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NEW GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

[Editor's note: The following article is based on Carol C. Mukhopadhyay and Patricia J. Higgins, "Anthropological Studies of Women's Status Revisited: 1977-87," Annual Review of Anthropology 17 (1988):461-95. The authors would be happy to provide reprints of the full review. Write to: Dr. Mukhopadhyay, Department of Anthropology, California State University, Chico, CA 95929.]

Is male dominance universal? Are there any societies in which women are the rulers? The warriors? The major economic powers? When and how did male dominance arise? These are some of the questions feminists of the late 1960s asked of anthropologists and anthropological data. Twenty years later, there is still no definitive answer to most of these questions, but recent anthropological studies of women have had a profound effect on our present understanding of human society and culture.

In the 1960s, the answers to these questions were sought first through a re-examination of the corpus of anthropological data and theory. It became quickly apparent that there was relatively little information about the female of the species, and that the existing information was permeated by androcentric bias. Female lives were seen through the male eyes of native informants, anthropologists, or both. Anthropological theory presumed that political and ritual leadership were male domains, that men exchanged women in marriage, and that cultural evolution was powered by technological advances in male activities. At a minimum, feminists argued, we must

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learn to recognize and to question such assumptions.

New Evolutionary Theories

Stimulated by currents of change in their own society, feminist anthropologists more recently set about the task of formulating more comprehensive theories of gender asymmetry and of collecting new data that could help illuminate female lives, to provide a more gender balanced view of humanity. Through this effort they have contributed to a renewed awareness of how difficult it is even for anthropologists--professionally dedicated to "objectively" understanding other cultures from the "inside"--to avoid contaminating their data and theories with subtle assumptions about their own culture.

One of the first areas in which feminist anthropologists cited deficiencies in theory and data was human evolution, with all its implications about "natural" human behavior. "Man the Hunter" theories had down-played female contributions to human evolution. Such theories tended to portray proto-human society as based on male dominance, female dependency, and monogamous or polygynous mating arrangements. Feminist reaction was to formulate alternative theories that would explain the extant data at least as well, while postulating an early human society that was egalitarian, if not in some ways female centered. Isn't it more plausible, for example, to expect that the first food exchange would be from mother to off-spring rather than from adult male to dependent female mate? And that among the first tools would be a baby carrier?

Studies of contemporary non-human primates, which constitute one important source of data for constructing theories of human evolution, seemed particularly susceptible to biased interpretation. Couldn't leadership in a baboon troop be coming from the core of females just as easily as from the "point men"? Couldn't their polygynous mating arrangements be as easily seen as a way for females to rid the group of excess males as it is a way for males to accumulate and control females? And wouldn't the chimpanzee, with its flexible, gregarious, egalitarian social relations and its genetic similarity to humans, make a better model for early human society than baboons in any case? Such alternate theories have become more sophisticated and scientifically grounded, and new studies of non-human primates, contemporary hunting-gathering societies, and the physical traces of early humans have provided much supportive data. Many features of these alternative theories have been incorporated into the standard accounts of human evolution, although androcentric interpretations and assumptions also persist.

"Culture" vs "Nature," Public vs Domestic Hypotheses

In cultural anthropology the initial efforts of feminists were directed toward explaining male dominance in human societies. As in other branches of feminist scholarship, overtly biologically based explanations largely were rejected out of hand. Data were gathered to argue that male size, strength, and hormone balance were insufficient to explain male predominance in hunting, warfare, physical aggression, and male control of political and ideological spheres. The alternative explanations proposed differed most significantly according to whether it was universal male dominance that was to be explained or the particular (pre)historic conditions under which male dominance arose.

Those who thought male dominance was universal sought some other cultural universal by which it could be explained. An early and influential hypothesis was that the universal division of society into public and domestic spheres, and the association of men with the former and women with the latter, underlies women's secondary status. A related argument asserted that all peoples distinguish culture from nature, define culture as superior to nature, and associate males more closely with the former and females more closely with the latter.

These two early explanations generated much debate and discussion, stimulating new data collection and re-analysis of old data. Ethnographers cited examples of

cultures that did not distinguish between culture and nature, or define culture and nature differently than we do: they identified males rather than females with nature, or equated not the female-male contrast with nature-culture, but a gender inclusive contrast such as married-unmarried or child-adult. While the Hagen of New Guinea, for example, make a conceptual distinction between "wild" and "domestic," which embodies some of what Americans mean when they contrast nature and culture, it does not include the notion that the domestic is superior to and can control or tame the wild. The Hagen have no concept of "nature" and "culture" analogous to the Euro-American one. The Laymi Indians of Bolivia also make a distinction between the wild and the cultivated or social, which includes some but not all of the meanings of the English terms "nature," and "culture." In this case, however, when these terms are applied to humans it is the unmarried rather than women who are seen to be more "wild" and less social and the married (men and women) who are the embodiment of the social. Among the Sherbro of Sierra Leone, it is children who are seen as wild and natural and who are made cultural by their parents and by initiation ceremonies. In our own culture men are not always more closely associated with culture; in fact, women are frequently associated with civility and refinement, as contrasted with the "natural" barbarity and roughness of men. Similarly, ethnographers questioned whether a valid distinction really exists between the domestic and public spheres in foraging and other non-state societies, whether females are always associated with one and males with the other, and whether the domestic is always subordinate and devalued relative to the public sphere. Among the Sherbro, for example, men and women are both actively involved in and associated with both the domestic and the public spheres.

