

# INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Garrick Bailey

James Peoples







# *Introduction to* **Cultural Anthropology**

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## Preface

Cultural anthropology attempts to explain or interpret the rich cultural diversity of the world's peoples. As authors of a leading comprehensive text, *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, now in its fourth edition, we have been extremely gratified that so many instructors have chosen to adopt our text for their beginning cultural anthropology course.

Over the years, however, we have heard from numerous colleagues as well as instructors unknown to us that they wanted a shorter and less expensive textbook for their students. This brief text ideally would cover the basic theories, methods, concepts, terms, and dimensions of cultural diversity which would serve as the core for their course. Such a book facilitates the assignment of multiple additional ethnographies and other readings to supplement the main text. They want to be able to bring into the classroom anthropological films and to make use of the exciting new tools for the electronic classroom, such as multimedia and the Internet. It is for these instructors that we have written *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*.

The writing of this short text has been challenging. As long-time instructors of beginning cultural anthropology courses, we had to ask ourselves what constitutes the essential core materials—concepts, ideas, factual material, and the like—of cultural

anthropology. In our discussions, and sometimes debates, about what should be included and what should be better left out, we were forced to reconsider the topics. As a result, we believe *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* is a conceptually rich, yet accessible text.



### An Overview of Contents

Chapter 1 (“The Study of Humanity”) begins by providing an overview of anthropology as a whole, concentrating on the very broad scope of the discipline and briefly describing the five subfields. It then discusses cultural anthropology, focusing on its differences and similarities with other social sciences, its perspectives on studying diverse cultures, and the contributions anthropologists have made to the understanding of humanity.

Chapter 2 (“Culture”) is a more detailed discussion of culture than is found in most introductory texts. We emphasize the distinction between knowledge and behavior, then provide a definition that we think is both simple and useful for understanding cultural diversity. The chapter describes some of the underappreciated components of cultural knowledge and their importance in shaping the behavior of individuals and groups. We close by discussing how humanity's



biological heritage requires us to learn a culture in order to adapt to nature, live in groups, and interpret reality.

Chapter 3 ("Language") first introduces five distinctive elements of language and then provides minimal technical coverage of descriptive linguistics, focusing on phonology and morphology. This information provides the background needed to understand the relationship between the culture of a people and the language they speak. We focus on the relationship between language and three specific aspects of culture: cognitive classifications, world view, and how language use and speaking style reflects social relationships.

Topics that some call "theories and methods" are combined into a single chapter 4 ("Studying Culture"). Most of the chapter describes the history of anthropological thought about cultural diversity and how it can best be explained or understood. We briefly cover orientations such as evolutionism, historicism, and functionalism, in order to show how modern anthropological approaches and methods have developed. The contemporary theoretical division between materialist and idealist approaches is covered in some depth, to aid student appreciation of the great diversity of modern scholarship. Ethnographic fieldwork methods, problems, and ethical issues conclude the chapter.

Chapter 5 ("Adaptation") begins our specific discussion of the various ways cultures differ. Hunting/gathering, horticulture, intensive agriculture, and pastoralism are described, using many cultural examples to illustrate general points. For each adaptation, we interweave coverage of the adaptation itself with the broad impacts it has on the cultural systems of peoples who live by it. By the end of the chapter, we hope students will see that adaptation is an important force that makes cultures differ in dimensions such as settlement size and sedentism, property rights, inequality, and scale of the organized political unit.

Chapter 6 ("Exchange") covers the standard reciprocity-redistribution-market triad. We emphasize the kinds of societies in which each exchange mode is dominant, reinforcing in students'

minds the idea that impersonal buying and selling of products is not characteristic of all economies. We show that even the "market" exchange form sometimes takes on a different character when it is embedded in a peasant community.

In Chapter 7 ("Domestic Life"), we discuss diversity in marriage, residence, and family forms. Throughout this chapter (and hopefully in others as well), we emphasize that beliefs and practices that many students brought up in the Western cultural tradition find strange or even abhorrent do in fact make sense once they understand the life conditions (context) that often give rise to them.

