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Settler agnosia in the field:

Indigenous action, functional ignorance, and the origins of ethnographic entrapment

ABSTRACT

In the late 1930s a novice fieldworker from the University of Chicago wrote in his field notes that his collaboration with a Ho-Chunk interpreter had failed because of the interpreter's "aggressions" in the struggle for "white class status." The notes exhibit a pattern of perceptual failure that I call "settler agnosia," elements of which have been noted in research on the obstacles facing Indigenous activists. The case shows that the tendency of older anthropological accounts of contemporary American Indian life to obscure evidence of both colonial oppression and Indigenous action may have originated as consequences of a form of functional ignorance triggered by interpersonal struggles over position in the everyday relations of settler society. An ethnographic investigation of the links between settler agnosia and the practice of settlerness connects perception in everyday interactions to larger issues of knowledge production in and of settler societies. [settler colonialism, field theory, Bourdieu, race, ignorance, indigeneity, Native North America]

In September 1938, Leo Srole, a doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, traveled to the Wisconsin Dells to begin a year of field research on Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) social organization and cultural change. One of his first interviews was with Phyllis Crandall-Connor, the Anglo-American artistic director of *The Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial*, a tourist pageant in which Ho-Chunk people had performed for two decades. Crandall-Connor complained to Srole that her Ho-Chunk employees refused to perform many of their traditional dances for tourists, ascribing their defiance to their "childlike" nature. She added, "The negro knows his place, but the Indian doesn't know how to act. You have to be careful about what you say or he'll walk out on you" (Srole 1938d, 6). In the typescript of his interview with Crandall-Connor, Srole offered no comment on the remark but noted elsewhere in his field notes that

the white attitude hereabouts seems to be a clear-cut case of ambivalence. On the one hand the Indian is looked upon as something of a museum piece, the remnant of a glorious, colorful tradition in American history, which has been especially memorialized in the school-books of children. . . . But on the other hand, there are almost caste-like attitudes and evaluations of the Indian, expressed in such words as "dirty, stinking, drunken, thieving, lying." (1938c, 4)

Srole had come to the Dells in 1938 specifically to recruit James Daybreak, the Ho-Chunk master of ceremonies in Crandall-Connor's tourist show, to be his guide and interpreter.¹ Having worked for previous researchers, Daybreak promised to be an especially valuable contact for Srole because, in addition to his work at Stand Rock, he participated in "most of the ceremonies of the conservative or traditionalist religious faction" and was an initiated member of the Medicine Lodge, a status "unusual for one of his generation" (Srole 1938b, 14). But Srole and Daybreak's collaboration did not last long. From the beginning, Daybreak criticized "white people who come to the Indians to get all they can out of them and give nothing in return," and when the two visited Ho-Chunk households, he seemed to interfere in Srole's efforts to document kinship

and ceremonial activities (Srole 1938b, 4). In response, Srole broke off the collaboration and sent his supervisors at the University of Chicago a 33-page account of Daybreak's "personality" in which he depicted Daybreak as marked by a set of "aggressions" linked to the pursuit of "white class status" (3, 6).

Srole continued his research after he stopped working with Daybreak, eventually interviewing 22 Ho-Chunks and 17 whites. He learned from both groups about the strained race relations in the region, and his research included reports of recent mass meetings held by white residents who opposed the integration of Ho-Chunk students into local schools (Srole 1939a, 1939b, 1939c). The material he collected substantiates the contention he expressed in a March 15, 1939, letter to his advisers that he could write a study "unlike (for better or worse) any other study of an American Indian tribe" because he could describe and define "exactly the nature and extent of the relations and status of the Winnebagoes in white society, the attitudes of both Winnebago and whites to each other and to their relations" (Srole 1939d, 1). Yet in Srole's notes for a never-completed monograph based on his research, he focused not on the causes of the tense local race relations or white hostility toward Indians, but rather on the breakdown of Ho-Chunk culture and the "instability" of the Ho-Chunk "personality" (Srole 1939e).