Most of those who did not believe male dominance was universal sought to explain its rise in terms of economics and in connection with the origin of hierarchical societies and the state. Women in non-class, communal societies, best represented today by such hunting-gathering societies as the Bushmen, Australian aborigines, and the Pygmies, were understood to enjoy a status equal to that of men based on individual autonomy within the context of total group interdependence. Even in those "kin corporate societies" with ranked patrilineages, such as the Nuer, Lovedu, Sherbro, and many other African societies, women as sisters and co-owners of property could be equal to men. It is only with the establishment of class society and state institutions that dependency and subordination become the dominant attributes of womanhood.

While such formulations have become more complex and sophisticated, the ethnohistoric and comparative studies they have stimulated have not always produced results which fit neatly into this new theoretical mold. In many state societies, for example, women of the elite continue to enjoy considerable autonomy, power, and prestige, and some states base their ideologies and political institutions on concepts of sexual dualism or gender parallelism. Among the Dahomy of West Africa, for example, every office was held jointly by two people--a man and a woman--and the queen mother held a position complementary to that of her son, the king; a similar pattern of male and female sharing of positions of highest authority was found in other African societies, such as the Swazi and the Ashanti. Among the Incas, women also held high political positions, but they attained these either through individual achievement or succession in the female line, rather than through their kinship relationship to males. In addition, continuing reports of male dominance in even the most communal, foraging societies can only be reconciled with these theories by arguing that the reports are biased or inaccurate or that the behavior patterns reported are the result of contact with male dominant, state societies.

Sexual Division of Labor

While theorists on both sides of the universality issue sought to distance themselves from biological explanations, all accepted as universal not only the existence of a sexual division of labor, but one with near universal parameters set by reproduc-

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HIGH INFANT MORTALITY AMONG THE URBAN POOR

[Editor's Note: Over 10,000 Black American infants die before their first birthdays. The cultural, social, and health factors that contribute to this record high rate of American infant mortality are explored by cultural anthropologist Margaret S. Boone in a new book *Capital Crime: Black Infant Mortality in America* (Frontiers of Anthropology, vol. 4. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA, 1989). Dr. Boone is affiliated with the Department of Pathology at George Washington University's School of Medicine and Health Sciences and is presently coordinating a one-year follow-up of 600-800 men and women who have received drug treatment. Dr. Boone recently spoke with Ann Kaupp about her research on infant mortality among poor inner city women in the nation's capital.]

What led you to conduct research on infant mortality?

In the 1970's, I read a newspaper article about the District of Columbia's high mortality rate. Then I learned of a National Science Foundation program that funded scientific research projects in publicly-oriented organizations. I received funding as an anthropologist to work in an inner-city hospital to investigate infant mortality among the urban poor. I was in residence there for one year (1979-80) but was actually there for about five years, since I became a member of their Internal Review Board as a community representative.

The pregnant women you interviewed suffered from poverty, poor nutrition, and some form of substance abuse. What kind of future did they envision for themselves and for their children?

One of the real striking things about these inner city women is the fact that they don't look into the future very much. These women don't seem to plan. They feel: "What will happen will happen." Certain elements of Oscar Lewis's culture of poverty concept have received a lot of bad press, but he was right on target when it comes to a present-time orientation. For example, many poor people are strongly fatalistic. Because there are not a lot of options laid out by society for these women, they don't define a lot of options for themselves. How can they plan? It doesn't make any sense to them.

Did any of the women try to stop using drugs while pregnant?

The notion that substance abuse can be overcome with just pure will is malarkey. Crack is very addictive and nicotine is almost as addictive. It is unrealistic to think that because a woman is pregnant she'll give

up nicotine, though a lot of them do. Pregnancy was a time when the fewest of them smoke and drink. The heroine addict I spoke with tried to quit, but she wasn't successful for long. A number of the boarders [babies living in hospitals] suffer from AIDS and cocaine addition. It appears that crack has a strong affect on motivation of poor women, and the craving for it seems to top all other cravings. In studies of mice, the mice kept on taking crack until they died; they didn't care about food. A baby is way down on the list when you talk about a substance that is addictive. You don't even think about taking care of yourself.

How did the women view their pregnancies?

I kept hearing about the importance of being pregnant in and of itself. That pregnancy was highly prized and valued and great disappointment resulted when a child was lost. But none of that seemed very much related to an envisioned household or an envisioned relationship with a man. In other words, it seemed that pregnancy and gestation were separate from childbirth: it was good to be pregnant and to have a child, but it was also good to be pregnant to prove oneself fertile. Men also liked to know they had fathered children. I think this whole notion of reproduction is very important for men and women.

