with the upper status of barbarism and the dawn of civilization: “slavery” and “nations” (540).⁸ Ostensibly incompatible with slavery, Native American societies can be imagined as antidotes to its ills; their putative lack of a concept of nations helps justify colonization. Having previously enjoyed the “undisturbed possession of a continent,” Native Americans, according to Morgan, seem to have willingly bequeathed it to their putative Aryan successors.

The absence of “slavery” (and “nations”) from the ethnic periods represented by Native Americans is crucial for Morgan’s translation of colonization and racialization into inheritance, and it is related to his perception of Africans. Unlike the “Indian family,” which is a model of evolutionary order, Africa is characterized as “an ethnic chaos of savagery and barbarism” (16); Morgan excludes numerous African languages from his 1871 kinship-studies book, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*. Although this voluminous study encompasses “four-fifths and upwards, numerically, of the entire human family” (1997, xxii), its coverage remains incomplete. “An attempt was made,” Morgan writes,

to reach the Negroid nations of Africa, but it proved entirely unsuccessful. The people of pure negro stock are . . . limited in numbers on the African continent. Unimportant in numbers, feeble in intellect, and inferior in rank to every other portion of the human family, they yet centre in themselves, in their unknown past and mysterious present, one of the greatest problems in the science of the families of mankind. They seem [*sic*] to challenge and to traverse all the evidences of the unity of origin of the human family by their excessive deviation from such a standard of the species as would probably be adopted on the assumption of unity of origin. . . . the negro is the chief stumbling block in the way of establishing the unity of origin of the human family. . . . It is difficult to know even the direction in which to look for a discovery of the causes which produced such an

excessive amount of divergence from a common typical standard of the species. (462)

The most striking feature of this account—second only to its blatant racism—is the implicit though powerful separation of Africans (who seem associated here with Africa but not with America) from both humanity and U.S. culture.

The data for *Systems* was gathered before, during, and after the Civil War; Morgan couldn't have simply forgotten African Americans. He refrains from discussing actual slavery even though the diminished “numbers” of “people of pure negro stock” may be attributed to the slave trade; despite the fact that the claim for intellectual “feeble[ness]” invokes the stereotypes fostered by the slaveholding society; and although his otherwise monogenist views challenged pro-slavery polygenism, which was articulated by Louis Agassiz at Harvard (Kuper 1988, 44). *Systems* was the product of an ambitious project of global dimensions: by finding similarities and relations among the kinship terminologies of as many languages as possible, Morgan hoped to prove that the entire “human family” shared a common origin. Unable to collect so much information alone, he was helped by the Smithsonian Institution, government officials, and missionaries. All that effort was motivated by faith in monogenism. Yet in stark contrast to the linear scale connecting the pasts and presents of numerous populations, the “unknown past and mysterious present” of Africans are theirs alone, shared by no other group and unavailable for ethnological inquiries. Morgan excludes the kinship terminology “of the Negroid family” from the detailed tables published in *Systems*, and his discussions of African societies makes no room for African Americans, who are thus left, in Du Bois's term, within a “veil” (1968, 16), which preserves the distinction between white and black, in both Morgan and Du Bois's texts. This “veil” fixes the boundary separating white from black; its absence between red and white means that this latter distinction is blurred.

Morgan's respective treatments of Native Americans and Africans must be contextualized within the prevailing racial imagination of his contemporary United States, which was still dominated by the red/white/black

trio. The exclusion of Africans became a powerful factor in preparing the ground for a red/white merger that could presumably transcend the national problems that racists associated with the very presence of people of African descent in the United States. At the top of Aryan “civilization,” the United States, as I show above, seems to Morgan the most refined product of universal cultural evolution. As prenatal communities with no notion of territorial sovereignty, Native Americans are appropriated into and subsumed under the white, civilized nation-state in a process of natural succession. Unstained by slavery, moreover, Native Americans signal a way out of national crises, to be established by strengthening the natural ties between red and white, and excluding black from a national imagination and from global human history. By leaping from an imagined Native American past to the post-Civil War United States, Morgan imagines that slavery never existed, and portrays the colonization of Native American lands as a natural event. The existence of Africans is perceived as an aberration in national, scientific, and human terms. Their presence in the United States is thus represented as stemming from a historical accident rooted in inappropriate human intervention in a teleological evolution. Cultural-evolutionary inheritance is presented as a corrective that can erase this error and establish a new national and scientific order that would absorb red into white and make black disappear.⁹

