

IN THE MUSEUM OF MAN



RACE, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND EMPIRE  
IN FRANCE, 1850–1950

ALICE L. CONKLIN

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This book grew out of my earlier study of French colonial administration in West Africa between 1895 and 1930. In that work, I was struck by the ways in which high-level officials in the 1920s began to claim that the very African peoples whom the French were exploiting had “cultures” and “civilizations” worth preserving. I concluded then that this newfound French “respect” for an “authentic” African way of life was largely a political response designed to contain demands by young, educated Africans for equal rights, but later I began to wonder how the best anthropologists of the day were talking about these same African societies. This question led me to the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, and through it, to a labyrinthine world of ideas, networks, and scientific practices not only unfamiliar to me, but also to many historians of modern France and to anthropologists everywhere. The result of my intellectual foray into this world, I hope, is a story that will interest historians and anthropologists equally.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

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AMAAO	Archives du Musée d'Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie
AMH	Archives du Musée de l'Homme
ANF	Archives Nationales de France
ARP	Archives du Rectorat de l'Académie de Paris
AS	<i>Année Sociologique</i>
BMSAP	<i>Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris</i>
CDJC	Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine
CNRS	Conseil National de la Recherche Scientifique
IAIA	International African Institute Archives
IE	Institut d'Ethnologie
IFAN	Institut Français de l'Afrique Noire
IMEC	Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine
MNHN	Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle
PH	Phototèque (at the Musée de l'Homme)



# INTRODUCTION

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In 1930s France, the biological study and ranking of the human races was still considered a fully legitimate branch of the human sciences. By the late 1940s, in contrast, a group of Parisian anthropologists had taken the lead in warning the public about the political dangers of such inquiries. With the help of Alfred Métraux (Swiss-born but French-trained), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued in 1950 the first condemnation of scientific racism by an international organization. This condemnation ended with the radical claim that “race was less a biological fact than a social myth.”<sup>1</sup> Shortly afterward, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michèle Leiris, colleagues who had worked with Métraux, published pamphlets for UNESCO advocating the need for cultural pluralism and underscoring the irrelevance of race as a determinant of civilization.<sup>2</sup>

What was the background for this dramatic change? How exactly did anthropologists think about racial and sociocultural difference at the high-water mark of French imperialism in the 1920s and 1930s, and how did France’s experience of defeat during World War II change their views? These questions lie at the heart of this study, and the answers take us, first, into the formative years of anthropology and social theory between 1850 and 1900; then deep into the renewal of anthropology under the name of ethnology, both in Paris and in the empire before and especially after World War II; and finally, into the fate of the discipline and its practitioners under the German Occupation and its immediate aftermath.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, scholars around the Western world aimed to found a general science of man, or “anthropology.” Armchair theorists in industrializing—and especially colonizing—nations compared, classified, and ranked data (physical and cultural) about “primitive” peoples and “races” believed to be at an earlier evolutionary stage of political, social, and technological development. Many thinkers insisted that members of “backward” societies lacked the cognitive capacity of “advanced” Westerners, and that these societies would “progress” only when each member acquired the ability for abstract thought—a process that imperialism was supposed to accelerate. At the same time, “race” was understood to correlate with civilizational levels, and it was assumed that all groups followed the same upward trajectory from ape to human, just not at the same speed or with the same ultimate outcome. Hence the principal reason for anthropologists to study “primitives” was to reveal new information about the supposedly similar Stone Age predecessors of their own societies.

As part of their quest for a general human science, these nineteenth-century scholars began to develop specialties within their common field of inquiry. Some concentrated on studying the physical types of humankind, for example the American Josiah Nott (1804–73); others, such as the Englishman John Lubbock (1834–1913) and the American Frederick Ward Putnam (1839–1915), focused on identifying the stages of evolution in human prehistory. Still others sought to discover the universal laws of cultural evolution and origins of such human traits as marriage, religion, law, language, and

art, along the lines of Henry Lewis Morgan (1818–81) in the United States and E. B. Tylor (1832–1917) in Britain. In France, too, self-styled anthropologists began to develop different subfields, but they made their greatest mark internationally in racial classification. France's most famous anthropologist in the nineteenth century was Paul Broca (1824–80), whose pioneering methods made his school the world leader in the measurement of skull and brain capacities of different races. After his death, physical anthropology remained the dominant branch of the professional discipline in France, and Broca's precocious attention to race helped to place the concept of fixed racial differences at the heart of French anthropological studies.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, French anthropology began to change its methodology, organization, and orientation. In particular, a new cluster of ambitious scientists sought to renew and expand the study of human cultural diversity, at a time when British and American anthropologists were challenging earlier theories of unilinear evolution, and working their way toward the pluralistic idea that every human society was historically rooted and environmentally conditioned. This perspective recognized that societies develop not as a result of each member's acquisition of "abstract reasoning" but rather through the interactions of all members, and their collective adaptation to different modes of subsistence. In France, these new students of the social sciences consciously chose the name "ethnologists" to distinguish themselves from physical "anthropologists," whom they considered too preoccupied with the racial classification of humans, past and present, and too attached to the idea of universal and inflexible stages of evolution for races and civilizations. This same group of ethnologists also introduced a new scientific method that was gaining ground internationally: *in situ* contact with so-called primitive societies, especially those close at hand in France's colonies, rather than armchair theorizing exclusively from ethnographies and artifacts collected by others. In 1925 the sociologist Marcel Mauss and the physical anthropologist Paul Rivet organized France's first university training in ethnology: the Institut d'Ethnologie at the Sorbonne (University of Paris), whose funding came from taxes levied in France's empire, which this new science was also supposed to serve. In 1938 the Institut d'Ethnologie moved into the Musée de l'Homme, or Museum of Man, which Rivet had directed since 1928. An energetic reformer, Rivet had transformed the museum into what critics at the time deemed the most modern of the world's institutions devoted to the display and study of humankind's racial and cultural diversity.

Under the combined impetus of Mauss and Rivet, a reformed science of man swiftly took shape in France, with the Musée de l'Homme and the Institut d'Ethnologie as its institutional and public homes, absent any dedicated university professorships in the new discipline. Mauss's doctoral students became ethnology's pioneering foot soldiers, testing empirically in the field certain anthropological constants that Mauss had formulated for understanding the different lifeways of "primitive" peoples, and working collaboratively as a group to synthesize their results in order to found a genuinely new "Maussian" school. Active Socialists both, Mauss and Rivet fostered a strong sense of solidarity in their young community as well as a deep commitment to antiracism and cultural pluralism: a lived humanism and openness to the world, in an age of intensifying racism, nationalism, individualism, and rise of authoritarianism on the Right and the Left. Many of these students worked throughout the 1930s in the Musée de l'Homme trying to modernize it, and to bring this message of tolerance to the wider public through their exhibits.

