

Aaron Podolefsky
Peter J. Brown



Applying Cultural Anthropology

An Introductory Reader

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S E C O N D E D I T I O N

Applying Cultural Anthropology

An Introductory Reader

Second Edition

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For Paula Brown,
*a gifted teacher, mentor, and scholar whose
outstanding work has earned her a secure
place in the history of the anthropological
study of New Guinea and in the hearts of
her many students.*

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To the Student

An introductory course in any discipline is chock-full of new terminology, concepts, and facts. Sometimes students forget that these new ideas and vocabulary are actually intellectual tools that can be put to work for analyzing and solving problems. In preparing this book, we have selected readings that will show you how anthropological concepts, discoveries, and methods can be applied in today's world.

The study of anthropology can help you view the world in a completely different way than you ever had before. You can come to appreciate the great diversity of human cultures and the interrelatedness of economic, sociopolitical, and religious systems. Anthropology can give you a broad perspective on humanity and help you understand other people's beliefs and customs. In doing so, it can help you become a better citizen in an increasingly global society.

The fascinating side of anthropology seems obvious to most educated people, but there is also a lesser known practical side of the discipline. The readings we have selected demonstrate that practical, applied side. Many of the articles are examples of anthropological ideas and research methods in action—as they are used to understand and solve practical problems. We have included career profiles of anthropologists working outside the academic setting to show how they are applying anthropology. We believe that the fundamental lessons of anthropology can be applied to many careers and all areas of human endeavor.

To benefit from the study of anthropology, you need to study effectively. Over the years, we have found that students often read assignments without planning, and this actually makes studying less efficient. Before you read a selection, spend a few moments skimming it to get an idea of what it is about, where it is going, and what you should look for. This kind of preliminary reading is a poor idea for mystery novels, but is essential for academic assignments.

Without this preparation, the article may become a hodgepodge of facts and figures; details may be meaningless because you have missed the big picture. By planning your reading, you can see how the details are relevant to the central themes of an article.

To help you plan your reading, at the beginning of each article we have included questions and a list of glossary terms. By studying these questions in advance, you may gain an idea of what is to come and why the article is important. This will help make the time you spend reading more fruitful. Most of the questions highlight the central themes of the selection or draw your attention to interesting details. Some of the questions, however, do not have straightforward answers—they are food for thought and topics for discussion.

These articles have been selected with you, the student, in mind. We hope they convey our excitement about the anthropological adventure, and we expect that you will find them both enjoyable and thought-provoking.

If you are interested in further reading in applied anthropology, there are several excellent books available, such as *Applied Anthropology: A Practical Guide*, by Erve Chambers; *Applied Anthropology: An Introduction*, by John van Willigen; *Anthropological Praxis: Translating Knowledge into Action*, by Robert M. Wulff and Shirley J. Fiske; *Applied Anthropology in America*, by Elizabeth M. Eddy and William L. Partridge, and *Making Our Research Useful*, by John van Willigen, Barbara Rylko-Bauer, and Anne McElroy. You might also want to look at the journals *Human Organization* and *Practicing Anthropology*, both of which are published by the Society for Applied Anthropology. The National Association of Practicing Anthropologists (NAPA) has also published interesting works on specific fields such as Medical Anthropology.

To the Instructor

Introductory cultural anthropology has become an established part of the college curriculum, and through this course our profession communicates with a large and diverse undergraduate audience. Members of that audience differ in experience, academic concentration, and career aspirations. For those students considering anthropology as a major, we need to provide (among other things) a vision of the future, a view of anthropological work to be done in the public domain as well as within academia. For them, we need to provide some answers to the question, "What can I do with a degree in anthropology?" For students majoring in other areas, such as business, engineering, or psychology, we need to address the question, "How can anthropological insights or research methods help me understand and solve human problems?" If we can provide such a service, we increase the likelihood that students will find creative solutions to the professional problems that await them, and we brighten the future for our anthropology majors by underscoring the usefulness of an anthropological perspective in attempts to solve the practical problems of today's world.