Chapter 8 ("Kinship") begins with a discussion of the nature and importance of kinship, especially in the social organization of preindustrial peoples. We then note the various ways in which cultures trace descent and how descent is used to establish differing types of social groups. Finally, we discuss the five main types of kinship terminologies and the social significance of kinship terms.

Chapter 9 ("Gender") focuses on three major issues. First, we discuss the difference between sex (biologically determined) and gender (a cultural construct). Second, we address the sexual division of labor, noting cross-cultural differences and similarities, as well as explanations for why such differences exist. Finally, we discuss the status of women in different societies and those factors that influence it.

In Chapter 10 ("Politics and Social Inequality") we cover three interrelated topics. The varying types of social inequalities and stratification found in societies is discussed first. This is followed by a discussion on the diverse forms of political organizations found among the world's peoples. Finally we examine the nature of social control, with an emphasis on the law and legal system.

Chapter 11 ("Religion") first discusses the nature of religion and then presents major explanations as to why religion is found among all peoples. This is followed by a discussion of the different types of religions found in the preindustrial world. We end with a discussion of sorcery and witchcraft and why such beliefs are so widespread.



In Chapter 12 (“Personality Formation and the Life Cycle”) we discuss the relationship between personality and culture, with particular attention to child-rearing practices and the formation of personality. This is followed by a discussion of life-cycle stages, noting the major age categories and the varying attention different societies devote to these categories. Special attention is given to rites of passage, particularly puberty rites.

Chapter 13 (“Applied Anthropology and the Modern World”) addresses two issues. First, from an anthropological perspective we examine three of the major issues confronting the world’s peoples: the global economy, demographic shifts, and ethnic conflicts. Secondly, using the approach of applied anthropology, we show how many of these problems are interrelated and the importance of anthropology in attempting to resolve them.

In the final chapter (“Indigenous Peoples”) we discuss the indigenous peoples of the world today and how global forces threaten their physical and cultural survival. We argue that the rights of indigenous peoples should be protected, not just for moral reasons, but for the cultural knowledge transmitted through their traditions that is, or may be, of value to all peoples of the world.

Instructors may find it useful to have the main thrust of each chapter summarized in as few words as possible. The following list can be useful the first day of class, or in preparing a course syllabus. Briefly, each chapter covers:

*Chapter 1* anthropology as a field of study; ethnology’s approaches and contributions

*Chapter 2* the nature of culture and its importance to understanding humankind

*Chapter 3* understanding language itself and how it relates to culture

*Chapter 4* the development of anthropological thought and methodology

*Chapter 5* types of adaptation and their main impacts on cultures

*Chapter 6* exchanges of products and their causes and consequences

*Chapter 7* making sense of variations in marriage, residence, and family structure

*Chapter 8* kinship forms and terminologies and how to understand their diversity

*Chapter 9* understanding diversity in constructions and practices related to gender

*Chapter 10* the organization of power, control, and wealth in human societies

*Chapter 11* the variability in human religions and how anthropologists interpret them

*Chapter 12* how individuals are shaped and move through the course of their life

*Chapter 13* anthropological insights on the modern world and global problems

*Chapter 14* the survival of indigenous cultures



## Pedagogical Features

As befitting a brief introduction to the discipline, we have tried to keep the text’s pedagogical features to a minimum. Each chapter has the following features:

- ▲ A chapter-opening preview
- ▲ Key Terms, which are boldfaced at their first mention and initial definition and listed in order of mention at the end of each chapter
- ▲ Point-by-point summaries for each chapter
- ▲ Suggested Readings at the end of the chapter
- ▲ A glossary that defines each of the Key Terms in alphabetical order

We have tried to minimize the use of anthropological jargon, while providing students with the definitions of Key Terms that most instructors of the course are likely to use themselves. Again, finding the appropriate balance between breadth and depth of coverage was not easy.

In addition to the above, most (but not all) chapters contain one or more **Concept Reviews**, which



focus the readers' attention on the key terms and/or concepts presented in the chapter or that portion of the chapter. As in *Humanity's* four editions, we chose to improve the readability and flow of the text by collecting and briefly annotating references at the end of the book, organized by chapter. Finally, we have provided an appendix, **The Internet and Anthropology**, that introduces the Internet and provides an annotated list of selected web sites that are useful in the field of anthropology. For those of you who have not yet made use of the Internet, we think that you will find a wealth of materials which can be used for a variety of course projects.



