

2

Ishi's Two Bodies

Anthropology and Popular Culture

RACHEL ADAMS

In October 1911, the *San Francisco Sunday Call* ran a full-page story about Ishi's visit to a vaudeville show. That evening at the Orpheum Theater was surely one of the strangest of his life. A photograph depicts his visible discomfort as he grins nervously at the camera, surrounded by his companions, who pose with the conventional severity of the time (Figure 2.1). Indeed, the degree of composure Ishi exhibits is remarkable given that only a month earlier he had emerged from the wilderness of Mt. Lassen, driven by hunger and loneliness into the hands of the civilization responsible for the deaths of his family and friends. What could he have been thinking as he sat in the darkened theater box looking out at a house packed with more white people than he had ever seen before? What did the variety acts taking place onstage mean to him? We will never know, for Ishi left no record of his impressions of that night save the frightened smile captured by the newspaper image. What we do know is that these questions provoked considerable speculation among his contemporaries, the anthropologists and journalists who watched Ishi watch the evening's performance and came to very different conclusions about what they had seen. The disparities in these accounts have much to do with the assumptions about the relationship between native people and modernity that each author brought to the encounter. And although their reports, which were printed alongside one another in the newspaper, cannot be said to speak for Ishi, they tell a fascinating tale of their own about the dynamics that set the stage for his reception into the modern San Francisco of 1911. In what follows, I read the competing accounts of Ishi's night at the theater as the products of broader conflicts over cultural authority and aesthetic judgment. Whereas Ishi's story is about the meeting of two radically different cultures, the Yahi and the Anglo-American, it is also about struggles taking place within an increasingly diverse and hierarchical



Fig. 2.1. Ishi (*front left*) and others at the Orpheum Theatre in 1912. From the *San Francisco Call*, October 1911.

U.S. culture, between anthropology and popular ethnography, between professionals and the public, and between institutions of science and entertainment.¹

The version of the evening's events provided by the reporter, Grant Wallace, is a representative example of Ishi's treatment within the popular press. While it is easy to dismiss the newspaper coverage for its sensationalism, it also must be understood as one of the primary organs for the wide dissemination of Ishi's story. Once fixed in print, these stories set the terms for how the papers' readers would interpret what they saw. However inaccurate, the details of Ishi's biography provided by the news were not simply journalistic fantasy; they combined a selective understanding of the anthropologists' official pronouncements with an available repertoire of popular beliefs about the Indian. Wallace's portrait of Ishi would have been recognizable to the paper's readers, for it draws on familiar, paradoxical stereotypes about the Indian as both an unredeemable savage and a tragically endangered natural resource. Ishi is at once a "barbarian," an

"abysmal brute caveman," a "primordial savage of the stone age" and a man of "extraordinarily acute perceptive powers," with "long tapering fingers [that] might well have belonged to an artist and a thinker," who faces the confusing experience with "courage . . . fortitude and self control."² These are the well-worn characteristics of the Indians found in contemporary dime novels, storefront museums, and Wild West shows, which brought the excitement and drama of the frontier to American city-dwellers, who craved stories of the Western frontier.³

As they presented him to the public, the anthropologists charged with Ishi's care struggled to cordon off the showman's fabricated Indian from their own empirically derived knowledge about indigenous tribes. But popular culture provided a compelling and accessible lens through which the lovers of Western mythology who flocked to the University Museum could make the wild man meaningful. As Theodora Kroeber writes, Ishi fueled the imagination of a public seeking the "illusion and fantasy" promised by "the voice of the barker, falsetto and arresting, which entices the listeners to pay to see what waits behind drawn curtains – be it freak, belly dancer, hypnotist, or wild man from Borneo, or better yet, from Mount Lassen."⁴ Often using the discourse of ethnography, contemporary popular culture challenged the anthropologists' exclusive claim to a professional language and specialized erudition on the subject of Native Americans. Indeed, at Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893, Buffalo Bill's Wild West was voted the most genuine ethnological exhibit for its "composition of so many races and nationalities."⁵

