



# Before Cultures: The Ethnographic Imagination in American Literature, 1865-1920

By Brad Evans

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## Before Cultures: The Ethnographic Imagination in American Literature, 1865-1920 By Brad Evans

The term *culture* in its anthropological sense did not enter the American lexicon with force until after 1910—more than a century after Herder began to use it in Germany and another thirty years after E. B. Tylor and Franz Boas made it the object of anthropological attention. *Before Cultures* explores this delay in the development of the culture concept and its relation to the description of difference in late nineteenth-century America.

In this work, Brad Evans weaves together the histories of American literature and anthropology. His study brings alive not only the regionalist and ethnographic fiction of the time but also revives a range of neglected materials, including the Zuni sketchbooks of anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing; popular magazines such as *Century Illustrated Monthly*, which published Cushing's articles alongside Henry James's; the debate between Joel Chandler Harris, author/collector of the Uncle Remus folktales, and John Wesley Powell, perhaps the most important American anthropologist of the time; and Du Bois's polemics against the culture concept as it was being developed in the early twentieth century.

Written with clarity and grace, *Before Cultures* will be of value to students of American literature, history, and anthropology alike.

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#### **Review**

"A fascinating work, bringing anthropology to bear on literary studies and giving American literature a new and hitherto under-theorized frame of reference. Evans argues that there is a definitional tension between ethnographic cultures, referred to in the plural, and humanistic culture, referred to in the singular. That tension haunts us still." - Wai Chee Dimock, Yale University"

#### **About the Author**

**Brad Evans** is assistant professor of English at Rutgers University.

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