

on BECOMING
an anthropologist



a CAREER pamphlet
for students



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Prepared for the American Anthropological Association

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WHAT ANTHROPOLOGY IS ABOUT

Anthropology has been defined as the study of man. This may seem a big order. Many sciences study something about man and his behavior: anatomy, psychology, medicine, and all the behavioral sciences. But anthropology is the only discipline that tries to understand man as a whole—as an animal, as a social being, as a literate being; man from the very beginning of time and all over the world. It is therefore appropriate to say that anthropology is the study of man.

Anthropology tries to explain the differences among men—differences in their physical characteristics as well as in their customs, behavior and attitudes. Some of these differences are biological. The physical differences between populations, that is, the racial characteristics, are largely the result of biological inheritance, of genes. It may be that some differences in behavior are also determined by inheritance, but except for a few abnormalities, no evidence for this has been established. Anthropologists generally are now convinced that such important elements of behavior as intelligence, loyalty, artistic ability and the like do not vary from one population to another because of inherited differences. Instead, anthropologists believe that such differences can be explained by the total circumstances in which particular peoples grow up; that is, by what anthropologists call culture.

What is meant by culture? In the first place, culture is the customs of the people; it includes simple things like the way they greet one another to very important and complex things like the way they worship. In the second place,

culture is the way people make their living. Some live simply by hunting and gathering wild foods, some by gardening, others by keeping animals, and some, like ourselves, by a wide variety of activities. Closely connected with the way man gets his living are the knowledge and tools that he has: the things he uses in order to get his food, the clothes and houses he uses for shelter, and the things he makes because he thinks they are beautiful or because they represent things he feels are important.

Culture has still other elements. The attitudes and sentiments that a people share are part of culture. For instance, every people has some idea of right and wrong; some idea of how a good man or woman should behave, what makes some people behave in one way and some in another, and what to do about someone who does not behave, and these ideas are part of culture. Anthropologists find these things also vary from one people to another.

All of this has to do with what people learn as a result of growing up in one particular society. Each of us usually does what we see others do around us, what we are told to do, the way we think things ought to be done because that is the way people are doing them. In other words, culture is learned behavior. One thing anthropologists are very interested in is the way in which—and the degree to which—children learn to behave and to think like the people around them.

Everywhere, men live in societies, that is, organized communities of people who collaborate in their activities. Some societies consist of merely a few dozen individuals; most are much larger and some are, of course, large nations. Whatever the size, there is a structure to the system, a set of regulations which govern how people should—and generally do—behave toward one another. The organization of society provides for the division of labor, for appropriate roles, for differences in social standing and in authority, and generally provides means of resolving conflicts when they arise.

Since children learn their culture from the older generation, who in turn learned it from *their* parents, culture comes out of the past. Therefore, anthropologists are interested in human history. In fact, they are interested in the very beginnings of human life. Though culture derives from the past by a kind of social inheritance, it is also constantly changing, as new knowledge and ideas and situations arise. Anthropologists study the way man's culture has grown and changed through time, and the way man has spread over the earth. This is not the history of kings and great men or of wars and treaties; it is the history of man's knowledge and behavior.

Man emerged from his primate ancestor when he acquired the use of tools and, presumably, the use of language, some million years ago. In the intervening years, he gradually acquired knowledge of fire, weapons, tools and various crafts, by means of which he has attained an increasing mastery of his environment. Just as we speak of biological evolution, we can speak of cultural evolution—the gradual increase of man's skills and knowledge, culminating in the development of agriculture and animal husbandry, writing and the great technological progress that has been built on the basis of these arts.

Broadly speaking, then, this is the subject matter of anthropology. What each anthropologist does is more narrowly defined, but contributes in some way to this general body of knowledge.

THE FIELDS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is usually divided into four basic fields of study, and each anthropologist specializes in one of these. Indeed, as our knowledge increases, it is necessary for the individual anthropologist to specialize more narrowly within these fields.

Biologic or Physical Anthropology. The physical anthropologist is concerned with man as a biological being. He is concerned with the relation between the human species and other animals, with the gradual evolution of man, with the biological features that distinguish the races, and with the relation between man's biological well-being and his culture.

Some physical anthropologists study man's relation to other animals, particularly the apes and monkeys. Biologists classify man together with these animals as primates, and man is closer to these animals in behavior, as he is in biology, than he is to any other animal. Physical anthropologists are concerned with the origin of man—where and when did it take place, and what caused man to become different from other creatures. They are also interested in understanding ape behavior, for it may lead to knowledge of how man once behaved, before he acquired language and culture. Very many have watched the behavior of troops of monkeys and apes for hours to study the relationships between the old and young, the males and females.

