

## Peopling Natural History

Qureshi, Sadiah

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**Sadiah Qureshi**

## **Peopling Natural History**

Naturalists have long pondered over people. What makes us human? Do we belong to a universal family or are we divided into numerous species? How have we come into being? When did we appear in earth's history? By the mid-nineteenth century, European scholars interested in these questions tried to redefine the physical, social and cultural criteria used to classify humans.

European understandings of humanity's origins and place within the natural world had been deeply informed by the Biblical account of Creation. God created Adam and Eve, who were expelled from Eden to beget humankind, and everyone now living is descended from them through Noah by virtue of having survived the Great Deluge. Thus, humans have been customarily viewed as a single family with a custodial role in nature.

Drawing primarily on British and American examples, this essay explores the making of humans into natural historical subjects. It argues that natural history, performance and anthropology were linked through a continual exchange between world fairs and museums and the emerging apparatus of disciplinary publications, institutions and professional practitioners. Recognising the importance of displayed peoples for natural historical research does not entail that the shows were 'human zoos'. This catchy designation is commonly used but misleading. Displayed peoples were always interpreted within multiple contexts such as broader debates on enslavement, human development, moral philosophy, imperial politics and natural history. Likewise, displayed peoples appeared in museums, theatres, art galleries, public garden, world fairs, museums and zoos. Historians need to attend precisely to this geographic diversity. The 'peopling' of natural history is worth recapturing because of its lasting significance for theories of race, the emergence of anthropology as a discipline and for histories of the human sciences more broadly.

### **The Riddle of our Ancestors**

In Europe, nineteenth-century debates on humanity's past were dominated by discussions of antiquity, evolution and descent. Up until the early nineteenth century, humans were usually considered to be late arrivals on the earth. Their history was conflated with that of literate peoples and dated using Biblical chronologies.<sup>1</sup> The brief human past was radically revised between the 1820s and 1860s. Claims to have found ancient human remains from the 1820s onwards were consistently met with scepticism and extreme caution and both stone tools and fossils were

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Manias, *Race, Science, and the Nation: Reconstructing the Ancient Past in Britain, France and Germany* (London: Routledge, 2013).

incorporated into established understandings of human history.<sup>2</sup> For example, in 1833 Philippe-Charles Schmerling found two human skulls in a cave in Liege, Belgium. He claimed that the remains were ancient fossils. His medical education, scholarly publications and insistence that he had personally excavated undisturbed cave sites lent weight to his case. Nonetheless, his critics countered that the bones were aged but not ancient. In 1856 a partial skull, thigh bones and other fragments were discovered above the banks of the Neander River, near Düsseldorf, Germany (later interpreted as the remains of an unknown human, fig. 1). As further finds accumulated in the 1840s and early 1850s, murmurs of antiquity continued to fascinate geologists, ethnologists, philologists and historians. The religious consequences of rejecting a Biblically dated human past were profound and considered carefully for decades. Notions of human antiquity also depended upon accepting Earth had a considerably longer history than previously imagined. Thus, fossil finds alone did not ensure the rewriting of the human past; rather, achieving a consensus on human antiquity depended upon interpreting ancient remains within newly established visions of 'deep time'.<sup>3</sup>

The discovery of an undisturbed cave in Brixham proved significant for debates on human antiquity.<sup>4</sup> The cave's untouched floor was peeled back under careful geological supervision to yield heaps of animal bones and seven flint tools. Previous sites were not pristine or were excavated by men who, despite their expertise, lacked formal affiliations with elite societies that might have invested them with sufficient authority to validate claims. The finds prompted renewed investigations of other sites in Europe and a new consensus quickly emerged that humans had a 'prehistory'. The immediate controversy over human evolution is well known within the European context and, increasingly, a global one, but the importance of antiquity is often neglected.<sup>5</sup> Yet the vast new timescales of human development made claims regarding human evolution substantially more plausible. Charles Darwin began the *Descent of Man* (1871), his first extended discussion of human evolution, by expressing his debt to the fact that the 'high antiquity of man has recently been demonstrated...this is the indispensable basis for understanding his origin. I shall, therefore, take this conclusion for granted'.<sup>6</sup>

Simultaneously, naturalists deliberated on the issue of human descent. The predominant position always remained that humans were a single species, but marginalised dissenters remained.

