

Twelfth
Edition



Cultural Anthropology

The Human Challenge

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Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge, Twelfth Edition
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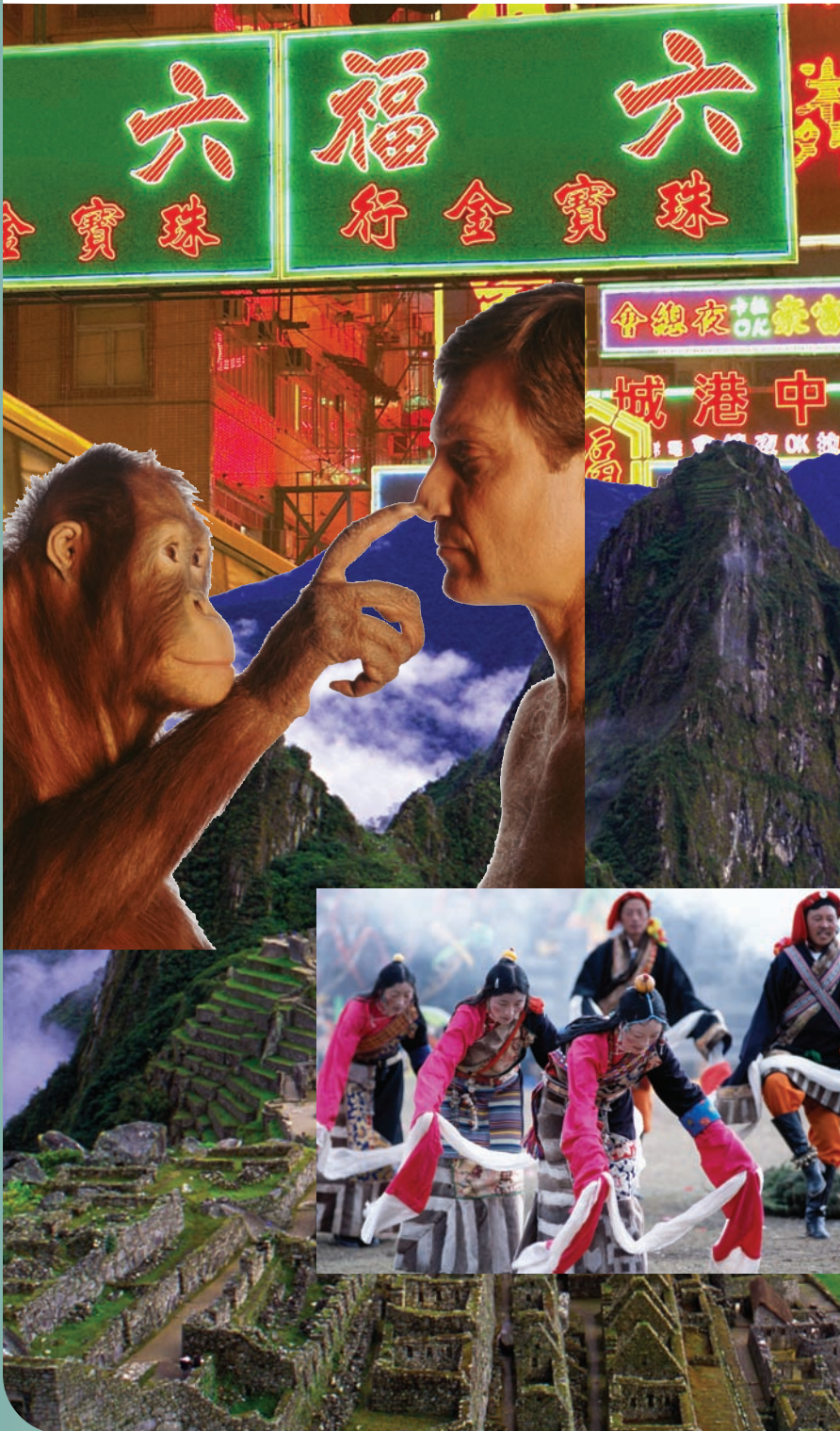
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The Essence of Anthropology