Why is the Black infant mortality rate so high, particularly in Washington, DC?

Blacks have the highest infant mortality rate in the U.S. In Washington, D.C., the rate is about twice what it is for Whites, among whom infant mortality is not good either. Why it's so high is a complicated explanation that involves looking at several demographic factors--fertility, mortality, and migration. Blacks have a higher mortality rate in general. Among poor women, the reproductive cycle seems to be shortened because of ineffective contraception, and the inter-pregnancy intervals are very short. My research pointed out that the women who tend to have the unsuccessful pregnancies--the very low birth-weight infants and stillbirths--are those with short pregnancy intervals, often less than a year.

Can you explain what significance migration has played?

I think that one of the things we all forget is the dramatic change in rural-urban residence for American Blacks this century. Anthropologists who work in the developing world and see that magnitude of rural to urban change are far more impressed. In one generation, American Blacks have changed from three quarters rural to three quarters urban. I don't think we recognize how much of a cultural strain it has been. Washington, D.C. is the first migratory stop northward and more than 50% Black. Most of the Blacks in D.C. are from South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, so they just moved north. Blacks in Texas moved to Chicago. [For this reason], I think in the District of Columbia a lot of cultural patterns were exaggerated, including demographic and health patterns. Theoretical works [describe] how minority groups that have become very large create a situation where an individual can be born, live, and die within their community without much interaction with the larger society. When migration declined, there was less renewal of family values from migrants to northern cities, and the upperly mobile moved to the suburbs. I think that is what has happened in Washington, D.C. What you've got left is a group of very disadvantaged people in the inner-city.

Do you think these women are getting adequate information about birth control in their communities?

The women I talked with knew about birth control, about all kinds of [contraceptives] and how they worked, but they just didn't use them. They couldn't explain why. When I asked about contraception used between pregnancies, they told me about the different kinds they tried but said none of them worked. If they know about all these methods then why don't they work? Again, I think it's because children are so valued. What these women value is what their community values. People in their environment are having a lot of children and they're put under a lot of pressure to do what their peers are doing. Traditionally, the childbearing pattern has begun early; the average age of the first pregnancy of

the group that I studied was 18 years old. But childbearing stops earlier than among Whites.

Is prenatal care easily available for these women?

We assume something is easily available if we can drive there, if it has certain hours such as 9-5, and if it's considered a good and necessary thing by our peers. But all those things don't match. In other words, they can't get there in cars, they can't get there during open hours, and their peers are not pushing them to do it. If you define availability that way, it's not available. It's not a high priority, especially with all the road blocks.

What role does education play?

In my study, the women who had low birth-weight infants and those who had normal weight infants didn't differ in the number of years of education. I was wondering why in the world this was, and that was one of the advantages of the more sophisticated statistical methods such as cluster analysis. Cluster analysis, a technique that tends to group your cases, or factor analysis which reduces your variables to something more basic, revealed something very interesting with respect to education and social class. It helped me develop a hypothesis about why education doesn't work. A small group at one side of the cluster diagram, which I named "Brenda's Group," showed larger and healthier babies, and the only thing that distinguished them was years of education of the woman and of the woman's partner, the father of her infant. So what I came up with was a model that said basically that the reason education doesn't work in the inner city, in a statistical way, to distinguish women with normal and very low birth-weight deliveries is because everything else is "swamping it." In other words, with quickly paced pregnancies, drugs, smoking, poor nutrition, and environmental factors such as pollution, education doesn't mean as much as it should. It doesn't even have a chance to have an effect.

If you want to talk about policy implications, what that basically says is that you can throw all the education at the inner city you want, but if you don't get rid of crack, heroine, smoking, and don't teach women to use contraception better so they can space their pregnancies, education is not going to do any good at all.

From my research, I came up with a model using a regression technique for a woman who is best off. The woman who is so-called "best off" has had prenatal care for the pregnancy in question, has no history of hypertension, engaged in no form of substance abuse, street drugs, alcohol, or nicotine, and was within the 20-24 year age range (that's where the distribution shows the best pregnancy outcomes). I looked at this small group and another very interesting factor came out--the education of the man, which was important for these women. I found that fascinating. This leads to all kinds of hypotheses about men having a very strong effect on this process. We think of men and infant mortality as completely separate, but it's not true. You ask yourself, does the man encourage his partner to get prenatal care because it's his child who's at stake? Or is it that the better educated man picks the better educated partner?

What is the role of men?

From very good to very bad. I think we tend to forget about men in this whole process. Inner city women have obviously developed a very adaptive structure through the female network, that Carol Stack described in *All Our Kin.* This network pools resources and refrains from reliance on men, because men drain resources, and gives women a way to rear children without consistent support from men. But I think you need to bring men back into the process, to get teenage fathers interested in it. The more interested a man is in his child, the more he will provide financial support when he can, and also emotional support to the woman. I think you need to bring men back into the whole process of keeping women and children healthy. In other words, don't go with the female network just because it's been a marvelous adaptation. Let's work with it, but let us not exclude men in the process.

