

MISSIONARY POSITIONS

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As I was exploring the ways in which Franz Boas's *Journal of American Folklore* articulated ideas about Africa during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, the threads of evidence led me to the Dakotas and Hawaii and to the early missions on the Sandwich Islands during the 1840s—west across the Pacific, not east across the Atlantic.¹ These civilizing missions form a discursive diaspora of colonial desires that are as much a part of (and have forged) global processes as the political and economic dimensions so often referenced. Indeed, missionaries and reformers deployed folklore in complex ways to contribute to a project of racial uplift that linked Hawaiians, American Indians, and African Americans together during the late nineteenth century. During this earlier period of globalization, the macronarrative of Christianity worked hand in glove with the reproduction of racial ideologies to discipline peoples whose customs and behaviors did not conform to the puritanical (and tyrannical) desires of colonial administrators and church leaders. In this essay, I demonstrate that in forging networks across diverse populations, reformers engaged in projects whose civilizing missions transcended the specific racial and colonial contexts that confronted them, ultimately leading to the formulation of a universal model of industrial education.

Uplift and the Uses of Folklore

Documenting, conserving, and reifying African cultural practices in the Americas was not initiated by Melville and Frances Herskovits in the 1920s, as Sally and Richard Price have contended (Price and Price 2003). In the United States, these processes started right after the Civil War when missionaries and military personnel began documenting the languages and customs of indigenous peoples in North America and the South Pacific, and of African Americans during reconstruction. In order to “convert the heathen,” the colonial logic went, they first had to understand and document their languages, behaviors, and customs. Although the term culture (as we know it today) was not employed, missionaries, scholars, and educators confidently described and documented aboriginal practices that were “a real hindrance and obstacle in the way of civilization” (Eastman 1896: 93). This obsession with eradicating traditional African, Indian, and Hawaiian practices and beliefs motivated people like Merrill E. Gates, president of the influential reform group The Lake Mohonk Friends of the Indian, to confidently declare: “We are for a vanishing policy” (M. Gates 1900: 12). By the 1880s, anthropologists joined this group and eventually took over the colonial project of documenting disappearing cultures in the wake of “Christian civilization.”

By calibrating culture as the index with which to measure civilization, missionaries, reformers, educators, and ethnologists sutured culture to race, helping to fuel the exploitation of imperial and colonial regimes. The goal of these maneuvers was racial uplift, a pedagogical project that emphasized individual savings and thrift, back-breaking and exploitative labor, temperance and sobriety, fidelity and monogamy, and Christian salvation in the disciplining of countless “savages” from South Africa to South Dakota, Montego Bay to Maui, Perth to Pohnpel (Gaines 1996; Hoxie 1984; Brumble 1988). Reformers and missionaries involved in these projects shared a putatively progressive Lamarckian vision that social and racial traits were acquired and then transmitted to the next generation. In the United States (inclusive of its territories and protectorates) and the Caribbean, the racial uplift discourse made a particularly deep impress, so deep that even the venerable Frederick Douglass played this race-as-indexed-by-culture card in his influential speech on Colored American Day at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He juxtaposed American Negroes with the extended Fon family from present-day Benin who resided at the fair in a living ethnological exhibition called the Dahomey Village. Pushing the racial uplift

metaphor to its limits, Douglass implored his rapt audience to “look at the progress the Negro has made in thirty years! We have come up out of Dahomey unto this. Measure the Negro. But not by the standard of the splendid civilization of the Caucasian. Bend down and measure him—measure him from the depths out of which he has risen” (Douglass 2000 [1893]: 194).

There is little epistemological difference between Douglass’s call to “bend down and measure him” and reformers’ vanishing policies. Both articulated a theory of racial progress predicated upon the eradication of putatively indigenous customs and beliefs. This was the same gospel of racial uplift that flowed around the world during the 1890s as American Protestant missionaries began to dominate the foreign mission movement and the United States slowly, but never surely, blazed its way through the Wounded Knee massacre, Chinese exclusion, the Spanish-American War, acquisition of island territories, Jim Crow segregation, and the Progressive Era (Hutchison 1987: 62–124).