Over the years, we have found that most introductory texts have done little more than include a chapter on applied anthropology at the end of the book. This suggests, at least to students, that most of anthropology has no relevance to their lives. Such treatment also implies that the application of anthropological knowledge is a tangent or afterthought—at best, an additional subject area, such as kinship or politics.

We disagree. We believe that the applications of anthropology cut across and infuse all the discipline's subfields. This reader is a collection of articles that provide examples of both basic and *applied* research in cultural anthropology and anthropological linguistics.

One of our primary goals is to demonstrate some of the ways our discipline is used outside the academic

arena. We want anthropology to be seen as a field that is interesting as well as relevant to the real world. Like the public at large, students seem well aware that the subject matter of anthropology is fascinating, but they seem unaware of both the fundamental questions of humanity addressed by anthropologists and the practical applications of the field.

Although people distinguish between basic and applied research, much of anthropology falls into a gray area, having elements of both. Many selections in this reader fall into that gray zone—they are brief ethnographic accounts that contain important implications for understanding and resolving problems. We could have included a large number of articles exemplifying strictly applied research—an evaluation report of agency performance, for example. While this sort of research is fascinating and challenging to do, it is usually not exciting for students to read. We have selected articles that we believe are fascinating for students and convey the dual nature (basic/applied) of social science research.

Any student who completes an introductory course in cultural anthropology should learn that anthropological work, in its broadest sense, may include (or at least contribute to) international business, epidemiology, program evaluation, social impact studies, conflict resolution, organizational analysis, market research, and nutrition research, even though their introductory anthropology texts make no mention of these fields. The selections in this book should help students understand why cultural anthropology is important in today's world, and also make the course more memorable and meaningful.

FEATURES OF THIS EDITION

- We chose the readings in this book to complement the typical course in introductory cultural

anthropology. The sequence of articles follows the organization of standard cultural anthropology textbooks, grouped under traditional headings such as culture and communication, rather than headings based on the applied areas such as medical anthropology or the anthropology of development. Had we meant this book to be a reader on applied anthropology, our organization would have been different. While this book could be used in courses on applied anthropology (an earlier edition has been), this was not our intended audience. Also, for this reason, we have not provided extensive discussion of the history or definition of applied anthropology. For students interested in this, there are a number of fine books on the subject. These include *Applied Anthropology: A Practical Guide*, by Erve Chambers; *Applied Anthropology: An Introduction*, by John van Willigen; *Anthropological Praxis: Translating Knowledge into Action*, by Robert M. Wulff and Shirley J. Fiske; *Applied Anthropology in America*, by Elizabeth M. Eddy and William L. Partridge, and *Making Our Research Useful*, by John van Willigen, Barbara Rylko-Bauer, and Anne McElroy.

- To emphasize how anthropology can be put to work in different settings, we have included a number of profiles of anthropologists whose careers involve applying anthropology outside the university setting.
- To help students better understand the subject matter, we have included a number of pedagogical aids: introductions, a list of glossary terms, and guiding questions for each article; a world map that pinpoints the locations of places and peoples discussed in the articles; and, for easy reference, an extensive glossary and index.
- To help busy instructors, we have provided an instructor's manual for this edition that includes for each article a brief summary, glossary terms, and test questions.
- Among the 12 new articles in this edition are several that pertain to gender issues. We've combined two sections, "Sex Roles and Marriage" and "Socialization and Parenting," into one called "Gender and Socialization." In addition to two new articles here (one on changing marriage patterns and population growth among a group of Amazonian Indians and the other on dowry death in India), we've included a new article on male-female mis-

communication in the section "Culture and Communication."

