Domestic Exotic: Dispossession and Desire in South Florida 20th c Tourism

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Domestic Exotic
Dispossession and Desire in South Florida 20th c Tourism

Emily Velez Nelms
Masters of Environmental Design
May 2, 2024

Chair | Keller Easterling
Advisor | Ned Blackhawk
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Roundtable Guest | Jennifer Gonzalez
Roundtable Guest | Daniel HoSang

Project Abstract

Domestic Exotic, considers the conditions that led to the rise of cultural tourism in Florida and examines Yale University’s involvement in this economic phenomenon. Cultural tourism is defined as site-seeing attractions where performers interact with visitors under fabricated conditions. At these sites, ‘the spectacle of the other’ was demarcated onto specific bodies, creating a collective imaginary that helped to shape the infrastructure and public thought of Florida as a travel destination for Euro-American audiences.¹ This document supports an exhibition at the Yale Peabody Museum titled, the Resonance of Things Unseen: Indigenous Sovereignty, Institutional Accession, and Private Correspondence (March 26 - November 1, 2024).

Readers Note

This is artist text, consists of

01. two grounding archival figures,
02. a writing on anthropologist William Sturtevant,
03. and imaging from a current exhibition at Yale Peabody Museum.

Over the past three years at Yale, I have collected ephemera relating to the formation of cultural tourism in Florida, compiled toward studio production. This practice began while an M. Arch I student at the Yale School of Architecture, carried on in the Master’s of Environmental Design, and ended as a Studio Participant within the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Independent Study Program (ISP). During my three years at Yale, I have benefitted from the diversity of interdisciplinary study and am grateful to have journeyed alongside several cohorts, with whom have undoubtedly shaped this work.

In the final year of the Masters of Environmental Design, I joined the ISP under the guidance of Gregg Bordowitz and through a series of seminars and studio visits completed this text. Please read the following material as in flux, with continuing additions forthcoming with the culmination of the Whitney ISP exhibition at Westbeth Artists Housing in New York, opening May 9th, 2024.

*Domestic Exotic* primarily provides context for an exhibition currently open at the Yale Peabody Museum, *Resonance of Things Unseen: Indigenous Sovereignty, Institutional Accession, and Private Correspondence*. This exhibition, for the first time, presents materials including museum purchase receipts and documents concerning genetic study undertaken at the Anthropology department at Yale, through a reading of the William Sturtevant Papers housed at the Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives.
Florida’s cultural tourism industry can be traced to earlier progressivist “exposition” displays, which presented difference as spectacle and attempted to make peoples and cultures from around the world accessible at a single site. In Paris the 1889 Exposition Universelle included a developmental timeline of human habitation, where homes from the Penobscot community were relocated from Maine and shipped across the Atlantic to be displayed behind the newly constructed Eiffel Tower. This exhibition created a narrative of human evolution told through forms of habitation, where the “primitive” hut was imported to support the legitimacy of racial hierarchy and, by contrast, celebrate the advancement of contemporary technologies. Western modernity was celebrated here as the lead innovator, while architecture of cultures defined as isolated

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were placed in the backdrop. A text was published alongside the exhibition which displayed dwellings under two categories, that of “Invasions of the Aryans” and “Peoples Isolated from the General Movement of Humanity.”

The latter group extended to include the Village Nègre, where approximately 400 Indigenous peoples were brought from an array of global locations annexed by France to visually produce the dichotomy of “civilized” and “primitive” for the general public.

These ideas traveled to the U.S. four years later, during the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago which celebrated the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the “New World” by Christopher Columbus. As the first officially sponsored live exhibit in the United States, the Ethnological Village was installed facing Lake Michigan as the side attraction to the “White City” and labeled as the “backdrop to the picture of intellectual and material development.”

The site contained architectural structures such as Haudenosaunee houses, Penobscot lodges, wigwam, and Kwakwaka’wakw totem poles, arranged in a “living village” where multiple Indigenous communities were presented as coexisting alongside one another, “as near as possible as they lived at the time of the discovery of America by Columbus.”

The Kwakwaka’wakw poles would later travel to the American Museum of Natural History to establish its primary exhibit, the Northwest Coast Hall, curated by Franz Boas as his first major project.

This connection with the Natural History Museum is multi-tiered, as both the 1889 Exposition Universelle and the Chicago World’s Fair were organized by fledgling ethnographers at the birth of their field, concurrent with the rising eugenics movement. Scientists and ethnographers were key observers at such sites, recording obsolete observations and extracting genetic material from those within the attractions.