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TEACHER'S CORNER: THE LAND AND PEOPLES OF ALASKA AND SIBERIA

The tragic oil spill in Prince William Sound earlier this year made the nation keenly aware that people's livelihoods and animals' lives depend upon a clean Pacific ocean. Yet the people, cultures, and ecological zones from 48 degrees north to the Arctic Ocean remain a mystery for many. All too often students think that only Eskimos live in what must be solely a frozen wilderness and that they are Indians living in igloos. A new teaching guide corrects such misconceptions and ignorance. History, geography, science, and anthropology teachers in grades 7 through 10 will value and enjoy Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska.

This instructional guide, produced by Carolyn Sadler and Laura Greenberg from the Office of Education, National Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, grew out of the recent exhibition "Crossroads of Continents," but only the last of the seven activities requires a visit to the exhibition. (The exhibition will be at the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, November 26-March 25, 1990; Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum, Los Angeles, October 21-February 24, 1991; Anchorage Museum of History and Art in Anchorage, April 7-August 11, 1991; and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa, September 22-January 26, 1992. From there it will make several stops in the Soviet Union.)

This curriculum packet is the first complete educational package focusing on the cultures of the North Pacific Rim and provides the only up-to-date information about this region easily accessible in English. The guide comes with a clearly written booklet; a poster map on the traditional dress and housing of the region's people; a 32-minute video on the history and anthropological research of the area and the peoples in the 20th century; a pronunciation guide for names such as Inuit, Chilkat, and atlatl; an excellent set of 57 photographs; a glossary; a filmography; a bibliography; and answers to study questions. Students read three valuable primary sources: the journal of an 18th century explorer naturalist, a contemporary high school student's account of an archaeological excavation, and the archeological director's description of the dig. (The last two were published in the winter 1988 issue of *Anthro.Notes.*)

Through a set of carefully coordinated and sequential exercises, students can see for themselves the connections between environment and culture. A biogeographical approach emphasizes the geographical distribution of living things. In the first unit, "Geography of the North Pacific Rim," students locate and label on a map the significant places in the far northern rim of the Pacific Ocean such as the Bering Strait, The Aleutians, The Chukchi Sea, The Amur, and Cook Inlet. In the next unit, "Environments of the North Pacific Rim," students first map the location, the climate, and the vegetation of their home area, and

then learn about the four major land environments in the Crossroads area: the tundra, the taiga or boreal forest, the mixed forest, and the temperate rain forest. Using photographs and characteristics of the four environments, students decide which environment is represented in each photograph. Then, with the first map, the poster map, and *Goode's Atlas*, they draw in the different environmental zones using a color code.

In the third unit, "Cultures of the North Pacific Rim," the students map the North Pacific Rim cultures after reading about culture and adaptation. Using a separate color for each group, the students identify each group on the map--The Eskimo cultures (The Siberian Yupik, the Bering Sea Yupik, the Inupiat, and the Pacific Eskimos); the Chukchi and Koryak of Siberia; the Athapaskans and the Even; the Northwest Coast Cultures; and the Amur Cultures. Next, students draw in and label the traditional or subsistence economies on the map.

Finally, the interconnections begin, and biogeography is in action. Looking at their maps, students answer a set of problems in order to see why some cultures have adapted the way they have, why some areas are able to have varied economies, and why housing and dress are made the way they are. Most of the time there is a close link between culture and environment and between culture and subsistence, and with these maps students can intelligently understand why.

The last three units are: "Traveling with Vitus Bering," with a focus on interpreting history; "Unearthing the Past," the Ungaluyat project, emphasizing excavating history; and "Joining the Jesup Expedition," focusing on doing fieldwork, studying a single society (ethnography), and studying a topic cross-culturally (ethnology).
Many of the activities cannot be reproduced easily for *Anthro.Notes* because they involve a video, photographs, or a poster map, but two activities are reproduced below for your use in the classroom. For information on borrowing, free, the entire Crossroads educational package write to: Carolyn Sadler, Office of Education, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560.

1. NATURAL HISTORY FIELDWORK IN YOUR AREA

(This activity, "Environments of the North Pacific Rim," gives students practice observing and documenting.)

Visit a natural area, a natural park, or a section of undeveloped land. Take notes on what you see and make a map. Describe the landscape, vegetation, animals (including insects and other invertebrates), and evidence of humans. Make a collection of leaves and flowers (beware of poison ivy, oak, and sumac). Put each plant sample into an envelope, and on the outside write your name, the date, the location, and the type of habitat (such as broadleaf forest, high plains, marsh, field). This is your "documentation." Also make drawings or take photographs of the area. (Sketches are fine--these do not have to be art works.)