Some physical anthropologists are most interested in the study of fossil man, to understand the evolution of man from his beginning when he was quite different in appearance and structure to the time when the modern races of man developed. They must find these ancient remains in places like Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania, from which the earliest known types of men come, and then study every detail of the bones they find. From such information they can determine whether the individual walked erect, whether he used tools, and many details of his appearance. They cannot know, of course, what his hair looked like or what color his skin and eyes were, for only the bones remain of these earlier and extinct species of men, but they can reconstruct many details of hominid evolution.

Other physical anthropologists are interested in modern man as he differs in different parts of the world. They have classified man into "races" on the basis of careful examination of differences in structure, skin, hair, eyes, etc. Nowadays, there is less concern with the racial differences than with the way in which these features are inherited. Many physical anthropologists are thus doing work that is very close to the field of genetics, which is a part of the science of biology. As a matter of fact, they often work in departments of biology or in schools of medicine, as well as in departments of anthropology.

Archeology. Archeology is the study of man's past, based on the things that people have left in the ground. In a way it is a part of the study of history, and many history departments have archeologists working in areas where man had writing, such as in ancient Egypt and Greece. Archeological investigations also

support more recent historical research, as for instance in Colonial America. But most archeologists study the remains of peoples who had no writing and were therefore not known to history. These archeologists must know anthropology, for they interpret what they find by comparing it with what is known about primitive cultures.

The first task of the archeologist is to dig up the remains that give evidence of man's past behavior. Whether he digs up an Indian camp near his town, or a cave in Europe in which men lived tens of thousands of years ago, or a city in Mesopotamia at the dawn of man's knowledge of writing, he must dig with meticulous care and preserve every evidence of how the people lived. He is not so much interested in the artifacts, as he calls the things that he finds, as he is in the evidence of how man lived and how that life changed through time. Scraps of bone tell him what the people ate. Fossil pollen from plants tells him not only what men ate but what kinds of plants existed in the area at the time. Details of the arrangements within a site tell him things about the social organization. Therefore he must record precisely where each item came from and preserve everything made or used by man—even samples of the soil.

The second task of the archeologist is to analyze his finds; to use these scraps of evidence to show what the climate was, whether the people had domestic animals and engaged in farming, what kind of religious beliefs they had, how their society was organized. Ultimately, from many such careful studies the archeologist will give us a complete picture of the unfolding of human history from when man first came onto the earth up to modern times.

Linguistics. The one thing that most clearly separates man from all other animals is his use of language. Not only is speech important in distinguishing man from other beings, but it is also critical in the understanding of other parts of culture, for it is largely by means of language that men learn the culture they become part of. For these reasons, linguistics is a very special branch of anthropology—so special and important that it has become a science of its own. Still, many linguists are anthropologists.

Every people has the ability to speak, and this means not only that they have words for things but that they have a grammar, even though their language was never written down. The first task of the linguistic anthropologist is to make dictionaries and grammars of the languages of primitive peoples. They do this through detailed questioning of the native speakers of the language.

There are many things that we learn from studying languages of people in different parts of the world. First of all, we can find out what languages are related to one another. We learned long ago that English and German are fairly closely related, that these are more distantly related to French and Spanish, and that ultimately most of the European languages and many of those from India are all part of the same "family." Linguists have made studies of the historical relations of other families of languages and thus contributed to our knowledge of the history of the people who speak them. The second thing we learn by the study of language is to see how the language people use influences the way they think about things. The words a people use classify the things and events around them, but the principles of classification vary and therefore things do not fall

into the same categories. Navaho grammar emphasizes the verb, in contrast to ours which emphasizes the noun, so that they think more in terms of process while we think more in terms of actors. Such differences have been shown to affect the native speakers' way of seeing and understanding things. Third, by studying different languages, the linguist hopes to show how language works; what it is that makes man a speaking animal when all other creatures do not talk. The linguistic anthropologist is also interested in the place of linguistics in the lives of people; their beliefs and attitudes about language and its use, the relation of language to other modes of communication, the patterns by which one or another language, or variety of a language, is chosen, depending on situation and purpose. Some are working on the relation of these kinds of knowledge to problems of education and social development in the contemporary world.

