Folklore and Ideology during the Gilded Age

The nineteenth century had not even drawn to a close before E. Benjamin Andrews, President of Brown University, self-assuredly declared in his massive history of post-Reconstruction America that "few quarter-centuries in the world's life bristle with salient events as does that following the year 1870" (Andrews 1896, vii). As speculation turned to the order of the new century, he and many other intellectuals offered justification for the "progress of civilization in the United States" in a brand of cultural history promoted by folklorists and anthropologists. This progress was an industrial vision of expansive empire and unfeathered enterprise. It was an imprint of progress designed along the lines of rational science and with the promise of Utopian peace and pleasure.

My purpose here is to interpret the rhetoric established by writers on folklore to this dominant theme in American ideology between 1880 and 1900, and consider the philosophical reasons for its rise and fall. I do not propose another exercise in the ways in which scholars produced work reflecting the temper of the times, but rather suggest that in this formative period for professional studies, writers self-consciously prepared a menu of culture which fed the appetite of policymakers and opinion molders. Borrowing the topics of the industrialist William Washington's influential book Progress and Prosperity (1911), I might summarize the menu as "The Old World and Its Remaking into the New—The Story of the Mediums of Development—The Building of Empires in America, the World's Wonderland." It includes concerns for the advancement of industry, the modern role of women, and the integrity of the American nation-state. It is, as Washington noted, built on the theories of cultural evolution provided by scholars following Darwin and Spencer, scholars who Washington said "are vitally concerned in the healthful condition and expansion of their own and the nation's industries" (Washington 1911, 1–5).
This statement appears ironic at the very least, since folklorists during the late nineteenth century were hailed as preservers of tradition. But, while many folklorists recorded "survivals" of ancient tradition for a modernizing audience, they were not necessarily advocates of preindustrial life. From his station in the nation's capital at the Bureau of American Ethnology, John Wesley Powell urged the study of American Indian folklore to help control the Indian lands and railed against the scourge of superstition, and Captain John Bourke of the army called for the colonization of Mexico and referred to the "abomination" of its native folkways (Hinsley 1981, 147–51; Bourke [1895] 1987; Porter 1986). There were some figures such as Cornell University's T. F. Crane, one of the founders of the American Folklore Society, who pointed out the aesthetic power and intrinsic value of folklore. As I will discuss later, the special situations of blacks and Jews in American society complicated matters for folklorists, but they did not deter the charting of an inexorable "progress toward civilization."

The dominant tide of evolutionary doctrine was given impetus by the first great chronicler of American folklore studies, Lee J. Vance. In 1896 he offered the view that the end of the nineteenth century

will be marked by the rise and growth of a new science—the science which studies mankind from the time when the earth and the human family were young down to the present time. This science (whether called Anthropology or Comparative Folklore) studies the progress of man in culture. It reveals the evolution of modern culture from the beliefs and usages of savages and simple-minded folk. Now folk-lore is concerned more particularly with the "survival" of primitive or ancient ideas and customs in modern civilization: that is to say, our study traces the development of tribal custom into national law; of pagan custom into Christian ecclesiastical usage and popular festivals; of sorcery and magic into astrology, and finally into astronomical science; of song and dance into Greek drama and poetry; of nursery tales and Märchen into the epic and the modern novel. Again, the end of the nineteenth century is remarkable for the immense number of books devoted to the Folk—to people who have shared least in the general advance. These people are, first, the backward races, as the natives of Australia and our Indian tribes; then the European peasantry, Southern negroes, and others out of touch with towns and schools and railroads. (Vance 1896/1897, 249)

With the "immense number of books devoted to the Folk," as Vance stated, the path to culture could be diverted from the established one charted in classical education. The discovery, or invention, of "the Folk" in the nineteenth century shook the elite pillars of Greek and Roman civilizations as the source of valued modern arts. In widely discussed works tracing culture "scientifically" to the savage folk, such as The Golden Bough (1890) by J. G. Frazer, even classical religion received challenge as the wellspring for human destiny (Ackerman 1990). Locating origins of modern culture in the customs of the folk allowed for expansion of civilization to include the popular practices associated with growing middle class existence.
Slow and steady progress could be charted from narrow native roots to an expansive foliage of the rational present. In decentering civilization toward the present, the evolutionary concept of the folk opened possibilities of global connections to advanced industrial developments, even for upstart social experiments like the United States.

Folklore was a popular "modern" subject at a time of change when the "modern" seemed more distanced from "tradition." By 1893, the American society outnumbered its European counterparts, and branched out into local organizations in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and other major cities. In 1895, according to press reports of the day, folklore stole the show at the Congress of American Scientists, which featured seven learned societies, including highly touted organizations for psychology, mathematics, and anatomy. "Scientists Make Great Progress, Folk-Lore is Discussed," the Philadelphia Inquirer announced with a special regard for the significance of industrial progress. "Important Papers on Many Subjects Read by Men Well-Known in All Professions," the headline continued, but it was the folklore society's doings that led the story. The story of folklore, told in evolutionary fashion, confirmed the Victorians' lofty opinion of themselves. Folklore delved into exotic customs and rites and measured the advancement of the present day. It titillated the senses and it offered explanation on a grand scale.

MUSEUMS IN THE ADVANCE OF CIVILIZATION

Folklorists were men and women who had a stake in advancement of "progress" as it was perceived in the late nineteenth century. It was led by industry, invention, and transportation and involved an adoption of rational science to understand and improve the world. The American Folklore Society, one of the many new "scientific" societies of the late nineteenth century, was founded in 1888 and boasted a membership mostly of physicians, lawyers, writers, military officers, and museum officials. Like other learned societies formed at the time, the American Folklore Society appealed to middle-class professionals who sought new intellectual pursuits outside the classical university curriculum (Bledstein 1976, 80–128; Bronner 1986a, 17–19). The study of folklore and ethnology arose outside of the academy, which was slow to give up its classical curriculum. If the experts on the new subject wanted a full-time occupation, they found homes in museums. By storehousing relics of preindustrial ages and exotic cultures, many new museums of the day praised material and scientific progress of the Gilded Age. With museum exhibits emphasizing the interpretation of clues to the ancient past excavated from below-ground sites or collected from exotic cultures, often in arrangements that drew comparisons to the allure of world's fairs and department store displays, many ethnologists and folklorists were able to find influential platforms from which to proclaim their principles. The Museum of Natural History opened in 1869, the United States National Museum in 1879, the University of Pennsylvania Museum
Stewart Culin, c. 1905. (Brooklyn Museum)
in 1887, and the Brooklyn Institute Museum and the Field Museum in 1893. Each of
these added ethnological sections to their collections. From this vantage, many
ethnologists had rare opportunities to reach the public with their ideas, and the
ethnologists also benefitted from private and governmental funding of great collect­
ing trips, especially to Indian lands out west. Between 1890 and 1903, ten presi­
dents of the American Folklore Society, when they took office, held professional
affiliations with ethnological museums. Frederic Ward Putnam, head of the
Anthropology Department at the Chicago World’s Fair, was director of the
Peabody Museum. Otis Mason was head curator of ethnology at the United States
National Museum and worked closely there with Frank Hamilton Cushing.
Cushing also did work for the University of Pennsylvania Museum, the home base
of Daniel Brinton and Stewart Culin.

To get a profile of the Gilded Age museum man using folklore to respond to
issues of his day, I point to the life of Stewart Culin, who became president and
curator of the American Folklore Society. Born in Philadelphia in 1858 to mer­
chant-class parents who had roots in America’s colonial settlement, Culin graduat­
ed from Nazareth Hall, where he fondly recalled being regaled with American
Indian tales by an influential teacher. At the age of seventeen, Culin entered his
father’s merchant business in Philadelphia, where he conducted business with
Chinese immigrants and learned their language. Versed in the early studies of
anthropology, he recorded the “exotic” customs of the Chinese in the city. He col­
clected their medicines, games, arts, and religious objects. With the merchant’s care
for detail and accurate record keeping, he expanded his collections and interests to
cover the entire Orient. He joined and later became secretary of the Numismatic
and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia. He was influenced there by fellow mem­
ber Daniel Brinton, who attracted international acclaim for his prolific writings in
archaeology, linguistics, mythology, and religion. Brinton, later to become the first
university professor of anthropology, published Culin’s article on medical prac­
tices of the Chinese in 1887 and encouraged him to make a career of his studies.

Brinton envisioned a museum at the University of Pennsylvania which would
undertake the collection, display, and study of cultural objects. Plans went ahead
for the museum in 1887, and Culin left his business to become the first secretary for
the Oriental Section in 1890. That same year he publicized his innovative plans for
a “folk-lore museum.” Such a museum, he wrote, “would have an extended field,
and might embrace a vast number of objects which do not ordinarily come within
the domain of the collector, and yet are most valuable as illustrating customs,
myths, and superstitions.” He gave as an example the rabbit’s foot to bring good
luck and the potato and the horse chestnut carried to prevent rheumatism. They
are “often quite interesting in themselves,” he said, and “if properly arranged and
labeled with their special story or signification, would form a vastly entertaining
collection and a valuable aid in the study to which the Folklore Society is devoted”
(Culin 1890, 312–13).
In 1892, Culin put together a ballyhooed exhibition of religious objects of the world at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Largely as a result of the show’s success, he was appointed secretary of the American Historical Commission to the World’s Exposition in Madrid in 1892. He then rose to the position of director of archaeology and paleontology for the university museum. He followed in 1893 with a display of “folklore objects,” many garnered from American Folklore Society members, for the Chicago World’s Fair. Visitors to the fair marveled at the exhibit he had assembled in eye catching arrangements. “Folklore most intimately connects this age with the greatest antiquity,” exclaimed the Chicago Record, “and of folklore no branch so directly informs of our relation to the people of most ancient days than the games for the different stages in the history of the world.”

At the fair Culin met Frank Hamilton Cushing of the Bureau of American Ethnology, who took great interest in Culin’s exhibit and offered to collaborate on a study of Indian games. The exhibit showed an evolution of religious objects giving way to games. Besides this concern for custom, Culin noticed the ornamental
features of his objects. "When we examine the products of man's handicraft," he reflected, "we everywhere find evidences of an aesthetic sense, of an effort, not only at mere utility, but at decoration and ornament, analogous to that which is universal among cultivated people at the present day." His explanation? Ornament stemmed from religion, magic, and superstition—"of the reasoning which led many to attempt through magic to control or influence the forces of nature" (Culin 1900a).

In 1899 and 1900, Culin grieved over the deaths of his two greatest influences: Daniel Brinton and Frank Hamilton Cushing. To Culin was left the goal of advancing his mentors' evolutionary studies. He replaced Brinton as lecturer in anthropology and continued Cushing's study of Indian games. In 1900, he left the comforts of his Gilded Age house in Philadelphia to travel west with the Wanamaker Expedition into the Indian territories, sponsored by the famous department store mogul. The first stop was Tama, Iowa, where he visited the Sac and Fox nations. Observing a tribal feast, his eyes turned to the old men sitting on platforms in the longhouses, their medicine bags hanging from rafters above them. Culin was deeply moved by what he witnessed. He passionately wrote in his journal, "These feeble creatures, with strangely wrinkled faces, expressive of patience and suffering and more of life's experience than falls to all the collected multitude of our modern towns, were once the tribal leaders and are still the repositories of the tribal secrets and traditions. One by one, they will be carried to the little graveyard on the hillside and buried with their precious packs, and all their wealth of curious knowledge will be lost to the world forever" (Culin 1901, 2). Culin vowed to rededicate himself to recovering the traditions of the natives and especially their rites and objects.

In 1907, Culin published his magnum opus of 846 pages, *Games of the North American Indians*. In the book, Culin classified and illustrated American Indian gaming implements in American and European museums according to activity and called upon field observation to document and compare the games across cultures. Culin penned a letter to the chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology explaining the significance of the work: "I might suggest that this is the first serious attempt to compare and study the games of more than one tribe. It is by far the largest collection of data about aboriginal games, whether in the Old World or the New. It is, too, the largest collection of data existing on any particular subject referring to the objective culture of the Indian." The term *objective* appealed to Culin because of its inclusion of "objects," the center of study, and its objectivity, reflecting the stress on a detached "scientific" approach. By this he meant "science which embraces the examination of all man's activities.... Like modern science generally it is based upon multitudes of more or less minute and widely extended observations, but unlike those sciences such as mathematics and chemistry which we know as exact its formulations are less definite, although no less alluring" (Culin 1924, 93). With his reference to the singular *Indian*, rather than the plural *Indians*
Otis Mason, c. 1890s. (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)
or Indian cultures, he shows the racial classification commonly used to mark cultural division in evolutionary writing.

Culin argued for the practical use of folklore collecting among "lower" races to benefit American industry. He had a guiding hand in the commercial packaging of the traditional game Parcheesi by Selchow and Righter. Almost thirty years after his triumphant exhibit of toys and games at the World's Columbian Exposition, the commercial magazine Playthings interviewed Culin about the exhibit and his suggestions for better-designed toys. He told the magazine that "I constantly think of the possibilities of the practical adoption of games which I encountered in remote places to the requirements of our own American industry" ("World's" 1920, 105–10). Culin wrote columns for Men's Wear, Women's Wear, and the New York Times on good fashion based on the history of textiles and primitive design, and he served as a judge for window display contests. He organized a series of lectures at the Brooklyn Museum on decorative objects such as "portable boxes and containers employed in conserving and transporting merchandise and household gear, bearing in mind the primitive and oriental objects I describe supply unnumbered suggestions of value to our manufactures."

Culin as merchant used the museum as an adviser to industry and an educator of the public. As curator and ethnologist, he sought purposes and themes for objects and for his age. Seated in a Paris bistro in 1920, Culin questioned how far the age had actually progressed according to his evolutionary belief. He watched a drunken display of jazz playing and dancing and entered the scene in his journal. "I have been among the savages, but a display like this I have never seen." This was not, in his view, social progress. Walking through his museum gallery for one of the last times, he reflected, "It has been my habit as an ethnologist devoted to the study of the material culture of mankind to think of the races of antiquity as younger and not older than the people of our own age; to refresh myself with such contacts as I have had with their minds to feel myself younger and more vital. I have realized my dreams among savages in whose lives and thoughts I have had glimpses of the dawn of the world" (Culin 1927, 43).

While Culin gained prominence in museum positions in leading commercial cities of Philadelphia and New York, Otis Mason (1838–1908) iterated the message in the country's "national" museum at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Both figures used exhibitions of folk artifacts organized on the basis of evolutionary doctrine to address the remarkable material progress of America as a culmination of the civilization process. Born in Maine and raised in Virginia, Mason went to Columbian College (now the George Washington University) in Washington, D.C., receiving, in the tradition of college education at the time, a general knowledge of biblical and classical studies, literature and philosophy. After graduation in 1861, he stayed on to teach natural history, classics, history, English, mathematics, and geography. During the 1870s, he championed "general principles of Natural Science" at the school. By 1880 he was instructor of English and history.
When he left in 1884 for the United States National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, he was listed as professor of anthropology. Among the courses he taught were “Races of Man,” “History of Culture,” and “History of the Past as Revealed in the Sciences of Archaeology and Folk-Lore.” In folklore he found the ancient “artifacts” of civilization and the “specimens” for its cultural history. To organize the growing study of folklore, he became a founder of the American Folklore Society, its president in 1891, and host of its meetings in 1891 and 1894. Reflecting on the appeal of this study, Mason said, “In the last decade of the nineteenth century, when the world was looking forward, it was a relief to vary this mental attitude by occasionally glancing backward, and considering the past as it appeared by its survival in the present.” And Mason found many present-day labels to attach to cultural survivals. “Without doubt,” he offered, “there is also a folk-speech, folk-trades and practices, folk fine art, folk-amusement, folk-festival, folk-ceremonies, folk-customs, folk-government, folk-society, folk-history, folk-poetry, folk-maxims, folk-philosophy, folk-science, and myths or
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As head curator of the ethnological collections at the United States National Museum in the Smithsonian Institution, Mason took on the enormous task of sorting the museum's cultural collections. He used the objects in the collections to establish a cultural history based on the evolutionary principles of natural science. He categorized by technological type and arranged them from primitive to industrial. As cultural history, Mason's studies were intimately connected to issues of the day which were being hotly discussed in the nation's capital. Students of primitive and folk culture were naturally involved with such issues, he observed, because they participated in the search for the hidden "secrets of man's origin, progress, and destiny." "Folk-lore," he said in 1891 in a manifesto of evolutionary folklore studies, "stands for the hereditable part of our activity; invention is the creative, originating part of our action. Folk-lore is crystalloid; invention and science are colloidal. Folk-lore is kept alive by public opinion, and is opposed to progress; invention and science are centrifugal, venturesome, individual. This ability to act in common has itself had a historic growth, beginning with such savage acts as beating time to a rude dance, and rising to a grand chorus, a great battle, or a modern industrial establishment employing thousands of men marking time to one master spirit" (Mason 1891).