CHALLENGE ISSUE

It is a challenge to make sense of who we are. Where did we come from? Why are we so radically different from other animals and so surprisingly similar to others? Why do our bodies look the way they do? How do we explain so many different beliefs, languages, and customs? What makes us tick? As just one of 10 million species, including 4,000 fellow mammals, we humans are the only creatures on earth with the mental capacity to ask such questions about ourselves and the world around us. We do this not only because we are curious but also because knowledge has enabled us to adapt to radically contrasting environments all across the earth and helps us create and improve our material and social living conditions. Adaptations based on knowledge are essential in every culture, and culture is our species' ticket to survival. Understanding humanity in all its biological and cultural variety, past and present, is the fundamental contribution of anthropology. This contribution has become all the more important in the era of globalization, when appreciating our common humanity and respecting cultural differences are essential to human survival.



CHAPTER PREVIEW

What Is Anthropology?

Anthropology, the study of humankind everywhere, throughout time, produces knowledge about what makes people different from one another and what they all share in common. Anthropologists work within four fields of the discipline. While physical anthropologists focus on humans as biological organisms (tracing evolutionary development and looking at biological variations), cultural anthropologists investigate the contrasting ways groups of humans think, feel, and behave. Archaeologists try to recover information about human cultures—usually from the past—by studying material objects, skeletal remains, and settlements. Meanwhile, linguists study languages—communication systems by which cultures are maintained and passed on to succeeding generations. Practitioners in all four fields are informed by one another's findings and united by a common anthropological perspective on the human condition.

How Do Anthropologists Do What They Do?

Anthropologists, like other scholars, are concerned with the description and explanation of reality. They formulate and test hypotheses—tentative explanations of observed phenomena—concerning humankind. Their aim is to develop reliable theories—interpretations or explanations supported by bodies of data—about our species. These data are usually collected through fieldwork—a particular kind of hands-on research that makes anthropologists so familiar with a situation that they can begin to recognize patterns, regularities, and exceptions. It is also through careful observation (combined with comparison) that anthropologists test their theories.

How Does Anthropology Compare to Other Disciplines?

In studying humankind, early anthropologists came to the conclusion that to fully understand the complexities of human thought, feelings, behavior, and biology, it was necessary to study and compare all humans, wherever and whenever. More than any other feature, this unique cross-cultural, long-term perspective distinguishes anthropology from other social sciences. Anthropologists are not the only scholars who study people, but they are uniquely holistic in their approach, focusing on the interconnections and interdependence of all aspects of the human experience, past and present. It is this holistic and integrative perspective that equips anthropologists to grapple with an issue of overriding importance for all of us today: globalization.

For as long as they have been on earth, people have sought answers to questions about who they are, where they come from, and why they act as they do. Throughout most of human history, though, people relied on myth and folklore for answers, rather than on the systematic testing of data obtained through careful observation. Anthropology, over the last 150 years, has emerged as a tradition of scientific inquiry with its own approaches to answering these questions. Simply stated, **anthropology** is the study of humankind in all times and places. While focusing primarily on *Homo sapiens*—the human species—anthropologists also study our ancestors and close animal relatives for clues about what it means to be human.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Although works of anthropological significance have a considerable antiquity—two examples being cross-cultural accounts of people written by the Greek historian Herodotus about 2,500 years ago and the North African Arab scholar Ibn Khaldun nearly 700 years ago—anthropology as a distinct field of inquiry is a relatively recent product of Western civilization. In the United States, for example, the first course in general anthropology to carry credit in a college or university (at the University of Rochester in New York)



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was not offered until 1879. If people have always been concerned about themselves and their origins, and those of other people, then why did it take such a long time for a systematic discipline of anthropology to appear?

The answer to this is as complex as human history. In part, it relates to the limits of human technology. Throughout most of history, people have been restricted in their geographic horizons. Without the means of traveling to distant parts of the world, observation of cultures and peoples far from one's own was a difficult—if not impossible—undertaking. Extensive travel was usually the exclusive privilege of a few; the study of foreign peoples and cultures was not likely to flourish until improved modes of transportation and communication could be developed.

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anthropology The study of humankind in all times and places.