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<sup>2</sup> The best summary is Martin Rudwick, *Worlds before Adam: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Reform* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 407–422.

<sup>3</sup> Rudwick's work remains the authoritative guide.

<sup>4</sup> A. Bowdoin von Riper, *Men among the Mammoths: Victorian Science and the Discovery of Human Prehistory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860–1950* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013) shows that some Muslim theologians embraced evolutionary ideas in an effort to prove that Islam was in accord with modern science, more accommodating than Christianity and a rational religion against racialized accusations of superstitious ignorance.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871), 3.

In Europe, as early as 1655, Isaac de la Peyrère's *Prae-Adamitae* suggested that a human race had existed before Adam's creation and had been the progenitors of a different species.<sup>7</sup> Even those rejecting la Peyrère's daring proposition insisted that racial variation was both sufficient and necessary to cleave humans apart. For instance, the French physiologist Marie Jean-Pierre Flourens argued that white skin consisted of 'three distinguish distinct laminae or membranes—the derm, and two epiderms', whilst black skin had an additional 'two layers, the external of which is the seat of pigmentum or colouring matter of the Negroes.'<sup>8</sup> Charles Darwin believed that the 'most weighty' argument in favour of unified descent stemmed from the lack of consensus on this very issue: 'Man has been studied more carefully than any other organic being, and yet there is the greatest possible diversity amongst capable judges whether he should be classed as a single species or race, or as two (Virey), as three (Jacquinot), as four (Kant), five (Blumenbach), six (Buffon), seven (Hunter), eight (Agassiz), eleven (Pickering), fifteen (Bory St. Vincent), sixteen (Desmoulins), twenty-two (Morton), sixty (Crawfurd), or as sixty-three, according to Burke'.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, Darwin amalgamated authors who insisted that humans ought to be divided into multiple species (e.g. Virey and Morton) with those who proposed a lower order difference into races (e.g. Blumenbach). Darwin's own explanations of racial variation were rooted in his theory of sexual selection.<sup>10</sup>

Between the 1840s and early 1870s, scholars interested in debates on human antiquity, descent and variation transformed the natural history of race. Most obviously, interest in humans fissured into new disciplines. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, natural history, philology, anatomy, theology and history all contributed to studies of the human past. By the later nineteenth century, the sciences of archaeology and anthropology had been firmly established across Europe and become home to studies of fossilised humans and racial variation.<sup>11</sup> In Britain, the Aborigines' Protection Society was founded in 1837 in the aftermath of the 1836 report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aborigines. The report detailed extensive colonial violence and argued for British imperialism to become a more benign form of custodianship. In 1843, a breakaway faction founded the Ethnological Society of London and in 1863 a further splintering led to the emergence of the Anthropological Society of London. After years of fractious, albeit often overstated, rivalry, the latter two societies amalgamated to form the Anthropological Institute of

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<sup>7</sup> David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Marie-Jean-Pierre Flourens, 'On the Natural History of Man' *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, 27 (1839), 351–58.

<sup>9</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1871), 1:226.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Endersby, 'Darwin on Generation, Pangenesis and Sexual Selection', *Cambridge Companion to Darwin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 69–91.

<sup>11</sup> Manias, *Race, Science, and the Nation* and George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

Great Britain and Ireland (founded 1871). Their publications included the *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* (1848–56, new series 1869–70), the *Ethnological Journal* (1848–66), and *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* (1861–69). These institutions and their periodicals brought together formative discussions on anthropology's methodologies, intellectual scope and practitioners with significant repercussions for the natural history of humans.