In the case of the Chicago World’s Fair, such materials were sent to the American Natural History Museum, whose accession files document the connection. In the museum’s floor plan the ghost of the living village can still be seen, inscribing into its circulation the same logics of order and comparison that drove the comparative displays of peoples at world’s fairs and the production of racial taxonomy charts—two related but distinct approaches to visualizing racial hierarchies.

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6 Ibid. pp. 21.
7 Ibid.
8 Racial inferiority was physiologically supported through the cranial measurements against those of Europeans, as well as the observation of everyday tasks to understand cultural formation. The archives within the American Museum of Natural History as an anthropology institution hold within them multitudes of narratives of mistreatment at such sites, containing materials of human origin. See Bones Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory In Museums, by Samuel J. Redman. Redman, Samuel J. "Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.
The Sale of Lands

The Seminole population during the 40 year period after brutal conflict with the U.S. government seldom engaged with northerners, aside from trading deer, otter, raccoon, and alligator hide. Economic and land stability was interrupted when interest surfaced in draining the Pahayokee, it would be reduced down to what is now known as the Everglades National Park, through efforts led by Hamilton Disston and the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund. Over the next two decades, two million acres of swampland were depleted as an interconnection of canals was dredged, linking the Everglades to Lake Okeechobee and Kissimmee Valley lakes.

The above map from the Florida Land & Improvement Company, details Hamilton Disston’s purchase of 4,000,000 acres. This map printed and hand colored in 1880 documents the largest bill of sale in United States history, the repositioning of nearly the entire mass of the Florida peninsula to a single purchaser. Disston’s map bears witness to the official dispossession of land from Indigenous communities. This exchange kickstarted the construction of Henry Flagler’s Railroad, subsequent Florida Land Boom, and the establishment of the cultural tourism industry which displayed people of varying cultural backgrounds for educational and entertainment purposes. The deep green section of the map reveals another development project that Disston participated in as the treasurer for the Atlantic and Gulf Coast Canal and Okeechobee Land Co., this dredging project that would begin in 1884. The map is accompanied by a pamphlet including a series of farming suggestions and instructions on land management, such as “how to grow an orange grove” - a guide for Euro-American farmers to encourage agricultural production. Notice that the lower right portion of the state of Florida is not highlighted, as the city of Miami was already underway, with the incorporation of the town to occur in 1896.

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Yale Peabody Museum, March 26 - November 1, 2024

Resonance of Things Unseen: Indigenous Sovereignty, Institutional Accession, and Private Correspondence

Exhibition Wall Text /
This installation considers the intersection of anthropology, tourism, and Native sovereignty within the papers of ethnologist William Sturtevant, produced while he was a graduate student at Yale and during his early professional years from 1950 - 1958. Sturtevant’s research focused on the physical, medicinal, and cultural knowledge of the Seminole and Miccosukee people, whose tribal homelands are in southern Florida. He deeply depended on his relationship with elder Josie Bille, the sole Miccosukee Seminole who would engage with him. Sturtevant acquired over 200 objects for the Yale Peabody Museum, often from tourist attractions. He also helped secure funding for Yale’s Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, where faculty conducted genetic studies that used biological materials from Indigenous communities.

Outside of Yale, he served as the general editor of the 20-volume Handbook of North American Indians, published by the Smithsonian Institution beginning in 1978. This handbook profoundly affected the study of Native America in the twentieth century.

Etched on yellow flypaper and dotted with mosquitos from the Florida wetlands, Sturtevant’s letters are displayed alongside an architectural blueprint from “The Jungle Queen,” the oldest running tourist attraction in Florida and a site where he acquired objects. This installation considers the often hidden
figure of the anthropologist / curator, and in particular, how institutions have historically used Indigenous knowledge as content for academic research and exhibitions.\textsuperscript{12}

**Introduction**

The career of William Sturtevant, renowned anthropologist, best known for his role as the general editor of the 20-volume *Handbook of North American Indians* (spanning 1978 - 2008) and his ethnographic work within Florida, tells a complex narrative of a scholar navigating the transitioning field of anthropology amidst personal ambitions and institutional restructuring.