Nevertheless, this humanism did not lead Mauss and Rivet to reject all racial theories, in a France still deeply embroiled in the violent and exclusionary practices of empire, and in a scientific world

where the epistemological foundations of racial thought were just beginning to be challenged. Sociocultural explanations of human diversity did not definitively triumph over a racialized conception of difference among ethnologists in the interwar years. Rivet, for example, was a physical anthropologist by training who defined ethnology as the study of languages, civilizations, and race. Yet he also saw race as malleable and therefore meaningless for determining capabilities at the level of any particular group. Here he had much in common with the American antiracist anthropologist Franz Boas, whom Rivet knew personally and admired. Rivet's balancing of racialist and culturalist anthropology, ironically, meant that he appeared to share some of the same slippery conceptual terrain as a group of biological determinists who resurfaced in the wake of the global Depression and the rise of the Nazis to power. The most extreme of these scientific racists among professional ethnologists in interwar France was Mauss and Rivet's contemporary, George Montandon, whose racism dressed up in the guise of the science of humanity went uncriticized by his peers in the field, in France and abroad. Montandon would become a highly visible collaborator during the German Occupation.

Despite certain continuities with nineteenth-century racial science, the emergence of a university-based ethnology in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s represented a turning point in the human sciences in France institutionally and epistemologically—but not in a way that either historians or anthropologists have previously recognized. The experience of conducting intensive fieldwork in one of France's colonies often relativized younger ethnologists' understandings of race and culture. Mauss's and Rivet's students, as scientists, became detached from the very colonial state that supported them. Mauss, who did the majority of the teaching at the Institut d'Ethnologie, trained future fieldworkers to look at every society holistically and to historicize cultures, rather than to search for a general law of cultural or biological development. Mauss also insisted that, because of the denser ties of reciprocity they fostered among their members, "archaic" societies were "wiser" than modern industrial and liberal ones. Armed with these insights, Mauss's students were quick to register the shock that colonial capitalism represented for the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Oceania. The most talented among them began to analyze the ravages of empire in their ethnographies and to challenge long-standing and insidious forms of racial prejudice. In their works, racial science not only disappeared but was replaced by an alternative sociologically grounded understanding of difference based on such innovative universal concepts as the gift, the person, and historical contact between societies. For these ethnologists, there were no "primitives" without history or culture, living "more simply" and "authentically" than people in the modern West.

Many of these "Maussians" then risked and lost their lives during World War II. Trained to work cooperatively and to synthesize their conclusions as a group, they were drawn to fight fascism in part for ideological reasons (although none had followed their mentors into traditional party politics), and part because successful resistance required the skills and empathy that they had honed in their work as ethnologists. The Resistance also represented the best hope of defeating the unprecedented degree of politicization of racial science during World War II—whose atrocities in the name of science, at least in Europe, had been unthinkable before the Holocaust. The French contribution to the 1950 UNESCO statement that "race was less biological fact than social myth" was, in this sense, a public rebuke to ethnologists and physical anthropologists alike to those, including members of their own academic community, who had allowed the science of man to be harnessed to a lethal political discourse. Before 1940, many French intellectuals still accepted that "true facts" displayed in a museum would suffice to combat scientific racism; the war helped to change all that. To put it another way, the UNESCO

statement offered the opportunity for a specific community of intellectuals to make a political response to racism, a problem that society had created and that science could not resolve alone. By taking advantage of this opportunity, these scientists revealed that their idea of the proper relationship between politics and science had changed dramatically since the late nineteenth century.

At this point it may be useful to clarify certain questions of terminology, for when it comes to studying concepts as confused and as heterogeneous as those associated with “race,” there is always a danger of applying contemporary meanings to notions that were understood differently in the past. In this book, I use the term “racial science” to designate the field of inquiry that developed around the study of race in the nineteenth century, particularly by anthropologists seeking to professionalize the field. These scientists tried to sort humans neatly into racial categories in which intelligence correlated with skin color, on the basis of increasingly precise measurements of body parts, usually skulls. Racial science, in short, defined what it meant to be human in the most rigid, harmful, and dehumanizing terms imaginable. It nevertheless conformed to the best scientific standards of its times, at least as practiced by Broca, his school, and their successors in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Although their hypotheses were racist, in the sense that anthropologists assumed from the outset that a hierarchy of races with different mental capacities existed, these same scholars established professional norms for testing their hypotheses, and institutions that supported the norms (peer review, journals, learned societies, museums, laboratories, and schools). Over time, many of these scientists came to realize that their original hypothesis was flawed, and although they continued to study races, they no longer ranked them or assumed that race correlated in any way with intelligence. They were, in short, no longer racist in the ways their predecessors had been, or in the way that some of their successors would be again.

In contrast, I use the term “scientific racism” to designate the efforts of individual anthropologists to publicize the findings of their science for racist political ends, particularly in two charged moments in recent French history: at the height of the Dreyfus affair (between 1898 and 1906), and then again in the 1930s. The distinction between racial science and scientific racism is to some extent heuristic. Scientific racism had roots in the racial science that developed in the nineteenth century everywhere, and scientific racism surfaced in France in many additional contexts besides the two listed above. But to label all racial science as scientific racism undermines any serious attempt to explain how and why this science became politicized only at certain moments and not at others; it also obscures the complicated ways in which antiracist anthropologists viewed bodies in racialized and sociocultural ways simultaneously. To state the obvious: not all racisms (or for that matter, antiracisms) are the same, and it is essential to examine the past range of practices mobilized by racial science (including scientific racism)—as well as its relation to the society in which it was produced—in order to better understand its persistence down to the present. As Tracy Teslow has argued in the case of American anthropology, “recapturing the fullest possible picture of how science and scientists functioned within society serves an epistemological and historical purpose in counter-acting the powerful ideological and rhetorical force of science itself.”<sup>4</sup>

The use of the term “primitives” in the past to designate the object of study of sociocultural anthropologists poses a slightly different problem. Here, I retain quotation marks or write “so-called primitives” to make clear that such a designation was an earlier usage that has passed from our current vocabulary (unlike the term “race,” which has survived while changing in meaning). It is noteworthy that no satisfactory term has been devised to describe the various groups of people who interested

ethnologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A number of substitute terms have come and gone in the academy and beyond: “traditional,” “simple,” “tribal,” “preindustrial,” “peoples without writing,” “peoples without machines,” “technologically simple peoples,” “indigenous,” “autochthonous,” “vanishing,” “vanished,” “native,” “premodern”—and the list goes on. I have sought to respect the usage that seems to have become most common among specialists for different parts of the world: Amerindians for the peoples of the pre-Columbian Americas, Oceanians for the peoples of the South Pacific, Africans and Asians for the peoples of those continents. Since Mauss used the word “archaic,” I use this term as well, without quotation marks, when discussing him and his school; often I resort to the qualifiers I find the least demeaning: premodern, vanishing or vanished (although given that we are talking about colonized peoples, “vanquished” would be even more accurate). The problem is not only a semantic one. The supposedly more neutral terms that we have introduced to replace the older terms “primitive” and “savage” continue to designate a foundational difference that our society still finds meaningful: that between the industrialized West that purportedly led the way into modernity, and those groups who ostensibly failed to follow. One aim of this book is to understand how anthropologists’ discourse contributed to constructing this demarcation in France, and in so doing to demonstrate that an earlier generation, now largely forgotten, also struggled, with a certain amount of success, to replace it with a genuinely pluralist understanding of human differences.<sup>5</sup>