Srole's turn to personality despite the evidence of racism he documented will not surprise those familiar with the history of anthropological studies of American Indian acculturation (for bibliographies, see Keesing 1952; Siegel 1955). Many anthropological accounts during the era of his research explained contemporary American Indian life in terms of broken cultures and pathological personalities, which anthropologists saw as the covert causes of Native people's apparent failure to adapt to contemporary life (e.g., Kluckhohn 1943; MacGregor 1946; Mead 1932; Thompson 1951). These studies developed sometimes-brilliant analyses of patterns of culture and personality, but they also made these concepts into "invisible ontologies" (Fields and Fields 2012, 220–24) that obscured the structural and historical foundations of the sort of racial oppression Srole had noted in Wisconsin.²

In recent years, scholars in Indigenous studies have criticized anthropologists for approaching American Indian life in ways that obscure problems linked to colonization and racism. Under the banner of methodological decolonization, these scholars condemn past studies for perpetuating a form of "ethnographic entrapment" that reduces the material, intellectual, and affective structures of settler-colonial oppression to descriptions of difference (Silva 2007; Simpson 2011; Smith 2010). The charge of entrapment resonates with long-term reflections within anthropology on problems of colonial complicity, ethnographic authority, and conceptual reification (Asad 1973;

Clifford and Marcus 1986; Hymes 1972; Povinelli 2002; Turner 1991). Such concerns have reshaped anthropological accounts of Native North America, leading anthropologists to reflect on the complicated legacies of the "Americanist tradition" (Briggs and Bauman 1999; Buckley 1996; Field 1999; Lewis 1998; Simpson 2007; Valentine and Darnell 2007) and to create new ethnographic accounts that emphasize the agency of Indian peoples, past and present, in struggles against dispossession and racism (Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997; Cadena and Starn 2007; Strong 2005; see also Cattellino 2008; Dennison 2012; Fowler 2004; Lambert 2007; Nesper 2002; Richland 2008; Simpson 2014). Srole's field notes suggest that an understanding of how ethnographies carried out within settler-colonial contexts can entrap Indigenous people can look to the experiences created by the interpersonal politics in the colonial field, and the relationship between racism, indigeneity, and settlerness.

Settlerness, or "whiteness in settler contexts" (Veracini 2011, 9), names the position of privilege vis-à-vis indigeneity within settler society.³ The position represents, in the words of Audra Simpson, the "stable ontological core [and] unquestioned 'self'" (2007, 70) that exists largely unmarked in institutional and everyday contexts. As unmarked, it has often been invisible to white scholars and persons (Moreton-Robinson 2004). Its invisibility relative to Indigenous difference is sustained in part by what Mark Rifkin has called a "settler common sense" that comprises an "embodied set . . . of sensations, dispositions, and lived trajectories" that shape action in the "field of possibility" constituted by settler society (Rifkin 2014, 8–9, 12–16; see also Rifkin 2012).

Srole's account of Daybreak both exhibits and insightfully analyzes, if unwittingly, the "common sense" of settlerness and, in particular, a pattern of perceptual failure that I call "settler agnosia." Settler agnosia refers to a socioculturally acquired disposition that, like neuropsychological agnosias, involves the inability to "arrive at the meaning of some or all categories of previously known stimuli despite normal or near-normal sensory capacity" (Marotta and Behrman 2002, 59). The pattern of perceptual and cognitive failures that comprise settler agnosia has already been noted in research on the colonial gaze aimed at racially marked bodies (e.g., Lutz and Collins 1993) and on the role of modern language ideologies in the subtle "conceptual subordination" of racially marked voices in the white public sphere (Hill 2008). These failures have been documented in ethnographic accounts of how public scrutiny works to silence Indigenous critiques and constrain Indigenous actions (Conklin and Graham 1995; Graham 2002, 2011; Oakdale 2004; Viatori 2012). In the words of Jodi Byrd, referring to "colonial agnosia," this mode of perception "cannot connect the present tense presence of [Indigenous] bodies and referents to the larger systems of domination that continue to inform Otherness within U.S. settler imperialism"

(n.d., 13).⁴ Its intrusion into ethnographic projects can lead even trained observers like Srole to fail to recognize key features of the racialized situations in which they encounter Indigenous interlocutors.