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## *Chapter 1*

# **The Study of Humanity**

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Anthropological Linguistics

Applied Anthropology

#### **Cultural Anthropology Yesterday and Today**

#### **Anthropological Perspectives**

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#### **The Contributions of Anthropology**

Anthropologists investigate the biological, linguistic, and cultural diversity of humanity.



A couple of million years ago, on the plains of southern Africa, there lived a species that was a lot like us, although its brain was only about half as large. Members of this species walked on two legs, ate both animals and plants, lived in mobile social groups, made crude tools out of stone, and probably fought over mates and resources.

Twenty thousand years ago, on the continent known today as Europe, lived a people virtually indistinguishable from twentieth-century people biologically. They got most of their food from hunting large mammals, were highly skilled at fashioning knives and spearpoints out of stone, kept themselves warm with animal skins and fire, painted images of animals on the walls of caves, and occasionally fought among themselves.

Five thousand years ago, in the place that would later become part of the nation of Iraq, there existed a civilization. Its citizens got almost all of their food from growing and processing grains and eating the products of livestock, lived in walled cities that numbered in the thousands, smelted metals, manufactured pottery, kept records by making marks on tablets of wet clay, and fought among themselves and with other people quite a lot.

Right now, in the city of Los Angeles, people of many different nationalities live. Few of them know how to hunt or grow their own food, make tools or pottery or their own writing utensils, or build houses. Instead of doing these things, many of them get up at five so they can make it to work by eight, earn \$50,000 per year so they can afford their \$1,500 monthly mortgage payments, run themselves ragged getting their kids to soccer games, and wonder whether Social Security will be there for them. Few of them actually fight, but they do worry a lot about getting ripped off.

Anthropology is the field that studies all these people. Anthropologists are interested in almost everything about humans: our genetic make up, our biological evolution, our languages, our emotions, our technologies, our art styles, our families, and our behavior. Within colleges and universities, anthropology is usually classified as a social science, along with disciplines such as psychol-

ogy, sociology, economics, geography, and political science. But as we shall see, anthropology has much in common with the natural sciences (such as biology and geology) and the humanities (such as religion and art), as well.

Obviously, anthropology is a diverse field. In fact, perhaps the main way anthropology differs from other social sciences is its broad scope. Anthropology is broad in two senses. First, anthropologists are interested in all human beings: we study people wherever they are found today and whenever they lived in the past. Second, anthropologists are interested in many different aspects of humans: we investigate skin colors, kinship systems, religions, technologies, cuisines, and practically every other dimension of human life.



## Subfields of Anthropology

Clearly, no individual can become familiar with the enormous range of subjects studied by the whole discipline of anthropology. As a practical matter, almost all modern anthropologists specialize in one of five the main subfields: physical anthropology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, anthropological linguistics, and applied anthropology. In turn, each subfield has its own divisions and subspecializations (summarized in the Concept Review).

Although cultural anthropology is the main subject of this book, a brief discussion of the other four subfields will help to understand the whole discipline.

### Physical Anthropology

**Physical anthropology** investigates the biological evolution of the human species, the behavior and anatomy of monkeys and apes, and the biological variations among human groups. Physical anthropology (also sometimes called **biological anthropology**) is closely related to the natural sciences in both its goals and its methods.



One goal of physical anthropology is to understand how and why humans evolved from pre-human, ape-like ancestors. The investigation of human biological evolution is known as **paleoanthropology**. Through many decades of searching for and analyzing fossil remains, paleoanthropologists are learning how humans evolved biologically. There remains much disagreement over details, but the outlines of human evolution are becoming clear. Most specialists now agree that the evolutionary line leading to modern humans split from the line leading to modern African apes (chimpanzees and gorillas) at least five million years ago. It also appears that fully modern human beings, *Homo sapiens*, came into existence surprisingly recently, probably less than 100,000 years ago. Recent evidence strongly supports the idea that "Neanderthal Man" (as this species was called when first discovered in the nineteenth century) is not a direct ancestor of humankind, but a sister species.