Cultural Anthropology. By far the greatest proportion of anthropologists devote themselves to the study of the customs, the culture and the social life of living peoples. These are generally called cultural or social anthropologists.

For about three quarters of a century, anthropologists have gone out to study peoples in various parts of the world: the Australian aborigines in the "out-back," the Eskimo in the Arctic, the native tribes of America and Africa. They have recorded the legends, the beliefs, the daily life and the social relationships that they found. The description of the way of life of a people is called an ethnography. In former times, when travel was difficult and there were very few anthropologists and many tribal peoples to study, the cultural anthropologist tried to study every aspect of native life. Nowadays, he generally specializes in one or another part; perhaps he is most interested in the economy, or the religious ceremonies, or the way the people take care of their infants. In such research he examines these events as they relate to the total culture.

Many people believe that anthropology is the study of primitive people. Though most cultural anthropologists do study tribal or peasant societies, some have always been interested in customs and behavior patterns in our own society. Many anthropologists have studied modern American communities; they have even studied the customs of doctors in hospitals and the conduct of teachers and children in schools. An increasing number of students enter anthropology with such interests.

Anthropologists study cultures in order to make a record of how man lives in different times and places. But this is only the beginning, for the anthropologists seek to explain why people behave different ways in different places. In order to try to answer this very difficult question, the anthropologists compare the behavior of peoples, to see how they vary and what can explain the differences that they find. The more that the anthropologist has pondered this basic question, the more he has felt he needed to know about the details of human behavior in different societies. Even though the number of tribal societies is dwindling rapidly, there is much that still remains to be discovered about how people live in those that remain; there is still much work to be done.

All living races or varieties of man belong to a single species, *Homo sapiens* (although other species and even other genera are found in fossil form). It is not surprising that, despite differences in cultural behavior, human behavior has a degree of

similarity wherever it is found, and these consistencies are also important. We have already pointed out that all men have language, though the *form* of the language varies. Similarly, we can say that all peoples live in social groups, and organize their social life according to customary rules, though the rules vary. All peoples, for instance, recognize the importance of kin and regulate much of their behavior according to the relationship that exists among them, just as we do—though, again, how they feel about particular relatives may differ from our sentiments. All people have some form of marriage, some kind of legalized union for procreation, and all people consider marriage between kin to be incestuous—though once again, just what degree of relationship is to be considered incest will vary from one people to another. All peoples exhibit religious beliefs; all have notions of gods or spirits and all engage in ceremonies concerning these supernatural events, but it is not necessary to point out that they do not all believe the same thing. The uniformities and consistencies are as important to understand as the differences.

HOW TO BECOME AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

The anthropologist is a scientist and scholar. That means, among other things, that he has not only completed college but has done graduate work in anthropology. Although many graduate departments in anthropology accept students who have not majored in anthropology, they prefer those who have such a major and often require a year of extra work for preparation. Furthermore, with increasing competition for admission and especially for fellowships, the student with an undergraduate major enjoys an advantage over those without one.

It is therefore helpful but not necessary to have an undergraduate major in anthropology. Whether one has a major or not, it is important to develop as wide a range of knowledge as possible. Undergraduate training should include competence in at least one foreign language (preferably French, German, Russian or Spanish). Mathematics, especially statistics, is becoming increasingly important in all fields of anthropology and is absolutely necessary for physical anthropology. One cannot stress too strongly the importance of the ability to write good, clear English. Aside from these skills, the student should have a good background in one or more related disciplines—those that touch on the area in which he will work. Thus a physical anthropologist should know anatomy and genetics; an archeologist should have knowledge of geography and geology; a social anthropologist should develop a background in one or more of the other social sciences.

Most persons who are professional anthropologists today have a PhD, but some who have professional standing have only the master's degree. The MA usually requires a year or two of postgraduate work; the doctorate usually requires four or five years as a minimum. The specific requirements depend on

the university, and the best way to find out what the requirements are is to send for the catalog of the university you would most like to attend.

There are usually three phases to a graduate degree program in anthropology: (1) a general program covering all the fields and ending with the master's degree; (2) graduate work in which specialized knowledge is obtained through graduate courses and seminars, often with independent reading or research work on the side; and (3) original research into some special aspect of anthropology, on the basis of which the thesis is written. The research is usually done "in the field"; that is, by going to a tribe or community and making direct observation of native life, or by digging an archeological site, or the like, though some students base their dissertation on the cumulated writings of others, while physical anthropologists often work in laboratories. The thesis is proof that the individual is a scholar who can place new facts and explanations before the public.