In 1894, Mason published Primitive Travel and Transportation, a 350-page combination of a detailed catalogue of objects in the museum's collection and of the reconstruction of the development of modern transportation industries from "primitive" cultures, mostly American Indian. According to Mason's study, rail and steam travel were the culmination of thousands of years of development and provided the direct route to enlightenment. In the same year that his study of transportation appeared, Mason's Woman's Share in Primitive Culture was published. He noted that the moving, socially aspiring "new woman" of the late nineteenth century had raised pressing political and cultural questions. What effect would changes in her traditional roles have on the family and society? Would she be industrious or leisurely, scientific or sentimental? Mason defended the modern woman of leisure by pointing out that women had been the first industrialists. In primitive cultures, they had manufactured the shelters, clothes, containers, and foods for domestic and community use. If middle-class Victorian women now appeared to be idle, it was no wonder, Mason thought, because they had earned that right from their taxing early industrial efforts. In 1911, social critic Anna Spencer, writing in Forum, used Mason's ideas to make an argument for women's adaptability to industrial work. Women, she opined, first "attained the discipline of a 'steady job.' The biological hints of the busy bee, the industrious beaver, the ant, to whose example the human sluggard was long ago commended, all seem to have been taken lightly by the primitive man" (Spencer 1911, 546-48). She argued that women therefore embodied the character of modernity. Olive Schreiner's
Women and Labor, which in 1912 was one of the ten best sellers in America, warned, however, that "in a strange new world" women could become a race of "laboring and virile" women, the equals of their ancient ancestors.

In The Origins of Invention (1895) Otis Mason expanded his arguments for the explanation and justification of modern industrial advancement in the hidden past of tradition. The labeling by folklorists of primitive and folk activities commonly stressed modernist terms such as "industry" and "invention." Besides Mason, who used the terms widely, Alexander Chamberlain, the first American Ph.D. in anthropology in 1892, wrote on "Mythology and Folklore of Invention" for the Journal of American Folklore (1904); Thomas Wilson published "Primitive Industry" for the Smithsonian Institution Annual (1893). Mason and these authors helped to fashion a distinctive social rhetoric. By connecting manual labor to "primitive industry," no conflict was implied. The development from handicrafts to industry seemed natural. The progressive present set the standard for the primitive past. The lack of conflict is noteworthy, because America during the 1890s was plagued by strikes from hand trades, which were protesting against the "unnatural" industrialization of their work and consequent dehumanization of their activity. A depression in 1893 brought criticisms that industries had grown out of touch with society and its patterns by overproducing and speculating. But, in the same year, the Anthropology Building at the Chicago World's Fair featured exhibits on "labor-saving devices, illustrating generally the progress of the amelioration of the condition of life and labor" (Truman 1893, 260–61).

From their positions in museums, folklorists actively wrote and exhibited on divisions of culture: the past and present, industry and craft, men and women. Their writing was spread in popular magazines of the day as the voices of scientific authority on social and cultural change. Besides writing on Indian crafts and foodways, Frank Hamilton Cushing of the Smithsonian wrote on "primitive motherhood" (1897). Stewart Culin of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, meanwhile, regularly wrote in the For Woman's Entertainment section of the Philadelphia Record and contributed to Women's Home Companion with articles on folk toys and games, religion, tables, and decoration. "There is no more amusing game," Culin satirically wrote, than "picking out people and objects and then arranging them properly." To Culin, the division of men and women's roles in primitive cultures suggested an explanation for the rise of the "new woman." George Wharton James argued in "Primitive Inventions" (1903) that if women were not active in invention for the industrial age, it was because their period of invention had passed. He had collected among Southwest Indians, and he credited basketry, weaving, pottery, house building, and food customs to woman's predominance in primitive culture, and hence to an earlier stage of modern civilization. Some intellectuals such as Thorstein Veblen in "The Barbarian Status of Women" (1899), William Thomas in "Sex in Primitive Industry" (1899), and Lester Frank Ward in "Our Better Halves" (1888) argued that women, like their children, were still treated like primitives.
Rather than viewing the modern age as one of rest from their previous labor, they viewed the present as a repression of their march to progress.

Elsie Clews Parsons (1875–1941), president of the American Folklore Society in 1919 and 1920, signaled the end of feminist reliance on evolution and the idea of a primitive matriarchal age. Downplaying the empiricism of evolutionism, she proposed a psychological argument for the reality of perception. In “Femininity and Conventionality,” published in 1914, she used the relativistic argument that it is “apprehension of difference rather than actual difference which bulks so large now and always in the social regulation of sex. It is fear of the unlike rather than the fact of it” (Parsons 1914, 47–53). She argued that as the Victorian preoccupation with a usable past had subsided, so, too, would studies emphasizing evolution give way to the examination of social function within specific societies.

FOLKLORE AT THE FAIR

The Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 was probably the high-water mark for the American ideology of industry and enterprise as well as for evolutionary folklore studies. At the fair America’s corporate vision of grandeur was forcefully put on display, and folklorists played leading roles. The midway of the fair, with its exhibits of people “who have shared least in the general advance,” was put under the charge of the anthropology department. The department was also responsible for what turned out to be among the most popular exhibits of the fair, a gold-medal-winning display
of "folk-lore objects" consisting of gaming artifacts shown to evolve from religious rites, prepared by Stewart Culin. In the Manufactures Hall, the university museum exhibited "a very complete series of objects illustrating the customs of the Chinese laborers in the United States." Elsewhere, "George F. Kunz displayed under the name of the New York Branch of the American Folk-Lore society a collection of gems and minerals having a folk-lore significance which were of peculiar interest and value." The Chicago World's Fair, Stewart Culin observed, "afforded the greatest opportunity to the student and collector of folk-lore that has ever been presented upon this continent" (Culin 1894, 51–59).

As part of the fair's educational mission, learned congresses served to honor the pressing issues at the end of the nineteenth century. The task of organizing a folklore congress was given to a former navy officer, Fletcher S. Bassett (1847–1893), founder of the Chicago Folk-Lore Society. The society was formed in December 1891, and saw as its special field the collection of "traditional literature" west of the Alleghenies. The significance of the section, according to the society's credo in its second publication, The Folk-Lorist in July 1892, was that "its progress so far has been encouraging, and it is now established on a footing that insures its usefulness" ("Chicago" 1892, 1). The first publication was a manual of folklore collection that carried a logo showing an American Indian engaged in a mystical ritual to cure disease and insure
Cover of the Chicago Folk-Lore Society’s publication *The Folk-Lore Manual*. The seal was drawn by Frederick W. Gookin and, according to the society publication, depicted a “Navajo akáán ndéínilii, or meal sprinkler—a courier sent by the singer, or chanter, during the ceremonial known as Dzítk'íji, or Mountain Chant.” The motto is a verse from Longfellow’s “Hiawatha.”
prosperity. The motto on the logo was taken from Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, “Whence These Legends and Traditions?” The motto invoked the search for hidden, ancient origins of exotic lore, and it also implied applying the lessons gained from this search to American polity and culture. “There is abundant traditional lore to be gathered in the Western country,” the introduction to *The Folk-Lorist* announced, “and much that is fast disappearing.” It emphasized that “this Society encourages the collection of such material, important to the study of the history of mankind, and in its bearings upon the many problems of life” (“Chicago” 1892, 1).

The Chicago Folk-lore Society proclaimed its purposes in its major public event, the “Third International Folk-Lore Congress” at the Chicago World’s Fair in July 1893. It was the first such congress to be held in the United States after previous meetings in prestigious locations of London and Paris. Bassett organized an advisory committee of two hundred scholars from around the world and received promises for one hundred papers on the program. The subject matter of folklore made the program “the center of attraction” among several congresses held at the fair, according to the *Chicago Tribune* (McNeil 1985, 13). Newspapers carried notices of several of the presentations, especially accounts of exotic American Indian rites and customs. One headline expressed amazement at a demonstration of sign language by several members of the Sioux nation and a Lieutenant Scott to “Converse without the Use of Words.” According to the paper, “Lieutenant Scott’s expert use of the sign language met with the unqualified approval of the warriors, who rewarded every speech with greasy grins. The audience applauded the performance vigorously and wanted more, but the length of the program wouldn’t permit more to be given” (“In a Sign” 1893). Public attendance and interest reached a height at the folklore congress with the arrival of eminent “scientific authorities” and “a monster twin concert held in the Hall of Washington and the Hall of Columbus” consisting of highly arranged folk music held at the Chicago Art Institute. The Tribune reported it on July 15 as the fair’s main “event of the day.”

When the congress in Chicago opened, Bassett gushed when speaking of the growth of folklore studies in the previous few years: “Publications, annual, quarterly, monthly and weekly, appear in our own city, in Boston, in London, in Ghent, in Antwerp, in Liège, in Helsingfors, in Copenhagen, in Berlin, in Leipzig, in Leyden, in Paris, in Palermo, in Vienna, in Warsaw, in Bombay and in other cities, devoted to this study, besides others whose columns are largely devoted to Folk-Lore” (Bassett 1898, 20; see also McNeil 1985). Bassett then went on to note the special role of folklore studies in American society. “Folk-Lore societies encourage the collection, publication and study of this important and beneficent information and serve an important purpose in our civilization,” he explained. “The labors of the eminent scholars of America in this direction,” he offered, “demonstrate that Folk-Lore is far advanced in our midst, in spite of the youth of our existence. Folk-Lore,” he emphasized, “has become a subject of the day” (Bassett 1898, 20).
Indeed it had. In studies of folklore, writers described unusual “manners” of “ruder ages” and “removed lands,” judged by the rigid moral standards of the day. The accounts dwelled on sensuality and emotional bonding in customs and tales and the deep attachments and meanings apparent in ritual and decorative objects. Folklore showed the closeness of humans to nature and the plight of the toiling hand. The sweep of tradition was broad, but Victorians drew three special lines of inquiry related to rapid changes in the social life of the late nineteenth century. Related to the Victorians’ concern for the secularization of modern culture, the displacement of religion by science as a formula for living, was their search for the meaning and development of spiritual belief. Related to their concern for the rapid industrialization of everyday life was their uncovering of primitive “invention,” “industry,” and “technology.” And, linked to their concern for the utilitarianism of the rational order brought by industrialization, many Victorians sought out the character of art and expression in folk tradition. For expansive nations like England and America, where folklore was especially popular, evolutionary folklore studies opened the world for cultural judgment.

What, then, was the message provided by the evolutionary folklorists of the fair? Perched before the turn of the century and the momentous change it represented, University of Chicago professor and president of the Chicago Folklore Society William I. Knapp chimed the idea that folklore showed the transformation of the past into the civilized present. It was a movement of progress, with science replacing superstition. And what better place to show this than Chicago, America’s symbol of rapid growth—social and material? “Chicago is to-day the centripetal maelstrom toward which the tidal wave is rolling and from which the centrifugal reaction will be world-wide,” Knapp bellowed (Knapp 1898, 24–25). The triumph of cultural evolution theory at the time of the fair capped fifty years of Victorian scientific advances which benefitted the public, according to W. J. McGee. “The main movements,” he announced, meant that

the sources of aesthetics and ethics have been successfully sought, the early steps in the course of industrial development have been traced, the beginnings of law have been analysed, and the course of human development has been brought to light; and it is now known that the lines of human progress in the arts and industries, in sociology, in language, and in thought are convergent, rather than divergent like the lines of development among beasts and plants, and that the unification of ideas by telegraph and telephone and press is but a ripple marking the course of the great stream of human activity. (McGee 1898, 319)

This grandiloquent rhetoric with its declaration of modern American social dominance also marked the opening of the International Folklore Congress at the Chicago World’s Fair. “The crowning principle of the nineteenth century,” Knapp’s keynote addressed emphasized, “is the brotherhood of man.” “For forty years,” he continued, “the peaceful procession has moved on from the remotest corners of
the earth to a few common centers. Quaint faces, strange costumes, unintelligible tongues, have blended with the dominant civilizations of Western Europe and the New World beyond, while venerable races have made obeisance to the material prosperity of younger and novel institutions” (Knapp 1898, 24–25).

To the Victorians, the tradition of the primitive past represented collective repetition while the present fostered individual creativity. When he spoke in Chicago at the World’s Fair, Otis Mason praised the city as the epitome of creativity. He observed that Chicago, the most rapidly growing city rightly situated in the heart of the world’s most quickly developing nation, had an air of experiment, invention, and expansion. Mason told the folklore congress at the Chicago World’s Fair that the student of folklore “deals chiefly with those who follow suit. He does not require patent offices, but places of assembly, and listens to the repetition of things that have been done often and often before.” From this basis he outlined five evolutionary climbs which explained the rise of invention in modern society. The first is “the creation of new desires with progress and the greater complexity of each want as it became more exacting.” Summarized, this evolution is a progress, he said, from naturalism to artificialism. The second evolution is in “the mental change involved in the act of invention,” that is, from the assumedly simple observations of nature to the complex uses of a controlled laboratory. The third evolution is the improvement of implements, and the fourth evolution is the growth of public rewards for the inventor. The final evolution is vaguer than the rest; it refers to the organizational development in a society. In Mason’s words, it is “the unfolding of that national, or tribal, or family genius which constitutes the mark by which they have become known.” Each family of mankind in its native home, Mason concluded, “has invented a series of arts, the relics of which lie buried in their tombs and place of business. The history of their industries is written in these things. At the same time, by frequent trials and failures, they have invented languages and social structures, philosophies and mythologies, the history of which is written in the sayings and doings of the folk.” Taken together, this evidence provides the all-important “evolution of thought in the world” (Mason 1898).

The rhetoric of evolutionary doctrine was evident at the Chicago fair in justifications of spreading empire of industrialized countries to “backward” countries. The United States stood divided on the question of annexing the Philippines after the Spanish-American War because of the conflict with the nation’s revolutionary past against colonialism. Invoking evolutionary rhetoric, President McKinley supported territorial acquisition, reasoning that the Filipinos were not ready for self-government. His mission as representative of an advanced civilization was “to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them” (Cashman 1988, 331). At the 1904 World’s Fair, called the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the United States government organized the Philippines Reservation to showcase the association of “primitives,” as they were called, with unexploited natural resources. In its use of reservation—some twelve hundred Filipinos demonstrated
their culture in the center of the fairgrounds—organizers of the exhibition drew comparison to America’s control of “savage” Indians through the reservation system. It became the most popular exhibit of the fair, and as Robert Rydell explained, it “exalted imperial prowess.” “Depicted as resource rich and lacking the material goods that anthropologists equated with civilization, ‘primitive’ cultures on display had the effect of underwriting the predictions of a bountiful future for the ‘culture of abundance’ and expansion of overseas markets forecast at the fair” (Rydell 1989, 196–97).

At previous fairs, anthropological exhibits appealed to American voyeurism about “primitive peoples” and their folkways—on the Midway Plaisance, which stood well behind the central “Court of Honor” with its main feature of the Manufactures Hall. The Midway Plaisance consisted of numerous small exhibitions giving the impression of the variety of races in the world. The Manufactures Hall was the largest single building of the fair and it culminated a trip through the fair by representing the unity and progress of industrial advancement. The president of the Chicago Folk-Lore Society welcomed participants to the World’s Fair by declaring, “So all this gathering of human races and faces from the four winds of heaven, contains a lesson that will soon be incarnated into a purpose. We are transforming, almost transformed” (Knapp 1898, 24–25). President Cleveland’s symbolic evolutionary procession to open the Chicago World’s Fair began with “the uncouth aliens of the Midway Plaisance,” in E. Benjamin Andrews’s words, and ended at the Manufactures Hall. Making reference to the traditions lying behind him as foundation for the “stupendous results of American enterprise and activity,” the president announced, “We stand to-day in the presence of the oldest nations of the world, and point to the great achievements we here exhibit, asking no allowance on the score of youth. It is an exalted mission in which we and our guests from other lands are engaged as we co-operate in the inauguration of an enterprise devoted to human enlightenment” (Andrews 1896, 244).

The Ideology of Evolution

Viewing primitive customs and rites, Victorians felt reassured that they had risen above what they assumed to be their ancient ancestors. Yet while feeling superior in thought and behavior, they sensed emotional loss. Industrial advancement had its price, so it seemed, and many cultural critics thought that a spiritual vitality apparent in primitive rites and customs was traded in for the march of civilization. Some social advisers sought to refine primitive rituals for modern application so as to invigorate the sensibilities of modern cosmopolitans. Often borrowing from the example of masked rites, masquerade events enjoyed a vogue in Victorian society; secret and fraternal societies arose invoking elaborate rituals and codes; and cosmetics and bodily ornaments grew in popularity with the suggestion that they provided primitive sensuality. Game manufacturer Selchow and Righter copyrighted
the Asian game of Parcheesi in the 1870s, and the "primitive" game caught on as a Victorian parlor game. Books of peasant fairy tales, savage myths, and Indian legends were among the best sellers of the Victorian period, and their redactors, men like Andrew Lang, Hans Christian Andersen, and of course the Grimm brothers, became world renowned.

