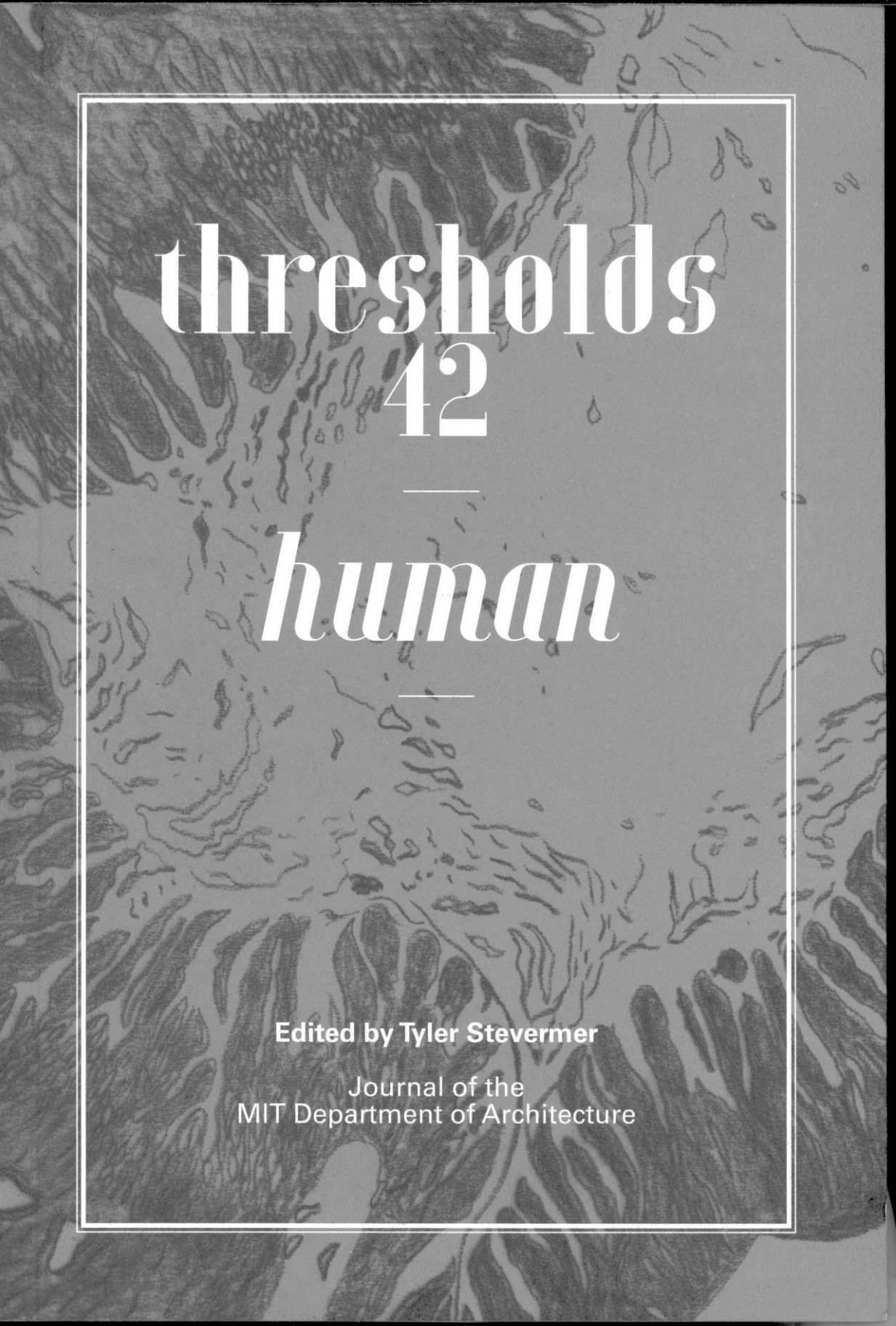


The background of the entire cover is a complex, abstract, and organic pattern. It consists of numerous dark, irregular, vein-like shapes that branch out and interconnect, creating a dense, textured appearance. The pattern is rendered in shades of dark gray and black against a lighter gray background. The overall effect is reminiscent of a microscopic view of a material or a complex network diagram.

