

# Anthro Notes

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## HISTORY, PROGRESS AND THE FACTS OF ANCIENT LIFE

How many of us consciously or unconsciously assume that human history is largely a tale of progress through time? Can anyone dispute that the development of modern medicine, sanitation facilities, and almost universal education have brought us today to an era of great benefits for all? If we look far back into human history, did it not all begin with the "Neolithic Revolution," the domestication of plants and animals that ushered in sedentary farming, earliest cities, trade networks, large scale governments and craft specialization. Did not these, in turn, bring humankind to a new level of well-being from which progress could continue steadily up to today?

Most of our elementary, secondary, and college texts still reflect a deep human

belief in the progress wrought by "civilized" life, by the developments growing out of ancient cities. Unfortunately, our sense of human history as steady progress in human well-being does not accord with the actual data at hand. Instead, the facts provide innumerable clues that "civilized" living has been accomplished only at considerable cost to most of the players. We need to revise our thinking, our teaching, and our textbooks to reflect this new research.

### RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST

Scientists utilize three main means of reconstructing patterns of health and nutrition in ancient societies. The first method uses small scale groups (hunter gatherers) in the modern world to offer clues about our prehistoric ancestors. The



!Kung San of the Kalahari (sometimes known as the Bushmen) come to mind most readily, but there are dozens of such groups scattered on the various continents (among whom the vaunted "affluent" San actually appear somewhat impoverished).

The second method uses what geologists call "Uniformitarian" reasoning and argues that natural processes--in this case the processes of nutrition and disease--must have operated in the past much as they do today and can therefore be reliably reconstructed. The third and most recently exploited method analyzes the skeletons of prehistoric populations to measure health and disease. Although many skeletons are now being reburied, there were once many thousands available for study. Many prehistoric communities were each represented by several hundred skeletons. There were, for example, 600 representing one Mayan town in my own small college lab--a fairly good sample from which conclusions can be drawn about health and disease in an ancient community.

None of these three methods--looking at modern hunters and gatherers, studying modern disease processes, and analyzing ancient skeletal remains--is wholly satisfactory. Contemporary hunting and gathering populations do live in the modern world, after all, so they are not exact prototypes of prehistoric groups. Disease processes involve living organisms which can evolve; thus they may not adhere as reliably as do rocks to uniformitarian principles. And prehistoric skeletons document only a limited sample of human ills. But the three methods taken together gain strength, often supporting one another in the manner of the legs of a tripod.

In any case, these three types of evidence are the only evidence we have ever had concerning prehistoric health, the only evidence available to Hobbes or Rousseau or any of the more recent philosophers, historians and educators who write the textbooks and the history books we use with our students. Taken together the three types of evidence paint a picture very

different from the one we learned as children, and it is important to correct the erroneous old images of progress still found in many of our "authoritative" texts.

### EVIDENCE ON NUTRITION

First, the evidence suggests that the quality of human nutrition, the balance of vitamins, fats, minerals and protein, has generally declined through human history except, of course, for the ruling classes. We talk of 20th century improvements in stature (getting taller) as proof of improving nutrition, yet prehistoric hunting and gathering populations were often as tall if not taller than the populations that replaced them, and the predominant trend in human stature since early prehistory has been downward. (The people of Europe of the 17th and 18th centuries to whom we usually compare ourselves with pride are, in fact, among the shortest people who ever lived.) Eclectic diets of fresh vegetable foods with some meat apparently assure hunting and gathering populations a good vitamin and mineral balance, and, in fact, such groups generally have access to relatively large amounts of meat and protein, rivaling consumption in the affluent United States and exceeding modern Third World averages by a large margin.

Modern hunter gatherers rarely display clinical manifestations of protein deficiency, anemia (iron deficiency), or deficiencies of any other vitamin or mineral even when more "sophisticated" farmers nearby are deficient. To the initial surprise of health teams, infantile and childhood malnutrition, marasmus and kwashiorkor are also quite rare among hunter gatherers. These diseases are more common among share-croppers or other modern populations forced by poverty to rely on a single food such as rice or maize. The most poorly nourished people turn out to be the poor or lower classes of historic and modern "civilized" states from which modern trade systems withhold or actively withdraw various nutrients.

The most common shortage among modern hunter gatherers is one of calories. Paradoxically to any American who has ever gone on a diet, modern hunter gatherers tend to be chronically lean while otherwise well nourished, probably as a result of exercising and eating lean animal products and high-roughage vegetable foods. They get no "free" processed calories. In addition, modern hunter gatherers are making a living in some of the poorest environments on earth, the only environments still left to them after the expansion of modern states.

The skeletons of prehistoric hunter gatherers generally confirm this sense of good nutrition. They commonly show fewer signs of porotic hyperostosis (the skeletal manifestation of anemia) than the skeletons of later populations. Rickets (bending of bones), a disease of vitamin D deficiency reflecting poor diet and/or lack of exposure to sunlight, is primarily a disease of modern cities and is extremely rare either in modern hunter gatherers or in ancient skeletons. Teeth of early archaeological populations display relatively few enamel hypoplasias, the scars of infantile illnesses which are permanently recorded in the teeth.