In American literature, Mark Twain (a member of the American Folklore Society) is celebrated perhaps above all other fiction writers for his use of folklore to represent the piquancy of American vernacular characters and settings. He also is noteworthy for his attention to evolutionary theory used to interpret folklore. In his preface to *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), Twain declared that the customs touched on in the tale were "survivals" found at a later time, which can be assumed to have been practiced during the sixth century. But Twain satirically concluded, "One is quite justified in inferring that wherever one of these laws and customs was lacking in that remote time, its place was competently filled by a worse one" (Twain [1889] 1979, 45). In an unpublished preface, he addressed the ethnological rhetoric of progress more explicitly: "The strange laws which one encounters here and there in this book, are not known to have existed in King Arthur's time, of course, but it is fair to presume that they did then exist, since they still existed in Christian lands in far later times—times customarily called, with unconscious sarcasm, 'civilized and enlightened'" (Twain [1889] 1979, 518). Writing at a time when he invested in as many as a hundred new gadgets and manufacturing schemes, particularly an ill-starred typesetting machine, Twain sketched the central character, Hank Morgan, as the bourgeois Yankee, practical and free of "sentiment." One of Morgan's workers, who carries the mythical name Hercules, knocks Morgan unconscious in a factory squabble. Morgan wakes up in medieval England, but rather than becoming despondent over his fate, he decides to take commercial advantage of the situation. He embarks on a campaign for industrial development, on the one hand, and for the destruction of traditional life on the other. At different times he calls King Arthur's subjects "this folk," "white Indians," "modified savages," "pigmies," "big children," and "great simple-hearted creatures." His plan to have a modern industrial establishment mark time to a master spirit finally clashes with the forces of tradition in a great nihilistic war. He destroys his "civilization-factories," and with a band of fifty-two boys indoctrinated into his industrial system, creates a destructive automated battlefield against hundreds of thousands of noble, but hopeless, barbaric Englishmen.

In the disturbing battle scene, the comic tone of the early part of the novel is gone, and the narrative turns grimly dark. Many critics have attributed Twain's change in mood to frustration in his own life with his failing investments in technological gadgetry and his subsequent questioning of popular confidence in the progress of industrial civilization. The spin put on the book by the publisher for the Gilded Age audience, however, was to promote Twain's ideological defense of American democracy. "The book answers the Godly slurs that have been cast at us
for generations by the titled gentry of England," the advertisement copy stated. It implied that the book was an affirmation of the superiority of American progressivism and the benevolence of a government of the people trying to deal with rising industrial labor movements that were making a case for an American working class consciousness. Appealing to national "patriotism," the publisher's announcement further blurted, "Without knowing it the Yankee is constantly answering modern English criticism of America, and pointing out the weakness and injustice of government by a privileged class often mentally and physically far inferior to the masses of the people over whom they rule. At the same time the Yankee illustrates in a practical way the advantages of a Republican government like that of America" (Twain [1889] 1979, 540).

Twain used materials of an English medieval age that in the American popular imagination dripped with folklore. Volumes of medieval English fairy tales compiled by Andrew Lang and Joseph Jacobs, among others, well captured an American market, and they often noted the English coinage of the very term "folklore." Such tales, canonized as the textual core of tradition, had come under the name of "folklore" since 1846, when Britisher William John Thoms (1803–1885) proposed a "good Saxon compound" for what had previously been referred to in English as popular antiquities and literature. In a letter to Athenaeum, a leading weekly review of literature, science, and the arts, Thoms described folklore both as a connected whole—"the Lore of the People"—and as separable parts—"manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs." In the next issue of the weekly magazine, a department of folklore was established, with Thoms in charge. During the 1850s, English books began to appear using "folklore" in their titles: Thomas Sternberg's The Dialect and Folklore of Northamptonshire (1851), Jabez Allies's On the Ancient British, Roman and Saxon Antiquities and Folk-Lore of Worcestershire (1852), and Thoms's Choice Notes from "Notes and Queries": Folklore (1858). By 1876, Thoms was signing himself "An Old Folk-Lorist," giving a name to the student of the subject. The next year, the term was given sanction by the formation in England of the Folk-Lore Society.

Thoms's goal was to accomplish for the British what the Grimm brothers had done for Germany. He claimed that "the present century has scarcely produced a more remarkable book, imperfect as its learned author confesses it to be, than the second edition of the Deutsche Mythologie and, what is it?—a mass of minute facts, many of which, when separately considered, appear trifling and insignificant,—but, when taken in connection with the system into which his master-mind has woven them, assume a value that he who first recorded them never dream of attributing to them" (Thoms [1846] 1965, 5). His description of the appearance of folklore as a collection of discrete parts that when brought together take on a great value provides a metaphor for nationalism during the mid-nineteenth century. Emerging nation-states sought to justify their boundaries by pointing to the varied folklore of many communities that have at their heart common themes. The
Grimms contributed to the mid-nineteenth-century push to unite German-speaking regions of central Europe into a united Germany. As lore, parts of tradition could be separated more easily from the communities of which they are a part, and connected to a greater whole.

Some writers who distinguished folk “life” from folklore during the nineteenth century argued for the integrity of communities and ethnic minorities within regions. William Wells, writing on “Folk-Life in German By-Ways” in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1873, for example, pointed out that “the German peasants form the most conservative communities in the world. Within a stone’s throw of all the habits and customs of modern civilization, they will persistently maintain their speech, their costume, and their notions, both at work and at play. These differ also greatly in different regions, so that one can stand on a mountain summit, and look into valleys right and left, whose inhabitants wear different garbs, speak different dialects, and who, quite likely, may be of opposite faiths” (Wells 1873, 590). Despite a scattering of folklife references, citation of folklore as the survival of ancient customs dominated English-language periodical literature during the Gilded Age.

In Europe, and increasingly in America, folklore could be heard to invoke a sense of peoplehood that justified national aspirations. No less a political figure than Theodore Roosevelt urged the collection from the folkloric “treasure-house of literature … of a buried past” in the United States to stir nationalism. He especially praised the “expressions of that valor of soul” as the wellspring of a serious national art and literature found in the national folklore in Ireland. Citing the collecting of Ireland’s Lady Gregory, he called for an American effort to represent the country’s uniqueness through “all the local features of our composite nationality.” “American work must smack of our own soil, mental and moral, no less than physical, or it will have little of permanent value,” and “Americans must in some degree express the distinctive characteristics of our own national soul,” he emphasized (Roosevelt 1926b, 334, 336). Answering the call were volumes such as the popular *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* by Charles Skinner in 1896 and *American Myths and Legends* in 1903. In his placement of “our own land” in the title, Skinner indicated the association of mythology with countries outside of the United States, especially in Europe. Skinner’s strategy was to promote a national mythology for the United States around the mystery of the American land. He showed wondrous narratives inspired by a fabulous wilderness and remarkable deserts that transformed Europeans into Americans.

In his efforts to hail in folklore an enlivened American spirit as well as celebrate a stupendous land, Roosevelt was especially excited by the appearance of *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* collected by folklorist John Lomax (1910). Roosevelt sent a letter of congratulations which was printed in the volume, and Lomax in turn dedicated the volume to the president “who while President was not too busy to turn aside—cheerfully and effectively—and aid workers in the field of American balladry.” In his letter Roosevelt drew comparisons of the inspiration for
the material in "the conditions of ballad-growth which obtained in medieval
England," but pointed out the distinctive American condition of the frontier West
that contributed to folk literary composition. During America's Gilded Age, the
cowboy, the lumberjack, and the raftsman became exalted into zesty American folk
types that characterized national traits of ruggedness and independence born of the
mythic wilderness.

Concerned for the absence of a native peasantry inspiring a national "soul," a
host of writers around the turn of the century focused their primitivist attention
on American Indians and various groups perceived to be rich in tradition, such as
European immigrants, African Americans, French Canadians, Appalachians and
isolated mountain or maritime groups, and children. For notable journalists like
Roosevelt's conservationist colleagues George Bird Grinnell, editor of *Field and
Stream*, and Henry W. Shoemaker, who published over two hundred books and
pamphlets on regional folklore and natural history of America's forests and moun­tains, folklore showed America's "medley of races" and the sacredness of America's
natural surroundings. All three were founding members of the Boone and
Crockett Club in New York City, named after rough-and-ready folk heroes person­ifying the wilderness mettle of America.

Collecting folklore took place in the "field" much as Darwin collected speci­mens in the wild for his grand natural history. As Victorians became more and
more "worldly" in the search for empire, they ventured out on collecting trips to
gather exotic flora and fauna, as well as customs and objects, and arranged them
on parlor furniture and museum shelves. In countless evening lectures that were
part entertainment, part education, Victorians heard that their collections were
like mosaics revealing wondrous hidden worlds in the small pieces and offering a
pattern or "object lesson" when looked at from the lofty vantage of civilization.
The placement of folklore as a layer covered over by civilization came out in sever­al definitions of folklore that followed Thom's. The British *Handbook of Folklore*
(1914) explained that folklore "has established itself as the generic term under
which the traditional Beliefs, Customs, Stories, Songs, and Sayings current among
backward peoples, or retained by the uncultured classes of more advanced peo­ples, are comprehended and included" (Burne 1914, 1). George Laurence Gomme
in *Ethnology in Folklore* (1892) offered that "the essential characteristic of folklore is
that it consists of beliefs, customs, and traditions which are far behind civilisation
in their intrinsic value to man, though they exist under the cover of a civilised
nationality" (Gomme 1892, 2).

A range of writing, academic and popular, saluted natural history in the wake of
Charles Darwin's explosive evolutionary theories. Natural history at the time wor­shiped a version of science that rewarded a new faith in knowable, minute facts,
"links" as one writer explained "in a great chain of development from primitive to
advanced forms" (Merrill 1989, 260). Reacting to religious reliance on the unknow­able, natural history offered keywords stressing observable objectivity: specimens,
collections, cabinets. It used an arrangement of globally scattered facts shaped by humans into an ordered whole emphasizing advancement through time. "The nineteenth century made the mistake of worshiping the Muse of History as a goddess," Noel Annan reflected. "Truth, they believed, was revealed in History, not in the Bible—but like every revelation it required interpretation" (Annan 1966, 151). Truth was based on empirically verifiable facts, but faith could still be interpreted from sentimental virtues of nature, lore, and literature.

In a secularizing and industrializing age, a sense of lore associated with nature became apparent in new studies that suggested that folklore held a special spiritual appeal. It was consequential for a growing middle class to temper the "nervousness," the popular term for a kind of anxiety over change, engendered by the new cult of business and science (Lears 1981). In George Miller Beard's widely circulated book *American Nervousness* (1881), for example, the author invoked the traditional past to understand the present, for "the moderns differ from the ancient civilizations mainly in these five elements—steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women. When civilization, plus these five factors, invades any nation, it must carry nervousness and nervous diseases along with it" (Beard 1970, 238). In the perception of the period, nature and lore—"the old log cabins, shady groves, giant trees, old fords, ferries, beaver dams, and reed-grown pools" and "the legends, the folklore, the ghosts that lingered about these survivals"—represented a simpler day that had been left behind because of the inevitable march of civilization (H. Shoemaker 1916, 187).

Among Darwin's revelations to his Victorian audience was that the past extended far longer than had been proposed by religious leaders, advanced species of life evolved from "lower" forms, and natural laws controlled the evolution. Opening up the long history of nature by collecting, classifying, and arranging specimens into an evolutionary order suggested that creation might be similarly defined for humanity, and hence for culture. In culture, however, survivals collected by folklorists implied a convergence toward unity from bottom to the top rather than diverging to a variety of species as in nature. With the past apparently remote, specialized practitioners with esoteric "scientific" skills became necessary to uncover the past for the public. The social side effects of such changes in thinking were significant. For one, a shortened theological past which had been part of the older wisdom meant that changes in nature and man were necessarily large leaps. The opening of the evolutionary past suggested that the world's beginning was not a literal wholesale creation, but was a metaphor for slow and constant change. While Victorians frequently expressed the belief that transformative changes were occurring during their time, the new world view provided the security that their era was not a cataclysm, but a natural climax of steady growth. The narrative of history, natural and culture, was progressive, one layer of life building on and over another that will not accept change. Darwin himself commented in *The Descent of Man* (1874) that "it is apparently a truer and more cheerful view that progress has been
much more general than retrogression; that man has risen, though by slow and interrupted steps, from a lowly condition to the highest standard as yet attained by him in knowledge, morals and religion.” At the conclusion of the book, he endorsed the view of progress that was common to his age: “Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having thus risen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future” (Darwin 1874, 162-65). Edward Tylor, a leading authority on the new cultural evolutionism, emphasized the relation of collecting folklore survivals to dealing with issues of the day when he wrote, “not merely as a matter of curious research, but as an important practical guide to the understanding of the present and the shaping of the future, the investigation into the origin and early development of civilization must be pushed on zealously” (Tylor 1970, 24).

Victorians prescribed healthy doses of fantasy and exoticism in folklore to balance the nervousness and monotony of public industrial life. Building on the groundbreaking collections of the Brothers Grimm, Victorian writers anthologized and created new fairy tales of enchanted forests and magical animals. European folklore, especially, was popularly collected and presented to satisfy the public hunger for mysticism, and even nationalism, while a small circle of “scientific men and women” insisted on keeping its study on “sound” evolutionary principles. In popular magazines such as Harper’s Monthly, Atlantic Monthly, Scribner’s Monthly, Century, Nation, Open Court, Outlook, Popular Science Monthly, and Overland Monthly, readers found essays on, among other subjects, primitive invention and industry, women’s roles in primitive society, beliefs and customs having to do with the supernatural, and the evolution of folk religious objects into play items.

Further evidence of the folklore “vogue” during the Gilded Age is that the two main guides to popular periodicals at the time, Poole’s Index to Periodical Literature and the Reader’s Guide, indexed the Journal of American Folklore. The number of articles cited under “folklore” reveals a pattern from the founding of the American Folklore Society into the first decade of the twentieth century. Poole’s Index listed fourteen articles on folklore (folk song was listed separately) from 1887 to 1892; from 1892 to 1896, the number jumped to seventy-seven, but dropped down to seven from 1902 to 1905, when Poole’s ceased publication. The Reader’s Guide listed a whopping 177 articles for folklore between 1890 and 1909, not counting entries for the Journal of American Folklore. In 1905, however, the Reader’s Guide ceased indexing the journal. In the ensuing years, the Reader’s Guide doubled the number of periodicals that it indexed, but between 1910 and 1924, the guide listed only fifty-eight articles on folklore. The last decades of the nineteenth century not only have the claim, then, to the Gilded Age, but also the title of the Ethnological Period, full of folkloristic forays far from the beaten path to answer questions close to home.

W. J. McGee, writing in Atlantic Monthly in 1898, boasted of the particularly favorable response to evolutionary folklore doctrine in America. “The earliest and
strongest apostles were Americans," he claimed, and "the free, vigorous and trenchant American mind was peculiarly hospitable to the tenets of the new law; and it was accepted here as the foundation for the cult of science years before it was similarly accepted in Great Britain." While industrial advances ushered in the greatest revolution in the history of civilization, according to McGee, Darwin's ideas on evolution triggered "the most profound revolution in the history of human thought" (McGee 1898).

Americans gave a particularly hospitable reception to the social Darwinism of the Englishman Herbert Spencer, who made a case for industrial progress and laissez-faire economics on the grounds of Darwin's natural selection. By 1903 more than 368,000 volumes of Spencer's works had been sold in the United States. The popular American writings of John Fiske, author of *Myths and Mythmakers* (1900), and William Graham Sumner, author of *Folkways* (1906), applied Spencer liberally in their work. Preacher Henry Ward Beecher wrote Spencer with this observation on the American embrace of his work: "The peculiar condition of American society has made your writings far more fruitful and quickening here than in Europe." Beecher thought that although industrialization and its social effects came to the United States later than to Europe, it spread more quickly and with greater ripples through the diversity of cultural groups living on America's soil.

Fiske and Sumner likened America to Darwin's Galapagos Islands because of its rich variety of cultural species and settings. John Sterling Kingsley followed this line of thinking by attributing American uniqueness, and greatness, to its blend of races. He wrote in *The Standard Natural History* published in Boston in 1885: "Instance after instance could be cited, were it desirable, to show that intercourse between nation and nation, mixture of blood between race and race, lies at the root of growth, development, progress, and culture; that offered by our own country is all that need be mentioned. Here there has been mixture almost beyond precedent; here the most different elements have been amalgamated, and the result is one which fully confirms the law" (Kingsley 1885, 472). He assumed, however, that the "amalgamation" tended toward the progress set by a dominant white English race.

Lewis Henry Morgan, influential author of *Ancient Society: Or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (1877) opined that "rich as the American continent is known to be in material wealth, it is also the richest of all the continents in ethnological, philological, and archaeological materials, illustrative of the great period of barbarism" (Morgan 1974, iii). On American soil, where native tribes provided an authentic layer of primitive culture below "American civilization," Morgan's evolutionary lens brought into focus a unified orderly outline from savagery to barbarism to civilization to enlightenment. Using natural history metaphors inspired by Darwin and Spencer, Morgan offered that "these circumstances appeal strongly to Americans to enter this great field and gather its abundant harvest" (Morgan 1974, iv).
Folklore and Ideology during the Gilded Age

The natural history model of a cultural ladder from savagery to enlightenment was the organizing principle for the Bureau of American Ethnology, established by the United States government in 1879. The Bureau sought out folklore, language, architecture, and customs in its field collecting trips as a key to uncovering the nation's savage past among its Indians. It had fashioned, W. J. McGee said, "a New Ethnology, in which men are classified by mind rather than by body, by culture rather than by color." In a popular view of cultural evolution, McGee classified all the world's peoples into stages of development, "namely: (1) savagery, with a social organization resting on kinship reckoned in the female line; (2) barbarism, in which the social organization is based on kinship reckoned in the male line; (3) civilization, in which the organization has a territorial basis; and (4) enlightenment, in which the laws and customs are based on intellectual rights." Again pointing to American conditions to explain the intellectual fervor for this scheme, McGee wrote: "Our physical progress has been great because invention is encouraged by free institutions; our progress in geology has been rapid by reason of intellectual freedom and a vast domain; while our progress in anthropology has been marvelous because of the elevated point of view and an incomparable range of types both of blood and of activity" (McGee 1898, 318–19).