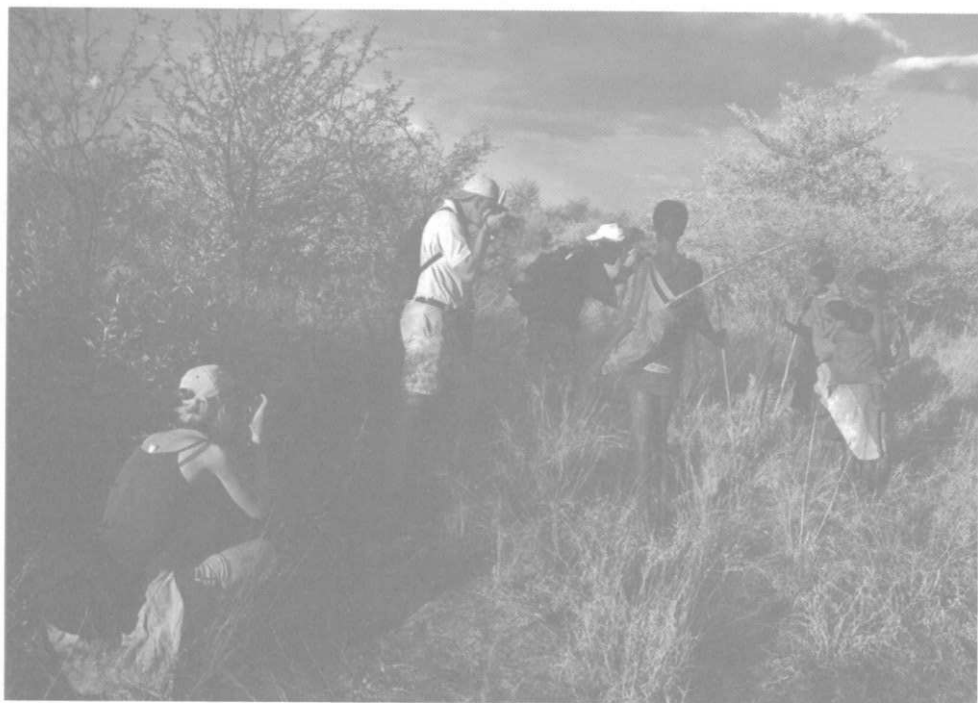
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ARE WE *HOMO SAPIENS* YET? MARK JARZOMBEK



!Kung being photographed for a documentary.

From Sapiens To Hunter/Gatherers

We may appreciate the Enlightenment-era optimism about our intrinsic epistemological capacity, but when the Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus (1707 - 1778) coined the term *Homo sapiens*, this was not the Socratic mandate to know thyself. Instead our "knowledge" belonged to a complex classificatory tree, the smallest element of which was a species and its 'varieties'. It was a revolution just as significant as Darwin's theory of evolution some hundred years later. Linnaeus' Man was not a creature of the Bible tortured by the perplexing duality of body and spirit, but an animal, one of the thousands, that populates the world. And yet, *Homo sapiens* had a special gift, for it alone sees that everything fits into a single, vast *Imperium*. The argument was the perfect and perhaps somewhat frightening fusion of reason and empire.

Imperium- the phenomenal world

Regnum- the division of nature into animal, vegetable, and mineral.

Classis- the subdivisions of the above; in the animal kingdom, six were recognized (mammals, birds, amphibians, fish, insects, and worms)

Ordo- the subdivision of the above- the class Mammalia has eight, including Primates

Genus- the subdivisions of the order- in the order Primates there are four. One of which is *Homo*

Species- the subdivisions of genus, e.g. *Homo sapiens*.

Varietas- the species variant, e.g. *Homo sapiens europaeus*.

As it turns out *Homo sapiens* was not a particularly stable category.¹ In the 1735 first edition of *Systema*, distinctions were based on color. But in the 1766 edition, Linnaeus changed his mind and divided *Homo* into categories that reflect the increased contact with non-European people.

1735

Sapiense europaeus albus (white)

Americanus rubescens (red)

Asiaticus fuscus (brown)

Africanus niger (black)

1766

Europaeus (regulated by law)

Americanus (regulated by custom)

Asiaticus (regulated by opinion)

Afer (African, governed by caprice)

furus (wild)

monstrosus

troglodytes (nocturnal people)

Just as the lower animals were governed by instinct, *sapiens* were now bound to one of four social frameworks: custom, law, opinion and caprice. Among the four, *Homo sapiens europaeus* still reigned supreme since he alone was governed by law. Linnaeus also expanded the geographical reach of his humans. There were now also three sub categories. Troglodytes- or what we would today call 'cave men' - were regulated by the sun and moon. Whereas the Wild People (*furus*), or what we might call the Eskimos, were the most unregulated of all.