Whether the reliability of human food supplies has improved with time is one of the most controversial and most important issues in assessing the "march of human progress" through time. There are many anecdotes of hunger or starvation among historic and modern hunter gatherers. However, these typically occur in the arctic or in extreme deserts where more advanced civilizations do not even try to compete, or they occur in contexts where modern states restrict the movement of hunters or limit their activities. Judging by the relative efficiency with which different kinds of wild foods can be obtained, prehistoric hunter gatherers would have been particularly well off when they lived in environments of their own choosing and before large game (one of the richest food sources) was depleted, as appears to have occurred on every continent occupied by

early people. We like to think that modern transportation and storage capabilities have alleviated hunger, and they can; nevertheless, farmed fields may be inherently less stable than naturally selected wild resources. Being mobile may be safer in the face of famine than being sedentary.

Moreover, storage and transportation can fail; governments can and do refuse to help the needy; and in a world of economic specialists and private property, people may be unable to command the price of food even when food is plentiful. We have to remember that any government, the institution which can protect, is double-edged, since it is almost always in some way protecting a privileged class. Modern trade networks inevitably move food (both calories and quality nutrients) away from some populations in favor of others.

The archaeological record of skeletons reflects no steady record of improvement. In fact, if the clues in our teeth are utilized as the measure, one could argue that the frequency of stressful episodes to which the average individual has been exposed generally increases through time in most parts of the world. The historical record of famine in Europe, Russia or China over the past several centuries also suggests no improvement until perhaps the last 150 years--and, of course, people in the Third World are still not protected from starvation.

### DISEASES THROUGH TIME

In addition to the decline in the quality of human nutrition, the second point confirmed by all three types of evidence is that the variety and intensity of human infections and infectious diseases have generally increased through human history. Epidemiological theory predicts that diseases will not be transmitted as readily among small groups of people who change their base camp periodically as they are transmitted when people live in large permanent human settlements.

Diseases transmitted directly from person to person in the air or by touch like the flu are most efficient when population density is high and large crowds are gathered (one reason why schools and other similar institutions commonly help disease to spread). Diseases that spread through human feces (including hookworm as well as cholera and most other diarrhea) will obviously be most dangerous for large permanent populations where feces accumulate. Historic outbreaks of cholera in London were traced to instances in which, amid high density population, latrines were able to contaminate wells. The same is true of diseases like bubonic plague, which are carried by rats or other parasites on accumulations of human garbage. And as the experiences of American Indians after Columbus demonstrate, long distance travel and large scale trade spread diseases with devastating effect (it has been estimated that 90% of the Native population was destroyed by disease). The history of bubonic plague in France, decimating large port cities but leaving villages in the interior unharmed, is a good example of the dangers of urban living and conversely the ability of small size and isolated population patterns to provide protection against infectious diseases.

It is, in fact, a fairly commonplace observation that hunting and gathering

bands are relatively infection free and that the rates of many diseases increase when mobile hunters are settled in larger permanent camps. The skeletal record again provides confirmation. Signs of infection in the skeleton become more common as people settle in large-scale cities in essentially every region of the ancient world where the appropriate study has been done. In addition, the low incidence of anemia among ancient hunter gatherers is thought by many scholars to reflect low rates of parasitic infestation as much or more than diet. Tuberculosis, one of the diseases which specifically can be detected in skeletons, is conspicuously absent or quite scarce in the archaeological record until relatively recent times.

Moreover, many "epidemic" diseases appear to require a critical threshold of human population size (either in one place or connected by rapid transport) in order to spread. Measles, mumps, smallpox, influenza, and German measles all appear to need large and rapidly reproducing human populations to survive. The implication is that these diseases did not spread until the recent growth of cities and transportation networks. However, once many Europeans were immunized by constant childhood exposure, these diseases became major vehicles of conquest in the

(continued on p. 14)



THREE METHODS OF RECONSTRUCTING PATTERNS OF HEALTH & NUTRITION

## SUMMER FIELDWORK OPPORTUNITIES

Summer can be a time to explore new cultures, both past and present, through research expeditions and field schools. This article provides names of organizations that offer such opportunities, some geared specifically for teachers and students.

### SMITHSONIAN PROGRAMS

One opportunity to whet your appetite is Smithsonian Expedition's Crow Fair and Family Reunion at Crow Agency, Montana. Crow Fair, an annual event held in August, is a time when families and friends reunite and solidify relationships through "give-aways." Each day starts off with a parade of men, women, and children in ceremonial dress, followed by inter-tribal dancing and drumming ending late into the night. This summer will be the fourth season of collaboration between the Smithsonian and Little Big Horn College of Crow Agency, whose archives are the recipients of the extensive data collected by dedicated volunteers. The research focus this year is the role of young men in the military service, career choices for Crow youth, and the resurgence of Indian arts, crafts, and customs. Volunteers will gather information from interviews, observation, and participation in the Crow Family Reunion.