Another specialization within physical anthropology is **primatology**. Primatologists specialize in the evolution, anatomy, adaptation, and social behavior of primates, the taxonomic order to

which humans belong. By conducting field studies of how living primates forage, mate, move around in their environment, and interact socially, primatologists hope to shed light on the forces that affected early human populations. Primatological research on the behavior of group-living monkeys and apes has added significantly to the scientific understanding of many aspects of human behavior, including



One specialization within physical anthropology is primatology. Here Sarah Blaffer Hrdy observes Hanuman langurs, a monkey of India.

## Concept Review Primary Interests of the Five Subfields of Anthropology

ANTHROPOLOGY				
Physical/Biological	Archaeology	Cultural	Anthropological Linguistics	Applied
biological evolution of <b>Homo sapiens</b> ; physical variation among human populations; comparisons of human anatomy and behavior with other primate species	changes in human cultures over very long time spans by excavating sites, to reconstruct human prehistory and supplement written historical documents	differences and similarities in contemporary and historically recent cultures, investigated through intensive fieldwork and careful comparisons	general relation between language and culture; role of language and speaking in cultural and social life of specific peoples; how language shapes cognition and thought	applications of anthropological skills, knowledge, and methods to the solution of real-world problems



sexuality, parenting, cooperation, tool use, and intergroup conflict and aggression.

Yet another type of biological anthropologist is interested in how and why human populations vary physically. All humans are members of a single species, and one of the basic tenets of anthropology is that the physical similarities among the world's peoples far outweigh the differences. Nonetheless, the residents of different continents were once more isolated from one another than they are today. During this separation they evolved differences in overall body and facial form, height, skin color, blood chemistry, and other genetically determined features. Anthropologists who study **human variation** seek to measure and explain the differences and similarities among the world's peoples in these and other physical characteristics.

Most physical anthropologists work in universities or museums, as teachers, researchers, writers, and curators. But many also work in "practical" jobs, applying their knowledge of human anatomy to find answers to problems. For instance, **forensic anthropologists** work for or consult with law enforcement agencies, where they analyze and help identify human skeletal remains. Among their contributions are determining the age, sex, height, and other physical characteristics of crime or accident victims. Forensic anthropologists know how to gather evidence from bones about old injuries or diseases, which are compared with medical histories to identify victims. For example, forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow has worked with governments and human rights investigators to identify victims of atrocities in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In the 1990s, teams of forensic anthropologists exhumed remains from graves in Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Haiti to identify victims of political assassinations and determine the exact causes of their tragic deaths.

## Archaeology

**Archaeology** is the investigation of the human past by excavating and analyzing material remains. Because it studies the ways in which human life has changed over the centuries, archaeology has

much in common with history. It differs, however, in its methods and, to some extent, its goals. Modern archaeology usually is divided into two major kinds of studies: prehistoric and historic.

**Prehistoric archaeology** investigates cultures that never kept written records of their activities, customs, and beliefs. Although prehistoric peoples lacked writing, evidence of their way of life exists in the tools, pottery, ornaments, bones, plant pollen, charcoal, and other materials they left behind, in or on the ground. Through excavation and laboratory analysis of these material remains, prehistoric archaeologists reconstruct the way people lived in ancient times and trace how human cultures have changed over the centuries. In fact, research conducted by prehistoric archaeologists provides our main source of information about how people lived before the development of writing.

To learn about the more recent past, historians use written materials such as diaries, letters, newspapers, and tax collection documents. Written records provide useful data, but they typically are fragmentary and provide information only on specific subjects and subgroups within a society. The growing field of **historic archaeology** supplements written materials by excavations of houses, stores, plantations, factories, and other historic structures. Historic archaeologists often uncover hard data on living conditions and other topics lacking in written accounts.

Many archaeologists are employed not in universities, but in museums, public agencies, and for-profit corporations. Museums offer jobs as curators of artifacts and as researchers. State highway departments employ archaeologists to conduct surveys of proposed new routes in order to locate and excavate archaeological sites that will be destroyed. The U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service hire archaeologists to find sites on public lands so that decisions about the preservation of cultural materials can be made. Those who work in the growing field of cultural resource management locate sites of prehistoric and historic significance, evaluate their importance, and make recommendations about total or partial preservation. Since the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, private