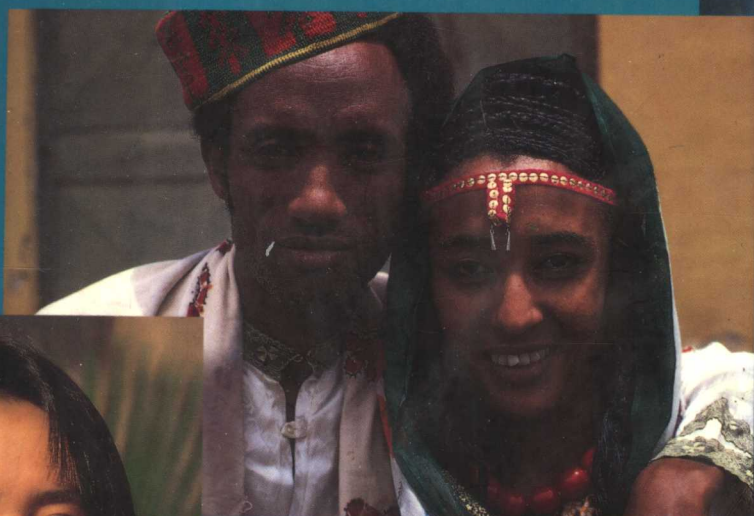

Cultural Anthropology



DAVID HICKS
MARGARET A. GWYNNE

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY



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TO EMMA AND PAUL
AND TO THE MEMORY OF MARGARET SPENCER WOOD ANDERSON

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Cultural Anthropology

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PREFACE

Before we embarked on the preparation of *Cultural Anthropology*, neither of us had ever found a textbook entirely suitable for our first-year anthropology students, and colleagues sometimes mentioned encountering the same problem. Some available textbooks seemed unnecessarily pedantic; others dwelt on material that was obviously remote from students' interests; still others seemed to us to be too abstract. We were looking for something that was clearly and engagingly written; that was as comprehensive as any single textbook could reasonably be, covering the basic subjects to which instructors would wish to expose their introductory students; that would introduce certain materials commonly short-changed in current textbooks (such as women and culture, the human body as a vehicle for cultural expression, and sexuality from a cross-cultural point of view); and that would genuinely interest and even excite its undergraduate readers.

We wrote *Cultural Anthropology* to address these needs. We were guided by two related and equally fundamental premises: that American college students are interested in their own cultural experience, and that the comparative study of their own culture with others will result in a deeper appreciation of all cultures. In *Cultural Anthropology* we quite consciously focus on familiar aspects of Western culture that find parallels in other cultures, since we believe this will foster readers' awareness of, and tolerance for, the ethnic diversity that constitutes an ever-increasing element in the lives of American students.

.....

THEMES

Cultural Anthropology is designed around four distinctive themes that we regard as fundamental to the education of anthropology students in the last decade of the twentieth century.

1. *Cultural relativity.* Most introductory cultural anthropology texts promote the notion that some invisible dividing line separates Westerners from non-Westerners. In *Cultural Anthropology* we reject what we consider the improper distinction between "us" and "them," and following from this general stance, consistently advocate what we take to be the most important lesson cultural anthropology has contributed to human understanding: cultural relativity, the ability to evaluate a culture in terms of its own

values rather than those of another culture. Throughout the book, we contrast this ideal with its opposite, ethnocentrism.

2. *Holism.* Despite its traditional fragmentation into four subfields customarily treated in separate courses, anthropology remains a holistic discipline, and “American anthropologists . . . credit the quality of their insights, research and teaching in one field to past and present influences of the remaining three. Trained in one subdiscipline, they still are affected by other parts of the whole. The persistent power of holism continues today as American anthropology’s essential and coveted reality” (Givens and Skomal 1992:1).

The same concept is also used by anthropologists to convey the idea that the various aspects of any culture are closely interrelated, even as the different but interconnected parts of a car’s engine work together to keep the car running smoothly. Anthropologists study cultures holistically because the synchronic interconnections between the different aspects of a given culture help to impart meaning to it. We continue this tradition here.