In taking up the story of the struggle to turn an older French anthropological tradition into a humanist science that studied peoples for the values each society creates, rather than one that ranked them on charts or graphs relative to other races, this book joins a field of sociological and historical inquiry into the origins, institutions, and ideas of the nascent human sciences, as well as into the history of the idea of the proper relationship between science and politics in modern France and its empire. The emergence of this scholarship owes much to Pierre Bourdieu’s call in the 1970s for the social history of the social sciences based on his idea of “fields”—which he defined as a particular structured space with its own criteria, rules, and hierarchies that determine entry, success, and the degree of autonomy of its competing members and the knowledge they produce.<sup>6</sup> Scholars interested in the human sciences have paid increasing attention to the networks, institutions, and journals that underpin and inform scientific production and help explain how and why certain scientific ideas are formulated, and eventually overturned.<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault’s studies of how professional disciplines emerge in liberal polities, and how their forms of knowledge operate independently of any particular progenitor, have been similarly provocative and productive—although perhaps more outside France than within it. Foucault’s insights have encouraged careful historical research into particular kinds of “experts” who came to “embody” power, as well as into the institutional regimes, including museums, that organized the production of social scientific knowledge along disciplinary lines.<sup>8</sup> In the wake of these and related theoretical developments, scholars of the human sciences have increasingly been placing texts in their political and social contexts.<sup>9</sup>

One result of this interest in the history of the human sciences has been new attention paid to the specific contributions of anthropologists to the larger domain of racial science, in France and overseas. Thanks to such scholars as Nélia Dias, Martin Staum, Laurent Mucchielli, and Claude Blanckaert, we now have a variety of rich and nuanced studies regarding the content, practices, and political implications of nineteenth-century anthropology; these works also examine how certain physical anthropologists and the Durkheimian sociologists broke with biological determinism before World War I, as part of an alternative view that human behavior is socially determined.<sup>10</sup> The

contributions that individual colonial administrators, missionaries, travelers, and explorers made the emergence of a separate branch of sociocultural anthropology and a modern ethnographic method in France from 1900 onward are coming into focus as well.<sup>11</sup> Other works have opened up new approaches to thinking about how specialized knowledge of human groups, whether in the form of discourses (missionary, administrative, or legal) or objects (bones and artifacts), emerged and circulated among colonies and between colonies and metropolises between 1850 and 1950.<sup>12</sup> Finally, new scholarship on shifting definitions of the nation under the Third Republic (1870–1940) and Vichy (1940–44) has produced a substantial body of work on race experts who were not trained as physical anthropologists but who were deeply influenced by them.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the growing number of studies on different aspects of the history of sociology and anthropology in France, the shifting intersections of ideas about race, society, and culture among professionalizing academic scientists in the first half of the twentieth century, and their relationship to the political, social, and imperialist trends of the time, remain poorly understood.<sup>14</sup> The few general histories of French anthropology tend either to slight these years or to stop in 1930.<sup>15</sup> This neglect is beginning to change, however. Three excellent recent biographies—those of Filippo Zerilli and Christine Laurière on Paul Rivet, and of Marcel Fournier on Marcel Mauss—along with Harriet Liebersohn’s erudite study of the long genesis of Mauss’s concept of the gift have brought part of this story I wish to tell to the fore, and I draw from all of them.<sup>16</sup> Another exciting vein of scholarship is emerging on museums and the other, scientific displays at colonial exhibits and world fairs, and the intertwined worlds of interwar scientific ethnographic writing and literature.<sup>17</sup> The persistence of nineteenth-century racial science into the twentieth century and its influence on political elites have also come under scrutiny.<sup>18</sup> Yet a focus on particular individuals and institutions, or ideas and practices, misses how Mauss, Rivet, and their colleagues and students *collectively* forged innovative anthropological theories and institutions after 1900 that helped the younger generation to mobilize politically and intellectually in new ways against a resurgent misuse of science. Although much more work remains to be done to bring all facets of the scientific study of humanity in modern France into light, this book represents one step in that direction, by considering together the history of physical and sociocultural anthropology across a century of traumatic political change and rapid imperial expansion.<sup>19</sup>

The relative lack of scholarly attention to the emergence of ethnology in France and its empire, and the role it played in the history of the Third Republic and Vichy, remains all the more striking when compared with the rich tradition of writing about English- and German-language anthropology for the same period. For a long time, reconstructions of Anglo-American physical and cultural anthropology proceeded separately and teleologically. The dominant narrative was that progressive scientists who boasted a cultural understanding of human variation “won out” over physical anthropologists with pernicious essentialist and racist ideas. In this context, George W. Stocking, Jr.’s work in the 1960s and 1970s, which portrayed Franz Boas as a transitional figure between an older racial science and newer cultural anthropology, was an early and crucial exception.<sup>20</sup> Several scholars have since followed Stocking’s lead in providing more nuanced accounts of Boas’s career and the larger trajectory of American anthropology, including the “retreat of scientific racism.”<sup>21</sup>

In the case of British anthropology, the persistence of racism in the postcolonial era has also led historians and anthropologists alike since the early 1990s to reconsider traditional ideas about the

discipline's history, and more particularly to examine the relationship between its growth and that of the empire. The literature on colonialism and anthropology is now extensive, and some of the earlier assumptions about how anthropological knowledge served empire's racist ends are being revised. Although there is no question that anthropologists used the empire to their own professional advantage, as Helen Tilley has argued in her study of British human scientists in Africa in the 1930s, this colonial imbrication had unintended consequences. When it came to "selling" their respective expertise to colonial officials in the interwar years, anthropologists interested in analyzing social change were more successful than psychiatrists who sought to conduct racial intelligence testing of the local populations. In Tilley's words, "anthropologists, who had worked for so long to stake out a claim to be included among the empire's experts" then used their tools to chip away at colonialism from within.<sup>23</sup>