McGee and his fellow evolutionists at the Bureau of American Ethnology especially sought rites and customs to illustrate the "mind" of culture. Such "specimens" often appeared unusual or exotic and suggested to the Victorians backward and progressive levels of beliefs about man in relation to his environment. At lower levels, rites represented control of the world by supernatural and natural forces, and later in advanced stages, by human, technological forces. The progression of items, many evolutionists believed, worked from superstition to science, from primitive rites to refined manners, from exotic customs to rational observances. They held that while societies advance, many folk items persist in practice, although they lose their original significance and intimate connection with the group. In evolutionary theory, the persistence of such customs was analogous to survival of the culturally unfit. The survivals could be collected often in remnant form among civilized folk and could be seen in full flowering among existing "savage" groups such as American Indians. Thus, many writers offered to give the piquant original meanings of curious sayings and objects that once had significance in primitive customs, while others gave a glimpse of the similar ways of thinking among different primitive groups.

Black Folklore and "Progress of the Race"

American writers viewed Indians as the nation's main "primitives" during the Gilded Age. Government policy treated them as a conquered nation, isolated from whites who presumably gave the nation its culture. Removed to reservations, Indians were considered remote and tribal, comparable to "aboriginal" groups
stuck in a savage state around the globe. In keeping with the natural science model, many folklorists and anthropologists connected to the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) and various museums viewed American Indians as a pure, ancient species in danger of extinction, and they scurried to the reservations to record an array of exotic tribal languages, myths, songs, and crafts before they inevitably disappeared. The museums were typically natural history museums which included the native Indians in the natural realm. Natives appeared to be in commune with flora and fauna, maintained the virgin land before whites came, and made productive use of it. Folklore was especially important evidence in the salvage work done by the BAE and natural history museums. Folklore collected from Indians documented uses of language and history, since most tribes rarely kept written records. Overall, this material constituted for many of the museum anthropologists the “spiritual” side of culture, offering the beliefs, indeed the character, of the “race.” Hence, the early leadership at the BAE justified the “scientific” expeditions as a national cause to help guide Indian policy toward management of the reservations.

The “Negroes” or “Afro-Americans,” as they were sometimes called at that time, presented a special problem in American culture during the Gilded Age. While they often were isolated, especially in sections of the South, they were lodged, if precariously, within American society. They were not on native, or virgin land. They were less remote than the Indians, more numerous, and more geographically spread. Many American writers differentiated, as well as stigmatized, them in America because of their origin in Africa and history of enslavement. While they were recognized for a distinctive patois, they mostly spoke English, and were forced to adopt the former masters’ manners, so conventional wisdom held. They did not seem comparable as the Indians were to natives on other continents. Yet their racial difference also suggested cultural contrast, and in evolutionary thinking their darkness was a gauge of their backwardness. While they resided in view of the advancements of the age, in evolutionary doctrine they had lagged well behind in progress toward civilization. The progress that was possible, or acceptable, after emancipation became closely watched. In this view, folklore could be a measure of how far blacks had come or could go. Folklore of the former slaves was late in being collected compared to that of American Indians. As Reconstruction ended and the Gilded Age began, black folklore was more likely to be comically distorted on the stage than analytically reported in print. As the harvesting of black folklore proceeded, the intentions of the reapers were naturally questioned. They attracted close scrutiny, arguably even closer than for the Indians, to check for suggestions of challenge to the social order, especially as segregation became deeply entrenched.

The main evidence for cultural difference of African Americans that entered popular discourse during the Gilded Age was in spirituals, superstitions, and folktales. The recognition of a distinctive American “Negro” spiritual by whites
opened the black folklore field for inspection. It also contained enough ambiguity of meaning to allow a range of opinions on “the Negro problem.” That problem was essentially a way to forge a future for blacks as free citizens after a history of white control. For if Negroes in the South were no longer slaves during the Gilded Age, they nonetheless were regarded, as many social critics noted, as something of a created serf class, even a caste, without the poetic suggestions it had in some places in Europe of serving as the ethnic backbone of a nation (see Fry 1975; Levine 1977). Even after emancipation, they were long tied to the rural Southland by various measures that recognized their economic value as cheap agricultural labor, while resisting social equality, capitalist development, and educational advancement (see Steinberg 1981, 24–31).

References to spirituals sung by slaves as symbols of the desire for freedom appeared in several pre-Civil War autobiographies, most notably Frederick Douglass’s Narrative (1845). Douglass asserted that the traditionally learned and emotionally performed songs gave him his “first glimmering conceptions of the dehumanizing character of slavery” (Sundquist 1995, 322). From the viewpoint of the ex-slave writers, they were also an introduction to literacy—intellectual and cultural (Sundquist 1995, 323–24). By learning an extensive repertoire traditionally, expanding upon the songs and elaborating them, all in apparent defiance of masters’ restrictions on education and expression, the spirituals seemed to be a communally shared language of hope as well as frustration.

Ex-slave narratives often described spirituals as a communicative code and an ethnic marker during slavery, and hinted at their therapeutic value after emancipation (Levine 1977; O’Connor 1995; Peters 1996). Songs could be heard, such as the famous “Go Down Moses,” making an analogy between the biblical bondage of the Israelites in Egypt and blacks in the South. A symbolic link was also possible between heaven and the North, as fugitive Harriet Jacobs indicated in her Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861): “Ole Satan’s church is here below/Up to God’s free church I wish to go” (Peters 1996, 682). Other songs supposedly could be used to signal that a way was safe for escape, or offered warnings. Lyrics intoned the sorrow of bondage and the promise of deliverance. The music sounded familiarly close to white Protestant hymns, but showed differences, presumably from African influences and American black creativity, performed in a style more emotionally rendered than whites considered usual.

If narratives written by former slaves pointed to the symbolic meaning of spirituals, it was a trio of whites who brought spirituals as an American black cultural trove to wide public attention. Only two years after the end of the Civil War, William Francis Allen, Lucy McKim Garrison, and Charles Pickard Ware published a collection entitled Slave Songs of the United States (1867). Allen, the main force behind the volume, was a Latin and classics teacher from Massachusetts who spent two years in the South with the Freedmen’s and Sanitary commissions. He began collecting the songs in South Carolina and Arkansas and upon meeting
Ware and Garrison, who had transcribed some spirituals, led the collaboration to prepare a substantial volume. It stood as the first extensive collection of black folklore published, and in the words of W. K. McNeil, "whetted the interest in collecting, analyzing, and performing Negro folk music that has never since abated" (McNeil 1996a, 18).

*Slave Songs* contained 136 examples of songs taken from oral tradition and accompanied with commentaries. Some of the most memorable that were frequently picked as literary references included "Go Down Moses," "Roll Jordan Roll," "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," and "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" (Sundquist 1995, 318–23). Black music was not unknown in the period—it was mimicked in hokey minstrel shows—but Allen and his collaborators gave the songs as the genuine article of slave life. In keeping with evolutionary thinking, the collectors used white church music as a standard and typically judged the level of "barbarism" evident in the black folk songs. Intent on presenting the civilized dignity of the spirituals, famous black choirs from Fisk University and Hampton Institute usually formally performed the songs with sanitized arrangements (Marsh 1876; Fenner et al., 1901). In such settings, the spirituals could be alternatively heard as signs of black adoption of white ways or of a new cultural creation.

Popular acceptance of the spirituals may have owed to their recognizable Christian forms and reorientation of African-American performance toward white audiences. To be sure, many reviews of black choirs praised the emotion of the songs conveyed in performance. Mark Twain seemed to have been especially affected, and his endorsement for the Fisk singers may have helped spread their fame. He wrote for the group's publicity in 1897: "I think these gentlemen and ladies make eloquent music—and what is as much to the point, they reproduce the true melody of the plantations, and are the only persons I ever heard accomplish this on the public platform. The so-called 'negro minstrels' simply mis-represent the thing; I do not think they ever saw a plantation or heard a slave sing. I was reared in the South, and my father owned slaves, and I do not know when anything has so moved me as did the plaintive melodies of the Jubilee Singers" (Fishkin 1993, 150). Twain may have been slyly ambiguous in justifying on the one hand the cultural difference of blacks and on the other giving a muffled reference to the pain of slavery expressed in the songs when he observed, "It was the first time for twenty-five or thirty years that I heard such songs, or heard them sung in the genuine old way—and it is a way, I think, that white people cannot imitate—and never can, for that matter, for one must have been a slave himself in order to feel what that life was and so convey the pathos of it in the music" (Fishkin 1993, 150).

As spirituals were performed through the Gilded Age by the choirs, they were commonly introduced as a legacy of slavery, well past, and not taken as a threat for the present. They could be reassuringly heard as signifying the promise of black adoption of white religious virtues rather than the cry for protest. They became symbols of plantation and cabin, and of rural Negroes who had not strayed far
from home. Secular songs, many of them from urban locales, were late in being recorded compared to spirituals, and aroused more controversy. When the often irreligious content of the secular work songs, hollers, and laments began to be published, often alongside accounts of magical practices, they revealed hardy, boastful singers capable of resistance.

The location of New Orleans as the main stage of the drama ensuing over the black secular material is not coincidental. The city was different enough culturally from other southern cities to attract attention for its exoticism, and similar enough for its common race prejudices to be familiar. The contrasting backgrounds of the main characters in the morality play—George Washington Cable and Lafcadio Hearn—thickened the plot. Unlike the English domination common in the other major eastern cities, the French established New Orleans, and the city took in many ethnic influences in its subsequent history. The city had a decided French flavor, even after the Spanish came in.

Many writers described the “easy intermingling” of ethnic groups within the city, and the intermarriage of Spanish and French settlers, who shared a Catholic affiliation, producing a new American group called Creoles. Added to the mix were black Creoles who retained many Caribbean and African characteristics, including religious practices sometimes called “voodoo.” They, too, circulated in the city, and the resulting mixtures were given names such as quadroons (one-quarter black) and octaroons (one-eighth black). New Orleans carried a reputation for social and cultural miscegenation that at the time made it morally loathsome, and exotically alluring, in American consciousness. White Americans had entered the wide-open city even before the United States had completed the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. New Orleans showed more diversity by taking in German, Irish, and Italian immigrants through the nineteenth century. By 1860, it became the largest city in the South, and it had a sizable black population, including many freedmen.

George Washington Cable (1844–1925) is credited for first bringing national attention in fiction and folklore to the Louisiana Creoles, black and white. And through this work, he viewed the problem of race relations as central to the decline of the South as a sectional society. He was born in New Orleans, but was neither Creole nor Catholic. His parents came to the city from the North, and most accounts credit the mother with passing on to the writer son a strong streak of New England Puritanism (Butcher 1962). Cable fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, but came to question southern secession and the institution of slavery.

After the war, Cable wrote for the New Orleans Picayune where he had a regular column on city events. Tired of factual reporting, he became attracted to a form of writing called “local color” that was increasingly featured in national magazines. It was a prose sketch of the compelling geographical and cultural aspects of a region. Folklore that brought out the charming peculiarities of local residents and their relationships to the distinctive environment was regularly featured in this journalism. Local color writing gained popularity at a time when the nation achieved its
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“manifest destiny” and spread its population from coast to coast. Editors at the magazines boosted an interest in the dazzling variety of American community life in the geographically spread nation.

Cable first tried his hand at some local color fiction based on Creole life in New Orleans, for *Scribner's Monthly* during the 1870s. The New York editors were eager to arouse readers with the reputation of New Orleans for exoticism. Encouraged by the response to his stories, Cable brought his magazine stories together in 1879 as a book entitled *Old Creole Days*, and it was quickly followed by *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (1880). Cable offered a good amount of picturesqueness in his scenes and characterizations, and lent realism to his narrative with convincing details of folk sayings and customs.

While Cable gained national notice for uncovering Creole life, he garnered resentment at home. He could not be dismissed easily as a mere parochial writer offering gentle nostalgia for a bygone day. For as his writing gained national currency, it brought out in the rise and fall of Creole life the problem of institutionalized race prejudice that undermined the future of the South. The aristocratic white Creoles at first recoiled from the suggestion that they were formed from intercourse not just between the French and Spanish, but also with blacks and Indians. They were further incensed when Cable connected them to convicts who had settled in the old colony, and insinuated their patronage of prostitutes. Rather than blame the loss of the war for their troubles, Cable fingered a racial mindset that kept them from progressing socially. He flattered black characters and intimated the need for social agitation. In *The Grandissimes*, a white character tells the quadroon Honore Grandissime, who appears to be Cable’s surrogate, “I can imagine a man in your place, going about among his people, stirring up their minds to a noble discontent, laying out his means, sparingly here and bountifully there, as in each case might seem wisest, for their enlightenment, their moral elevation, their training in skilled work; going, too, among the people of the prouder caste, among such as have a spirit of fairness, and seeking to prevail with them for a public recognition of the rights of all; using all his cunning to show them the double damage of all oppression, both great and petty—” (Butcher 1962, 83).

As Cable became more forcefully political through the 1880s, reviewers from corners of the white South outside of New Orleans castigated his fiction. Cable published stormy essays advocating government-sponsored education programs for blacks and attacking the convict-lease system, which primarily used black labor. He especially raised a row in the South by unequivocally demanding social equality for the races in “The Freedman’s Case in Equity” (Cable 1885). Denial of freedmen’s civil rights as American citizens, Cable righteously proclaimed, degraded blacks and corrupted whites. When Cable published an opinion piece on southern race relations in *Century* magazine in 1885, it brought an avalanche of letters to the editor and a ferocious rebuttal from the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, a southern ideologue reasserting the inferior status of blacks and their needs for
white control (Grady 1885). A biting rejoinder by Cable answered that change could be made, had to be made, if it were not for "the Silent South," composed of whites who would grant blacks fair treatment but who were intimidated into silence. Cable offered moral justification from his religion for altering the social order and political reasoning for further reconstructing southern state governments. Backed by the American Missionary Society, Cable republished his editorials and attempted to blanket the South with them (Cable 1885). Cable's opinions made residence increasingly difficult for him in the South, and he moved north to Massachusetts in 1885.

Cable gained prominence in 1884 by joining Mark Twain in a tour featuring their readings of fiction about the South. Yet the pair never appeared south of Kentucky. He performed black Creole songs on the tour, and by all accounts they roused the loudest audience reaction. A survey of reviews written during the tour reveals more mention of encores for the songs than for any other part of the program. Introduced originally as an impromptu variation from the program, the songs became an anxiously awaited feature of Cable's performance. The Buffalo Express for December 11, 1884, noted that Cable had "varied the printed programme by an African Creole song, which he rendered very finely. It was a peculiar bit of plaintive minor music, and the light soft voice of the novelist was well adapted to it. Responding to the encore he sang a short bit representing the wail of a Creole mother for her lost child." The next month, the Chicago Tribune delighted at the sight of the "dignified," "refined," and "graceful" dandy (Twain was not, so most of the reviews read) Cable rendering gutty black songs in his sweet, high-pitched voice. The reviewer observed: "His third number consisted of Creole-negro songs in the French patois used by that race in their weird dances and incantations." Twain, according to the memoirs of the tour's manager, encouraged Cable's performance of the songs and gave renditions privately of "plantation songs and Mississippi River chanties of the negro." Around the same time that the songs became a regular feature of the tour, Twain added a reading of a new section from Huckleberry Finn in which Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn free the slave Jim. Twain integrated the songs into the reading, as he explained to his wife, Olivia: "To-night I read the new piece … & it's the biggest card I've got in my whole repertoire. I always thought so. It went a-booming; & Cable's praises are not merely loud, they are boisterous…. It took me 45 minutes to recite it, (didn't use any notes) & it hadn't a doubtful place in it, or a silent spot … I make 2 separate readings of it, & Cable sings a couple of songs in the middle" (December 29, 1884, Pittsburgh). Reflections on the injustices of slavery were evident thereafter. From Chicago, Cable excitedly wrote his wife: "Ah! What an effect we did have tonight. Clemens's story of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer liberating runaway [Jim] was received with a continual tempest of merriment, and when I gave 'A Sound of Drums' I saw persons in tears all over the house. I was called back twice after my Creole songs and twice after 'Mary's Night Ride.'" (January 17, 1885). With this
favor for the songs and their protest themes probably in mind, Cable in 1886 published a groundbreaking collection for the popular magazine *Century* entitled "Creole Slave Songs." He then went on to encourage more literary attention to the songs by opening a Department of Negro Folk Song in the Chicago Folk-Lore Society, later known as the International Folklore Association.

The secular songs were important to Cable in his cause for racial equality because they affirmed the living tradition of southern blacks. In attaching a marked African influence to the songs, Cable suggested an independence, a dignity, that comes with a separate cultural continuity. It was a music not controlled by whites, he intimated, and furthermore showed an enlivening process of racial creolization. In presenting what he had collected and realizing the sensitivity of the material, he hoped to encourage blacks to research their own cultural history. Contributing "A Negro Folk-Song" (a transcription of a game song, "Susan Gay") to *The Folk-Lorist* (published by the Chicago Folk-Lore Society), he wrote: "There is a kind of folk-song in the Southern States which it might be found very interesting to consider, if only some one would give it some research. Doubtless there are educated negroes in the South who might do this, and who would have facilities for such a labor of love, which others would hardly command" (Cable 1892). In advocating educational programs at black industrial schools, to which he contributed generously, he had in mind this kind of collection that could lead to progressive social and literary results. In his call for intellectual advancement and the priority of social equality, he parted company with former ally Booker T. Washington about the educational needs of southern blacks (Butcher 1948). By the turn of the century, his uncompromising stance lost him supporters, both black and white.