Slavery and nations represent moral milestones in Morgan’s view of property as the fuel of progress. While slavery emerges at an early point in the development of property relations, and must be overcome in the process of civilization, the concept of nations—which develops shortly after slavery—manifests the morality of civilized life as nations stabilize the relations between people and property. The future of civilization is one in which slavery—and its byproduct, “aristocracy”—would end with the “overthrow of privileged classes,” a process that has so far, Morgan claims, been accomplished only “in the United States” (1985, 540, 551–52). Envisioning the growth of civilization through the appropriation of red by white, Morgan deviates from the strict teleology of his cultural evolution and imagines a two-way merger that enables the United States to efface the stain of slavery and avoid the excessive accumulation of property:

The time will come . . . when human intelligence will rise to the mastery over property, and define the relations of the state to the property it protects. . . . A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future as it has been of the past. . . . democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality, and fraternity of the ancient gentes. (552)

In Morgan's theory, "ancient gentes" (or "clans," in current parlance) are the basic units of Native American societies. Similarly, the future values that would transcend a "mere property career" characterize his portrayal of Native American cultures. Marx and Engels were impressed by this passage and by Morgan's cultural evolutionism, which inspired Engel's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Shaw 1984).¹⁰ For my purposes, its significance lies in the portrayal of Native American cultures as raw material for reforming and redirecting a post-Civil War United States and its struggles over the bounds of expansionism, the limits of freedom, the course of progress, and their relation to national property and objectives. This passage explains the role of Native American cultures in the United States, in Morgan's thought and far beyond it: the cultural property of Native American societies is perceived as the rightful inheritance of the United States. The revival of Native American values would manifest itself in U.S. national progress, which has been partly sidetracked by slavery and the unacknowledged presence of blacks. Native Americans would necessarily be subordinated to this progress by virtue of their putative "arrested development."

The higher "revival" of the "ancient gentes" was a motivating, controlling idea in Morgan's thought and ethnological practice. His interest in Native Americans emerged from the central role he played in the early 1840s with a secret fraternal society that was initially called "The Gordian Knot" and whose purpose was to contribute to the creation of authentic national literature. Before long, the fraternity became "The Grand Order of

the Iroquois,” as Morgan and his fellow members reoriented their search for authentic national expression toward Native American cultures (Resek 1960; Deloria 1998; Bieder 1980). Throughout Morgan’s career, his ethnological work integrated the appropriation and study of Native American cultures for nation-building purposes to the extent that the two can hardly be distinguished in his texts.

By highlighting the role of inheritance in Morgan’s evolutionary thought, I add another dimension to the mutually-constitutive activities of appropriation and study to which he was devoted. A “revival, in a higher form” means that inheritance by appropriation not only reproduces but also *improves* the appropriated and inherited origin. This version of cultural appropriation entails more than “imperial nostalgia” (Rosaldo 1989). Its consequences reach beyond the terms through which Philip Deloria analyzes the shift in Morgan’s career from the “Grand Order of the Iroquois” to ethnology. Deloria locates Morgan on two sides of a border, between romantic perceptions of Native Americans as “interior Others” to modernist ones in which Native Americans are recast as “exterior Others” (1998, 93).¹¹ Inheritance intensifies appropriation and turns it into a natural process. Through inheritance, Morgan and other white U.S. citizens could imagine that they internalized concepts and practices associated with Native Americans into their very selves. As property of white Americans, such concepts and practices became heirlooms to be passed on to the next generations. In the following section I explain the complexity of inheritance in more detail.

THE NATION’S RED ANCESTORS

Morgan’s inheritance scheme (which highlights the influential role of Native American cultures in the formation of white U.S. culture) may seem incompatible with nineteenth-century neo-classical trends (which cast ancient Greece and Rome as the symbolic origin of national culture). Morgan interweaves both ideological strands by defining the evolutionary stage of ancient Greece and Rome as the end of barbarism and the dawn of civilization, in two “ethnic periods” that bridge the gap between Native

American existence in putative barbarism and the presumably advanced U.S. civilization (see Table I).

TABLE I: MORGAN'S CULTURAL EVOLUTION

SOCIAL GROUP	ETHNICAL PERIOD
Native Americans	Lower and Middle Statuses of Barbarism
Ancient Greeks, Romans, Germanic tribes	Upper Status of Barbarism and dawn of Civilization
White U.S. citizens	Civilization

Incorporated into national evolution of global consequence, classic Greek and Roman ancestors support the drama of a natural-scientific manifest destiny in which the “possession of a great continent” unfolds. Whereas Greece and Rome’s ancestry and legacy are defined in temporal rather than spatial terms and seem limited to the intangible realm of texts, political thought, and artistic and architectural styles, those of Native American societies are tangibly rooted in the land, which seems to have been transferred naturally to the “possession” of the United States. Tangible heritage may seem more persuasively real than the bequeathal of Greece and Rome as the former does not connote the artificiality invoked by concepts such as civilization, literature, and art.