Wild West shows and popular ethnographic exhibits shared the perspective of European colonial anthropology, which drew a firm distinction between savagery and civilization.⁶ From this viewpoint, the Indian was a more primitive ancestor in the great, unified narrative of human progress, which reached its pinnacle in the modern Anglo-American societies. However rudimentary and undeveloped, tribal life was interesting because it could tell white Americans about their own past, as well as emphasizing, by contrast, the accomplishments of Western civilization.⁷ This developmental paradigm undergirds Wallace's account of the vaudeville excursion. According to the enterprising reporter, Ishi is the perfect subject for a journalistic "experiment" designed to study "the primordial savage of the stone age" during his first encounter with "the contaminating influences of civilization." Wallace describes the theater as a "temple of music and folly," the place where civilization reached its enlightened, even decadent heights. He explains that Ishi thought he was in heaven: "Poor, simple-minded wild man! He could not know that the heaven of white people is never likely to be so crowded as their vaudeville houses, nor that so far there never has been half the scramble to get through the pearly gates that there is every night to

get a front seat at the Orpheum's top gallery." Ishi's unfamiliarity with the conventions of theatrical performance becomes an opportunity for the reporter to celebrate the sophistication of the modern audience. The Indian's primitive religious beliefs are the rude counterpart to those of urban San Franciscans, who worship the gods of commerce and luxury. Although many who met him would contemplate Ishi's apparently unspoiled condition with regret, holding up his perfection against the corrosive effects of city life, Wallace saw it as an occasion to promote the accomplishments of modernity.

The climactic moment of the evening is Ishi's introduction to "the silvery voiced and fascinating Orpheum headliner, Lily Lena of the London music halls." Modernity at its most decadent and pleasurable extreme is represented by a woman who enralls and terrifies him with her charms. The importance of the meeting is illustrated by a large graphic that dominates the page, accompanied by a caption that reads: "Sketch of the Meeting of Ishi and Lily Lena. He is Shown in the Costume He Likes Best and She in the Costume the Audience Likes Best" (Figure 2.2). The sketch depicts Lena in high heels and a tight dress that barely comes down to the top of her thigh, shaking hands with a dark-skinned man wearing animal skins who looks nothing like Ishi but is a perfect rendition of the stereotypic wild Indian of contemporary sideshows and dime novels. As it is illustrated here, the encounter between Ishi and Lena mobilizes a predictable fantasy about the dark-skinned savage's innate attraction to white womanhood. However, instead of an irrepressible lust, the savage grows weak and docile when confronted by the white woman's allure. As Lena sang directly to Ishi, Wallace observed, "the cold sweat was standing out on Ishi's forehead. His face was drawn. His fingers, grasping the crimson hangings, trembled visibly and his first cigar, which he had been puffing with pretended sangfroid, now slowly grew cold and dropped from his teeth." Making a crude and obvious equation of Ishi's virility with the suddenly extinguished cigar, Wallace enjoys his discomfort at the sight of a white woman. The potential threat of the savage's untutored sexual desire is contained by his complete captivity to Lena's charms.

If Ishi was such a tragic figure, at once noble and gentle, why would Wallace want to contaminate him? Why take such apparent pleasure in his anxiety and fear? Whereas one obvious answer is the demand for sensationalism required by yellow journalism, there is also an element of class animosity at work among the participants in this story, one that had little to do with Ishi and everything to do with the reporter's attitude toward his companions, the anthropologists. In the midst of Wallace's exploded rhetoric are moments of sincere admiration for Ishi's bravery, but these are counteracted by his deep resentment toward the professional men who accompany him, whom he describes in overwhelmingly negative terms. Ultimately, it is clear that Wallace's goal is less to prove Ishi's

The San Francisco Sunday Call

FINDS ENCHANTMEI



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Fig. 2.2. Sketch of the meeting of Ishi and Lily Lena. From the *San Francisco Call*, October 1911.

inferiority than that of the anthropologists, a task he initiates by dismantling their claims to knowledge and professional expertise. As he describes their undertaking:

The university professors, who have added Ishi to their museum of antiquities and curiosities and who are conducting this series of scientific experiments on him, justly regard him as a unique specimen of the genus homo, the like of which does not exist in all the world. They call him the 'uncontaminated man,' the one man who (possibly from lack of opportunity to talk) has never told a lie; the one man with no redeeming vices and no upsetting sins. This conclusion was decided doubtless from the fact that Ishi had never been brought into contact with the contaminating influences of civilization; therefore to permit the barbarian to mingle with our unsettled civilization is to expose him to contamination.⁸