Cable apparently lost his missionary zeal for the campaign, for his published work after 1892 hardly makes mention of "The Negro Question" (Cable 1888). His biographer, Philip Butcher, thought that Cable had his idealism dashed that "the South would listen to dispassionate debate on controversial subjects and would heed the advice of high-minded men who urged the adoption of a course of action based on principle rather than on expediency" (Butcher 1962, 110–11). It is also true that his disillusionment coincided with the end of his religious writing and distance from the South. Prominent black figures such as Booker T. Washington, Charles Chesnutt, and W. E. B. DuBois who had once lauded him barely mentioned him after the turn of the century (Butcher 1962, 177). Nonetheless, activists in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s revived his political writing with an important volume called *The Negro Question* (Turner 1958). The reception for Cable's political writing may lead to the conclusion that during the Gilded Age he was either too late as a postbellum abolitionist or too early as a southern civil rights advocate.

Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904), Cable's street-wise companion in the search for black Creole folk songs in New Orleans, could not be said to have shared Cable's
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puritanical motivation. But he bore Cable's sense of outrage at social injustice to blacks and even more than Cable penetrated the hidden African-American realms of the city. He also fired away at the hypocrisy of a city that claimed racial separation even though abundant evidence could be found of social and cultural miscegenation (Hearn 1926). Cable and Hearn had both covered local events for New Orleans newspapers and incorporated black folklore into their fiction. Hearn was even more of an outsider to the city, having been born in Greece, raised in Britain, and schooled in France. But to his advantage within New Orleans, Hearn was fluent in French and had lived closely with blacks. Forced into homelessness, he lived for a time on the street where he learned of the city's underside and its cast of haunting characters.

Hearn came to New Orleans from Cincinnati in 1877 after establishing himself as a journalist sensationally exploring uncharted cultural territory on the other side of the tracks. Instead of bringing back stories on crime, he narrated the life of criminals; rather than reporting the degradation of underclass blacks, he gave their artistic expressions of spirited hope in song and story. More than a decade before Cable gained fame for his collection of secular slave songs, Hearn had published a riveting series of essays on black folklife in Cincinnati. It exposed the present, maybe the future, of black life uprooted from the staid countryside and flourishing in the rising cities. He wrote incredible reading material for the time—lurid descriptions of scarred roustabouts and their toughened expressions of hardscrabble lives and boisterous surroundings. Along the docks of a black section called Bucktown, he recorded for city readers the rough-hewn lyrics, "I went down to Bucktown, Nebber was dar before, Great big niggah knocked me down, But Katy barred the door" (Cott 1992, 101; see also Hearn 1957). In 1876, he brought out the racial protest of lines like "Nigger an' a white man playing seven-up, White man played an ace; an' Nigger feared to take it up, White man played ace an' Nigger played a nine, White man died, an' Nigger went blind" (Cott 1992, 103). It was hardly like anything dripping with plantation nostalgia or the wholesomeness of the spirituals. He did not see acquiescence in this churning urban setting. "There is an intense uniqueness about all this pariah existence," Hearn engrossingly wrote of the city's black section: "its boundaries are most definitely fixed; its enjoyments are wholly sensual, and many of them are marked by peculiarities of a strictly local character" (Cott 1992, 100). He avowed the African origins of the melodies he heard, and applauded the creative exuberance of the singers teasing effusive narratives out of their bustling city scenes.

Hearn had personal reasons for his interest in black life. In defiance of antimiscegenation laws, he married a black woman in Cincinnati who had been born a slave, and his employers at the Commercial unceremoniously fired him when the union was discovered. Moreover, he expressed sympathy with the plight of a racial outcast out of his experience in Britain, where he felt ostracized for his dark looks gained from a Greek Gypsy mother. His father was of Irish birth and experienced
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a variety of exotic cultures at various military stations for the British Empire. Lafcadio came into the care of an elderly great aunt, who attempted to instill strict Catholicism into the boy and opened her library to him to keep him from wandering. He learned languages, devoured books, and explored the countryside. Compensating for an eye blinded in an accident, he took notes on the minutest details of natural life. He was drawn to mysticism and talked of being hounded by ghosts. Lafcadio ended up being abandoned by his family and, with his strange ways and swarthy appearance, was shipped off, not by his choice, to America. He took to journalistic writing to support himself and built a reputation in the United States as an accomplished prose stylist. He became so intimately associated with absorbed reporting of African-American life that the black editor of the Colored American swore that Hearn must have been at least partly black (Murray 1904).

In the different places in America that Hearn worked, he became lured to the world respectable America rarely encountered and hardly understood. In his naturalist essays, he waxed poetic on the complexity of the small insect, and in cultural forays he glorified the “little people.” In an America grabbing after material wealth and industrial strength, Hearn followed those not sharing in national progress. He offered their traditions as spiritual advances and showed that they had myriad aspirations, complex lives, and longstanding traditions.

More than Cable, Hearn dug at the roots of New Orleans black life to show their long reach. He devoted extensive literary efforts to traditional sources of New Orleans black culture in the West Indies and Africa (Hearn 1890a, 1890b). Cable helped Hearn place his pieces in national magazines, and the two worked together collecting songs with Cable transcribing the music while Hearn recorded the lyrics. After the gentlemanly Cable left the flattering light of New Orleans’s main quarter, the rumpled Hearn continued to explore the dingy back streets deep into the night. Following his experience in Cincinnati, Hearn took quickly to the inner life of the black Creole community and became enthralled with the mystery of its traditions. Hearn assiduously studied the language of the black Creoles, and besides gathering songs he feverishly recorded foodways, beliefs, customs, tales, and proverbs (Hearn 1885a, 1885b, 1924, 1964; see also Fortier 1895). He wanted to show black tradition as more than entertainment; he billed it as a robust way of life.

At a time when the local press tarred Cable as a despicable traitor to southern tradition, Hearn stood alone in defense of Cable in columns for the Times-Democrat. Distance grew between the writers, however, as Hearn affronted Cable’s puritan sensibilities by making it known that he was a regular customer at the brothels. It also must have been shocking for Cable to read of Hearn’s deep involvement in the city’s voodoo world. It was Hearn’s journalism that helped boost the legends of Marie Laveau (the Queen of Voodoo) and Jean Montanet (the King of Hoodoo). He described them as agents of enormous power, proud of their African origins and commercially successful. He wrote, for example, “Jean, in short, possessed the mysterious obi power, the existence of which has been recognized in most
slave-holding communities, and with which many a West-Indian planter has been compelled by force of circumstances to effect a compromise" (Cott 1992, 142). Here were prideful blacks to be feared and respected, Hearn brassily reported.

Other Gilded Age folklorists who delved into the voodoo world saw a different implication. Mary Alicia Owen in *Voodoo Tales* (1893) considered the tradition a confirmation of the superstitious nature of blacks, which represented a lower state of advancement toward civilization. The collection of the magical aspects of “Negro superstition” was indeed sensitive work, because of the path it suggested away from Christian sensibilities (see Puckett 1926). In the minds of many readers, it confirmed a primitive irrationality indicative of an ignorant race and the necessity of guidance from the higher vantage of white civilization. Voodoo particularly was a far cry from the spirituals, which could be more easily accepted as signs of moral accommodation to white Christian ways. Hence the special significance of the relativistic view given by African-American writer Zora Neale Hurston in “Hoodoo in America” (Hurston 1931). Influenced by the antiracist anthropology of Franz Boas, who wrote an introduction to her *Mules and Men*, Hurston carried further Hearn’s implications of voodoo being a religious cultural system in its own right based on ethnic continuity (Hurston 1935, 1938).

Hearn left the problems of race relations in New Orleans behind and immersed himself in the homogeneous society of Japan. He extolled the serenity of well-preserved tradition in Japan and uttered his disgust at the materialistic West that lost its soul in the crusade for industrial progress. He continued to write (and took teaching posts) on folklore as a location for antimodern values and gained considerable renown for collections of Japanese ancient myths and ghostly legends. Yet the very same enrapturement with old Japan that made him interesting to American readers also made him seem all the more bizarre, blind to the promise of Western modernization. Embracing the mystical traditions of Buddhism in Japan, Hearn alienated himself further from American outlooks. Considering Western advances in Asia to be a harmful intrusion, he chided evolutionary folklorists for their support of industrial progress that spurred imperialism.

Despite the efforts of Cable and Hearn to expose the unrestrained urban possibilities of postbellum black life and cultural miscegenation, literary uses of black folklore during the Gilded Age remained primarily attached to the romanticized antebellum plantation. The images of spiritual song and superstition appeared in relation to control of whites and a static rural environment. They fed an ideology of accommodation necessary, so the thinking went, for a people cut off from a native culture and dependent on whites for guidance. In “Shadowy Memories of Negro-Lore” written for *The Folk-Lorist* in 1892 by a former slave owner, the author affirmed the importance of “attempting to trace to their origin the superstitions of the race” (Barron 1892, 46). Yet as “backward” as Negro folklore appeared to him, he noted that it was decidedly different from the “aboriginal state,” presumably because of the civilizing effect of the plantation. He emphasized that, “the
Southern negroes had in antebellum days many notions, beliefs, traditions and superstitions similar to those set down as peculiar to English, French, or Norse countries. You will at once declare this to be likely enough, the thing indeed to be expected, considering the mixed condition of the society in which they were held in slavery. Americans being a heterogeneous people, assembled from all parts of the world, it is naturally to be supposed that their slaves would pick up and assimilate the multifarious folk-lore of the household” (Barron 1892, 47–48). From the view of this author, blacks received rather than created traditions under the institution of plantation slavery. Indeed they were served culturally by the plantation system and, in a portent of the future, seemed to operate best within it.

Within the discourse of the Gilded Age, the constructed, and contested, images of folklore from the southern plantation are especially evident in the awesome popular response to Brer Rabbit tales proffered by Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908). Born in Eatonton, Georgia, to a struggling, fatherless family, he apprenticed at the tender age of fourteen to a weekly plantation newspaper, *The Countryman*, where he absorbed the concerns and events of the South through the Civil War. He bounced around newspapers in New Orleans and various towns in Georgia until landing an editing position in 1876 at the major daily *Atlanta Constitution*, where he stayed for twenty-four years. The editorial tone of the
Constitution resisted northern pressure to reconstruct the South. It was the editor of the Constitution, in fact, that howled the loudest in rebuttals of George Washington Cable's editorials for social equality of the races in the 1880s. Literary pieces placed in the paper often tendered reassuring nostalgia for the Old South before the Civil War.

In line with the Old South theme, Harris developed humorous sketches in dialect that he drew from the everyday life he knew as a child in Georgia. In 1879, the paper published his tale of the rabbit outwitting a threatening fox as told by a genial old slave named Uncle Remus. While it might have seemed a shift to give a black voice in the newspaper, the story's setting on a plantation, exuding a natural pleasantness and stable social order, was in keeping with the images commonly set before its readers. The sensation the story created took the author and his paper aback, especially when over a thousand requests came in for reprints shortly after the piece appeared. A little over a year after the first story was published in the newspaper, Harris hurriedly collected his material into the first book presenting Uncle Remus's tales. The illustrations of the Remus character added to the text by Frederick Church and James Moser in the early editions set an endearing and lasting portrait of Remus, smiling, bespectacled, and bearded, spinning his tales to a wide-eyed white boy on the antebellum plantation.

With the creation of the Uncle Remus storytelling character and the popularization of his Brer Rabbit stories set on the old plantation, Harris fixed an image of slavery times in American consciousness of black folklore and brought the ideology of accommodation into view. Harris made sure to indicate the benevolence of the slave plantation system in his introduction to the first set of Uncle Remus stories. His parting words in the essay were: "If the reader not familiar with plantation life will imagine that the myth-stories of Uncle Remus are told night after night to a little boy by an old Negro who appears to be venerable enough to have lived during the period which he describes—who has nothing but pleasant memories of the discipline of slavery—and who has all the prejudices of caste and pride of family that were the natural result of the system." These words flew up at William Francis Allen, the groundbreaking compiler of black spirituals. Allen angrily wrote in his review of the book for Dial of the "moral for those who cannot see how the freed slaves should ever act politically with their old masters." Allen complained of this attitude in favor of an "unaccountable servility of spirit" that formed a main obstacle to necessary reconstruction of the South. While another reviewer eleven years later in Dial admitted the "great wrong" of slavery, he saw in Harris's volume a case for preserving the best qualities of blacks during that period into freedom: "full of quaint good sense, full of affection, of good humor, and of natural courtesy."

Folklorists meanwhile jumped on the issue of the tales' origin to test evolutionary ideas about cultural survivals in America. Harris invited commentary on the matter by affirming that animal stories he heard and faithfully rendered in dialect assuredly came from Africa. Lest this view sound overly sympathetic to a case for
Illustration by A. B. Frost from *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1880), by Joel Chandler Harris. The caption was “Brer Rabbit ain’t see no peace w’atsumever.”
Illustration by Milo Winter of Brer Rabbit as a trickster figure outwitting Brer Fox, from the story “Brer Rabbit's Riddle” in Tales from Uncle Remus, by Joel Chandler Harris (copyright 1911 and 1935 by Esther La Rose Harris). The caption read “Brer Rabbit Turnt 'Er Aloose, En Down She Come—Ker-Swosh!” The story originally appeared in Nights with Uncle Remus: Myths and Legends of the Old Plantation (1883). (Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.)
black cultural continuity, Harris hedged his bets by noting unexplainable parallels to the story outside of black influence and speculated on a pre-African origin. He contrasted the Uncle Remus character, who owed his good manner to whites and told his stories to a white boy, with a later invention, African Jack, who spoke Gullah dialect and seemed primitive and more dangerous by comparison. In subsequent volumes of Remus's tales, Harris tired of evolutionary speculation and emphasized the literary value of what he offered while maintaining that he genuinely rendered the stories from oral tradition. In the years after Harris's tales were published, hundreds of collections of animal stories from southern blacks collaborated his claims to oral tradition and a frenzy for finding variations and origins ensued to locations as remote as India and Japan (Griffis 1893).

If Harris sounded like an unreconstructed Southerner in the 1881 edition of *Uncle Remus*, his proposal for the function of the trickster rabbit in many of the stories anticipated later interpretations and retellings of black resistance in the performance of the animal stories (see Levine 1977; Lester 1987, 1989). He swore “it needs no scientific investigation to show why he [the Negro] selects as his hero the weakest and most harmless of all animals, and brings him out victorious in contests with the bear, the wolf, and the fox. It is not virtue that triumphs, but helplessness; it is not malice, but mischievousness.” Yet softening the blow of this revelation, Harris took the position that an interpretation of the stories as “allegorical … may be unreasonable.”

As the Uncle Remus stories became nationally and then internationally known, Harris took the part of children’s entertainer rather than southern interpreter. He changed much of his tune by singing the praises of universal moral themes in the stories such as avoiding stinginess or being honest rather than referencing social struggles in the South. In the 1892 edition of *Uncle Remus and His Friends*, Harris retreated from his earlier “serious” intentions by quipping, “I knew a good deal more about comparative folk-lore then than I know now.” He avoided functional, or political, commentary, proclaiming that “the stories … were written simply and solely because of my interest in the stories themselves, in the first place, and in the second place, because of the unadulterated human nature that might be found in them.” He deflated the impact of the stories by juvenilizing them, turning them into entertainment for children, especially white children, rather than an expression of black subversion. He explained: “As I wrote them with my own children around me, or with their voices sounding not far away, I seemed to see other children laughing as the homely stories were read to them” (Harris 1892).

In the Gilded Age discourse on the status of black culture in America generated by an outpouring of titles on Brer Rabbit stories particularly and songs and superstitions generally, opinions of blacks themselves on their folklore appeared conspicuously absent. But an organized movement at Hampton Institute changed that. The school founded in 1868 in Hampton, Virginia, had featured black choirs singing spirituals and folk songs since the 1870s. Its publication, the *Southern Workman*,
founded in 1872, featured essays on slave life and lore. Guiding a student body made up of 537 blacks and 135 Indians, the newly appointed principal in 1893, the Reverend Hollis B. Frissell, intended to expand the school’s efforts in folklore to mark racial progress from the uneducated state of slavery to the present. Thinking of the Indians in his school who had what he considered a developed sense of their rich cultural tradition, Frissell worried that blacks “would stand as an anomaly among civilized races, as a people having no distinct traditions, beliefs or ideas from which a history of their growth may be traced” (Sharps 1991, 30). He fretted that in the educated black tendency to repress the memory of slavery almost thirty years after emancipation, a valuable cultural inheritance was slipping away. From that cultural inheritance, he argued, the “progress of the race” could be held up to inspire black achievement and white support. The person who became primarily responsible for launching a movement for blacks to interpret themselves turned out to be a white teacher at the school named Alice Mabel Bacon (1858–1918).

