

FROM HAMPTON “[I]NTO THE HEART OF AFRICA”: HOW FAITH IN GOD AND FOLKLORE TURNED CONGO MISSIONARY WILLIAM SHEPPARD INTO A PIONEERING ETHNOLOGIST

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I

The African-American missionary, William Henry Sheppard Jr. (1865-1927), lived in the Kuba kingdom of central Africa at the turn of the twentieth century.¹ A student of Virginia’s Hampton (Normal) Institute in the early 1880s, Sheppard left the United States a decade later to preach in the Congo Free State, a colonial territory claimed by Belgian monarch Leopold II. This king’s army, the Force Publique, and its local auxiliaries spawned suffering throughout the equatorial region. They pillaged villages in Kasai, the southern Congo area surrounding Sheppard’s Presbyterian outposts, killing families and driving survivors into brigades that collected wild rubber for European concessionary companies.² This rubber boom, in turn, generated profits that not only enriched Leopold II and his business allies,

¹This paper benefited from a Virginia Foundation for the Humanities grant in 2004. VFH funds supported the writing of a bibliographic guide to the William Henry Sheppard Papers (WHSP) in the Hampton University Archives (HUA), which my colleague at George Mason University, Ms. P. Slade Martin, and I co-authored in 2005. Without her innovative ideas and guidance as Associate Director of GMU’s African American Studies Program, this paper would not have been possible. I also owe a debt of gratitude to undergraduates in my historical methodology course, “HIST 300: Colonialism in Africa.” Over the past five years, we investigated Sheppard’s ethnological fieldwork in the Congo. Below, I acknowledge students whose final papers on Sheppard’s missionary career used evidence from Hampton and other archival repositories. Finally, I thank the following scholars for their contributions and comments: D. McDow, R. Harms, R. Edgar, R. Short, S. Krech, R. Vinson, and L. Vis.

²These Presbyterian mission stations were named Luebo and Ibanj.



Figure 1: William Henry Sheppard Jr., Congo Missionary, 1893³

³Illustration courtesy of HUA

but also propelled a revolution in transportation that culminated in the mass production of tires for the bicycle and automobile.⁴ Sheppard is known for bearing witness to Congo atrocities, but his ground-breaking ethnological research remains unfamiliar to many Africanists.⁵ It is fortunate for these scholars that the college that nurtured Sheppard's fascination with folklore, Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), houses his papers, photographs, and artwork. This paper introduces and analyzes these sources.

II

Between the 1890s and first decade of the 1900s, William Sheppard's writings and speeches depicted a Christian revival in the Congo amid the brutality of rapacious imperialism. When he first informed his Presbyterian sponsors of the terror in Kasai, his accounts revealed such shocking carnage—detailing, for example, the burning and mutilation of women by Belgian-backed Songye mercenaries (or Zappo Zaps)—that his supporters back home alerted leading newspapers of a crime against humanity unfolding in Africa.⁶ Journalists did the rest. Their broadsheets featured Sheppard's dispatches, among them haunting excerpts from his Pianga Massacre report (1899) on the murderous raids of Songye henchmen around his Luebo mission. Articles condemning “Horrors in Congo” and “Natives . . . Tortured” fueled outrage in the West and boosted an international human rights campaign led by Edmund Morel, one of the founders of the Congo Reform Association.⁷ Headlined as a hero, Sheppard enjoyed rare fame for an

⁴R. Harms, “The End of Red Rubber: a Reassessment,” *JAH* 16(1975), 73-88.

⁵In the late nineteenth century ethnology was being enfolded into anthropology, an emerging social science recognized by leading universities and, significantly, by the United States government. By the early 1880s, Congress had started to fund a Bureau of Ethnology to tap the minds of “scientific men engaged in the study of anthropology.” George Stocking elucidates: “Conceived in evolutionary terms, ‘anthropology’ was no less embracive than ‘ethnology’ . . . since an evolutionary explanation had in principle to account not only for the physical development of the human species, but also for the development of its distinctive mental capacities—including not only language, but all the mental or social phenomena . . . of ‘culture’ or ‘civilization’:” Stocking, *Delimiting Anthropology: Occasional Inquiries and Reflections* (Madison, 2001), 310-11.

⁶For other Zappo Zaps' atrocities reported by Sheppard see S. Shaloff, *Reform in Leopold's Congo* (Richmond, 1970), 165-74.

⁷“Horrors,” *Washington Post* (15 March 1903); “Natives,” *Boston Globe* (25 March 1904). See also: R. Benedetto, *Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa: a Documentary Account of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission and Human Rights Struggle in the Congo, 1890-1918* (Leiden, 1996); E. Morel, *King Leopold's Rule in Africa* (London, 1904); W. Lewis and J. Stengers, *E. D. Morel's History of the Congo Reform Movement* (Oxford, 1968). Mark Twain cited Sheppard's Pianga Massacre report in *King Leopold's Soliloquy: a Defense of His Congo Rule* (Boston, 1905), 23; Rare Books and Special Col-

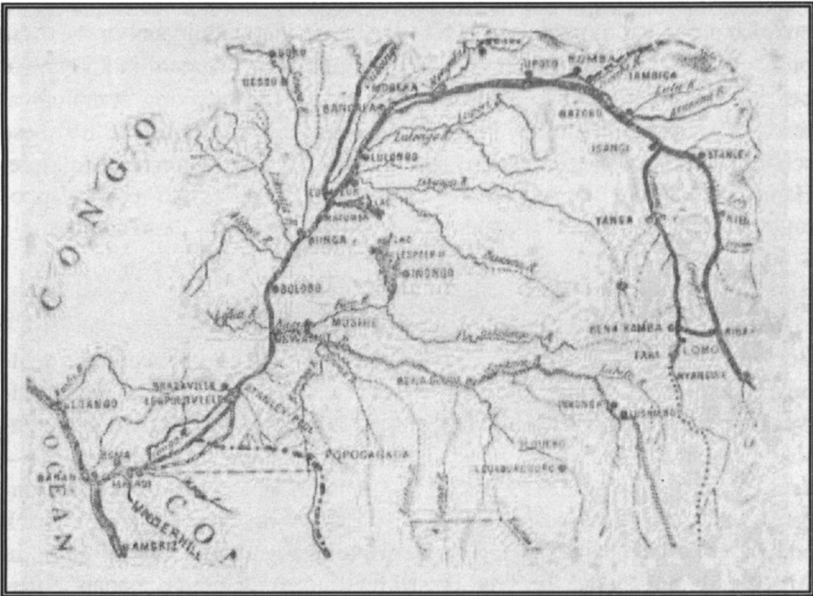


Figure 2: Sheppard's Map of Kasai Region, with Luebo Mission in Lower Right, 1893⁸

African-American man in the United States during the Jim Crow era. The *Boston Herald* extolled this “Son of a Slave” who “Informed [the] World of Congo Abuses.”⁹ By 1910 Sheppard had earned accolades from President Theodore Roosevelt and the memorable sobriquet, “Black Livingstone.”

Sheppard is the subject of two quite different biographies published in 2002, one comprehensive study by Presbyterian Church scholar William Phipps, the other an impressionistic work by novelist Pagan Kennedy.¹⁰ Similar to Sheppard's own memoir, Phipps and Kennedy focus on the Congo missionary's crusade against colonial oppression and “heathen” ignorance.¹¹ The two contemporary biographers revel in Sheppard's daring qualities. Their protagonist eludes countless brushes with danger—virulent

lections, Jefferson Building, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Links between Sheppard and Congo reformers: K. Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884-1926* (London, 2004), 35-36, 39-42, 62-67; and S. Cooley, *Britain and the Congo Question, 1885-1913* (New York, 1968), 59-67, 107.

⁸Illustration courtesy of HUA

⁹*Boston Herald* (17 October 1909).

¹⁰W. Phipps, *William Sheppard: Congo's African American Livingstone* (Louisville, 2002); P. Kennedy, *Black Livingstone: a True Tale of Adventure in the Nineteenth-Century Congo* (New York, 2002).

¹¹W. Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneer in the Congo* (Richmond, 1917).



Figure 3: “Black Livingston”: Sheppard in the Congo, ca. early 1900s¹²

disease, bush predators, rogue warriors, and Belgian persecutors. He is the consummate explorer, according to Kennedy, more thrilled by the “outback with a rifle across his shoulder” dressed “as a colonial Brit” than preaching to the pagan.¹³ The global dimensions of Sheppard’s *dramatis personae*, i.e., the humanitarian movements in Europe and America that celebrated his evangelism, also structure several chapters in Adam Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* and James Campbell’s *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa*.¹⁴

¹²Image source: www.library.yale.edu/div/exhibits/AfricanAmericanMissionaries.ppt accessed 4 January 2009.