The satisfaction volunteers receive in experiencing another culture and in being part of a team can best be expressed in the following quotes:

"I feel real personal growth as a result of this experience. I believe I made a contribution to a better understanding between people of different backgrounds and cultures" (Nancy Crowell, 1990).

"For a brief time I was able to know some of the Crow people as people. This is the greatest gift of the Crow Fair. I do not want to let go of this experience; I want to build on it" (Becky Matthews, 1990).

"It's great being a part of a group of inquiring folks--learning and sharing. So our time spent is multiplied, since we can hear from others about what they have

learned while we've been off doing something else" (Carol Lowe, 1991).

In addition to the Crow Fair and Family Reunion (August 12-18), Smithsonian Research Expeditions is offering another anthropology-related summer project: PaleoIndians and Large Mammals in Saltville, Virginia, (July 12-25 or July 26-August 8, 1992). For further information, write or call Smithsonian Research Expeditions, 490 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W., Suite 4210, Washington, DC 22024; (202) 287-3210.

### Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

A National Seminar for Teachers titled "Teaching Writing Using Museum and Other Community Resources" will be offered July 7-16 by the Smithsonian Institution for elementary and secondary teachers living more than 75 miles outside Washington, D.C. Teachers may receive graduate credit from the University of Virginia. Applications must be postmarked by March 30. For more information and an application form, write: National Seminars, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Arts & Industries Bldg., Room 1163, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560; or call (202) 357-3049 or (202) 357-1696 (TDD).

OESE also offers ten week-long seminars with in-service credit for teachers, K-12, from Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia. Practical teaching ideas are given in a variety of interdisciplinary courses in the sciences, arts, and humanities. Three such courses are: Introducing Students to Chinese Art and Culture, Multicultural Education and Pre-school Children, and Psychology in the Classroom. Call Clare Cuddy at (202) 357-2404 for a registration form after May 1.

### ORGANIZATIONS TO CONTACT

You may discover within your own community fieldwork opportunities available to you. Anthropology departments at local universities and colleges, state historic preservation offices, and state archeological societies often organize local archeological excavations and frequently accept volunteers with no previous fieldwork experience. The Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) offers a listing

of state archeologists associated with the national organization as part of its yearly field school listing for the U.S. and abroad. The cost, which includes shipping and handling, is \$10.50 for members and \$12.50 for non-members. For each additional copy ordered add 50 cents for shipping. To order, write: Kendall-Hunt Publishing Co., Order Dept., 2460 Kerper Blvd., Dubuque, IA 52001; (800) 338-5578. *Archaeology* magazine, published by the AIA, features an archeology travel guide to sites open to the public in the Old World (March/April issue) and the New World (May/June issue). A field school listing is also available from the American Anthropological Association for \$5.00 for members and \$7.00 for non-members, with a self-addressed envelope with 56 cents postage. Write: AAA, 1703 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009 or call (202) 232-8800.

There are several organizations that offer volunteer public participation in worldwide research expeditions in various scientific disciplines. Many of these organizations, listed below are non-profit and participation fees may be treated as tax-deductible contributions.

University Research Expeditions Program  
University of California  
2223 Fulton, 4th Floor  
Berkeley, CA 94720  
(415) 642-6586

Earthwatch  
680 Mount Auburn St., Box 403,  
Watertown, MA 02172.  
(617) 926-8200  
(Scholarships available for teachers)

International Research Expeditions  
140 University Dr.  
Menlo Park, CA 94024  
(415) 323-4228

Foundation for Field Research  
787 South Grade Rd.  
Alpine, CA 91901  
(619) 445-9264

CEDAM International  
(CEDAM stands for Conservation,  
Education, Diving, Archeology, Museums)  
Fox Road

Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520  
(914) 271-5365

### SELECTED FIELD SCHOOLS

Study ancient and modern Mexican cultures and visit important archaeology sites with the Meso-American Field Program. Field trip (June 18-July 8) led by *AnthroNotes* illustrator Robert Humphrey and Bernard Mergan. Write Dr. Bernard Mergan, American Studies, George Washington University, P203B, Washington, DC 20052, or call (202) 994-6073.

Picuris Pueblo in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, New Mexico, is the focus of an ethnographic field school (July 26-August 16) sponsored by Middlesex County College. In addition to three weeks of instruction on the southwest cultures and in field methods, students will live with Pueblo families and participate in village life, including pottery making, adobe construction and feast day. Limited enrollment on a competitive basis. Write: Dr. Diane Z. Wilhelm, Middlesex County College, 155 Mill Road, Box 3050, Edison, NJ 08818-3050; or call (908) 548-6000 ext. 3099.

High school students and teachers are invited to excavate, for one to four weeks, a ceremonial mound at Moundville Archaeological Park, the site of a Mississippian culture (A.D. 1,000 to 1,500). Excavation will take place from June 7-13 and June 28-July 4. Write: Melissa Moon, Museum Expeditions, Alabama Museum of Natural History, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0340; or call (205) 348-2040.