The daughter of an abolitionist Congregationalist minister, Bacon had come from New Haven, Connecticut, in 1883 to Hampton to teach and help with the operation of the school. It was a return trip actually, since she had spent a year there in her childhood residing with her sister Rebecca, then assistant principal of the newly established school. She attended classes with blacks and developed a fascination with their spirituals. A member of the American Folklore Society, Bacon knew several founders from their philanthropic and administrative connections to Hampton. Alice Cunningham Fletcher, who made her fame in collections of Omaha tribal folklore, was a Hampton teacher and administrator, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who wrote on black folk song, was a Hampton trustee. Bacon was named an editor of the school’s journal, Southern Workman, and initiated a “Folklore and Ethnology Department.” With many of her duties focused on training of teachers for service in black schools, she saw folklore as a connection that the educated blacks could make to their students and environments in the rural South.

Bacon came up with the idea of forming a folklore society at Hampton after reading “Science and the African Problem” by eminent Harvard educator Nathaniel Southgate Shaler (1841-1906) in Atlantic Monthly for July 1890 (see also Shaler 1884, 1886, 1895, 1900). Bacon was so impressed with the article she reprinted it the same year in the Workman. Shaler had been born into a slaveholding family in Kentucky, and many family members joined the Confederate forces during the Civil War; but he fought on the Union side. He referred to himself as an “ex-Southerner” concerned for the future progress of the region if it did not adequately deal with its racial divide. In the annals of science, he became renowned as an early American proponent of evolutionary theory, breaking away from his famous naturalist mentor, Louis Agassiz. A regular contributor to the popular magazines Atlantic Monthly, Popular Science Monthly, and Arena, Shaler frequently applied the rising evolutionary theories to social issues of immigration and race (see
Alice M. Bacon at Hampton University. (Hampton University Archives)
Shaler 1893, 1895). Primarily known as a naturalist and geologist (he also wrote books on government and philosophy), he suggested a “scientific” organization for recording the cultural history of blacks according to natural science principles, in an effort to solve their social problems (Shaler 1890). He argued that the data would be invaluable in establishing black “progress in civilization,” which was a prerequisite for equal participation in modern industrial society. Putting his faith in science for providing a social solution, he declared the goal that the collecting work “would give to all who are interested in him [the Negro], data from which to reason toward more efficient work” (Sharps 1991, 33; emphasis added).

Principal Frissell and teacher Bacon became enthusiastic about Hampton, translating Shaler’s call into a focus on folklore work because it helped build the ideological case for the school’s approach to the “Negro question.” The school was devoted to vocational training that would economically uplift blacks before social equality could be achieved. It would join blacks to the drive for materialism as a mark of success during the Gilded Age. Toward this end, it encouraged development of an economically viable yeomanry composed of black masses serving the South. It presumed a need for slow and steady social progress and the secondary importance of intellectual pursuits as signs of advancement (Warren 1996). It was a doctrine publicized by Booker T. Washington, Hampton’s best-known student and the driving force at the industrial school at Tuskegee Institute. Underscoring the connection of awareness of black traditions and industrial progress at Hampton and Tuskegee, Washington bragged that the schools had “done more good, and, in the true sense of the word, been more cultural than all the Greek and Latin that have ever been studied by all Negroes in all the colleges in the country” (Sharps 1991, 149).

At the same Atlanta Exposition where Washington made his famous speech calling for economic preparedness before social equality could be achieved, Hampton had a featured exhibition on black material progress staffed by members of the Hampton Folklore Society and documented in a book by Alice Bacon (Bacon 1896). The book, in fact, reprinted the text of Washington’s speech. Washington understood the value of her folklore project in supporting his accommodationist ideology and expressed the hope that such an enterprise would reveal “the true history of the race.” He additionally proposed to collect “in some museum the relics that mark its [the race’s] progress” (Verney 1996, 148). That evolutionary history tended to view the antebellum plantation as a “civilizing school” for blacks, tearing them away from African savagery and in Washington’s words giving them “a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe” (Sharps 1991, 138). The collection of antebellum black folklore, joined to plantation life, could establish a tradition for blacks that rationalized commitment to, rather than departure from, the South. Echoing Frissell’s cry for recovering a cultural tradition to mark racial progress, Washington advised
his black brethren: "We must have pride of race. We must be as proud of being a Negro as the Japanese is of being a Japanese" (Verney 1996, 147). Washington's comparison raises the possibility that he had indeed Bacon's other major project at a national tradition in mind, for she spent several years at work in Japan on folklore, and Washington for all his overseas travel never visited Asia (Bacon 1894, 1905; Verney 1996, 148).

Following attendance at the Chicago World's Fair, where Hampton had an exhibition of "Negro progress" and a folklore congress had been held, Bacon prepared a circular letter to graduates of Hampton in 1893 encouraging the formation of a folklore society that would have as its object "the education of the colored people to do their own observing and collecting; to watch the little things peculiar to their own race, and to record them and place them where they can be made of permanent value" (Bacon 1898, 17). Attached to the letter were testimonials of support for the project from luminaries Booker T. Washington, George Washington Cable, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, William Wells Newell, Alexander Crummell, and Nathaniel Southgate Shaler. The letter warned that if preservation of the lore was not undertaken, then the common school system and loss of memory would combine to eradicate any sense of a distinct American black tradition. The letter insisted on the responsibility of educated blacks to appreciate the heritage of the largely uneducated masses and implied that this task was made all the more pressing by the misinterpretation of black folklore by white literati. Bacon wrote that the work must be done by observers who enter into the homes and lives of the more ignorant colored people and who see in their beliefs and customs no occasion for scorn or contempt or laughter, but only the showing forth of the first child-like but still reasoning philosophy of a race reaching after some interpretation of its surroundings and its antecedents. To such observers every custom, belief, or superstition, foolish and empty to others, will be of value and will be worth careful preservation. This work cannot be done by white people, much as many of them would enjoy the opportunity of doing it, but must be done by the intelligent and educated colored people who are at work all through the South among the more ignorant of their race, teaching, preaching, practicing medicine, carrying on business of any kind that brings them into close contact with the simple, old-time ways of their own people. (Bacon 1893, 306)

If the call for racial pride, and appreciation for the southern black tradition, suggested bonds to the masses that hinted at black nationalism, another side to the appeal was confirmation that Hampton graduates represented the most likely elite to lead them to integration with whites. In the words of prominent Hampton graduate and folklorist Robert Moton, "I know of no institution that inculcated more throughly, and I believe more successfully, the missionary idea—that every student is trained not alone that he may make a better citizen but that he may devote himself to the elevation of his people" (Sharps 1991, 104). It did not escape the notice of Principal Frissell that showing the backwardness of southern blacks reinforced the
Robert R. Moton as a student at Hampton University. (Hampton University Archives)
Robert R. Moton as principal of Tuskegee Institute. (Hampton University Archives)
value of Hampton's approach to education (Sharps 1991, 30). This set up a potentially damaging admission, as historian Kenneth Warren has described it, that "whatever its intent, uplift necessarily presumed some degree of depravity, incapacity, backwardness, and general unfitness as being prevalent among the black population" (Warren 1996, 1595). Calhoun School in Alabama, founded by Hampton faculty, for instance, accomplished cultural and economic progress because it was set in the "midst of a small cabin population of ignorant and degraded black people," as Southern Workman reported in 1894 ("Report" 1894). The backwardness attributed to black folk culture could be checked, however, by the reminders of pride of tradition it provided and the promise of joining the material progress of the age.

Washington and Frissell rhetorically expressed tradition and progress as social virtues especially enjoyed by whites. Washington thus rallied members of the Negro Business League by references to folklore of slavery and then proclaimed, "Let us go from this great meeting filled with a spirit of race pride; rejoicing in the fact that we belong to a race that has made greater progress within fifty years than any race in history" (Verney 1996, 147). Another example of this "check" on the perceived black "folk" class came from Bacon in 1897. Reflecting on the work of the society, she simultaneously noted efforts to "preserve a record of customs and beliefs now happily passing away, but which connect the negro's African and American past with his present" (Bacon 1898, 18; emphasis added). Her view was that black folklore emanating primarily from the plantation provided a valued identity, "a racial pride," which would impel contemporary efforts toward material progress.

In Bacon's rhetoric, the Hampton Folklore Society represented a black-led "movement." It was motivated less by scientific interest than social needs. She told the American Folklore Society in 1897 that "it arose, to begin with not in enthusiasm for the collection of folklore, but from a strong desire on the part of some of those connected with the Hampton work to bridge over, if possible, the great gulf fixed between the minds of the educated and the uneducated, the civilized and the uncivilized,—to enter more deeply into the daily life of the common people, and to understand more thoroughly their ideas and motives" (Bacon 1898, 17). The Folklore Society, she underscored in the same address, was designed to understand "present conditions," translated as social problems. The first public meeting was held the day after the college's commencement ceremony in 1894 and featured an encouraging address by William Wells Newell of the American Folklore Society. Blacks from the onset led the group's organization and held monthly meetings for those close to Hampton. Bacon left for Japan in 1899 and did not return to the United States in 1902.

The zealous devotion to Hampton exhibited by its graduates sustained the Hampton Folklore Society for many years. The society maintained a broad network of correspondents, who would often gather at reunions and school anniversaries. It forged links to folklore projects at Hampton's affiliated schools, including
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first and foremost Calhoun Colored School (Calhoun, Alabama) followed by Tuskegee Institute (Tuskegee, Alabama), People's Village School (Mt. Meigs, Alabama), Penn School (St. Helena, South Carolina), and Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School (Cappahoe, Virginia). It had communication with other fledgling organizations devoted to black folklore study such as the Washington Negro Folklore Society and the Asheville Folklore Society. Hampton thus became a flagship for a fleet of folklore projects to collect American black folklore. William Wells Newell, secretary of the American Folklore Society, urged the Hampton folklorists to form a Virginia or Negro branch of the national society, but they insisted on keeping the Hampton label as a symbol of the society's driving ideology. It publicized the society's "scientific" folklore work in the name of the institution's educational mission. Although Alice Bacon became a member of the American Folklore Society's executive council, the Hampton Society always remained independent from the national organization.

Southern Workman enthusiastically published notices of the Hampton group's projects and meetings. Bacon's editorial hand in reporting the society's collections avoided alterations and value judgments. Most of the material consisted of beliefs and folktales connected to the plantation South, which were occasionally reprinted in the Journal of American Folklore. In the avoidance of African traditions and the emphasis on plantation material was indeed an implication of acculturation, if not positive moral effects, during the slavery era.

In answer to white retellings of black folklore by the likes of Joel Chandler Harris, Hampton folklorists demanded exacting transcriptions of Brer Rabbit stories and supernatural accounts from tradition-bearers (see Bolden 1899; Washington 1895; see also Waters 1983). Although encouraging uses of southern plantation folklore by black writers such as Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar, Hampton folklorists could also be critical of their black brethren as much as white authors for taking liberties with oral tradition or appearing insensitive to Hampton's ideology. They harshly reviewed Chesnutt's Conjure Woman (1899) for misrepresenting the conjuring tradition, which they had faithfully recorded, and they took Paul Laurence Dunbar to task for "a lack of appreciation of the character of the best South" (Sharps 1991, 198–99).

In keeping with their doctrine of fidelity to tradition, the Hampton folklorists avoided reporting folk songs. As Bacon explained, "The Hampton School has already done much work in the line of collecting, arranging for our system of musical notation, and publishing, the negro spirituals, but that is not the kind of work our Society wishes to do. Our desire is, not to obtain any song in a more or less changed or mangled condition, as you surely do when you take it out of its foreordained and appropriate setting in some part of the complicated negro religious ritual, and adapt it to be sung as a regular four-part song by a choir or congregation, either white or black" (Bacon 1898, 19–20). As laid out in the original circular letter, the Society's priorities were first the folktales, including the well-known animal
tales, and second, customs, “especially in connection with birth, marriage, and death, that are different from those of whites.” Bacon explained that “the old nurse, who first takes the little baby in her arms, has great store of old-fashioned learning about what to do and what not to do to start the child auspiciously upon the voyage of life” (Bacon 1894, 306). The society’s emphasis on oral literacy and folk medical practices could be tied to vocational interests at Hampton. In addition to its teacher training program, Bacon had initiated a drive for the “Dixie Hospital” that opened in 1891 to provide nursing education and scientific medical care.

Among the black leadership of the Hampton Society emerged several figures such as Robert Russa Moton and Frank Dean Banks who attended American Folklore Society meetings and published folklore scholarship. Cementing the connection of Hampton to Tuskegee, Robert Moton (1867–1940) became Tuskegee’s second principal after Washington died, while Banks, vice president and treasurer of the Hampton Folklore Society, was a Tuskegee board member (Moton 1921). Long-time president of the Hampton Folklore Society Frederick Douglass Wheelock had been a librarian at Tuskegee. While organized folklore collecting by these black educators became centered at Tuskegee in Alabama and Hampton in Virginia, the efforts of the group ranged beyond the South. In 1902 Hampton folklorists drew wide notice with the organization of a folklore concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City (Sharps 1991, 63–64). The rhetoric for the concert iterated the theme of promoting “race pride [of Negroes] by giving … more respect for their customs and traditions” (Sharps 1991, 63–64). Moton particularly espoused the importance of the movement for interpretations by blacks of their own past and future. In the title of his book *What the Negro Thinks*, he gave notice that indeed blacks could intellectualize their own situation (Moton 1929).

While the collectors became a close-knit group tied with their folklore interest and allegiance to Hampton, the generation of Moton (class of 1889), Banks (class of 1876), and Wheelock (class of 1888) did not effectively sustain the organized work of the Hampton Folklore Society past World War I, although folklore studies persisted at Hampton. One factor affecting the attitude toward the original group’s mission was that Hampton’s vocational curriculum and accommodationist ideology underwent a sea change with the succession of principal Frissell by James Gregg in 1918. Yet the society’s work came back into national notice through publications of unpublished material after World War I by Elsie Clews Parsons and Calhoun School graduate Portia Smiley. The editors framed the works, however, as raw data without comment on the organizing principles of “progress of the race” (see Bacon and Parsons 1922; Smiley 1919). By the time the groundbreaking collections found new audiences, a rethinking of the role of folklore in African-American life, particularly traditions of the old plantation, was evident among notable black leaders. The result was several directions that recast folklore in light of ideologies that challenged the Hampton movement.
In December 1896 Alexander Crummell, who had sent in a letter of support to the Hampton Folklore Society three years before, invited distinguished college-educated men to Washington, D.C. Crummell differed from the leaders of the Hampton movement in being a northerner, born in New York in 1819 to a family of free blacks. He had studied in England and was a missionary to Liberia. He had collected his learned essays into a volume called *Africa and America* in 1892. He expressed devotion to "preservation of traditions, folklore, ancestral remembrances, etc." that would reveal the ancestral "derivation of the American Negroes" in Africa (Sharps 1991, 158; Bacon 1894, 307). Beyond his irritation at the lack of attention to African origins and uncritical portrayal of plantation slavery by the Hampton folklorists, he increasingly felt discomfort with the ideology behind their effort to promote industrial education and emphasize the drive for material progress over the urgency of political rights.

A coterie of eighteen young learned men, many of whom taught classics in American universities, answered the call from the elderly luminary in 1897 and formed the American Negro Academy (ANA). Crummell explained its purpose to advance their race toward civilization by embracing the spirituality of Christianity and "the life of the mind" (Moss 1981, 39–40). He urged the group to find a different voice from Washington’s to lead blacks to social progress in the new century. According to a chronicler of Hampton’s relationship to the ANA, the ANA objection to the Hampton plan was broader and deeper than the mere cause of classical versus industrial education. The issue centered on the concept of civilization and Negro character. The academy creed asserted a belief "that the Negro people, as a race, have a contribution to make to civilization and humanity, which no other race can make," and that race identity must be maintained until that mission was accomplished and "the ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility." Folklore was significant to an understanding of both the processes of civilization and the raising of race consciousness. (Sharps 1991, 165–66)

Among those processes of civilization in dispute were the uniqueness of black cultural expressions and ability of blacks to master intellectual pursuits. ANA publicist Anna Julia Cooper explained "the fact that the Negro’s ability to work had never been called in question, while his ability to learn Latin and construe Greek syntax needed to be proved to sneering critics” (Cooper 1969, 260).

Cooper had endorsed the work of the Hampton Folklore Society but later urged it to change its tack. She along with another ANA member, William Scarborough, who addressed the Hampton Folklore Conferences of 1896 and 1899, wanted folklore used as a basis of a black intellectual renaissance emphasizing artistic uses. They understood such an effort to involve the rise of a distinct civilization, not tied to whites and led by black elites. Referring to folklore and classics together, Cooper said poetically, "if one had the insight and simplicity to gather together, to digest and assimilate these original lisplings of an unsophisticated people while they were yet
close—so close—to nature and to nature's God, there is material here, one might almost believe, as rich, as un hackneyed, as original and distinctive as ever inspired a Homer, or a Caedmon or other simple genius of a people's infancy and lisping childhood" (Sharps 1991, 173). Scarborough, born a slave in Georgia, was one of many classics teachers in the academy. He assaulted the cultural destruction to the race in slavery and iterated the call to creative uses of African-American tradition and intellect in an editorial for the academy in 1903. The encouragement of achievement in the arts, he insisted, kept "before the world the fact that the Negro possesses intellect; that he is both able and capable, and that through this possession and training the race proposes to develop its civilization" (Scarborough 1903, 3).