As a committed institutionalist, Sturtevant exerted influence as a curator at the Yale Peabody Museum and the U.S. National Museum, a staff member of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), a founding member of the Center for the Study of Man, and President of the American Anthropological Association, the American Society for Ethnohistory, as well as the American Ethnological Society.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} This exhibition and programming is made possible by the Yale Peabody Museum, the Yale University Art Gallery’s Martin A. Ryerson Lectureship Fund, Yale Environmental Humanities, the Public Humanities at Yale, the Yale Group for the Study of Native America, and the Yale School of Architecture.

In 1978, Claude Levi-Strauss commented on the scope of his handbook project as, "the first product of a monumental enterprise in gestation for more than ten years.. an absolutely indispensable tool that should be found on the shelves of all libraries, public and private alike."14

During his graduate studies however, Sturtevant relied on a single interlocutor whose increasing reluctance to engage with him indicates the exploitative nature of the relationship. The foundation for his career of incredible prominence was what we might now consider stalking. His dissertation, titled “The Mikasuki Seminole: Medical Beliefs and Practices” already hinted at a broader ambition to encapsulate and analyze Indigenous cultures through the lens of Western scientific inquiry, which took fuller form in his later totalizing handbook.

Another little-known aspect of his graduate student days was his ethically questionable engagement with genetics under the guise of anthropology alongside John Buettner-Janusch at Yale University. His unpublished essay, "How much Negro Ancestry Have the Florida Seminole," not only assisted in the seed funding of Yale’s Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, it also contributed to faculty studies using biological materials Sturtevant collected from hospitals without patient consent in southern Florida.

Sturtevant’s ambitions led him to help secure funding—worth over four hundred thousand dollars in today’s currency—through a grant titled "Genetic Studies on the Blood of Primates." While the grant application did not feature his signature, it benefited from his involvement. This collaboration, and the substantial funding it attracted, demonstrates how Sturtevant leveraged his ethnographic work for ventures that extended beyond his administrative and editorial scope. The infrastructure and financial backing for these projects, as detailed in the grant documentation, suggest an institutional complicity that goes beyond individual ambition to encompass a broader, departmental initiative that the university would have been aware of.

Sturtevant also initiated new centers outside of academia to extend the relevance of his work. When the Bureau of American Ethnology was absorbed by the Smithsonian and reduced to the Smithsonian Office of Anthropology in 1965, he initiated The Center for the Study of Man, to form an

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independent private committee for the *Handbook of North American Indians*. Without this new small center of ethnographic conservatives, the book project may have never materialized.

Sturtevant’s ethnographic conservatism, coupled with his involvement in genetic studies and biobanking at Yale prolonged the arm of the Bureau of American Ethnology far beyond the government-funded project of the salvage movement. Within Sturtevant’s work, we are met with large ethnologies that serve as expert opinions on their contents, authored primarily by exterior anglophone perspectives. Sturtevant’s legacy, particularly his work in Florida and his uncanny rise to institutional acclaim, remains an understudied pivotal chapter in the history of anthropological research in relation to the formation of Native Studies.

As the following sections show, Sturtevant’s major influence at the time of his research diverted attention from the legal implications of termination policies, the question of federal recognition, and the novel economic models that the Seminole and Miccosukees. Throughout the introduction of the dissertation produced from these experiences, he details his own extended, parasitic, and exploitative method. His cultural preservationism blinded him to the most pressing, present-day matters facing the communities he observed, pointing to the increasing irrelevance of his own approach to the study of Native peoples.

**William Sturtevant and the Making of a Career**

*The matter goes even deeper. Despite the scope of the content, which includes, for example, a chapter on tribal traditions and records as well as attention to Indian languages throughout, these are very much narratives written from the outside.*

David J. Wishart, Review of the *Handbook of North American Indians*[^1]

The Seminole and Miccosukee communities in southern Florida have long stood as outliers in the broader narrative of “Indian and American relations”. Named an “unconquered people”, they have not only maintained their distinct reputation in the field of anthropology as once perhaps the most enclosed groups of Indigenous North Americans, but their experience in cultural tourism has also paved the way for the

multi-billion dollar tribal gaming industry. This writing, however, focuses on another story: that of the institutional reliance and personal career development of ethnographer William Sturtevant, in the wake of a burgeoning Indigenous-led economy. Eclipsed by his own professional interests, Sturtevant clung to an antiquated era of ethnographic technique influenced by racial science, where his later editorial role for the 20 volume, *Handbook of North American Indians*, would opaque the realities of the termination era and the activism of the American Indian Movement, functioning little more than to prolong a practice of ethnographic gaze well into the 21st c.