Summer Field School in St. Eustatius, Dutch West Indies, is sponsored by The College of William and Mary, June 22-July 31. The main focus will be the excavation of 17th through 19th century Dutch domestic urban sites. Application deadline is April 1. Write: The Reves Center for International Studies, College of William and Mary, P.O. Box 8795, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795, or call (804) 221-3594; FAX (804) 221-3597.

Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, a non-profit institution specializing in Southwestern archeological research and education, provides programs in archeological field methods, laboratory techniques, and excavation. The Adult Research

Program: Excavation and Environmental Archaeology, consisting of week-long sessions, is conducted from the last week of May through the second week of October. The High School Field School takes place from June 28 to July 25; applications should be mailed in asap. The Teachers' Workshop is scheduled for August 1-9. Transferable academic credit is available for these programs. Archaeological and cultural programs to the Southwest and workshops led by American Indians are also available. Write or call: Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, 23390 County Road K, Cortez, CO 81321; (800) 422-8975, (303) 565-8975.

Archaeology in Israel involves three weeks of excavation at Tel Kerioth and one week of touring. Groups leave May 22 and June 20. Write or call the U.S. Group Coordinator Sheila Sigal, 14149 Garrett Ave., Apple Valley, MN 55124; (612) 432-8098.

Center for American Archeology, Kampsville Archeological Center conducts educational research programs for junior and senior high school students, college students, and the non-professional, and workshops for teachers. This season a stratified site of the Archaic Period located on a flood plain will be the focus of excavation. Scholarships are available for American Indian students. The Center is also participating in a certification program for Illinois avocational archaeologists in concert with the Lewis and Clark Community College. Write: Admissions Office, Kampsville Archeological Center, Kampsville, IL 62053, or call (618) 653-4316.

High school juniors and seniors and college students are also eligible to enroll in the Archeological Field School at Kampsville through the University of Chicago beginning June 14. Write: Dr. Jane Buikstra, Department of Anthropology, The University of Chicago, 1126 E. 59th St., Chicago, IL 60637, or call (312) 702-7150.

Drew in West Africa offers a comprehensive study of West African art and architecture. In Mali (July 4-25), students will be introduced to West African cultures through lectures and travel. In the Cote d'Ivoire (July 23-August 20), students will learn through apprenticeships about West African arts and crafts and archaeology. Write: Office of

Off-Campus Programs, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940-4036; (201) 408-3438.

The Elden Pueblo Project, administered by the Arizona Natural History Assn. in cooperation with the US Forest Service, is excavating the residential remains of the Sinagua people who occupied the area near Flagstaff, AZ 700-800 years ago. For information, write: Joelle Clark, Elden Pueblo Project, Arizona Natural History Association, P.O. Box 1633, Flagstaff, AZ 86002; or call (602) 523-9642 (messages only).

A field program in Mediterranean Archaeology on Sardinia takes place June 1-July 10. Write: Dr. Gary Webster, Sardinia Project, Penn State University-Mount Alto, Mount Alto, PA 17237; or call (717) 749-3111.

Northwestern University's Ethnographic Field School (June 22-August 15) is an opportunity to learn about the Navajo or Hispanic cultures of New Mexico and Arizona by designing independent research projects. Write or call: Professor Oswald Werner, Department of Anthropology, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208; (708) 491-5402 or (708) 328-4012, evenings.

Historical Archaeology Field School at Historic St. Mary's City, Maryland will focus this season on an unknown brick foundation that may be a 17th century Jesuit school. The ten-week intensive field school takes place from June 10 to August 16. The public is welcome to volunteer throughout the summer, including during the Tidewater Archaeology Weekend (August 1 & 2). Write: Dr. Tim Riordan, Archaeology Program, Department of Research, HSMC, P.O. Box 39, St. Mary's City, MD 20686, or call (301) 862-0974.

Archaeology in Hawaii (June 22-July 21) will focus on excavating three historic mission houses. Write: Michael W. Graves, University of Hawaii, 2424 Maile Way, Honolulu, HI 96822.

La Cienega del Pasado, a Spanish Colonial habitation site dated from ca. 1620 - 1680 and located near Santa Fe, New Mexico, is the focus of the Field School of The Colorado College (May 24-July 3). Write: Dr. Marianne L. Stoller, Chair, Department of Anthropology, The Colorado College, 14

East Cache La Poudre St., Colorado Springs, CO 80903, or call (719) 389-6362.

Quarai Pueblo, occupied from around A.D. 1300 to 1674, is part of Salinas National Monument in central New Mexico. This season (June 1-July 12) uncover information regarding the development of crafts and cotton production through the excavation of middens associated with room blocks. Write: Dr. Kate Spielman, Department of Anthropology, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-2402.

