Imperialism's Wayward Child: The Impact of Imperialist Thought on Neanderthal Reconstructions

Introduction

In August 1856, modern humans discovered something unprecedented: we were not the only human species to have walked the earth. In fact, we weren't even the only human species to exist at one time. Until about 40,000 years ago, an archaic species of human called *Homo neanderthalensis,* commonly referred to as Neanderthal, existed in Eurasia, even crossing paths with our own species. In 1856, the first identified Neanderthal specimen, Feldhofer-1, was found in Feldhofer Cave in Neander Valley, Germany. It was the first fossil hominin (hominin referring to *Homo sapiens* and all extinct members of our lineage, including the genuses *Homo, Australopithecus,* and *Ardipithecus*) to be discovered and studied by modern humans and had drastic impacts on our understandings of human nature and evolution.

Although their status as a distinct species was not confirmed until almost a decade later, from early on the Neanderthal was described and presented in comparison to modern man. Scientific and popular images of the Neanderthal have changed dramatically since, going from savage ape to essentially human, and have been closely tied to changes in Western social ideology. This provides an excellent case study of how social biases influence scientific analysis, which in turn reifies the initial bias. In this case, many scholars have connected Neanderthal reconstructions to racial ideologies, especially due to the imperialist and post-Enlightenment undertones in 19th century Europe, and I will draw on some of these ideas in my analysis. However, many analyses only briefly mention imperialism itself and do not consider its influence after the early 20th century, though it remained influential beyond that time. Therefore, I argue that scientific and popular portrayals of the Neanderthal between the mid 19th and mid

20th centuries were consistently shaped by European and American imperialism, exhibiting a constant dichotomy between racism and human goodness.

In this paper, I will trace the relationship between imperialism and Neanderthal reconstructions from the 1850s through the 1970s, considering how the Western sociopolitical climate influenced scientific work as well as how this work was adapted in popular culture. First, I will consider how Enlightenment thought catalyzed the relationship between scientific racism and European colonialism in the 19th century. Then I will relate this sociopolitical climate to the discovery, analysis, and popular portrayal of Neanderthals between 1856 and the early 1900s, which established Neanderthals as a racial "other" and is a commonly explored relationship in previous scholarship. Next, to extend the Imperialism-Neanderthal relationship, I will consider the 20th century social climate created by imperialist conflict, particularly World War II, including a sense of guilt in the West and a questioning of human morality that would continue into the Vietnam War. Finally, I will connect this social unease, including remnants of imperialism such as antihumanism and American counterculture, to the humanization of the Neanderthal, which exemplifies a relationship not only to race but to conflicting ideas of human nature and goodness.

Throughout my analysis, I will largely pull from Bruce Baum's *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race* to provide historical context that I will then match to trends in Neanderthal characterization. In considering these relationships, I will look at primary sources by scholars such as Thomas Huxley and Ralph Solecki, as well as secondary sources, including Julia Drell's *Neanderthals: A History of Interpretation* and Nicholas Ruddick's *The Fire in the Stone*, among others. By following these relationships and expanding on this previous scholarship, the evolution of Neanderthal reconstructions can be understood as a product of imperialist thought.

Essentially, early research portrayed the species as simian as a justification for imperialist expansion, while their post-war humanization arose from an adverse reaction to the results of imperialism.

Scientific Racism During and After the Enlightenment

The Age of Enlightenment was an intellectual movement in 17th and 18th century Europe that emphasized using reason rather than religion to understand the natural world, and it was during this time that anthropology, the study of man, was first born. As exceptional value was placed on scientific progress, Enlightenment thought became increasingly characterized by naturalism – the belief that everything occurred and could be explained by natural rather than supernatural causes. Early research of human evolution centered around understanding man's place on Earth as a species. The prime example of this is Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871), which identifies an evolutionary perspective of humanity. Notably, as discussed by Nicholas Ruddick (2009), Darwin's ideas signal a shift away from viewing man as a "fallen creature" (p. 109), as assumed in the Bible, and a shift towards viewing him as a "risen one" (p. 109), ascending upwards from a "lowly origin" – that is, from ancestral apes (Darwin, 1871, as cited in Ruddick, 2009). With the debate over humanity's evolution steadily underway during a time of Western expansion and contact with new peoples, however, Western scholars began to debate the origin of human *variation* in a scientific way. Accordingly, scholars in the later 18th century used naturalism in attempts to scientifically classify regional differences among humans, a line of thought that eventually gave rise to the concept of "race."

