



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of Natural History*

MS 2004-07 David Efron Gesture Research

National Anthropological Archives  
Museum Support Center  
4210 Silver Hill Road  
Suitland, Maryland 20746  
naa@si.edu  
<http://www.anthropology.si.edu/naa/>

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## Collection Overview

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|--------------------|---|
| <b>Repository:</b> | National Anthropological Archives           |
| <b>Title:</b>      | MS 2004-07 David Efron Gesture Research     |
| <b>Date:</b>       | (bulk circa 1930-1940)                      |
| <b>Identifier:</b> | NAA.MS2004-07                               |
| <b>Creator:</b>    | Efron, David, 1904-<br>Van Veen, Stuyvesant |
| <b>Extent:</b>     | 0.2 Linear feet (1 box)                     |
| <b>Language:</b>   | English .                                   |

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## Administrative Information

### Provenance

This collection was donated to the archives by Paul Ekman.

### Other Archival Materials

Stuyvesant Van Veen's papers are maintained by the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, which also has a 1981 interview with Van Veen in which the artist discusses his work with Boas.

### Citation

Manuscript 2004-07 David Efron Gesture Research, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

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## Biographical / Historical

A student of Franz Boas, David Efron conducted his gesture study to examine differences in the gestural repertoire of different neighboring immigrant communities, as well as the effect of assimilation on the range of gestures used by their first generation descendants. Efron's demonstration of the cultural basis of gestural style challenged Nazi "scientific" claims that gestural style was racially inherited. The results of his research were published as *Gesture and Environment* (King's Crown Press, 1941), republished as *Gesture, Race and Culture* (Mouton, 1972).

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## Biographical / Historical

Efron collaborated on his gesture research with Stuyvesant Van Veen (1910-1988), a New York City artist who studied at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students league and worked with the muralist Thomas Hart Benton. Van Veen is also known in anthropological circles for the illustrations he produced for Franz Boas' research on Kwakiutl dances.

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## Biographical / Historical

Efron's was perhaps the first ethnographic research to combine meticulous participant observation and artistic collaboration with the analysis of everyday social behavior recorded on motion picture film.

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## Scope and Contents

This collection contains fieldnotes, drawings and illustrations from Efron's research on gesture language among Sicilian and Lithuanian Jewish immigrants on the lower east side of New York City. The several hundred original captioned illustrations in the collection were created by Stuyvesant Van Veen. The collection also includes a 115-page Bibliography of Gesture and Posture, which Efron apparently never published, and one item on Native American gesture language from 1890.

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## Local Numbers

NAA MS 2004-07

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Anthropological linguistics
- Gesture
- Immigrants
- Italians -- United States
- Jews, Lithuanian
- Language and languages -- Documentation

Cultures:

- Italians -- United States
- Jews, Lithuanian

Places:

- New York (N.Y.)

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## Container Listing

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 1    | Photocopies of drawings and associated descriptions   |
| Box 1, Folder 2    | "Some observations on the conversational bodily postures of 'traditional' and 'assimilated' eastern Jews and southern Italians in New York City" draft fragment |
| Box 1, Folder 3    | "The Indian Gesture Language" manuscript, 1890  |
| Box 1, Folder 4    | Bibliography of gesture and posture   |
| Box 1, Folder 5-11 | Illustrations by Stuyvesant Van Veen  |