Another teacher of Greek and Latin who took on the leadership of the academy, indeed of the dissident movement for black intellectual development and political rights, was W. E. B. DuBois (1868–1963). At the first meeting of the academy, DuBois stirred the audience with a reading of "The Conservation of the Races." Referring to his intellectual audience as "the advance guard" of the black masses, he unabashedly argued that their destiny is "not absorption by the white Americans." Critical of the "immorality, crime and laziness" among the black masses, which he blamed on "a heritage of slavery," he urged leadership of the intellectual elite in the effort for the uplifting of American blacks. His rhetoric for racial pride was similar to the Hampton movement at the time, but his goal appeared to be separation rather than integration of the black masses.

DuBois's platform was to push for aggressive political agitation and artistic applications of black contributions. In another call for renaissance, he emphatically pronounced, "that if in America it is to be proven for the first time in the modern world that not only Negroes are capable of evolving individual men like Toussaint, the Saviour, but are a nation stored with wonderful possibilities of culture, then their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unsparingly follow Negro ideals" (DuBois 1986, 820). With Crummell's death a year after the first meeting of the ANA, DuBois became president of the group, serving for the next five years. In 1905, DuBois issued a redoubled civil rights call "for organized determination and aggressive action on the part of men who believe in Negro freedom and growth" (DuBois 1986, 618). Meeting near Buffalo, New York, the group declared themselves the Niagara Movement, openly hostile to what DuBois called the "Hampton-Tuskegee machine" of Booker T. Washington.

DuBois, like Crummell, was a northerner, born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1868, but he attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, before going to Harvard for a second B.A. in 1890, and Ph.D. in 1895. He described the black South as foreign to his existence; it was in his mind "the South of slavery, rebellion and black folk" where he was "thrilled to be for the first time among so many people of my own color ... which I had only glimpsed before, but who it seemed were bound to me by new and exciting and eternal ties" (DuBois 1986, 569).
While still north, he had an emotional response to a symbol of the South, which he referred to often as a life-changing moment for him. He heard for the first time “Negro folk songs” performed by the Hampton Quartet. He recalled the moment as fixing his attention to black tradition: “I was thrilled and moved to tears and seemed to recognize something inherently and deeply my own” (DuBois 1986, 570).

Connecting the urban North to the rural South, DuBois undertook an ambitious sociological study of black Philadelphia and its sources in rural Virginia when Crummell issued his invitation to the ANA. He then went south to join the faculty of Atlanta University but defiantly refused to patronize segregated facilities or transportation. He left Atlanta for New York, where he edited The Crisis for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). His reputation grew as an unrelenting critic of American racism and a forceful advocate for civil rights. Toward these ends he promoted projects showcasing the history of American blacks reaching back to Africa. In 1913, he staged a history pageant called “The Star of Ethiopia” in New York, followed two years later by publication of The Negro, an overview of black history and culture. Realization of a racial tradition going back to Africa served DuBois’s cause by proclaiming a cultural vitality deserving of black self-pride as well as American intellectual and social respect.

The role of folklore in DuBois’s rhetoric can be seen in his classic work, The Souls of Black Folk (1903). Every chapter heading was emblazoned with a bar of a spiritual, which he emphasized in his introduction as “Sorrow Songs.” The book culminated in the last chapter with a case for the spiritual as a metaphor for black experience. Its emotion and sacredness provided the “soul” of a resistant enslaved culture, and its singers were the “primitive folk,” capable of expressing vibrant beauty despite their bondage. The sorrow of the songs was for the cruelty of slavery and the destruction of cultural integrity. Rather than gaining civilization in slavery and finding new roots in the rural South, DuBois found civilization prior to America and implied a remigration to find cultural renewal. He read in the lyrics of the folk songs hope as well as faith in social justice that would allow blacks to be themselves. “Persistently mistaken and misunderstood,” the black folk song to DuBois constituted the only “spiritual heritage of the nation” and was the greatest gift of African heritage to the world.

In declaring a struggle to establish a racially egalitarian society in America, DuBois beheld black strength above all in its sacred traditions. He insisted on rebuilding black culture on its distinctive features, rather than imitating the legacy of whites. Referring to evolutionary theories of progress, DuBois reinterpreted the role of American blacks on the ladder of civilization. “Like all primitive folk, the slave stood near to Nature’s heart,” DuBois wrote (DuBois 1989, 210). From the path taken from there to the present, DuBois drew a different conclusion. Instead of concluding that the “backward races of today are of proven inefficiency and not worth the saving,” DuBois saw sometimes greater virtue in the original. Seeing in
the classics a lesson for the priority of an enlightenment previous to modern industrialism, DuBois asked “Why should Aeschylus have sung two thousand years before Shakespeare was born?” In fact, he saw in ancient civilizations on the African and Asian continents a counterargument to the “dogmatism” of the “blond races” leading civilization. His version of civilization provided a basis in his mind for commanding wisdom and justice through classical pursuits in need of being regained. It implied an antimaterialist construction of culture in need of renewal. He posed haunting questions from the plantation folk song: “Sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?” (DuBois 1989).

For DuBois as well as many critics of evolutionary doctrine, the “barbarism” of World War I was a severe blow to a model of European-American industrial enlightenment promised by the ideology of cultural evolution. Indeed, commentators on the “Great War” often viewed it as a terminus for the Gilded Age that crushed the self-confidence in the evolutionary progress of the West (Kern 1983). With the brutal reality of the mechanized war made vividly clear in the world press, DuBois wrote, “The day of camouflage is past.” His harshest indictment came in “An Essay Toward a History of the Black Man in the Great War” originally appearing in Crisis in 1919 (DuBois 1986, 879–922). “To everyone war is, and, thank God, must be, disillusion,” DuBois baldly wrote. He explained that “this war has disillusioned millions of fighting white men—disillusioned them with its frank truth of dirt, disease, cold, wet and discomfort; murder, maiming and hatred…. But the story of stories is that of the American Negro” (DuBois 1986, 880). He caustically observed that “we gained the right to fight for civilization at the cost of being ‘Jim-Crowed’ and insulted; we were segregated in the draft; we were segregated in the first officers’ training camp; and we were allowed to volunteer only as servants in the Navy and as common laborers in the Army, outside of four regular Negro regiments” (DuBois 1986, 881).

DuBois exposed racist policies practiced by the American army and concluded that no longer could the United States claim to be on the highest rungs of civilization when it possessed starkly vicious social attitudes. To DuBois and other critics, the carnage of the war discredited any claims Europeans had to a superior civilization. Instead of seeing race as a natural state suggested by the evolutionary anthropologists, DuBois argued for race as a phenomenon of the modern era and its intersection with capitalist class formation engineered by European whites (Holt 1995, 189). Increasingly calling for black separatism and embracing communist support, he split with the NAACP over the board’s integrationist policies and became more estranged from reigning black leadership. Before he left The Crisis in 1934 in a bitter dispute with the NAACP, DuBois used the magazine to foster one of his goals of ushering a renaissance of black self-expression by publishing many black writers who drew on folklore, such as Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Countee Cullen.
While DuBois became painted by his opponents as a dangerous radical after World War I, other leaders emerged with him who also used folklore in their rhetoric for social change. Charles S. Johnson (1893–1956) fought in France during the Great War, and upon his return became distressed by urban race riots in the North, especially during the bloody “Red Summer” of 1919. He subsequently decided on an academic career pursuing the social bases of racial conflicts. He became convinced that races could be integrated if historical and economic barriers were lifted. Like DuBois, he used the rhetoric of civilization to show that blacks have had a beneficial contribution to make to American culture (Johnson 1930). In contrast to DuBois’s spiritual and aesthetic campaign for black self-expression, Johnson established Opportunity for the Urban League in 1923 to “scientifically” address social problems for blacks and whites in a common cause against traditions of prejudice.

Trained in sociology at the University of Chicago, Johnson undertook wide-ranging empirical research of the rural South at Fisk University that helped form an argument for integration. Ascending to the position of Fisk’s first black president, he became widely recognized in the ranks of the nation’s educational leaders. Earning the respect of white racial reform leaders, he provided heaps of social statistics to discount the reality of an inherent biological racial difference between blacks and whites. He posited the idea of a constructed “folk Negro” to describe the isolation of the rural black put in that position by historical and economic forces (Johnson 1930, 1934, 1967).

Johnson’s studies were further ammunition against the evolutionary conception of the biological inferiority of darker races. He railed against stereotypes perpetuated by “the subtle handicap of tradition ... a sort of conspiracy of the ages” (Sharps 1991, 270). He found folklore significant for its psychological effect on both blacks and whites as a “vague and intangible world of feeling” (Sharps 1991, 273). In the first volume of Opportunity, Johnson penned an editorial called “Romulus and Uncle Remus,” in which he viewed the way that traditions of the old-time Negro could be perpetuated by whites through a master narrative that clouded over actual changes in the black population. He wrote that “in these rapidly shifting scenes, when all classes are breaking with traditions and old moorings are being swept away, one is too apt to overlook the fact that Negroes themselves are subject to these same influences” (Johnson 1923, 195). In underscoring the need for social causation, he could be critical of DuBois’s narrative of African priority as well as Joel Chandler Harris’s image of the pleasant plantation.

With reference to Johnson’s social scientific efforts to detail the “folk Negro,” Alain Locke (1886–1954) pronounced a construction of the “New Negro” apparently removed from Gilded Age folklore of the Old South. In 1925, he wrote that “in the last decade something beyond the watch and guard of statistics has happened in the life of the American Negro.... The Sociologist, the Philanthropist, the Race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him”
Spotlighting a great migration of blacks to northern cities, Locke predicted a great divide between the folk tradition of the black South and a new “Twentieth Century civilization” being created in the North. Hailing from Philadelphia, Locke in 1907 had the distinction after his undergraduate study at Harvard of being the first black to be awarded the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship. He returned to Harvard to earn his doctorate in philosophy and taught at Howard University and City College of New York.

Locke used the model of Jews who had been able to form a distinct artistic consciousness out of prejudice heaped upon them. He saw in their urban experience on the Lower East Side of New York a dramatic shift from repressed village life of the Old World to New York intellectuals and artists in a single generation. Harlem to him was the new beginning, “the home of the Negro’s ‘Zionism’” (Locke 1994, 30). Setting a tone for a movement called the Harlem Renaissance, Locke declared that blacks could no longer be seen as peasant folk artists, but instead as modern cosmopolitans of a fresh period of history.

Although participants in the renaissance such as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Arna Bontemps made artistic usage of folklore, they had a new urban audience and experimented with novel forms. Apparently less concerned for argument over the historical character of slavery or origin of folktales, they set a future course for innovative black expression in a new environment that joined a modern cultural democracy. The creative “pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem,” Locke enthusiastically announced. He drew attention to a new “second crop” of literary contributions separate from the first crop of the South’s folk music and art. Setting the jazzed excitement of Harlem as the symbol for the new-fashioned vibrancy of black life, he scanned how the Negro “now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization” (Locke 1994, 31). While black cosmopolitans might be inspired by the rhythm and emotion of southern black tradition, Locke believed that ultimately “the American mind must reckon with a fundamentally changed Negro” and, with that reckoning, different kinds of racial relationships in a plural American culture (Locke 1994, 25). Locke’s manifesto had a major intellectual effect of loosening allegiance to southern tradition and its attachment to folklore. He foresaw in the swirling northern city a creative independence, indeed, “a spiritual Coming of Age.” He obscured the Gilded Age priority of “making material headway and progress” for the race in favor of the cosmopolitan ideal of creative “self-expression and spiritual development” (Locke 1994, 31).

Relativism and the Diversity of American Culture

Not far from Harlem, Franz Boas (1858–1942) at Columbia used the lessons of American black and Indian folklore to encourage replacement of evolutionary
Franz Boas demonstrating a Northwest Indian ritual for the Bureau of American Ethnology. (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)
"progress of the race" with a relativism of plural cultures. That relativism, he noted, countered a racist undertone in evolutionary thought of connecting biological differences to a cultural hierarchy from dark to white peoples. He had worked on the evolutionary exhibitions for the Chicago World's Fair and had been hired by the Smithsonian's Otis Mason in 1894 to collect Northwest Indian ritual objects. But in the multiethnic atmosphere of New York City toward the turn of the century, his writing increasingly showed skepticism of evolutionary claims. After assaulting in print the methods of evolutionary anthropologists and folklorists, he severed his ties with institutions that promoted cultural evolutionary doctrine (Boas 1896). He resigned from the Museum of Natural History and criticized the powerful Bureau of American Ethnology. He opposed American entrance into World War I, which earned him censure from the American Anthropological Association. Facing resistance in the association to his demands for a relativist agenda, he used the American Folklore Society and the Journal of American Folklore, which he controlled as editor, to expand on his vision of culture as holistic, relativistic, and pluralistic (Liss 1995).

Boas established an academic program in anthropology at Columbia University and advanced a way of thinking about cultures applying the new idea of relativity known in physics. Relativity assumed that one's view, one's cultural patterns, depended on the time and space one occupied. If that was the case, then cultures were relative to one another rather than arranged in hierarchies. Cultures were not united into a march to civilization but ranged widely in their histories, locations, and social structures. Boas sketched distinctive patterns for each culture and came up with a level ethnographic map of many whole cultures around the world instead of an outline of a converging ladder with succeeding rungs of savagery, barbarism, and civilization.

Boas explained cultural similarities by the diffusion of ideas between cultures rather than an evolutionary rise, and he introduced ideas of individual psychology into the evaluation of styles of cultural expression. He embraced folklore as primary cultural evidence to reveal the particular character of a group and the ways that cultural ideas move. Folklore for Boas comprised the tales and myths that revealed the specific values and history within a bounded group. Using folklore even more than linguistics or physical anthropology, he described cultures by their geographical spread and special conditions rather than by their level and type (Reichard 1943; Jacobs 1959b).

In Boas's view, the world was varied, heterogeneous, and simultaneous. Its cultures needed mapping and observing in their totalities, rather than what he thought of as the purging of their cultural specimens. From his position of power at Columbia University, Boas and his students controlled the American Folklore Society after the turn of the century, and offered the intellectual foundations for twentieth-century views of race and society that supplanted Victorian ideas of cultural evolution. At the same time, Boas pushed the study of folklore into academe,
isolating it from the center of public consumption it had enjoyed in the late nineteenth century. As editor of the *Journal of American Folklore* from 1908 to 1924, Boas published many dissertations and studies completed under his direction at Columbia University that emphasized the distinctiveness of cultures. The distinctiveness could be measured by the use of folklore as a reflection of a group's special social and historical conditions.

After Boas stepped down as editor, his influence continued at the journal because his students Ruth Benedict and Gladys Reichard maintained the editorial helm until 1941. A new generation weary of the previous generation's dubious grand claims took the place of the older "scientific men and women" who had touted evolution as rational explanation of cultural variety and industrial advancement. The first editor of the *Journal of American Folklore*, William Wells Newell, recognized that evolutionary doctrine, apparently so well suited to the nineteenth century, would not last in the new century. In 1901 he wrote in the journal: "From the small body of anthropological students in America during the last decade have been removed many names, some of world-wide reputation, others beloved and admired in their own circle, and the places of these laborers have not as yet been filled" (Newell 1901, 56). Gone by 1901, for example, were leading Victorian lights such as Daniel Brinton, Frank Hamilton Cushing, Fletcher S. Bassett, and John G. Bourke, and six years later Newell himself died. The year 1900 was a turning point in the direction of folklore studies, for it also marked Franz Boas's ascent, at the age of forty-two, to the presidency of the American Folklore Society (McNeil 1980, 866–926).

Boas had emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1887, apparently because he felt frustrated by anti-Semitism and organizational restrictions on his work (Herskovits 1953, 12). Familiar with the role of a minority culture considered inferior in Europe because of his German-Jewish background (in America he joined the Society for Ethical Culture), Boas attacked racial classifications and assumptions of inferiority based on theories of natural science (Glick 1982; Hyatt 1990). His social conviction for the future was to eliminate racial stereotypes, and indeed to eliminate race as an objective category. He wrote, "The identification of an individual with a class because of his bodily appearance, language, or manners has always seemed to me a survival of barbaric, or rather of primitive, habits of mind.... Groups as they exist among us are all too often subjective constructions; those assigned to a group often do not feel themselves to be members of it, and the injustice done them is one of the blots on our civilization. Too few among us are willing to forget completely that a particular person is a Negro, or a Jew, or a member of some nationality for which we have no sympathy and to judge him as an individual." His contention was that "it must be the object of education to make the individual as free as may be of automatic adhesion to the group in which he is born or into which he is brought by social pressure" (Boas 1938a, 203).
If individual freedom—the basis of civil rights movements beginning in the early twentieth century for blacks, women, and Jews—became a touchstone for Boas's ideas, then tradition became a central concept to explain the attachment of individuals to groups. He announced, "My whole outlook upon social life is determined, by the question: how can we recognize the shackles that tradition has laid upon us? For when we recognize them, we are also able to break them" (Boas 1938a, 202). Boas, then, was also not calling for the preservation of tradition, as much as using its knowledge to enhance intellectual freedom. He used his father's example to make his point: "My father had retained an emotional affection for the ceremonial of his parental home without allowing it to influence his intellectual freedom. Thus I was spared the struggle against religious dogma that besets the lives of so many young people.... As I remember it now, my first shock came when one of my student friends, a theologian, declared his belief in the authority of tradition and his conviction that one had not the right to doubt what the past had transmitted to us. The shock that this outright abandonment of freedom of thought gave me is one of the unforgettable moments of my life" (Boas 1938a, 201). For others, Boas's stands sounded revolutionary, and indeed, Boas had publicly mentioned that he had been conditioned by "a German home in which the ideals of the revolution of 1848 were a living force," referring to unsuccessful protests of noble privilege and efforts to guarantee civil liberties for Jews and other minorities.