This is not to say that people have been unaware of the existence of others in the world who look and act differently from themselves. The Bible's Old and New Testaments, for example, are full of references to diverse ancient peoples, among them Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, Jews, and Syrians. However, the differences among these people pale by comparison to those among any of the more recent European nations and (for example) traditional indigenous peoples of the Pacific islands, the Amazon rainforest, or Siberia.



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Anthropologists come from many corners of the world and carry out research in a huge variety of cultures all around the globe. Dr. Jaysinhji Jhala, pictured here, hails from the old city of Dhrangadhra in Gujarat, northwest India. A member of the Jhala clan of Rajputs, an aristocratic caste of warriors, he grew up in the royal palace of his father, the maharaja. After earning a bachelor of arts degree in India, he came to the United States and earned a master's in visual studies from MIT, followed by a doctorate in anthropology from Harvard. Currently a professor and director of the programs of Visual Anthropology and the Visual Anthropology Media Laboratory at Temple University, he returns regularly to India with students to film cultural traditions in his own caste-stratified society.

With the invention of the magnetic compass for use aboard better-equipped sailing ships, it became easier to determine geographic direction and travel to truly far-away places and meet for the first time such radically different groups. It was the massive encounter with hitherto unknown peoples—which began 500 years ago as Europeans sought to extend their trade and political domination to all parts of the world—that focused attention on human differences in all their amazing variety.

Another significant element that contributed to the emergence of anthropology was that Europeans gradually came to recognize that despite all the differences, they might share a basic humanity with people everywhere. Initially, Europeans labeled societies that did not share their fundamental cultural values as “savage” or “barbarian.” Over time, however, Europeans came to recognize such highly diverse groups as fellow members of one species and therefore relevant to an understanding of what it is to be human. This growing interest in human diversity, coming at a time when there were increasing efforts to explain things in scientific terms, cast doubts on the traditional explanations based on religious texts such as the Torah, Bible, or Koran and helped set the stage for the birth of anthropology.

Although anthropology originated within the historical context of European culture, it has long since gone global. Today, it is an exciting, transnational discipline whose practitioners come from a wide array of societies all around the world. Societies that have long been studied by European and North American anthropologists—several African and Native American societies, for example—have produced anthropologists who have made and continue to make a mark on the discipline. Their distinct perspectives shed new light not only on their own cultures but also on those of others. It is noteworthy that in one regard diversity has long been a hallmark of the discipline: From its earliest days both women and men have entered the field. Throughout this text, we will be spotlighting individual anthropologists, illustrating the diversity of these practitioners and their work.

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Many academic disciplines are concerned in one way or another with our species. For example, biology focuses on the genetic, anatomical, and physiological aspects of organisms. Psychology is concerned primarily with cognitive, mental, and emotional issues, while economics examines the production, distribution, and management of material resources. And various disciplines in the humanities look into the artistic and philosophical achievements of human cultures. But anthropology is distinct

because of its focus on the interconnections and interdependence of all aspects of the human experience in all places and times—both biological and cultural, past and present. It is this **holistic perspective** that best equips anthropologists to broadly address that elusive phenomenon we call human nature.

Anthropologists welcome the contributions of researchers from other disciplines and in return offer their own findings for the benefit of these other disciplines. Anthropologists do not expect, for example, to know as much about the structure of the human eye as anatomists or as much about the perception of color as psychologists. As synthesizers, however, anthropologists are prepared to understand how these bodies of knowledge relate to color-naming practices in different human societies. Because they look for the broad basis of human ideas and practices without limiting themselves to any single social or biological aspect, anthropologists can acquire an especially expansive and inclusive overview of the complex biological and cultural organism that is the human being.

The holistic perspective also helps anthropologists stay keenly aware of ways that their own culture’s perspective and social values may influence their research. As the old saying goes, people often see what they believe, rather than what appears before their eyes. By maintaining a critical awareness of their own assumptions about human nature—checking and rechecking the ways their beliefs and actions might be shaping their research—anthropologists strive to gain objective knowledge about people. Equipped with this awareness, anthropologists have contributed uniquely to our understanding of diversity in human thought, biology, and behavior, as well as our understanding of the many things humans have in common.