3. *Women and Anthropology.* A major theme of *Cultural Anthropology* is that lifeways, the beliefs that encapsulate them, and the institutions by which they are brought into action belong not to one gender but to both. Until recently, even though much anthropological fieldwork was carried out by women, most published work in anthropology was dominated by the presumption that culture was male culture and society was male society. This unrealistic (not to say outmoded) stance is currently in the process of being replaced by one that emphasizes the complementary influences of males and females in fashioning the communal worlds in which they live. While not wholly uncritical of contemporary feminist research, we draw upon it frequently in our attempt to fashion a coherent, balanced account of the contributions of women to the cultures they have helped create.
4. *The Value of Applied Anthropology.* In the 1980s, the proportion of anthropology graduates who applied their training outside of academia increased to such an extent that these anthropologists now outnumber their academic colleagues. However, applied anthropology continues to take a back seat to academic anthropology in the majority of textbooks. In contrast, *Cultural Anthropology* emphasizes this newly recognized and growing subdiscipline and gives it special attention in three chapters (Chapters 1, 9, and 16).

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Cultural Anthropology has no theoretical axe to grind; we treat the most influential perspectives and approaches used in our discipline with an even hand. Still, as teachers of anthropology we have found that we can best express our holistic view of culture through two approaches, the structural-functionalist and the cultural materialist. Since holism is a lesson we regard as fundamental to understanding cultures, and therefore an essential one for our readers to grasp, we emphasize these two approaches rather more than, say, the psychological or structuralist approaches. This is perhaps especially true for Chapters 5 and 9, which provide cultural-materialist treatments of subsistence strategies and economics, and Chapters 7 and 12, which provide structural-functionalist interpretations of marriage and religion.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Unique Coverage

While generally following the now-standard format and range of topics found in other major introductory anthropology textbooks, *Cultural Anthropology* offers additional materials not available in any introductory text with which we are familiar.

- ♦ *Unique chapters on sexuality and the human body.* We devote an entire chapter (Chapter 8) to a cross-cultural look at social constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality, and another (Chapter 15) to considering how people in different cultures reconstruct the human body to reflect their own cultural images.
- ♦ *“The Anthropologist at Work” boxes.* Over the past twenty-five years our students have told us that they are perhaps more interested in learning about how anthropologists gather their information than in any other topic discussed in introductory anthropology. So in addition to devoting a full chapter (Chapter 2) to a discussion of fieldwork and the professional and personal lives of anthropologists, we have created boxes entitled “The Anthropologist at Work” in most chapters. Each of these focuses on a practicing anthropologist and her or his work, or else suggests a way students might apply an undergraduate education in anthropology toward a specific career path.
- ♦ *“Ask Yourself” boxes.* We believe a good textbook

should provide intellectual challenge, actively encouraging its readers to think for themselves. To promote independent thinking, we have placed inserts, entitled "Ask Yourself," throughout each chapter. These boxes ask readers to formulate their own personal answers to questions—many of them of an ethical nature—related to the text. We hope they will also stimulate discussion in class.

Student Accessibility

Unfamiliar material, especially when combined with technical jargon, can intimidate newcomers to anthropology. We have taken pains to ensure that our special features and style of writing will make this book accessible to undergraduate students.

- ♦ *Chapter-opening vignettes.* Each chapter of *Cultural Anthropology* opens with a brief vignette, selected from Western culture, calculated to evoke immediate interest and recognition in student readers. Many of these vignettes are drawn from the popular press. The chapter on marriage, for instance, begins with a backpage news story about a brother-sister marriage in Massachusetts, and discusses this episode in the context of familiar Western marriage customs before going on to consider the different forms of marriage encountered cross-culturally.
- ♦ *Student-oriented writing.* We have taken to heart our students' preferences for brevity, informality, and even humor. Each chapter is short enough to be read comfortably at a single sitting; our writing style is nonpedantic; and here and there, we hope, the material will bring a smile to our readers' faces.
- ♦ *Personality profiles.* We have also learned that students relate much more directly and meaningfully to the experiences of individuals (particularly other young adults) than to analytical abstractions. Accordingly, our focus is consistently on people, their behavior, their ideas, and their feelings. To underscore this focus, we include fictionalized profiles of three contemporary, non-Western people, each of whom reflects a particular culture, socioeconomic setting, and world view.

Cultural Anthropology is the result of our combined teaching experience of over forty years. Our hope is that students who read it will become considerably better informed about the contemporary world and the place of a wide range of cultures, theirs and others, within "the world system."

ACCOMPANYING SUPPLEMENTS

We have written our own *Instructor's Manual and Test Bank* to aid instructors in the classroom use of *Cultural Anthropology*. Each chapter of this manual includes suggested additional lecture topics with substantial discussion; a suggested class activity; recommended reference materials; full citations for related audiovisual materials, including source information; essay-type exam questions; and a test bank of multiple-choice questions.