¹³Kennedy, *Black Livingstone*, xviii. For Sheppard’s complex Victorian manhood see J. Turner, “A ‘Black-White’ Missionary on the Imperial Stage: William H. Sheppard and Middle-Class Black Manhood” *Journal of Southern Religion* 9 (2006): at jsr.fsu.edu/Volume9/Turner.htm accessed 2 November 2008.

¹⁴A. Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terrorism, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston, 1998), 152-73; J. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (New York, 2006), 137-87.

In illuminating Sheppard's epic feats and unusual profile as a swash-buckling black missionary, these otherwise engaging books skim over his formative spiritual, physical, and intellectual experiences. During his youth, Sheppard read Christian adventure stories that kindled his desire to convert the "Dark Continent," gamboled in the Virginia wilderness, and studied folklore at Hampton Institute. Indeed, we know comparatively little about how Sheppard's childhood and schooling shaped his views of the Congo and the ways he represented the Congo to diverse audiences.¹⁵ Scholars seeking to open these lines of inquiry would do well to consult a diverse pool of evidence in the Hampton University Archives.

III

Born in 1865, William Henry Sheppard Jr. and his sister Eva initially grew up in Waynesboro and then moved to Staunton, two small towns in the wooded Shenandoah region of Virginia. In the dense forests he swam in creeks, avoided poisonous snakes, and hunted small quarry. This verdant landscape served as Sheppard's proving ground. From an early age, he mastered the outdoor skills that would enable him to traverse tropical Africa. His mother, Fannie Sheppard (*née* Sarah Martin), was a maid at a health spa; his father, William Sheppard Sr., worked as a barber. The family prayed in a white-led church that treated black worshippers as second-class Christians. During the Civil War, this congregation heralded a "Southern Presbyterian" creed sanctifying slavery.¹⁶ Such support for the Confederacy permeated Sheppard's Virginia, creating a harsh reality that contradicted what the gospel told him. He looked for assurances from his mother that the scriptures proclaiming God's love did not apply exclusively to white supremacists. Sheppard also devoured books narrating the pilgrimages of young men who, guided by Christ, discovered mysterious worlds and

¹⁵W. (Randy) Short's deeply researched doctoral thesis delves into these themes: "William Sheppard: Pioneer African-American Presbyterian Missionary, Human Rights Defender, and Collector of African Art, 1865-1927" (Ph.D., Howard University, 2006).

¹⁶Phipps, *William Sheppard*, 7. For racial politics in Sheppard's hometowns see F. Pancake, *A Historical Sketch of the First Presbyterian Church, Staunton, Virginia* (Richmond, 1954); A Hoge, *Report of Treasurer of the First Presbyterian Church, Staunton, Virginia, from April 1, 1885, to June 30, 1898, with a Brief History of the Church* (Staunton, 1898); Historic Staunton Foundation, *A Town in Transition: Staunton, Virginia* (Staunton, 1979); G. Hawke, *A History of Waynesboro, Virginia, to 1900* (Waynesboro, 1997); G. Hawke, E. Meese, and Waynesboro Heritage Foundation, *A History of Waynesboro, Virginia, 1900-1976* (Waynesboro, 2007). I thank GMU undergraduates D. Rorer and G. D'Angelo for pointing me to these sources. For scholarship on the Civil War in western Virginia see E. Ayers and A. Rubin, *Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War* (New York, 2000).

enlightened the inhabitants that salvation was near.¹⁷ As a fledgling preacher, he enacted his own version of these religious journeys in the Congo.

During his boyhood, William Sheppard coped with ubiquitous racism by seeking out sympathetic whites. He sought refuge in the few established outlets that provided greater security and mobility, cultivating ties with former Confederates, who expanded his vocational opportunities. He maintained friendships with Southern Presbyterians like Dr. S. H. Henkel, a local dentist whose wife urged Sheppard to “go to Africa as a missionary.”¹⁸ Dr. Henkel hired the future Congo evangelist as a stable-hand and office assistant, even teaching Sheppard how to extract teeth, a procedure he later employed to good effect among the Kuba, preaching that the promise of deliverance entailed relieving mouth pain.¹⁹ Encouraged by the Henkels and other civic-minded whites, the fifteen-year-old Sheppard resolved to pursue his education at Hampton Institute, a place that not only became his intellectual beacon, but now houses an important body of materials that shed light on his childhood.

Some of these sources can be found in the following boxes of the William Henry Sheppard Papers in the Hampton University Archive: Box 1 contains key biographical information such as a document describing Sheppard’s mother’s occupation in Warm Springs. Newspaper stories in Box 2 acknowledge the influence of Sheppard’s mother on his development. Several articles in the *Southern Workman*, the newsletter of Hampton Institute, provide biographical sketches of the Sheppard matriarch, a “free woman” in Virginia who, unlike most slaves, benefited from unfettered access to the bible. A set of uncataloged boxes contain legal documents pertaining to Sheppard family properties. A transcript of an oral history interview with Sheppard’s son, Maxamalinge, provides vivid memories of Sarah Martin

¹⁷Inspired by his own boyhood (Christian) adventure literature, Reverend Sheppard decided to write his own series of children’s books with Congo themes; see, for example, *An African Daniel: Katembua, the Bugler*: WHSP, HUA.

¹⁸W. Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa” (typescript), 14 November 1893, WHSP, HUA. In the early 1900s, when Sheppard returned to the United States on furlough to raise funds for his Congo mission, he visited leading Southern secessionists. In 1906, for example, Sheppard and his wife Lucy approached the widow of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson, who later wrote to the couple expressing her gratitude to William Sheppard for expressing “esteem and admiration of my dear husband.” Mary Jackson asked the Sheppards for their “acceptance of the small check I enclose to aid in carrying on your work in Africa.” Letter Mary A. Jackson to Rev. W. H. Sheppard, 9 January 1906, William Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, North Carolina. I thank P. Slade Martin for this reference.

¹⁹Kennedy, *Black Livingstone*, 64. For an interesting study of conversion, missionaries, and tooth pain in colonial Africa, see P. Landau, “Explaining Surgical Evangelism in Southern Africa: Teeth, Pain and Faith,” *JAH* 37(1996), 261-81.

Sheppard, the maternal figure who instructed the future Congo missionary to embrace a race-blind God. As a toddler, Maxamalinge (who was named after a prominent Kuba prince) lived in a central African mission with his father and mother, Lucy Gantt Sheppard. Another oral history interview with Arthur Ware, William Sheppard's nephew, refers to the "free papers" and birthplace (Nelson County, Virginia) of Sarah Martin Sheppard. Researchers will find a series of children's books entitled *True African Stories by William Sheppard*. In the morality-tale tradition of his boyhood, Sheppard cajoles young readers to glory in Christian adventuring. The short texts include *A Little Robber Who Found Great Treasure*, *The Story of a Bad Boy*, *A Young Hunter*, *A True Story of Central Africa*, and *An African Daniel: Katembua, the Bugler*.

IV

Sheppard spent his teenage years at Hampton Normal Institute, a white-run school that originally catered to Native Americans. By the time of his enrollment in 1880, however, the school was admitting more and more black applicants.²⁰ Sheppard took evening courses taught by Hampton graduates like Booker T. Washington (class of 1875), who championed middle-class Christian respectability and black vocational training. Washington was expounding his "up from slavery" ethos, a muscular rendition of the "civilizing mission" fashioned for America.²¹ During this time Hampton attracted visiting dignitaries. In 1882 Sheppard probably attended one lecture by Edward Blyden, the Presbyterian president of Liberia College, then touring the United States. The speaker notoriously exhorted "the instrument for African evangelization must be the African himself."²² Did the young Shep-

²⁰For Native American education at Hampton see W. Robinson, "Indian Education at Hampton Institute" in K. Schall, ed. *Stony the Road: Chapters in the History of Hampton Institute* (Charlottesville, 1977), 1-29.

²¹For Washington's "up from slavery" ethos as domesticated "civilizing mission" see L. Harlan, *Separate and Equal* (Chapel Hill, 1983); R. Norrell, *Up From History: the Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, MA, 2009). See also R. Vinson and R. Edgar, "Zulus, African Americans and the African Diaspora" in B. Carton, J. Laband, and J. Sithole, eds. *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* (London, 2008), 242-43.