Up until the early to mid-nineteenth century, European scholars interested in the natural history of humans were often natural historians, physicians, philologists and colonial officials steeped in humanistic research methods; this began changing with newer practitioners trained in zoology, anatomy and medicine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Early ethnologists frequently drew on the writings of natural historians, travellers, missionaries, philologists and colonial officers for detailed information on peoples they may never have encountered personally. In the later nineteenth century, new practitioners increasingly distanced themselves from their forebears with attempts to establish professional positions and freshly demarcate what counted as anthropologically useful knowledge. Alfred Cort Haddon was appointed to a lectureship in ethnology at the University of Cambridge in 1900. Three years later his presidential address to the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland eschewed early ethnologists and sought newly 'trained observers and fresh investigations in the field'.<sup>12</sup> Ten years later, his colleague on the 1898 expedition to the Torres Strait and future doctor to shell-shocked soldiers of World War one, William H. H. Rivers continued to argue for the importance of 'intensive work'.<sup>13</sup> Dismissing earlier generations was a highly partisan strategy for garnering prestige and securing funding for emerging professionals. Subsequently, histories of anthropology are often narrowly focused on the 'rise' of fieldwork.<sup>14</sup> Although useful in highlighting the increasing importance placed on in situ, extended observations as with so many other naturalists and collectors in the field, this emphasis led to a neglect of the substantial research that continued to be done in European and American metropolises throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast, it is worth revisiting how anthropologists conducted research closer to home.

## The Natural History of Performance

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<sup>12</sup> A. C. Haddon, 'President's Address: Anthropology, its Position and Needs,' *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 33 (1903), 11–23, especially 19–22.

<sup>13</sup> William Rivers, 'Report on Anthropological Research Outside America', in *Reports on the Present Condition and Future Needs of the Science of Anthropology*, ed. W. H. R. Rivers, A. E. Jenks, and S. G. Morley, Carnegie Publication 200 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1913), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Older histories inaccurately describe the replacement of 'armchair anthropology' in favour of fieldwork. See Fredrik Barth, et al. *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French and American Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and George W. Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888–1951* (London: Athlone, 1995). Compare with the continuities traced in Efram Sera-Shriar, *The Making of British Anthropology, 1813 to 1871* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013).

Foreign people have been imported from their homelands to be exhibited abroad for centuries.<sup>15</sup> On returning from the New World, Columbus presented two Arawaks to the Spanish court, where they soon died.<sup>16</sup> Shakespeare is said to have been inspired to create the pitiful Caliban for *The Tempest* after having seen an exhibition of Native Americans.<sup>17</sup> Missionaries have often displayed converts as evidence of their success. For instance, in 1804 the London Missionary Society displayed three Khoekhoe converts, John and Martha van Rooy and Martha Arendse, alongside their missionary Mr Kircherer in local congregations.<sup>18</sup> Early displays featured individuals or small groups who had travelled to foreign metropolises by voyagers, missionaries and entrepreneurs. In the nineteenth century, displayed peoples were imported to order and exhibited in ever larger groups, sometimes featuring dozens of performers in the world fairs of Britain, Continental Europe, the USA, South Africa, India, Australia and Japan. Just as such shows became more frequent and commercially successful, managers and anthropologists expended considerable labour into making performers into specimens.

Sara Baartman was the first and most famous person to be exhibited as an exemplar of ethnic alterity in nineteenth-century London.<sup>19</sup> Born in the 1770s on the South African frontier, she eventually found employment in Cape Town as a maid. By 1808, she was being exhibited at Cape Town's hospital by her employer Hendrick Cesars. He was approached by the surgeon Alexander Dunlop who wanted to display Baartman in England. All three set sail in April 1810. In London's Piccadilly, customers paid two shillings to poke and prod her body whilst she wore a dress so tight that her bosom and behind were 'as visible as if the said female were naked'.<sup>20</sup> The abolitionist Zachary Macaulay was so convinced that Baartman had been enslaved he initiated a case against Dunlop at the court of King's Bench. Dunlop argued that Baartman had signed a contract and so consented. Baartman was interviewed and provided with a Dutch translation of the contract. By November, the case had been dismissed and patrons kept flocking to the show. By 1814, Baartman was being exhibited in Paris under new management. She was examined by the men of science at the *Jardin des plantes*, where she appeared naked before them but refused to allow an intrusive examination of her labia. Baartman died in late December 1815. The leading French comparative

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<sup>15</sup> Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire and Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> See the timeline in Coco Fusco, 'The Other History of Intercultural Performance', in *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995), 37–63.

<sup>17</sup> Alden T. Vaughan, 'Shakespeare's Indian: The Americanization of Caliban', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988), 137–53.

<sup>18</sup> Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Biography and a Ghost Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Crais and Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus* and Sadiya Qureshi, 'Displaying Sara Baartman, the 'Hottentot Venus'', *History of Science*, 42 (2004), 233–57.