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Contents

Introduction: Understanding Humans and Human Problems 1

CULTURE

- 1 Swimming in Cross-Cultural Currents 5**
Conrad Phillip Kottak (Natural History, 1985)
A comparison of the meaning of “time” and how it affects the organization of competitive swimming in Brazil and the United States reveals important, although subtle, differences between these two cultures.
- 2 Loading the Bases: How Our Tribe Projects Its Own Image into the National Pastime 11**
Bradd Shore (The Sciences, 1990)
Culture is an extraordinary human invention because it allows us to *unconsciously* interpret meanings in everyday events. This can be seen in Shore’s analysis of baseball as a ritual that symbolically expresses some of Americans’ central cultural ideas. Few people recognize the hidden cultural meanings of their own day-to-day behavior.
- 3 Body Ritual Among the Nacirema 18**
Horace Miner (American Anthropologist, 1956)
The examination and analysis of the rituals of this tribe shed light on the meaning of culture and help us reflect on our own way of life.

FIELDWORK

- 4 Letter from Peri — Manus II 22**
Margaret Mead (A Way of Seeing, 1970)
One of America’s best-known anthropologists reflects on her long involvement with the people of Manus.

- 5 Crack in Spanish Harlem 26**
Philippe Bourgois (Anthropology Today, 1989)
 While some anthropologists travel long distances to find exotic cultures, others stay closer to home. During fieldwork in a New York neighborhood on the social organization of addicts and sellers and the economics of crack cocaine, the author comes face to face with a culture of terror. Underlying the violence, the drugs, and the ruined lives is a different view of the American dream.
- 6 PROFILE OF ANTHROPOLOGISTS Corporate Anthropologists 34**
Jennifer J. Laabs (Personnel Journal, 1992)
 Since the 1930s business anthropologists have been applying their skills to the understanding of corporate cultures, product development, and market research. This subfield has recently experienced exceptional growth.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

- 7 Shakespeare in the Bush 41**
Laura Bohannon (Natural History, 1966)
 Laura Bohannon finds great difficulty in communicating the dramatic themes (and basic story line) of *Hamlet* to the Tiv of Nigeria. Assumptions about human motivations, morality, and the nature of reality are embedded in a cultural context and limit the possible understanding of the story. Great art does not necessarily transcend cultural boundaries.
- 8 Preserving Language Diversity 47**
H. Russell Bernard (Human Organization, 1992)
 Computer technology provides the opportunity for native peoples to produce literature in their own language, which may lead to the preservation of linguistic diversity.
- 9 "To Give Up On Words": Silence in Western Apache Culture 57**
Keith H. Basso (Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 1970)
 Cross-cultural communication involves more than differences in language and gesture. This sociolinguistic analysis explores the role of silence in Apache society in particular situational contexts. There are social rules that dictate when talking is appropriate, and these rules vary across cultures.
- 10 Problems in Pocatello: A Study in Linguistic Misunderstanding 67**
Barbara Joans (Practicing Anthropology, 1984)
 An anthropologist is called as an expert witness in a dispute between the Social Security Administration and six Native American women. At issue is the ability of bilingual speakers to understand bureaucratic language.
- 11 A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunication 71**
Daniel N. Maltz and Ruth A. Borker (from Language and Social Identity, 1982)
 Misunderstandings between men and women may be due to differences in subcultural rules about speech and conversation. Sociolinguistic variation in question asking, gestures of agreement, and topic flow can cause misinterpretation of the speaker's intentions. Valuable parallels can be drawn between interethnic miscommunication and cross-ethnic miscommunication.

**12 PROFILE OF AN ANTHROPOLOGIST Living Abroad: Cross Cultural Training
for Families 82**

Lillian Trager (Practicing Anthropology, 1987)

Training programs are extremely important for employees and their families who are going abroad. Anthropologists can make a special contribution.

CULTURE AND FOOD

13 Ancient Genes and Modern Health 86

S. Boyd Eaton and Melvin Konner (Anthroquest, 1985)

Many of the serious health problems confronting us today may be the result of an incongruity between our genetic heritage as descendants of hunter-gatherers and our current diet and lifestyle. The study of Paleolithic people may be the key to a healthy life.