To assist students in their review and comprehension of the text material, a *Student Study Guide* has also been developed by Peter Aschoff at the University of Mississippi. Each chapter of the study guide contains a chapter outline, chapter learning objectives, key points for review, identification exercises, a practice test of multiple-choice questions (including an answer key), and three practice essay questions which require the student to synthesize the chapter material.

A NOTE TO SPECIALISTS

Cultural anthropology poses special challenges to scholars seeking to synthesize its theories, hypotheses, and philosophical approaches. On the one hand, we see our discipline as holistic. On the other, we acknowledge that its elements may not only be disparate but controversial or even contradictory as well.

One problem is definitions. Anthropologists are notorious for disagreeing, and nowhere is this more obvious than in their attempts to define terms such as "marriage" or "religion." The more general a definition, the more specific instances it can accommodate; the more precise the definition, the fewer. Broad or narrow: which to choose?

Another problem is empirical generalizations. Anthropologists have been conditioned by experience to avoid these, yet in interpreting features of social life we find it impractical to do so. Topical and geographic specializations are essential, but paradoxically they must be transcended if our discipline is to progress, for without cross-cultural generalization cultural anthropology would have no academic justification. So we generalize, but our generalizations almost invariably result in some distortion.

We ask colleagues who may be concerned—and rightly so—about the distortions that our particular definitions or generalizations may have introduced into *Cul-*

tural Anthropology to help us find our way through the semantic or conceptual minefields we have no doubt wandered into by interpreting our material for their students in their own way.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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David Hicks

Margaret A. Gwynne

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CHAPTER I

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Natural or Social Science?

The Branches of Anthropology

Pioneers

The First Anthropologists

Frank Hamilton Cushing (1857–1900)

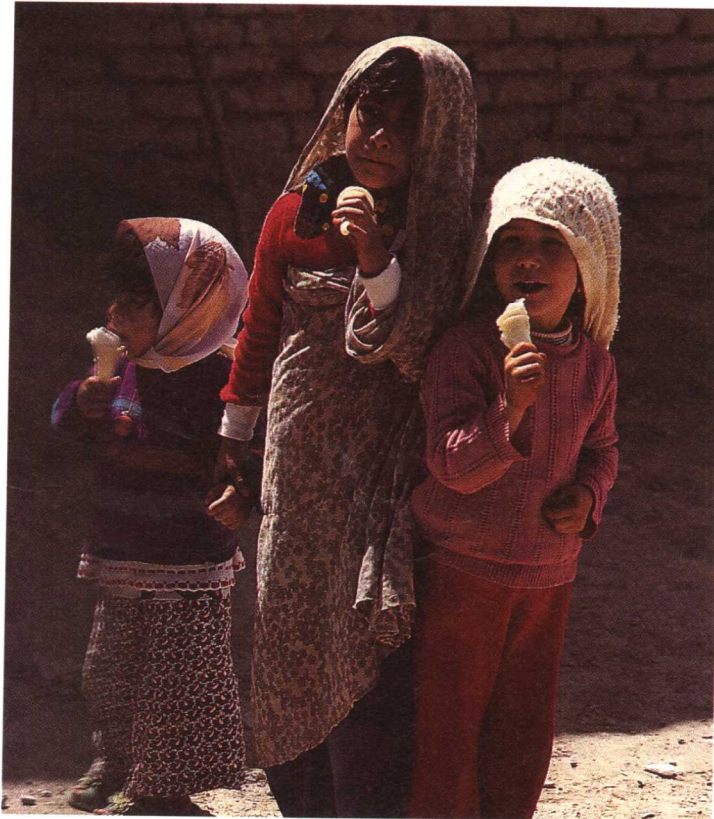
Franz Boas (1858–1941)

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ANTHROPOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS



Anthropology is the study of people and all the things they do, think, say, and make. The behavior, ideas, language, and appearance of these little girls, enjoying ice cream in a village in central Iran, would all be of interest to an anthropologist.

INTRODUCTION

College student, standing in doorway of anthropology professor's office: "I found this really weird-looking rock on the beach, and I was wondering if you could identify it for me."

Medical technician, making small talk while taking patient's pulse: "I see on your personal history form that you're an anthropologist. Doesn't that have something to do with old bones?"

Small nephew, climbing into aunt's lap: "Mom told me you're an anth-ro-pol-o-gist, so I wanna show you my model dinosaurs."