This is a story of self-importance and career maneuvers. Through a reading of the William C. Sturtevant papers housed at the Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives, we encounter an up-and-coming museum curator in the 1950s, during his graduate years at the Department of Anthropology at Yale University. We see his motivations and organizational approach within his dissertation, *The Mikasuki Seminole: Medical Beliefs and Practices*, as well as his genetic and physiological studies as out of focus against the backdrop of two tribal communities contending with the government’s era of termination. We also see that his field notes and writing reflect a strange presumptive practice laced with internal desires to capture a mysticism which is unlocatable. *An Anthropological Need.* Filling the Yale Peabody Museum with materials sourced from Native sites of entrepreneurship, Sturtevant is reluctant to unclench his fist on a period predicated on primitivism and genetic study, while institutions are intentionally downsizing their ethnographic research funding. As a young professional in the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), Sturtevant assisted in the finding of a genetic studies lab in the Yale Anthropology Department, making use of his graduate fieldwork to secure a sizable grant for the institution. These are the foundations of a later scholarship and ultimate project that posited that First Nations Peoples could be contained to a single volume of study and drastically shaped the field of the study of Native America from 1978 to 2008. Ultimately, his scholarship underestimated the agency of not only Seminole and Miccosukee communities to speak back to capitalistic structures, but he also mischaracterized all of Native North America, as a people relegated to study.

By tending to Sturtevant’s early scholarship, a scaffold for his life’s handbook project, is made evident, opening up insight into institutional fragility and dependence. The thread of commonality between his graduate

16 For a comprehensive history on Seminole gaming, see Jessica Cattelino’s *High Stakes* and Patsy West’s *Enduring Seminoles*.


and professional work is located in their totalizing ambition to describe and lump together distinct cultural practices under a single publication. Within his work, we are met with large ethnologies that serve as expert opinions on their contents, authored by an exterior anglophone perspective and in some cases through conversations with a single community member. In this way, these vats of scholarship, legitimized by a totalizing force of the academy are only able to stand as testaments to White American lament and a desire to access ancestral knowledge which can never be known from someone for whom it does not belong. Sturtevant’s ethnographic conservatism, coupled with his involvement in genetic studies and biobanking at Yale prolonged the arm of the Bureau of American Ethnology far beyond the government-funded project of the salvage movement.

To Render Extinct, the Salvage Movement

“Anthropologists have often assigned themselves the status of ‘expert’ over the cultural narratives and social histories of the first cultures of the Americas. As “experts” many anthropologists have neither respected Indigenous knowledge systems and community contributions nor addressed the intended and unintended impacts of anthropological research on those communities.”

- Dr. Akhil Gupta, President of the American Anthropological Association

In November of 2022, the American Anthropology Association issued a long delayed public statement, apologizing for the production of pseudoscientific theories that substantiated cultural and racial hierarchies and legitimized eugenic practices. The salvage movement was a near 100-year period in American history, during which Euro-American enthusiasts of Native American culture grew increasingly preoccupied with the perceived decline of Indigenous North Americans due to Western expansion. Focused on the creation, enforcement, and recording of difference, several hobbyists and enthusiasts began to “salvage” cultural materials that were considered at risk. This imperialist nostalgia wrapped up in mourning for a seemingly “traditional” society became an academic and government project, as well as a public phenomenon to collect and record materials related to communities actively undergoing vicious programs of termination and disbandment. Audra Simpson, anthropologist and citizen of the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Nation, redresses these methods of knowing, particularly, ethnological comparison, linguistic translation, ethnohistory, and ethnoscience, as a military project to theorize “ethnically-defined territorial spaces” toward legalized land dispossession. As a project of academic, physical, and spatial extraction of territories, cultural materials, and physical bodies, the salvage period is one of

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21 Ibid.
America’s most explicit acts of multi-linear violence.\textsuperscript{25} Massive in scale, the totality of the project and its spatial consequences are difficult to recount, as it contains hundreds of active characters, motivated by their particular impulses.\textsuperscript{26}

Most pressing to convey in this documentation practice is that it was funded as a series of government expeditions to fuel newly minted libraries and museums, such as the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale University (1866), the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Harvard (1866), the American Museum of Natural History (1869), and the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago (1894).\textsuperscript{27} This abrupt proliferation of institutions over a thirty-year period, doubling the national average at the time, closely relates to the development of key publications within academia, primarily \textit{On the Origin of Species} (1859) by Charles Darwin, \textit{Primitive Culture} (1871) authored by anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, \textit{The Mind of Primitive Man} (1911) by Franz Boas, and the formation of the Anthropology Society of London in 1863.\textsuperscript{28} The importance of the construction of the primitive against the rise of modern identity cannot be overstated, especially as it pertains to aesthetics, see \textit{Crime and Ornament} (1908) authored by Adolf Loos, \textit{Negro Sculpture} (1915) by Carl Einstein, and \textit{Savage Philosophy in Savage Minds} (1922) Lucien Lévy-Bruhl.