In 1922, Elsie Clews Parson published “Playing Dead Twice in the Road” in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*. This was a short folktale from Elizabeth City County, Virginia, that articulated the distinctive pan-African trickster motif. This was not unusual. During the 1920s and early 1930s, Boas’s *Journal of American Folk-Lore* published a half-dozen issues dedicated exclusively to African and African American folklore. Affectionately known as the “Negro Numbers,” these issues became standard fare for “New Negroes” as they documented and celebrated African cultural patterns in the Americas. What made this one tale from 1922 unique was the fact that a member of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society had originally recorded it in 1893. The educators and graduates of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute had formed the society to record cultural practices of rural blacks in order to demonstrate that industrial education had succeeded in fostering the so-called Christian civilization of its graduates, in part by identifying how much African heritage remained to be rooted out. “Playing Dead Twice in the Road” was one of hundreds of tales, jokes, and conundrums Alice M. Bacon, founder of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society, organized into many notebooks of fieldwork during the last decade of the nineteenth century. During the Harlem Renaissance, therefore, African Americans interested in celebrating their rich African heritage were actually drawing from folklore that had been collected with the intention of eradicating it.

To begin to understand the complicated racial project articulated at Hampton during the 1890s, we must turn to the founder of the Hampton Institute, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, and his father, Dr. Richard

Armstrong. In 1831 after graduating from Princeton Theological Seminary and marrying Clarissa Chapman, a teacher at the Pestalozzian Infant School in Brooklyn, Richard Armstrong became a missionary in the South Pacific. The newlweds were initially placed on the island of Maui, where they stayed for seven years until Dr. Armstrong was appointed to the First Native Church in Honolulu. During his years on Maui, Armstrong observed that the natives were in need of "steady industrial occupation." Thus, as he ministered to the health of the populace, he also convinced the Hawaiians to build schools, churches, sugar plantations, and saw mills.²

Armstrong rose through the ranks of the missionary and government agencies and soon became the island's minister of education and a close advisor (both on spiritual and policy matters) to King Kamehameha III (Lindsey 1995: 1-2; Talbot 1969 [1904]: 3-37; S. Armstrong 1909: 1-4; "Death of Rev. Richard Armstrong" 1860: 76-77). He was perhaps best known for his creation and administration of the many missionary and government schools bearing his distinct philosophy of moral and industrial education, which above all aimed to civilize the natives. Armstrong outlined this philosophy in a letter to King Kamehameha III in which he accepted the position as minister of public education in 1847:

No sphere of labor sir, would be more congenial to my feelings, than the department of public instruction, and I may add, no branch of the government, seems to me of more vital importance to the welfare, of the Hawaiian race than this. Education, intellectual, moral, and physical, is the great lever by which philanthropists of every land, are seeking to redeem and elevate the mass of people. Here it is of peculiar importance, where the glory and safety of the nation must depend in so great a degree upon the proper training of the young. If depopulation here is to be arrested; if the vices which are consuming the natives are to be eradicated; if an indolent and thriftless people are to become industrious and thrifty; if Christian institutions are to be perpetuated, the work must be accomplished [sic] mainly where it has been so prosperously begun, in the education of the young. (Quoted in M. Armstrong 1887: 29-30)

Writing to his daughter on October 6, 1844, he explained why the "inhabitants" were in need of this type of education: "Had they skill and industry they might abound in every good thing. . . . But, poor creatures, they will not very soon shake off the low wretched habits of their former state. Their government, until recently, was one of the worst forms of despotism . . . and

in those days a character was formed which will not soon be entirely reformed. When I look over this valley, I think what a little Yankee skill would do here" (S. Armstrong, Letters: R./CA). Armstrong even complained in a letter of February 18, 1844 that the "King himself is as near to being an animal as man can well be & most of the high chiefs are ignorant, lazy, and stupid." His remedy to help advance what he called "Christian civilization" among these near-animal heathens was to improve "the heart, the head & the body at once." As he surmised, "this is a lazy people & if they are ever to be made industrious the work must begin with the young. So I am making strenuous efforts to have some sort of manual labor connected with every school. . . . Without industry they cannot be moral" (R. Armstrong: RA/RCA).

Dr. Armstrong's intimate knowledge of the traditional language, customs, and folklore of his charges was the key to his success as an educator, missionary, and confidant to the king. Using his genuine respect of Hawaiian language and culture, he was an important facilitator of the so-called great awakening when thousands of Hawaiians converted to Christianity by the mid-nineteenth century.³ Armstrong often used folklore or other cultural markers to demonstrate how far the Hawaiians had come, suggesting, for example, that the natives "have better clothes than they used to have" and explaining, "we rarely see a native now unclad or even wearing native kapa." But he also used such markers to show how much civilizing work remained to be done, lamenting that the natives "still live in small and filthy grass huts, destitute of every comfort, and herding together often a dozen sleeping on mats in one small house without even a partition" (M. Armstrong 1887: 63).