While once as little studied as the French tradition, the political, cultural, and social history of the German-language anthropological tradition is coming into its own, in part once again thanks to the work of George W. Stocking, Jr. His interest in Boas's German years helped to launch a new wave of scholarship on the genesis and evolution of the German tradition considered on its own terms. It is, of course, impossible here to escape the specter of 1933–45, and one of the major questions informing much of this scholarship is whether or not German-language anthropology overall changed direction from a liberal to a racist science between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This question, with its implicit or explicit engagement with the *Sonderweg* thesis, has produced several new studies examining nineteenth-century anthropology and its connections (or not) to colonialism.<sup>24</sup> While the debate continues over how rooted first colonial, then Nazi scientific racism was in the anthropology of imperial Germany, there seems to be a growing consensus that in the years leading up to World War I, Germany still boasted a liberal cultural anthropology, side by side with a Darwinian-inflected essentialist one. By the mid-1920s, however, a new generation of biologicist determinists came to the fore, radicalized by events inside and outside the profession, including the deaths of the "founding" fathers, defeat in the Great War and the Treaty of Versailles, and the advancement of genetics.<sup>25</sup> Many among this new generation would collaborate with the Nazis.<sup>26</sup>

In the face of this strong interest in English-language and German-language anthropology for the period after 1900, why has the history of the discipline in France so far been neglected? Several factors can be cited. One has to do with the selective memory of anthropologists themselves. As suggested above, it has long been assumed that there was not much of a story to tell. Racial science, according to conventional wisdom, was an embarrassing "error," on its way out after 1900, and sociocultural anthropology took off immediately after World War II. From this vantage point, the years in between saw only institutional organization, not new theories or methods—or none worth remembering. Among these new theories were certain cultural-racist ones that today are as discomfiting as those of racial science. Mauss and Rivet did not, in fact, have a monopoly on thinking about culture in innovative ways. The pessimistic ideas of the nineteenth-century essayist and diplomat Joseph-Arthur (Comte de) Gobineau about the inequality and future degeneration of the races and superiority of Indo-European civilization resurfaced in altered form in the 1930s, especially in theories that ranked civilizations in hierarchies similar to those used by physical anthropologists of the human races. Like racial science, this dark side of anthropology has been more convenient to forget than address. The painful question of colonial and wartime accommodation and collaboration by anthropologists has played its part, too, in making much of the ethnological production of the

fraught 1930s and 1940s seem better left alone.<sup>27</sup>

A second reason for the neglect of pre-1950 French ethnology has to do with the “unusual” way in which it was established professionally. In hindsight, ethnology appeared to lack a charismatic leader (comparable, for example, to Durkheim for sociology) who might have negotiated the discipline’s entry earlier into what is often referred to as the new (or reformed) university in late nineteenth-century France.<sup>28</sup> This absence posed a problem for a discipline habituated to constructing its memory in genealogical and patriarchal terms. From this perspective, the death of several of Durkheim’s most talented students in World War I marked the end of the glory years of sociology—ethnology’s “older sibling,” so to speak. Durkheim’s nephew, Marcel Mauss, has often been remembered “only” as a brilliant precursor rather than a theorist in his own right, because he never completed any books. This view, however, overlooks the fact that Mauss was a superb and dedicated teacher who eschewed “leadership” in favor of guiding the collective scholarly enterprise of his students. The fact that World War II decimated the already small ranks of Mauss’s followers made their achievements seem even more marginal.

Third, in the immediate postwar decades the dominant trend among anthropologists was again toward universalizing concepts, often either structuralist or Marxist. These approaches reoriented the discipline away from the historically grounded study of individual societies in which the 1930s ethnologists had excelled, and which had taken into account the impact of colonialism as well as the instrumentalization of anthropology by colonial authorities. Fourth, the creation of university positions under Vichy and after shifted the cutting edge of the discipline from the museum to the academy, making it all the more tempting to ignore the phase of ethnology’s consolidation associated with the Institut d’Ethnologie and the Musée de l’Homme, when no university chairs in ethnology existed in France. Finally, the crisis of confidence and the self-reflexive turn that rocked the discipline of anthropology more generally in the 1970s over its direct and indirect “complicity” with empire and other forms of racial injustice seems—after a first burst of scholarship—to have diverted attention away from the very history that needed to be written.<sup>29</sup>

This book aims to rectify these imbalances in a variety of ways. In keeping with recent trends in the larger history of anthropology, it seeks to provide an analysis of texts in contexts.<sup>30</sup> To this end, it begins with a reconsideration of nineteenth-century developments, before turning to the contested ground and bitter confrontations that the renovating science of man generated between 1900 and 1950. A second goal is to replace a comforting narrative of the inevitable triumph of good sociocultural anthropology over bad physical anthropology with a more complex story of the gradual separation of racial science and ethnology from 1900 through to the end of World War II. More benign, but also more malign, outcomes were always possible. Rather than take as my analytical lens a single institution or individual or set of ideas, I focus on providing a multigenerational group portrait, and on examining their writings and their lives *in situ*. The material and professional structures and the changing political and imperial contexts that conditioned their intellectual output, their career options, their attempts to reach out to the public, and their wartime choices are especially emphasized.

The chapters that follow study the ideas, research practices, and colonial encounters of the ethnological school founded by Mauss and Rivet at the Institut d’Ethnologie more or less at the same time that Rivet acquired control of the most important ethnographic and osteological collections in Paris—collections that would in 1938 form the core of the Musée de l’Homme. The Institut d’Ethnologie and Musée de l’Homme were themselves part of an older constellation—what the French



call a *nébuleuse*—of overlapping networks, people, museums, and schools in France and in the colonies, all with an interest and expertise in modernizing the science of humanity on the eve of World War I. Since some of these innovators were racial and racist scientists who were accepted as legitimate interlocutors in the wider intellectual field, they, too, are considered. In particular, we explore the strange career of the physical anthropologist and ethnographer George Montandon, which sheds new light on the murky world of scientific racism in 1930s France. Although a marginal figure in some ways, he was part of a larger group of physical anthropologists whose professional fortunes revived in the 1930s, and whose extreme biological anti-Semitism became scientific dogma in the new political context of Vichy and the Occupation. How this transformation became possible demands an explanation.

Last but not least, making sense of certain intellectual, institutional, and political French trends requires the evocation of a broader context still in the pages that follow: that of comparable developments in the rest of Europe and the United States, at a time when anthropologists internationally were facing many of the same professional and political choices, constraints, and opportunities to reinvent themselves as those in France, and the discipline remained itself split institutionally between the museum and the university. Until the Occupation made international communication impossible, French ethnologists were cosmopolitans who paid close attention to what was happening in German, Soviet, American, British, and Scandinavian sociocultural and physical anthropology: they read their publications, visited their museums, and met each other at conferences. In the interwar era, many human scientists in these countries lobbied their governments to recognize the practical implications of their science for governance and experimented with new ways to popularize their findings. Mauss was simultaneously admiring and critical of the towering “pioneer of modern solo fieldwork, the Polish-born British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, whose work Mauss’s students had to read. And Mauss and Rivet regularly evoked “foreign” examples to try to squeeze more resources for their fledgling science out of a parsimonious state, financially strapped colonies, and a university system hostile to innovation. France, they argued, had once been a leader in this particular domain of the human sciences but now had fallen way behind.