Settler agnosia bridges the forms of racial ignorance described in recent interdisciplinary scholarship (Mills 2007; Steinberg 2007; Sullivan and Tuana 2007) with the more conventional anthropological idea of culturally shaped perception. Settler agnosia is a form of functional ignorance that orients actors struggling over status to the affordances of their situation, making it possible for them to navigate a social space polarized by the racial politics of settler colonialism. *Affordance* is a neologism popularized by the work of ecological psychologist James Gibson to name the action imperatives of the perceived world that provoke “specific, often visceral reactions” in those attuned to them (Martin 2011, 167; see also Gibson 2014; Reed 1996). Settler agnosia makes apparent a clear path through a distorted social field because it obscures so much that would be obvious to a critical observer (Martin 2011, 230). Labeling the agnostic perceptions “functional” does not imply that they are justified in any ethical or epistemological sense, least of all for those claiming to be scientific observers. Rather, conceiving the difference between perceptions in the field and the analysis possible in ethnography as due to functional ignorance makes it possible to study settler agnosia as part of a wider array of practices of settlerness within the field of settler-colonial society.

Entrapment and the ethnographic encounter

The Ho-Chunk Nation was the dominant Indigenous polity in the lands west of Lake Michigan at the time of first European contact in the 17th century. When US settlers expanded into the region in the early 19th century, Ho-Chunk villages stretched from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River. In the 1820s and 1830s, however, the Ho-Chunk people were coerced into ceding their territories in a series of treaties (Lurie 1978). Forced removal from 1840 to 1875 led to a split between “treaty-abiding” Ho-Chunks, who eventually established themselves on a reservation in Nebraska, and a “disaffected” band of families who resisted removal and ultimately won the right to take up individual homesteads in Wisconsin beginning in the 1870s (Lurie 1978; Onsager 1985). Located on lands generally unsuited for agriculture, Ho-Chunks in Wisconsin survived through trapping, gathering, and working in agriculture and in the growing regional tourism industry (Lurie 1952). In the decades preceding Srole’s research, they began organizing various ad hoc committees to seek legal remedies for past treaty violations. James Daybreak (1900–70) played a leading role in such efforts, including a stalled effort to organize a tribal government under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (Arndt 2015; Gudinas 1974).

Srole went to Wisconsin in 1938 to research Ho-Chunk life as part of a general shift to contemporary topics in the anthropology of Native North America. By the 1930s, the growth of anthropology programs in US universities and new sources of research funding encouraged increasingly ambitious theory-building efforts directed at contemporary cultural problems and processes (Stocking 1985). Srole’s work continued a project begun in 1931, when the University of Chicago’s anthropology department initiated several studies of culture change, including a study of the Meskwaki Nation of Iowa by Sol Tax (Daubenmier 2008) and of the Ho-Chunk people in Wisconsin and Nebraska by Rachel Commons. Family issues forced Commons to suspend her work in 1933, and it was left incomplete when she died in 1935 (McMillan 1986, 232–33n11). That same year, Srole (1908–93) came to Chicago from Harvard University with his adviser, W. Lloyd Warner, for whom he had worked in Newburyport, Massachusetts, on the Yankee City project, the “most intensive, exhaustive, and expensive survey ever made of a small American city” (Thernstrom 1965, 236). While waiting to defend his dissertation, which would later be published as *The Social System of American Ethnic Groups* (Warner and Srole 1945), the third of five in the Yankee City series, Srole was funded to continue Commons’s Ho-Chunk research under the supervision of instructor Fred Eggan and department chair Faye Cooper-Cole. He left for Wisconsin in late August 1938 and hired Daybreak “for four weeks at the rate of ten dollars for a three-day week,” with plans to visit all the Ho-Chunk settlements that Commons had documented.⁵

But Srole’s relationship with Daybreak was tense from the start, which Srole blamed on Daybreak. In correspondence with his advisers, Srole complained that during interviews Daybreak would signal to older, conservative Ho-Chunk interviewees that they should not provide information on religious topics. Daybreak apparently also “intimated that I had no right to go prying into the private affairs of the Winnebago,” and “pointedly” refused “to be interviewed himself.” Ultimately, “when I made no bones that I wanted information, he flatly refused. . . . In spite of the fact that [our] original understanding was that, for a fixed consideration, he was to help me in every way possible” (1938b, 1).