During the Armstrongs' final year on Maui in 1839, Mrs. Armstrong gave birth to Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the sixth of their ten children. Samuel grew up close to his father and would later explain that his father's philosophy of education shaped that of Hampton. Comparing the Lahaina-luna Seminary, which taught Greek and Latin, to the Hilo Boarding and Manual Labor School, Samuel Armstrong explained, "As a rule the former turned out more brilliant, the latter less advanced but more solid men. In making the plan of the Hampton Institute that of the Hilo School seemed the best to follow. . . . Hence came our policy of teaching only English and the system of industrial training at Hampton. Its graduates are not only to be good teachers but skilled workers, able to build homes and earn a living for themselves and encourage others to do the same" (S. Armstrong 1909: 4-5).

In 1860 Samuel Armstrong left Hawaii to attend Williams College, and as the Civil War erupted, he accepted a commission as captain, recruiting and

training Company D of the 125th Regiment of New York. Promoted to major and then to colonel, Armstrong was put in command of the 9th Regiment of U.S. Colored Troops. In March of 1865 Abraham Lincoln made the 26-year-old Hawaiian citizen a brevet brigadier general.

As the war ended, he searched for a mission in life, both personal and Christian. As a commander of Negro troops, he had been impressed by "their quick response to good treatment and to discipline" and he was convinced that African Americans yearned for education because he witnessed how his soldiers were "often studying their spelling books under fire" (S. Armstrong 1909: 6). Immediately after the war, the commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, General Oliver Otis Howard, appointed Armstrong as the superintendent for the tidewater area of Virginia; its headquarters was the small town of Hampton. General Armstrong's jurisdiction was populated with a large number of formerly enslaved people, and his area quickly became a bellwether for radical reconstruction experiments as missionaries, bureau agents, and the new freedmen and women negotiated competing agendas, policies, and plans.

After the war, the American Missionary Association took the lead in establishing schools for African Americans in the South. Armstrong used his access to both government and missionary resources to establish a co-ed industrial and normal school that would train African American elementary school teachers. This school opened in 1868 with two teachers and fifteen pupils, but it grew quickly and soon became independent of both the missionary association and the government. Armstrong often touted his brand of industrial and moral education, known as the Hampton idea, as "the only way to make them good Christians" (S. Armstrong 1909: 12). The Hampton idea found powerful support among philanthropists, missionaries, and the nation's political and industrial leaders. Although interest was generated by Hampton's civilizing mission, white backers were also attracted to its political and economic components which, as they saw it, would foster regional stability by discouraging students from participating in party politics while encouraging the efficient exploitation of their labor (Spivey 1978: 22). The majority of black colleges followed Hampton's model, and when Hampton's own graduate, Booker T. Washington, reproduced Armstrong's model at Tuskegee Institute in the late nineteenth century, it became *the* most influential model for black schools (Fredrickson 1971: 216).

Not only did Armstrong create the blueprint for Washington's popular industrial education with its concomitant policies of racial accommodation and cultural assimilation, he also helped to shape the federal government's

policies regarding Native American assimilation through education. From 1878 through 1893, Hampton "experimented" with Indian education, again employing the notion that industrial education helped to civilize the savages (Lindsey 1995; Robinson 1977: 1; Adams 1995: 28–59). In 1878, Captain R. H. Pratt, who after the Civil War had commanded black troops and Indian scouts on the Great Plains, searched without success for a school to continue the education of a group of Indians under his control. General Armstrong welcomed the opportunity to extend Hampton's civilizing mission to American Indians and invited Pratt to bring them to Hampton. The experiment was seemingly so successful that President Rutherford B. Hayes announced in his State of the Union address the following year that the Department of Interior would reproduce Armstrong's Hampton idea for Native Americans, extolling the virtues of "the experiment of sending a number of Indian children of both sexes to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, in Virginia, to receive an elementary English education and practical instruction in farming and other useful industries" (Hayes 1966 [1879]: 1390). And that year, 1879, Captain Pratt, along with some American Indian students from Hampton, started the influential Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Like Tuskegee and Hampton for Negroes, the Carlisle School became a defining institution for the education policy to assimilate Indians.⁴

Armstrong's gospel of industrial education was even spread to Africa. With close ties to the American Missionary Association, Hampton provided many recruits for the associator's work of converting and educating West Africans (A. White 1878: 54; also see Sharps 1991: 121). General Armstrong deployed a transnational and transracial discourse about Christian civilization, assimilation, and industrial education to build an institution that defined dominant approaches to the education of African Americans, American Indians, Hawaiians, and even Africans. And, like his father, General Armstrong realized that understanding the folklore and cultural practices of these peoples would facilitate the mission.