<sup>20</sup> Court Records, reprinted in Zoë Strother, 'Display of the Body Hottentot', in Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Showbusiness* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1–61, 43.

anatomist Georges Cuvier obtained her corpse, dissected it, made a full body cast, preserved her brain and pudenda and removed her skeleton. His report of the procedure is laced with voyeuristic triumph and veers between describing Baartman as an intelligent woman able to speak several languages and someone he is convinced exemplifies the lowest form of humanity.<sup>21</sup> Many people followed in Baartman's footsteps from their homelands onto stages in strange lands and, all too often, into natural history collections. They were exhibited in commercial exhibitions at precisely the same time as scholars fought to revise the meaning of 'race'.

In the 1840s, managers began to advertise such shows as explicitly relevant to scientific debates. Posters, promotional pamphlets, newspaper reviews and playbills all proclaimed that, for a fee, one could see foreign peoples who had 'Just Arrived' and were 'THE FIRST OF THEIR TRIBE EVER SEEN IN EUROPE' or 'Two New Races of People, the First of either Race ever discovered'.<sup>22</sup> Reviewing the 1847 exhibition of San prompted the *Theatrical Journal* felt that, since they were a 'diminished, and diminishing, species', 'the naturalist as well as the philosopher must look on them with interest' (fig. 2).<sup>23</sup> Similar claims continued into the later nineteenth century. In 1884, the Great Farini exhibited a group of San as the 'Earthmen'. The *Era* felt that 'Everyone should see these Earthmen; they constitute an exhibition without any repulsive features, and interesting alike to the ethnologist and the general public.'<sup>24</sup> Advertising tried to conjure excitement and urgency by emphasising how recently performers had arrived, how soon they would leave and their novelty. The commercial viability of displaying foreign peoples may seem obvious. Yet, a city like London was home to significant immigrant populations and commentators frequently claimed that walking the streets of London was enough to witness global human diversity. By showcasing what made performers unique and different from the resident immigrant populations in bigger metropolises, promotional materials created a clientele willing to pay for seeing ethnic difference.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, promotional material that emphasised the value of the shows for rational and recreation forged strong associations between the shows and the natural history of race.

Many scholars interested in human difference took up opportunities to examine displayed peoples. In the early 1840s, George Catlin exhibited groups of Native Americans who were examined by phrenologists such as Mr Bally. The science of Phrenology divided the mind into numerous

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<sup>21</sup> The body cast and skeleton were exhibited in Parisian museums until objections led to their removal in the 1980s. South Africans launched a repatriation campaign in 1995. Eight years later, Baartman's state funeral was held on National Women's Day in August 2002. Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, 142–169.

<sup>22</sup> Handbill for the 'Botocudos', 1822, Human Freaks 4[59], and entrance ticket for the 'Aztecs', 1853, Tickets Show Places 18, John Johnson Collection, University of Oxford.

<sup>23</sup> 'Chit-Chat', *Theatrical Journal*, 8 (1847), 239.

<sup>24</sup> 'Farini's Earthmen', *Era*, 27 September 1884, 11.

<sup>25</sup> On London's ethnic diversity see Nick Merriman, ed. *The Peopling of London: Fifteen Thousand Years of Settlement from Overseas* (London: Museum of London, 1993).