This formulation of racialization in terms of property and inheritance rests on a logic of race that both preceded and succeeded Morgan and that has been inextricably intertwined with property and inheritance. Connoting both the material goods that one *has* and the inherent, organic qualities that define who one *is*, property and inheritance are contextualized by both economic and natural discourses, whose intersection constructs possessive individualism (Macpherson 1964; Handler 1991). In terms of natural property, inheritance is perceived today primarily as a biological process through which what we call genetic makeup is transferred from ancestors to their offspring; this aspect of inheritance is seldom mentioned in Morgan’s works.¹² Morgan’s discussions of inheritance were often divorced from biological concerns, and were formulated in the economic terms of “the

relation of the state to . . . property.” This focus on racialization as a process that is founded on property relations enables us to examine Morgan’s thought in light of theorizations of race that highlight material patterns and policies that perpetuate discriminatory divisions (Lipsitz 1998; Wiegman 2002). In both the biological and the economic sense, inheritance connects individuals or generations within particular groups so that biological and material properties are transferred from the deceased to the living members of the same group. Critiques of the economic aspects of race therefore highlight the social boundaries circumscribed by inheritance, where the very stability of privileged racial groups is maintained through the boundaries that exclude others from inheriting the possessions of those whose stable hold of property perpetuates and naturalizes hierarchic power relations.

Morgan’s logic of inheritance, by contrast, *allows* the transfer of possessions *between* groups while its progressive frame polices the direction of such transfer, turning Native Americans deterministically into the vanishing ancestors of their presumably advancing white heirs. The transfer of the “possession of a great continent” from Native Americans to the United States is facilitated by Morgan’s insistence that “tribes and nations in [precivilized] ethnical periods” represent “our own remote ancestors” (1985, 18). Ancestry and inheritance are deterministic, unidirectional forces that order the power relations that foster particular forms of racialization, which are sanctioned by and contribute to national discourse. The imagined line dividing red from white is blurred as Native Americans become the “ancestors” of white U.S. “heirs” who inherit and appropriate not only the land of their presumably barbarous predecessors, but their entire, accumulated, tangible and intangible cultural property. The bequeathal by ostensibly barbarous “ancestors” to their putatively civilized successors constitutes, for Morgan and his audience, a scientific theory that reinterprets the history of colonization and prescribes a national future. This theory is encapsulated in elaborate discussions of the Family as the building block of History.

FAMILY, HISTORY, AND WHITE/RED RELATIONS

I have capitalized Family and History here to distinguish *Family* from the mundane meanings of the nuclear family as a limited social unit, and *History* from a contingent aggregate of events. In far more ambitious terms, Morgan conceptualizes the Family in three different ways: the Human Family represents the entire human population (excluding those he does not consider human); the specific Family of a distinct ethnical period (or, in twentieth-century terms, any particular “race,” “people,” or “culture”); and the Family as a prominent social institution by whose development History is measured (Morgan imagines progress from presumably promiscuous, primitive, extended families to the ostensibly civilized, monogamous, nuclear one). These three concepts of Family are crucial in the construction of History as a line of progress from savagery, through barbarism, to civilization.

Inheritance merges evolutionary History with national history through curious double periodization. The universal “ethnical periods” are complemented in North America (mostly the U.S. portion, though this is partially valid for Mexico as well) by another set of three periods: the “aboriginal period,” the “period of discovery,” and the period of “American civilization” (Morgan 2003, 63, 105, 44), which represent the linear building blocks of American (i.e., U.S.) history (see Table II).

TABLE II: MORGAN’S IMPLICIT PERIODIZATION

HISTORICAL PERIOD	MORGAN’S CATEGORY
Pre-colonization	“Aboriginal Period”
Colonization	“Period of Discovery”
U.S. history	“American Period”

This sequence serves as the implicit, national-history parallel of the savagery-barbarism-civilization continuum of evolution’s History, and it helps naturalize the transfer of the “possession of a great continent.” The “period of discovery” represents a decisive break, foreshadowing the imminent disappearance of Native Americans and their replacement by U.S. “Americans.” The “American civilization” period embodies the reward of

cultural evolution: former colonizers become “American” by virtue of having inherited the fruits of the “aboriginal period.” In evolutionary History, the temporal distance between Native Americans and U.S. citizens is immense, but in this version of U.S. history, the distance is bridged through a grand narrative that almost eclipses the prominence of ancient Greece and Rome. Evolution’s History intersects with national history thanks to European “discovery” and colonization, which, once “launched” on the page of History, foreshadow and necessitate the imminent inheritance scheme that turns Europeans into Americans.