While other social sciences have concentrated predominantly on contemporary peoples living in North American and European (Western) societies, anthropologists have traditionally focused on non-Western peoples and cultures. Anthropologists believe that to fully understand the complexities of human ideas, behavior, and biology, all humans, wherever and whenever, must be studied. A cross-cultural and long-term evolutionary perspective not only distinguishes anthropology from other social sciences, but also guards against the danger that theories of human behavior will be **culture-bound**:

holistic perspective A fundamental principle of anthropology: that the various parts of human culture and biology must be viewed in the broadest possible context in order to understand their interconnections and interdependence.

culture-bound Theories about the world and reality based on the assumptions and values of one’s own culture.

VISUAL COUNTERPOINT



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Although infants in the United States typically sleep apart from their parents, cross-cultural research shows that co-sleeping, of mother and baby in particular, is the rule. The photo on the right shows a Nenet family sleeping together in their *chum* (reindeer-skin tent). Nenet people are arctic reindeer pastoralists living in Siberia.

that is, based on assumptions about the world and reality that come from the researcher's own particular culture.

As a case in point, consider the fact that infants in the United States typically sleep apart from their parents. To most North Americans, this may seem normal, but cross-cultural research shows that co-sleeping, of mother and baby in particular, is the rule. Only in the past 200 years, generally in Western industrial societies, has it been considered proper for parents to sleep apart from their infants. In a way, this practice amounts to a cultural experiment in child rearing.

Recent studies have shown that separation of mother and infant in Western societies has important biological and cultural consequences. For one thing, it increases the length of the child's crying bouts. Some mothers incorrectly interpret the cause as a deficiency in breast milk and switch to less healthy bottle formulas; and in extreme cases the crying may provoke physical abuse. But the benefits of co-sleeping go beyond significant reductions in crying: Infants also nurse more often and three times as long per feeding; they receive more stimulation (important for brain development); and they are apparently less susceptible to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS or "crib death"). There are benefits to the mother as well: Frequent nursing prevents early ovulation after childbirth, and she gets at least as much sleep as mothers who sleep without their infants.¹

¹Barr, R. G. (1997, October). The crying game. *Natural History*, 47. Also, McKenna, J. J. (2002, September-October). Breastfeeding and bedsharing. *Mothering*, 28-37; and McKenna, J. J., & McDade, T. (2005, June). Why babies should never sleep alone: A review of the co-sleeping controversy in relation to SIDS, bedsharing, and breast feeding. *Pediatric Respiratory Reviews* 6(2), 134-152.

These benefits may lead us to ask, Why do so many mothers continue to sleep apart from their infants? In North America the cultural values of independence and consumerism come into play. To begin building individual identities, babies are provided with rooms (or at least space) of their own. This room of one's own also provides parents with a place for the toys, furniture, and other paraphernalia associated with good parenting in North America.

Anthropology's early emphasis on studying traditional, non-Western peoples has often led to findings that run counter to generally accepted opinions derived from Western studies. Thus, anthropologists were the first to demonstrate

that the world does not divide into the pious and the superstitious; that there are sculptures in jungles and paintings in deserts; that political order is possible without centralized power and principled justice without codified rules; that the norms of reason were not fixed in Greece, the evolution of morality not consummated in England. . . . We have, with no little success, sought to keep the world off balance; pulling out rugs, upsetting tea tables, setting off firecrackers. It has been the office of others to reassure; ours to unsettle.²

Although the findings of anthropologists have often challenged the conclusions of sociologists, psychologists, and economists, anthropology is absolutely indispensable to them, as it is the only consistent check against

²Geertz, C. (1984). Distinguished lecture: Anti anti-relativism. *American Anthropologist* 86, 275.

culture-bound assertions. In a sense, anthropology is to these disciplines what the laboratory is to physics and chemistry: an essential testing ground for their theories.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS FIELDS

Individual anthropologists tend to specialize in one of four fields or subdisciplines: physical anthropology, archaeology, linguistic anthropology, or cultural anthropology (Figure 1.1). Some anthropologists consider archaeology and linguistics as part of the broader study of human cultures, but, archaeology and linguistics also have close ties to biological anthropology. For example, while linguistic anthropology focuses on the cultural aspects of language, it has deep connections to the evolution of human language and the biological basis of speech and language studied within physical anthropology. Each of anthropology's fields may take a distinct approach to the study of humans, but all gather and analyze data that are essential to explaining similarities and differences among humans, across time and space. Moreover, all of them generate knowledge that has numerous practical applications.