14 You Are What You Eat: Religious Aspects of the Health Food Movement 90

Jill Dubisch (The American Dimension, 1981)

Health foods are viewed as a system of symbols that represent a particular world view. As a system of beliefs and practices, the movement has some of the characteristics of a religion.

15 Chinese Table Manners: You Are How You Eat 98

Eugene Cooper (Human Organization, 1986)

Knowing good manners from bad is extremely important in cross-cultural encounters. The author heightens our sensitivity by describing Chinese table manners.

CULTURE AND AGRICULTURE

16 The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race 105

Jared Diamond (Discover, 1987)

The agricultural revolution has long been considered one of the most important transformations in human history. But was it for the better or worse?

17 Agricultural Development and the Quality of Life 109

Peggy F. Barlett and Peter J. Brown (Agriculture and Human Values, 1985)

Agricultural development does not necessarily bring about an increase in the "quality of life." Economic change radically alters different societies' perceptions of life circumstances and life satisfaction.

18 The Agrarian Basis of Conflict in Central America 117

Billie R. DeWalt (The Central American Crisis, 1985)

Political turmoil in Central American countries has its roots in a particular history of agricultural and landholding policies. An emphasis on agricultural production for export has resulted in extreme inequalities in the social distribution of resources. Agricultural structure creates social tensions and results in political unrest.

- 19 The Domestication of Wood in Haiti: A Case Study in Applied Evolution 123**
Gerald F. Murray (Anthropological Praxis, 1987)
 Using his anthropological knowledge of Haitian peasants, Gerald Murray designs and administers an astoundingly successful reforestation project. Wood as a cash crop makes good economic sense to Haitian farmers, and, as a consequence, both production and agricultural earnings increase.

ECONOMY AND BUSINESS

- 20 In Search of the Affluent Society 133**
Allen Johnson (Human Nature, 1978)
 A comparison of Machiguenga Indians of Peru and middle-class Parisians raises questions about the meaning of affluence. Who has more leisure time?
- 21 Eating Christmas in the Kalahari 141**
Richard Borshay Lee (Natural History, 1969)
 When the !Kung San make fun of an ox that the anthropologist wants to give the group for a Christmas feast, Richard Lee learns about the important value of reciprocity in a food-foraging band.
- 22 If Only They Would Listen: The Anthropology of Business and the Business of Anthropology 146**
S. Brian Burkhalter (Practicing Anthropology, 1986)
 The methods used to analyze the social and cultural dimensions of economic exchange among exotic tribal cultures are equally effective in the American corporation. Anthropologists have much to offer the business community through their study of corporate culture.

GENDER AND SOCIALIZATION

- 23 Society and Sex Roles 152**
Ernestine Friedl (Human Nature, 1978)
 Equality between men and women is the product of the social organization of food production and the control of scarce resources. Cross-cultural comparisons of hunter-gatherer groups reveals marked variation in equality between the sexes. Such comparisons contain important lessons for our own society.
- 24 Child Care in China 158**
Bruce Dollar (Saturday Review of Education, 1973)
 Cultural beliefs and values of revolutionary China are purposefully encouraged in the socialization of preschool children. Group activities are used to foster cooperation, sharing, and altruism. Cultural values are reflected in and recreated by institutions of socialization.
- 25 American Schoolrooms: Learning the Nightmare 163**
Jules Henry (Columbia University Forum, 1963)
 In addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, American children learn fundamental cultural values at school. One of the most important lessons is the fear of failure in our competitive society.

- 26 Family Planning, Amazon Style 170**
Warren M. Hern (Natural History, 1992)
 High fertility is linked to the health and economic problems of Shipibo Indians. The older custom of polygyny allowed longer spacing between births. Economic change results in new ideas about appropriate marriage patterns, and an untoward consequence has been rapid population growth.
- 27 When Brothers Share a Wife 175**
Melvyn C. Goldstein (Natural History, 1987)
 Fraternal polyandry, a rare form of plural marriage, has both benefits and costs for the people of Tibet. Given the economy and ecology of this area, the practice of polyandry has adaptive functions.
- 28 Law, Custom, and Crimes Against Women:
 The Problem of Dowry Death in India 180**
John van Willigen and V. C. Channa (Human Organization, 1991)
 Dowry-related violence against women in northern India is a serious and perplexing problem, difficult to explain with an anthropological functionalist approach. Economic transformations have negatively affected the status of women and intensified economic pressures on families to provide dowry at the marriage of daughters.