Bedeviling Christian Civilization

Armstrong explained the role "comparative ethnology" played within the process of "civilization" in his introduction to a series of 1878 reports for Hampton's *Southern Workman* that explored Negroes' "firm belief in witchcraft and conjuration." He compared the way Negroes and Sandwich Islanders practiced the "tangle of superstition, demonology, and fetish worship,"

which he described as "a combination of Salem and Central Africa." After discussing the parallels between the Hawaiian "'kahuna' or native witch-doctor" and the Negro conjure doctor, he concluded that both groups had "the same love of the supernatural and dense ignorance of the laws of living," and that the Negroes thus possessed the "elements which form the soil for a growth of superstition as rank and as fatal as that which is helping to depopulate Hawaii" (S. Armstrong 1878: 26).

The reports on conjure doctors were intended "to throw light upon the mental condition of the masses of this people, and the kind of work that must be done among them if they are to be raised to civilization or even saved from extinction" (S. Armstrong 1878: 30). The reports spawned a flurry of published responses. Orta Langhorne, a regular contributor to the *Southern Workman*, reminded readers that conjure doctors were "evidently a legacy handed down to [American Negroes] from their savage ancestors." As if to illustrate Langhorne's contentions, a member of Hampton's junior class offered compelling examples of the good and ill work of conjure doctors and closed his letter to the editor "by saying that I believe in the conjure Drs. and all this that I have written I can vouch for my self" (31). Armstrong's faith in the civilizing mission of the Hampton Institute prompted him to comment, "Two years more in the school will change his ideas, it is to be hoped" (30).

W. I. Louis, a Hampton alumnus teaching in Spartanburg, South Carolina, took a different tack. Upset with the reports, he wrote, "I fail to see what is gained by your repeating this dark legend of a by-gone day." He wanted the *Southern Workman* to report "facts that are elevating, facts that will inspire even the humblest." He concluded by noting that "our days of childhood are (if not, they should be) fast taking their flight, and the advent of manhood is at hand" (quoted in S. Armstrong 1878: 35).⁵ This letter provoked perhaps the most spirited response from the good general, and he candidly and confidently described why the *Southern Workman* frequently published missionary accounts and folklore from around the world:

It is time for every man who loves his people to lay aside sensitive feeling and go to work with all the aid he can get. And the first step of all is to make known the true state of the case. When a general begins a campaign, the first point is to get a true map of the country, and spy out all the enemy's forces and know the strength of every battery. It is not the beauty of his banners and his martial music that will win the victory, but knowledge of the work before him, and hard fighting. . . . Let us not be afraid to

face our own faults and follies, to drag them into the light where they will show for what they really are. (ibid.)

Combining espionage with exorcism, folklore and ethnology not only became a way of demonstrating how Hampton succeeded at civilizing students, but also of demonstrating the need for continual financial support. More importantly, the *Southern Workman* reports of the cultural practices of Native Americans, Hawaiians, and African Americans were used in the service of a complicated racial project that articulated a putatively progressive discourse about an individual's ability to rise to a state of civilization during a period when many scholars argued that every member of these groups was doomed to eternal savagery.

The graduates and educators of Hampton, Fisk, Howard, and other black schools explicitly used the term of this discourse in their programs of racial uplift. These self-described Negro elites most often framed their pejorative descriptions of their less civilized neighbors in terms of class, but the Hampton Folk-Lore Society did so in terms of culture (see Gaines 1996). Virtue, chastity, and cleanliness were the key signifiers of civilization that black elites embraced while chastising vice and sensuality. Uncivilized blacks were the ones who believed in conjure doctors, told animal stories, sang work songs, and gyrated their bodies in the ring shouts and jook joints. They were also the field hands, manual laborers, domestics, and washer women who never had the opportunity to attend one of the normal schools in which strict discipline and obsession with proper behavior convinced students they had become civilized. It was these uneducated and less refined souls who were held responsible for the vice, promiscuity, and debauchery associated with all black Americans. Moreover, the notion that African culture underpinned the behavior of uncouth black people was so routine that it provided useful shorthand for one Hampton graduate who complained about the rural school district of his first teaching job. Displeased with all of the "drinking, swearing and fighting," he reported, "when I came here I thought that there was as much Africa here as I cared to witness" ("Dear Teacher" 1876: 46; see also Hunter 1997: 175).

