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FOOTNOTES TO THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

SEPARATION AND LINKAGE IN AMERICAN INDIAN LINGUISTICS, c. 1900

Dell Hymes
University of Pennsylvania

In 1956, Dell Hymes, then at the Department of Social Relations of Harvard, wrote to John Swanton (1873-1958) an early student of Franz Boas and long-time member of the Bureau of American Ethnology, inquiring about Boas' and Swanton's early work on Chinookan languages, on which Hymes had completed his doctoral dissertation ("The Language of the Kathlamet Chinook," Indiana University, 1955). In the correspondence that ensued, Swanton had occasion to comment on the work of John Napoleon Brinton Hewitt (1858-1937), who had already been at the Bureau for many years when Swanton joined it in 1900. Although not included in the recent volume on American Indian Intellectuals edited by Margot Liberty, Hewitt was one of the first Native Americans to be professionally employed in anthropological research. Swanton's recollections focused primarily upon Hewitt's somewhat unusual individual personality, rather than upon Hewitt as Native American. The extent to which Hewitt's idiosyncratic style and marginal position within the Bureau, or his subsequent neglect, may reflect also his situation as Native American is perhaps a matter for further study. In any case, it is clear that he had important contributions to offer to the study of American Indian linguistics. (Hewitt's linguistic work is discussed briefly in Darnell, 1969:94-101; Stocking, 1974; and also in Judd, 1967).

22 George St.,
Newton 58, Mass., March 14, 1957

Dear Dr. Hymes:

You inquire regarding J. N. B. Hewitt's work on the languages of Oregon and Washington. What I know of the matter is about as follows. Mr. Hewitt was an unusual character. He was, as you probably know,

part Tuscarora in origin. He was taken from civilian life - he told me one time of his experiences as driver or conductor of a street car in New Jersey - taken to assist Erminie Smith with her Iroquoian researches. She died soon afterward and he took up her work and spent almost the entire remainder of his life in Iroquoian studies. He was particularly interested in the esoteric side of Iroquois ceremonies and finally had printed a set of the ritual legends of the Iroquois as they appear in the Bureau Reports. I say "finally" because it was almost impossible to get them out of him. There was always "something more" that had to be done. He was a thorough procrastinator and at times stood in his own light in consequence. He was at one time given charge of the archives and asked to classify them. Repeatedly he put off completing the work. After a time a substantial raise in salary was promised him if he would finish this, but he still put off the work. In this matter as in his linguistic work he acted something like a miser, afraid to let anything out. At one time we were anxious to find a certain map that one of our collaborators had compiled and the existence of which we were certain of. For a long time it could not be located and then one day Hewitt suddenly brought it to me.

He excused his failure to turn in material on the ground that he has been appointed in a peculiar manner as a sort of inside assistant and was not expected to furnish material like the rest of the staff. It is true that he was used for the comparison of certain linguistic vocabularies and this included work comparing some American languages with Polynesian to carry out a theory of Cyrus Thomas! He worked on some of the languages of Mexico as you will see by consulting the administrative sections of the Bureau Reports. He was very much influenced by the social theories of Powell and McGee who were in turn influenced by Morgan McLellan [McLennan] and others of that period, and in his studies of vocabularies he seems to have favored the theories of those he was working for. At that time Powell was opposed to putting stocks together and later, as you remember, he was abetted by Boas before Sapir burst upon the scene. This separationist standpoint was shared also by Gatschet who compiled those volumes on Klamath. An example of Hewitt's separationist tendency is shown by his comparison of McGee's Seri material with Yuman. He reported that Seri must be a distinct stock in line with the ideas of Powell and McGee and in opposition to Brinton, but we know of course, as shown by Kroeber, that Brinton was right.

Yet Hewitt was very jealous of his work, particularly as regards Iroquois. At one time Dixon asked me why in his linguistic map Powell had extended Iroquoian so far I think into Labrador and as I respected Dixon's opinion, in our next issue of the map a change was made. I had not known that the original boundary was set by Hewitt and it was characteristic of him that instead of complaining to me directly of the change I began to hear reports from the other Bureau offices that he had visited around with them and made his complaint. Finally he did come to me directly with it and, as I thought his case was good, the change back was made. But the whole proceeding was absurd. I was not a specialist in that area and had no personal feeling in the matter. But this indirection was a rather amusing side of Hewitt's nature.

