

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Second Edition

Marvin Harris



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CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Second Edition



HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS, New York
Cambridge, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington,
London, Mexico City, São Paulo, Singapore, Sydney

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Sponsoring Editor: Alan McClare
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Cover Photo: Morocco; Klaus D. Franke, Peter Arnold, Inc.
Text Art: Vantage Art, Inc.
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Production Assistant: Paula Roppolo
Compositor: Progressive Typographers
Printer and Binder: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company

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brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For
information address Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 10 East
53d Street, New York, NY 10022.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Harris, Marvin, 1927–
Cultural anthropology.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Ethnology. I. Title.

GN316.H36 1987

306

86-18461

ISBN 0-06-042669-1

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

This second edition of *Cultural Anthropology* is a thoroughly revised book. I have tried to make it the most up-to-date, coherent, and readable volume of its kind. To improve continuity and organization, I have added two new chapters, Production (Chapter 4) and Reproduction (Chapter 5). The topics covered move explicitly and logically from the biological and evolutionary foundations of culture to infrastructural, structural, and superstructural aspects of sociocultural systems. The student is given a reason for this order of presentation and is shown how the topics treated early in the book relate to those treated later on.

To accommodate requests by reviewers, I have also added a chapter on anthropological linguistics (Chapter 3). Although some instructors may not have time to use this chapter in its entirety, the materials are available so that choices can be made.

In addition to the new chapters, this edition offers a number of subjects that are entirely new or substantially updated and improved. These new or revised subjects are:

Chimpanzees teaching chimpanzees to sign: revised section.

Scientific creationism: new section.

Optimal foraging theory: new section based on latest studies.

Empirical tests of Leslie White's "law" of evolution: new section.

Kula revisited: revised section based on latest restudies.

Division of labor: new section.

Patterns of work: new section based on latest time allocation studies.

Rossel Island money: revised section based on latest studies.

Why war?: new section.

The origins of states: new section based on latest studies.

Aztec cannibalism: revised section based on latest studies.

Homosexuality: revised section incorporating latest data from New Guinea.

Haitian agroforestry project: a new section on an applied success story.

Mexico's second green revolution: a new section on an applied problem.

Concentration of wealth: revised section based on latest studies.

Hyperindustrial family and sex roles: new section incorporating latest data on marriage, fertility, divorce, family structure, and sexuality in the United States.

A theory of culture change in the United States: new section with revised version of the relationship between the feminization of the work force and the rise of the service and information economy.

Another important change is the use of boxes to break up long sections, provide definitions, give optional readings, or highlight important quotations. The new boxes include:

- “An Anthropological Scorecard” (anthropological fields and specialties)
- “The Paluxy River Footprints” (excerpt from the American Anthropological Association pamphlet)
- “An Intuitive Explanation of Optimal Foraging Theory”
- “Energy Input In Packaging and Processing Industrial Foods”
- “Aggression and War” (quotation from Brian Ferguson)
- “Two Kinds of Feedback” (positive and negative)
- “Three Souls of the Jivaro” (adapted from Michael Harner)
- “How Icanancowi Became a Shaman” (quotation from Charles Wagley)
- “Cure By Vomit” (quotation from Charles Wagley)
- “The Witchety Grub Intichiuma” (classic Arunta ceremony)
- “Ndembu Circumcision” (adapted from Victor Turner)
- “The Aztec Calendar”
- “Sexual Symbolism In Bangladesh” (adapted from Shirley Lindenbaum)

“Without Holism: An Andian Fiasco” (applied case)

“Co-opting the Demon Behind Deforestation” (quotation from Gerald Murray)

“Dietary Affluence For Some, Scarcity for the Masses” (quotation from Billie DeWalt)

“Gross Domestic Product, USA”

“Women on Womanhood, USA” (New York Times survey)

I hope that this edition goes further than the previous one towards eliminating vestiges of male theoretical bias in the presentation of ethnographic facts and anthropological theory. It is intended to be more sensitive to the need for gender-specific, as well as class- and caste-specific, viewpoints than any other introductory textbook. Further, no other introductory textbook devotes as much attention to problems of hierarchy and stratification, the understanding of which is a central goal of anthropological research. Because of the increasingly sharp separation of social strata and the mounting indifference to the plight of the less fortunate members of our endangered species, introductory textbooks more than ever have a special obligation to “tell it as it is.”