Though today *Homo sapiens europaeus* has silently slipped into the waters of historical amnesia, the word *Homo sapiens* has most certainly not. But its stability is hardly assured and indeed it might be good to remind ourselves just how difficult it was to identify humankind's claim of self-knowledge. In 1802, William Turton, an English naturalist whose specialty was sea shells- and a member of the society- translated Linnaeus' work from the Latin into English, but kept, of course, the famous term. And it stuck. However, whereas Linnaeus focused on what regulates humans, Turton gave his *sapiens* psychological characteristics. The metaphys-

1 Philip Sloan, "The Gaze of Human Nature," *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-century Domains*, Edited by Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, Robert Wokler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 124.

ics of law and geography was replaced by a metaphysics of personality types.

Americans: copper-colored, irritable, erect

Europeans: fair, sanguine and brawny

Asiatics: sooty, melancholy and rigid

Africans: black, phlegmatic and relaxed²

The shift from social custom to psychology reaffirmed the colonial superiority to the *Homo sapiens europaeus*, while acknowledging that that superiority might have more to do with brawniness than with the rule of law. This was not the last transformation. Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) divided the dark whites from the blond whites, and the Spaniards from the Berbers and Swedes. Joseph Deniker, a French anthropologist (1852-1918) went even further, making thirteen divisions yielding 29 races, one of which, and his most lasting contribution to the field of racial theory, was the designation, *la race nordique*, which for him replaced *Homo sapiens europaeus*. By the 1920s there were *Homo sapien bushmen* and *Homo sapiens dravidicus* (Indians) and so forth. In 1950, even the authorities at UNESCO waded into the issue and announced in their "Statement on Race" that there were just three divisions of *Homo sapiens*, namely Mongoloid, Negroid and Caucasoid with many unspecified subgroups.³ Clearly this did not help. The term Caucasian turned out to be complex and ambiguous. But it was only in 2005, that the United States National Library of Medicine finally decided to replace it with "European Continental Ancestry Group."⁴

To avoid the problem of race, anthropologists turned to geography, as in a species that was discovered in 2010, that was named *Homo gautengensis* after an archaeological site in South Africa, namely Gauteng. The same logic is true for *australopithecus africanus* ("southern ape of Africa"), *Homo floresiensis* (named after the island of Flores), the *Homo neanderthal* (named after a valley in Germany), and *Homo*

2 Carl von Linné, William Turton, *A General System of Nature*, Vol. 1 (London: Allen and Co., 1806), 9.

3 Ashley Montagu, "The Race Question: Statement issued 18 July 1950," 5. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001282/128291eo.pdf>

4 http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/techbull/nd03/nd03_med_data_changes.html [accessed June 2, 2013] See also: Bruce David Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: a Political History of Racial Identity* (New York NY: New York University Press, 2006), 64-67.

heidelbergensis (named after a city in Germany).⁵ Simultaneously there was an attempt to push back the point at which *Homo sapiens* emerged historically to make the category more – shall one say – inclusive. The result was that *Homo heidelbergensis* was no longer a hulking predecessor to *Homo sapiens*, but itself a *Homo sapiens*! And the *Homo sapiens*, in order to be differentiated from its hominoid cousins, were now called *Homo sapiens sapiens*. This subspecies (namely you and me) began to be used in the 1950's by scholars like Ernst Mayr, George Simpson and Theodosius Dobzhansky and it was related to their shared view that *sapiens* represented a polytypic species meaning that the various genetically isolated populations of early humans arose as local differentiations of a single stock. This position stands in opposition to polyphyletic models of modern human origins, which argues that there were several 'beginnings' not just one. Regardless of the scholarly point, the bizarre doubling of our knowledge-carrying capacity is what now differentiates us from our Neanderthal predecessors.

The irony of all this is that if we turn to anthropology, which claims to see our ancient past not through the lens of abstract categories, but through the ostensible realities of flesh and blood, our ancient ancestors were what they called "hunter-gatherers." The term is not an old one, but appeared in the early 1970s, more or less at the same time that *Homo sapiens* became *Homo sapiens sapiens*.⁶ It was adopted with almost no criticism in the rising tide of anthropological studies. There is a whole encyclopedia, published by Cambridge University Press in 1999 that is dedicated to "hunter-gatherers."⁷ The *Homo sapiens* went from being the high arbiter of reason, to a creature groveling around for food, a tuber or two away from starvation.

Some anthropologists now admit that it was wrong to identify ancient cultures solely with food acquisition. Most of the time spent by ostensible "hunter-gatherers" is not in hunting and gathering, but in activities of social cohesion.