When you get home or to school, use a plant identification book to find out the common and scientific names and other information about the plants such as their geographical distribution. Then find out from this book or ask your teacher about how to "press" your plants to preserve them.

Finally, using a looseleaf notebook, write a report about your field trip. Include your general observations, a map, and drawings. Have a separate page for each dried leaf or flower with a description of it that includes your field notes and the plant's regional and/or world distribution.

2. TRAVELING WITH VITUS BERING

(This exercise gives students an historical perspective and practice in interpreting historical information.)

In July 1741, the Russian expedition led by Vitus Bering made landfall for the first time on the American continent. They had embarked from a port on the Kamchatka peninsula. Among the first to go ashore was Georg Steller, a German naturalist, who had accompanied the expedition. In the following diary entry (translated from the original German), Steller describes his first few hours on land. He encounters no people, but he gets his first impressions of

them nonetheless. The date is July 20, 1741. The place is probably Kayak Island [in the Gulf of Alaska near Prince William Sound], and the people may have been Tlingit Indians. Steller's diary was first published in 1793. The following excerpt is from vol. II of *Bering's Voyages: An Account of the Efforts of the Russians to Determine the Relation of Asia and America* by F.A. Golder, published by the American Geographical Society in 1925. In 1917 Golder discovered Steller's original manuscript in Leningrad (then Petrograd). The writing and language may seem unusual, but students should remember this is a message from another time, another culture, and another place.

[Excerpt Begins]

As soon as I, with only the protection and assistance of my own cossack, had landed on the island and realized how scant and precious was the time at my disposal, I seized every opportunity to accomplish as much as possible with the greatest possible dispatch. I struck out in the direction of the mainland in hopes of finding human beings and habitations. I had not gone more than a verst [about two-thirds of a mile] along the beach before I ran across signs of people and their doings.

Under a tree I found an old piece of log hollowed out in the shape of a trough, in which, a couple of hours before, the savages, for lack of pots and vessels, had cooked their meat by means of red-hot stones, just as the Kamchadals did formerly. The bones, some of them with bits of meat and showing signs of having been roasted at the fire, were scattered about where the eaters had been sitting. I could see plainly that these bones belonged to no sea animal, but to a land animal. . . . There were also strewn about the remains of yukola, or pieces of dried fish, which, as in Kamchatka has to serve the purpose of bread at all meals. There were also great numbers of very large scallops over eight inches across, also blue mussels similar to those found in Kamchatka and, no doubt, eaten raw as the custom there. In various shells, as on dishes, I found sweet grass completely prepared in Kamchadal fashion, on which water seemed to have been poured in order to extract the sweetness. I discovered further (not far from the fireplace) beside the tree, on which there still were the live coals, a wooden apparatus for making fire, of the same nature as those used in Kamchatka....

After having made a brief investigation of all this, I pushed on farther for about three versts [about 2 miles], where I found a path leading into the very thick and dark forest which skirted the shore....I held a brief consultation with my cossack, who had a loaded gun, besides a knife and commanded him to do nothing what- soever without my orders....After half an hour we came to a spot covered with cut grass. I pushed the grass aside at once, and found underneath a cover consisting of rocks; and when this was also removed we came to some tree bark....All this covered a cellar two fathoms deep in which were the following objects: 1) lukoshkas, or utensils made of bark...filled with smoked fish of a species of Kamchtkan salmon...2) a quantity of sladkayatrava (or sweet grass), from which liquor is distilled; 3) different kinds of plants, whose outer skin had been removed like hemp...and perhaps are used, as in Kamchatka, for making fish nets..."

[Pause In Excerpt]

Here we briefly interrupt Steller's account in the interests of time. After exploring the cellar further and discovering a few arrows, Steller takes some fish and other goods as proof of what he found--and reluctantly, after being summoned by Bering, returns to the ship. In return, following Steller's suggestion, some goods were sent to the cellar. These were described as follows:

[Excerpt Begins Again]

...an iron kettle, a pound of tobacco, a Chinese pipe, and a piece of Chinese silk were sent to the cellar, but in return the latter was plundered to such an extent [by Steller's shipmates] that, if we should come again to these part, the natives would certainly run away even faster or they would show themselves as hostile as they themselves had been treated, especially if it should occur to them to eat or drink the tobacco, the correct use of which probably could be as little known to them as the pipe itself....[it was suggested to leave a] couple

of knives or hatchets, the use of which was quite obvious [and] would have aroused... interest....But to this it was objected that such presents might be regarded as a sign of hostility, as if the intention were to declare war. How much more likely was it, particularly if they attempted to use the tobacco in the wrong way, for them to conclude that we had intended to poison them..."

Interpreting History (group discussion)

1. How did Steller refer to the natives?
2. How did he know what the foods and implements were?
3. Do you think any of the peoples on shore witnessed Steller's activities? How would we know if they had?
4. Let's assume that some Tlingit people watched every move Steller and the Cossack made. If they had no system of writing, how might it have entered their history? How would their history be different than written histories? What kind of information might be accurate and inaccurate in oral history and in written history?