Classifying the museum's contents as "antiquities and curiosities," Wallace equates the work of the University anthropologists with mass entertainment. He suggests the hypocrisy of their desire to preserve Ishi as an untainted man of nature by sealing him away in a museum where he will be protected from the contaminating effects of modernity only to be turned into a specimen for scientific examination. The reporter's scornful tone, use of the Latin phrase "genus homo," and dubious references to the pedants' disdain for "civilization" and its pleasures reveals his resentment toward the intellectual establishment the professors represent. Wallace conceives of his own social "experiment" as a counter to the experts' scientific methods, a way of demystifying the aura conferred on their objects and methods of study. His desire to blemish Ishi's innocence with a visit to the theater is motivated by his understanding of anthropology as a science devoted to the study of untainted human specimens, and anthropologists as haughty elites disdainful of the pleasures enjoyed by more ordinary folk. Having tainted Ishi, he will have compromised the primary document essential to their research.

Whereas Wallace was openly antagonistic toward the professors, many San Franciscans who flocked to the University Museum were simply confused by them. Charmed and delighted by the "wild Indian" himself, Ishi's visitors seemed unclear about the function of the anthropologists and the institution that sheltered him. Their misconception of the experts' professional status is reflected in letters sent to the museum offering assistance in deciphering Ishi's language and origins. These helpful hints are evidence that their authors did not understand or respect the firm boundary between the anthropologists' specialized knowledge, acquired through years of training and advanced degrees, and their own speculation. For example, one missive respectfully expressed doubts about Ishi's authenticity: "I understand very well how enthusiastic you can be if

you have discovered a stone age man in the middle of civilization. But is he such?" The question is followed by the writer's own theory: "To me he looks like a Jewish student who wants to make a hit as [an] impersonator – the most striking point is his likeness with the notorious Dr. Cook the discoverer of Poles."⁹ The purpose of this ruse, he concludes, is the anthropologists' desire to study the limits of public credulity. Another visitor who pondered over Ishi's ethnicity offered: "[I] am much interested in the aborigines of the continents. I believe in heredity and environment. Therefor [*sic*] I think the Japanese and Indian are the same. Many words alike etc."¹⁰ Such were the voices of a public that, having seen Ishi described by one reporter as "a human document, with the key to most of the hieroglyphics lost," believed they had something to contribute to the task of interpretation.¹¹

Other letters and newspaper stories echo the more resentful tone of the Wallace story. For example, an editorial in the *Call* commented acerbically, "scientific rejoicing over the capture of 'the only uncontaminated man' is complicated by the fact that the first thing his captors did was to put him in jail." Summing up the scientists' efforts, he writes, "apparently the cave man is placed in the same category as the chimpanzee and is held in captivity to make a scientific holiday regardless of the . . . fourteenth amendment of the constitution." The author's reference to the Fourteenth Amendment implies that Ishi deserves the rights of an ordinary American citizen. Denying his humanity as well as his constitutional rights, the anthropologists have treated him as an animal to suit the purposes of their own research. The author concludes with one last insult: "the pictures of the wild man are disappointing. He does not fulfill the ideal, and, in fact, he looks more intelligent than a professor of anthropology." As was the case with Wallace, the author's target is the experts and their methods rather than Ishi himself. The author's claim that the wild man does not live up to his expectations is an insult less to Ishi than to the professors' superior knowledge and authority.¹²

Hostility toward the anthropologists was most pronounced in print reactions to Ishi's death from tuberculosis four years after he moved to San Francisco. Popular accounts of his demise held the cold, inhumane methods of science, embodied by the University faculty, responsible for killing off its objects of study.¹³ These articles charge the professors with sensationalism, while downplaying the reporters' own initial interest in the story. Reading them in isolation, it would be difficult to believe that journalists were responsible for planning Ishi's trip to the theater and dressing him in furs to look the part of an uncivilized wild man. Science was to blame for turning the Indian into a curious object and then examining him to death. "He furnished amusement and study to the savants at the University of California for a number of years, and doubtless