This insistence that France was a laggard, that “France was different,” has to be taken with a grain of salt. It is more accurate to see French ethnologists between 1900 and 1950 as full partners in an international science that was itself in flux, and then under siege everywhere, as war swept the globe for a second time. Certainly anthropology, physical and sociocultural, entered the university in France later than in its closest international rivals. Yet before and during World War II, ethnologists had considerable success in obtaining positions and appropriating funds and artifacts from the colonies for themselves. From the point of view of the development of new methods and new theories, French ethnologists and racial scientists made distinctive contributions, especially in terms of a Maussian sociological ethnography, but also in the revival of a biological determinism that essentialized the nation in racist terms. During the war years George Montandon, much like several of his counterparts across the Rhine, willingly used his expertise to further Hitler’s murderous ends. In all these ways French ethnology shared key features of the better-known cases of Anglo-American and German anthropology, while also retaining characteristics peculiar to its own time and place. This study therefore highlights the importance that underlying institutional and material structures and networks played and continue to play in the academic life of France, as well as the dangerous power of ideology to distort the most human of the human sciences.

In order to chart this complex history of ethnology, the chapters are ordered chronologically and thematically. Chapter 1 analyses the two major traditions—Paul Broca’s physical anthropology and the more fragmented science of ethnography—that professionalized in the early Third Republic. Chapter 2 follows the careers of Paul Rivet, Marcel Mauss, and George Montandon in the period from the Dreyfus affair to the establishment of the Institut d’Ethnologie in the late 1920s. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 examine the newly organized discipline of ethnology from three different vantage points (the museum, racial science, and the empire) during the politically polarized 1930s. This was a period of dramatic growth but also perils for the renovated science of man, as ethnologists struggled to articulate, for themselves and a broad public, a new concept of the human that remained entangled with biological notions of difference and the imperial cause. Chapter 6 provides a close reading of the field-based ethnographies produced by Mauss’s students, to highlight the combined power of his brilliant mentor and contact with colonial realities to challenge the resurgent scientific racism of the era. Chapter 7 analyzes the wartime choices of an intellectual community whose science suddenly mattered, or was thought to matter, to new political actors: Vichy, the Resistance, and the German Occupation of France.

Historians of anthropology everywhere have tended to read backward into their profession the foundational division of the racial and physical from the cultural. This division did ultimately occur but not easily; and what anthropologists learned to separate with difficulty, a wider public has often not grasped at all.<sup>31</sup> As in the interwar and Vichy years, contradictions continue to mark racial formation and cultural identity in France. The “discredited” assumptions of nineteenth-century racial science seem to resurface regularly in popular and elite discourse, no matter what scientists may say on the question. The assertion that “not all civilizations are of equal value,” by the French minister of the interior Claude Guéant in a public speech on 4 February 2012, reveals the persistence of the discredited—but once “scientifically proven”—notion of a “natural” hierarchy of peoples, races, and cultures still in contemporary political discourse.<sup>32</sup> All too often, and not only in France, the concept of “civilization” or “culture” remains a code word for the older concept of “race,” in which an underlying biological understanding of difference is implicit. Such conflation is deeply depressing but they are neither new nor do they have to be permanent. As Andrew Zimmerman reminds us, anthropology since its birth has always had “multivalent and contradictory potentials”: to essentialize but also to democratize, to objectify the other but also to empathize.<sup>33</sup> In this longer perspective, the era of the two world wars represented a moment of intensifying mobilization—scientific and the political—against racism, as part of a larger search for commonalities that could govern relations among peoples; and in this mobilization, French anthropologists’ knowledge and actions played a crucial role.

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, 18 July 1950. See also Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge, 1992), 341.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Leiris, *Race and Culture* (Paris, 1951); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* (Paris, 1952).

<sup>3</sup> On the concept of normal science, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd enl. ed. (1962; Chicago, 1970). The question of how the Kuhnian paradigm of scientific development fits the human sciences is unsettled; Kuhn himself developed his model with the hard sciences in mind. See Steve Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times* (Chicago, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Tracy Lang Teslow, *Anthropology and the Science of Race in America, 1900–1960* (Cambridge, forthcoming), introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Here Joan Scott’s insights into the persistence of sexual difference as fundamental in modern French republicanism are pertinent. As she puts it, “Placing equality and difference in antithetical relationship has, then, a double effect. It denies the way in which

difference has long figured in political notions of equality and it suggests that sameness is the only ground on which equality can be claimed. It thus puts feminists in an impossible position, for as long as we argue within the terms of discourse set up by the opposition we grant the current conservative premise that since women cannot be identical to men in all respects, they cannot expect to be equal to them. The only alternative, it seems to me, is to refuse to oppose equality to difference and insist continually on differences—differences as the condition of individual and collective identities, differences as the constant challenge to the fixing of those identities, history as the repeated illustration of the play of differences, differences as the very meaning of equality itself.” Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York, 1999), 174–75; see also Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

**6** Pierre Bourdieu, “Le champ scientifique,” *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 2:2 (1976): 88–104, esp. 89.

**7** In France, the epicenter of this new interest in writing the history of the human sciences is the Société Française pour l’Histoire des Sciences de l’Homme, created in 1986, and its journal, the *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences de l’Homme*, launched in 1999. For the program, see Claude Blanckaert, “Pour une histoire des sciences de l’homme,” *Bulletin de la Société Française pour l’Histoire des Sciences de l’Homme* 4 (April 1991). The historian Christophe Charle’s work on intellectual networks has also been extremely influential: Charle, *Les élites de la République* (Paris, 1987); with Éva Telkes, *Les professeurs du Collège de France, dictionnaire biographique (1901–1939)* (Paris, 1988); *Naissance des “intellectuels” (1880–1900)* (Paris, 1990); and *La République des universitaires* (Paris, 1994). An earlier generation of American and French scholars also made decisive contributions to the sociology of knowledge, through their work on the Durkheimians. Among book-length studies, see Terry N. Clark, *Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA, 1973); Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim: His Life and Work; A Historical and Critical Study* (New York, 1973).

**8** See especially Michel Foucault, *L’ordre du discours* (Paris, 1971) and *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris, 1975). For a trenchant analysis of Foucault’s contribution to thinking about professionalization in the human sciences, see Jan Goldstein, “Foucault among the Sociologists: The ‘Disciplines’ and the History of the Professions,” *History and Theory* 23:2 (May 1984): 171–92 and Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (1987; Chicago, 2002). Other influential calls for overcoming the kind of cleavage between science and society that a traditional history of ideas tended to engender include David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (London, 1976) and Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers in Society* (Cambridge, MA, 1988).