\section*{The Parasitic Ethnographer}

\textit{“One word from them about anything they perceived as a lapse in the maintenance of our tribal culture could permanently call into question our own history, and potentially undermine our tribal sovereignty.”}
- Margaret M.Bruchac, \textit{Savage Kin : Indigenous Informants and American Anthropologists}\textsuperscript{29}

Anthropological study was contingent upon individual Indigenous community members as interpreters, interviewees, and guides, whose knowledge as interlocutors are rarely if ever acknowledged as intellectual equals. Reflecting on Indigenous collaborators and their knowledge as foundational for the Euro-American project of ethnography, it is evident that the work of Native “informants” were not peripheral, but central to the formation of the field. Located within uncountable linear mileage of published works is an explicit narrative of dependency, where the intellect of Indigenous interlocutors is extracted for anthropological scholarship.

Without George Hunt, Franz Boas’ cataloging of material collections for the American Museum of Natural History would not have possible;

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. [ Also see McMillen, Christian W. \textit{Making Indian Law: The Hualapai Land Case and the Birth of Ethnohistory}. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007. McMillen details the Hualapai Tribe’s land case of 1941, where the tribe fought and won their land rights back from the U.S. government. This required the ushering in of a new form of study to prove previous access to lands, the field of ethnohistory. ]
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Beulah Tahamont’s perspectives were the threshold by which Arthur Park gained insight into Abenaki epistemologies;

the knowledge of Louis Billy Prince was fundamental to Julian Steward’s implementation of cultural ecology;

the generosity of Ely S. Parker, the highest-ranking American Indian in the US Army during the Civil War, was the conduit by which Lewis Henry Morgan began his career as an ethnographer;

Geronimo’s perspectives gave Frances Densmore a platform for her interests;

and Josie Billie’s willingness to speak with William Sturtevant secured his graduate research and paved the way for his future scholarship.\(^ {30} \)

**538 Pages with/through/about/and/ [at the expense of] a Main Informant**

In the summer of 1950, William Sturtevant began his fieldwork funded by the Yale Caribbean Anthropological Program, traveling to several Indian reservations in southern Florida.\(^ {32} \) In his dissertation, *The Mikasuki Seminole: Medical Beliefs and Practices*, he adopted a diaristic tone that offered insights into his “comprehensive ethnology” of a people he inscribed as profoundly different from Euro-Americans and the most undisturbed among Native North Americans.\(^ {33} \) To Sturtevant’s dismay, with each engagement, whether on the Dania or Big Cypress Reservation, Seminole

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and Miccosukee members avoided interacting with him. Sturtevant was continuously redirected to seek a specific community member, Josie Billie. There seemed to be a tacit consensus among those he spoke with that Billie alone would address outside cultural inquirers.

The initial interactions between Billie and Sturtevant were casual, reflective of Billie’s experience engaging with local tourists; they soon reveal, however their divergent perspectives. After their first recorded conversation, Billie politely declined Sturtevant’s compensation. Billie seemed unimpressed by Sturtevant and unconcerned by his desire to record their dialogue, while Sturtevant saw Billie as a novel figure bearing knowledge he was desperate to transcribe.

As the weeks progress, so too do their interactions. Sturtevant, overwrought with fascination with Billie, follows him, incessantly asking for information. Notably absent in the archive, the dissertation notes, and the document itself is any effort by Sturtevant to gain Billie’s consent to speak with or follow him. What remains in the archive are long winded question sets, accumulative notepads, receipts, and a concerning letter exchanges with a local hospital. Over multiple hours of “interviews” Sturtevant failed by his own accord to disclose his status as a student or his relationship with an institution. Their extended “interviews” would last for over a year.