Although many Enlightenment thinkers were not concerned with biological human difference and even "eschewed ideas of racial superiority," the prevailing practice was to

understand and classify this difference (Baum, 2006). Over time, these classifications grew into race categories that described White Europeans in favorable ways, while other groups, particularly Black Africans and Australian Aboriginals, were described unfavorably. An important example of this is the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae* by Carolus Linnaeus, published in 1758. *Systema Naturae* introduced Linnaean taxonomy and binomial nomenclature, the *Genus species* method of classifying and naming species based on physical similarity that we still use today. The tenth edition, in particular, included new descriptions of the human genus *Homo,* which Linnaeus divided into four "varieties" (not yet "races"): *Americanus* (referring to Native Americans)*, Europaeus, Asiaticus, and Afer* (African) (Linnaeus, 1758, as cited in Baum, 2006, p. 65). Beginning in this edition, such "varieties" of *Homo* came to be described with behavioral and cultural attributes, rather than just geographical as they had before. There is an obvious bias towards *Europaeus*, which is described as "white," "gentle," and "inventive." Meanwhile, *Asiaticus* is described as "sallow," "haughty," and "avaricious" while *Afer* is described as "Black," "lazy," and "negligent." The *Americanus* variety is slightly more favored, described simultaneously as "obstinate" and "merry." These biased descriptions of a diverse *Homo* were characteristic of the racial classification that followed.

George Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon – commonly known as Buffon – like Linnaeus, classified the species of Earth, but he took an anthropocentric view. Buffon's approach first viewed species "most familiar to human beings" as the species "most closely related to them," and these species were held in the highest regard (Baum, 2006, p. 68). Going further with this hierarchy, distinctions were made within the human species as well. White Europeans – specifically those from the "civilized" temperate countries between 40 and 50 degrees latitude, extending from Spain eastward, to Ukraine – were identified as the "most beautiful," and all

other races were considered to be degenerative from this White normative (Buffon, 1812, p. 444). It should be noted that Buffon considered climate to be a major factor in skin color, coming close to a non-racialized explanation for variation, but he still conflates skin color with civilization or primitivity.

Going beyond immediate outward differences (primarily hair and skin color), the practice of craniology became popular in the late 1700s. Craniology is the study of the shape and size of the skull, particularly racial variations. It later led to craniometry, the scientific measurement of the skull, and then phrenology, which considered such measurements as an indication of mental capability. Like Linnaeus, Johann Blumenbach identified different varieties of human beings, but paid particular attention to differences in the size and shape of the skull, describing it as a "truer indicator of 'racial' distinction" due to the theory that the skull was "more permanent" than other physical traits previously described (Baum, 2006, p. 75). Unlike Linnaeus, Blumenbach used the concept of "race," going beyond simple "varieties." Though he is often considered the "father of the study of race," he rejected ideas of difference in intelligence among races, and he believed not only that racial differences resulted from different climates, but that different races could be equally successful with education (Wolpoff and Caspari, 1997, p. 61). However, Blumenbach did consider Caucasians to be the "primeval" race from which all others degenerated, and his work opened up the possibility for further phrenological analysis (Wolpoff and Caspari, 1997; Baum, 2006 p. 77). Indeed, this type of analysis continued post-Enlightenment, becoming increasingly scientific in its racialization, as is evident by works such as Carl Vogt's influential *Lectures on Man* (1864), which compared the brains of Black Africans to those of White children.

These biological classifications became popular as a way to justify colonization and enslavement in Western Europe and America. The 19th century was a time of progress in the West, a value prominent in humanism – a system of thought that emphasized human potential and goodness; barbarism was seen as an "exception that would soon be gone" and extinction became understood as an "inevitability" of evolution that signified "a failure to adapt" (Vanheste, 2007, p. 335; Madison, 2021, p. 369). The "primitivity" of non-White, non-civilized peoples was seen as an obstacle to humanity's progress. The idea that such peoples were doomed in a progressive society because of their inferiority made it easier to rationalize their subjugation and, in some cases, their extermination (Madison, 2021). For example, in 1898 Benjamin Kidd extended Vogt's brain comparison between Africans and children. He claimed that the low intellectual development of Africans meant that they were incapable of governing themselves, and therefore colonial expansion into tropical Africa was necessary (Kidd, 1898, as cited in Gould, 1996). This type of thinking became even easier with the rise of polygenism, the belief that different human races had evolved separately in different regions from different ancestors (as opposed to monogenism, the belief, arising first from Christianity, that all of humanity had a single origin). Polygenism became a popular and heated debate with supporters on both sides. Notably, Darwin advocated against polygenism – as did Linnaeus, Blumenbach, and Buffon – arguing that humankind had developed from a common ancestor and then developed different adaptations in their respective environments (Baum, 2006; McCluskey, 2016). However, he also maintained that there were "qualitative distinctions" between the African, Asian, and American "savages" and European civilization, an idea that perhaps overshadowed his rejection of polygenism (McCluskey, 2016, p. 72). Proponents of polygenism included Voltaire, Vogt, and possibly Georges Cuvier, all prominent scholars in their time (Baum, 2006; Stocking, 1982).