Human Origins and Prehistory in Kenya: The Koobi Fora Field School, offered by Harvard University Summer School and the National Museums of Kenya, introduces the wealth of paleoanthropological evidence at Koobi Fora and field methods in early man research (June 7-July 18 or July 23-September 2). Write or call: Dr. Harry V. Merrick, Koobi Fora Field School, Harvard Summer School, 20 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138; (203) 481-0674 (Thursday through Sunday) or (617) 495-2921 (Harvard University Summer School Office).

Ancient Greece: History and Archaeology is a cooperative program between the University of Ioannina and Boston University. Students can choose between the lecture tours (June 1-17) and the archaeological field school (June 1-11). Write or call: Boston University, Division of International Programs, 232 Bay State Rd., Boston, MA 02215; (617) 353-9888.

Archaeology in Cyprus offers an opportunity to research the Iron Age (July 6-24) and the Bronze Age (July 27-August 14). Write: Antichita Archaeology Research Teams, Dept. P, P.O.B. 156, St. Catherines, Ontario, L2R 6S4 Canada.

Learn about Australian language, society, culture, and ecology by joining Syracuse University Australia. Write or call: Syracuse University, Division of International Programs Abroad, 119 Euclid Ave., Syracuse, NY 13224; 1-800-235-3472.

Salt Center for Documentary Field Studies will document the tradition and change in Maine among American Indians, fishermen, store keepers, mill workers, farmers, and artisans, June 15-July 7. Write Salt Center for Documentary Field Studies, 19 Pine St.,

P.O. Box 4077, Portland, ME 04101, or call (207) 761-0660.

Archaeology of Britain is offered by the University of Cambridge Summer Studies Program for Adults (July 12-25). Write or call, Office of Cooperating Colleges, 714 Sassafras St., Erie, PA 16501; (814) 456-0757.

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## CALL FOR ANTHROPOLOGY SYLLABI

The American Anthropological Association's Task Force for the Teaching of Anthropology seeks syllabi of introductory anthropology courses (physical/medical, archaeology, world cultures/regional courses, cultural, linguistics, and applied). These syllabi can come from kindergarten through college/university curriculum. These materials will be used to analyze what is being taught in our schools and to make them available to teachers who want to learn what others are doing. Send your materials as soon as possible to: Professor Charles Ellenbaum, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137. For further information, call Chuck at (708) 858-2800, ext. 2511.

## NEW PUBLICATION

*Archaeology and Education: The Classroom and Beyond*, edited by KC Smith and Francis P. McManamon, is a collection of papers from the 1990 annual meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology. The collection includes an article on anthropology teacher training programs by *AnthroNotes* editor Ruth Selig; a case study about "Project Origins," an archaeology field program at the Arizona State Museum for people with mental and physical handicaps by Michael Faught and James S. Gittings; and a description of the Museum of Florida History's archaeology programs for youth by KC Smith. To obtain a copy free-of-charge, write to: Publication Specialist, Departmental Consulting Archeologist/Archeological Assistance, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; or call (202) 343-4101; or FAX (202) 523-1547.



language, Spradley believed, you learn their culture from their point of view--"from the inside out."

### AMERICAN SUBCULTURES

A brilliant and charismatic teacher, James Spradley urged anthropologists to take the ethnographic study of American culture and subcultures seriously. During the 1960s he came to believe that American urban crises demanded that people in our cities be understood from their point of view--not ours. As he explained in his book, "by defining people as bums, Skid Road alcoholics, vagrants, common drunkards, or homeless men, the average citizen or even the professional knows these men only through the values and language of their own culture--through a popular, medical, sociological, or legal framework" (p. 68).

To develop policies and laws that could help these men, one first had to understand who these men really were and why they lived as they did. Spradley believed that anthropology could contribute vital information to public policy and to practical solutions for social problems, if anthropologists could demonstrate their ability to analyze and describe the culture of others "from the inside out." (In the anthropological lexicon, this analysis of the "culture-bearer's" world from the inside is called "the emic" view as opposed to the outsiders' view that is called "etic.") Anthropologists have long believed that one of their discipline's unique strengths lies in its ability to understand and describe cultures from the emic point of view, and that this view is essential to understanding human cultures worldwide.

### ETHNOGRAPHIC SEMANTICS

You Owe Yourself a Drunk is an eloquent, highly detailed ethnographic study of the way tramps organize and identify their life experiences by means of a specialized vocabulary of English, a lexicon that Spradley believed held the key to understanding their culture. Learning this complex language enabled Spradley to

identify five major cultural scenes that tramps find themselves in: buckets (jails); farms (treatment centers); jungles (encampments); skids (Skid Rows); and freights (railroad cars). Within each of these scenes, Spradley identified the various terms that help tramps understand and organize their world: from 15 different kinds of tramps they distinguish among themselves, to one hundred types of sleeping places ("flops") they utilize, to strategies for survival while "making the bucket" (the cycle of getting arrested, pleading guilty, and doing time in jail).