In 1951, upon his return to the wetlands, Sturtevant’s focus shifted significantly from that of a general inquiry, toward a deeply invasive description of medicine and religious practices. His papers reveal annotations whose headings aim to distill the cultural ontology of the community. Despite previous academic skepticism concerning Billie, Sturtevant sources the entirety of his study with this single informant, who becomes crucial to his narrative.

34 Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 24.
35 Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 25.
36 Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 24.
37 Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 25.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
Billie was known for his selective engagement with enthusiastic outsiders. He set clear boundaries in “the field”, often redirecting ethnologists whose intentions were unclear. Billie’s interview tactics involved strategic maneuvers around exploitative and invasive lines of inquiry. His tendency to respond prematurely, in a misleading manner, or through jesting at the ethnographer further positioned him as unreliable. These skillful negations reveal the intense oddity of the ethnographer’s gaze, pointing to the reality that Sturtevant was an outsider: an uninformed visitor to the wetlands, seeking information for his own self-referential reasons.

Additionally, Billie commercialized a cultural commonplace - getting married. He turned the table on tourists and ethnographers who paid to witness an “Indian ceremony”. In these scenarios, tourists became the subject of observation and target of a sophisticated bait & switch. Visitors arrived at attractions looking for an authentic experience and were presented with performances tailored to their stereotype of a mythologized primitive character. Billie delivered to their expectation, while simultaneously inverting the visual dynamics at play. We might imagine the bride surveying the audience for her third wedding of the week, filled with humor,

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40 Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 59.

disappointment, distrust, indifference, or frustration, surrounded by her supporting cast in the production of everyday life.

Aside from the performances themselves, associated goods were available for sale, whose meanings transitioned once they were purchased by ethnologists and sent to enter the museum machine. Items located in the Yale Peabody Archive, sourced from sites of tourism, elucidate the phenomenon of value transfer, gaining academic and monetary capital when recontextualized as an assigned item in a museum’s collection. An ephemeral performance could not be maintained like an object in a museum, but it could be recorded and cited as evidence supporting an ethnographic narrative—despite the fact that, as a performance, it largely attended to the viewer’s own imaginary.

As Billie navigated this cross-cultural amalgamation of Euro-Americans infringing upon his community, Sturtevant continued to make demands on his time.\textsuperscript{46} Crucially, there wasn’t a way to kick Sturtevant out when his probing became a nuisance. Seminole and Miccosukee tribes had not yet been “recognized” by the Federal Government with sovereign rights over their property, and many lived within primarily Anglo-owned business establishments.\textsuperscript{47} Those living within tourist villages and in the wetlands did not have the authority to regulate the constant circulation of inquirers. With Sturtevant’s behavior more akin to stalking, Billie resorts to extreme measures of avoidance. He seeks a job from a White rancher, whose land is protected through a bill of sale and therefore privatized.\textsuperscript{48} While building western homes for the rancher, Billie negotiates a comparable pay to that of speaking with the ethnographer, in doing so, he also secures his own privacy. Sturtevant must refrain from interrogating him or conducting his fieldwork studies, while Billie is on the job site.

\textsuperscript{41} Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 59.
\textsuperscript{42} West, Enduring Seminoles, 109. | Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 60.
\textsuperscript{44} Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 64
\textsuperscript{45} Sturtevant, William C. "Letters." Box 2, William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, MD.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Sturtevant, Mikasuki Seminole, 64.
“Spent a couple of days while in Washington looking at Seminole material in the National Archives. The place is a gold-mine, and a delight to work in. I’ll have to spend a summer there some time.”

“I had several long talks with Mike Osceola, and got to know him better than ever before. I disagree with most of his political and social notions, but am full of admiration for his intelligence, shrewdness, and knowledge; before I’d rather discounted him, since it was (and still is) impossible to use him as an informant in any sense -- I never met a person so close-mouthed about what he knows.”

It became so difficult for Sturtevant to gather information from an array of sources on site in Florida that he left to attend court hearings in D.C., sitting as an onlooker to Seminole and U.S. affairs while continuing his ethnographic work. In a letter to fellow anthropologist, Louis Capron, he related his disappointment in how the Seminole representatives presented. From his perspective, those who testified acted inauthentically and in stark contrast to the demeanor he had witnessed in Florida. He discredited their awareness during the proceedings, naming George Osceola, a Seminole councilman, as a “most pathetic figure.”