Now, regarding the northwestern languages. Hewitt was at an early date given vocabularies of Shahaptian and Waiilatpuan to compare, the last represented by Cayuse I believe. As a result of this comparison he reported that they showed signs of relationship and this was entered in the 15th Annual Report, page XLV. By consulting that reference I see that the Waiilatpuan vocabulary he studied is called "Old Cayuse." Of this study the report says: "The results of his study (Hewitt's) tend to indicate that the Waiilatpuan family is really a branch of the Shahaptian. Should further research indicate this to be true, it will be an important addition to knowledge of the distribution of linguistic stocks in northwestern United States."

No further investigation seems to be indicated but I know that Hewitt did prepare two manuscripts in one of which he compared the two languages in question, while the other added to them material from Klamath. When I saw them it struck me at once that relationship was strongly indicated, but I think this did not come out until after one of Boas' pupils [Melville Jacobs], newly appointed to the University of Washington I believe, announced the relationship of at least two of three and ultimately of all three. Hewitt then felt considerably aggrieved that no recognition of his work had been given, but the fault was largely his own in not having pushed the matter when he made the discovery, or thought he had. If Powell and McGee had been on the ball they would have pushed the matter at the time and thrown those three stocks together. I suggested that something be done about it but I was only a kid ethnologist at the time, Hewitt was unable to assert his own claims at the time that should have been done, and the atmosphere of the Powellian attitude and of Gatschet with his great work on Klamath behind him was in opposition.

I myself saw those vocabularies and they should be preserved among the archives of the Bureau but that was a long time ago. All that anyone could say now would be that "although comparative work by Hewitt indicated quite conclusively that there was a relationship between these three sets of languages" the results were never set forth in a conclusive manner. That is about all that could be said."

There is a reference to Hewitt's work in the 19th Annual Report, page 838, but it has no bearing on the above question. Boas, conservative as he was, saw the relationship right away, but he never had access to Hewitt's material. He was in no way responsible for any neglect of Hewitt which was due to Hewitt himself and to his own immediate superiors.

A few items have dropped from my memory, and this is about all that I can recall.

Sincerely yours,

[Signed] John R. Swanton

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Judd, Neil, 1967. The Bureau of American Ethnology: A Partial History. Norman, Oklahoma.

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CLIO'S FANCY: DOCUMENTS TO PIQUE THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY: THE CASE OF FREDERICK STARR

In the last decade or so, the relationship of anthropology and imperialism has been the topic of both ideological controversy (and more recently) historical research. Despite their frequent grounding in Marxist assumption, controversialists have seemed to imply that the undeniable linkage was as much a matter of moral inadequacy as of social determinism: had anthropologists of earlier periods possessed a proper moral sensibility, they would have opposed European imperialism rather than contributing to its ideological base or seeking its support for their anthropological research. The problematic character of retrospective moral judgment on such issues is illustrated in the case of one turn-of-the-century American anthropologist who seems to have been actively involved in the organized anti-imperialist movement: Frederick Starr, who was on the faculty at the University of Chicago between 1892 and 1923.

While the details of Starr's activity on this issue must await the investigation of some future biographer, his papers contain an interesting letter from Erving Winslow, secretary of the Anti-Imperialist League, indicating that Starr on occasion used his anthropology as a weapon in the service of the anti-imperialist cause.

The Anti-Imperialist League
20 Central St., Boston, Feb. 6, 1908

Dear Prof. Starr:

For the evening meeting of the Twentieth Century Club March 26th I will suggest the use of the subject "Field Experiences of an Anthropologist" with a sly introduction of anti-imperialism. I will let you know whether the lantern slides are desired or not later. For the luncheon on the 27th the subject can be "The Natives of the Philippines," with anti-imperialism turned on in full (no slides). I