5 This followed the dictum of Frank Livingstone, who wrote, "There are no races, there are only clines," invoking a word coined in 1938 to describe geographical gradients of features in natural populations. Frank Livingstone and Theodosius Dobzhansky, "On the Non-Existence of Human Races," *Current Anthropology* 3 (1962), 279 (279–281).

6 For a review of the disciplinary problems associated with research into hunter/gatherers see Peter Mitchell, "Hunters and Gatherers," *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeology*, Edited by Barry Cunliffe, Chris Gosden, Rosemary A. Joyce, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 411–416.

7 *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers*, Richard B. Lee and Richard Daly, editors. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Naturally, food collecting is an important activity, but remarkably the majority of the time spent by the !Kung, for example, is spent in other pursuits, such as resting in camp or visiting other camps. Women spend their time preparing food, doing embroidery, visiting other camps, or entertaining visitors from other camps. The men go on hunts, but their schedule is unpredictable and subject to magical control. During periods when there is no hunt, the men spend time visiting, entertaining, dancing and preparing their bows and arrows.⁸ The life of the !Kung cannot be considered completely identical to those of ancient times, but at least it shows that a well-positioned camp close to water, nut-bearing trees, animal habitats and other human settlements was more stable, orderly and complex than was assumed even a few decades ago.

So why this emphasis on food acquisition since it brings us back to statements like the following from 1870?

*Care for his natural wants must have absorbed his whole being; all his efforts must have tended to one sole aim – that of insuring his daily subsistence.*⁹

I suspect that the sudden appearance of "hunter-gatherers" in the 1970s had something to do with the so-called War on Hunger. The World Food Council, after all, was created in 1974. Coincidentally, the !Kung in Africa appeared on the anthropological map in the early 1970s and quickly became the poster child for the new category. Anthropologists were eventually amazed to figure out that the !Kung had lived in the Kalahari Desert quite comfortably for a hundred thousand years.¹⁰ Studies have made it clear that when so-called hunter-gatherers encountered agriculturalists many adapted; but others did not fundamentally change their way of life. For them, the world was in essence already "farmed." All that needed to be done was the harvesting. During his study of the !Kung, the anthropologist, Richard Lee, when he asked the people why they did not farm, received the reply, "Why should I farm

8 James Woodburn, "An introduction to Hadza Ecology," *Man the Hunter*, ed. Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore (Chicago: Aldine, 1968).

9 Louis Figuier, *Primitive Man* (New York NY: D. Appleton & Co., 1871), 39.

10 Eric Wolf's book *Europe and the Peoples Without History* (Berkeley: Univ. Calif. Press, 1982) was a benchmark for the development of so-called hunter-gatherer studies. Afterwards, anthropologists become increasingly aware of the political consequences of their writing. See for example: Fred R. Myers, "The Politics of Representation: Anthropological Discourse and Australian Aborigines," *American Ethnologist* 13/1 (February 1986), 138-53.

when there are so many mongongo nuts?¹¹ The Aboriginal Australians put it in similar terms.

*You people go to all that trouble, working and planting seeds, but we don't have to do that. All these things are there for us; the Ancestral Beings left them for us. In the end, you depend on the sun and the rain just the same as we do, but the difference is that we just have to go and collect the food when it is ripe. We don't have all this other trouble.*¹²

These quick frays into the historiography of our ancient past should remind us that even though we might today think that we have moved past centuries of biases, this is not the case. We might have removed some of the more obvious aspects of bias, but we have not removed our civilizational hubris. We have no shame in calling the !Kung hunter-gatherers, when even we do not spend all our time in the super markets and would find it laughable if Cambridge University Press was to write an encyclopedia entitled "Super Market People." And yet, in the 1980s, we placed our ancestors on an astonishingly low plane of existence at the very same time that the Linnaeans were elevating our intelligence to the point of absurdity. Just as it is a disciplinary disgrace to call the !Kung or for that matter any early society hunter-gatherers, I would prefer it if the scientists would not label us *homo sapiens sapiens*. We certainly haven't earned it.

The Precursor Paradox

Neither *Homo sapiens* nor "hunter-gatherers" are historical categories. Both are timeless conditions and it is thus easy to critique these concepts as falsifications. But the problem is not resolved if one turns to the question of history. The introduction of historical time was, of course, one of the great accomplishments of the Enlightenment; except that by the word history many meant ages. The idea of ages is itself old and derives from Hesiod's Five Ages: gold, silver, bronze,

11 Richard B. Lee, Irvén DeVore, and Jill Nash, *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968). See also Jack R. Harlan, *Crops and Man* (Madison, Wisconsin: American Society of Agronomy, 1975); Richard B. Lee, "Subsistence Ecology of the !Kung Bushmen," (PhD Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1965); Grahame Clark, *The Stone Age Hunters* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967); Richard B. Lee, *The !Kung San: Men, Women, and Work in a Foraging Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