Finally, I should like to take this opportunity to thank Alan McClare and Joan Gregory of Harper & Row, and Susan Joseph for their extra effort in behalf of making this edition one that both author and publisher are proud to offer. I should also like to thank David Price for his assistance in updating the bibliographical materials, Phyllis Durell for typescripts, and Madeline Harris for doing all the chores no one else would do.

Marvin Harris

TO THE STUDENT

Cultural Anthropology provides you, the student, with a global and comparative perspective for understanding the origin and prospects of the modern world. In the pages which follow you will learn mostly about the customs and beliefs of people who are alive today or who lived in the recent past—people who inhabit great cities and are citizens of superpowers, as well as people who live in tiny desert bands and remote jungle villages.

You are about to encounter an amazing variety of customs and beliefs. Some you may find amusing; others may shock you. But I have not written this book to compete with Ripley's *Believe-It-Or-Not*. We have a more serious task before us. My aim is to explain—to the limits of currently known facts and the latest scientific theories—why customs and beliefs differ from one society to another, and why, despite such differences, remarkable similarities exist in the way human beings live in even the most distant parts of the globe.

I have done everything I could think of to make this book as easy to read as possi-

ble. Yet the subject matter of cultural anthropology is vast and complex. If we are to have serious explanations of scholarly merit, mental concentration cannot be eliminated. I won't apologize. I think you will get a lot out of reading this book. It will tell you not only what cultural anthropology is all about, but something more important. It will tell you about your own customs and beliefs—how they originated, why they are maintained, and why they are changing. In other words, it will tell you a good deal about who you are and why you and your relatives, friends, and fellow citizens think and act in certain ways and not in others.

Although I have worked hard to make this edition both readable and informative, room for improvement undoubtedly exists. If you have any suggestions as to how further improvements can be made, please send them to me care of Harper & Row and I will try to incorporate them in future editions.

Marvin Harris

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ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF CULTURE

This chapter tells what anthropology is about, how anthropologists make a living, and what anthropology is good for. It also provides a definition of culture and sets forth certain general features of cultures that will be used throughout the rest of this book to describe and explain cultural differences and similarities.

Anthropology is the study of humankind, of ancient and modern people and their ways of living. Since this subject is large and complex, different branches of anthropology focus on different aspects or dimensions of the human experience. Some anthropologists study how our species, known scientifically as *Homo sapiens*, evolved from earlier species. Other anthropologists study how *Homo sapiens* came to possess the uniquely human facility for language, how languages evolved and diversified, and how modern languages serve the needs of human communication. Still others concentrate on the learned traditions of human thought and behavior known as *cultures*. They study how ancient cultures evolved and diversified and how and why modern cultures change or stay the same.

Within departments of anthropology at major universities in the United States, the different perspectives of anthropology are usually represented by four fields of study (Fig. 1.1): cultural anthropology (sometimes called social anthropology), archaeology, anthropological linguistics, and physical anthropology (Fried 1972; Goldschmidt 1979).^{*} The various branches of the major areas are described in Box 1.1.

Cultural anthropology deals with the description and analysis of the cultures—the socially learned traditions—of past and present ages. It has a subdiscipline, *ethnography*, that systematically describes contemporary cultures. Comparison of cultures provides the basis for hypotheses and theories about the causes of human life-