After the hearings he spoke with Mike Osceola, a business owner and a relative of George, who shared insights on the termination policies the communities were negotiating. *explain what it is in relation to this specific community* In correspondence recounting these conversations, Sturtevant dismissed Mike’s assessment of the court proceedings and lamented his

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
refusal to act as an informant while remarking with apparent surprise on his intelligence. Writing Mike off as “impossible to use”, Sturtevant values him only for what he can gain, unable to see him in his full personhood, as a political representative and entrepreneur. In his utilitarian framework, he effectively “others” Mike and positions him as a source of raw materials for extraction and study, rather than an authority on his community’s legal proceedings. In the dissertation, Sturtevant omits the present and pressing issues of Indigenous governance at stake in the hearings and reinscribed the trope of primitivism, developing an obsessive, fetish-leaning text on curing, birth and death, magic, religion, and ethnobotany. Following the hearings, Sturtevant returned to his research at the “Vatican” of the salvage movement—the National Archives—writing of the site was a “gold-mine” for researchers.  

“..."This reluctance to work for me seems to have been due to ambivalence about revealing the more esoteric aspects of Seminole culture. The tendency became worse the longer we worked..."

Upon his return to Florida, he engages with Billie for the last time. Over the thirteen-month period of inquiry, Billie has become severely burdened from “intensive questioning” pertaining to medicine bundles, a

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52 Ibid.
together and the deeper we penetrated into his culture, the simplest way to avoid the difficulty was not to talk to me.”

“I did not dare renew the discussion of the medicine bundles until the last day I was on the reservation. At that time he answered the questions, as usual, although he was obviously uncomfortable about it.”

“he had two dreams which he interpreted as a warning not to tell me all his songs or even all the verses. In one dream he saw people trying to take his medicine away from him, but they could not. In the other, he entered some water and went 15 or 20 feet under the surface. When he emerged, he saw his camp with all his belongings spread out and two men setting fire to it, one of them building a long line of fire some distance away, and the other making a short line of fire on the same side of the camp but closer to it.”

“I offered to increase his pay from 75 cents to $1.00 an hour, in hope that this might have some effect... and he finally asked me why I wanted to know all these things.”

core element in the spiritual life of the community. After a series of canceled appointments and eventual compensated interactions to maintain contact, Billie completely avoids him.

Billie developed night terrors, triggered through this disrespectful pursuit, that made explicit the waking reality of Sturtevant’s capture and threat on his sanctity. Sturtevant’s unrelenting presence highlights the errors of his method, driven by his personal ambitions for his ethnographic study. Billie, on the final day he conversed with Sturtevant, asked him why he was seeking to know “all these things”. Sturtevant does not record his reply. Using Sturtevant’s own religion as a diversion to forgo his final questions, Billie states that “he was afraid to go against the bible, and that it was wrong and “just foolishness”. His newfound relationship with Christianity, fostered through his study of the Bible, had illuminated to him that it “was not right” to speak of such pagan practices.

Race, religion, and land claims blend in this space to take away agency, suggesting a continuity between the brute Doctrine of Discovery, the “discovery” of Florida by Europeans, and Sturtevant’s ethnographic project to “discover” the cultural traditions of two distinct communities. Sturtevant’s behavior, at best, reflects a lack of serious self-awareness coupled with faulty ethical boundaries, and at worst, exhibits a complete disrespect for Billie’s agency in representing his community or Mike’s authority as a financial leader and public-facing figure. Sturtevant perceives decline but mistakes its site—it is his own disciplinary approach, rather than the people he studies, that is becoming extinct in the modern world. This misperception raises doubts on any claims to authenticity that his dissertation bears witness to— as well as its later validity in the field of Native Studies. What is elicited of value, if anything, from Sturtevant’s graduate work, is a case study of an oddly persistent ethnographer who somehow rose to institutional heights, eclipsing in his study the rise of a novel Indigenous business model and adept legal activism of the community.

53 Pg 62
54 Medicine bundles in collections - a little history on this. Pg 25 and 62
55 Stu Diss, pg 65
56 Pg 62
57 Pg 63
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
Chronology of William Sturtevant’s Involvement with Genetic Studies at Yale

1951 / Sturtevant first collects genetic materials, ahead of John Buettner-Janusch (BJ) arrivals to Yale. (This is documented in correspondence to a blood bank in Miami, study results, and an essay written.)

1952 / Sturtevant writes, "How much Negro Ancestry Have the Florida Seminole" with results from his study.

1954 / Sturtevant submits his dissertation and accepts an assistant curatorial position at the Peabody.