Morgan’s perception of evolutionary History sounds absurd primarily because, as I show more elaborately below, it was powerfully refuted by modern anthropology’s emphasis on relativism and diffusion as the only valid explanations of cultural differences.¹³ But absurd as it may seem, Morgan’s theory was far from marginal within its contemporaneous intellectual climate. Elisabeth Tooker defines him as “one of the most influential of all nineteenth-century anthropologists” (1992, 357). His centrality probably stemmed from his ability to respond to, reflect upon, and articulate the concerns and convictions of the intellectual milieu of mid-nineteenth-century Britain and the United States. His ideas may not have been accessible or influential in the arena of popular culture, but they were well received and had followers in elite intellectual and institutional circles. *Ancient Society*—by far his most influential book—was distributed to workers of the Bureau of Ethnology, a government agency that, at that time, functioned as the nerve center of U.S. anthropological practice, and whose official doctrine was Morgan’s cultural evolutionism (Longacre 2003, x).¹⁴ As David Wallace Adams writes, the book gave the “idea of social evolution” its “authoritative verification” and provided the “intellectual framework” for not only scientists, but for philanthropists and reformers, as well (Adams 1995, 14).¹⁵ Beyond the United States, nineteenth-century scholars of kinship and social evolution used Morgan’s ethnological data (Tooker 1992, 371). Additionally, as mentioned above, Marx and Engels found his evolutionism inspiring.

Morgan’s evolutionary work responded to the groundbreaking transformations of natural science in the wake of Darwin’s 1859 text *Origin of Species*

and the expansion of human time. Previously, Western scientists had used biblical chronologies to assess the duration of human existence, but by 1860, archeologists had abandoned the biblical confinement of human time and replaced its presumed 4,000–6,000 years with a much longer span extending thousands of years into the past (Grayson 1983; Stocking 1982).¹⁶ This newly established duration of human existence supported monogenist theories, which Morgan shared, and which portrayed humanity as a biologically-unified group with common descent. Despite his polygenist classification of the “Negroid nations,” Morgan intended for his evolutionary work on the “Human Family” to achieve three goals: to refute polygenism; to establish a progressivist framework of human History that would negate the hypothesis according to which “non-civilized” populations devolved from previously higher stages of existence; and to lay the foundations for a national science of Native Americans. In this vision, the U.S. “nation” was white—devoid of African Americans—and in possession of Native Americans. “The question is before us as a nation,” Morgan writes in his last book, *Houses and House-Life of the American Aborigines* (1881), “whether we will undertake the work of furnishing to the world a scientific exposition of Indian society” (2003, 224). Such “exposition” was to support monogenism and progressivism and unite national and scientific aspirations for progress. By tracing the indigenous population of the “New World” to a common descent with “Old World” societies (excluding Africans), and by portraying the social and technological conditions of this population as an earlier, ancestral stage in relation to Europeans, Morgan hoped to solve *both* scientific and national conundrums about the purpose and design of History and national history. Africans were excluded from both historical perspectives.

Kinship studies were a powerful tool in this project, which promoted the idea of a monogenetic, African-free “Human Family” and the prominence of the nuclear, “monogamian” family. Morgan distinguishes two basic systems of kinship terminologies, which represent two stages in humanity’s cultural evolution: an earlier (“classificatory”) one characterizes Native American and other languages, and a later (“descriptive”) one is shared by the languages of “civilized” Europe and the United States, among others. In the latter “descriptive” system, family ties are exclusive: “Each relationship,” Morgan

explains, “is . . . independent and distinct from every other.” The European or U.S. “ego”—the product of the nuclear family—has one “father” and one “mother.” By contrast, the Native American “classificatory” system is inclusive; it “reduc[es] consanguinei to great classes . . . [and] applies the same terms to all the members of the same class.” Therefore, in Native American languages, Morgan argues, each “ego” can have several fathers and mothers because the same-sex siblings of the biological parents are also regarded as ego’s “mothers” and “fathers” (1997, 12–13). In this interpretation of kinship, fundamental distinctions in the regulation of inheritance, such as next of kin, are revised in a way that implies that biological reproduction is only one possible aspect of familial relationships, which may be supplemented by equally valid, nonbiological family ties. Native American families are portrayed as inclusive, receptive social units that are capable of embracing new members, regardless of Western gradations of relationships. This inclusiveness plays a crucial role in the unidirectional blurring of the boundaries separating the white and red categories of national racialization.