The Other Side of the Story (individual or team writing exercise)

Write about the Steller episode from the Tlingit point of view. Imagine it is 1741, and you observe Steller and the others come ashore. How would you describe the episode to a close friend, also Tlingit, who was not there? What did Steller and his cossack look life? What did you think they were doing? What were your feelings as you watched?

Extra Project--Putting Steller in Chronological Context

The State of the World in 1741. You are an 18th century scholar who is preparing a world almanac for 1741. What are the major countries, who is in power? What are the current events? The latest discoveries and technologies, the major intellectual and artistic figures? Write a 2-5 page report. You can use *The Timetables of History* for the year and its events, and history books for an overall perspective of the times.

JoAnne Lanouette

("Infant Mortality" continued from p.6)

How would you describe the household makeup these women belong to?

There are more women raising children in a matrifocal household than in a household with a conjugal pair, I mean any kind of conjugal pair. There were not more than three households out of the 210 I looked at, where women were married and living with their partner and raising their child. Everyone else was divorced, separated, or sometimes living with mother and father, mother and boyfriend, grandmother and grandfather. Of the conjugal pairs, almost none were the woman and her partner, but rather an aunt and an uncle or somebody else, usually of an ascending generation.

Do you have much hope for the future of these women and future generations?

The problem of maternal and infant health care is always going to be present. What gets attention and money are waves of lifestyle epidemics, first heroin, then crack. It seems like every cataclysm in lifestyle that the United States goes through eventually hits the inner city Black community the hardest. That's where the money goes, but underlying this is a constant need for prenatal care and its availability. Cocaine babies actually have a reduction of brain cells at birth. This drug causes permanent organic damage, and it's not going to go away. The damage it causes will show up in kindergarten, in grade school, in later divorce rates. We need to understand that culture, or ethnic group, influences drug-taking. Culture tells you why you drink, or why you take crack. What I am so concerned about in terms of public relations on this issue, is that your average middle class suburbanite has no notion that he or she is the one paying for the crack babies, through taxes, through loss of productivity, through the diminishment of what I call the "public good."

THE AAA TASK FORCE ON TEACHING ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology has long lagged behind the other social sciences in the level of professional attention and support its national organization provides to precollege education. Partly in recognition of this past history, the American Anthropological Association's new Programs Department helped form an official AAA Task Force on the Teaching of Anthropology in the Schools that will exist for four years: November 1988 to November 1992. The co-chairs of the task force are Jane White (Education Dept., Univ. of Maryland, Catonsville, MD 21228; 301/455-2378) and Patricia J. Higgins (Dept of Anthropology, SUNY-Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh, NY 12901; 518/564-4003).

This task force culminates several years of collaborative effort by anthropologists in the United States and Canada who organized symposia and workshops, obtained grants for developing curriculum materials and teacher training programs, worked with other organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies, and helped stimulate interest in and legitimacy for precollege anthropology within the discipline. Since 1979 Anthro.Notes has been in the forefront of this effort. (Anyone seeking a review of this work should consult Practicing Anthropology 8:3-4, a special issue devoted to precollege education, available free-of-charge from Ruth O. Selig, SI-120, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560.)

The overall mission and mandate of the official AAA task force is to encourage the effective teaching of anthropology in North American schools--at various grade levels and through a diversity of specific subjects. Three major task force goals have been outlined:

1. To explore the conditions that contribute to or impede the teaching of anthropology in North American schools.

2. To make recommendations on the curricular role of anthropology and how all those concerned--teachers, students, parents, school administrators, teacher educators, college and university professors, publishers, community educators and boards of education--might strengthen teaching and learning through the use of the anthropological perspective.

3. To help the staff of the American Anthropological Association, specifically the Director of Programs, promote the teaching of anthropology in schools.

The task force is divided into four working committees, each with a focused set of objectives. These committees and their chairs are:

Committee One: Research on Anthropology in Schools (Paul Erickson)

Committee Two: Development of Guidelines for the Teaching of Anthropology (Jane J. White and Charles Ellenbaum)

Committee Three: Review and Development of Curriculum Materials (Ruth Selig and Ann Kaupp)

Committee Four: Outreach (Patricia Higgins)

Some of the specific projects the task force hopes to complete through its committees are:

-- surveying requirements for teacher certification to teach anthropology and/or social studies in precollege classrooms and proposing ways to increase anthropology's participation in this process;

-- evaluating materials currently available for teaching anthropology as well as encouraging the development of new materials;

-- developing and distributing resource lists, curriculum guidelines, bibliographies, and packets of materials useful for teachers;

-- facilitating the publication of booklets and bulletins helpful to those teaching anthropology;

-- developing and maintaining a mailing list of teachers interested in integrating anthropology into their curricula;

-- organizing workshops, as well as in-service and pre-service anthropology courses for teachers;

-- working with social science and science organizations and with teacher organizations.