Regardless of its debate, just the *idea* of polygenism allowed for an increased perceived "otherness" among races, who became understood as not necessarily being the same species. This belief was a perfect set-up for the race/species continuums that would arise as modern humans discovered the Neanderthal, an actual archaic human species, for the first time.

Imperialism and Early Neanderthal Reconstructions

The first Neanderthal remains to be studied in depth by scientists, leading to their identification as a separate species of *Homo,* were Feldhofer-1, discovered in 1856. The racial ideology of the time and debates about human antiquity made the Neanderthal a bit of a problem. This fossil "man" was so like modern humans, and yet not enough like them, spawning debates about whether or not it was the same species – debates which, by their very nature, had to consider the idea of human evolution. On one hand, if Feldhofer-1 was considered to be a modern human, they became associated with "inferior" races by their physical attributes. On the other hand, if they were considered a separate, ancestral species, they were placed on a continuum from ape to man and still associated with inferior races. It seems as if scholars were trying to distance this anomaly from enlightened Western culture as much as possible, viewing it in contrast to the favored White man.

Among the first scientists to study these remains was Hermann Schaaffhausen, who maintained that the Neanderthal was an early human rather than a different species and equated them to the "primitive" people of Earth (identified as "Negroes, Eskimos and Australian Aborigines"), a " 'savage' version of our own species" (Drell, 2000, p. 4). Julia Drell, in *Neanderthals: A History of Interpretation*, describes some of Shaaffhausen's contributions to the Neanderthal problem, including the same type of cranial measurements that were present in the

growing realm of race science. Schaaffhausen believed, like many scholars of the time, in phrenology – that the shape of the skull was an indication of intelligence, and any deviation from the round, high-vaulted shape of the Western European cranium indicated lower cognitive capacity. Drell also discusses the traditional idea of human linear progress, an advancement from savagery, to barbarism, to civilization, which was common in early anthropology and humanist thought. Neanderthals, considered to be at the most savage end of this continuum, could be neatly fitted to reinforce the idea of progress: they were savage, and by association the "primitive people" described by scholars like Schaaffhausen were savage and/or barbaric peoples who simply had yet to achieve enlightenment.

Thomas Huxley, like Schaafhausen, considered the Neanderthal to be an archaic version of modern human, rather than a separate species. He also placed them on a continuum from ape to human, with Neanderthals positioned closer to human, although he famously described the Feldhofer-1 skull as "the most pithecoid of human crania" (Huxley, 1896). Going a step further than Schaaffhausen, Huxley controversially emphasized this continuum to demonstrate evidence of human evolution (Ruddick, 2009). Despite push-back, this approach effectively placed the Neanderthal in an ancestral context rather than a racial one. Still, Huxley did use craniometry to compare the Neanderthal to Australian Aboriginals, who, as we know, were seen as wild and primitive (Figure 1). His proposed continuum was later reconfigured as a vertical hierarchy based on principles of racial separation, following the order of: ape, Neanderthal, savage, European (Ruddick, 2009). Therefore, despite Huxley's evolutionary approach, the Neanderthal was still identified racially and was used to situate non-White races on the "savage" step of social evolution.

Figure 1

Feldhofer-1 cranium superimposed on an Australian skull

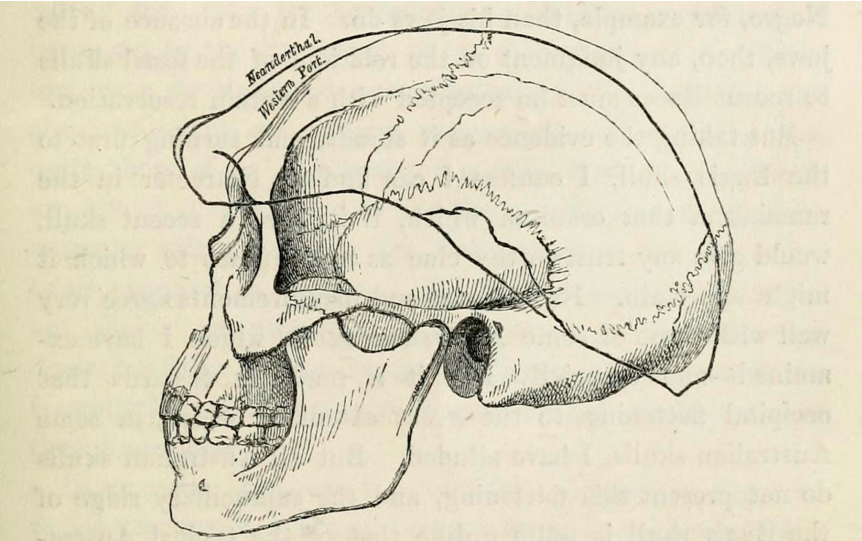


Fig. 31.—An Australian skull from Western Port, in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, with the contour of the Neanderthal skull. Both reduced to one-third the natural size.