It is evident in Srole’s personality profile of him that Daybreak offered reasons for his resistance, although Srole seems not to have recognized or accepted them. Responding to Srole’s request for information on the Medicine Lodge, for example, Daybreak replied,

Well, even if I wanted to, I couldn’t tell you. I haven’t the right to. The old men would be down on me if I did. After all I expect to go back to my people and live among them some day. I’ve got to protect myself as well as them. (Srole 1938b, 15)

Daybreak had reason to be cautious, given the controversy surrounding the fieldwork of Boasian anthropologist Paul Radin (1908–13). Radin had incurred the enmity of Ho-Chunk traditionalists three decades earlier by obtaining and making public sacred knowledge that was forbidden to non-initiates (Radin 1991, 35–40). The problems of collaborating with an anthropologist were intensified in Daybreak's case by his status as a young person already highly integrated into white society; this made him an object of suspicion for older traditionalists. He told Srole with evident bitterness that even his own father had signed a petition to have him removed from the claims committee because all those who dealt too comfortably with whites were generally mistrusted (Srole 1938b, 16–17).

The conflict between Srole and Daybreak was evident in their first meeting and appears to have been the result of Daybreak's unwillingness to accept Srole's terms for their collaboration. According to Srole, when he told Daybreak that he "had very little money," which he "meant to stretch" as far as he could in carrying out the research, Daybreak reacted "jokingly but disbelievingly," making comments in the following days "about white people who come to the Indians to get all they can out of them and give nothing in return" (1938b, 3–4). Soon thereafter, Daybreak asked Srole if he was Jewish, and when Srole said yes, Daybreak replied, "I thought so." A few days later, Daybreak told a pointed tale about Jewish merchants "who bid for furs caught by Indians at half the price that should be offered." Daybreak concluded his story with a message: "The Indians are on to their game. They tell the Jews to either pay the regular price or go to hell. And they get the price. Of course, Jews are all shrewd with money but they can't beat the Indians any more" (1938b, 4).

Such "innuendoes" led Srole to decide that

I had better make myself clear very soon. . . . So several days later I told him I was aware that he was a high priced man and that I obviously couldn't pay him what he was worth for his assistance. Further, that I had budgeted my money and found that I could only pay a certain standard low rate per hour to the Indians who cared to help me. (1938b, 4)

He reported Daybreak's reaction:

That clearly hit him between the eyes. I don't know what exactly he was expecting, but it was obvious that my terms were far from what he had hoped for. It is my impression that he had anticipated being engaged at a fair salary all fall. His face assumed that dour look old Indians affect among whites, and his eyelids narrowed. He hemmed and hawed but finally accepted. (4)

According to Srole, Daybreak continued to contest the terms of their relationship, refusing to give Srole information during the hours he was not being paid and

attempting to make Srole pay for meals and other expenses wherever possible. Srole reported that he let Daybreak "get away with his lesser offenses, but would clamp down on him when he was too blatant" (1938b, 5). Once "reprimanded" in this way, Daybreak became "very fawning, and obeisant," making conciliatory overtures, offering "to buy me cigars or to treat me to a movie" (5), which Srole rebuffed.

Although Srole uses their interactions in the personality profile to illustrate Daybreak's "aggressive" personality, his account makes it evident that their conflict resulted from a mutual struggle over positioning in which he was just as active as Daybreak. In this jockeying for position, both men drew on similar resources and strategies. Srole, for example, had already described in his field materials how he understood and had used the local "gifting complex" to work himself "into the W[innebag] social fabric" (Srole 1938f, 2). He noted that "the cigar has special significance, as leaf tobacco is an important ritual object in their sacred ceremonies," and that

to increase the feeling of intimacy, I am taking advantage of their strong gift complex by giving a cigar to each of the men I meet [along with a "wise-crack"]. . . . I find myself giving cigars, quite spontaneously, to my landlord, to the mailman, to the barkeep in my favorite Tomah Hofbrau. (1938f, 2)

Srole's account also shows that Daybreak made explicit certain role relations entailing their relative positions in social space. Srole later quotes him as complaining that the employees of the Indian school in Tomah, Wisconsin, "treated Indian kids . . . as if they weren't white" (1938b, 21). Daybreak thus contested the automatic assumption among whites, even those who lacked education or income, that Ho-Chunk people like him were their subordinates.⁶ This is also clear in Daybreak's parable of the Jewish trader and the Indians, which denied Srole's effort to frame their relationship in terms of friendship and scientific collaboration by making clear that they were negotiating over valuable goods. The parable also made the issue of race explicit, undermining Srole's standing in the relationship by invoking anti-Semitic stereotypes that raised questions about his whiteness and thus challenged any presumption that Daybreak should accept the subordinate position in the relationship. When it became clear to Srole that Daybreak would not provide the information he wanted, Srole ended their collaboration, continuing his research with other Ho-Chunk consultants.