Nearly all colleges now have some courses in anthropology and most of them offer a major in anthropology. There are about 140 colleges that offer the master's degree and about 80 that offer the PhD degree (most of which also offer the master's) in the United States and Canada today. You can find out which ones do so by checking the current *Guide to Departments of Anthropology* which is published annually by the American Anthropological Association and should be available at your public library or the library of the university nearest you. Or you can purchase a copy from the Executive Office of the American Anthropological Association. Which university you select will depend on where you want to live, what university you prefer, and the special interests that are emphasized in the various institutions. Most universities have fellowships, scholarships or teaching assistantships available for qualified graduate students, and most graduate students either hold such positions or are otherwise self-supporting, at least after the first year of graduate work.

WHERE YOU WILL WORK

About 80 anthropologists out of every 100 teach in colleges or universities. The professor of anthropology may spend most of his time in classroom teaching, particularly in the junior colleges and four-year colleges. In the universities, the professor is expected regularly to engage in research along his line of special interest as well as to teach, thus contributing to the growth of anthropological knowledge. About ten in every 100 are employed by museums. The purposes of the museum are similar to those of a university or college: to educate the public and to engage in research. But the museum curator's work is very different; instead of teaching classes he prepares exhibits, which are independently viewed by the public. He also has a responsibility to that public, such as answering queries and authenticating man-made objects that people have found—either in the ground or in their attics. He usually has more time for research, however,

and most museum curators are actively engaged in field work of one kind or another, usually sponsored by the museum they work for.

The remaining ten percent may do a wide variety of things. As is so frequently the case in the development of science, anthropology first concerned itself with recording the events that were pertinent to its subject and trying to explain them. As a result of the better understanding that we have gained through these studies over the century in which anthropology has been a recognized subject of study, it has been possible to put that knowledge to practical use. Perhaps the most dramatic use of anthropological understanding took place half a century ago when the anthropologist Rattray convinced the British government that the Golden Stool of the Ashanti was a sacred emblem of that African kingdom and that earlier efforts to capture it were a desecration. Respect for the Ashanti beliefs did much to improve the relationship between the two peoples, whereas disregard for them had initiated bloody warfare. But it was not until World War II that anthropology became a factor in policy making. Nowadays, not only our government and major business enterprises seek anthropological consultants, but many of the developing countries find it useful to have anthropologists serving on their staffs. When a people want to begin writing a language which had formerly only been spoken, they are apt to seek an anthropological linguist; when a developing government wants to codify the laws of the tribal groups that live within its territory, it may call in an anthropologist to help; when a new crop or industry is developed, the anthropologist can often predict the resistance to the change and find ways to minimize the disruption such innovations may cause. It is the anthropologist's recognition of the total range of human behavior and the exploratory, flexible and intimate character of his research that make his contributions to problems involving human relationships of particular value. These practical applications of anthropological knowledge are not without their problems. The uses of anthropology can include techniques for manipulating the behavior of peoples, and there are some anthropologists who feel that it is improper to give advice to governments and corporations, the usual clients for such advice, when it is not also available to those with less power and influence in their societies. The Society for Applied Anthropology formulated a statement for professional ethics some years ago. The American Anthropological Association published a Statement on Problems of Anthropological Research and Ethics in 1967 and in 1968 created a special committee to consider the moral problems inherent in the use of the scholarly knowledge of anthropology.

In 1970, salaries for anthropologists who have just finished their PhD degree are generally between nine and eleven thousand dollars per year, depending upon the institution with which they are working and the level of independence that is expected of them. As time goes on, and their knowledge increases and their responsibilities become greater, they may command a salary twice that size or more.

But anthropologists have not entered the profession because they want to get rich. They receive enough salary to live and to raise their families, but their real interest lies in the fascination of uncovering facts about human life; in seeing

how the world differs, how it has grown to be what it is, and to understand that remarkable creature we call man.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

The American Anthropological Association is the general organization of scholars interested in all fields of anthropology. It was formed in 1902. It publishes the *American Anthropologist*, which contains scholarly articles and reviews of anthropological books; the *Newsletter*, which discusses problems common to anthropologists, gives information on research opportunities and news about members and organizations concerned with anthropology; a timely series of volumes entitled *Anthropological Studies*; the *Guide to Departments of Anthropology*, an annual directory of departments in both universities and museums; and various other special publications. It holds an annual meeting, usually in mid-November, at which scholars offer papers on their research, hold special symposia or discussion groups and in other ways share and communicate their understandings of the subject. There is also a business meeting of the Association.