Note. From Huxley, 1896

Another scholar, Rudolf Virchow, one of the most popular scientists in Germany at the time, disagreed with the idea of evolution and even with the idea that the Feldhofer-1 remains were archaic in nature (Drell, 2000). However, to his credit, Virchow did not assign the remains a racial identification and did not believe in inherent racial value, going so far as to warn that such distinctions would "lead to the elimination of supposedly lower races" (Drell, 2000, p. 5). Yet his warnings went unheeded. The simple knowledge that Neanderthals had existed in the same place and time as modern humans led to speculation over why we survived and they did not. Many scientists attributed this to the Neanderthals' lack of those traits that the modern human species prides itself on: intelligence, complex behavior, and complex culture (Pyne, 2016). It was thought that this inferiority meant they couldn't survive in competition with superior modern

humans, and so they were eliminated. Therefore, the Neanderthals' extinction seemed to support the idea that inferior human races, so often associated with Neanderthals during this time, were doomed. This could be used to justify their subjugation under colonial expansion because, supposedly, they would inevitably be replaced by the superior White Europeans (Madison, 2021).

This evolutionary edge became a key point in separating Neanderthals from modern humans, as is evident in the infamous Boule's Error. Marcellin Boule strove to eliminate the Neanderthal from possible human ancestry and provided a flawed depiction of the species that has permeated Neanderthal reconstructions to this day. He based much of his analysis on the first full Neanderthal skeleton to be discovered, commonly referred to as the Old Man of La Chapelle, found in 1908. His reconstruction was later challenged and found to be incorrect, but not until after the damage was done. In his analysis, Boule described the Old Man as incapable of complex culture and behavior, with a slouching stance and an oblong, robust skull that indicated low intelligence. Lydia Pyne (2016) identifies this as a comfortable explanation for why Neanderthals went extinct: they simply lacked the intelligence and culture necessary to survive. This served to separate Neanderthals from humans as much as possible because scholars were uncomfortable with the idea of a "failed" species being remotely similar to us.

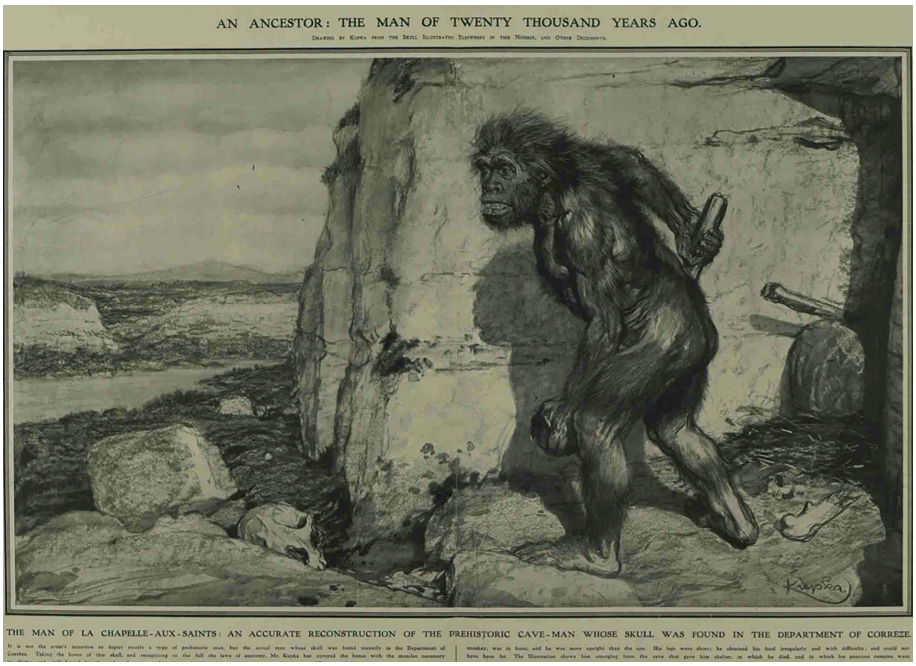
The humanist thought at this time emphasized progress and human potential, again making Neanderthals, and their extinction, a problem, perhaps a threat. In fact, the knowledge that the Old Man was found in an intentional burial pit, which indicated a concept of culture by its very nature, was often overlooked because it challenged humanity's "evolutionary edge" (Pyne, 2016). Thus a tension was created between positioning Neanderthals adjacent to modern humans for racial and colonial purposes and distancing them from humans in order to maintain

the ideal that complex culture equates to progress. However, Boule's analysis still could have been heavily influenced by racial bias, and this was considered by later scholars. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, barbarism was seen as an exception to humanistic progress and was meant to be eradicated. Therefore the separation of Neanderthals from humans could also symbolize a separation of the "primitive" races from civilized ones.