The personality profile

After Srole ended their working relationship, he sent his advisers at the University of Chicago his account of his conflict with Daybreak. Srole argued that the rupture in their

relationship resulted from “three principal aggressions” evident in Daybreak’s behavior. The first of these was Daybreak’s “shrewd aggressiveness” in obtaining money. It was, as Srole noted, “the source of no little friction between” them (1938b, 3). Daybreak was “determined that he shall do nothing for which he is not paid” (2), and in Srole’s view, this insistence on payment was inappropriate given the framing of their collaboration as a friendly partnership. Moreover, it suggested to Srole that Daybreak had “dropped the fundamental Winnebago attitudes of reciprocity” and “accepted white attitudes in their place, but . . . without understanding fully the important qualifications whites make as to the types of context in which money exchange is proper” (6).

Srole linked Daybreak’s “money aggression” to what he perceived as a second aggression, Daybreak’s “drive to acquire suitable symbols of white class status” (6). Daybreak, he noted, boasted that he was both willing and able to pay “much for good things” (3). Srole was particularly interested in Daybreak’s use of clothing and other commodities to construct a persona, observing that when Daybreak was “out among whites,” he dressed “immaculately, his dark suit neatly pressed, his hair oiled and combed,” and when he was “about a specially important engagement,” he had “a perceptible odor of perfume” (1–2). Srole noted that Daybreak’s outfit included a \$60 overcoat “more expensive than the standard, for example, of someone like myself” (6). Daybreak also drove an especially flashy car, a cream-colored 1937 Ford V-8 with special white-walled Vogue brand tires, and maintained a rented room with a lower middle-class white family in Madison rather than stay at his parent’s house in the small Wisconsin town of Wyeville. In Srole’s eyes, the housing arrangement was Daybreak’s effort to claim “middle-class” white status rather than the “upper lower-class” status of his Indian parents (9).

For Srole, Daybreak’s preference for lower middle-class white symbols linked his second aggression to a third: a quest for “aggressive mobility in white society” (9). Srole observed that Daybreak had an expansive network of acquaintances, noting that he was “hailed by whites on the street, in restaurants and taverns” with “Hi, Jim,” followed by informal conversations. Daybreak also made “extensive ‘contacts’ with the whites” through his public role at the Dells and in his work “before conventions and meetings of various white associations and corporations,” and he bragged to Srole of the celebrities he had encountered (9–10). Daybreak’s pursuit of such relationships seemed “aggressive” to Srole in part because Daybreak privately expressed resentments against whites, making offhand comments about “dumb white men” and telling stories with “connotations derogatory to whites” (14).

Srole summed up his portrait by describing Daybreak as a “tightrope walker” in a “perilous” position, attempting simultaneously “to walk two ropes . . . pitched at cross-purposes to each other” (17). In this image, one rope

represented white society; the other, the Ho-Chunk community. According to Srole, Daybreak was “deep into both groups without having a firm footing with either,” and so he straddled both groups, “swinging first with one foot on one rope, and then with the other foot on the other rope” (17).

Srole felt that Daybreak’s movements were complicated by his being as “attracted and repelled by the tribe” as he was by the whites (17). More specifically, Daybreak was attracted by Ho-Chunk religion and the relative status he enjoyed in the tribe, but repulsed by the “deplorable” conditions of Ho-Chunk life and by tribal members’ antagonism toward him, denouncing his wealth and lifestyle. Similarly, the status of whites attracted him even though he was repelled by their past behavior and by the possibility of racial denigration and rejection (17).

Srole concluded the analysis with a psychological diagnosis, suggesting that the aggressions were symptoms of “personal insufficiency and inadequacy in the presence of whites,” and speculated that they resulted from a psychosexual condition, the nature of which he only hinted at (17–20). In a letter to his advisers, Srole mentioned that he had consulted on his Ho-Chunk research with a psychiatrist from the University of Chicago, and that once his fieldwork was complete, they might collaborate on a study of Ho-Chunk personality (Srole 1938e, 9–10).