POLITICS, LAW, AND WARFARE

- 29 The Kpelle Moot 191**
James L. Gibbs, Jr. (Africa, 1963)
 The informal moot, a method of resolving disputes among the Kpelle of Liberia, is significantly different from our court system. It emphasizes the mending of social relations between the disputing parties; the process of the hearing is therapeutic. The moot is a useful alternative model for settling disputes in our own society.
- 30 Legal Planning in Papua New Guinea 199**
Richard Scaglion (Oceania, 1981)
 For a new nation like Papua New Guinea, the design of a national legal system must take customary law into account. The author describes three mechanisms of dispute settlement among the Abalam and demonstrates that flexibility is a fundamental attribute of the system.
- 31 Contemporary Warfare in the New Guinea Highlands 208**
Aaron Podolefsky (Ethnology, 1984)
 Intertribal warfare flares up in the highlands of Papua New Guinea even after decades of relative peace. To understand why, anthropologists focus on changes in the local economic system that have, in turn, changed marriage patterns.
- 32 Flaming Crosses and Body Snatchers 217**
David L. Kertzer (Ritual, Politics, and Power, 1988)
 Kings, revolutionaries, presidents, and even the Ku Klux Klan use symbols and rituals to build their political organization. Political ritual is not trivial fanfare, but a cross-cultural mechanism for getting and maintaining power.

RITUAL AND CURING

- 33 Hallucinogenic Plants and Their Use in Traditional Societies 226**
Wade Davis (Cultural Survival, 1985)
 The author, whose writing about psychoactive plants and *zombis* in Haiti has stirred controversy, surveys the use and functions of hallucinogenic plants in other societies. Particularly in traditional South American Indian societies, hallucinogens play a central role in religion and ritual.
- 34 The Doctor's White Coat: The Image of the Physician in Modern America 230**
Dan Blumhagen (Annals of Internal Medicine, 1979)
 A central symbol of the power and authority of the physician in American society, the white coat has a clear history. The symbolic communication between physician and patient is a key for understanding some of the social dynamics of healing.
- 35 The Integration of Modern and Traditional Health Sectors in Swaziland 237**
Edward C. Green (Anthropological Praxis, 1987)
 A shortage of biomedical health care personnel in developing countries might be eased by incorporating traditional healers into the health care delivery system. The first step in this cooperation is a survey of traditional healers and their activities.
- 36 PROFILE OF AN ANTHROPOLOGIST Anthropology and the World of Physicians 243**
Thomas M. Johnson (Anthropology Newsletter, 1991)
 A well-known clinical medical anthropologist describes his work in a hospital setting. Knowledge of anthropological principles is important for medical students to become successful clinicians in cross-cultural settings.
- 37 Ritual in the Operating Room 247**
Pearl Katz (Ethnology, 1981)
 Rituals exist in both sacred and secular contexts, and ritual behavior is an integral part of modern surgical procedures.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE

- 38 AIDS as Human Suffering 258**
Paul Farmer and Arthur Kleinman (Daedalus, 1989)
 In the past decade the AIDS epidemic has spread throughout the world. Social reactions to the threat of this terrible and lethal disease vary between cultures; in this selection, medical anthropologists compare the experience of people dying from AIDS in the United States and Haiti. The suffering caused by AIDS is both biomedical and cultural.
- 39 Advertising and Global Culture 267**
Noreene Janus (Cultural Survival, 1983)
 The expansion of the world economic system depends on the creation of new consumer demands through advertising. Do developing countries have the right to reject mass advertising for products that their citizens cannot afford?

