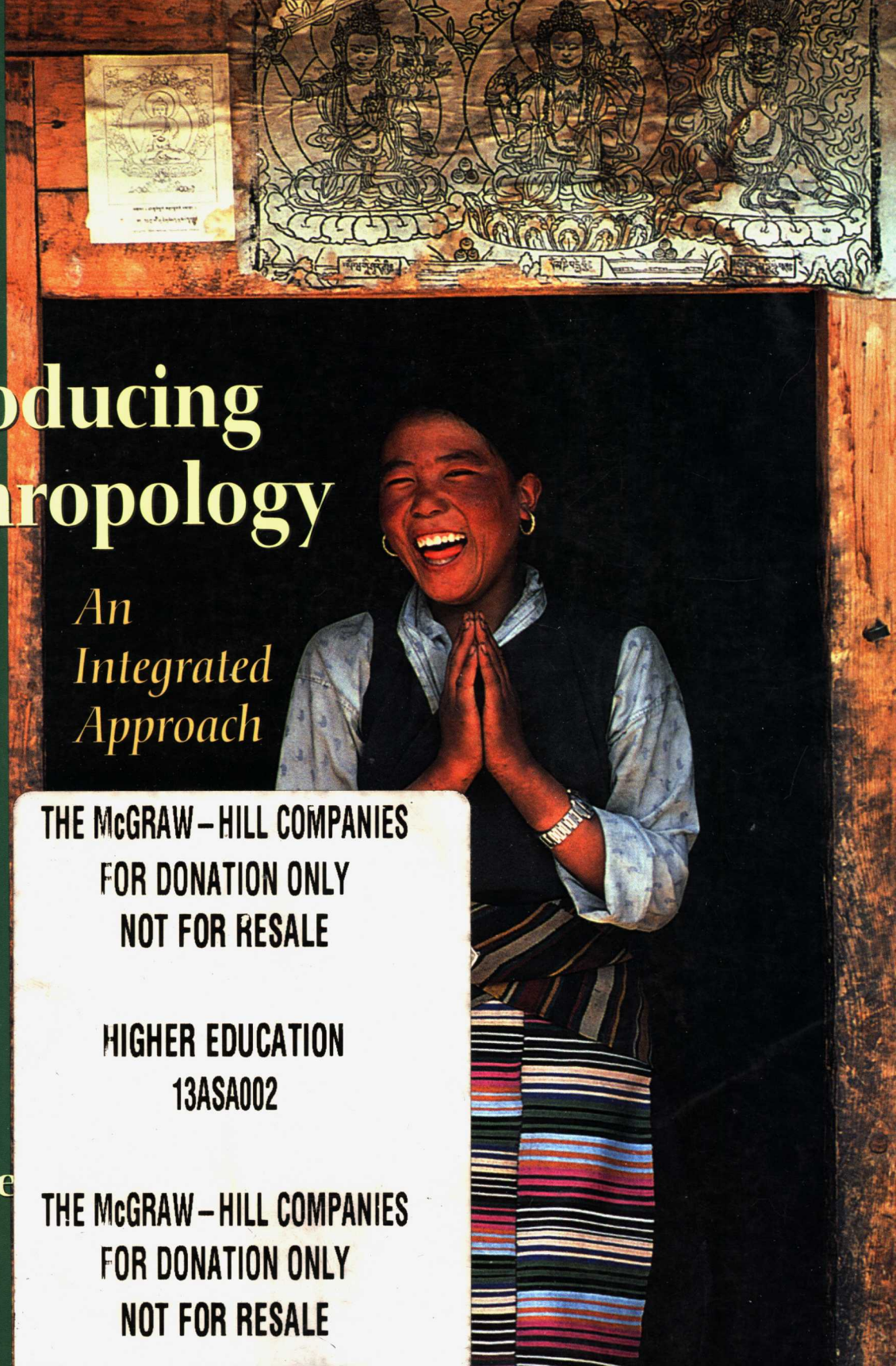
Introducing Anthropology

An Integrated Approach



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INTRODUCING ANTHROPOLOGY

An Integrated Approach

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INTRODUCING ANTHROPOLOGY

Preface

Modern anthropology has become extraordinarily diverse, with a wide variety of schools of thought and theoretical models within the discipline. Not surprisingly, this breadth in the field has led to a range of approaches to thinking about and teaching those courses traditionally called four-field introductions to anthropology. In short, we anthropologists each have sometimes very different answers to the question: What *is* anthropology?