THE INCLUSIVE HOSPITALITY OF FAMILY, HOME, AND CONTINENT

Inclusiveness characterizes Morgan’s representation of Native American domestic lifestyles as well, and it facilitates the process of inheritance through which a white United States replaces Native Americans in the “possession of the continent.” In *Houses*, Morgan ties the inclusiveness of Native American families to geographic space and portrays Native American homes and lands as inviting, welcoming terrains, available for the advancement of new “Americans.” “House architecture,” Morgan believes, illustrates “progress from savagery to civilization” (2003, 6); he uses it as an integrated model of human progress and national history while representing the process by which European colonizers, arriving in America as “guests,” eventually become “American.” In this theory of domestic evolution, Native American domesticity is constructed as inclusive and hospitable by rules such as “communism in living,” the sharing of resources in “large, joint-tenement” households, and “the ownership

of lands in common,” which extends “communism” and sharing beyond the household, applying them to the continent. These rules seem to lead naturally to “the law of hospitality”:

If a man entered an Indian house in any of their villages, whether a villager, a tribesman, or a stranger, it was the duty of the women therein to set food before him. . . . The same hospitality was extended to strangers from their own and from other tribes. Upon the advent of the European race among them it was also extended to them. (2003, 45)

This definition extends Native American hospitality to European colonists; Morgan supports his argument by quoting colonizers and explorers from John Smith to Lewis and Clark, whose voices serve as evidence that, in their ostensibly uncorrupted condition at the “period of discovery,” Native Americans invariably welcomed Anglo colonizers into their homes. Spanish colonization is not mentioned here, with the exception of “the expedition of Hernando de Soto into Florida,” which—in compliance with the convention of using the Black Legend to represent British colonization as benevolent by comparison (DeGuzmán 2005)—Morgan describes as “a hostile rather than a friendly visitation,” in which “the naturally free hospitality of the natives was frequently checked and turned into enmity” (2003, 48). The Spanish conquest of Mexico is conspicuously absent from this discussion, which is motivated by the wish to portray the future United States, rather than the Americas, as a hospitable receptacle of guests who eventually usher in the period of “American civilization.” Unlike the behavior of de Soto’s men, the indefinite stay of the Anglo “guests” neither violates nor abuses the “law of hospitality,” since their hosts become their “ancestors.” Through such fantasies of inclusion, Morgan portrays white U.S. “Americans” as heirs to Native American lands, cultures, and lives—even geographic conditions are recruited to support this process. “Notwithstanding this generous custom” of hospitality, Morgan clarifies,

the Northern Indians were often fearfully pressed for the means of subsistence during a portion of each year. A bad season for their limited

production, and the absence of accumulated stores, not unfrequently engendered famine over large districts. From the severity of the struggle for subsistence, it is not surprising that immense areas were entirely uninhabited, that other large areas were thinly peopled, and that dense population nowhere existed. (2003, 56)

The clichéd portrayal of America as available vacant land is translated into determinist scientific fact, to the end that colonization can be reinterpreted not as the result of historical contingencies (history), but as part of a teleological civilizing mission (History). Native American cultures are represented as almost destitute ancestral hosts whose resources and properties are transferred naturally to their ostensible heirs in the History of progress.

This inheritance is both abstract and material, as is illustrated by a graphic example of cultural evolution provided by Morgan in *Houses*. In 1878, while visiting Aztec pueblo ruins in New Mexico, Morgan “brought away” several specimens, including two “stone[s] from doorway” (2003, 179, 180). Back at home, writing *Houses*, he compares these stones to “a sandstone cut by American skilled workmen in the form of a brick,” whose engraving he prints next to that of the pueblo doorway stone (see Figure 1).

Appreciating the Pueblo doorway stone, Morgan writes:

The Village Indians of America were working their way experimentally, and step by step, in the art of house-building, as all mankind have been obliged to do, each race for itself. (2003, 180)

The modern brick seems to have no part in this evolution, which invokes a self-sufficient “race” advancing slowly “for itself.” But the graphic juxtaposition of the two images brings to mind the (later) image associated with Darwinian evolution in which several primates comprise an ancestral chain that begins with a crouching ape and ends with an erect *Homo sapiens*. Morgan’s image of masonry’s evolution implies that the stage at which “each race [works its way] for itself” is only temporary, and eventually leads to the transfer of the property of “Village Indians”—both intangible

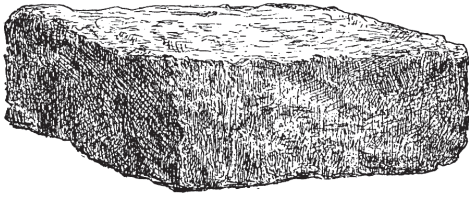


FIG. 41.—Stone from doorway.