Ethnographic semantics and related methodologies such as componential analysis were developed in the 1960s to apply explicitly "scientific" analytical frameworks to the analysis of cultural phenomena. These techniques sought to determine the definitive attributes of various local terms and cultural concepts in order to get at culturally important distinctions.

Throughout his book, Spradley used ethnographic semantics, identifying the terms tramps used and organizing these terms into chart form in order to create "hierarchical taxonomies." For example, he charted the terms used by the tramps for the people tramps interact with "in the bucket" (jail), the inmates, bulls (people with power), and civilians. Inmates, in turn, include drunks, lockups, and kickouts; bulls include matrons, bailiffs, sergeants, court liaison officers, and others; civilians include cooks, doctors, and nurses.

The organization of these terms into chart form transforms a collection of "folk terms" into a "hierarchical taxonomy," with each group of terms categorized within its proper "domain." Hence, people "in the bucket" are divided into three "domains": inmates, bulls, and civilians. On another and even more complex level, Spradley analyzed the various dimensions or "attributes" that explain the differences among domains. In the above example, the distinction among inmates, bulls, and civilians is the relationship each has to the system (inmates

are held by the system; bulls run the system; and civilians are employed by the system). Such a "componential analysis" results in the creation of "paradigms," a charting of attributes that show exactly how people divide up the various experiences they have. For Spradley's tramps, for example, whether a man travels, how he travels, what kind of home base he maintains, and what livelihood he utilizes turn out to be the four "attributes" by which these men divide themselves up into fifteen different types of tramps. The key role of mobility led Spradley to call tramps "urban nomads"--since that term most closely describes the way these men view themselves.

### THE SPRADLEY/MCCURDY TEAM

At Macalester College, Spradley and McCurdy became a team, developing a new approach to teaching anthropology to undergraduate students and co-authoring numerous publications based on their understanding of culture and their approach to doing ethnography. Spradley and McCurdy increasingly came to believe that students could best learn anthropological concepts, perspectives, and even theory by doing fieldwork. The anthropologists' challenge was developing a systematic, focused, and rigorous methodology for students to use within a realistic time frame to complete a fieldwork project. Ethnographic semantics applied to the study of microcultures provided this methodology and structure.

Inseparable as friends, colleagues, and daily racketball partners, Spradley and McCurdy worked together over a period of thirteen years, changing the way anthropology was understood and taught to undergraduates--at least at Macalester. According to former student and anthropologist Marlene Arnold, "we didn't learn theory, we were doing ethnography and discovering theory ourselves. Anthropology students became famous on the Macalester campus because we worked so hard and became so totally involved in the ethnographic studies we were carrying out in the community. Many of the studies by my classmates were

published by Spradley and McCurdy in their book, *The Cultural Experience, Ethnography in Complex Societies.*" This volume, first conceived by McCurdy, details the fieldwork approach for students and includes twelve ethnographic reports written by Macalester students. This book is still used in classrooms today.

With standing offers from some of the best universities in the country, Spradley elected to remain at Macalester, where he could work with McCurdy, pioneering their new approach to anthropology and co-authoring publications, including the widely used *Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, now in its seventh edition. Tragically, Spradley died in 1982, but the Spradley/McCurdy legacy remains vital even today, through McCurdy's popular courses at Macalester and through their joint publications that McCurdy rewrites, updates, and reprints. In all the publications, culture is a central focus.

### CULTURE AND ETHNOGRAPHY

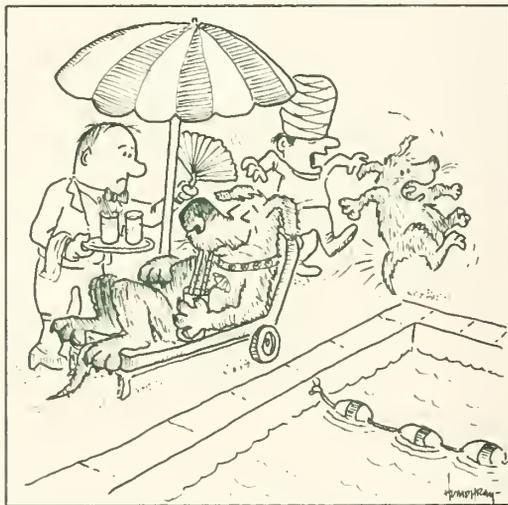
Culture, as defined by Spradley and McCurdy, is not behavior. Culture is a kind of knowledge, "the acquired knowledge that people use to generate behavior and interpret experience." As Spradley and McCurdy explain, as we learn our culture, we acquire a way to interpret our



ANTHROPOLOGISTS DISTINGUISHED FIFTEEN DIFFERENT KINDS OF TRAMPS

experience. One example they cite, based on McCurdy's field experience in village India, is the comparison of the American and Indian conception of dogs.

We Americans learn that dogs are like little people in furry suits. Dogs live in our houses, eat our food, share our beds...villagers in India, on the other hand, view dogs as pests....Quiet days in Indian villages are often punctuated by the yelp of a dog that has been threatened or actually hurt by its master or by a bystander. Clearly, it is not the dogs that are different in these two societies. Rather, it is the meaning that dogs have for people that varies. And such meaning is cultural; it is learned as part of growing up in each group (*Conformity and Conflict*, p. 7).



