



Cultural Anthropology

John Friedl

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

A Robert Carola Book

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My intellectual debts will be obvious to some readers, but I would like to point them out more specifically. Many of my ideas about cultural anthropology, and particularly my thoughts in Chapter 11, are a result of my first experience in the field, in a course with Gerald Berreman. My interest in culture change has grown from my work

with Jack Potter, and a great deal of Chapter 9 reflects his influence upon my thinking. George Foster impressed upon me the value of applied anthropology, and taught me always to think of anthropology in terms of solving problems, not just working with abstract ideas. Imitation is indeed a sincere form of flattery, as is evident in my treatment of applied anthropology in Chapter 10.

There is always a lot of tedious work that accompanies the more pleasant task of writing. My thanks go to Cathey Jenkins and Janet Nickerson for their help in typing the manuscript. Sandy Siegel offered many helpful suggestions along the way, and I am particularly grateful to him for the excellent job he did on the Instructor's Manual. I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to my colleagues in the Department of Anthropology at Ohio State for their support and encouragement of my work; I hope I have produced something that will be useful to them.

Finally, I wish to thank the most important people of all—my students. This book is, more than anything else, the result of feedback from students, and hopefully it reflects their concerns about the way anthropology is taught. If there is a spark of enthusiasm evident in the pages that follow, it is because teaching anthropology has been such a rewarding experience.

JOHN FRIEDL

Preface

If the Marquis de Sade could have invented education as it is now, he would probably have given up beating women.

ARTHUR PEARL *Schools versus Kids*

The lesson of cultural anthropology is not a collection of trivia such as one might be examined on in a TV quiz program. It is the fact that we as Americans are both similar to and different from each other and the various peoples around the world. Anthropology teaches tolerance and understanding, pointing out that we are strange not only to others, but among ourselves. Yet we are all basically the same, and share not only a common physical heritage, but, within a certain range, a common patterning of our behavior. To bring some sense of reality to this lesson is the goal of this book.

In the pages that follow, you will be introduced to the field of anthropology—first the scope and method of the discipline, then some of the basic areas of study within it, and finally some of the ways in which it can be meaningful to us in understanding and solving the problems of living in the twentieth century. In writing this book, I have departed from the usual style and format of anthropology textbooks in that I have tried to relate each topic to modern American life. The anthropologist James Spradley has pointed out that as kids brought up in middle-class America we learn the myth of the melting pot—that groups with cultural differences come together and work out their differences, becoming truly “American,” in a way of life best for everyone. This myth leads us to the goal of preserving our institutions to restore bygone days, with a sense of commitment to old values. What we learn in anthropology should lead us to question this goal as we expose the myth of one American culture shared by all Americans. We should be aware of differences and seek to change institutions or create new ones to deal with differences. And we must work hard to do so quickly and peacefully before it happens spontaneously and violently.¹

1. James P. Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1966, pp. 2-3.

This does not mean that no societies other than the American will be used to illustrate points, but rather that the emphasis is placed heavily upon our own culture. Further, it is *not* taken as understood that we all share the same culture; in fact we might assume the opposite: that no two Americans share exactly the same culture, and any examples given will thus have different impacts upon readers with various backgrounds.

A second major departure of this book is that I have tried to avoid the use of jargon. Sometimes new terms are unavoidable, and where they are necessary I have tried to define them in context. Of course, not all jargon is bad, or necessarily unintelligible. We have all learned, for example, to follow the news reports by wading through official government language which frequently bears no relation to reality. We are familiar with phrases like "winning the peace," which at least to some observers clearly means "losing the war." When we hear of "differential affluence" we immediately think "poverty." "Famine" becomes "distribution of hunger," while our polluted environment is spoken of in terms of "ecological variability." (We had ecology before we had pollution, but few people knew what the term meant in those days.) Many other social problems are likewise masked in official jargon which does not really cover them up, but somehow seems to make them more palatable. Unemployment, formerly a problem, now becomes "involuntary leisure," a non-problem. And so on.

Social scientists, including anthropologists, are as guilty as anyone of the gamesmanship involved in the use of jargon. Sociologists have all but defined away the problems of drug addiction, prostitution, gambling, etc., by calling them "victimless crimes." Anthropologists, in an attempt to describe the life of the slum dweller in terms that do not convey middle-class values and judge by middle-class standards, have invented the term "culture of poverty." We can thus set out to describe this life style in purely objective terms, immune from criticism for taking slum dwellers to task for not living like suburban middle-class businessmen, but we never really solve the problem we are describing. We simply make a word game out of it.

A few terms are obviously necessary, because anthropologists deal with concepts that are not commonly used by others. All too often, however, the use of specialized language is carried to extremes. In a notable controversy, the sociologist C. Wright Mills criticized his colleague Talcott Parsons for writing in such an unintelligible style that it was never really clear what he had to say. Mills was able to

take passages several pages in length from Parsons' work and "translate" them in a paragraph, a few lines, or even a single sentence. At one point he concludes that

grand theory, as represented in [Parsons' book] *The Social System*, . . . is only about 50 per cent verbiage; 40 per cent is well-known textbook sociology. The other 10 per cent, as Parsons might say, I am willing to leave open for your own empirical investigations. My own investigations suggest that the remaining 10 per cent is of possible—although rather vague—ideological use.²

Finally, one other device will be used in this book, although I take no credit for originating it. At the end of each chapter I have added an article to serve as an illustration of the material in the chapter. I have selected the articles because they are short, well-written, interesting, in some cases even humorous, and in general related to American culture. These articles are not necessarily the best anthropological papers on each subject, but they are consistent with my purpose: to make anthropology interesting and to make this book readable. I assume that the instructor will assign additional reading that will illustrate material from the text in a different way, perhaps with examples from other cultures. Also, at the end of each chapter I have listed a number of references to other anthropological works that bear upon the material discussed, so that the reader can follow up on any topic that may have stimulated his or her interest.

The idea for this book arose out of my experience in teaching introductory cultural anthropology. It is my attempt to solve some of the problems I have encountered in that experience, and it is based to a great extent upon my students' comments concerning the reading I have assigned and the material I have covered in lectures. I do not for a moment think that it is a perfect solution, and I hope that as a result of this first attempt, I will be able to get additional feedback so that I can improve the book in subsequent editions. Therefore, I would be most grateful for any comments from students or instructors who use this book, and who feel strongly enough about its strengths and/or weaknesses to take the time to drop me a note. I am presently on the faculty in the Department of Anthropology at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

2. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Grove Press, 1961, p. 49.

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