Settler agnosia and the perceptual politics of settlerness

Despite the psychological nature of Srole’s diagnosis, his description in the personality profile has an unmistakably social-interactive structure. The three aggressions he attributes to Daybreak—those of money, class status, and social connections—bear an uncanny resemblance to the fundamental forms of capital (economic, cultural, and social) at the core of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) relational account of human practice.⁷ This striking “homology” (as Bourdieu might have called it) suggests that Daybreak’s aggressions were not the manifestations of hidden drives, as Srole suggested, but rather claims to position vis-à-vis Srole in a shared field of action. Srole perceived Daybreak’s behavior as aggressive because it challenged his own position in the field. Daybreak wore nicer clothes, drove a fancier car, and sought to live in a manner that asserted his middle-class credentials. He was also well known and apparently well liked in the town where he worked, a virtual celebrity because of his high-profile role in the Dells’ most famous tourist show. On top of all this, he refused to adopt the expected attitude of a deferential and thankful employee and instead directly challenged Srole’s authority. Srole’s descriptions show that he recognized Daybreak’s parable of the Indians and the Jewish traders as implicitly invoking anti-Semitic stereotypes that undermined his standing in the relationship (or, from Daybreak’s perspective,

challenged the assumption that Daybreak should accept the subordinate position in the relationship) by questioning why Jews had a more natural claim to white status than Indians.⁸ That Srole was threatened is suggested by his response to Daybreak's parable—he reasserted the hierarchy between whites and Indians, warning Daybreak that he “could only pay a certain standard low rate per hour to the *Indians* who cared to help me” (1938b, 4; emphasis added). The labels—Indian, white, Jew—acted as forms of racialized, and racializing, “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1986) that invoked ideological frameworks stipulating their relative status-positions.

How could someone who readily recognized white “ambivalence” and hostility toward Indians in others be so oblivious to his own manifestation of such ambivalence and hostility? In part, the answer lies in the context in which he was working, a context in which racializing assumptions were normal even in social science. Indeed, throughout his account of Daybreak, Srole draws on terms and concepts from the social science of the era, invoking his mentor Warner's “caste” approach to race relations (Warner 1936; for an early critique, see Cox 1948). He also implicitly draws on the “index of status characteristics” that Warner employed in his Newburyport study, which included recognized symbols of class placement, modes of social participation, the relative prestige of various occupations, and the significance of house type and dwelling area (Warner 1960). Similarly, Srole's discussion of Daybreak's location on Indian and white tight ropes echoes the language of Robert Park's (1928) discussion of the “marginal man” struggling to “maintain self-respect” while adjusting to “bicultural” situations.⁹ As such, Srole's personality profile could be taken as an example of how the ethnography of that time tended to perpetuate an “epistemology of ignorance” surrounding issues of race and dispossession by obscuring the power dynamics of racialized or colonial situations (Steinberg 2007).

Yet it was not Srole's role as an observer but rather his position in the field as an actor that was the greater factor in his inability to see the situation clearly. A perceptual failure, or agnosia, was triggered in his confrontation with an Indian who did not know his place and in their struggles over position and status. Rather than seeing the historical and social contexts of Daybreak's behavior, Srole focused on visible, audible, or otherwise sensible marks of physical difference. Settler agnosia is thus a form of seeing and hearing that parallels the discursive techniques of racialization identified by linguistic anthropologists, techniques that make it possible for settler subjects “to turn an eye from inescapable disparities in access to material and ideological resources” (Dick and Wirtz 2011; Urciuoli 2011). A generation of work on the obstacles facing Indigenous activists has cataloged such racializing tactics, showing how forms of visual attention and representation render Indigenous

people invisible as persons subject to systematic injustice while allowing anthropologists to excessively scrutinize their bodies and behavior for signs of deviant or maladaptive tendencies that explain their poverty and powerlessness. This work has also shown how, in studying Indigenous people's speech in settler society, authorities can interpret utterances as discursive figurations of discrediting racial identities and thereby silence testimony about oppression (Graham 2002, 2011; Hill 2008; Viatori 2012). In most such cases, patterns of attention are overtly political in their use of ideological frameworks to respond to the threat of Indigenous defiance. Srole's field notes show how such patterns of attention emerged as the result of threats to an ethnographer's status in the context of struggles over position in the field.

