

## ANTHROPOLOGY CHANGING THROUGH TIME: THREE DECADES OF ANTHRONOTES®

by Ruth O. Selig



Since 1979 the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology has brought the perspectives and scholarship of leading anthropologists to a wide audience through the award-winning publication *AnthroNotes*® and the introductory text-reader *Anthropology Explored: The Best of Smithsonian AnthroNotes*. By examining three decades of *AnthroNotes*®, the dynamic shifts in anthropology and the emergence of public scholarship become clear, as the field of anthropology has become:

- More involved with community and collaboration;
- More involved with examining social issues and conflicts; and
- More self-reflexive (aware of how one's own culture affects one's view of another culture).

In addition, anthropologists now are more likely to

- Apply their findings to the real world;
- Use new technologies to turn old assumptions up side down; and
- Engage their subjects in their work as colleagues and collaborators.

For example, more professional anthropologists are willing and even eager to become involved in the lives and problems facing the people they study as well as in the

social and political issues impacting the modern world. Carolyn Fleur-Lobban's 1999 *AnthroNotes*® article, "Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights," describes her involvement with the issue of female circumcision in the Sudan and the impact of particular laws on women's lives.



The examination of the *AnthroNotes*® lead articles since 1979 yields clues as to why these fundamental shifts have taken place. The analysis also indicates reasons why there are increasing ways to bridge the worlds of academia, education, public scholarship, and museums, as anthropologists become increasingly engaged in the world around them.

### History of *AnthroNotes*®

Let me begin with a bit of history. Almost 30 years ago, a team of four (including myself, Alison Brooks, Ann Kaupp and JoAnne Lanouette) launched the *AnthroNotes*® publication at the Smithsonian. It was illustrated with ink drawings by the late anthropologist and cartoonist Robert L. Humphrey of George Washington University. I like to call *AnthroNotes*® “the little engine that could,” because it headed up the hill as a six page newsletter for local participants of the George Washington University/Smithsonian Institution Anthropology for Teachers Program, an NSF-funded teacher training program. Two teacher training programs, in Washington (1978-82) and Wyoming (1984-85), with their core, semester-long courses built on an in-depth monthly topic approach, laid the foundation for a subsequent 28 year publication effort to bring anthropology and archaeology to a wider audience, particularly in schools.

*AnthroNotes*® has always had the same three-part mission: 1) disseminate original, recent research to help readers stay current in the field; 2) encourage those teaching anthropology to utilize new materials, approaches, and community resources; and 3) more widely disseminate anthropology, particularly in schools. Once a six page newsletter, *AnthroNotes*® became a 16-page publication printed three times a year and then transformed again to a mini-journal of twenty pages published twice a year, containing articles on cutting-edge research authored by nationally and internationally known anthropologists. Today, *AnthroNotes*® reaches K-12, college, and museum educators and non-academic anthropologists and archaeologists in 50 states and 50 countries. Almost all *AnthroNotes*® articles are solicited from anthropologists throughout the country or written by the editors. The publication is mailed to 9,000 readers but increasingly it is read on-line (<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/anthnote/anthback.html>)

In the mid-1990s the Smithsonian Press approached the *AnthroNotes*® editors about publishing a compendium of the publication’s lead articles as an Introductory Reader to the entire field of anthropology. The first edition of *Anthropology Explored: The Best of Smithsonian AnthroNotes*® appeared in 1998 (edited by Ruth O. Selig and Marilyn R. London), and in 2004, a second, much expanded edition was published (with P. Ann Kaupp joining as editor), and a free, on-line *Instructor’s Guide* was prepared and made available electronically ([http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/anthropology\\_explored.htm](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/anthropology_explored.htm))

### *AnthroNotes* Changing Through Time

To analyze the changes reflected in *AnthroNotes*®, I began with a simple listing of the approximately 50 lead articles from two specific 10 year periods: 1981-1991 and 1995-2005.

#### 1981-1991

During the first ten year period, there were 26 lead articles, eight on physical anthropology, ten on archaeology, and eight on cultural anthropology, including linguistics. The majority of the articles were concerned with the cultures of the Americas (North and South), with an emphasis on new ways of viewing the past, shown by both new research findings/methods and relevancy to social concerns. The editors commissioned articles that emphasized new methodologies and relevancy, always trying to reflect current trends in the anthropological literature of the time.

Lead articles of this period that reflected new approaches focused on topics, such as New Gender Perspectives; Multidisciplinary Approaches as seen in Ethnoarchaeology, Ethnohistory and Taphonomy; New Research Findings in Human Evolution and the Settlement of the Americas; Ape Language Studies; New Fossil Finds; and Chimpanzee Studies, including field studies and language studies in laboratory settings.

Examples of other lead article topics that addressed societal relevancy or social concerns included Refugee Children in School, School Age Pregnancy, Applied Linguistics, Creationism, Ape Conservation, Student Fieldwork in the Community, and Aging in Various Cultures.



Some of the best and most satiric Humphrey cartoons come from this 1980s period. The cartoon below accompanied Alison Brooks' article about Ape Conservation in Africa.



ual Language: Tattoos and Piercing. Humphrey reflected this shift of emphasis in his illustration of Robert Sussman's article, "Are Humans Inherently Violent?"



### 1995 – 2005

The second group of *AnthroNotes*® lead articles reflect a slow, steady, but definite shift in emphasis and approach. The articles became more global and environmental in topic; more issue-oriented and conflict-focused; and many articles reflected collaboration with indigenous communities. As might be expected, there were fewer archaeological and more cultural articles during 1995-2005.

Many of these articles reflected a concern with current and sometimes contentious issues. Articles covered such topics as Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights; Linguistic Survival Among the Maya; Refugees: Worldwide Displacement and International Response; Collaborative Ethnography; Disease in Human Evolution; Aggression and Violence in Humans; and Body Art as Vi-

### Conclusion

*AnthroNotes*® not surprisingly offers us a reflection of the changes that anthropology has gone through over the past 30 years. One can see a growing concern with relevance, social issues, collaboration, and working closely with communities, as well as more involvement of anthropologists in the social and international issues of the day. It may be, in fact, that anthropology is entering a new phase of the discipline, looking ahead with renewed confidence and willingness to accept new views of what doing anthropology means. From a history that grew out of colonialism, anthropology today is a discipline with new agendas, new data, new technologies, and new frameworks. At the same time, a core four-field approach still remains at the heart of the discipline. It is likely that the trends discussed in this paper will continue into the future, along with new concerns reflecting the contemporary world.

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