²²*New York Times* (30 October 1882). Sections of Blyden's 1882 American tour speech, excerpted in the *New York Times*, refers to failed European evangelization in Africa, particularly at the "mouth of the Congo." For a scholarly analysis of Blyden's speeches see W. A. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison, 1982), 12-13. For Blyden as a Pan-Africanist see H. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (London, 1967); G. Shepperson, "Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism," *JAH* 1(1960), 299. For Pan-Africanism in Jim Crow America see S. Lemelle and R. Kelley, "Imagining Home: Pan-Africanism Revisited" in S. Lemelle and R. Kelley, eds. *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London, 1994), 1-2.

pard dabble in the Pan-African radicalism of Blyden or the self-help bromides of Washington? The Sheppard Papers in the Hampton University Archives offer few answers. If anything, the archival documents indicate Sheppard toiled quietly to meet rigorous academic standards, a point that Booker Washington hinted at decades later in *Outlook* magazine. In a 1904 article, Washington noted how far his former pupil had vaulted from tranquil Hampton to the international spotlight, where as the “Reverend William H. Sheppard” he boldly exposed a European sovereign’s “Cruelty in the Congo Country.”²³

At Hampton Sheppard did not restrict his activities to scholarship. He hunted near campus and ventured on walks through the tidewater marshes, home to venomous water moccasins. Besides Booker Washington, Sheppard had other teachers who inspired his dreams of advancing a robust civilizing mission. One mentor, General Samuel Armstrong, the Institute’s president and exponent of white paternalism, was in the mind of Sheppard “my ideal of manhood [with an] erect carriage.”²⁴ Similar to aspirant black men of his generation, Sheppard’s career would depend on such benefactors. Yet Armstrong, a Union commander of black troops during the Civil War, was more than a patron. He was Sheppard’s “holy inspiration,” the founder of Hampton in 1868, and a national intellectual who debated the merits of “racial diffusion,” a set of ideas pervading then-popular theories of “civilizationism.”²⁵ Racial diffusion, like civilizationism, posited a refrain familiar to missionaries who claimed that only the West and its (onward) Christ-

²³*Outlook* (8 October 1904), 375-77. Moved to action by Sheppard’s Pianga massacre report and endorsed by Mark Twain and British missionaries Alice and John Harris, Washington organized a White House visit for African-American preachers. This religious delegation informed President Theodore Roosevelt of Leopold II’s atrocities in the Congo: Letter, Thomas S. Barbour, Boston, to Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee, 3 January 1906, in L. Harlan, R. Smock, and G. McTigue, eds. *The Booker T. Washington Papers, 1904-1906* (Urbana, 1979), 8:482-84. Interestingly, while Washington was building up his Tuskegee institution, he was an outspoken critic of African-American “emigration to the . . . Congo.” Instead, he advised “young people . . . to lead a positive, helpful, and independent life, right here in Alabama as a black man:” Washington, “A Helpful Life,” *Southern Workman* (March 1880), 25. The *Southern Workman* had an illustrious reputation at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly in African-American intellectual circles, which praised the newsletter’s commitment to publish Booker Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, E. Pauline Johnson, and others: *Christian Recorder* (14 November 1901), 14.

²⁴Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers*, 17

²⁵Letter, Dr. H. B. Frissell to Mr. Sheppard, 4 January 1911, William Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, North Carolina. I thank P. Martin for this reference. My GMU student M. Jones also alerted me to a similar set of correspondence in the special collections at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.

ian soldiers, “battl[ing] against ignorance,” could rescue the benighted savages.²⁶

Armstrong incorporated folklore and ethnology in the Institute’s curriculum as a way of evaluating the accomplishments of different “races” on a continuum of “progress.”²⁷ In so doing he fulfilled a lifelong concern. Born on Maui in 1839, Armstrong grew up in a mission funded by the Congregationalist American Board Mission for Foreign Commissioners (ABM).²⁸ His family’s inclusion in the upper echelons of Hawaiian royalty served as a model for ABM missions in Africa, where other centralized monarchies such as the Zulu kingdom supposedly needed apostolic intervention.²⁹ Throughout the 1840s ABM proselytizers tried to insinuate themselves into the Zulu power structure. Intrinsic to their project was the recognition that Christianity could not be exported without some comprehension of indigenous cosmologies; hence the interest of many ABM missionaries in collecting “tribal folklore.”³⁰ By the 1880s Armstrong had translated this strategy

²⁶At Hampton diploma ceremonies, graduates were urged to advance the civilizing mission as a “line of soldiers who are to fight the battle against ignorance and prejudice and against all the evils that tie down the human race.” *Chicago Defender* (6 May 1911). For racial diffusionism see Short, “William Henry Sheppard,” 168; E. Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the Wars* (Cambridge, 1992), 40-42. African-American proponents of civilizationalism projected a vision of “‘pagan’ Africa awaiting ‘regeneration’ by its elite progeny” in “lieu of political influence and social opportunities at home”: K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 33-39. Sources on Samuel Armstrong life and ideas can be found in the Williams College Archives and Special Collections, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

²⁷Scholars trace Armstrong’s pioneering work in folklore and ethnology to his Hawaiian upbringing. See, for example, L. Baker, “Research, Reform, and Racial Uplift: the Mission of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society, 1893-1899” in R. Handler, ed. *Excluded Ancestors, Inevitable Traditions: Essays Toward a More Inclusive History of Anthropology* (Madison, 2000), 44.

²⁸For Samuel Armstrong in Hawaii see C. Kalani Beyer, “The Connection of Samuel Chapman Armstrong as Both Borrower and Architect of Education in Hawai’i,” *History of Education Quarterly* 47(2007), 23-48.

²⁹Sheppard’s admiration for his “holy inspiration” may have stemmed from the Hampton president’s penchant for regaling students about his Maui mission serving a royal family. Sheppard would find himself in similar circumstances as a missionary in the Kuba kingdom. See, for example, Sheppard’s campus orations “Into the Heart of Africa” and “Give Me Thine Hand” (typescripts) WHSP, HUA. On ABM influences in Hawaii see N. Meller, “Missionaries to Hawaii: Shapers of Island Government,” *Western Political Quarterly* 11(1958): 788-99; see also Central Committee of the Hawaiian Mission Centennial, *The Centennial Book: One Hundred Years of Christian Civilization in Hawaii* (Honolulu, 1920), 11-12.

³⁰B. Carton, “Awaken *Nkulunkulu*, Zulu God of the Old Testament: Pioneering Missionaries in the Age of Racial Spectacle,” in *Zulu Identities*, 133-40, 146-50.



Figure 4: Alice Bacon, Hampton Teacher and Folklore Scholar, 1893³¹

of cultural immersion into a pedagogical approach at Hampton that was focused on theology, folklore, and ethnology.³² To this end, he recruited teachers from New England versed in the bible and comparative ethnology. One of the educators was Alice Bacon, the future architect of the campus Folk-Lore Society and daughter of a Yale University divinity professor with ties to the Armstrong's family mission in Hawaii.³³ The link between the ABM's global evangelism and Sheppard's ethnological training would

³¹Illustration courtesy of HUA

³²S. Armstrong "Editorials about Papers on Conjuring," *Southern Workman* 7(1878), 26-35.

³³Baker, "Research," 52-55. Alice Bacon would play a decisive role in creating Hampton's Folklore Society in the 1890s; the Society had ties to Harvard's Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology; *ibid.*, 61. For the close links between folklore, ethnology, and the establishment of anthropology see R. Darnell, "American Anthropology and the Development of Folklore Scholarship," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 10(1973), 23-39.



Figure 5: Hampton Student Curiosity in Sheppard's Kuba Art, c. 1920s³⁴

come full circle in 1899 when a young Zulu man, Madikane Cele, sailed from Durban to America to attend a teacher training school in North Carolina.³⁵ Several years later, Cele enrolled at Hampton, eager to adapt Booker Washington's prototype of progress to racially divided South Africa.³⁶ It is probable that on the intimate campus the Zulu student heard of Sheppard. Indeed, shortly before Cele graduated, the Congo missionary ceremoniously donated his Kuba art in 1911 to the school's Curiosity Room.³⁷

³⁴Image courtesy of HUA.