much of Indian lore was learned from him," one reporter editorialized dubiously, "but we do not believe he was the marvel that the professors would have the public believe. He was just a starved-out Indian from the wilds of Deer Creek who, by hiding in its fastness, was able to long escape the white man's pursuit."¹⁴ Exaggerating the significance of their find, the anthropologists were little more than mountebanks who used their status as experts to swindle a gullible public and exploit their object of study. "The white man with his food and clothing and shelter finally killed the Indian just as effectually as he would have killed him with the rifle," the obituary concluded. The impulse to preserve native cultures was little better than the quest to eradicate them; in the end, the Indian's death was the inevitable consequence of the march of progress. A second article reported, suspiciously, "an alleged Stone Age man said to have been adopted by the University of California as a valuable acquisition has just died. To be used by a high-brow institution as an anthropological acquisition is enough to kill any man."¹⁵ Casting a dubious eye on Ishi's status as a survivor of the Stone Age, this piece accused the museum of hastening his death. No person could withstand the misery of being turned into a "valuable acquisition." Ishi's fatal illness was a consequence not of the innate frailty of his race, but of his treatment as a scientific specimen, an abuse to which anyone might succumb. By characterizing his death in this manner, these stories sought to debunk the anthropologists' professional mission and the institutions that promoted their activities. The popular press thus posthumously reconfigured Ishi from a stone-age relic to a person with common human desires and weaknesses.

Ishi's reception by the public who greeted him with respect and adoration, while often turning a cynical eye on the professional men who represented themselves as his guardians, is only one side of the story. His popularity forced the anthropologists, who seemed far more comfortable writing, teaching, or conducting research among their informants, to serve as intermediaries between Ishi and the crowds who loved him. That Kroeber found this an awkward position is evident in his response to the vaudeville excursion, which ran alongside Wallace's account of the evening. While Wallace drew on a series of predictable oppositions between savagery and civilization, innocence and corruption, primitivism and modernity, Kroeber underscored the utter difference of Ishi's cultural orientation, as well as his disdain for Wallace's reportorial enterprise. In a subsequent article he would comment sourly, "the reporter got his story. But he got it out of his imagination."¹⁶ Merging his palpable distaste for Wallace's "experiment" with a genuine effort to imagine the effects of the spectacle on someone who had never seen more than fifty people together in one place, the anthropologist insisted that, while Ishi was indeed awed by the size of the audience, "the performance itself I am sure he did not appreciate." What Wallace

took to be delight at the events on stage was, according to Kroeber, a reaction to those around him, "a pure automatic response or suggestion, for they might be laughing at a pun, a joke conveyed in words that were totally incomprehensible to him."¹⁷ While Wallace believed that the delights of the vaudeville acts transcended cultural differences, Kroeber established Ishi's apparent pleasure as a polite imitation of his companions rather than a sign that he understood the performances. Expressions that appeared, from the reporter's developmental perspective, to confirm the universal language of Western theater, looked to the anthropologist like evidence of an alterity so extreme that it stretched the limits of the imagination.

One particular point of contention was the subject of Ishi's manhood. Recall that Wallace attempted to deflate the Indian's virility with the image of the damp, rapidly extinguished cigar. Kroeber appeared to concur when he explained that hysterical symptoms resulting from exposure to such a large crowd had caused Ishi to laugh like "a young girl." However, a few lines later he reconfirmed Ishi's manhood by asserting that "there is nothing undeveloped about him; he has the mind of a man and is a man in every sense. With the exception of the habits which he has acquired by his manner of living he is thoroughly normal."¹⁸ *Normal* seems an odd word to describe anything about Ishi's situation, but Kroeber's insistence on his normality must be seen as a reaction against Wallace's representation of him as a primordial savage. Moreover, there is a matter of personal dignity at stake. In the face of stories that depicted the scientists as fussy, overcivilized pedants, Kroeber's comments about the Indian's manhood reinforce, by association, the manhood of the anthropologist who accompanied him.