As a result of his social and political stands, Boas frequently suffered anti-Semitic as well as ideological attacks in America. Working in the same city as Boas, Stewart Culin unleashed some of the most vitriolic rhetoric against the Columbia professor. Embittered in the 1920s because of the decline of museum evolutionism and fired up with Henry Ford's support of anti-Semitic tracts such as The International Jew, Stewart Culin implied that Boas's scholarship was a brand of radical socialism inspired by a conspiracy of international Jewry. He observed at a council meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia that members "were aligned, divided into two parties, who separated and seated themselves on opposite sides of the room. On one side were the Jews and their converts and supporters, mostly students of Franz Boas of Columbia University, and on the opposite side, their opponents. The Jews stood for Internationalism, and so proclaimed themselves. They had succeeded in securing possession of this important association and used it for their personal and political ends." Some old-line scholars associated Jews, especially from Russia, with revolutionary activity, and apparently feared a consequence of world diasporization that would be implied from the diffusionist and relativistic arguments of anthropologists with Jewish backgrounds such as Franz Boas, Melville Herskovits, Joseph Jacobs, and Moses Gaster. Although most anthropologists were not Jewish, this fact did not stop some critics from blaming Jewish influence on the rise of the new "radical" theories, especially because of Columbia's location in New York City.
Staunch evolutionist Adolph F. A. Bandelier (1840–1914), who had done field-work in the Southwest and Central America for the American Museum of Natural History, was especially vocal in anti-Semitic criticism of Boas. He wrote to Culin in 1912 that

since the Jewish elements has [sic] loomed up in Mexico, the Mexicans have become practical for the Israelites (worthily represented by Seler, Boas and soon, by Capitan) are manipulating the Mexican Government for scientific use to their heart's content, and getting “monish,” where the children of the soil never could.... I see clearly the game. If the thing lasts, Boas will soon declare, indigenous assistance useless and then, he will forcibly and generously be compelled—to import TRUE scientific help from the outside, which help, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will furnish.... He rummages about the country in quest of linguistics. What he says he is in search of is, the Morphology of the idioms. How he gets that in such a short time, now here, now there, without a system or definite plan, I fail to understand. His doings seem to me “all in the eye.” It is the JEW speculating on the ignorance of others.

Bandelier closed with a reference to the privilege that Boas's presence seemed to threaten: “Until now his influence is not to be dreaded, because he cannot penetrate the circles in which we move, what he may attempt to do in the United States we cannot foresee.” In another letter, he invoked a conspiracy theory to explain Boas's ascendancy: “In the United States, I am told—he is very unpopular, but feared owing to his influence with wealthy Jews.... His school of archeology is again represented by some blooming youngsters and by a Sheeny from Russia....”

Beyond the evidence of ethnic prejudice in Bandelier's letters, there was an intellectual problem in the discourse on evolution posed by the presence of supposedly “superstitious” Jews in the advance of rational science, indeed the very persistence of ancient Judaism in modern industrial civilization. The progress and mobility of Jews, indeed the recurring reference to an ascribed Jewish scientific “genius,” challenged the consistency of evolutionary racial doctrine (Efron 1995; Gilman 1996). According to Sander Gilman, “The anxiety about the meaning of Jewish superior intelligence haunts the American scene at the beginning of the century” (Gilman 1996, 80). Joseph Jacobs (1854–1916), a Jewish scholar known for his diffusionist folklore studies, presented results of an elaborate social study defying evolutionary predictions of cultural backwardness. In works such as “The Comparative Distribution of Jewish Ability” (1891) that built a case for the claim of Jews as being “civilized,” expressed ultimately in Jewish Contributions to Civilization (1919), he found that Jews have shown a higher rate of intellectual ability than evolutionary doctrine predicted. In his prideful phrase, “‘Tis a little people, but it has done great things” (Gilman 1996, 71).

Jacobs understood the Jewish record of achievement historically in their urban experience, reliance on multilingualism, emphasis on children's education, and tradition of resistance to prejudice. He infuriated the evolutionists with his closing
rhetorical flourish in the form of a mocking explanation. He turned the evolutionary assumption of the natural progression from Jewish to Christian civilization on its head. He accounted for Jewish persistence by a natural selection where the weaker members of the race unable to weather persecution embraced Christianity. He daringly wrote: "Jewish reason has never been in fetters, and finally the weaker members of each generation have been weeded out by persecution which tempted or forced them to embrace Christianity, and thus contemporary Jews are the survival of a long process of unnatural selection which has seemingly fitted them excellently for the struggle for intellectual existence" (Jacobs 1891, Iv). Whether or not Jacobs was serious, Franz Boas emphatically recoiled as much from the case for Jewish genius as the one for Christian superiority because of their problematic biological bases. In The Mind of Primitive Man (1911), he dismissed a relationship between cultural achievement and mental ability generally as a fallacy produced by racial typology (Gilman 1996, 79–80). This relationship had been prejudicially used in evolutionary tracts to judge fitness for social leadership of nation-states. It was especially a problem in America, he observed, because it provided an ideological impediment to democracy, the kind of representative democracy that allowed for cultural and political participation of plural groups in society (Boas 1945).

Presenting a case for racial typology in cultural evolution, John Sterling Kingsley in The Standard Natural History insisted on Jews as a race at a "low stage of culture" characterized by ignorance, fanaticism, and superstition (Kingsley 1885, 472). Yet if an evolutionary racial classification based on English Christian superiority categorized Jews in a primitive cultural rung, Kingsley had to explain the renown of highly regarded Jewish scientists, intellectuals, and leaders such as English prime minister Benjamin Disraeli, who was of Jewish heritage. "A Jew, it is true," Kingsley admitted, "can rise to be the premier of the British empire, but this is the exception noted; here there was contact with other people. To see the Jew in all his purity and the accompanying degradation, we must visit those places, like southern Russia, where they form whole communities" (Kingsley 1885, 472).

As a degraded "race" and an ancient religion functioning successfully in urban-industrial society, Jews provided a puzzle of civilization for evolutionists to solve. In "Present-Day Survivals of Ancient Jewish Customs," published in the Journal of American Folklore, one writer summarized the perplexing "two-sidedness" of Jews this way: "For nearly three thousand years they have been hurled from one end of the earth to the other; and yet, in spite of degradation and indignity ... they have lived by adapting themselves to their environment, although they have also always persisted in retaining their individuality in spite of change" (Yoffie 1916, 413). The author underscored that Jews were "indeed a 'peculiar people.'" Minimizing the challenge of Jews to evolutionary theory, she isolated them as an unexplainable exception by calling them "a miracle of history" (Yoffie 1916, 413).

Whether example or exception, the Jewish experience tested the doctrine works of Spencer, Frazer, Gomme, and Lang because of their confidence that
The “racial type” of the Jew depicted in *The Standard Natural History* (1885), edited by John Sterling Kingsley, p. 471.
enlightened Christianity replaced superstitious Judaism as assuredly as civilization succeeded barbarism. In evolutionary thinking, religion was supposedly more rational than superstition in its approach to explaining natural phenomena. In this view, a better system “naturally” succeeded a primitive one. It can then be conceived that Jewish belief hung on as survivals, and Jews, supposedly set against “progress,” would accept the “new covenant” and convert. But this scenario did not materialize from theory to practice. Responding to Edward Clodd’s concern for the “exception” of the three-thousand-year-old Jews or “Hebrew race” to evolutionary assumptions, Edwin Sidney Hartland admitted that “science has not yet solved every question in connection with the history of Hebrew myths and customs,” but predicted that “researches in Hebrew civilization will at no distant day be brought into line with those in other departments of the Science of Man” (Hartland [1899] 1968, 249).

Andrew Lang compensated for an apparent lack of consistency in the evolution of religion by suggesting that the origins of Christianity did not lie in Judaism at all, but rather derived from Babylonia and Persian customs. He argued that those practices constituted savage survivals in Christianity (Lang 1901, 76–81; see also Clodd 1885, 131–36). Although skeptical of Lang’s historical facts, Joseph Jacobs pointedly chose the word “conversion” to describe Lang’s statements on diffusion (Dorson 1968, 502; see also Maidment 1975). Reflecting the Jewish experience of diasporization, Jacobs’s view of folklore was that it spread from social movements and could be created in contemporary situations (Fine 1987a). Resisting racial stereotypes, Jacobs characterized the “folk” not as primitives, but as social segments of societies, “many-headed … and often many-minded” (Jacobs 1893, 234). Instead of a hierarchy of folk and modern, Jacobs declared the relativistic concept, “we are the Folk as well as the rustic, though their lore may be other than ours, as ours will be different from that of those that follow us” (Jacobs 1893, 237).

But asking, “Are Jews a Race?” Karl Kautsky reiterated the centrality of race to cultural evolutionism by trying to show that Jews in advanced European societies naturally seek progress, hence explaining their involvement in science, but the bonds of Judaism to the ancient superstitious past ultimately worked against evolution and kept Jews from advancing culturally. Franz Boas in championing cultural relativity referred much less than one would expect to the Jewish situation, although he often gave the example of American blacks, whose status of a persecuted group he related to that of East European Jews (Herskovits 1953, 110–14; Glick 1982). His strong voice opposing the ideas of Kautsky and Bandelier can be heard in addresses such as “Race and Progress” published in 1931. Boas maintained his barrage on the emphasis of evolutionism on biological determinism, by insisting on a turn toward cultural explanations. “Ethnological evidence,” he said, “is all in favor of the assumption that hereditary racial traits are unimportant as compared to cultural conditions” (Boas 1940, 13).

If Boas tried to point out the deleterious social consequences of cultural evolutionism, the old-line scholars reverted back to the Utopian promises of its ideology.
William Knapp had optimistically announced at the folklore congress at the Chicago World’s Fair, for example, that “the weapons of war shall be transformed into the innocent implements of joyful harmony, and the recognition of the old God of the ages shall convert hatred and ambition into a vague tradition, only known to the annals of a long-past history” (Knapp 1898, 25). With the experience of World War I, it became apparent that technological advance brought more destruction, rather than, as many writers had predicted, the obsolescence of war. In a rational evolutionary order, nations would realize the “superstition” or “uselessness” of war to reach sociopolitical ends; civilization supposedly harnessed technological power for practical purposes and encouraged negotiation to settle disputes. But in the aftermath of the Great War, the world seemed more divided than united, more barbaric than enlightened.

A growing bookshelf of works published after the Great War, such as The Decline of the West (1918) by Oswald Spengler, painted a gloomy picture and challenged the assumption that Western civilization is the pinnacle of progress. Instead of echoing the evolutionary argument that America would be the next great civilization in a steady western march from Asia to Europe to America, Spengler predicted that an abundance of social and economic resources will place power in Asia and Russia. Many new scholars took pains to disavow the evolutionary scheme for culture because of its disregard for existing social conditions. In France after the war, Arnold van Gennep contrasted folklore according to natural history, which is the study of “dead facts,” with biology, the study of living lore in a specific environment (van Gennep [1924] 1985). In Germany and Scandinavia intellectual fervor for geography and physical sciences provided encouragement for application of new models to explain cultural reformulations as once isolated peoples migrated in massive waves from Europe to North America.

The denouncement of indisputable “natural laws” suggested by evolution and a search for social flexibility in new approaches was a way to ward off the gloomy outlook that had been brought by the ills of modern warfare and industrial capitalism. Meanwhile, the reign of laissez-faire economics in governmental policy, which depended on “natural laws” in evolutionary theory for justification, was under attack. Dissatisfaction grew from unregulated cycles of booms and depressions that caused economic and social instability during the 1890s. Critics went after laissez-faire economics for aiding the rise of exploitative monopolies and stagnating society, instead of encouraging progress and competition, as a social process of natural selection promised. One prominent critic, Lester Frank Ward, arose to stress the rationality of primitive culture and propose a model of social intervention contrary to evolutionary thinking. He denied that uniform natural laws somehow mysteriously moved the social economy toward progress and insisted that rational bases of social planning, drawing on a physics of causes and reactive effects, were needed to insure growth in the public interest (Commager 1950, 199–226).
The splashing flow of immigration at the turn of the century reminded Americans of the influence that a movement of people could bring to another culture. Lee Vance acknowledged in 1897, “Our folk-lore is highly composite, resulting from the great tides of immigration which have rolled over our shores and formed our present strange commingling of races” (Vance 1896/1897, 251). For some evolutionists, anthropology provided evidence for making cultural judgment about the fitness of immigrants, judged by their primitive “racial” characteristics, for entry into progressive American civilization. George Dorsey, for example, wrote Stewart Culin, “I have come to the conclusion that Italians are undesirable immigrants. ... They are either better than we are and we should turn the whole country over to them, or they are rotten and we should stop the flow. I hold to the latter opinion.” In another letter, he worried about what East European immigrants “take with them of blood and brain to the United States” and the ways they “will affect American ideals.”

Suggesting a more supportive view of immigration, ideas of diffusion introduced into folklore studies implied that immigration was a natural cultural process. Countering the evolutionary assumption of biological inheritance of depravity and criminality among the immigrants, Franz Boas undertook a massive statistical study entitled Changes in Bodily Forms of Descendants of Immigrants (1911) to show that the physical characteristics of the foreign-born could not be used to predict their intelligence or personality. The ability of immigrants to continue folk cultures within industrialized, urban societies challenged assumptions of modernization. Apparently contradicting evolutionary doctrine’s emphasis on the irrationality of old traditions and the inevitability of progress, the “survivals” of these cultures appeared to function rationally to serve social ends. Global comparison of a level of culture became less convincing because the functions and contexts of the traditions seemed more different than similar upon close ethno­graphic examination.

A major event that raised doubts about the cultural ladder from savagery to civilization was the Russian Revolution. Russia had skipped a step, or moved back one, depending on the point of view, moving from a peasant economy to a communist society. Around the same time, a new feeling of isolationism swept America. After seeking its place in a global community, America sought exclusiveness, shunning the League of Nations and stressing America’s cultural distinctiveness. Accordingly, in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner caused a stir with a paper about the influence that the settlement of the West had on American culture. More mobile, more aware of space, Americans brought attention, in their leisure and in their theories, to movement across the landscape.

Despite fundamental differences in social views and approaches, some provocative parallels exist between folklore study in the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. During the 1890s and the 1990s, popular discussion of “materialism” and rapid technological change translated into a surge of folklore in the popular press.
Changes in roles of women and ethnic minorities gave rise to soul-searching studies, encompassing folklore, of problems in American society. During the 1990s, discussion centered far less on origin and evolution from so-called primitives; and the “dynamics” (to quote an oft-used metaphor taken from physics common in today’s folklore studies) of behavior among people in all walks of life in the present typically holds the attention of folklorists rather than history of remote, “ruder ages.” The dire consequences of some forms of technology have led to a reassessment of folk culture on its own terms for what material, social, and psychological benefits it provides. A preservationist fervor has been evident in folklore studies; often contemporary folklorists appear to be advocates for the folk, rather than for “industrial progress.” Rarely today are folk practices examples of primitive “industry” or “invention”; rather they are “folk arts” in need of “cultural conservation.”

The value of culture has been equally in dispute in the late twentieth century, but its translation was much more as everyday experience rather than an exotic hidden past. Indeed, a contribution of folklore studies, once it made a break with the cultural anthropology of “primitives,” was to emphasize the workings of expressive tradition in everyday life close to home—in factories, cities, and camps, and among ethnic groups as well as groups of friends. Questions arising from bureaucratic life, humanistic questions of a person’s social function, role, and purpose, often within a large organization, typically took center stage, with nods toward modern concerns of psychological adjustment provided by traditional expression. To be sure, the precedents that nineteenth-century scholars set for collection, classification, and display continue into the present, not only in the exhibitionistic treatment of artifacts of tradition, but also in the artifactual treatment of oral traditions. The empirical bias of folklore studies to observe and collect examples of culture in fieldwork remains at the core of the folkloristic enterprise. Indeed, it can be argued that Victorian anthropology and folklore established culture in public discourse as the expressive property of groups.

In addition to the elite notion of culture as a sign of lofty, “civilized” taste—culture with a capital C, so to speak—there emerged a notion of culture that arises from universal social existence. This is the kind of culture associated with shared local knowledge and performed expression. As rhetoric associated with description of “folk” and “primitive” traditions, this vogue of vernacular culture during the Gilded Age influenced interpretations of the advance of industrialization and incorporation. Ironically, discussions of social and technological innovation typically had a reference to cultural tradition as if the connection to “folk” tradition could temper the impact of change on American “nervousness.” “Folk-Lore,” Fletcher Bassett constantly reminded his audiences, “has become a subject of the day” (1898, 20). Its organization into professional and public discourse in support of ideological positions on industrial and social progress stood as one of the “salient events” of the Gilded Age.