The ideas about the nature of anthropology that have guided this book's organization, discussions, and selection of topics center on the field's identity as scientific, humanistic, and holistic:

- **Anthropology can be, should be, and is scientific.** That is, it operates by inductively generating testable hypotheses which are then deductively tested in an attempt to derive working theories about the areas of human biology and behavior that are our focuses. This is not to say that applying science to cultural variation or the abstract aspects of cultural systems is easy or particularly straightforward, or that science has even come close to satisfactorily answering all the major questions anthropologists ask about our species. Far from it. I simply believe that—if it is to be truly scholarly—the *process* of anthropologically investigating humankind is a scientific one.
- **Anthropology can be, should be, and is humanistic.** A scientific orientation and focus does not preclude nonscientific investigations and discussions of human behavior, or humanistic applications of anthropology. We are, after all, dealing with human beings who have motivations for their behaviors that fail to respond to fixed laws as do chemicals or subatomic particles. Moreover, because we deal with people, we cannot help but develop a concern for the welfare of our fellow humans. Indeed, this is what leads many to choose anthropology as a career in the first place. It becomes, then, only natural—if not morally

incumbent on us—to apply what we have learned about humans and human behavior to give voice to those without one, and to lend our knowledge to the agencies and governments that administer, guide, and, sometimes, compel and manipulate social change.

- **Anthropology can be, should be, and is holistic—*because its subject is holistic.*** Thus, affiliation with one of the traditional subfields of anthropology should be no more than a starting point to the scholarly investigation of the nature of our species. In short, despite the enormous breadth of anthropological subject matter and approaches to studying those subjects, there *really is* a field called anthropology which has a distinctive viewpoint and methodology that make it uniquely valuable.

FEATURES

The assumptions that guided my writing have been concretely applied though the following features:

- To convey the holism of the discipline, the traditional subfields are not used to divide the text into major parts, nor are they titles of chapters. The standard subfields are described and defined in the first chapter, but subsequently, the methods and contributions of each are interwoven throughout the book. In other words, the text is organized around the unique subject matter of anthropology—the human species in its holistic entirety—rather than being organized around the current subfield structure of anthropology itself.
- To convey the multidimensional holism of the field at the introductory level requires choosing a theme that can act as a common thread tying all the parts together. Just saying anthropology is holistic and giving a few specific examples is not enough. There are, of course, any number of themes that would be equally useful as such a pedagogical device. The one I have chosen is that of adaptation, broadly defined. I am not using the term in just its biological, ecological sense, although, of course, this definition does apply to human biological evolution and to the direct responses of cultures to their environments. But even abstract aspects of culture are adaptive responses to *something.* In other words, to paraphrase the title of an old reader, my theme is that "humans make sense." Even if we have a hard time making sense of some of our behaviors, my central integrative assumption is that behaviors have *some* explanation within their cultural contexts.

- I've assumed that student readers have no familiarity with anthropology or, if they do, it is incomplete. I am introducing them to the field from the ground up, starting from scratch, and having in mind courses whose goal is to truly *introduce* rather than supply an encyclopedic survey. For the introductory student, none of the detail about models, paradigms, or current theoretical debates makes a bit of sense unless and until that student has a basic knowledge of the general approach, subject matter, methodology, history, and facts of our field. Then—for students going on—all the nuances of opinion, and the current not-so-subtle differences, can be examined, understood, and appreciated. Discussions, for example, about whether variation in kinship systems is best explained through materialism, structuralism, psychology, sociobiology, Marxism, post-modernism, or any other model are meaningless unless one knows what kinship is all about in the first place. Although I do briefly discuss the area of anthropological theory and note several current debates, a text that focuses on that subject, or that is written from just one perspective would fail to do justice to the field. And it would certainly fail to convey to the introductory student the basic identity of anthropology, the basic facts that anthropology has discerned about the human species, and the richness of our subject matter, our scholarly world view, and our contributions to knowledge and human welfare.
- To get students to feel that I am talking to them personally, I have mixed an appropriate level of informality with the more formal style that must be used to convey the ideas of anthropology and the seriousness with which we approach our subject. I want the students to feel that I am taking a journey through anthropology with them, not that I have just given them a map and guidebook and left them on their own.
- Because a common misconception of our field is that we only study old dried-up fossils and exotic living peoples with their bizarre behaviors, I have tried to emphasize that anthropology studies the world's peoples in all their guises—ordinary and extraordinary, next door and in remote places. I have used as many examples and analogies as possible from North American cultures, groups, and situations. Students should know that anthropology doesn't stop the moment they walk out the classroom door—that they too can do anthropology and that they too are anthropological subjects.
- No one really understands anthropology unless they can and do apply it to thinking about their own lives. To further encourage this, the text includes a Contemporary Issues feature