During the 1870s and 1880s the boosters of the civilizing project combined ideas from many sources. They employed referents from the Bible that resonated with the ideas of Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer, Jean Baptiste Lamarck, and Lewis Henry Morgan to foster the idea that an individual could work hard and attain civilization while unloading the cultural baggage of African

savagery. As General Armstrong explained, however, in order to civilize the Negroes, reformers had first to "spy out" those Africanisms that bedeviled the civilizing project and debilitated the health and welfare of the poor. This approach animated the efforts of Alice Mabel Bacon and, through her, became the mission of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society:

Theory and Practice of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society

Alice Bacon, born in 1858, was the youngest daughter of Leonard Bacon, an influential abolitionist, professor at Yale Divinity School, and long-standing pastor of the First Church of New Haven. Her brother Francis was a professor of surgery at Yale and married Georganna Woolsey, who was the cousin of Yale's president, Theodore Dwight Woolsey. Georganna was the sister of Jane Stuart Woolsey, who supervised nurses during the Civil War and established training schools for nurses in New York City and New Haven. Jane was stationed in Virginia during the final campaigns of the Civil War, and General Armstrong persuaded her to come to the Hampton Institute in 1868 to direct the Girls Industrial Department, where she stayed until 1872. Jane's sister-in-law, Rebecca Bacon, also made the trip to Virginia's tidewater and became Armstrong's assistant principal (D. Waters 1983: 5).

In 1870, just two years after Hampton was underway, Rebecca Bacon brought her youngest sister, Alice Mabel Bacon, to Hampton for only a year. But in 1882, when her mother passed away, Alice immediately applied for a post at Hampton, where she taught for five years. At the invitation of her childhood friend Countess Oyama, she then left Hampton to spend a year in Japan, where she worked to help westernize the schools for elite Japanese women (D. Waters 1983: 6; Sharps 1991: 32). Returning to Hampton in 1889, she worked to establish Hampton's Dixie Hospital to provide health care to the needy in the area and nursing training for students at Hampton Institute. Bacon conducted case studies in communities in the surrounding Elizabeth City County to assess the need for the hospital, and in an effort to raise funds for the hospital, she wrote an essay for the *Southern Workman* that included graphic descriptions based on her investigations. Her essay opened by describing "the poorest and most ignorant of the colored people" who lived "in the little slab cabins with their mud chimneys, where father, mother, children of both sexes, and frequently adult lodgers of either sex, are thrown together at all times under all circumstances." She surmised that this "life must be more the life of the savage than that of civilization":

That the Negroes are by degrees moving upward, that every year more and more of them lift themselves a little above the merely animal life of the roughest plantation hand, is a fact that none but the most pessimistic can doubt, but to those who are working among them the question often arises, what can we do that will help to relieve, on some measure, those who from years or by reason of infirmities can never lift themselves out of the squalor and misery about them? (Bacon 1890: 124)

All they needed, she proposed, was basic medical attention and the "healing gift of Christian civilization."

Bacon soon discovered that one of the major obstacles to delivering medical care and Christian civilization to those she euphemistically called the cabin people was their tenacious belief in conjuring and superstitions. Thus, in her view, sociological and anthropological research ought to be used as an aid in missionary and health work (D. Waters 1983: 36). By 1893, Bacon's efforts were joined by those of some Hampton alumni, students, and faculty who began to see the need to salvage the songs, stories, and African survivals that made up Negro folklore. Combining Armstrong's commitment to espionage and exorcism with a desire for historical preservation, Bacon published a call to form the Hampton Folk-Lore Society in the form of a circular letter, reprinted in the December 1893 issue of *Southern Workman*:

Dear Friends: The American Negroes are rising so rapidly from the condition of ignorance and poverty in which slavery left them, to a position among the cultivated and civilized people of the earth, that the time seems not far distant when they shall have cast off their past entirely, and 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. If within the next few years care is not taken to collect and preserve all traditions and customs peculiar to the Negroes, there will be little to reward the search of the future historian who would trace the History of the African continent through the years of slavery to the position which they will hold a few generations hence. Even now the children are growing up with little knowledge of what their ancestors have thought, or felt, or suffered. The common school system with its teachings is eradicating the old and planting the seeds of the new, and the transition period is likely to be a short one. The old people, however, still have their thoughts on the past, and believe and think and do much as they have for generations. From them and from the younger ones whose thoughts have been

moulded by them in regions where the school is, as yet, imperfectly established, much may be gathered that will, when put together and printed, be of great value as material for history and ethnology.