Irate father to college student daughter: "Your mother and I spend all this money on your education, and now you want to major in *anthropology*? Why don't you study something that will help you find a job!"

As the old saying goes, if we had a nickel for every time we heard a comment reflecting some misconception about anthropology, we'd be rich. The confusion stems from the fact that there are several different kinds of anthropologists, and they study many different things. Some are interested in rocks and bones (if not dinosaurs), but only insofar as these can reveal something about people. The word *people* is the key to understanding what *anthropology* is about: it is the study of people, from the time of their emergence on this earth up to the present day, and of anything and everything that sheds light on their existence and behavior.

Almost every anthropologist is a specialist in some particular aspect of the study of people. On a given day, one anthropologist may be asking a resident of the Amazon jungle how she and her neighbors determine the boundaries of their banana gardens, another anthropologist may be sitting in a university laboratory peering through a microscope at a sample of human blood, and a third may be interviewing the patrons of a run-down urban bar. Yet another may be admiring an ancient stone arrowhead just dug out of the ground, and still another may be sitting cross-legged in a tent, entering into a portable computer the different terms by which the inhabitants of a Pacific island refer to their cousins. A sixth may be delivering a lecture to college students on the evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin, and a seventh, binoculars and notebook in hand, may be stalking a group of wild chimpanzees through the forests of Zaire.

Different jobs, but all anthropologists. What do they have in common? *Each of them—in his or her own way—is engaged, directly or indirectly, in the study of people.*



While all anthropologists study people, each anthropologist has his or her own specific interests. In Brazil, an Apinayé woman demonstrates a traditional knitting technique, unique to the New World, to anthropologist Dolores Newton.

Theories and Hypotheses

The accumulated knowledge of a science is contained in its body of **theories** and **hypotheses**. The scientific meaning of the term *theory* is rather different from its meaning in common usage. If you're halfway through a murder mystery and you remark, "I have a theory that the butler did it," you're using the word to mean an educated guess, or what we might call a "hunch." In science, however, a theory is a statement about some phenomenon (such as an event or thing or the relationship between two or more events or things) that has been examined repeatedly and is widely accepted as true. Einstein's theory of relativity is a classic example.

A *hypothesis* comes much closer to a hunch. It's a reasonable statement about a phenomenon or the relationship between phenomena that is based on, and does not contradict, already-established theory. Scientists formulate hypotheses and then test them to determine whether or not they hold true. If the validity of a hypothesis is proven, the predictive value of the theory from which the hypothesis was drawn is increased, and our confidence in the theory similarly increases. If testing shows that a hypothesis doesn't hold water, either the theory requires rethinking or the testing was carried out improperly.

THE DISCIPLINE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Natural or Social Science?

Science may be broadly defined as the attempt to discover the laws of nature by formulating and testing ideas called hypotheses, systematically collecting and analyzing data, and attempting to establish theories. Or science may be much more narrowly defined in terms of its specific objects of inquiry, such as the stars and planets, the chemical elements of which matter is composed, bacteria and viruses—or people. By either definition, anthropology can be considered a science.

Another way to define science is in terms of the procedures used to pursue scientific knowledge. In every scientific endeavor, information is collected, examined, analyzed, and classified in a systematic and—as far as possible—objective manner. Most anthropologists view their work in these terms. However, they distinguish between two different kinds of science: **social science** and **physical (natural) science**.

One distinction between the two lies in the relationship of the scientist to the subject under study. In physics, chemistry, or other natural sciences, the subjects of study are things or events, and the researcher and the phenomena under observation are clearly separated (Holy 1984:14). In psychology, sociology, or other social sciences, the subjects of study are human beings,

and often no such separation exists or it is blurred. Either way, the social scientist may affect the object of research and may in turn be affected by it. The greater subjectivity of social science is what most sharply divides it from physical science.

Another distinction between the social and physical sciences is that theories in the former are often less rigorous than in the latter. Some social scientific theories are more like viewpoints needed for interpreting data (see Chapter 2).

Anthropology is at once a physical and a social science, depending on the specific focus of study. When

theory a statement about some observable, testable phenomenon that has been examined repeatedly and is widely accepted as true

hypothesis a reasonable statement about some phenomenon or the relationship among phenomena that is based on, and does not contradict, theory

science the attempt to discover the laws of nature

social science the more subjective kind of science in which the researcher and the phenomena being observed may not be distinctly separated

physical (natural) science the more objective kind of science in which the researcher and the phenomena being observed are more clearly separated than is usual in the social sciences