**9** In writing about the history of primitivism in postwar France, Daniel Sherman has rightly warned about the need to avoid “a simple dichotomy between text and context, which tends to privilege or attribute explanatory value to one domain over another.” Daniel Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire* (Chicago, 2011), 7. In what follows, I nevertheless draw a fairly clear line between texts and contexts because I believe that political change in the 1930s and 1940s did decisively shape certain discursive shifts in the French human sciences. On this point, see also Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London, 1999), 5–7.

**10** The key works here are Claude Blanckaert, *De la race à l’évolution. Paul Broca et l’anthropologie française, 1850–1900* (Paris, 2009); Nélia Dias, *Le Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro (1878–1908). Anthropologie et muséologie en France* (Paris, 1999); Martin Staum, *Nature and Nurture in French Social Sciences, 1859–1914 and Beyond* (Montreal, 2011); Laurent Mucchielli, *découverte du social. Naissance de la sociologie en France (1870–1914)* (Paris, 1998); and Jennifer Michael Hecht, *The End of the Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France* (New York, 2003).

**11** For example, James Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World* (Berkeley, 1982); Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London, 1995); Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895–1960* (Oxford, 1999); Émmanuelle Sibeud, *Une science impériale pour l’Afrique? La construction des savoirs africanistes en France 1878–1930* (Paris, 2002); Oscar Salemink, *The Ethnography of Vietnam’s Central Highlanders: A Historical Contextualization, 1850–1990* (Honolulu, 2003); George Trumbull Loring, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 2009).

**12** See, among others, Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, MA, 1989); Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900–1945* (Ithaca, NY, 1992); Ann Laura Stoler, *Caribbean Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule, with a New Preface* (Berkeley, 2010); Richard Kell, *Colonial Madness: Psychiatry in French North Africa* (Chicago, 2007); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Colonial Humanism, Negritude, and Interwar Political Rationality* (Chicago, 2006); Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, 2011); Pierre Singaravélou, *Professor l’empire. Les “sciences coloniales” en France sous la IIIe République* (Paris, 2011); Émmanuelle Saada, *Les enfants de la colonie. Les métis de l’Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (Paris, 2008); Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Princeton, NJ, 1994); and Sherman, *French Primitivism*.

**13** William Schneider, Gérard Noiriel, and Patrick Weil have explored the science and politics of the geographer Georges Mauco and the immigration specialist René Martial before and during World War II. William H. Schneider, *Quality and Quantity: The Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1990); Gérard Noiriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France* (Paris, 2007); Patrick Weil, “Georges Mauco, expert en immigration. Ethnoracisme pratique et antisémitisme fielleux,” Pierre-André Taguieff, ed., *L’antisémitisme de plume 1940–1944. Études et documents* (Paris, 1999), 267–76; Patrick Weil, *How to Be French: French Nationality in the Making since 1789*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham, NC, 2008). In his work on the republican origins of Vichy, Noiriel usefully distinguishes between “experts” located outside the university (statisticians, doctors, lawyers,

physical anthropologists) and academic “savants.” He argues that throughout the life of the Third Republic and Vichy, politicians enamored of science turned to experts rather than more independent-minded university professors to draft policies designed to improve the French race. Noiriel explicitly (and rightly) exonerates the savants Mauss and Rivet from direct complicity in exclusionary practices toward foreigners; but he has not studied these ethnologists in any depth and fails to consider their close relationship to the empire. Gérard Noiriel, *Les origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris, 1999), esp. chap 5.

[14](#) On the collective inability in France to name race, much less remember its place in their history, see Ann Laura Stoler’s incisive article, “Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France,” in Janet Roitman, ed., “Racial France,” a special issue of *Public Culture* 23:1 (2011): 121–56.

[15](#) See the otherwise exemplary essay on France by Robert Parkin, in Frederick Barth et al., *One Discipline, Four Ways: British German, French, and American Anthropology* (Chicago, 2005); Li-Chuan Tai, *L’anthropologie française entre sciences coloniales et décolonisation (1880–1960)* (Paris, 2010); and Henrika Kuklick, ed., *A New History of Anthropology* (Oxford, 2008). Part of the challenge is that there is no definitive list of Mauss’s students in ethnology, since he taught in many different disciplines simultaneously at a time when their content was still in flux. For a list of many of those he taught, see Marcel Fournier, *Marcel Mauss* (Paris, 1994), 602.

[16](#) Christine Laurière, *Paul Rivet. Le savant et le politique* (Paris, 2008); Filippo M. Zerilli, *Il lato oscuro dell’etnologia. Il contributo dell’antropologia naturalista al processo di istituzionalizzazione degli studi etnologici in Francia* (Rome, 1998); Fournier, *Marcel Mauss*; and Harry Liebersohn, *The Return of the Gift: European History of a Global Idea* (Cambridge, 2011).

[17](#) Benoît de l’Estoile, *Le goût des autres. De l’exposition coloniale aux arts premiers* (Paris, 2007); Fabrice Grognet, “Le concept de musée. La patrimonialisation de la culture ‘des Autres’ d’une rive à l’autre, du Trocadéro à Branly. Histoire de métamorphoses” (Thèse de doctorat, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2009); Julien Bondaz, “L’exposition postcoloniale. Formes et usages des musées et des zoos en Afrique de l’Ouest (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso)” (Thèse de doctorat, Université Lumière Lyon 2009); and Vincent Debaene, *Adieu au voyage. L’ethnologie française entre science et littérature* (Paris, 2010).

[18](#) Carole Reynaud-Paligot, *La République raciale. Paradigme racial et idéologie républicaine* (Paris, 2006); Reynaud-Paligot, *Races, racisme et antiracisme dans les années 1930* (Paris, 2007).

[19](#) On the importance of analyzing past ideas about race and culture together, see Émmanuelle Saada, “Race and Sociological Realism in the Republic: Inquiries on the Métis in the French Empire (1908–1937),” *International Sociology* 17:3 (Sept. 2002): 361–91, esp. 385–86; and Ann Laura Stoler, “Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth,” *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 11 (1999): 183–206.

[20](#) George W. Stocking, Jr., “Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective,” *American Anthropologist*, n.s., 68 (Aug. 1966): 867–82; Stocking, “Racial Capacity and Cultural Determinism,” in George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883–1911* (1974; Chicago, 1989), 219–54. See also Regna Darnell, *And Along Came Boas: Continuity and Revolution in Americanist Anthropology* (Amsterdam, 1998); and Douglas Cole, *Franz Boas: The Early Years 1858–1906* (Vancouver, 1999), esp. chap. 15. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of George W. Stocking’s impact on the writing of the history of English-language anthropology by anthropologists and historians. The multivolume *History of Anthropology* series that he edited, published by the University of Wisconsin Press starting in 1983, has become an obligatory reference for anyone working in the larger field of the human sciences.