40 The Price of Progress 271

John H. Bodley (Victims of Progress, 1994)

Economic development, sometimes called "progress," can bring about unintended social and medical consequences, especially for marginalized tribal peoples. New disease burdens, ecological degradation, and increased discrimination are among the hidden costs of economic change for many people.

Glossary 280**Index 285**

Introduction:

Understanding Humans and Human Problems

To the uninitiated, the term *anthropology* conjures up images of mummies' tombs, Indiana Jones, and treks through steaming jungles or over high alpine peaks. Anthropologists agree that their chosen field is exciting, that they have been places and seen things that few experience firsthand, and that they have been deeply and emotionally involved in understanding the human condition. At the same time, however, the vision of anthropology presented by Hollywood has probably done more to obscure the true nature of the profession than it has to enlighten the public about what we really do.

Providing an accurate image of anthropology and anthropological work is both simple and complex. Essentially, anthropology is the study of people, or more properly, of humankind. But, you may say, many disciplines study people: psychology, sociology, history, biology, medicine, and so on. True, but anthropology is different in that it seeks to integrate these separate and narrow views of humanity. To understand ourselves, we need to join these disparate views into a single framework, a process that begins with our biological and evolutionary roots, explores the development of culture through the prehistoric and historical periods, probes the uniquely human ability to develop culture through communication, and examines the diversity of recent and present-day cultures that inhabit the globe.

From this conception of the *holistic* and *comparative* study of humankind emerge what are termed the four fields of anthropology: biological (or physical) anthropology, archaeology, anthropological linguistics, and cultural anthropology. Some universities offer an introductory course that covers all four of these subfields. Other schools cover the subfields in two or three separate introductory courses. Each approach has its advantage. The former may more fully integrate the biocultural and historical dimensions of humanity; the latter allows students to explore each subfield in greater depth. This book introduces you to the field of

cultural anthropology and how it is used in today's world.

Another way to divide the discipline—in fact almost any discipline—is into *basic* and *applied* research. These categories are important in this reader because we would like students to appreciate both the basic and applied sides of cultural anthropology. A survey of natural and social scientists and engineers conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the National Science Foundation used the following definitions of these fundamental concepts: *Basic research* is study directed toward gaining scientific knowledge primarily for its own sake; *applied research* is study directed toward gaining scientific knowledge in an effort to meet a recognized need.

Anthropology is a discipline concerned primarily with basic research. It asks “big” questions concerning the origins of humankind, the roots of human nature, the development of civilization, and the functions of our major social institutions (such as marriage or religion). Nevertheless, anthropologists have put the methods and skills developed in basic research to use in solving human problems and fulfilling the needs of society. Anthropologists have, for example, worked with medical examiners in the identification of skeletal remains. They have also helped communities preserve their cultural heritage and businesses and government agencies understand the social impacts of programs or development projects.

Although the application of anthropology has a long history, it has, until recent years, remained in the shadows of “pure” or basic research. The last 20 years have seen a change. Anthropologists have moved beyond their traditional roles in universities and museums and now work in a broad range of settings. They are employed in many government agencies, in the private sector, and in a variety of nonresearch capacities (such as administrator, evaluator, or policy analyst).

In response to the growing opportunities for anthropologists outside academia and to the demands of

students, an increasing number of master's degree and doctoral programs provide training specifically in the applications of anthropology. This is not to say that the classified ads list jobs titled "anthropologist." Rather, for those interested in anthropology, there are increasing opportunities to find careers that draw on anthropological training and skills. Profiles of people in nonacademic careers (consumer marketing, high-tech industry, and school administration) can be found in this reader. At the same time, studies have shown that there will be increasing job opportunities for anthropologists in universities and colleges during the 1990s and beyond.

Applications of anthropology are found in all four subfields. Anthropological work includes the identification of skeletal remains (forensics); the study of size and fit for the design of clothing, furniture, or airplane cockpits (ergonomics); exploration of the patterns and causes of disease (epidemiology); evaluation of the effectiveness of programs (from Third World development to crime prevention); assessment of community needs; prediction of the social impact of change; analysis of organizations such as businesses or government agencies; market research; and research into health and nutrition, to name but a few.