In his field notes, Srole documents his pattern of attention to visible and audible signs of difference. For example, he described the appearances of most of the Ho-Chunk people he interviewed but did not do so for any of the whites. He described Daybreak as “five feet, six inches tall, and of heavy, fatty build, giving him a squatty appearance” with a face that was “moderately Indian in structure, with skin color in the middle ranges of Winnebago variation” (1938b, 1–2). Similarly, he remarked on the voices of many of his Ho-Chunk interview subjects, including minor imperfections of grammar and vocabulary, generally in the same paragraph as his observations of skin color and other physical features. He judged Daybreak's use of English to be “in enunciation, grammar and choice of words . . . very nearly perfect,” but noted that “occasionally, when his guard is down . . . he makes slight grammatical slips” (2).

Although anthropologists' scrutiny of Indigenous bodies has a notorious history (Beaulieu 1984), Srole did not evaluate Daybreak based on these differences. What concerned him about Daybreak's appearance was his “social skin” (Turner 2012), as exemplified by his fancy suit and overcoat and its extensions, such as his car and home. In other words, Srole's gaze racialized Daybreak by focusing not on the color of his skin but on the cut of his suit. Similarly, he made nothing of Daybreak's “slight grammatical slips,” but instead noted the anger and aggression evident in Daybreak's passionate accounts of Ho-Chunk experiences of oppression. He noted that Daybreak expressed “vehement” disdain for “the US Indian Bureau and the local Indian Agency . . . more intense than that expressed by other Indians,” and that he “never allows himself to forget what the whites have done to the Indians” (1938b, 14). Focusing on Daybreak's emotions allowed Srole to sidestep the persuasive power of Daybreak's complaints about inequality and discrimination, to shift from message to code (Graham 2002), and thus to experience Daybreak as the sort of uppity Indian that Phyllis Crandall-Connor had complained to him about at the start of his fieldwork.¹⁰

Once triggered, settler agnosia enabled Srole to attribute the behavior—and the feelings it caused him—to Daybreak as personal faults. In a sense, this shift reveals what is functional about the perceptual patterning of settler agnosia. In recent work inspired by Bourdieu's field theory, but drawing more widely on the evolution of animal perceptual systems, sociologist John Levi Martin argues that people have evolved and cultivated perceptual apparatuses that allow us "to 'get' the causal texture of the environment in order to enable effective action in it" (2011, 245). We perceive this causal texture in the "action imperatives" of experienced objects (such as the patterns of behavior that constituted Daybreak's "aggressions" for Srole). Such forms of perception, according to Levi Martin, "bring cognition into alignment with an environment" (196)—in Srole's case, the environment created by settler society. Particularly in the personality profile, his insights as a participant in the struggle for position in settler society negated the critical insights into the situation that Daybreak and other Ho-Chunk people attempted to share with him, and also negated his own observations of local racial antagonisms.

Conclusion: The promise of ethnography in the field

Those who nowadays set themselves up as judges and distribute praise and blame among the sociologists and ethnologists of the colonial past would be better occupied in trying to understand what it was that prevented the most lucid and the best intentioned of those they condemn from understanding things which are now self-evident for even the least lucid and sometimes the least well-intentioned observers.

In this quotation from the introduction to *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1990, 5) challenges us to refrain from ad hominem attacks on past scholars for creating ethnographic accounts that downplay or ignore the violence and devastation of colonialism, of which we are now acutely aware. He urges us instead to ask what allows us to speak so easily about what those scholars remained silent on, or even obfuscated in their analyses. Throughout his work, Bourdieu focused attention on a form of logic unrecognized by the "scholastic point of view" that ethnographers brought with them to the field. Ignorance of the logic of practice led them to see some behavior as irrational or contradictory when in fact it was guided by a logic linked to the imperatives actors experienced because of how they were positioned in social space. The account of Leo Srole and his ethnographic work in this article extends this aspect of Bourdieu's argument by examining how fieldwork embeds ethnographic observers in fields of practical action. In such fields, interactions with Indigenous interlocutors can trigger perceptions and actions associated with struggles over "white class status" and an attendant form of

functional ignorance. The sense of reality created by this agnostic perception can undermine the critical insights into the racializing structures of settler-colonial society that are the goal of ethnographic work seeking "the critical estrangement of the lived world" (Comaroff 2010, 530).