The tone of defensiveness that colors Kroeber's response is certainly related to the challenge of making Ishi available to the public that clamored to see him, without exploiting his charge or compromising his understanding of the University Museum's function. As news of the discovery of an authentic wild man spread, the anthropologists were bombarded with requests from enterprising showmen eager to get their hands on "the last Stone Age man." According to Theodora Kroeber, the museum staff had to contend not only with reporters, but "motion picture companies, and entrepreneurs of carnival, circus, and vaudeville specialty acts"¹⁹ who saw Ishi as a potential source of publicity and profit. One vaudeville impresario even proposed a two-man act featuring Ishi and Kroeber, which would play at the Orpheum, the very theater where Ishi would see his first variety program. His scheme attests to the currency of anthropologists and ethnographic discourse within early twentieth-century popular culture. During this period, it was common to find men who called themselves "professors" or "doctors" lecturing audiences at freak shows, vaudeville

presentations, and ethnographic pageants where people from exotic lands were exhibited to the American public. Speaking with an authority and apparent erudition that was rarely confirmed by professional training, they delivered "educational" treatises about the human specimens on display.²⁰ While we do not have Kroeber's negative response to the vaudeville offer in print, evidence that he saw himself as a very different kind of professor, one whose dignity would be compromised by the world of show business, is to be found in a letter he wrote to the Board of Directors for the Pan-Pacific International Exposition regarding the content of the Fair's Native American village. Registering his objection to the type of living ethnographic exhibits typically mounted at World's Fairs, he described them as "amusement concessions . . . too often of the cheap show variety, thus being without educational significance."²¹ Whereas Kroeber believed that the anthropologist's mission was to collect and disseminate knowledge about Native American cultures, those who requested his expertise sometimes desired only to profit from the respectability of his professional imprimatur.

As I have suggested, the anthropologist's position was complicated by the fact that ethnographic knowledge had a place in popular culture as well as in the academy. If the difference between the two was clear to the first generation of professional academics and curators, it was less so to the non-specialized public confronted by many different sources of information about Native Americans, all represented as true and accurate. In his history of the Smithsonian, Curtis Hinsley observes that the institutionalization of anthropology "presented an unusual opportunity for making a science, for drawing a clear line between speculative popularization or commercial humbuggery, and the sober search for truth."²² It is instructive to interpret the anthropologists' treatment of Ishi and those who gathered around him as, in part, a product of their efforts to establish an emergent disciplinary discourse. In the United States, individual enthusiasts had been studying indigenous cultures for many decades, but anthropology acquired its institutional form only in the late nineteenth century, when a new system of training and accreditation was erected to separate the amateur from the professional. A Department of Anthropology had been created at the University of California just ten years before Ishi's appearance, and Kroeber was among the first generation of accredited university anthropologists.²³

The task of situating American anthropology in museums and universities necessitated a break with popular modes of presenting indigenous people and artifacts. Before the era of institutionalization, museums reflected the idiosyncrasies of private collectors, who chose their contents based on an object's individual interest rather than its contribution to a larger portrait of a culture or people. P. T. Barnum transformed the exhibition of curiosities into mass entertainment with the establishment of his American Museum in 1841.²⁴ For the

price of admission, visitors were presented with an array of unique artifacts, freaks, trained animals, performers, and informational lectures that promised to educate as well as entertain. At the American Museum, exotic exhibits such as the *What Is It?* – a black man supposed to be a missing link between human and animal species – were described in a jargon Robert Bogdan calls “anthropological humbug.”²⁵ Touring the act in London during the 1860s, Barnum claimed that the creature was discovered in “the wilds of California,” where “for the last 10 months it has been with a tribe of Indians.”²⁶ The establishment of anthropology museums in “the wilds of California” required that their founders distinguish them from this tradition by emphasizing didacticism over sensation, replacing the jumble of the private collection with organizational logic, and demanding new standards of decorum and seriousness from the visitor. Nonetheless, as we have seen in responses to Ishi’s arrival, the ability to discriminate between the curious and the representative, and the new understanding of institutional identity that accompanied these distinctions, did not necessarily register among the first generation of museum visitors.

Ishi appeared at a moment when the University museum itself was undergoing an institutional transition. Conceived under the auspices of wealthy regent Phoebe Apperson Hearst, the museum was intended to house her vast personal collection of antiquities gathered from around the world. As she made plans to donate her possessions to the University of California, Hearst was encouraged to take an interest in indigenous tribes, to balance her appreciation for European artifacts with a commitment to California’s local history and cultures. When a location in Parnassus Heights, San Francisco, was established for cataloguing and exhibition, she concurred by making a place for Native American specimens alongside acquisitions from ancient Egypt, Peru, Greece, and Rome. This juxtaposition is indicative of the increasing importance of American anthropology, which for the first time found a place alongside the classical antiquities of acknowledged beauty and value. The new museum opened to the public two months after Ishi’s arrival in 1911.²⁷ His presence at the opening reception, where he mingled shyly among benefactors, University regents, scientists and academics, attested to the contradictory relationship between the anthropology museum and the human subjects of ethnographic inquiry. Was he a guest or a living exhibit? How would his culture measure up to the great ancient civilizations already represented in the museum’s collections?