faculties. Each corresponding to a moral or intellectual trait, such as 'Pride' or 'Affection', that resided in specific physical locations of the brain.<sup>26</sup> Devotees believed that the shape of the skull directly reflected the maturity of each faculty and could be mapped to reveal a person's character. Bally made plaster casts of the Anishinaabe performers' heads.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, a Parisian phrenologist begged for an audience with the Bakhoje. Jim was the first performer to be examined. Afterwards, Jim reclaimed the favour and scrutinized the doctor's head.<sup>28</sup> In 1847, the Edinburgh anatomist Robert Knox began his season of lectures on race accompanied by a group of San, or 'Bosjesman', at Exeter Hall. After his lecture, the group went among crowd demonstrating their weapons and accepting gifts from Knox's patrons.<sup>29</sup> The lecture was almost certainly the basis for his chapter on the 'Dark Races of Man' in the notorious *Races of Men* (1850).<sup>30</sup> In 1853, Maximo and Bartola, exhibited as the 'Aztec Lilliputians', were proclaimed to be the last remnants of the ancient Aztecs rescued from the lost city of Iximaya (fig. 3). They were exhibited alongside Flora and Martinus, who were marketed as 'the Earthmen Children' (fig. 4). All four drew the attention of doctors and ethnologists. Contemporaries agreed that Maximo and Bartola were singular children but were sceptical of the fantastical claims regarding their origins and were more interested in their development. Both children almost certainly had severe mental impairments. They were examined by Richard Cull, secretary of the ESL, and Richard Owen, palaeontologist and comparative anatomist. They co-wrote a paper in the *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*. The men were keen to denounce the pair's authenticity and establish whether the pair were in fact 'idiots'.<sup>31</sup> Martinus died shortly after appearing with Maximo, and Bartola and Flora's deaths followed in 1864. Flora was dissected by William H. Flower, the conservator of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, and James Murie, a prosector for the Zoological Society of London, and was compared to Baartman throughout.<sup>32</sup> As late as 1883, a group of Krenak were being promoted as an 'Anthropological Exhibition' in Piccadilly Hall.<sup>33</sup> Thus public lectures, private viewings, dissections and articles became the technologies that materially incorporated performers' bodies into scientific practice.

One of the most important uses of performers' bodies in for scientific research was made by

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, *Outlines of the Phrenological System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim* (Edinburgh: William Aitchison, 1819).

<sup>27</sup> George Catlin, *Adventures of the Ojibbeway and Ioway Indians in England, France, and Belgium*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (London: Published by the Author, 1852), I: 120–21.

<sup>28</sup> Catlin, *Adventures of the Ojibbeway and Ioway Indians*, I: 247–250.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, 'Now Exhibiting at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly: The Bosjesmans, or Bush People...' (London: Chapman, Elcoate, 1847).

<sup>30</sup> Knox, *Races of Men*, 145–241.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Owen and Richard Cull, 'A Brief Notice of the Aztec Race, and a Description of the so-Called Aztec Children', *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, 4 (1856), 120–37.

<sup>32</sup> W. H. Flower and J. Murie, 'Account of the Dissection of the Bushwoman', *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology*, 1 (1867), 189–208, 198.

<sup>33</sup> Exhibition poster, Evanion collection, Evan.344, British Library.



Robert Gordon Latham, a philologist and ethnologist, who created a museum dedicated to the natural history of race within the new Crystal Palace at Sydenham.<sup>34</sup> Built in the wake of the 1851 Great Exhibition, the new palace was twice as large as the original, and showcased historical development from antediluvian monsters to modern industrialisation. Latham curated the ethnological material for the 'court' devoted to natural history, alongside Edward Forbes, a professor of botany at King's College, London. The court featured tableaux of flora, fauna and model peoples from the Americas, Africa, China, India, Australia and Pacific Islands. The displays for Africa included a group of Zulus using sorcery to locate a lost article, and a San family looking out over the horizon. The models were made as lifelike as possible, painted in flesh hues, with hair and individual facial features. Crucially, many were plaster casts from living subjects, including the Zulus, Flora and Martinus who were exhibited in London in 1853. Latham hoped the court would serve as a small-scale museum of natural history in which humans were thoroughly embedded.

On the whole, press reports were positive. The 'ethnological collection is nearly perfect', noted the *Lady's Newspaper*, and the 'life-like appearance of these figures is remarkable. ...It will instruct both the well-read man and woman, and the young child. Nothing, however, but a visit to this department can convey an adequate idea of its excellence and value.'<sup>35</sup> Latham's handbook to the court defined ethnology as the science of 'different varieties of the human species', and provided readers with detailed explanations of the tableaux and an account of debates on the cause of human skin pigmentation (fig. 5).<sup>36</sup> Given that over 1.3 million people visited Sydenham in the first year alone, the guidebook is likely to have been one of the most widely-read ethnological works of the 1850s. In 1866, a fire reduced the models to ashes. The *Anthropological Review* regretted the loss and hoped that a new collection, based on the Gallery of Anthropology in Paris, could be founded.<sup>37</sup> Latham's court of natural history made performers' bodies into publicly available specimens that were encountered by an extraordinary number of people. Moreover, the museum was open during the precise period in which ethnologists and anthropologists were debating the remit of their interests in humans.