Despite its later criticism, Boule's reconstruction of the Old Man became the face of the Neanderthal species. This portrayal circulated worldwide in a variety of pop culture mediums between 1908 and c. 1950, perpetuating a savage view of Neanderthals that dominated during this time period and lingers until this day. One of the most popular visual depictions of them was

Figure 2

"An Ancestor: The Man of Twenty Thousand Years Ago"



Note. By Frantisek Kupka, 1909, originally published in the Illustrated London News and accessed on British Newspaper Archive

Frantisek Kupka's drawing of an ape-like creature, positioned in front of a cave wall (Figure 2) (Kupka, 1909; Pyne, 2016). This drawing was largely based on and popularized Boule's reconstruction. This type of depiction was extremely popular in 20th century paleofiction as well, capturing the imagination of authors and readers alike. One of the most popular examples is *The Grisly Folk* (1921) by H.G. Wells, which contrasted a savage Neanderthal against the civilized Cro-Magnon – the early modern humans of Europe. The Cro-Magnon are described as "clever," "social," and lawful, the "true men" of Earth. Meanwhile, Neanderthals are described as isolated, monstrous, unintelligent, and lacking compassion. They're depicted as stalking the Cro-Magnon and killing a human child, reminiscent of a cannibalism hypothesis that circulated around this time to further distance Neanderthals from humans (Ruddick, 2009). Nevertheless, the "true men" in the story triumph over Neanderthals. This idea of invasion and elimination exhibits "images congruent with an imperialist view of race relations" as White Europeans invaded and colonized new regions (Drell, 2000, p. 12). Additionally, Wells describes the Neanderthals as having "queerly shaped brains," which is reminiscent of the contemporary practice of phrenology. This is an example of what Ruddick (2009) later described as the Neanderthal in paleofiction being used in "racial opposition to the progressive Aryan" (p. 154) a concept that became heavily influenced by the eugenic movement, discussed in the next section.

Western Science and Society Post-WWII

Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment racial and imperialist ideologies were later applied to the eugenics movement, which rapidly swept Western society. Eugenics encouraged the reproduction of desirable traits and discouraged the reproduction of inferior traits in order to "improve" the human race as a whole through selective breeding. Influenced by racist and

xenophobic ideologies, this movement was widespread in the late 1800s and early 1900s; it included practices such as forced sterilization and segregation in order to perfect the human race by allowing the passing down of only socially valued genes and eliminating unfit lineages (National Human Genome Research Institute, n.d.). In Germany, by the Third Reich, racial science was thought to support the following ideas: polygenism and inherent racial difference existed biologically; mental and behavioral traits were associated with race; races differed in their capacity for civilization; and races could be purified and improved through selective breeding (Weinstein and Stehr, 1999). Such ideas were utilized by Nazi race theorists during the Holocaust, as they implemented "Racial Hygiene," their version of eugenics, which led to the sterilization, forced relocation, and eventually the mass extermination of Jewish people and other groups deemed unfit, such as those with hereditary disorders (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.).

After the Second World War, the global public was appalled by the capacity for violence and terror that had been exhibited by humanity, including the mass subjugation and genocide during the Holocaust and the warfare that destroyed homes, families, and livelihoods around the world. Undeniably, the ideologies that led to this terror culminated from ideals of imperialism, human progress, and scientific racism. The humanist ideologies that had fueled the expansion of Western civilization, valuing "progress" – nearly the attainment of perfection – in the human race above all else became viewed not as a sign of human goodness and potential but as a simple facade for colonial aggression and genocide. It was blamed, after the war, both for its inability to "prevent the barbarism" of humanity and for its inhumane role in perpetuating it (Vanheste, 2007, p. 336). Attempts to understand what had happened made Western society question its own complicity in racial terror, leading later 20th century scholars to reconsider the role of Western

humanism in the making of the war. For example, George Steiner proposed that the West was so distracted by ideas of progress and optimism, focusing on scholarship and material culture, that they became "insensitive to the real grief around [them]" (Vanheste, 2007, p. 342). Other explanations, however, bluntly described humanism as a cover-up for the colonial desire for power, allowing for Western racism and imperialism to prevail under a mask of "progress" at the expense of other populations (Vanheste, 2007). At this same time, as human morality was questioned, Raymond Dart popularized the Killer Ape Theory, which posited that inherent aggression in humans was the driving force of our evolution all along. This idea became contentious in Western scholarship, highlighting the tension between human morality and terror, and it exemplifies the trend of anti-humanism that arose in the mid-20th century.