³⁵Personal communication with Cele's daughter, Joyce Cele Williams, Lynchburg, Virginia, 26 April 2009. My thanks to Bob Edgar for facilitating this, and for his research on Madikane Cele's academic career in the United States.

³⁶Vinson/Edgar, "Zulus," 245-46; see also Z. Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa* (Chicago, 2004), 173. Cele's Hampton-inspired influence in South Africa: *Chicago Defender* (4 October 1913)

³⁷An account of Sheppard's donation of Kuba art to Hampton is M. Hultgren and J. Zeidler, *A Taste for the Beautiful: Zairian Art from the Hampton University Museum* (Hampton, 1993), 24-26. See as well *Southern Workman* 20 (1891), 168.

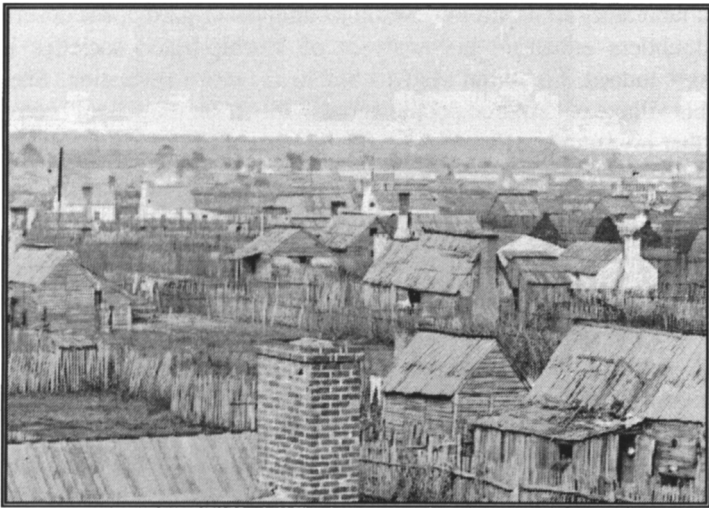


Figure 6: Slabtown, Virginia, 1864³⁸

With Armstrong's blessing, it was Alice Bacon who established the Curiosity Room as an interactive museum at Hampton. The Curiosity Room exhibited ceremonial totems of "Negroes" who practiced "witchcraft," among other artifacts from Pacific Islanders and Native Americans.³⁹ In her courses Bacon questioned the superstitions of "conjure-doctors" in nearby African-American settlements like Slabtown. By the 1890s, the *Journal of American Folk-Lore* had published her ethnological reports from Virginia.⁴⁰ Under her tutelage, students like Sheppard ventured to Slabtown, an African-American settlement close to college grounds, where they scrutinized the rituals of former slaves and, in keeping with the philological concerns of ethnology, recorded vernacular traditions.⁴¹ Slabtown offered Shep-

³⁸Image source: www.shorpy.com/node/5788 accessed 27 March 2009.

³⁹Baker, "Research," 68.

⁴⁰A. Baker, "Proposal for Folk-Lore Research at Hampton," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 6(1893), 305-09; idem., "Conjuring and Conjure-Doctors in the Southern United States," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 9(1896), 224-26. The practices of conjure-doctors in African-American communities annoyed Hampton graduate Booker T. Washington, who called them enemies of respectable progress: Baker, "Research," 52. See as well Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 32-42. For a demographic portrait of Slabtown see L. Jackson, "The Origin of Hampton Institute" *Journal of Negro History* 10(1925), 131-49. See also R. Angs, *Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, 1861-1890* (Philadelphia, 1979).

⁴¹Vernacular African-American traditions in the Hampton area such as "hag-craft"—i.e., occult techniques involving women healers and their balms—were reported by Bacon to the *American Journal of Folk-Lore* 7(1894), 66, 79; see as well A. Bacon and E. C. Parsons, "Folk-Lore from Elizabeth City County, Virginia," *Journal of American Folklore* 35 (1922), 250-327.

pard a laboratory in which to develop techniques of participant observation that doubtless enhanced his analyses of kinship-based societies in the Congo.⁴² Indeed, his initial visit to Slabtown was a revelation. Sheppard said this village of “colored people about a mile from the school” convinced him “that my future work was to carry the gospel to the . . . forgotten people.”⁴³

IV

Although Sheppard was later treated as a favorite son of Hampton, he never completed his degree there. Sometime during his third year, he left the school, perhaps for academic or financial reasons, and enrolled in Tuscaloosa Theological Institute (now Stillman College) in Alabama. In Tuscaloosa he met Lucy Gantt when she was home on holiday from Talladega College, an Alabama school for blacks started by the same religious fraternity that backed Hampton.⁴⁴ Sheppard and Gantt fell in love. Like her future husband, Gantt learned from the New England elite, her teachers at Talladega. They too propelled her to pursue a vigorous “civilizing mission” and sent her to uplift Appalachian communities by bringing bible literacy to former slaves. This experience, like Sheppard’s Slabtown forays, equipped her for Africa, as she recounted in an undated biography, *Lucy Gantt Sheppard: Shepherdess of His Sheep on Two Continents*, written by Julia Kellersberger.⁴⁵

In the midst of Sheppard’s courtship of Gantt, he began his ministry in Atlanta.⁴⁶ It is unclear whether this position befitted him, but by 1889 he was petitioning the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board to grant him an appointment in the Congo. These requests were repeatedly denied.⁴⁷ After

⁴²Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa,” WHSP, HUA.

⁴³Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers*, 17; see also: Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa,” WHSP, HUA. For further links between Alice Bacon and William Sheppard with regard to the Congo and ethnology, see: *American Journal of Folk-Lore* 7(1894), 84.

⁴⁴This religious fraternity was the Missionary Association for the Congregational Church.

⁴⁵J. Kellersberger, *Lucy Gantt Sheppard: Shepherdess of His Sheep on Two Continents* (Atlanta, n.d.), 5-10; WHSP, HUA.

⁴⁶In 1894 the couple married in the United States. That same year they left for the Congo Free State, where over the next few years Lucy proselytized between and during multiple pregnancies. She and her husband had only one surviving daughter, Wilhemina, and one surviving son, Maxamalinge. Virulent contagions took their toll on the family. To avoid the threat of deadly disease, Lucy Sheppard insisted that her toddlers go back to Staunton, Virginia, where her husband’s sister, Eva, was for a time the surrogate mother of Wilhemina and Maxamalinge Sheppard.

⁴⁷W. Sheppard, *William H. Sheppard: Pioneer Missionary to the Congo* (Nashville, n.d.), 9-10; WHSP, HUA; W. Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo*, 18.



Figure 7: Lucy Gantt Sheppard, ca. early 1900s⁴⁸

each rejection, Sheppard's resolve stiffened. He may have wanted to be a pastor in Africa as much as he longed to escape the repressive milieu in the United States. At the end of the nineteenth century, black people faced the sadistic "whims of white supremacy just by going out in public."⁴⁹ Lynching had become a pastime throughout the South, parts of the Midwest, and in panhandle states. In Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Ohio, Florida, and Texas white thugs stalked black men accused of real and imagined offenses, especially those of "respectable appearance."⁵⁰ To be sure, "middle-class sanctuaries" like Hampton temporarily sheltered Sheppard "from such crude encounters," but the lack of skilled jobs for educated African Americans provided little solace.⁵¹ Some mainstream newspapers

⁴⁸Image courtesy of HUA.

⁴⁹E. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven, 1969), 9.

⁵⁰*Ibid.* Lynching peaked in the 1890s, just as new laws increasingly stripped African Americans of the vote, rights to own property, and skilled employment. See W. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana, 1993); W. White, *Rope and Faggot: a Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York, 1929).

⁵¹Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 52-53.

condemned the ubiquitous racial hate, especially after a lynch mob climaxed in a cannibalistic rite, torching its victim and “hack[ing] off . . . [bodily] ‘souvenirs.’”⁵² Notwithstanding, editorial protests offered African Americans no protection.