### Anthropologists' Visions

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, world fairs provided particularly important opportunities for research. In 1886, the Colonial and Indian Exhibition hosted one of the largest cohorts of anthropologists at a British exhibition (fig. 6). Based in South Kensington, the exhibition explicitly

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<sup>34</sup> Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 193-208.

<sup>35</sup> 'A Visit to the Crystal Palace', *Lady's Newspaper*, 10 June 1854, 365.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Gordon Latham and Edward Forbes, *A Hand Book to the Courts of Natural History Described* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1854), 6.

<sup>37</sup> 'Anthropological News', *Anthropological Review*, 5 (1867), 240-56.

celebrated the British Empire, especially India, as a source of goods, colonial labour and imperial pride. 89 living 'natives' worked as shopkeepers, artisans and servants throughout the event (fig. 7). Several meetings of the Anthropological Institute were held at the exhibition. Anthropologists heard lectures on artefacts and peoples before being led around the site for closer inspections.<sup>38</sup> A significant number of articles drawing on research conducted at the exhibition appeared in the Institute's Journal in 1887 and 1888. In the 1889 *expositions universelles* in Paris, numerous 'native villages' were constructed in the shadow of the Eiffel tower (fig. 8).<sup>39</sup> In 1893, the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago hosted an international congress on anthropology. The human material was primarily curated by Frederick Ward Putnam, a Harvard Professor and Curator of Archaeology and Ethnology, who had originally campaigned for its inclusion.<sup>40</sup> William J. McGee, the first president of the American Anthropological Association, curated all the villages of displayed peoples for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. As well as displaying 3,000 people, a Field School was established at this exhibition and was run by Frederick Starr, the first lecturer in anthropology at the University of Chicago, who spent three weeks giving lectures, supervising independent research and holding practical demonstrations.<sup>41</sup> The course was officially accredited by the University of Chicago, and earned the institution an award in recognition of the value of the Field School from the exposition's organizers. World fairs not only staged race for the public, they also provided ideal, albeit short-lived, opportunities for scientific research and collaboration.

Despite anthropologists' best efforts, they were often left frustrated that more could not be done. Francis Galton, the eugenicist and president of the Anthropological Institute, identified three problems with conducting research at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, despite its being a 'great event of anthropological interest'. The 'chief difficulty' arose from the time constraints on conducting research at an event that only lasted a few months. Galton also considered the displays insufficient for a comprehensive anthropological survey of the Empire's subjects. For instance, the Canadian displays focused almost entirely on settlers, with the material devoted to the 'whole of the Red Indian' occupying 'no more horizontal space than would be afforded by a moderately-sized dinner table.'<sup>42</sup> The frustrations blossomed into discussions on founding an Imperial Institute. Galton

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<sup>38</sup> Francis Galton, 'Opening Remarks by the President', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 16 (1887), 175–77.

<sup>39</sup> Timothy Mitchell, 'The World as Exhibition', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31(1989), 217–236 and, for the 1930s see Benoît de l'Estoile, 'From the Colonial Exhibition to the Museum of Man: An Alternative Genealogy of French Anthropology', *Social Anthropology*, 11 (2003): 341–61.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Brinkman, 'Frederic Ward Putnam, Chicago's Cultural Philanthropists, and the Founding of the Field Museum', *Museum History Journal*, 2 (2009), 73–100, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, 'Taking Ethnological Training Outside the Classroom: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition as Field School', *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 2 (2006), 69–102.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Galton, 'Opening Remarks by the President', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 16 (1887), 189–90, 189.

was keen and proposed that a 'an Ethnological Museum of the races in the British Dominions' ought to feature prominently.<sup>43</sup> The campaign failed. British anthropologists had contented with the British Museum's reorganized Ethnographical Gallery, which followed the establishment of the Natural History Museum in London (1881) and Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum (1884).