[21](#) Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism*. Yet even in Barkan, there is an underlying teleology that implies that racial science disappeared for good after 1945, which is clearly not the case. Since the appearance of Barkan’s book in the early 1990s, scholars have begun looking more closely at the role of anthropologists in the constructions of race in the United States at different moments since World War II. See Teslow, *Anthropology and the Science of Race*; Michelle Brattain, “Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public,” *American Historical Review* 112:5 (Dec. 2007): 1386–1413; and Lee Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley, 1998).

[22](#) The literature on the relationship between colonialism and the human sciences is especially rich for Britain and its empire, but work is now emerging on other empires. See among other works Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (New York, 1973); George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge* (Madison, WI, 1991); Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge, 1991); Nicholas Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1992); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO, 1992); Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture*; Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ, 1996); Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, eds., *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2000); Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*; Helen Tilley with Robert J. Gordon, ed., *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Manchester, UK, 2007); Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (London, 2007); Omnia Khan, *Shakry, The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, CA, 2007); Lynn Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham, NC, 2001); Florence Bernault, “l’Afrique et la modernité des sciences sociales,” *Vingtième Siècle* 70 (2001): 127–38; and Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950* (Chicago, 2011). See also above, note 10 and below, note 29.

[23](#) Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory*, 311.

[24](#) On nineteenth-century anthropology, see Suzanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial*

Germany, 1770–1870, Post-Contemporary Interventions series (Durham, NC, 1997); H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001); Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago, 2001); H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl, eds., *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2003); and George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago, 2008).

[25](#) The continuity between Weimar racial science and Nazi *Rassenkunde* is now well established. See Robert Proctor, “From *Anthropologie* to *Rassenkunde* in the German Anthropological Tradition,” in George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., *Bones, Bodies, Behaviors: Essays in Biological Anthropology* (Madison, WI, 1988), 138–79; Benoît Massin, “From Virchow to Fischer: Physical Anthropology and ‘Modern Race Theories’ in Wilhelmine Germany (1890–1914),” in George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition* (Madison, WI, 1996), 79–154; and Massin, “Anthropologie raciale et national-socialisme. Heurs et malheurs du paradigme de la ‘race,’” in J. Olf-Nathan, ed., *La science sous le Troisième Reich* (Paris, 1993), 197–262; Thomas Hauschild, *Lebenslust und Fremdenfurcht. Ethnologie im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, 1995); Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics from National Unification to Nazism* (Cambridge, 1989); Christopher Hutton, *Race and the Third Reich: Linguistics, Racial Anthropology, and Genetics in the Dialectic of the Volk* (London, 2004); Gretchen E. Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich* (Urbana, IL, 2004); Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, 1927–1945* (Dordrecht, 2008); and the articles in Catherine Sachse and Mark Walker, eds., *Politics and Science in Wartime: Comparative International Perspectives on the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute*, *Osiris* 20 (Chicago, 2005).

[26](#) Andrew Evans has recently shown how a younger nationalist generation of physical anthropologists carried out measurements of POWs from across Central Europe between 1914 and 1918, which helped to pave the way for a racist racial science again to become ascendant. Andrew D. Evans, *Anthropology at War: World War I and the Science of Race in Germany* (Chicago, 2010).

[27](#) This taboo is rapidly ending, as evidenced by the seminar in ethnology at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, run jointly by Christine Laurière, Daniel Fabre, and André Méry. Its subject in 2010–2011 was “Questions d’histoire de l’anthropologie en Europe (1930–1960),” and in 2011–2012 and 2012–2013, “Les ethnologues et le fait colonial (1920–1960).”

[28](#) Paul Broca might have achieved this entry, had he not died in 1880. With the advent of the Third Republic, France’s institutions of higher learning, and especially its universities, acquired greater autonomy in recruitment, areas of research, and decisions over new courses of study—hence the designation the “new” university. Specialized research and publication became more important for faculty promotion than the popularization of ideological concepts, which had been the norm earlier in the nineteenth century. George Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France, 1863–1914* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), introduction and chap. 8.

[29](#) Early works that explored the question of social scientists’ complicity in empire include Gérard Leclerc, *Anthropologie et colonialisme* (Paris, 1972); Jean Copans, ed., *Anthropologie et impérialisme* (Paris, 1975); Philippe Lucas and Jean-Claude Vatin, eds., *L’Algérie des anthropologues* (Paris, 1975); Pierre Bourdieu, ed., *Le mal de voir. Ethnologie et orientalisme. Politique, épistémologie, critique et autocritique* (Paris, 1976); Daniel Nordman and Jean-Pierre Raison, eds., *Sciences de l’homme et conquête coloniale. Constitution et usage des sciences humaines en Afrique (XIX–XXe siècles)* (Paris, 1980); Jean-Claude Vatin et al., eds., *Connaissances du Maghreb. Sciences sociales et colonisation* (Paris, 1984). For the self-reflexive turn in anthropology more generally, which began in the United States, the key work is James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, 1986).

[30](#) I am using the term “text” here broadly to include museum objects, which also have to be “read” by the historian.

[31](#) In the United States, pronouncements by scientists correlating intelligence with race or gender offer ample testimony that the notion that “science” can tell the “truth” about the “innate” capacities of different human groups is still deeply entrenched. See, for example, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles A. Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York, 1994); and Lawrence Summers’s 2005 remarks while president of Harvard, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/science/june05/summersremarks\\_2-22.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/science/june05/summersremarks_2-22.html). For an excellent historical analysis of the persistence of racism and its constant reinvention, see Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

[32](#) <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/election-presidentielle-2012/20120204.OBS0607/claude-gueant-toutes-les-civilisations-ne-valent-pas.html>.

[33](#) Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism*, 11.

# RACES, BONES, AND ARTIFACTS

## A General Science of Man in the Nineteenth Century

In France, anthropology took a course of development distinct from that in other countries. It was a Frenchman, Boucher de Perthes, who inaugurated the epoch-making advances of prehistory; and his continuators, from Lartet and de Mortillet to l'Abbé Breuil, have remained pre-eminent. Man as a biological organism has also stirred French enthusiasm for many decades, as the names of Broca, Topinard and Boule testify. But for some inscrutable reason the arts and manners of living peoples have attracted little interest. There were French colonies with Oceanian and Negro populations, but the accounts published of them long remained few in number and inferior in quality to the comparable reports of British and German officials. As for scholars trained to observe in the field—until lately there were none.

—ROBERT LOWIE, *The History of Ethnological Theory* (1937)

In the nineteenth century, physicians and naturalists began inventorying the physical and racial variability of the human species on a much greater scale than ever before. At the same time, there was a movement among writers, artists, and linguists to study the spirit of vanishing peoples through their customs and languages developed, originally in German-speaking lands but soon throughout Europe and the Americas. Educated French men and women and their governments participated fully in these new trends, by embarking on a long path to professionalize the science that would come to be known as anthropology—that is to say, the science of humanity in its physical and sociocultural dimensions. These aspiring scholars created institutions for collecting, defining, and dispensing their new knowledge, including learned societies, peer-reviewed journals, private schools, and museums, at home and in their new colonies. Indeed, by the 1870s, France boasted a rich proliferation of all these structures, the most ambitious of which embraced the goal of building a “general anthropology” whose object was the human species in all its aspects: biological, linguistic, and civilizational.