De jure discrimination also obstructed Sheppard’s path to better prospects, even when this path passed through the office of compassionate pastors such as the Rev. Robert Bedinger, principal of the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board. Bedinger later recalled that he “hesitated to send this untried, inexperienced colored man alone” to Africa. It was only in 1889, when Bedinger located “a talented young white man, the Rev. Samuel N. Lapsley” to volunteer “services in the same cause [that] the Committee gladly turned to Mr. Sheppard.”⁵³ Thus, Sheppard’s commission hinged on Lapsley, the son of an Alabama judge and former slave-owner who would be anointed mission supervisor.⁵⁴ Over the ensuing two decades Sheppard achievements in the Congo would demonstrate that he could excel at evangelizing, even while some white Presbyterian elders in the United States derided him. They insisted, for example, that Sheppard willfully ignored or undermined Southern injunctions to make Africa into “a stronghold of Caucasian power.”⁵⁵ Sheppard avoided direct confrontation with these detractors. It would appear that his childhood encounters with subtle and blatant discrimination in Virginia primed him to value accommodation in the face of white supremacy.⁵⁶

While some in the Presbyterian hierarchy scorned Sheppard, African-American clergy increasingly viewed him as a rising star consecrated with a unique opportunity. Out of the tens of thousands of Americans who applied for an overseas mission, approximately 100 black proselytizers from the United States went to Africa. In the last third of the 1800s and first decade of 1900, six of these black missionaries were assigned to the Congo Free State.⁵⁷

⁵²*New York Times* (19 July 1903)

⁵³R. Bedinger, *Triumph of the Gospel in the Belgian Congo* (Richmond, 1920), 20; WHSP, HUA.

⁵⁴Samuel Lapsley fondly remembered his childhood playing with sons of freed slaves: J. Lapsley, ed. *Life and Letters of Samuel Norvell Lapsley* (Richmond, 1893), 2–22. See as well *The Missionary* (January 1891), 34; *Washington Post* (13 December 1903).

⁵⁵S. Verner, *Pioneering in Central Africa* (Richmond, 1903), 4; WHSP, HUA.

⁵⁶For evidence of Sheppard’s obliging response to Jim Crow protocols, see his willingness, while on furlough from the Congo, to address separate racial congregations in Bristol, Virginia: *Bristol Herald* (16 December 1905). My interpretation of Sheppard’s “accommodationism” draws on the ideas of my colleague P. Slade Martin: P. Martin, “‘Through the Back Door’: William Henry Sheppard: Accommodation as Resistance in Jim Crow America” (Unpublished paper, George Mason University, 2003).

⁵⁷Williams, *Black Americans*, 85; see as well S. Jacobs, ed. *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa* (Westport, CT, 1982), esp. 184–90.

In January 1890 the Presbyterian Executive Committee finalized its plans to dispatch Lapsley and Sheppard.⁵⁸ The partners cultivated a friendship that lasted until Lapsley succumbed in the Congo to malaria in March 1892.⁵⁹ Their short-lived collaboration reflected a mix of affection and awkwardness; for the aide, not his supervisor, predominantly blazed the trail in Africa. After the tandem arrived at the Congo River mouth, Lapsley appeared discomfited by his new setting and stayed in the European-controlled port named Banana, where their vessel docked. Meanwhile, Sheppard advanced the logistical agenda by picking up phrases of a commercial *lingua franca*, Sierra Leone Krio, and by striking out for interior villages to scout a site on which to build a Presbyterian outpost. Returning from one of these inland reconnaissances, he jumped into the ocean and swam in shark-infested waters before awed onlookers.⁶⁰

V

While such exploits dominate portrayals of Sheppard, the manly missionary, more quotidian biographical details can be found in Hampton archival sources on his higher education, relationship with Lucy Gantt, and engagement with the (racially divided) Presbyterian Church. For example, Box 9 in the Sheppard Papers holds his Founder's Day addresses at Hampton, in which he discusses the lasting impact of mentors like Samuel Armstrong. Typescripts of campus talks such as "Into the Heart of Africa" and "Graphic Talk of Darkest Africa" specify how he used ethnological methodology to probe kinship relationships in the Congo. A set of uncataloged boxes contain correspondence between Sheppard and Hampton representatives on issues of vocational education in the United States and Africa. Box 7 includes photographs of Lucy Sheppard, her daughter Wilhemina, and the entire family in the Congo. Julia Kellersberger's undated biography, *Lucy Gantt Sheppard: Shepherdess of His Sheep on Two Continents* is in Box 7 as well.

Box 2 holds the Sheppard marriage certificate and articles in the *Southern Workman* on Lucy Sheppard. In addition, clippings of Hampton and Presbyterian newspapers chronicle the condescension that some white preachers exhibited toward their black counterparts in the Congo. Box 8

⁵⁸Instructions of Executive Committee to the Reverend Messrs. Lapsley and Sheppard, 13 January 1890, *Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa* ed. Robert Benedetto (Leiden, 1996), 71-72.

⁵⁹Lapsley's untimely death greatly grieved Sheppard: Phipps, *William Sheppard*, 66-67.

⁶⁰The biographers of the "Black Livingstone" single out such intrepid displays to show the prowess of their protagonist emerging in the Congo. But in doing so, they overlook the young Sheppard's prior encounters with danger in Virginia's wilderness.

contains a booklet by the white supremacist Presbyterian missionary Samuel Verner, titled *Pioneering in Central Africa* (Richmond, 1903). Verner positioned himself as Sheppard's rival. In the Congo the white missionary amassed "a large collection of articles" for the "ethnological department" of the National Museum in Washington, DC, "illustrating the dress, habits and customs of Central Africans." He also proposed a book "descriptive of the . . . ethnological characteristics of the Kasai people [that] will have something of the geology of the country, negro folk lore . . . [resembling] the same folk lore to [sic] negroes of the South."⁶¹ Verner's *Pioneering in Central Africa* commends Leopold II's benevolent treatment of the Congo.

Sheppard sought to challenge Verner's white supremacist outlook, if indirectly, in his presentations of African politics, languages, and arts, often before assemblies at Hampton.⁶² Sheppard was an electrifying speaker who attested to Belgian cruelties in the Congo by unveiling evidence recorded with pen, paper and Kodak camera.⁶³ Unfortunately, one of the most intriguing sources generated by Sheppard, his Kodak snapshots of colonial abuses, are not at Hampton.⁶⁴ Nor, apparently, are they in other repositories containing his papers, except for a few grainy pictures of the Pianga attack in the Presbyterian Historical Society of Montreat, North Carolina.⁶⁵ One question historians should consider is where are these photographs? If they do exist, how were they preserved? A manipulated image that could have come from Sheppard's camera—a caricature of a marauding Songye (Zappo Zap) chief—could have survived as an illustration in *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, Mark Twain's sardonic critique of purported colonial philanthropy in the Congo.⁶⁶

⁶¹*New York Times* (10 March 1899).

⁶²At Hampton, Sheppard was frequently introduced as an honored Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. On Sheppard and the Royal Geographic Society see "The Negro as Missionary," *Missionary Review of the World* 26(1903), 946.

⁶³One could compare Sheppard's charismatic discourses to previous promotional speeches on Africa given by Martin Delany, who in 1879 published *Principia of Ethnology: the Origin of Races and Color with an Anthropological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization from Years of Careful Examination and Enquiry* (Philadelphia, 1879). This treatise explored how ethics of loyalty and nobility originated in ancient Africa and spread elsewhere in the world: W. Moses, *Afrotopia: the Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge, 1998), 78-80.

⁶⁴The issue of Kodak images of Belgian atrocities is an important theme in Mark Twain's pamphlet, *King Leopold's Soliloquy*. Twain's fictional monarch grouches about "photographs of mutilated negroes," adding that he once "was looked up to as the benefactor of down-trodden and friendless people. Then all of sudden came the crash! That is to say the incorruptible Kodak." Twain, *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, 39.

⁶⁵I thank my GMU student M. Jones for providing me with this information.

⁶⁶Twain, *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, 25.



Figure 8: Twain’s Rendition of Sheppard’s Kodak Image⁶⁷

⁶⁷Ibid, 24.