American colleagues shared similar hopes and challenges. The World's Fair Congress of Anthropology, held in Chicago in 1893, was assembled too hurriedly for it to 'rise fully to the dignity expected of an international congress' with fewer international participants than originally envisioned.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, it featured figures such as Harvard's Frederic Ward Putnam, Franz Boas, later known as the pioneer of relativistic American anthropology, Otis T. Mason, curator of anthropology at the National Museum, and D. G. Brinton, as the President of the Congress. The Congress dedicated many sessions to considering the research value of the artefacts brought together by the fair. As early as 1890, Putnam had dreamed of a 'great anthropologic museum' to house the collections he had amassed, and so boost the professional standing of American anthropology. At the Congress, his colleagues sensed the 'opportunity of a century'.<sup>45</sup> Unlike Galton's dashed hopes, Chicago's anthropological displays found a permanent home when the Field Columbian Museum opened in 1894. Initially, Putnam's vision was only partially realised. The city's donors wanted the museum to be a permanent tribute to the entire fair. The original museum contained substantial sections devoted to themes such as the industrial arts, transport and agriculture that fell outside the boundaries of natural history. By 1910 the Museum had become an institution devoted to natural history and anthropology, after significant restructuring of the collections. In 1905, the new name of the Field Museum of Natural History was adopted.<sup>46</sup> To this day, visitors can visit dinosaur skeletons, stuffed animals and ethnographic artefacts all under one roof. The continued inclusion of indigenous art and artefacts in the museum is a jarring testament to the racialized hierarchies that the fairs helped create and that remain with us.

## Conclusion

Scientific research on displayed peoples has been consistently overlooked or misrepresented in contemporary histories. Many have touched upon scientific interest in displayed peoples within the broader context of world fairs and the history of anthropology; nonetheless, such work is dismissed as pseudoscience, even in otherwise impressive accounts of anthropologists curating world fairs,

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<sup>43</sup> Francis Galton, 'Address Delivered of the Anniversary Meeting of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, January 25th, 1887', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 16 (1887), 387–402, 391.

<sup>44</sup> W. H. Holmes, 'The World's Fair Congress of Anthropology', *American Anthropologist*, 6 (1893), 423–434, 423.

<sup>45</sup> Holmes, 'World's Fair Congress', 426.

<sup>46</sup> Brinkman, 'Frederic Ward Putnam', 97.

conducting research on site and using the fairs as training grounds.<sup>47</sup> These analyses perpetuate the damaging assumption that science cannot create, be entrenched in, and informed by, racism. Yet, modern historians have also misread the claims of some nineteenth-century practitioners. For example, in 1885 the President of the Ethnological Society of London, John Connolly, declared that ‘specimens showing the progress made in arts or in science among rude people and in remote regions, and even the natives of such regions...have been merely regarded as objects of curiosity or of unfruitful wonder...’<sup>48</sup> By 1900, even in a new era of institutionalised anthropology, W. H. R. Rivers was frustrated that ‘At present, little or nothing is done to utilise the anthropological material which is thus brought to our doors, although in other countries, and especially in Germany, much useful work has been done’.<sup>49</sup> These laments were never neutral claims. The polemics were intended to rally colleagues into making even more systematic investigations of displayed peoples than the investigations we know took place across Europe, America and in Britain. Rivers, for instance, noted with admiration the concerted efforts to investigate displayed peoples under the auspices of the Berlin Anthropological Society and its head, Rudolf Virchow.<sup>50</sup> Connolly, Rivers and their peers sought to bolster the institutional and intellectual standing of their discipline by campaigning to become the *sole* arbiters of racial authenticity. In doing so, they deliberately overlooked the shows’ importance for broader public engagement with the natural history of race. Yet, even without desired exclusivity, anthropologists expended considerable labour in making use of exhibitions.

Displayed peoples underpinned anthropology’s foundations in numerous ways. Firstly, the shows provided both the lay and the learned with opportunities to participate in debates on the nature of being human. Lay engagement has been particularly misunderstood as vulgar misunderstanding or uncritical consumption of managers’ promotional claims. Yet patrons were frequently provided with significant resources, often drawn from travel literature, to inform their visits, and consistently encouraged to consider performers as exemplars of human development.<sup>51</sup> Secondly, exhibitions often provided possibilities for formal scientific research. Whether examining the clothing, weapons or other artefacts imported for the shows or examining performers’ bodies, scholars sought to use the shows for their research. Such opportunities were particularly important

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<sup>47</sup> Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 307, 321, and 348 and Pascal Blanchard, et al., eds. *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, trans. Teresa Bridgeman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> John Connolly, *The Ethnological Exhibitions of London* (London: John Churchill, 1855).