But, if this material is to be obtained, it must be gathered soon and by many intelligent observers stationed in different places. It 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 of the first child-like, but still reasoning, philosophy of a race. . . . To such observers, every custom, belief or superstition, foolish and empty to others, will be of value and will be worth careful preservation. The 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 own 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: 180–81)

Bacon's initial rationale for continued research on the so-called cabin people was to make missionaries more efficient health-care providers, and she effectively articulated this rationale in her later work (Bacon and Heron 1896). But the emphasis on cultural preservation so evident in her 1893 statement spoke to another, perhaps less obvious motivation: the urgency with which Bacon enjoined the graduates to go out and salvage disappearing Negro lore stemmed from the educators' need to demonstrate the success of the Hampton idea. One of the most effective publicity and fundraising tools of both the Hampton Institute and the Carlisle School were before and after photographs of Indian students. Native Americans were routinely photographed fully adorned in their religious regalia as they enrolled in school and then later in a formal suit and tie or frilly dress in order to demonstrate the schools' success at civilizing their charges (D. Adams 1995: 45). In her 1893 call, Bacon seems to suggest that her proposed folklore society might be the last opportunity of Hampton educators to record the "ignorant people" before the impact of common schools eclipsed the remaining folk culture. Armed with a record of African American folklore that was no longer practiced, the educators at Hampton would be able to reproduce the popular before and after images used to raise money for their Indian program.

Bacon's call for the formation of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society was greeted with great enthusiasm. Letters of support came in from all corners of the intellectual community, yet African American supporters of the society held nuanced views of its promise. For example, the missionary, educator, and early pan-Africanist Alexander Crummell strongly supported the formation of the society, but he warned that its members must offer a positive interpretation of their African heritage and not a negative one. "The truth," he explained, has been "the dimming of the 'colonization' cause into the ears of the colored people—the iteration of the idle dogma that Africa is THE home of the black race in this land; has served to prejudice the race against the very name of Africa. And this is a double folly:—the folly of the colonizers and the folly of the black man" (Crummell 1894: 5). Another activist, educator, and author, Anna Julia Cooper, also commented on the philosophical foundation of the organization:

What you say is true. The black man is readily assimilated to his surroundings and the original simple and distinct type is in danger of being lost or outgrown. To my mind, the worst possibility yet is that the so-called educated Negro, under the shadow of this overpowering Anglo-Saxon civilization, may become ashamed of his own distinctive features and aspire only to be an imitator (of that which can not but impress him as the climax of human greatness, and so all originality, all sincerity, all self-assertion would be lost to him. What he needs is the inspiration of knowing that his racial inheritance is of interest to others and that when they come to seek his homely songs and sayings and doings, it is not to scoff and sneer, but to study reverently, as an original type of the Creator's handiwork. (A. Cooper 1894: 5)

The comments by both Crummell and Cooper suggest that even with the formation of the first black folklore society, some African Americans understood that folklore could provide a positive interpretation of their African heritage or a scientific basis to identify and preserve their distinctive culture. Still, they did little to influence the twenty or so Hampton students, teachers, and alumni who made up the society. Most Hampton graduates did not question their desire to ascend to a civilized state, and even more perhaps loathed any association with Africa. However, other students departed from this trend. Robert R. Moton, for example, one of the society's elected leaders, used the folklore and the society to challenge the "contempt and derision" of the minstrelsy industry that transformed black folksongs, stories, and sayings

into laughing-stock buffoonery, which crystallized stereotypes for all African Americans (Lott 1993).

One could argue that the Hampton Folk-Lore Society's approach amounted to a form of "applied folklore" (Sharps 1991: 65). The core of the society was a group of young men and women who graduated from Hampton and went on to work in business, education, or medicine. By better understanding the practices and lore of their clients, patients, and students, these young professionals believed they could contribute to racial uplift by developing more efficient ways to sell, heal, and teach. More generally, the society's work, as published in Hampton's *Southern Workman*, formed part of a missionary discourse integrated into a complex racial project whose proponents engaged in a racial politics of culture that shaped communities from Hawaii to Hampton.

Although missionary efforts to civilize people of color made little distinction with regard to the savage state of Indians, Hawaiians, and Negroes, their methods and rhetoric served remarkably well at making distinctions between individuals within each group who had supposedly reached a state of civilization. Specifically, the putatively civilized people of color in the late nineteenth century used the discourse that homogenized difference between groups to mark the heterogeneity within their group—describing and inscribing a distinction between themselves, the civilized, and those others, the uncivilized. Moreover, the American Folk-Lore Society, founded by William Wells Newell in 1888, participated in and scientifically validated this racial project by supporting and collaborating with the Hampton Folk-Lore Society.