Other questions linger. Were Sheppard's snapshots accidentally lost or were they deliberately destroyed? Did they possess the emotional immediacy of British missionary Alice Harris' portraits? Harris' daguerreotype images of tortured victims of Belgian rule illustrated Edmund Morel's pamphlets appealing to Americans for money to support the Congo Reform Association (CRA). One could also ponder why Morel, who acknowledged Sheppard's accounts of mercenary attacks, chose to feature Harris' photographs when CRA representatives visited Washington, across the Potomac River from Sheppard's home state.⁶⁸

This particular pamphlet circulated in Washington, on the eve of Sheppard's 1909 defamation trial before a colonial judge in the Congo. Before this proceeding, Sheppard had furnished the CRA with evidence of Belgian atrocities through the *Kasai Herald*, the Presbyterian Church's newspaper in central Africa. In one article entitled "From the Bakuba Country," he publicized the violent labor recruiting tactics of Leopold II's concessionary business, the *Compaigne du Kasai*. In another expose he alluded to photographic proof of crimes committed by colonial henchmen in pursuit of rubber. The *Compaigne du Kasai* demanded a retraction from Sheppard and his Presbyterian supervisor at the time, Rev. William Morrison. They refused. As a consequence, Sheppard and Morrison faced serious slander charges. However, the spirited defense of their lawyer, Belgian socialist Emile Vandervelde, along with Presbyterian Church backing and sympathetic press coverage, helped the accused win an acquittal.⁶⁹

During his legal ordeal, Sheppard impressed the court with his grasp of indigenous dynamics in the Kasai region. In the United States his presentations on the Congo also revealed deep ethnological knowledge. For exam-

⁶⁸For Morel's engagement with officials in Washington see *New York Times* (17 October 1904), and for CRA appeals in the United States, *Washington Post* (20 November 1908). Morel's choice of images for CRA brochures may have been for more than an aesthetic preference. Harris took her photographs as a self-styled activist of human rights, while Sheppard did not openly claim that mantle.

⁶⁹For period accounts of the trial see "Missionary Matters in the Kongo," *Missionary Review of the World* (September 1909), 717-18; "The Kongo Missionaries Acquitted," *Missionary Review of the World* (November 1909), 805. Given the international interest in this libel case, researchers should consider whether Sheppard's Kodak images were entered into the court record and subsequently lost. Could the photographs be in someone's private papers? For scholarly inquiries into these questions see J. Thompson, "Light on the Dark Continent: the Photography of Alice Seeley Harris and the Congo Atrocities of the Early Twentieth Century" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26(2002), 146-49; K. Grant, "Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain" *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 29(2001), 27-58. I am grateful to my GMU student K. Smith for uncovering the provenance of CRA atrocity photographs.

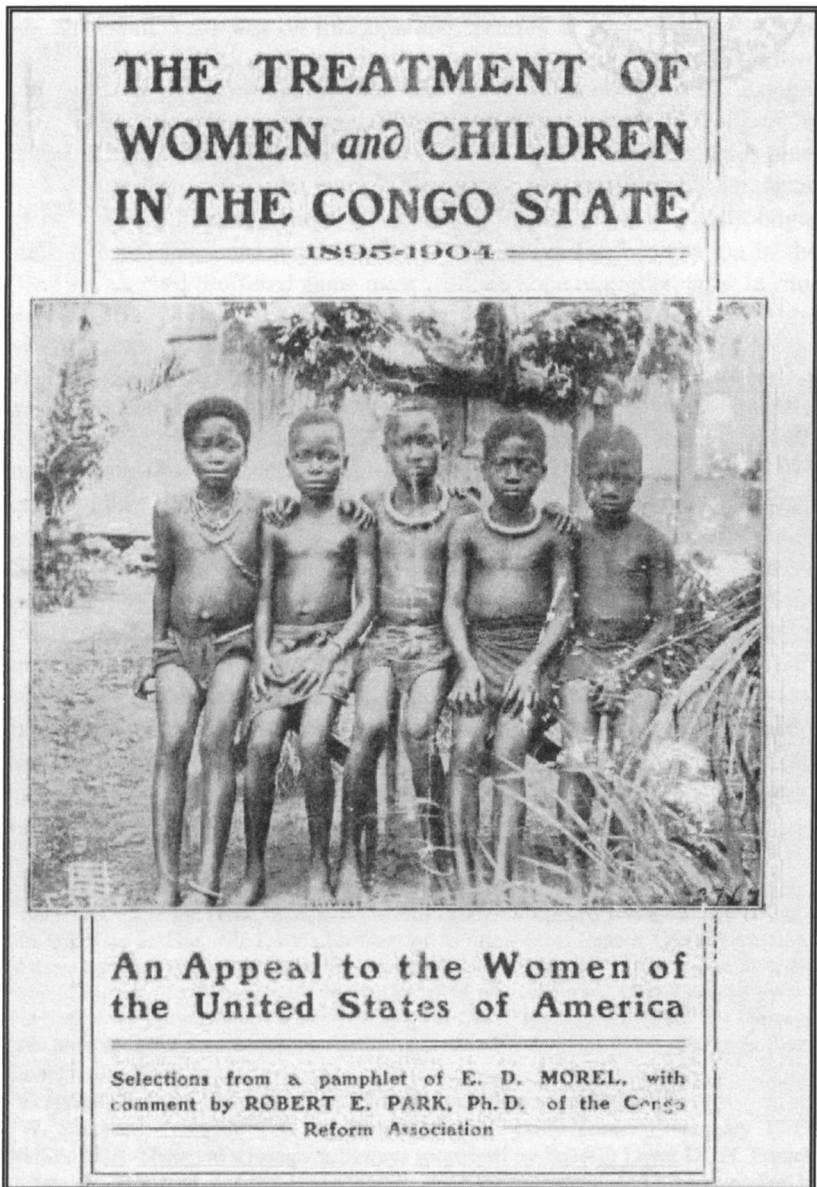


Figure 9: Alice Harris' Photo on CRA Brochure, 1904⁷⁰

⁷⁰E. Morel, *The Treatment of Women and Children in the Congo State, 1895-1904* (Boston, 1904). I thank my GMU student, Y. El-Amin, for providing me with photographs from this pamphlet.

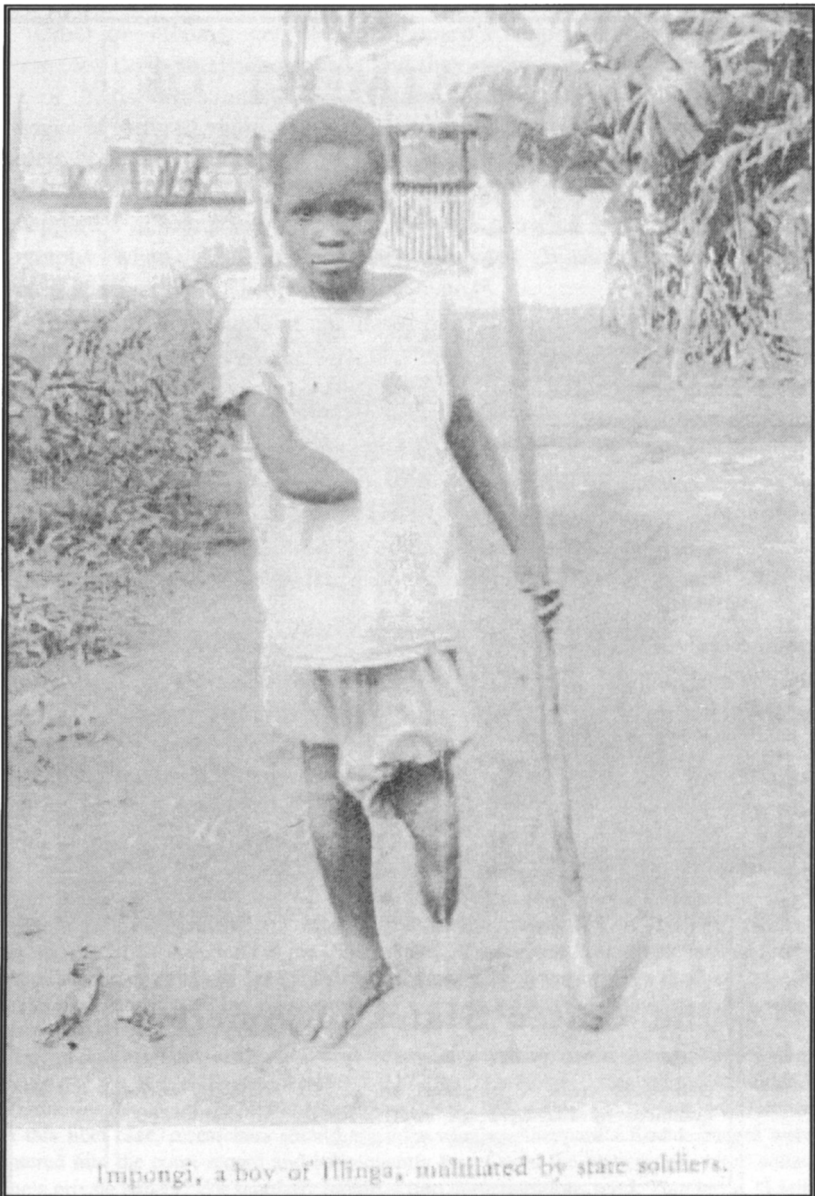


Figure 10: Harris Atrocity Photo in CRA Brochure, 1904⁷¹

⁷¹Morel, *The Treatment of Women and Children*.