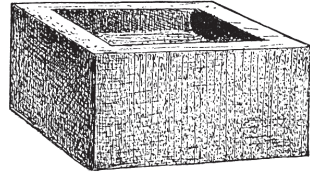


FIG. 41 a.—A finished block of sandstone, for comparison with Fig. 41.

Fig. 1: “Stone from doorway” and “A finished block of sandstone” (Morgan 2003, 180).

technological knowledge and tangible “ruins”—to the hands of white U.S. culture and “American skilled workmen.”

At this point, Morgan merges evolutionary History and national history into a single plan of progress. This transfer represents neither group as independent of the other; Native Americans are reinterpreted as ancestors and white U.S. citizens as their heirs. Interestingly, Morgan reenacts this colonial fantasy of hospitality in an uninhabited pueblo, and thus lends implicit evidence for faith in the imminent disappearance of Native Americans. As the literal ruins of a pueblo from the “aboriginal period” are shown graphically to be succeeded linearly and replaced by the literal building block of the “American period,” History and history are no longer distinct. Their intersection collapses the racial boundaries between Native Americans of a former “aboriginal” period and white U.S. citizens of an advancing “American” period. The progress of one race is hindered by, and loses itself in, that of another, which is rewarded by the experience of its putative predecessor. Morgan’s focus on ruins, rather than on inhabited pueblos, drives the point home. “It is a singular fact,” he writes,

that none of the occupied pueblos in New Mexico at the present time are equal in materials or in construction to those found in ruins. It tends to show a decadence of art among them since the period of European discovery. (188)

Thus, the succession of the “aboriginal” period by a more advanced “American” period is portrayed as natural evolution rather than violent colonization.

REFUTED THEORIES, ENDURING LEGACIES

The decades that followed Morgan's death witnessed dramatic shifts in U.S. studies of Native American people and cultures; with the emergence of social Darwinism, eugenics, the rise of cultural relativism, and the academic institutionalization of anthropology, Morgan's version of evolutionism suddenly seemed irrelevant, and was explicitly refuted. The most concrete, early example of its rejection was Boas's success in revising the organization of anthropological museum exhibits. Inspired by Morgan's theory, such late nineteenth-century exhibits constructed a universal, progressive scale of History by grouping artifacts by type rather than by region. Any particular basket, for example, was displayed among baskets produced in various places, and collectively the exhibit was expected to demonstrate the progress of basketry throughout the ages and locations of human experience. In such exhibits, contemporary Europe and the United States represented the apex of civilization and the beneficial accumulation of the entire human experience. Attacking the method six years after Morgan's death, Boas writes:

By regarding a single implement outside of its surroundings, outside of other inventions of the people to whom it belongs, and outside of other phenomena affecting that people and its productions, we cannot understand its meaning. . . . we want a collection arranged according to tribes, in order to teach the peculiar style of each group. (1887, 485)

Tested against faith in cultural relativism, Morgan's idea of inheritance seemed outdated and his scheme of progress was declared pseudohistory. Individual pieces of property were detached from a universal course of progress and attached instead, much more exclusively, to particular groups, within which any single object had a unique meaning.

Still, Boasian anthropologists acknowledged Morgan's contribution to the development of anthropology and seem to have shared his perception of anthropology as a national project. It was here—at the intersection of anthropology and national culture—that Morgan's legacy lived longest.

Toward the end of his life, while wrapping up his last book, *Houses*, Morgan reflects on U.S. anthropological endeavors:

Our ethnography was initiated for us by European investigators, and corrupted in its foundations from a misconception of the facts. The few Americans who have taken up the subject have generally followed in the same track . . . until romance has swept the field. (2003, 274)

Hoping for a positive reception of his last book—offered as a contribution towards reducing “romance” and advancing “science”—Morgan ends the book thus:

I have now submitted all I intended to present with respect to the house architecture of the American aborigines. . . . Should the general reader be able to acquiesce in this interpretation, it will lead to a recognition of our aboriginal history, now so imperatively demanded. (2003, 276)

A few decades later, when few U.S. anthropologists would “acquiesce in the interpretation” of evolutionary progress, Morgan would be respected primarily for helping to divert “our ethnography” from an ostensibly romantic course to a putatively scientific one.