In the face of fantastic newspaper accounts, eager crowds, and a deluge of requests to exhibit Ishi on vaudeville and in traveling shows, anthropologists encouraged him to assimilate by learning English and working for a living. Treating Ishi as if he were more a collaborator than a specimen was their strategy for resisting the popular belief in his irreconcilable difference, a barbarian survivor

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of the prehistoric past. If the popular conception of the Indian's absolute otherness is encapsulated in the sketch of Ishi and Lena, the anthropologist's intense personal bond with his subject is captured in a photograph of Ishi and Kroeber. A visual representation of the intimacy between the two, this image also illustrates Kroeber's attempt to prove Ishi's "normality" through sartorial means (Figure 2.3). But the differences between these men belie the more immediate parallelism, for the pale, bearded anthropologist who stands erect with his suit and tie neatly in place, clearly is not a double for the shorter, broader, and barefoot Ishi, who appears disheveled and uncomfortable in his civilized garb. Ishi was no more "normal" dressed in a suit and tie than he was swathed in a cave man's furs. Efforts to assimilate him often only further emphasized how alien he was in the modern environment. Instead of showing his equivalence with American men, the photograph suggests the limits of his adaptability to the new culture.

Attempting to debunk the evolutionary perspective of the news coverage, Kroeber went to considerable lengths to describe Ishi's situation by using analogies accessible to his readers. For example, he wrote, "it is as though we were to visit the moon. We would get used to the novelty of it in a short time and then when the surprise had worn off, while we understood nothing of what was going on about us we should learn to take it all for granted."²⁸ Throughout his writing about Ishi, Kroeber shows that he is familiar with popular misconceptions about indigenous people, and he works to dispel them through reason and evidence. At various points he deflates the "'missing link' of popular fantasy," the myth that fire is made by rubbing two sticks together, and the belief that nonwhite people were biologically inferior.²⁹ In a 1912 article Kroeber wrote: "Ishi himself is no nearer the 'missing link' or any antecedent form of human life than we are; but in what his environment, his associates, and his puny native civilization have made him, he represents a stage through which our ancestors passed thousands of years ago."³⁰ Asserting Ishi's fundamental equality with his Anglo-American contemporaries, Kroeber begins to articulate one of his most important contributions to the field of anthropology, the decoupling of culture from biology, by insisting that Ishi's differences were social and historical, not physiological.³¹

Rather than dispelling the myth that Ishi was a "Stone Age" relic, however, Kroeber's writing for mainstream publications often granted it legitimacy with the objective language of science. In enforcing Ishi's biological equality, Kroeber belittled his tribe as a "puny native civilization," giving voice to the same theory of cultural evolution as the newspapers and confirming that the Yahi represented a more primitive stage in the inevitable advance toward modernity. At times, when he recorded Ishi's story in newspapers and magazines, he employed