DOG DOMAINS

## CRITIQUES

As Spradley and McCurdy's approach and publications became better known, anthropologists responded to their work, and to the more general question of whether undergraduates can or should do fieldwork, regardless of what methods they used. Many anthropologists use the field approach to teaching anthropology, particularly in courses on methodology. As Ruth Krulfeld of George Washington University explains:

In my methods class, I always have my students do a fieldwork project. They don't usually use ethnographic semantics, but they read Spradley and McCurdy, and they develop a focus and methodology best suited to the project they choose. They can't do the sort of in-depth, sophisticated study a graduate student can do, or an anthropologist who does a two year field study, but, nevertheless, they learn a great deal about culture and about anthropology from their participant-observation study. Through their own projects, many students become so excited about what they are learning that they decide to pursue graduate work in the field.

Sociolinguist and Beloit College anthropologist Lawrence Breitborde explains the appeal of the Spradley/McCurdy approach:

By utilizing a highly structured and precise methodology, Dave McCurdy is able to give his students, even first year college students, a practical and systematic way to get into the field, and to understand culture from the insider's point of view. I admire the precision and the structure, and it's been an influential force in teaching anthropology, spreading to a number of departments across the country.

In the 1970s the early promise of ethnoscience--to provide a scientific basis for ethnography--was never fully realized. Anthropologists could see that language was only one important "window" to another culture, and that ethnographic understanding required several methodologies. Defining groups within the urban underclass as separate cultures or microcultures also was criticized for suggesting that the behavior of these individuals was due to cultural transmission of different values rather than to common reactions to similar pressures of the larger society. (see, e.g. E. Liebow, 1967, *Tally's Corner*, pp. 208-231).

In the 1980s, ethnography itself, and in particular the writing of ethnography, came under serious attack, as revisionists (post-modernists) asserted that an anthropologist's understanding of another culture is so filtered through his or her perceptions, language, and culture, that any description of another culture is suspect. [Because this debate within anthropology has been so divisive and has created a crisis of confidence within the discipline, a future issue of *Anthro.Notes* will review two volumes of essays that illuminate the issue: *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (1986); and *Recapturing Anthropology*, edited by Richard M. Fox (1991).]

Not surprisingly, Spradley and McCurdy's approach to teaching ethnography has caused debate. Some anthropologists assert that unsophisticated undergraduates cannot do ethnography because they know so little anthropology, and, in particular, know so little theory; that practical considerations rule out the approach for most departments and most professors; and that student ethnographers, in fact, will make mistakes and run the risk of engaging in unethical behavior, such as not protecting informants, or trying to study illegal activities, such as groups involved with drugs or alcohol.

#### MCCURDY RESPONDS

At the 1990 American Anthropological Association meetings, McCurdy described his approach to student ethnography and answered these criticisms. To those anthropologists who assert that undergraduates are not trained to do fieldwork and need to learn theory first, McCurdy pointed out that an overall grasp of theory can, in fact, be important to providing structure, definition, and focus to field research. There are, however, other ways for students to focus their research. By beginning to collect and analyze data using one highly structured technique, the student can come to understand the theoretical basis of that technique and its

limitations, and can also develop hypotheses and interpretations based on the analysis.

McCurdy gave several examples to support his assertion that students can arrive at theoretical hypotheses through their own research. One student, for example, studied paramedics working on ambulance teams. The student discovered that these paramedics used three separate languages to convey the same information, depending on who received the message: a radio language, a technical-medical language, and a slang language. The student hypothesized that slang (for example, "crispy critter" denoting a badly burned patient) developed for functional purposes, easing the terrible emotional stress paramedics endured while caring for seriously injured and often mutilated human beings.

McCurdy offered several suggestions to ease the practical problems of teaching field research to students, although admitting that this is a problem with large classes of undergraduates. He suggested assigning limited problems for students to research in short papers (for example, ask students to report on the ways people celebrate birthdays); lecturing on field methods and using hand-outs; having graduate students or section leaders handle student discussion of their projects as they develop; or running a seminar in interviewing and field research or a summer field school.

Regarding ethical problems, McCurdy was emphatic. Students must learn from the beginning that informants need to be protected. Student researchers must explain to their informants and anyone they come into contact with who they are and what they are doing. No student can study any illegal activity. All students must read the AAA Statement of Ethical Principles and Responsibilities, and informants' privacy must always be the paramount consideration. Ethical risks exist, McCurdy stated, but they exist for all ethnographers, no matter how well trained or sensitive they are. McCurdy summed up his response:

I have argued that ethnographic research is a central and unique property of cultural anthropology. Ethnography can be undertaken by undergraduate students without theoretical training; it may actually be a useful way to bring students to theory. Although teaching ethnography may place a strain on faculty time, adaptive measures make it practical even for fairly large classes. Similarly, ethnography always entails ethical risk, but such risk may be reduced by openly facing ethical consequences.