ple, when Sheppard was on furlough and lectured at Hampton in 1893, he enlightened audiences on European corruptions of “native prefix,” and then elaborated on the grammatical rules and personal pronouns of the Kongo, Kete, Luba, and Kuba languages. “Ba-Congo means people of Congo,” he said, and “Mu-Congo means a person of Congo; Mu is singular; Ba is plural; Ba-Kette [sic], Ba-Kuba, etc.”⁷² Sheppard often extended his linguistic pursuits during hunting forays, when he scrutinized the mores and obligations safeguarding communal vitality. To build his local reputation in the Congo, Sheppard proffered game meat with the hope of participating in rituals of reciprocity that opened channels to Kuba elites. Once under the watchful gaze of 300 men, who left their canoes to observe him, Sheppard wheeled around and killed a swimming hippopotamus. He promptly waded waist-high into the water for his quarry, calling out, “here is the meat for you.” His followers “draged it ashore.” Then Sheppard watched as “villagers came down—men, women, babies, and children—and feasted and carried home the meat. So they became at once our friends.” At such impromptu feasts merchants aligned with Kuba royalty paid attention to Sheppard, the new “big man.” He recounted: “I went to work to pick up the language by entertaining the BaKuba traders. They were not hard to entertain. I don’t believe any one is,” Sheppard declared, “when you spread a table before them—nice elephant steak, etc.!”⁷³ Sheppard delighted in narrating these adventures at Hampton and other venues, where he opined on the achievements of his flock and defied stereotypes of “Darkest Africa,” particularly during several high-profile speeches sponsored by Samuel Armstrong’s successor, Dr. Hollis Frissell.⁷⁴ Moreover, Sheppard’s addresses dwelled on the moral excellence of the “tribes he visited” in a Kuba world

⁷²Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa,” WHSP, HUA. Sheppard also spoke of his Luba name, Xepate, and his wife Lucy’s Luebo mission title, Mama Xepate. On the etymology of these names, see F. Starr, *A Bibliography of Congo Languages* (Chicago, 1908), 82. Lucy Sheppard also demonstrated her philological interests, translating Tshiluba hymns in a book titled *Musambu ws Nzambi, or Songs of God*. This book’s original title seems to have been *Mukamba wa Misambu Luebo* (American Presbyterian Press, 1902): F. Starr, *Bibliography*, 82.

⁷³Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa,” WHSP, HUA. See appendix below.

⁷⁴W. Sheppard, “Graphic Talk on Darkest Africa,” *Daily Trader* (9 January 1905) WHSP, HUA. Sheppard’s Hampton lectures sponsored by Frissell: Letter Dr. H. Frissell to Rev. W. Sheppard, 1 April 1911, WHSP, HUA. Sheppard showed a keen interest in examining the multifarious rivalries in the Kuba royal family. See, for example, W. Sheppard, “An African’s Work for Africa,” *Missionary Review of the World* (October 1906), 770. Scholarly analyses of Kuba succession disputes include J. Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison, 1966), 108–22, 192–242; idem., *The Children of Woot: a History of the Kuba Peoples* (Madison, 1978), 43–50, 153–72. Finally, while Sheppard extolled “Kuba civilization,” he lamented one missing dimension in the kingdom, Christianity: Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa,” WHSP, HUA.

“to white people,” demonstrating a subtle awareness of the complex ethnic composition of the kingdom.⁷⁵ This polity, in Sheppard’s estimation, was the paragon of organization. Its walled capital, Muxenge, encircled the palace of the Bushong ruling lineage, while specialized classes representing different functions—priests and priestesses, medicinal healers and royal advisors—lived in surrounding neighborhoods with named streets.⁷⁶

VI

Nowhere was Sheppard’s ethnological acumen expressed more fully than in the raffia textiles, ritual clothing, tools, and masks he acquired for Hampton.⁷⁷ Sheppard’s collection of artwork encapsulated many phases of Kuba life. His linguistic skills enabled him to find the routes that led to weavers, carvers, and metal-forgers. Rather than use imposed categories, Sheppard classified designs in Kuba terms, such as the *tooln*, the totemic snake, a sacred pattern favored by prominent lineages, and *N’co*, the royal leopard motif.⁷⁸

Male initiation garb became a prominent feature of Sheppard’s art collection and his speeches on Kuba culture.⁷⁹ In one Hampton lecture, he showed headgear to illustrate Kuba rites of manhood: “[A] boy is not allowed to wear a hat till he is about fifteen years old . . . [at which time] a ceremony takes place . . . [with] seventy-five or a hundred boys mak[ing] their hats” from thick fibrous threads, shells and beads. He said they “are brought together into the presence of the king . . . [who] takes a hat and puts it on the head of the boy, fastening it with a pin to the knot of hair which is rolled up on the top of his head—‘Pompadour style.’ . . . When all the hats are on, the king gives the charge to the boys, saying, ‘Yes, marry her and take her to your home.’”⁸⁰ Is it too much to suppose that collective customs

⁷⁵Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa,” WHSP, HUA. Much later, academics trained in anthropology and history such as Jan Vansina revisited the wider region surrounding Sheppard’s area of fieldwork and mapped the ethnic groups of the Kuba kingdom from the Bulang, Pyang Ibaam, and Bieng to Ngongo, Mbengi Kete, and Cwa: Vansina, *Children of Woot*.

⁷⁶Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa,” WHSP, HUA.

⁷⁷Examples of Sheppard’s collection are installed in the Hampton University Museum. For Sheppard’s analysis of Kuba art see H. Cureau, “William H. Sheppard: Missionary to the Congo and Collector of African Art,” *Journal of Negro History* 67(1982), 340-52; Hultgren/Zeidler, *Taste for the Beautiful*.

⁷⁸W. Sheppard, “African Handicrafts and Superstitions,” *Southern Workman* (September, 1921), 401-08; see also Jan Vansina, *Art History in Africa: an Introduction to Method* (London, 1984), 3-19.

⁷⁹During the question-and-answer session that often followed his addresses, Sheppard unfurled ornate mats and cowrie strings, and lifted wooden carvings and metal knives: *Washington Post* (25 December 1893). See also: W. Sheppard, “African Handicrafts and Superstitions,” *Southern Workman* (December 1921), 401.

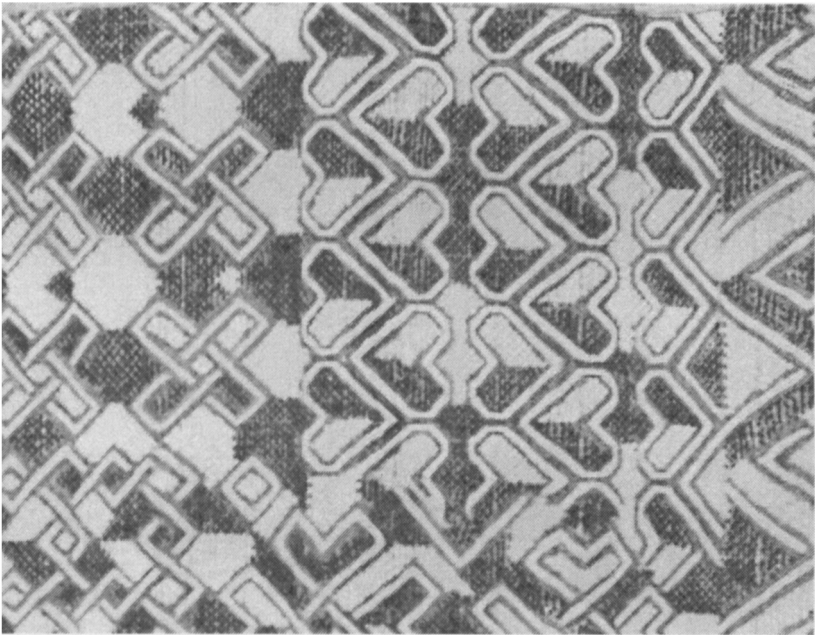


Figure 11: Raffia Cloth from the Kuba Region⁸¹

recognizing the incorporation of young men as respected members of their “nation” attracted Sheppard? He was a product of Jim Crow America, where black manhood was encumbered by legal disabilities and threatened by racist violence.