<sup>49</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, ‘[Communication from Dr. W. H. R. Rivers Regarding Exhibition of Human Specimens]’, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 30 (1900), 6–7, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Anti-Humanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001) and Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck’s Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 155–182.

for first-hand research on physical anthropology and language. Thirdly, much of this research was subsequently published in prestigious journals such as the *Lancet*, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* or *American Anthropologist*. Thus, performers were inscribed into broader experimental and publishing practices integral to modern scientific research. Fourthly, the shows and world fairs provided both the impetus for establishing permanent museums of anthropology and the nuclei of their founding collections. Even when unsuccessful, calls for such museums were important indications of the value anthropologists placed on material collections. When fruitful, as with the Field Museum, such institutions had a profound and lasting impact on the tendency to view some human cultures as of natural historical interest. Finally, pleas to use the shows for research and to found museums were often deeply rooted in concerns about educating current and future cohorts of practitioners. Hailing from diverse backgrounds in medicine, zoology and anatomy, early anthropologists were acutely aware of a lack of systematic and shared means of enskilling the next generation and, through their campaigns, sought to sustain the long-term viability of their new discipline. By informing the intellectual debates on human variation and methodology and playing a role in research and training, displayed peoples helped shape anthropological research.

The history of natural history needs to be peopled. Naturalists' interest in humans and their pasts shaped broader debates on who was considered human and how differences between peoples were racialized. It is easy to forget that humans have been the agents and subjects of natural history, partly because we are so accustomed to the consequences of disciplinary fissures between natural history and anthropology. Yet recapturing the collection, display, dissection and inscription of humans into natural history texts provides a way of materially tracing how hierarchies of human worth were created.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, who counted as human was of utmost concern to naturalists in the nineteenth century; as we have seen, displayed peoples were often compared to animals and placed on the lower spectrum of human development. Yet, such comparisons underscored that the 'line of demarcation between man and the lower order of animals' was both real and 'very slight indeed.'<sup>53</sup> This profound interest in performers' bodies was well known. Tellingly, an exhibited Zulu was once said to have recalled being taken to see the 'doctoring houses' where cadavers were 'cut up and dried.' He remembered that when 'we were at the door we saw dead men standing up as if they were alive, so we feared to go in.' When asked why the English cut up their dead, he recalled: 'I heard that the doctors were the people who liked dead men, and that if the graves were not taken care of their people stole the bodies for them; we were also told that the man of our party who died at Berlin was only buried because we were there, and that he was afterwards taken out and cut up,

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<sup>52</sup> Ben Shephard, *Kitty and the Prince* (London: Profile Books, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> 'Chit-Chat', *Theatrical Journal*, 8 (1847), 239.

to see if he was made inside like the white people'.<sup>54</sup> The Zulu's recollections were reported by a missionary. Whether they are the words of a traveller who survived or the missionary, they confirm that, dead or alive, people mattered to naturalists.

### Further Reading

1. Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire and Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2011).
2. Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2013).
3. Anne O'Connor, *Finding Time for the Old Stone Age: A History of Palaeolithic Archaeology and Quaternary Geology in Britain, 1860-1960: A History of Palaeolithic Archaeology and Quaternary Geology in Britain, 1860-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
4. Chris Manias, *Race, Science, and the Nation: Reconstructing the Ancient Past in Britain, France and Germany* (London: Routledge, 2013).
5. Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).
6. Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Biography and a Ghost Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
7. Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Anti-Humanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
8. Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).
9. Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: from the Crusades to the twentieth century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

### Image Captions

1. Neanderthal Skull fragments, from T. H. Huxley, *Man's Place in Nature* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1894), 180-81. Author's collection.
2. 'The Bosjesman, at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly', *Illustrated London News*, 12 June 12, 1847, 381. Author's collection.
3. Poster advertising Maximo and Bartola's wedding breakfast. By kind permission of the Wellcome Library, London.
4. Cover of Robert Gordon Latham and Edward Forbes, *A Hand Book to the Courts of Natural*

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<sup>54</sup> 'A South African Native's Picture of England', *Munger Africana Library Notes*, 9 (1979): 8–19, 17.

*History Described* (1854). Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library.

5. *Colonial and Indian Exhibition Daily Programme* (London: William, Clowes and Sons, 1886). Author's collection.
6. 'Sketches at the Paris Exhibition', *Illustrated London News*, 10 April 1889, 187.