After the war, European imperialism began its decline as colonial empires, including Great Britain and France, were undermined and colonies, one by one, became sovereign states (Baum, 2006). In reaction to the impacts of racism, racial science became taboo and largely eliminated from scholarship. However, race – and other issues involved in social structure such as ethnicity, gender, physical ability, and sexual orientation – remained prominent socially and even scientifically, despite the adverse reactions to World War II (Baum, 2006). Social discourse and unrest following the war was omnipresent, as evidenced by the countercultural movements in the United States. Commonly associated with 1960s and 1970s protests and social nonconformity were the hippies, who originated in the United States and spread to the United Kingdom. Hippies rejected the ideals of their parent generation and mainstream authority, instead valuing, along with freedom and experimentalism, love and peace, a reaction to the Cold War and Vietnam (Street, 2020; Pruitt, 2019).

Additionally, despite the near elimination of traditional post-Enlightenment race science, racism in America continued to exist in full force and debate continued – and continues even today in social science discourse – over whether race is solely a social construct or if it can (or should) be identified biologically. If we recall the colonial origins of the concept of race, then the Civil Rights Movement in America can be understood not only as a push-back against racism, but a push-back against imperialist ideologies as well. Furthermore, the Vietnam War was heavily influenced by France's colonial history, and later by U.S. imperialist force; the violence and political turmoil that stemmed from such events and histories was widely protested in the United States, especially by countercultural groups such as the hippies. This unrest created a social climate that was increasingly against oppression, allowing for the uplifting of diverse and controversial viewpoints in culture and in science.

The Neanderthal in Post-War Society

In part due to the post-war questioning of human nature, discussed above, the Neanderthal became more humanized first through popular media, and later through new research. Whether it was through attempts to 'correct' the racial ideologies that had fueled imperialism or as a direct questioning of human morality, writers began to portray Neanderthals as more sympathetic creatures. Published in 1955, William Golding's *The Inheritors* depicts Neanderthals as innocent, gentle, and familial. They have their own culture and language, reminiscent of how we might imagine the earliest *Homo sapien* behavior. Furthermore, Golding imagines what the meeting between Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnon may have been like, and he chooses to portray the Neanderthals' lives as being disrupted by the introduction of Cro-Magnon – the "new people." While there is continuity in that the Cro-Magnon are written as

being more technologically advanced than the Neanderthals, and the Neanderthals are still written as rather ape-like in appearance, Golding does not maintain the same sense of superiority that earlier paleofiction did. The new people are more aggressive, towards each other and towards the Neanderthals, and they kidnap and kill some of the Neanderthal children. This is a direct contrast to H.G. Wells' *The Grisly Folk*, in which Neanderthals are the aggressive ones taking Cro-Magnon children. The story also reflects Golding's earlier work, *The Lord of the Flies,* as both books consider the human capacity for evil as well as themes of competition, survival, and savagery vs. civilization. Both books, in their own ways, are reactions to the war (Ruddick, 2009).

Another book raising questions of human morality through the use of Neanderthals is Isaac Asimov's *Child of Time* (1991)*,* which was based on his 1958 short story "The Ugly Little Boy." This book was published during the Civil Rights movement and revisits the idea of Neanderthal as a racial "other" in a post-war, perhaps countercultural story that considers internal biases and perceptions of difference. It follows a Neanderthal child who was taken from his own time, over 40,000 years ago, to ours. The main characters see the child as brutish and primitive, but come to realize that his differences may have more to do with an unfamiliarity with the environment than innate dissimilarity (Ruddick, 2009). Ruddick comments that the child "represents the disfavored racial Other who cannot join the modern world, not because he is unable, but because we won't let him" (p. 164), a clear parallel to the struggle for civil rights at the time of the book's publication. The Neanderthal here is again depicted sympathetically and is used in popular media to make a political statement about Western civilized society.

In the 1950s, new scientific research into the Neanderthal species also contributed to their renaissance. First, there were several new discoveries of human ancestors who were even more

ape-like than the Neanderthals – namely *Australopithecus* specimens – making the Neanderthals seem increasingly similar to us. Additionally, in 1957, following the trend of the humanization and de-racialization of the species, William Strauss and A. J. E. Cave released their findings following a reevaluation of Marcellin Boule's Old Man of La Chapelle, bringing "Boule's error" to light. Boule had previously described the Neanderthal as brutish, stooping, and simian. Straus and Cave identified osteoarthritic deformation in the specimen's spine, which they pinned as the cause of Boule's misrepresentation (Drell, 2020). They claimed that the Neanderthal man likely stood with a posture similar to that of a modern human before this deformation, and there was no reason to believe otherwise, ultimately discrediting the long-standing portrayal that Boule had locked into public understanding of the species. Erik Trinkaus later claimed that the deformation should not have deeply affected Boule's reconstruction, and therefore Boule's attempts to eliminate Neanderthals from the human lineage would have stemmed from his own internal bias, oriented around the superiority complex of Western empires, but it is impossible to know for sure (Pyne, 2016).