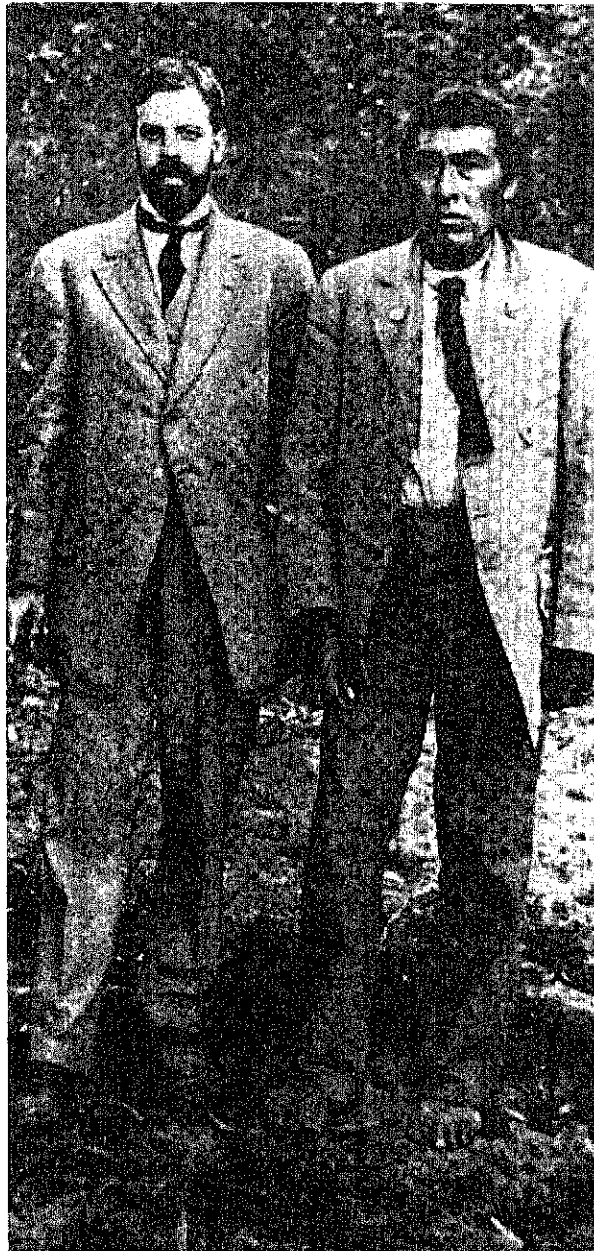


Fig. 23. Ishi and Kroeber. Courtesy of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California.

a developmental rhetoric that included turns of phrase, such as "the progress of civilization,"³² that undermined his Boasian conviction that cultures should not be measured against one another, or in relation to a unified standard of human achievement. In one instance, claiming that "in short [Ishi] has really lived in the stone age, as has so often been said," Kroeber equated cultural difference with temporal distance, appearing to position the native as a stranded outcast from history. Doubtless, the adjective "stone age" refers to the Yanas' rudimentary use of tools, but to most readers it would have evoked images of primitive barbarism. The flights of imagination inspired by Kroeber's choice of adjectives is evident in a newspaper headline that announced, "Stone Age Indian Hauled from Forests' Depths by Savants: Creature Found in the Wilds of Feather River a Link between Past and Present." Whereas the initial clause echoes Kroeber's own vocabulary, the description that follows figures Ishi as a "missing link" of the kind that was commonly found at freak shows of this period.³³ Despite his commitment to treating Ishi as an equal, Kroeber used the language of his time in a manner that could backfire by feeding directly into the popular fantasies he wished to contradict.

For anthropologists, reporters, and their audiences it was impossible not to read Ishi's story as a lesson about modernity, whether they believed it taught them about the desirable or tragic consequences of progress. How each described Ishi's response to the new culture is thus as much a barometer of how that group understood its place within its own culture as it is an assessment of Ishi himself. What was Ishi thinking that night in the darkened Orpheum theater? What did he make of his companions, the crowds dressed in evening wear, the antics onstage, the white woman who sang to him? My purpose has not been to resolve these questions, or to measure the accuracy of one version over another, but to explain why and how their answers were meaningful to Ishi's companions. Although Ishi's appearance was a surprising and unanticipated event, the responses to it were less so as they were forged in large part by the cultural location of their authors, which dictated a more familiar set of animosities and expectations. His sojourn in 1911 San Francisco forced unanticipated confrontations between the subjects of anthropology and the Indians of popular culture, an elite professional class, public institutions, and the audiences who frequented them. For Ishi not only occasioned an unprecedented and productive contact between Native American and Anglo-American cultures; he also brought the participants within separate spheres of a stratified U.S. culture into dialogue. If he could not transcend vast differences between his environment and theirs, his appeal crossed the lines of class and educational training. Ishi's own words are a fitting mode of closure here. His friends recalled that his favored way of saying goodbye was "you stay, I go."³⁴ After Ishi's death, the anthro-

pologists, reporters, and public who loved him would be left behind to make sense of his life and, as they did so, their own place within an increasingly complex and hierarchical American culture.