12 Jack Rodney Harlan, *The Living Fields: Our Agricultural Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26. See also: Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, *Man, Land & Myth in North Australia: The Gunwinggu People* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1970).

heroic, and iron. But Hesiod, a Greek poet who lived in the 8th century BCE, did not mean by these terms an archaeological description of history, but a cultural one that went downhill after the great Golden Age. Even when the poet Lord Byron wrote *The Age of Bronze* (1823), he meant it as a cultural descriptor where bronze was a euphemism for the present, *not*-golden age. Christian Jürgensen Thomsen (1788-1865), head of antiquarian collections of the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen, is credited with defining the Stone-, Bronze-, and Iron Ages in the modern sense.¹³

The system emphasized progress, from stone to bronze to iron. The superiority of one age over the next was expressed in the writings of John Lubbock, a politician, banker and amateur archaeologist who helped bring the work of Thomsen into English awareness.¹⁴ Influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, he argued that as a result of natural selection, human groups had become different from each other not only culturally, but also in their biological capacities to utilize culture.¹⁵ In other words, humans evolve socially much like animals evolve biologically, with Europeans as the implied end-product of this intensive cultural and biological process. It was a rather typical Victorian-era argument that implied the supremacy of the fittest ends with the white man, and, for Lubbock, with the English Empire. "The study of savages," he argues was of particular importance to the English since the English have "colonies in every part of the world and fellow-citizens in many stages of civilization."¹⁶ In one of Lubbock's books, *The Origin Of Civilisation And The Primitive Condition Of Man; Mental and Social Condition of Savages*, he argued that the "inactivity of the savage intellect," belonging to "the lower races of men," was redeemed only with the awakening of "moral feeling," followed by the creation of mathematics, and finally the rise of law. "The whole history of man shows how the stronger and progressive increase in

13 William H. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past: a History of Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 46.

14 John Lubbock, *Prehistoric Times, as Illustrated by Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), 3. See also Sven Lilsson and John Lubbock (ed.), *The Primitive Inhabitants of Scandinavia* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1868), p. v. For discussion see: Mark Patton, *Science, Politics and Business in the Work of Sir John Lubbock: a Man of Universal Mind* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

15 Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 173.

16 John Lubbock, *The Origin Of Civilisation And The Primitive Condition Of Man: Mental and Social Condition of Savages* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), 5.

numbers and drive out the weaker and lower races."¹⁷ He was clearly trying to square the "scientific" definition of Europeans as "fair, sanguine and brawny" with historical reality.

Today, the use of the term Stone Age is now being debated by anthropologists and the use of the term 'savages' is a thing of the past, but the fact remains that the 'ages' have not been replaced, merely redesigned or camouflaged to appear more innocuous. Ages are now divided into ever smaller bits, usually, and obsessively, into threes: we have Early-, Middle- and Late Paleolithic; Incipient-, Initial- and Late Jōmon; Early-, Middle- and Late Woodland; Early-, Middle-, and Late Iron Age; Early-, Middle-, and Late Bronze Age, with Middle Bronze Age further subdivided into Middle Bronze Age IIA, IIB, and IIc and so on- relating to ever more specific geographical and temporal entities. In almost all cases, "late" is equated with "decline" having to do with things like population growth, ecological changes, or internal cultural weaknesses.

To navigate our ancient history these days is to navigate an alienating set of archaeological terms that drift ever closer into the realm of nonsense. One culture may be in the "Middle Iron Age" and another culture more than a few hundred miles away be in the "Early Iron Age," and down the road there may be people living in the "Late Stone Age." While this might do justice to localist narratives, the obvious fact, for example, that the pit houses of "Middle Jomon" are similar to those of the Yu'pik in Alaska and even to the Navajo in New Mexico, make it difficult for scholars to theorize cross-regional and cross-temporal tendencies. As far as I can see there is not a *single* archaeological study of this most basic and obvious circumstance, and the few studies that do exist are not by archaeologists.

The problem of abstraction also haunts the concept of pre-history, the brainchild of Daniel Wilson, a British-born, Canadian archaeologist and ethnologist. He was a scholar of Scottish history and as such was confronted with the standard image of Scotts as 'barbarians.' To counteract this, he devised the distinction in the 1850s between the 'historical' age and the 'pre-historical' age. One age had writing, the other did not, his point being that just because the Scotts did not have writing this did not mean that they lacked other skills, much less

17 Ibid., 3.