Sheppard also gathered articles of bridewealth to debunk Western assumptions that African girls were destined to be slaves of their polygamous husbands. Plural marriage in the Kuba kingdom, he discovered, was for the privileged few, mainly patriarchs in the royal family or their important allies. Among commoners, Sheppard explained, a young woman could “refuse a [marriage] offer, but when her consent is gained and her parents’, the court is called together, and the . . . [couple] and their people go before it. He takes two large mats which he gives to her parents . . . cowrie shells—some time fifteen thousand and three hundred more to pay the judge (300 cowrie equal five cents).” The ceremony ended when the “judge says to the young man: “This is your wife. You must have but one, or you will [be]

⁸⁰Sheppard, “Into the Heart of Africa,” WHSP, HUA.

⁸¹Image courtesy of the African and African American Studies Program, GMU. For academic analyses of raffia cloth see M. Adams, “Kuba Embroidered Cloth” *African Arts*

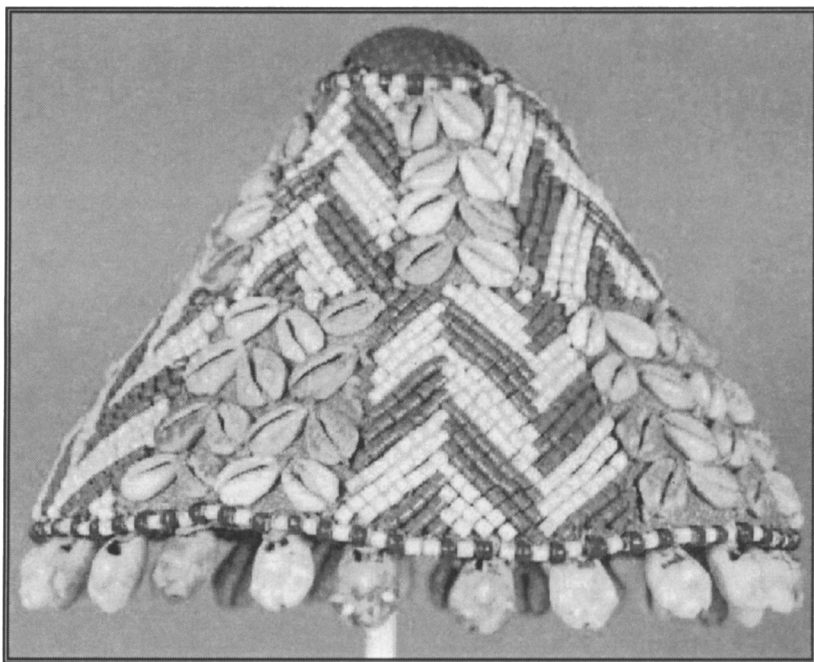


Figure 12: Kuba Man's Hat⁸²

beheaded.' He tells the girl, 'This is your husband; you are to love him. . . . Then there is a general slapping of hands and congratulation.'⁸³

Sheppard bestowed Kuba textiles and totems on family, friends, and dignitaries, including Theodore Roosevelt.⁸⁴ Sheppard's knowledge of Kuba material culture became a point of reference for buyers of African art, among them doyens of the Harlem Renaissance like Alain Locke, whose collection is now in New York City's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.⁸⁵ Sheppard sold the lion's share of his Kuba art, totaling over 400 pieces, to Hampton in 1911.

12/1(1978), 24-39; and P. Darish, "Kuba Textiles: The Dynamics of Creation, Style, and Meaning within the Kuba Kingdom" (Ph.D., Indiana University, 1991).

⁸²Image source: www.harn.ufl.edu/beadwork/gallery/pages/kristintibbits/kubahat.php accessed 16 January 2009.

⁸³W. Sheppard, "Into the Heart of Africa," *Southern Workman* (December 1893), 187.

⁸⁴Sheppard and President T. Roosevelt: *Washington Post* (15 January 1905).

⁸⁵Hultgren /Zeidler, *Taste for the Beautiful*, 25. This pictorial book, with scholarly commentary, features William Sheppard's Kuba art and provides an excellent historical overview of the collection in Hampton's possession. See also D. Deacon, "African Art at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," *African Arts* 14/2(1982), 64-88; and L. Sims, "Collecting the Art of African-Americans at the Studio Museum: Position-

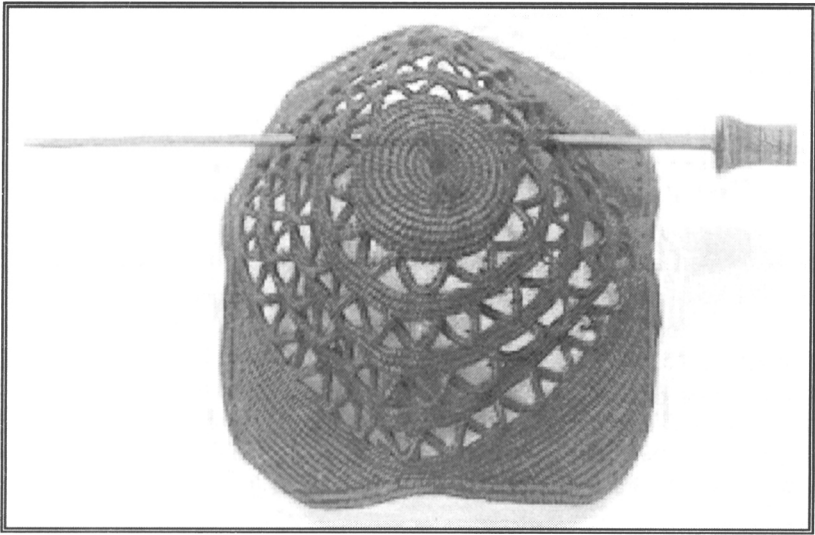


Figure 13: Kuba Man's Hat⁸⁶

In light of Sheppard's pathbreaking analyses of Kuba art, scholars should compare his broader ethnological oeuvre with other period "fieldwork" conducted, for example, by fellow Presbyterian missionary Samuel Verner and University Chicago anthropologist, Frederick Starr, whose Congo research in the early 1900s was funded by Leopold II. Starr produced a series of ethnological articles published by the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and then a compendium volume called *The Truth about the Congo* (Chicago, 1907). A proponent of eugenics, Starr's book on *Truth* ranked "negroid masses" in central Africa according to reputed child-like attributes of the "native mind." He also discounted the eyewitness accounts of terror campaigns conducted by colonial mercenaries, asserting that "[p]ages of newspapers are filled with stories of atrocities, many of which never happened, some of which are ancient, and a part of which, recent in date, are true."⁸⁷

Relevant information on Sheppard's speeches in America and appreciation of Kuba material culture can be found in Box 1, which contains news-

ing the 'New' from the Perspective of the Past" in B. Altshuler, ed. *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art* (Princeton, 2007), 149.

⁸⁶Image source: www.umich.edu/~hartspsc/umsdp/UMA/UMA034.html accessed 16 Jan. 2009.

⁸⁷F. Starr, *Truth about the Congo*, 5-8. A contributor to the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, Starr claimed to identify the source of cannibalistic behavior in central Africa: *New York Times* (28 January 1907). Scholarship analyzing the range of ethnological research

paper accounts of his Hampton addresses as well as commentaries on his "African Handicrafts" and the sale of his art collection. Box 2 also includes articles from the *Southern Workman* reprinting Sheppard's ethnological narratives on the Congo and a draft (scholarly) article on his Kuba art. Box 7 holds photographs of artifacts from the Congo. In Box 9 researchers will find Sheppard's most noteworthy Hampton orations, among them "Into the Heart of Africa." Finally, uncataloged boxes contain information on the location of Sheppard's African art outside Hampton, such as the decorative Kuba items that adorned the home of his son, Maxamalinge Sheppard, and the textiles exhibited at the Anderson Gallery in Richmond, Virginia.

In sum, Sheppard's ethnological insights, begun as a student at Hampton Institute and carried to King Leopold's Congo, have been overshadowed by his swashbuckling profile. For scholars seeking a more complete understanding of Sheppard's intellectual legacies, his papers, photographs, and other related materials in the Hampton University Archives are an excellent introduction to the breadth of his seminal contributions to modern African studies.

Appendix

during much of the period spanning Sheppard's career includes W. MacGaffey, "Ethnology and the Closing of the Frontier in Lower Congo, 1885-1921," *Africa* 5(1986), 378-89.

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