1956 / Sturtevant moves to the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE)

1958 / Buettner-Janusch arrives at Yale.

Sturtevant and Buettner-Janusch (BJ) author a grant together, filed and signed by the Provost of Graduate Studies, Norman S. Buck in 1958, titled "Genetic Studies on the Blood of Primates". (Sturteant’s signature is not in the grant, but there are letters between him and BJ discussing the grant bibliography, deadlines, letters of recommendation, as well as what Stu needs to collect in Florida to assist the study.)

Grant is for a total of $38,709, in contemporary numerics $410,434.79 (approximate), this document is signed by the University Provost, Norman Buck, with Spencer F. Miller (assistant Treasurer) as the financier. This project extends beyond a specific professor’s interest.
The “Facilities Available” section of the grant reads: "Arrangements have been made with Mr. William Sturtevant, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. to collect venus blood from about 200 Seminole Indians in Florida. These samples will be collected during the Spring of 1959."

The “Travel” section reads: $1,200 "to collect specimens from Seminoles, Utes."

The “Other Expense” section reads: $2,000 "to deray expenses of professional anthropologists who will help collect data and bloods from Ute and other human groups."

The “Facilities Available” section also reads: "Yale University has guaranteed basic laboratory facilities: Since a new laboratory will be set up. Such laboratory will provide not only unique and important data, but also training and experience for students. I am frankly asking for support in order to continue my work now in progress and to expand it in the future at my new university."

Sturtevant then writes Cornelius Osgood, Curator at the Peabody, for a letter of recommendation, for his "Seminole field work, concentration on ethno-botany, agriculture, and the social formation to support a population genetic study in which J. Buettner-Janusch will cooperate."

Cornelius Osgood responds confirming that he will write any necessary letters for the grant and sends his good wishes. This confirms the support of a Curator at the Peabody. At this time, I am not certain if BJs scholarship influences Peabody displays.

1960 /
From here, a couple of articles pop up in the Yale News confirming the arrival of monkeys from Madagascar ranging in number to 25 - 55.

1961 - 1964 /
Scholarship Under a New Lab, "Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Yale University.” Publications begin to be authored in full or part by BJ.

A new lab name appears on essay publications - the "Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Yale University”, suggestive of the new lab that was mentioned in the grant.
Here is one on **Yale Orbis.** (1961)

An 1962 essay, "Biochemical Genetics of the Primates-Hemoglobins and Transferrins" is cited as being **supported by the exact same grant # and title, as well as directly funded by the Department of Anthropology at Yale.** See screenshot below:

"The work reported in this paper was supported by RG 6053 of the United States Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland; by G-12331 of the National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C.; and by the Ford Foundation Research Fund of the Department of Anthropology, Yale University, New Haven, Conn."

**Yale news** highlights BJ’s studies. (1963)

A two volume text, "Evolutionary and Genetic Biology of Primates", is published under the Lab of Physical Anthropology, with many collaborators of other Universities. Title page attached below. (1963)

1965 /
BJ moves his lab of now 100 - 200 lemurs and other primates, as well as human material to Duke.

**In Summary**
Sturtevant assists in building the financial foundations of a larger genetic project through his initial studies as a graduate student. Just within four years of graduating he successfully aided in the establishment of a new lab through his grant writing with BJ, request for letters of recommendation from Peabody staff, and fieldwork to provide the lab with genetic material.

Sturtevant reasons in is graduate essay:
"It is very probable that the Florida Seminole are much closer to the pre-contact aboriginal southeastern physical type than is another surviving Indian group - for this reason their genetic characteristics are of great interest to those interested in investigating the amounts of Indian ancestry in U.S. Negroes."

Because the project is supported by the Provost, Finance Officer, a Peabody curator, and there stories of the genetic accomplishments of BJ in the Yale News, as well as BJ’s new lab initiatives with student involvement (running of an undergraduate course in "Primate Genetics"), dozens of living primates on
campus, it’s clear the Anthropology Department, its chair and faculty, as well as University were aware of his work.

Sturtevant’s activities are within and outside of Yale, with support of the University and as a part of its curriculum. He would later write this research up during his time as an employee of the BAE.

Archives Accessed
Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum / Tribally owned and operated
National Anthropology Archives / Smithsonian
Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library
Florida Memory, State Library & Archives of Florida
Boca Raton Historical Society

Select Bibliography


Bieder, Robert E. "Review of Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology 1846-1910, by