School administrators, engineers, business leaders, lawyers, medical researchers, and government officials have become aware that the substantive knowledge, the unique perspective, and the research skills of anthropologists are applicable to practical problems—in the United States as well as other countries.

As we explore anthropology, keep in mind the interplay between and interdependence of basic cultural research and the applications of anthropological knowledge and research methods to the solution of human problems.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Cultural anthropology is concerned with the description and analysis of people's lives and traditions. In the past, cultural anthropologists almost always did research in far-off "exotic" societies, but today, we have expanded our research interests to include our own society. Cultural anthropology can add much to both the basic and applied scientific understanding of human behaviors and beliefs. The study and interpretation of other societies—of their traditions, history, and view of the world—is inherently interesting and important because it documents the diversity of human lifestyles. The anthropological approach to understanding other societies also has practical value for addressing contemporary human problems and needs.

The concept of *culture* is central to anthropology. It

refers to the patterns of economy, social organization, and belief that are learned and shared by members of a social group. Culture is traditional knowledge that is passed down from one generation to the next. Although generally stable over time, culture is flexible and fluid, changing through borrowing or invention. The influential American anthropologist Franz Boas championed the concept of culture for understanding human diversity; culture, Boas argued, is distinct from biological "race" or language. Anthropologists believe that all cultural lifestyles have intrinsic value and validity. Other societies deserve to be studied and understood without being prejudged using our own narrow (and sometimes intolerant) beliefs and values; this universal tendency to prejudge based on the supposed superiority of one's own group, called *ethnocentrism*, is something everyone should avoid.

Culture is the crowning achievement of human evolution. To understand ourselves is to appreciate cultural diversity. Dependence on culture as our primary mechanism of survival sets humans apart from other members of the animal kingdom. This dependence is responsible for the tremendous evolutionary success of our species, which has grown in population (sometimes to the point of overpopulation) and can inhabit nearly every niche on the planet.

The paradox of culture is that, as we humans learn to accept our own cultural beliefs and values, we unconsciously learn to reject those of other peoples. At birth, we are capable of absorbing any culture and language. We are predisposed to cultural learning, but we are not programmed to adopt a particular culture. As we grow, our parents, our schools, and our society teach us what is right and wrong, good and evil, acceptable and unacceptable. At the subconscious level, we learn the symbolic meanings of behavior and through them interpret the meanings of actions. Beliefs, values, and symbols must be understood within the context of a particular culture. This is the principle of *cultural relativity*.

In addition to the concept of culture, the anthropological approach to the study of human behavior and belief has two essential characteristics: a holistic approach and a comparative framework. The *holistic approach* means that anthropologists see a particular part of culture—for example, politics, economy, or religion—in relation to the larger social system. Individuals are viewed, not in isolation, but as part of an intricate web of social relationships. Although an anthropological study may have a particular focus, the holistic approach means that the broader cultural context is always considered important because the different parts of a cultural system are interrelated. When, for example, the economy or technology changes, other aspects of the culture will change as well.

The *comparative framework* means that explanations or generalizations are informed by cross-cultural research. Questions about humanity cannot be based on information from a single society or a single type of society—like the industrial societies of the United States and Europe. Such a limited framework is simply too narrow for understanding the big picture that basic anthropological research seeks. By studying others within a comparative frame, we can better understand ourselves. If other cultures are a mirror in which we see ourselves, then anthropology is a mirror for humankind.

The broad generalizations about culture and society that we have been talking about are based on detailed knowledge of the world's cultures. To gain this knowledge, anthropologists go to the people. Often accompanied by spouses and children, we pack our bags and travel to far-off lands—to the highlands of New Guinea, the frozen arctic, the savannas of Africa, or the jungles of South America. Increasingly, anthropologists are bringing their research methods and comparative, holistic perspective into the cities and suburbs of America, the American schoolroom, or the corporate jungle. This "research adventure" has become the hallmark of cultural anthropology.