Perhaps the most impactful study to be discussed in the latter half of this paper comes from the mountains of Iraq. Archaeologist Ralph Solecki spent four excavation seasons in Shanidar Cave between 1951 and 1960, culminating in his 1971 book *Shanidar, the First Flower People,* which described a Neanderthal group that had not only a sense of culture, but clear compassion for one another. One notable specimen from this site, Shanidar-I, became popular with scholars due to pathologies that indicated he was severely handicapped in life. These include a right arm, collarbone, and shoulder blade that were not fully grown; scar tissue on the left side of his skull which led scientists to believe he may have been blind in that eye; and evidence of damage to the right side of the skull that had healed long before his death, which was

estimated to have been around the age of 40 – quite a long life for a Neanderthal (Solecki, 1971). Solecki argues that these injuries would have put Shanidar-I at a disadvantage in an already tough environment and lifestyle; they would have made it difficult for him to move quickly, forage for food, participate in cooperative hunting, or fend for himself. Therefore, it's likely that other group members supported him through life, and many anthropologists assert that this indicates a sense of compassion not previously seen or considered in Neanderthals.

Even more popular was the Shanidar-IV specimen. Shanidar-IV became commonly known for its "flower burial" – a burial, archaeologically identified as completely intentional, that, following scientific investigation of the surrounding soil, was thought to have included the placing of flowers over the body (Solecki, 1971). This conclusion was later accused of wishful thinking as other explanations for the presence of flower pollen were provided, but by then the concept of the flower burial had made its impact. The idea of a flower burial resonated with the public, who could connect emotionally with the peaceful and careful act of honoring loved ones.

Figure 3

Reconstruction of the Shanidar Cave Flower Burial

Note: By Karen Carr, from the Smithsonian Institution

This concept brought the Neanderthal closer to humans than ever before, and it was included in many stories, artworks, and popular museum exhibits (Figure 3) (Hochadel, 2021).

The "Flower People" title of Solecki's book resonated with the public as well. While Solecki did not explicitly compare the Shanidar Neanderthals to hippies, and the title was likely just a marketing decision, it largely conditioned how the finds were understood in 1960s and 1970s America, which was dominated by countercultural currents. The association of Neanderthals with nonviolent, peace-loving hippies made the Neanderthals themselves appear peaceful (Hochadel, 2021). Additionally, the sociopolitical climate in 1960s and 1970s America was perfect for the acceptance of the Neanderthal as peaceful, compassionate, human-adjacent creatures. The rise of counterculture supported raising up the Neanderthal, this (pre-)historical "other," in the face of discrimination and continued international imperial force. They were yet another group, it seemed, that had been wronged by the Western superiority complex, and had long been yet another excuse for the subjugation of people of color. These movements were widespread enough that many people seemed to favor the Neanderthals' humanization, tearing down the racist, ape-like portrayals of the past century.

Additionally, the tension of human goodness vs. evil remained prominent. On one hand, going back to Killer Ape Theory (which saw humans as inherently aggressive), if it was argued that Neanderthals were in fact our ancestors (it's important to note here that, according to modern research, we are not evolved directly from Neanderthals, but scholars were not certain at this time), depicting them as peaceful would mean that *we* cannot be inherently aggressive. On the other hand, if Neanderthals were seen as peaceful but they were wiped out by modern humans, then they were seen as sympathetic while modern man's aggression was reinforced. If they were seen as gentle creatures, similar to hippies, and modern man as the aggressor, then "in an era

when shaggy-locked anti-war protesters waving flowers confronted… heavily armed militia, it seemed easy to imagine how the Neanderthals' extinction might have come about" (Ruddick, 2009, p. 71). Neanderthals, in this case, were reinforced as a victim of *Homo sapien* aggression. Therefore, whether used as a rationalization for why humans *cannot* be inherently evil or as a rationalization for why humans *are* inherently evil, the Neanderthal became portrayed as sympathetic and almost human, resulting, decades later, from reactions to imperialist terror. These few decades post-WWII, especially with the advancement of the Shanidar finds, marked a drastic change in how the Neanderthal was depicted publicly and scientifically, making them look a lot more like ancient modern humans indeed.