By 1893, Newell had distinguished himself as a skilled administrator and editor within the closely knit anthropological circles, but he also wanted to distinguish himself as a folklorist and folklore as its own discipline, not as an adjunct to anthropology (Darnell 1973: 28; Bell 1973: 1–13). When Alice Bacon organized the Hampton society, Newell saw an opportunity to develop the Negro department of the journal, and thus to pursue a topic that few anthropologists were then exploring. He was "a personal friend" of one of Hampton's trustees, and there was considerable overlap between the founders of the American Folk-Lore Society from the Boston area and supporters of the Hampton idea, well before the Hampton Folk-Lore Society was even formed (Newell 1983 [1894]: 187).

Newell wasted no time incorporating the members of the HFLS into the AFLS. On May 25, 1894 he traveled to Hampton to deliver the keynote address for Hampton's first folklore conference, which followed the spring com-

mencement exercises. Speaking to "trustees, teachers, officers and graduates of the school," he gave a talk entitled "The Importance and Utility of the Collection of Negro Folk-Lore," which struck a note that resonated with General Armstrong's notion of civilization. He began by explaining, "I came from Cambridge, in the hope of forwarding an undertaking which appears to me most meritorious, and of promoting the work of the Negro Folk-Lore societies, a movement which is significant in regard to the present intelligence and rapid progress of Southern Negroes" (Newell 1983 [1894]: 186).

Alice Bacon became an integral member of the AFLS and eventually was elected to its council. Bacon and delegates from the HFLS participated in the meetings of the AFLS, and she and her colleagues published several collections in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore* (Banks 1894, 1895; Bacon 1898; Bacon and Herron 1896). When Alice Bacon left Hampton in 1899 to return to Japan to administer a school for young women, the Hampton Folk-Lore Society was not sustained. She died in 1918, but the notebooks of folklore she collected to articulate one racial project were republished in 1922 under her name, although they were used to articulate a very different project.

Lifting as We Climb

The Hampton Folk-Lore Society was operational as the so-called Progressive Era waxed and the Gilded Age waned. During that period, the tidewater region of Virginia was marked by increased lynchings and restrictions on black male suffrage, and the routinization and legalization of Jim Crow segregation. Under the leadership of Bacon, the work of the society sewed a tapestry of thrift, self-reliance, morality, and Christian faith. The society does not, however, fit neatly within the discursive practices of Progressive Era reformers, the black women's club movement, or the black men's self-help leagues. Although the society's members grappled with identical issues and enulated many of these other groups' practices, they are distinguished from the others by the particular attention they paid to ideas about culture, as well as class, to articulate the ideology of racial uplift. The former students of Hampton who made up the bulk of the membership of the society were part of a Negro elite who shared faith in Jesus and a moral obligation to uplift the race. Shouldering the responsibility of what would have amounted to a talented 2 percent, these "college-bred" Negroes (Du Bois and Dill 1968 [1910]) of the late nineteenth century promulgated a complex ideology of racial uplift inflected with gender and class distinctions. Black ministers, educators,

journalists, doctors, and social workers used rhetoric, research, and writing to combat egregious and dehumanizing claims that African Americans were inherently inferior and incapable of assuming the rights and responsibilities of citizenship or civilization.

Imbued with the optimism and progressive spirit of the age, these black leaders enlisted the support of white political and business leaders to foster racial progress, primarily through a trickle-down theory of education. College graduates would fan out throughout the South, teaching students in small schools the Victorian and Yankee ideals learned from the missionaries, ideals thought to improve the material conditions of blacks and demonstrate that they were capable of citizenship, civilization, and respect—indeed humanity. The efforts to show racial progress, however, were largely predicated upon identifying distinctions between those blacks who rose to a civilized state and those not quite there, and such distinctions often turned on status or class distinctions. Although proponents of uplift did not advance unified themes about racial progress, the idea that the race would progress toward a civilized citizenry served as a unifying theme as people searched for various ways to create an authentic and positive black middle-class subjectivity.