Despite a number of partial successes, nineteenth-century anthropologists failed to develop the general science of their dreams, and no discipline of anthropology entered the university before the twentieth century. This was in contrast to the successful launching of Durkheimian sociology during the period of expansion of academic positions that took place between 1880 and 1910, when the early Third Republic modernized higher education.<sup>1</sup> While empirically minded French anthropologists were pioneers in the biological study of human traits, especially racial ones that ostensibly lent themselves to precise quantification, the scientific study of languages and civilizations of “primitive” peoples—what came to be called in France “ethnography” (*ethnographie*)—was particularly slow to gain traction. American and British universities established general anthropology departments from the 1890s onward; in Germany physical anthropology and sociocultural anthropology were recognized as sciences by the *fin de siècle*.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, only in 1925 did a combined discipline of physical and sociocultural anthropology enter the University of Paris, under the new (or rather “old”—as we shall see below) name of “ethnology” (*ethnologie*). The reasons for this slower French path

professionalization ranged from early divergences over how to define, much less organize, the various branches of a new science of man in the age of Darwin, a lack of forceful personalities at the right moment, and the periodic politicization of scientific agendas because of persistent ideological division. One result of France's distinctive path to disciplinarization was that even when an interest in studying so-called primitive peoples scientifically developed, the old nineteenth-century ideal of unified science—one that considered races, customs, and languages together—remained the unquestioned objective.

This chapter analyzes two of the most important clusters of scholars in Paris from the 1850s to the 1890s who sought to organize a general anthropology (*anthropologie générale*); both would leave their distinctive mark on the development of academic ethnology in the twentieth century. The first initiative was led by Paul Broca, who established an anthropological institute that became world famous in the 1860s and 1870s for the study of humanity in all its dimensions. In practice, however, the Brocan school saw anthropometry and racial science, and the pursuit of physical anthropology in general (including prehistory and paleoanthropology), as its essential vocation.<sup>3</sup> Most of Broca's followers never developed a serious interest in premodern societies; nor would they shed the notion that an understanding of race was fundamental to explaining human behavior. Brocan investigation of racial traits temporarily lost much of its original appeal and direction in the last two decades of the nineteenth century—especially in the wake of the Dreyfus affair—but his anthropological school would reemerge in the 1920s and 1930s as an influential center for the study of the natural history of humanity, including races.

The second cluster in general anthropology to develop in this period centered on Broca's contemporary and friendly rival, Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau, holder of the first chair in anthropology, established in 1856, at one of the most venerable research institutes in the natural sciences in Paris, the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle. This Muséum school subscribed to the same general definition of anthropology as the Brocan circle—but unlike Broca's acolytes, they practiced what they preached. Muséum denizens not only embraced paleoanthropology and racial science; they also studied the ethnographic (i.e., man-made) artifacts and customs of "primitive" civilizations. By the late 1870s, in a context of expanding colonization and new investments in improving a recently defeated French nation through science, the Third Republic created Paris's first public museum dedicated only to ethnography, the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, and chose a young anthropologist from the Muséum to head it, Ernest-Théodore Hamy. The latter wished to use this institution to develop the study of premodern cultures into a serious science—one that could finally take its place alongside physical anthropology in a genuinely general science of man. Hamy, however, found little support in France's scientific community for his museum venture. Only with new actors, a new political context, and consolidation of empire in the early twentieth century would the conditions be right for a scientific field of ethnography to take off in France as part of a new academic discipline of ethnology—an ethnography that was a reaction against, but also heir to, the long and prestigious nineteenth-century tradition of privileging racial science over the study of languages and customs.

# **BROCAN ANTHROPOLOGY DEFINED: THE PRIMACY OF RACE, 1839–1879**

The dubious “achievement” of one cluster of nineteenth-century anthropologists was the creation of a doctrine of race more scientific than any before it, in France and internationally. The epistemological origins of this doctrine can be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century, when certain geographers, naturalists, anatomists, phrenologists, and physiognomists first began to explore the observable differences, and particularly racial differences, among human groups and to hypothesize about racial influence on individual and group behavior and capacity.<sup>4</sup> At the time it was widely assumed that humans sorted themselves into a natural hierarchy of distinct and stable races whose characteristics manifested themselves osteologically, particularly in the size of the skull, which could be measured; only a few voices argued for the possible equal endowment of the different races, but many were willing to believe that hereditarian inequality did not mean inability to progress, and that environmental influences rather than heredity (or some combination of the two) were responsible for the different races. Anthropometry and craniometry were invented as methods to try to demonstrate the biological reality of racial differences, although there was no scholarly agreement in this period on how to measure racial traits, much less on the proper methods to use to classify races.

The question of racial diversity, the reasons for it, and its implications for psychic capacity, were themselves part of a larger debate that riveted contemporaries, especially from the 1820s onward, when Lamarckian transformism first began to win adherents: whether humanity at its origin was single (monogenesis), as stated in the Bible—with all races descending from the same first man and woman—or multiple (polygenesis)—that is to say, with each race constituting a different species from the outset.<sup>5</sup> This question became entangled in another, more political one unleashed by Anglo-American imperialism and the early nineteenth-century practice of slavery: whether certain “primitive” races were capable of improvement. Yet, while French scholars from a variety of fields contributed to this nascent racial science, the most famous controversies of the era pitted the American, pro-slavery craniologists Samuel Morton, George Glidden, and Josiah Nott against the British scientist and defender of slaves James Pritchard. After 1850 the center of racial science moved to France, in large part because a gifted and ambitious doctor, Paul Broca, had trained in the shadow of these earlier debates and become frustrated by what he saw as a fundamental lack of scientific rigor in his elders’ approach to this “essential” aspect of human biology.

If we turn from the ideas that helped to launch the science of humanity in France as its own discipline to the key moments in its professional organization, the date 1839 stands out. In that year, a physiologist and antislavery advocate originally from Jamaica, the monogenist William Frédéric Edwards, founded the Société Ethnologique de Paris. Edwards is commonly recognized as the progenitor in France of a specifically racial science. Edwards’s major accomplishments in the short term were twofold: he managed for the first time to bring rival groups of naturalists, historians, travelers, and geographers together in a single society; and second, he brought about their reconciliation by arguing that race was permanent and determinative in human affairs, and by convincing the members of his new society that the proper object of “ethnological” studies should henceforth be the methodical study of the human races.<sup>6</sup> According to Edwards, pure races could be discovered beneath all the mixing of populations that had taken place over the past 6,000 years.



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