But Morgan’s most enduring legacy lies at the intersection of “our ethnography” with “our aboriginal history.” This intersection is anchored in national discourse, which makes the possessive adjective “our” intelligible in both phrases, and which turned it into the principal guiding force of U.S. anthropology until after World War II, when “the intimate relationship between anthropology in North America and the study of the American Indian” no longer defined the discipline (Darnell 2001, 9). Whereas before the war, U.S. anthropology found its “unifying cement” in “the ‘possession’ of the American Indian as its main field of study” (Adams 1998, 6), the postwar reconfiguration of U.S. foreign relations opened up numerous fieldwork sites from which European powers could no longer exclude U.S. researchers. For Morgan, “our ethnography” and “our aboriginal history” were conjoined, but the postwar political climate led to the extension and

expansion of U.S. anthropology far beyond studies of Native American cultures. Subsequent developments, primarily in the wake of decolonization and globalization, have transformed the discipline over the last half century, severing the ties that had previously anchored it to the imagined fixity of identity, place, culture, and nation. These radical shifts impacted anthropology departments in universities, but in museum anthropology, whose earlier days had been shrouded in Morgan's legacy, the fiction that Morgan called "our aboriginal history" lived longer. It is in museum anthropology that the logic of inheritance proved most powerful.

The power that U.S. museums had exercised over the ownership, representation, and handling of Native American human remains and objects resulted in the striking convergence of museum-related and human rights legislation. Long after Morgan's death, U.S. museums continued to claim proprietorship over a vast array of Native American human remains, burial sites, objects, and artifacts (which had been considered the rightful property of the United States) as though they were bequeathed—according to Morgan's vision of Native American property—as a reward for the new "American period." The academic institutionalization of anthropology meant that museums lost the exclusive hold they had once enjoyed over studying and defining Native American cultures, but they haven't lost their hold over countless objects and remains that have been acquired—and often stolen—from these cultures. Only with the passage of the National Museum of the American Indian Act (1989) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) did the United States recognize Native Americans' human rights for federal protection from grave looters (Trobe and Echo-Hawk 1992). Had the Native American holdings in anthropological museums not included human remains, it's doubtful whether this legislation would have been as unequivocal as it was; the shocking discovery that the Smithsonian Institution had been holding the remains of thousands of people helped promote this legislation in the face of competing claims for the interests of science.¹⁷

The practices of U.S. anthropology museums are particularly significant for this discussion of racialization as a process founded on concepts of inheritance because through these practices, museums redefined the relations

between death and inheritance. The logic of inheritance (by which property passes from the deceased to the living) stems from a fundamental distinction between human proprietors and property, a distinction grounded in the mutually constitutive relationship between proprietorship and personhood. In U.S. history, this distinction was most violently and obviously disregarded by slavery. The violations of this distinction in U.S. treatment of Native Americans have attracted less attention, and despite these violations, neither slavery nor the ongoing colonization of Native Americans disrupted U.S. narratives of the republic's protection of individuals' freedom under benevolent democracy. U.S. republicanism, as Carol Rose states, defined individual personhood through property: "'the people'" were "only those citizens who had the property necessary to make them 'independent' and thereby capable of participating in governance" (1994, 61–62).¹⁸ The holding of human remains by museums meant that the deceased—and Native Americans in general, potentially—were considered primarily as property; this redefinition was crucial for extending Morgan's logic of inheritance so that it would be applicable not only to Native American cultures, but also to Native American people, who became potential heirlooms of the U.S. national public.

Conceptualizations of inheritance are vital for the perception, possession, and management of cultural meanings and property associated with the past; today, discussions of cultural property often focus on the benefits (or lack thereof) of preservation for the living successors of dead ancestors (Harding 2003).¹⁹ Morgan and his contemporaries' practices highlighted the "salvaging" of objects and meanings from the contemporaneous Native American societies that they viewed as destined to disappear. This sense of disappearance and the putative "disappearance" of the red category from the national racial imagination intersected in museum practices as the ostensibly disappearing remains of a Native American past—and present, and possibly, ironically, future as well—could presumably be salvaged only through national appropriation. This process of translation, by which Native Americans could be represented as props for constructing U.S. national narratives, has been represented as a quasi-natural evolution despite undertones of racial difference.