at the end of each chapter that specifically applies the topic of the chapter to some question about the contemporary world, with a focus, where possible, on America and American culture. Questions range from "What Responsibilities Does the Anthropologist Have When Studying Other Cultures?" to "How Can We Account for the Recent Interest in Witchcraft?"

- Stories have worked well for most of human history as a vehicle for transmitting facts and ideas. They are more memorable than lists. I have written this text keeping in mind the narrative approach. There are a few literal stories, such as the one about my fieldwork that begins the book. But narrative in a more general sense refers to a causal sequence of events and I have tried to show how the various topics within anthropology connect with one another in this manner. The student readers should be able to navigate their way through the book and know where they are within the broad and diverse field of anthropology. I have provided signposts in the form of part, chapter, and subheading titles that logically and descriptively divide the subject as I have ordered it. The number of cultures used as examples is limited, so that the same groups may be referred to throughout the book in different contexts.

- A true introduction should be short and to the point. Achieving brevity while trying to introduce such a broad field is a challenge. I have tried to omit no major topic within mainstream anthropology, but, rather, have managed the amount of detail presented. If, for instance, I can convey a sense of a topic through one clear, interesting, memorable example, I think this is more efficient, at this level, than four or five examples. One's own favorite example can always be discussed or more detail added in class.

- Finally, the text is as accessible, attractive, straightforward, and uncluttered as possible. Important terms are boldfaced where they first appear and defined briefly in a running glossary in the margin. A more comprehensive glossary is at the end of the book. A standard bibliography is also included. The text itself is not interrupted with specific references and citations. These are included in a section at the end of each chapter called **Notes, References, and Readings,** along with other references to the topics covered and to some specific studies or facts for those interested in pursuing a subject further. A chapter summary precedes this section. Photographs and line art are in color where possible and captions add information rather than simply label the illustrations.

ANCILLARIES

The **Instructor's Manual** includes a test bank of about 500 multiple choice and short answer/essay questions, as well as chapter outlines and overviews, suggested activities, lists of key words, and sample syllabi.

A **Computerized Test Bank** is available free of charge to qualifying adopters. It is a powerful, easy-to-use test generation system that provides all test items on computer disk for IBM-compatible or Macintosh computers. Instructors can select, add, or edit questions, randomize them, and print tests appropriate to their individual classes.

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In memory of her companionship many years ago
as I conceived, researched, and wrote
my first book, this one is for:
Joyce
(1982–1996)

And the patches make the goodbye harder still.
—CAT STEVENS

Contents

A Personal Note to My Readers

I've always appreciated knowing something about the authors of the books I read and so I think you should know something about me—especially since you are relying on me to introduce you to anthropology.

I started my college career at Indiana University as a biology major, then switched two or three times to other majors. I took my first anthropology course because it sounded interesting—and because it fulfilled a university general education requirement and met at a convenient time. But soon I was hooked. Once I learned what anthropology was all about, I realized it was the perfect combination of many subjects that had always interested me. I went on to get my undergraduate degree in anthropology and stayed at Indiana for graduate work, specializing in biological anthropology—first human osteology (the study of the skeleton) and forensic anthropology and later redirecting my interests to evolutionary theory and evolutionary processes as they apply to the human species. This, as you'll read about in Chapter 1, was the focus of my field work and research among the Hutterites. I received my doctoral degree in 1979.

In 1973 I started working at Central Connecticut State University where I've been ever since, teaching courses in general anthropology (the topic of this book), human evolution, human biocultural diversity, forensic anthropology, the evolution of human behavior, and human ecology. I have also taught courses in the biology department and the university's honors program. I consider myself primarily an educator, so it was a natural step from classroom teaching to writing textbooks. This one is my sixth.

In addition to my personal and professional interest in anthropology, I'm also concerned about the quality of science education and about public knowledge and perception of scientific matters. I have written and lectured on such things as teaching about evolution, scientific investigations of palm reading and psychic detectives, and environmental issues.