Any person may be a member of the American Anthropological Association and receive its publications and participate in its meetings. Fellows and Voting Members have voting rights; the right to hold elected office is limited to Fellows, who must be established anthropologists, either holding the PhD degree in the subject or having demonstrated their competence through original research and writing in the field. The Association is governed by an elected executive board. Its executive offices, located in Washington, DC, take care of the business operations of the Association and serve in many other ways.

The American Anthropological Association is affiliated with the Social Science Research Council, the National Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies. This triple affiliation brings anthropology into the organizations of the social sciences, the natural sciences and the humanities, and bespeaks the wide diversity of interests that characterize the field. The American Association for the Advancement of Science has a special section devoted to anthropology. A worldwide organization, the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, meets every five years.

There are many other societies serving sectors of anthropology. These may be divided into three groups: (1) those of more specialized interest within the broader field, (2) regional societies, and (3) local societies. A list of the first two of these is printed on the back cover; you can probably learn if there is a local society by contacting the anthropologists at your nearest university, college or museum.

Aside from the *American Anthropologist*, which is the official journal of the Association, there are many other series in the field, some published by the societies and some by universities or other organizations. Those published in America which are of greatest interest to anthropologists in general are listed in

order of their age: *Journal of American Folklore*, *Monographs of the American Ethnological Society*, *Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, *International Journal of American Linguistics*, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, *American Antiquity*, *Human Organization*, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, *Human Biology*, *Ethnohistory*, *Ethnomusicology*, *Current Anthropology* and *Ethnology*.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you want to know more about anthropology, go to your nearest college or university and talk with an anthropologist on the staff. Before doing this, however, you should know some of the kinds of things about the field that may be gained through reading.

Of three pamphlets which may be of help to you, the first two discuss anthropology as a career and the third summarizes what cultural anthropology is about:

John Howland Rowe, *Archaeology as a Career*, reprinted from *Archeology*, Archaeological Institute of America; 100 Washington Square East, New York, New York 10003.

William C Sturtevant, *Anthropology as a Career*, Smithsonian Institution; Washington, DC 20025.

Walter Goldschmidt, *Cultural Anthropology*, No. 8 in READING FOR AN AGE OF CHANGE series sponsored by the American Library Association in cooperation with the Public Affairs Committee, Inc, Public Affairs Pamphlets; 381 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016.

The following books are suggested as being particularly helpful to students who are seeking their first knowledge of anthropology; many of them have been used in conjunction with high school classes, but each of them is recognized by scholars as a sound and useful piece of work.

For description of anthropologists' experiences:

Elenore Smith Bowen, *Return to Laughter*. Natural History Press; New York, 1964. (An autobiographical novel about field work in West Africa by an outstanding anthropologist)

Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds*. University of California Press; Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963. (The story of a lone surviving Yana Indian, and how he was helped and studied by the eminent anthropologist, A L Kroeber)

David Mayberry-Lewis, *The Savage and the Innocent*. The World Publishing Company; Cleveland and New York, 1965. (The adventures of an anthropologist and his wife in South America)

For descriptions of native culture:

Alice Marriott, *Ten Grandmothers*. University of Oklahoma Press; Norman, Oklahoma, 1945. (A narrative account of Kiowa Indians which gives an understanding of their culture)

Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, *The Harmless People*. Random House; New York, 1965. (An account of an expedition among the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa and a sensitive description of the lives of these people)

Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People*. Simon and Schuster; New York, 1961. (A description of the life of the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest in Africa)

For general discussion of anthropology:

Walter Goldschmidt, *Man's Way: A Preface to the Understanding of Human Society*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston; New York, 1959. (A general discussion of anthropological ideas)

Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man*. Fawcett; Greenwich, Connecticut, 1957. (Another general discussion of anthropological ideas)

Allan H. Smith and John L. Fischer (editors), *Anthropology*, published as part of the Behavioral and Social Sciences Survey. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970. (A general discussion of anthropology and its various subfields)

For description of special fields:

James Deetz, *Invitation to Archeology*. Natural History Press; New York, 1967. (An introduction to the study of archeology)

Joseph Greenberg, *Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction*. Random House; New York, 1968. (An introduction to the study of linguistics)

For further information, contact the American Anthropological Association, 1703 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009. Telephone (202) 232-8800.