Even outside of museums, Native American cultures have been perceived as the cultural property, national patrimony, and history of the United States. The national discourse in which “our” national community intersects with “our aboriginal history” relies—implicitly but powerfully—on a persistent logic of inheritance in U.S. popular culture, from films such as *Pocahontas*, (Edwards 1999), to the toy industry (Yellow Bird 2004), to sports mascots (King 2004). The distinction between refuted theories and enduring legacies explains why, even though Morgan’s “ethnic periods” ceased to make ethnographic sense long ago, his insistence on the intersection of “our ethnography” and “our aboriginal history” has retained its validity until at least the late twentieth century. The “recognition” that he “imperatively demanded” has more than simply materialized, and can be partially measured by the replacement of the tripartite racial imagination by the binary “color-line.” Redefined as the property of a white national community, red no longer required a distinct category.



NOTES

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1. Du Bois’s centrality to discussions of race in the United States was recently stated in a special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*. “Du Bois,” writes John L. Jackson Jr.—half ironically, half earnestly—“is racial Americana personified” (2005, 397). For useful references on the topic of race, see DeGuzmán (2005, 328-29 n.1.)
2. See also Tilton (1994).
3. According to Roy Harvey Pearce (1988), Morgan’s first book, *League of the Ho-De’-No-Sau-Nee, or Iroquois* (1851) marks the boundary between romantic and “scientific” or “objective” studies of Native Americans (Pearce 1988, 76, 90, 129–35). Instead of subscribing to such dichotomies, I emphasize the ideological impact of Morgan’s reframing of old issues.
4. “Culture” sometimes seems an antithetical, worthy alternative to race; it was this portrayal of the race/culture dichotomy that motivated the emergence of the anthropological concept of culture in the early twentieth century (see Stocking 1982).

- “Ethnicity,” as Henry Yu reminds us, was the “product” of this emergence (2003). Later, “culture” itself became a target of critique. For a survey and analysis of recent discussions of race and culture, see Hartigan (2005).
5. I refer here to the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of “common descent.” See also Hannaford (1996, 5, 147–49).
 6. See also Ben-zvi (2003).
 7. See also Spriggs (1997).
 8. Morgan’s claim that Native American cultures have yet to conceptualize “nations” is diametrically opposed to the eighteenth-century perception of Native Americans that Ed White associates with colonial discourse, in which the “dominant *practical* association” of the term “nation” was “with Native Americans” (White 2004, 64). In White’s analysis, the eighteenth-century understanding of Native American cultures as “nations” was crucial for the development of U.S. nationalism. In Morgan’s account, as I explain in more detail below, Native Americans’ presumed lack of the “nation” concept is instrumental for a U.S. nation-building project that relies on inheritance.
 9. George Fredrickson discusses the late nineteenth-century fantasy, among whites in the United States, who “foresaw the peaceful disappearance of a race of ‘feeble exotics’: the blacks would quietly fade away in the face of white competition because of racial weaknesses that were accentuated by climatic factors” (Fredrickson 1987, 229–30). Morgan seems to anticipate this fantasy by implicitly erasing the very presence of African Americans in the United States.
 10. The subtitle of Engels’s classic was *In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (Shaw 1984).
 11. See also Deloria (1998, 74, 82).
 12. It is mentioned in a journal entry written during a field trip Morgan took while researching *Systems*: “the absorption of the best blood of [the Native American] race into our own [i.e., white U.S. citizens’] is destined to take place,” he writes, as “respectable white people [will] marry the Indians . . . and these half breeds will then again intermarry respectably with the whites. Our race, I think, will be *toughened physically* by the intermixture and without any doubt will be benefited intellectually” (1993, 46–47; emphasis Morgan’s). In this fantasy, the ostensibly imminent disappearance of Native Americans is imagined as a natural process of assimilation within “our race.” The national community is portrayed as an aggregate of happy families, enriched and “toughened physically” by the indivisible unity of “blood” that would turn colonization into a story of biological amalgamation.
 13. For a debate that dramatizes this conflict, see White (1945) and Lowie (1946).
 14. See also Kuper (1988, 74) and Hinsley (1981, 133).
 15. See also Elliott (1998, 207–8).
 16. Morgan embraced and promoted this new historical framework: “the existence of mankind,” he stresses at the beginning of *Ancient Society*, “extends backward immeasurably, and loses itself in a vast and profound antiquity” (1985, xxix).
 17. As Trope and Echo-Hawk write, “national estimates are that between 100,000 and 2 million deceased Native people have been dug up from their graves for storage

- or display by government agencies, museums, universities and tourist attractions” (1992, 39). As background for federal graves protection legislation, they cite the 1986 discovery by Northern Cheyenne leaders that “almost 18,500 human remains were warehoused in the Smithsonian institution” (54).
18. For the anxieties that this exclusion entailed, see Wald (1995).
 19. For a problematization of cultural property and preservation in the context of repatriation, see Merrill, Ladd, and Ferguson (1993).

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