Anyone interested in joining one of the committees of the Task Force on the Teaching of Anthropology in Schools should write or call one of the Task Force Co-chairs, or contact the editors of AnthroNotes. The task force needs help from both teachers and anthropologists, and anyone with interest, ideas, and energy is encouraged to join.

Ruth O. Selig, Co-Chair
Task Force Committee 3

DO YOU KNOW?

● that a new series titled "Indians of North America," Frank Porter III, General Editor, appropriate for junior and senior high school students is now available. Some of the books published thus far cover the Cherokee, Seminole, Crow, and Cheyenne. Write: Chelsea House Publishers, Dept. WP3, P.O. Box 914, 1974 Sproul Rd., Suite 400, Broomall, PA 19008-0914.

● that a new series--"Raintree American Indian Stories" and "Raintree Hispanic Stories"--for upper elementary students is also available. Write: Raintree Publishers, 310 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53203.

● that the Harris Educational Loan Center, Field Museum of Natural History, lends free natural history materials in the form of small exhibit cases, experience boxes, and audiovisual and printed materials to educational organizations. For example, social studies experience boxes cover such topics as American Indian Games, Eskimo Spiritual World, Ancient Egypt: Planning for the Afterlife, African Musical Instruments. For more information, write: Field Museum of Natural History, Harris Educational Loan Center, Department of Education, Roosevelt Rd. at Lake Shore Dr., Chicago, IL 60605-2497.

● that you can obtain an educational resource publication on "The Native Peoples of the Northeast Woodlands" free from the Education Office, Museum of the American Indian, Broadway at 155th St., New York, NY 10032.

● that a new video, first of a series, "The Navajo: Legend of the Glittering World," is available for $29.95 from The American Indian Cultural Foundation, P.O. Box 3776, Page, AZ 86040.

("Gender" continued from p.3)

tive roles. It is women's reproductive roles that lead them to be more closely associated with the domestic sphere or to be seen as closer to nature than are men. It is again their reproductive roles that cause women to be less involved in trade or in other economic activities with variable outcomes and, therefore, less able to mobilize the labor of others. At the same time they are more subject to double exploitation as producers and reproducers when hierarchical societies arise.

Newer studies of fertility, pregnancy, nursing patterns and child-rearing have shown us, however, how flexible reproductive roles actually are and the extent to which societies, families, and individual women make choices concerning both reproductive and productive activities. Women around the world control their reproductive lives by a variety of techniques ranging from abstinence to infanticide. In many societies toddlers are cared for by older children, freeing mothers for more "productive" work; among the Nandi of Kenya child nurses do more child care work than do mothers. Even infancy can be handled in many different ways. Among the Bushmen, infants are in physical contact with the mother 70-80% of the time for their first year; among the Pygmies, infants are cared for and nursed by a number of different people. Furthermore, the tendency for feminist theories to see women's reproductive roles as limiting and debilitating rather than empowering, and the associated absence in feminist anthropology of serious development of matriarchal theories, should alert us to another area in which the assumptions of our own male dominant culture may be restricting the development of anthropology.

Women in Economics and Politics

Early efforts to provide a theoretical explanation of male dominance (universal or not) as well as to document the extent of its existence, were clearly limited by the quality of the data available on women's lives and gender relations. A major effect of feminist questions, therefore, has been the publication of much new ethnographic data on women--some of it culled from old field notes, most of it newly collected. These new data look at many aspects of women's lives, including their economic, political, ritual, and expressive activities as well as their reproductive, family, and "domestic" roles. These data derive from many culture areas and represents a variety of theoretical perspectives. Such ethnographic data can and should be infused into all anthropological teaching, and several recent reviews and guides to the literature facilitate this process. Here I can only give a few examples of the diversity of the literature and the impact it is having on our understanding of culture, and of anthropology.

Much of the new data looks at women's economic roles. Women have always worked, they have always made an economic contribution, and they have never been mere dependents. Early research showed that in contemporary hunting-gathering and horticultural societies women often contribute more than men do to the basic subsistence of the group. More recently a few cases have been documented in which women even hunt, an activity long thought to be an exclusively male preserve. Among the Tiwi of Northern Australia, for example, women hunt small animals using dogs and digging sticks, and among the Agta of the Philippines most women in nearly every age group hunt regularly using the same tools and techniques men use. While the existence of women hunters has challenged previous ideas about the limitations placed on women by size, strength, and reproductive roles, more careful attention to women's work has also challenged the way we define work. It has made us more aware that our definition of processing activities as domestic, and domestic activities as less important, has made us discount much of women's work in non-industrial societies, just as counting only wage labor as work has led economists, sociologists, and historians to ignore women's economic contributions to industrial society.