Conclusion

My analysis of Neanderthal reconstructions ends here, in the 1970s. Discourse and research since then has been dominated by new genetic science, allowing scientists to understand the Neanderthals and our relationship with them better than ever before. This research continues to humanize them, though racial ideologies continue to persist even in this new science. This paper has covered a vast array of science and culture over the span of 100 years; there are many research efforts, sociopolitical factors, and diverse viewpoints that could not be considered within the scope of it, and more research can be done. Here I have considered a scientific community dominated by white men, and even though this skewed constitution was overwhelmingly true of pre-21st century research and often remains so today, it would be worth considering if, when, and how Neanderthal research has been viewed by more diverse scientific communities and what impact they could have had on our reconstructions. This is perhaps a good example of how a lack of diverse perspectives can warp scientific understanding. However,

between the 1850s and 1970s, the Neanderthal was imperialism's wayward child, misunderstood and unpredictable in its consequences. Our reconstructions of them were deeply tied not only to race, as many authors have considered, but to the deeper ideologies and motivations of Western imperialism, stretching from justifications for 19th century colonization to adverse reactions to humanity's capacity for terror in the 20th.

Our world is increasingly dominated by science and technology, but everything we do is subject to internal and systemic bias, which often becomes entwined in that scientific work. The case of the Neanderthal provides a prime example of how sociopolitical bias can influence scientific analysis, and furthermore, how that flawed analysis can be incorporated back into mainstream society in such a way that perpetuates the original bias. Beginning with post-enlightenment racial classification, science was used to justify hegemony as Europeans colonized new regions, and this racial science in turn exerted heavy influence on the first scientific and fictional reconstructions of the Neanderthals. They became an "other," another casualty of colonization, and they were depicted as such in popular writing and artwork.

Furthermore, similar imperialist justifications were adopted by radical agendas in the 20th century, leading to greater horror than the world had ever seen in the form of eugenics, mass extermination, and world war. What followed was a questioning of human nature and the expansion of countercultural movements, creating a tumultuous social climate that was increasingly open to diverse, controversial ideas that went against mainstream culture. Thus, the Neanderthal was reborn in science and fiction as a sympathetic creature, all the while a product of imperialist and anti-imperialist agendas. Further research continues this trend, but it's important that we don't forget how our understanding of this species was for so long conditioned by racist and imperialist aggression.

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Rhetorical Situation Memo

Journal

I've selected *Inquiries Journal,* an academic journal that publishes work in many disciplines but primarily focuses on social sciences and humanities. I feel that my paper is interdisciplinary, bridging anthropology and history, and a social science/humanities journal seemed appropriate. As an interdisciplinary journal, they seem to have published some works that incorporate history and anthropology like mine. They accept submissions from the undergraduate level and above, with the majority being from undergraduates, and all submissions undergo an editorial process. It's preferred that articles be written in APA format and be between 2,500 and 7,000 words, though there is no formal length requirement. The articles often use section headers and include citations via a reference section at the end of the paper. Some articles use visuals but most do not seem to.

Thesis

Scientific and popular portrayals of the Neanderthal between the mid 19th and mid 20th centuries were consistently shaped by European and American imperialism, exhibiting a constant dichotomy between racism and human goodness.

Situating

Some sources I'm using to situate my argument include *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race* by Bruce Baum, *Fire in the Stone* by Nicholas Ruddick, and "The Flower People of Shanidar" by Oliver Hochadel. Baum's work provides context for the changes in racial ideology, starting with the Enlightenment. I'm using background from this book to guide my research and contextualize the sociopolitical climate for each time period I'm looking at. Ruddick's book provides information about Neanderthals as represented in fiction, which I am using to understand how scientific analyses were understood by the public and how this relates to broader sociopolitical trends. Hochadel's article is primarily about the Shanidar excavation. He briefly considers how counterculture in America conditioned the investigation's reception, but I planned to build on this specifically, more fully connecting the public reaction to counterculture and how that continues to relate to imperialism. While my section about Shanidar is only a small part of my paper, a lot of the original analysis I contribute comes from this section.

Other

Since the journal I chose is interdisciplinary and there is no guarantee that the audience knows any given term I've used, I tried to provide explanations on such terms as much as possible within the paper. After a few people recommended I do so, I also incorporated a few images to make some of my arguments easier to visualize, but I struggled to figure out how to properly format and cite them, so I'm not sure if I did it completely correctly.

Honor Pledge

I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination

Peer Review

My peer review did not provide any constructive criticism that could be incorporated into my final draft, however I incorporated feedback from Professor Forrester. This included adjusting some spelling mistakes and repetitive word use. Most notably, I incorporated information about Charles Darwin. Oddly, he didn't come up as much as expected in my research, but I agreed that his work would provide useful context in my first section and was able to incorporate him into the early research section as well as the polygenism section.