NOTES

1. See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1988) for a general description of this process, as it occurred in the American theater, museums, and public institutions.
2. Grant Wallace, "Ishi, the Last Aboriginal Savage in America, Finds Enchantment in a Vaudeville Show," *San Francisco Call*, 8 October 1911, reprinted in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, ed. Robert F. Heizer and Theodora Kroeber (Berkeley: University of California, 1979), 108.
3. Ishi's life in San Francisco (1911–16) coincided with the period of the Wild West show's greatest popularity and commercial success. Encouraged by his friend and doctor Saxton Pope, he became a fan of these pageants, where he once was introduced to a Sioux Indian performer who pronounced him "a very high grade of Indian" [Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California, 1961), 228–229]. On Wild West pageants, see Richard Slotkin, "Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire," *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan (Durham: Duke University, 1993), 164–184.
4. *Ishi in Two Worlds*, 129.
5. Robert Rydell, *All the World's A Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 97.
6. George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987). On significant, and often overlooked, differences between European and American anthropologies, see Karl Kroeber, *Artistry in Native American Myths* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1998).
7. Of course, the same developmental paradigm could be put to opposite ends. For the critic of modernity, primitive people represented an idealized past when human society was more attuned to the natural world. On the "antimodern impulse," see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Cultures, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).
8. Wallace, in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 108.
9. Letter to Thomas T. Waterman, Hearst Museum archives, University of California, Berkeley, 6 September 1911.
10. Quoted in *Ishi in Two Worlds*, 169.
11. Mary Ashe Miller, "Indian Enigma Is Study for Scientists," *San Francisco Call* 6 September 1911, in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 97.
12. "Scientific Fun with a Wild Man," Hearst Museum archives, nd.
13. By the time of his death, Ishi's public appeal had greatly diminished. After four

years in civilization, the wild man who lived at the University Museum was hardly a breaking story and the more he adapted to modern life, the less spectacular he became. In fact, within a few years of his appearance, newspapers were breaking stories that Ishi was *not* the last of his tribe, with headlines such as "Ishi Is Not The Last of Lost Tribe: Stockmen and Ranchers of Deer Creek Country Find Traces of Aborigines" and "Ishi's Squaw Seen Hunting for Mate: Parties Searching Underbrush Near Oroville for Wife of Lone Survivor" (Hearst Museum archives).

14. "Ishi's Death – A Chico Commentary," reprinted in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 242.

15. *Portland Oregon Telegram*, 30 March 1916, np, Hearst Museum archives.

16. Alfred Kroeber, "Ishi, the Last Aborigine," *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 121.

17. "Ishi, the Last Aborigine," 121.

18. A. L. Kroeber, "It's All Too Much For Ishi, Says the Scientist," *San Francisco Call*, 8 October 1911, reprinted in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 111.

19. *Ishi in Two Worlds*, 129.

20. See Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985) and Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*.

21. Unpublished letter, Alfred Kroeber to Board of Directors, Panama Pacific International Exposition, 23 June 1911. Kroeber Correspondence, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, Microfilm Reel 4.

22. Curtis Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1981), 35.

23. *Ishi in Two Worlds*, 121.

24. Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997) and Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1973).

25. Bernth Lindfors, "P. T. Barnum and Africa," *Studies in Popular Culture* 7 (1984); James W. Cook, Jr., "Of Men, Missing Links, and Nondescripts: The Strange Career of P. T. Barnum's 'What Is It' Exhibition," *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University, 1996), 139–157.

26. Quoted in Cook, "Of Men, Missing Links, and Nondescripts," 145.

27. *Ishi in Two Worlds*, 121–123.

28. Alfred Kroeber, "It's All Too Much for Ishi," in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 111.

29. Alfred Kroeber, "The Only Man in America Who Knows No Christmas: Ishi," in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 115.

30. A. L. Kroeber, "Ishi, the Last Aborigine," *The World's Work*, July 1912; reprinted in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 123.

31. For a discussion of Kroeber's influence on the anthropological study of human nature, see Carl Degler, "In the Wake of Boas," *In Search of Human Nature*, 84-104.

32. Alfred Kroeber, "The Only Man in America Who Knows No Christmas: Ishi," in *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, 114.

33. *San Francisco Evening Post*, 5 September 1911, front page.

34. *Ishi in Two Worlds*, 238.