At the same time, studies of women's economic activities has also shown that making a large contribution, even through basic subsistence activities, does not

necessarily entail economic power or social prestige (although control over the early stages in a production/distribution process may help to establish control over the entire process). Among New Guinea horticulturalists, such as the Hagen, women commonly do the bulk of the crop cultivation and also the raising of pigs, yet most ethnographers have seen these as highly male dominant societies. Feminist anthropologists turned their attention, therefore, to distribution and its control, to women's activities in exchange systems, and to more direct studies of decision-making, leadership, and politics. While a matriarchal society, in which women dominate men and regularly hold top positions of power and authority is yet to be documented, anthropologists are noting a larger number of societies in which women, individually or collectively, do hold leadership positions of considerable power. A classic example is the Iroquois, where women selected and could depose the chief, although that position was always held by a male. Other examples include the Inca and African societies cited above. Closer study has also shown the many ways in which women are involved in and influence decision-making, even in what appear to be the most male dominant societies. Considerable evidence now exists, for example, that New Guinea women, far from being powerless, make key political decisions in allotting pigs and shaping the exchange relationships of the men.

As in the realm of economics, the study of women in politics has had as much of an impact on the way we look at politics as it has on the way we look at women. Informal decision-making, for example, can be as important as the formal variety, whether it is women, men, or both who are involved, and decisions affecting society as a whole can be made from within the domestic sphere. The study of women in politics has also made us aware of our androcentric biases, as we see how often ethnographers treat women's talk as gossip (but men's as information exchange and networking) and women's organizations as recreational or even frivolous rather than bases for political power.

Biases in Interpretation

Investigations of family roles, the one area in which women were likely to be found in the older ethnographies, have also taken new directions in response to feminist interests. Recent studies look beyond woman as wife and as mother of young children, to woman as sister, aunt, co-wife, mother of adult children, or active agent in extended kinship networks. The arrangement of marriages in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other Middle Eastern societies, for example, is largely handled by older women (who, after all, are the only members of the groom's family able to meet and observe prospective brides in sex-segregated societies), although decisions may be announced by males. Our culture's definition of the family as a nuclear, child rearing unit and our idealization of young adulthood, especially for women, has imposed narrow blinders on our view of women in other cultures. As we increasingly note the power and prestige that older women have in many societies--societies as varied as the Iroquois, the Yanomamo, the Chinese, and the Indian--we see how deviant, in cross-cultural terms, our own society is. At the same time, the common attribution of this power and prestige of elder women to "freedom" from childbearing, rather than to the mobilization of adult offspring as a source of labor or as a core political following, serves as another illustration of subtle biases in our interpretation of other cultures.

As feminist anthropologists have become more conscious of the extent to which the assumptions of our own culture color our work as anthropologists, they have also become more involved in studies of American culture. A surprisingly large number of those anthropologists who contributed to the earliest feminist reformulations of the 1970s have, in the 1980s, turned to research in the United States, where they have been joined by other, relative newcomers to the field. As a result, we now have ethnographically based studies of American women's (paid) work and work cultures; of their family and kinship activities; of their reproductive lives and concepts of body; of the domestic division of labor and decision-making; and

of social issues of great consequence to women such as abortion rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and conservative feminism. In the study of women in the United States, as in other culture areas, attention has come to focus increasingly on the diversity of women's lives and on ideologies of gender and their impact on our actions.

Overall, the anthropological study of women has moved, in these two decades, from a search for broadly applicable explanations of male dominance to the study of inter-cultural and intracultural variability in women's lives, male-female relationships, and gender concepts. We have found that the biological differences between the sexes, whether in reproductive functions, body structure, or hormone balance, impose few absolute constraints and are themselves interpreted and given cultural meaning in a wide variety of ways. We have also found that the many roles women occupy, often simultaneously, may confer different degrees of power, authority, and prestige, and that there may be no one "status of women" in any single society, let alone cross-culturally. Our measures of women's status have been shown to be biased by the values of our culture--values that may not be shared by women of other cultures. We have been led to question not only the old androcentric paradigms, but also the new feminist alternatives as we try to free ourselves of Western cultural assumptions--such as the primacy of the individual and of material production. In the process, the focus has shifted from the study of women to the study of gender--an analytical concept comparable to kinship, economics, and politics--and a position from which the anthropological study of women should have an even stronger impact on anthropology as a whole.

Recommended reading:

Collier, J. F. and S. J. Yanagisako, eds. *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987.

MacCormack, C. P. and M. Strathern, eds. *Nature, Culture, and Gender.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Ortner, S. B. and H. Whitehead, eds. *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Rosaldo, M. Z. and L. Lamphere, eds. *Woman, Culture, and Society.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.

Sacks, Karen. *Sisters and Wives: The Past and Future of Sexual Equality.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979.

Patricia Higgins
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SI PROGRAMS ON GENDER

View "Men and Women: A History of Costume, Gender, and Power," a new exhibit at the National Museum of American History.

A symposium, "Gender Perspectives: The Impact of Women on Museums" will be held at the Smithsonian, March 8-10, 1990. For further information write or call: Artemis Zenetou, Program Coordinator, Arts & Industries Bldg., Room 2225, 900 Jefferson Drive, S.W., Washington, DC 20560; (202) 357-1331.

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