The Hampton Folk-Lore Society was also articulating a racial uplift ideology. Its members, too, were propounding the notion that “we are here.” But this was not the temporally static “we are here, right here.” It was a “we are (up) here, not (down) there.” Knowingly or not, society members used an anthropologically inflected folklore to plot the perceived temporal distance between the college-bred Negroes and the cabin people in the same way Frederick Douglass did when he plotted his graph “out of Dahomey.” Although this folklore helped to demonstrate how far they had come in their racial progress, it was ultimately deployed to document how quickly they were closing the gap and to measure the success of lifting as they climbed. The society provided an additional dimension to the idea of racial uplift by inserting notions about stages of culture. By explicitly distinguishing the low and savage African culture from the high and civilized Christian culture, they appropriated the comparative method of evolutionary anthropology to exploit the politics of culture to advance the status of specific individuals as citizens. Instead of coding culture in racial terms, they coded race in cultural or performative terms and set no limits on their access to the civilized citizenry. Challenging the prevailing science articulated by scholars such as Daniel G. Brinton, who envisioned civilization in the strict terms of a racial hierarchy where “the European or white race stands at the head of this list,

the African or negro at its foot” (Brinton 1890: 48), members of the society believed civilization was about how one behaved and what one believed. Access to it, therefore, was contingent upon the head and heart, not the brain and body.

Conclusion

The overwhelming success of Protestant missionary schools in the Pacific, Hampton, Tuskegee, and the Carlisle school demonstrates how U.S. nation building and empire building were mutually defining (Kaplan 1993). Although it might be a slippery and dangerous slope to make an argument about a common heritage that turns on a shared experience of colonialism, racism, and religion, one cannot ignore the fact that for several influential generations at the turn of the twentieth century, industrial school education, in Natal, Perth, Carlisle, Hampton, Kingston, Cape Coast, and Hilo, looked virtually identical. Each one of these poles reinforced and solidified a shared philosophy of racial uplift that transcended the particularities of community and history. These schools and their respective institutions (clubs, fraternities, churches, settlement houses, and so forth) played an increasingly important role in mandating and dictating very similar roles for the educated people of color during the very years that white supremacy became synonymous with civilization, the industrial revolution craved foreign markets, colonialism seemed like a success, and the United States tried its hand at empire.

Notes

1. I thank Kamari Clarke and Deborah Thomas for their leadership in putting this volume together. It is an honor and privilege to be asked to contribute. The special collections librarians at Williams College were very helpful as I tracked down some of these sources. As well, the editorial and research assistance given to me by David Rease and Bayo Holsley was instrumental. Charlie Pfo, and Randy Matory gave useful comments as I began to think how I could use my “throw research” to contribute to larger discussions about race and globalization. However, it was Deborah who really pushed me to use my history of anthropology to explore global issues—thanks. As always, thanks to my lovely wife Sabrina L. Thomas and my daughter Yaa Asemteewa Baker for their help and inspiration.

2. He succeeded in having the indigenous Hawaiians build much of the island's infrastructure, despite the fact they probably engaged in various forms of resistance,

or as Mrs. Armstrong recalls: "The natives were awkward and very destructive, breaking their tools and ox-carts and always relying upon their 'kumu' to repair them" (M. Armstrong 1887: 21).

3. Even King Kamehameha IV, who detested the influence of the missionaries, noted that Armstrong "was an eloquent preacher in the Hawaiian language" and commented on "his accurate knowledge of the Hawaiian language, and the facility with which he wielded the pen of a translator" ("Death of Rev. Richard Armstrong" 1860: 76; see also M. Armstrong 1887: 57–58).

4. For an interesting discussion on the relationship and parallels between Hampton, the Carlisle School, and the Indian boarding school movement, see D. Adams 1995. For information about the number of Native American students, graduation rates, gender balance, and so forth, see Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute 1893. For an analysis of the Native American experience in the boarding schools, focusing explicitly on Hampton, see Makosky 1989 and Robinson 1977.

5. As with many of the letters to the editor in the *Southern Workman*, some are signed, others are anonymous, and others only include initials. For these letters addressing the papers on conjuring, I note them all under the editorship of Armstrong because he clearly chose which submissions to print and which to respond to. In addition, when an article or an entry in the *Southern Workman* was difficult to cite, because it was anonymous or a letter within an article or editorial, I simply note the date, volume, and page number.

HISTORY AT THE CROSSROADS

Vodù and the Modernization of the Dominican Borderlands

ROBERT L. ADAMS JR.

To articulate the past historically does not mean recognizing it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger: The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it. For both, it is one and the same thing: the danger of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer; he comes as the victor over the Antichrist. The only historian capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the one who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious.

—Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History"

In his last known writings, Walter Benjamin argued that forgetting the "later course of history" was the key to discovering the past. Historical events offer multiple interpretations if the hegemonic present does not blind us to them. We have to question the authoritative story; master narratives that naturalize elite perspectives and control as the inevitable outcome of history. Benjamin encouraged critical historians to "brush history against the grain," subjecting