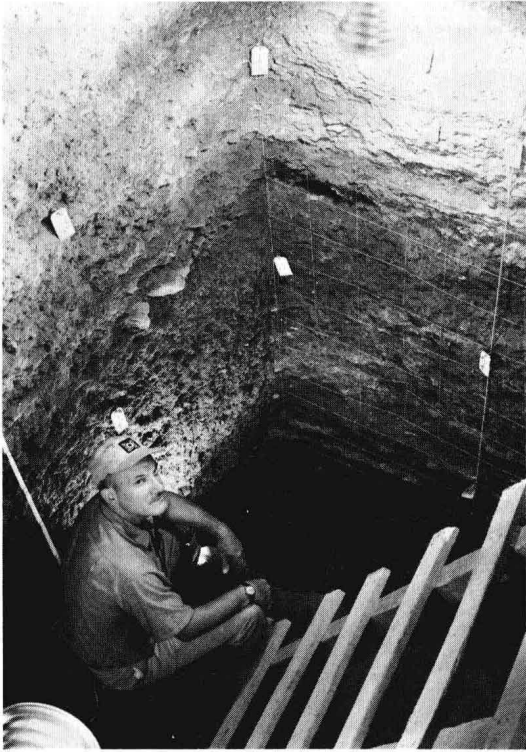
styles. Although this book is primarily concerned with the work of cultural anthropologists, the findings of the other kinds of anthropologists are essential for many of the topics to be discussed.

Archaeology adds a crucial dimension to the work of cultural anthropologists. By digging up the remains of cultures of past ages, archaeologists are able to study long sequences of social and cultural evolution under diverse natural and cultural conditions. The contribution of archaeologists to the understanding of the present-day characteristics of human existence, and to the testing of theories of historical causation, is indispensable.

Anthropological linguistics provides another crucial perspective: the study of the great variety of languages spoken by human beings. Anthropological linguists attempt to trace the history of these languages and of whole families of languages. They are concerned with the way language influences and is influenced by other aspects of human life and with the relationship between the evolution of language and the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, as well as with the relationship between the evolution of languages and the evolution of different cultures.

Physical anthropology grounds the other anthropological fields in our animal origins and our biologically determined nature. Physical anthropologists seek to reconstruct the course of human evolution by studying the fossil record. Physical anthropologists also seek to describe the distribution of hereditary variations among contemporary populations and to sort out and measure the relative contributions to

^{*} See page 427 for an explanation of the system of citations used in this book.

*a**b***Figure 1.1 ANTHROPOLOGISTS AT WORK**

(a) Archaeologist Ralph Solecki at Nahr Ibrahim, Lebanon, where excavations have reached Middle Paleolithic cultural levels over 50 thousand years old. (b) Linguist Francesca Merlin with the speakers of a previously unknown language near Mt. Hagen, New Guinea. (c) Physical anthropologist Richard Leakey inspecting newly discovered fossil at Koobi Ford, Kenya. (d) Ethnographer Margaret Mead among the Manus Islanders.

*c**d*

Box 1.1 AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCORECARD

Anthropologists frequently identify themselves with one or more specialized branches of the four major fields. The following is only a partial listing.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Applied Anthropology Study and make proposals to solve practical problems and evaluate results.

Medical Anthropology Study biological and cultural factors in health and disease and the treatment of the sick.

Urban Anthropology Study city life.

Development Anthropology Study the causes of underdevelopment and development among the less developed nations.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Historic Archaeology Study cultures of the recent past by means of a combination of written records and archaeological excavations.

Industrial Archaeology Use techniques of historic archaeology to focus on industrial factories and facilities.

Contract Archaeology Conduct archaeological surveys for environmental impact statements and protection of historic sites.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS

Historical Linguistics Reconstruct the origins of specific languages and of families of languages.

Descriptive Linguistics Study the grammar and syntax of languages.

Sociolinguistics Study the actual use of language in the communication behavior of daily life.

PHYSICAL (BIOLOGICAL) ANTHROPOLOGY

Primatology Study social life and biology of monkeys, great apes, and other primates.

Human Paleontology Search for and study fossil remains of early human species.

Forensic Anthropology Identify victims of murders and accidents.

Population Genetics Study hereditary differences in human populations.

human life made by heredity, environment, and culture.

WHY ANTHROPOLOGY?

Many disciplines other than anthropology are concerned with the study of human beings. Our animal nature is the subject of intense research by biologists, geneticists, and physiologists. In medicine alone,

hundreds of additional specialists investigate the human body; psychiatrists and psychologists, rank upon rank, seek the essence of the human mind and soul. Many other disciplines examine our cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic behavior. These disciplines include sociology, human geography, social psychology, history, political science, economics, linguistics, theology, philosophy, musicology, art, literature,