Recently, McCurdy was asked to comment on his career at Macalester:

When I take stock of Macalester's anthropology program these days, I can't help but be pleased by its progress. The faculty has doubled in the last 20 years; it attracts a larger number of undergraduate majors than at many large universities. It has ranked first in the number of students per faculty member for five of the last twenty years, and it has never ranked lower than fifth. A significant number of our students go on to graduate school, and scores of them claim the value of anthropology in their lives. Although one can never be sure, I like to think that ethnography had something to do with it.

#### BOOKS CO-AUTHORED BY JAMES P. SPRADLEY AND DAVID W. MCCURDY

*Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, 7th ed. Scott Foresman/Little Brown, 1990. (First edition published in 1971.)

*Instructor's Manual: Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, 7th ed. Scott Foresman/Little Brown, 1990. (First published in 1975.)

*Anthropology: The Cultural Perspective*. 2nd ed. reissued by Waveland Press, 1989. (This edition first published in 1980.)

*The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Societies*. Waveland Press, 1988. (First published in 1972.)

#### BOOKS BY JAMES P. SPRADLEY

*You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988. (Originally published in 1971.)

*Participant Observation*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1980.

*The Ethnographic Interview*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979.

Ruth O. Selig

(In a future issue of *AnthroNotes*, a Teacher's Corner by David McCurdy will further describe the Spradley/McCurdy approach to teaching ethnography using ethnographic semantics.)

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("HISTORY, PROGRESS, AND THE FACTS OF ANCIENT LIFE" continued from p. 4)

spread of European hegemony. These diseases not only killed many Indians but also appeared to provide evidence that Europeans were divinely favored.

Many other diseases that plague modern populations are also rare or absent in modern hunter gatherers. High blood pressure is generally not found in hunter gatherers regardless of age, "racial type," or location. Diets naturally low in sodium may be one good reason; another may be the lack of fatty build-up in blood vessels that contributes to widespread high blood pressure, strokes and heart attacks.

Diabetes also generally does not occur among hunter gatherers, although the same individuals may be prone to diabetes when fed a "modern" diet. Bowel and breast cancer are also relatively rare in populations who do not live a "modern" lifestyle. While this is sometimes attributed to a lower life expectancy, in fact, the proportion of adults who are over age sixty in hunting and gathering societies can be comparable to that of our own (see "Anthropological Perspectives on Aging," by Brooks and Draper, *Anthro. Notes*, Fall, 1991).

### LIFE EXPECTANCY

Trying to reconstruct the history of human life expectancy is difficult. Life expectancy, the number of years an individual can expect to live, refers to a rough average of age at death in a population, not to how long the oldest individuals live. (A group will have a life expectancy of 40 if half the group lives to 80 and half the group dies at birth). We can observe modern hunter gatherers and measure their individual lifespans, but the deaths we observe mostly result from causes that would not have been part of ancient life, like a tuberculosis epidemic. Most observed deaths are from infectious diseases and most of those from diseases we consider modern. We can determine the ages of skeletal populations, but they may not be complete. Moreover, while children can be aged relatively easily from their teeth and unfused bones, aging adults is difficult and full of controversy. Nevertheless, the combined data suggest life expectancy of about 25 years at birth for our early ancestors, a poor figure but one which again compares favorably to figures from much of urban Europe as late as the 18th or 19th century, and from India well into the 20th.

In particular, hunters and gatherers seem to have been relatively successful in rearing their young. A survey of all of the known modern hunter gatherer populations suggests that they lose an average of 20% of their children as infants and about 45% before adulthood, figures which accord

reasonably well with the evidence of ancient skeletons. These figures, terrible as they are, compare favorably with most of Europe prior to about 1850 and with many major American cities as late as the turn of the last century.

### CONCLUSION

The point of all this is that our models of history--the models which consciously or unconsciously shape our planning for the future--are misleading, based too much on the experience of the privileged classes which mistake their privilege for progress. In the 17th century, Hobbes characterized primitive life as "nasty, brutish, and short" at a time when life for most of his own compatriots was apparently shorter and was certainly nastier, at least for all those outside the ruling classes.

We do not simply progress. Many aspects of so-called "civilizations"--the adoption of sedentary farming, cities, trade, social class distinctions--are mixed blessings for the participants. It is better to see history as simple population growth and the endless competition between ever larger political units in which some societies lose and some societies win without necessarily generating benefits for all of their citizens.

It is particularly important to be aware of our own biases and our often unconscious desire to believe in progress as well as our tendency to forget the larger frames of reference through which human history develops. The facts of ancient human life can not only inform the understanding of our past, but also help us plan more carefully for the future.

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\*This article is adapted from Mark N. Cohen, *Health and the Rise of Civilization*, Yale University Press (1989) that provides detailed documentation and an extensive bibliography. The paperback edition can be found or ordered through most bookstores.

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