The research methods used by the cultural anthropologist are distinctive because they depend, to a large extent, on the firsthand experiences and interpretations of the field researcher. Cultural anthropologists conduct research in natural settings rather than in laboratories or over the telephone. This method for studying another society is often called *participant observation*, *ethnography*, or *qualitative methods*. The goal of describing, understanding, and explaining another culture is a large task. It is most often accomplished by living in the society for an extended period, by talking with people, and, as much as possible, by experiencing their lives.

The fieldwork experience usually involves a kind of culture shock in which the researcher questions his or her own assumptions about the world. In this way, fieldwork is often a rewarding period of personal growth. In their work, anthropologists expect to find that other people's behavior, even when it seems bizarre when seen from the outside, makes sense when it is viewed from the people's own point of view. This is why anthropological research often means letting people speak for themselves. While doing research, the anthropologist often thinks of herself or himself as a child—as being ignorant or uninformed and needing to be taught by the people being studied. This approach often involves in-depth interviewing with a few key informants and then interpreting (and writing about) that other culture for the researcher's own society. The ethnographic method, pioneered and devel-

oped in anthropology, is now being used in a range of applied areas, including marketing, management research, and school evaluation. Although ethnography is an important research style, the selections in this book demonstrate that many different methods are used in anthropology today.

The applications of cultural anthropology are diverse. Internationally, anthropologists are involved in programs of technical assistance and economic aid to Third World nations. These programs address needs in such areas as agriculture and rural development; health, nutrition, and family planning; education; housing and community organizing; transportation and communication; and energy. Anthropologists do many of the same things domestically as well. They evaluate public education, study agricultural extension programs, administer projects, analyze policy (such as U.S. refugee resettlement programs), and research crime and crime prevention, for example.

In the private sector, cultural anthropologists can add a fresh perspective to market research. They analyze office and industrial organization and culture. They create language and cultural training workshops for businesspeople and others who are going overseas. These workshops reduce the likelihood of cross-cultural misunderstanding and the problems of culture shock for the employee and, often more important, for his or her family.

Applied anthropological work can be divided into four categories. In the first group, applied and basic research look very much alike, except that the goal of applied research is more directly linked with a particular problem or need. For example, in Selection 31, Aaron Podolefsky studies the causes of the reemergence of tribal warfare in New Guinea. Such studies provide planners and policymakers with important insights for understanding the problem. This knowledge can lead to the design and implementation of programs that help bring an end to warfare in the region.

In the second category, anthropologists work as researchers for a government agency, corporation, or interest group on a specific task defined by the client as discussed in the selection "Corporate Anthropologists" (Selection 6).

In the third category, anthropologists work as consultants to business and industry or to government agencies that need in-depth cultural knowledge to solve or prevent a problem. In "Problems in Pocatello" (Selection 10), Barbara Joans enters the realm of law to assess the level of misunderstanding between government agents and a group of Native American women. Anthropologists often act as cultural brokers, mediating and translating between groups who are miscommunicating, not because of their words but because of cultural meanings.

Finally, a few anthropologists have developed and administered programs. Gerald F. Murray's work in reforestation in Haiti (Selection 19) exemplifies the development and actual administration of a project in which cultural understanding is a fundamental component. The overwhelming success of this agroforestry project attests to the practical value of cultural understanding for solving human problems.

A great deal of anthropological work remains to be done, though this seems to be a well-kept secret. People have a far easier time focusing on the individual as

the level of analysis. When divorce, drug abuse, or suicide affects small numbers of people, we may look to the individual and to psychology for answers. When divorce rates climb to 50 percent of all marriages and the suicide rate increases tenfold, however, we must look beyond the individual to forces that affect society at large. Because we are so immersed in our own culture, we have difficulty seeing it as a powerful force that guides—even controls—our behavior. We begin these readings, therefore, with three selections that convey the hidden, but powerful, nature of culture.