The functional ignorance and entrapping ethnographies of the past can also be understood as enabled by the action imperatives experienced and exploited by ethnographers in their particular field of cultural and intellectual production (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). Ethnographers of Srole's era worked in an intellectual field wherein anthropologists who attempted the sort of critical accounting of racial oppression and exploitation now central to the anthropological study of settler colonialism faced real obstacles in publishing and in attaining academic positions (Price 2004). The imperatives of scientific production and professional self-positioning have changed radically since the early era of acculturation studies. Decades of activism and national rebuilding in Native North America have created demands for new kinds of decolonized ethnographic relationships, not only in the field but also in print, even as they have presented ethnographers with new objects of analysis (Braun 2016; Deloria 1966; Hosmer and Nesper 2013; Wilkinson 2003). Such changes in Native North America and its anthropology have contributed to a process of self-reflection and critique that has changed the field of anthropology more generally. The contemporary production of ethnographic writing is addressed primarily to a relatively "restricted" audience of readers—fellow anthropologists and Indigenous interlocutors—that tends to both welcome and demand recognition of the problems of colonialism, allowing for the development of approaches to American Indian life that directly address the problems of settler colonialism and Indigenous responses to them in ways that were outside the remit of ethnographers in earlier eras (cf. Bourdieu 1996, 217, on the "field of restricted production").

While analyzing settler agnosia as part of the practice of settlerness offers an anthropological account of the "racial epistemologies of ignorance" (Mills 2007) at the foundation of settler-colonial society, current ethnographic accounts of indigeneity and settlerness are no doubt compatible with other forms of functional ignorance. Identifying the functional ignorance revealed by the disjuncture between perception in everyday interactions and ethnographic analysis links contemporary knowledge production to the structures of settler colonialism that continue to shape life in the contemporary United States.

Notes

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1. Daybreak also used the name James Smoke, but I refer to him as James Daybreak, the name he used in his first letter to Srole.
2. There are exceptions to these generalizations (e.g., Lesser 2006), but attention to colonialism and racism could have consequences. A study of Indian-white relations in Round Valley, California, carried out around the same time as Srole's research, was cut from *Acculturation in Seven* [originally *Eight*] *American Indian Tribes* because of what it revealed about the history of settlement (Linton 1940; Susman 1976).
3. Patrick Wolfe (1999) has argued that settler colonialism must be seen as a structure rather than a historical period; on the contemporary United States as a settler society, see Jessica Cattelino's (2010) analysis.
4. I became aware of Byrd's unpublished work from the anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this article: Byrd cites Ann Stoler's (2011) "colonial aphasia" as her inspiration; my own path to "agnosia" ran from the work of Charles Mills (1997), on "racial epistemologies of ignorance," through well-known work on *agnotology*, a now-familiar neologism proposed by Robert Proctor to name research into the production of ignorance through scientific research (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008).
5. Commons had documented six regional clusters containing over 300 families and 1,372 individuals in a community survey based on a 1931 census of Ho-Chunk people by Homer L. Morrison of the Tomah Indian School. Srole created a file containing over 1,000 cards with basic kinship and other data on individuals.
6. Other Ho-Chunk people expressed related sentiments in their interviews. For example, Howard Windblow noted that he had become "fed up" with the "white girls" working in the Tomah Indian School's laundry because they "looked down on [Indians]" (Srole 1938a, 3). He had moved to Madison so that he could contact a more "intelligent class of white people" (Srole 1938a, 3). On the complicated relationship between Indian identity and US racial categories, including whiteness, see the work of Brian Klopotek (2011), Malinda Lowery (2010), and Circe Sturm (2002).
7. In brief, Bourdieu argued that the forms of capital positioned individuals and groups in social space and that fields existed when their struggles over position were aligned by a common goal (Bourdieu 1993, 29–73; 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 94–114). According to John Levi Martin (2003, 2011), Bourdieu's field theory emerged within a long history of efforts to develop relational accounts of human action. See also the discussions of Bourdieu's field theory by Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2012), Philip Gorski (2013), and William Hanks (2005).
8. On the complexities of Jewish whiteness in 20th-century US society, see analyses by Karen Brodtkin (1998), Mathew Fry Jacobsen (1998), and Michael Rogin (1998).
9. Daybreak's reference to Srole's Jewish identity marked him as a member of the group that Park and his followers used as the epitomizing example of the "Marginal Man" (Park 1928, 891–93; Stonequist 1935, 9–11).
10. For the way evidence of emotions can be used to discredit claims to knowledge, see the account by Sue Campbell (1994, 46–47).

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