Within the four fields are individuals who practice **applied anthropology**, which entails using anthropological knowledge and methods to solve practical problems, often for a specific client. Applied anthropologists do not offer their perspectives from the sidelines. Instead, they actively collaborate with the communities in which they work—setting goals, solving problems, and

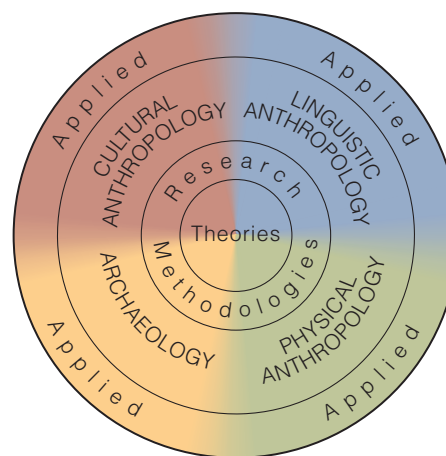


Figure 1.1

The four fields of anthropology. Note that the divisions among them are not sharp, indicating that their boundaries overlap. Moreover, each operates on the basis of a common body of knowledge. All four are involved in theory building, developing their own research methodologies, and solving practical problems through applied anthropology.

conducting research together. In this book, examples of how anthropology contributes to solving a wide range of the challenges humans face appear in Anthropology Applied features.

One of the earliest contexts in which anthropological knowledge was applied to a practical problem was

applied anthropology The use of anthropological knowledge and methods to solve practical problems, often for a specific client.

Biocultural

Connection

The Anthropology of Organ Transplantation

In 1954, the first organ transplant occurred in Boston when surgeons removed a kidney from one identical twin to place it inside his sick brother. Though some transplants rely upon living donors, routine organ transplantation depends largely upon the availability of organs obtained from individuals who have died.

From an anthropological perspective, the meanings of death and the body vary cross-culturally. While death could be said to represent a particular biological state, social agreement about this state's significance is of paramount importance. Anthropologist Margaret Lock has explored differences between Japanese and North American acceptance of the biological state of "brain death" and how it affects the practice of organ transplants.

Brain death relies upon the absence of measurable electrical currents in the brain and the inability to breathe without technological assistance. The brain-dead individual, though attached to machines, still seems alive with a beating heart and pink cheeks. North Americans find brain death acceptable, in part, because personhood and individuality are culturally located in the brain. North American comfort with brain death has allowed for the "gift of life" through organ donation and subsequent transplantation.

By contrast, in Japan, the concept of brain death is hotly contested and organ transplants are rarely performed. The Japanese do not incorporate a mind-body split into their models of themselves and locate personhood throughout the

body rather than in the brain. They resist accepting a warm pink body as a corpse from which organs can be harvested. Further, organs cannot be transformed into "gifts" because anonymous donation is not compatible with Japanese social patterns of reciprocal exchange.

Organ transplantation carries far greater social meaning than the purely biological movement of an organ from one individual to another. Cultural and biological processes are tightly woven into every aspect of this new social practice.

(Based on M. Lock (2001). Twice dead: Organ transplants and the reinvention of death. Berkeley: University of California Press.)

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the international public health movement that began in the 1920s, marking the beginning of *medical anthropology*—a specialization that brings theoretical and applied approaches from the fields of cultural and biological anthropology to the study of human health and disease. The work of medical anthropologists sheds light on the connections between human health and political and economic forces, both globally and locally. Examples from this specialization appear in some of the Biocultural Connections featured in this text, including the one presented in this chapter, “The Anthropology of Organ Transplantation.”

Physical Anthropology

Physical anthropology, also called *biological anthropology*, is the systematic study of humans as biological organisms. Traditionally, biological anthropologists concentrated on human evolution, primatology, growth and development, human adaptation, and forensics. Today, **molecular anthropology**, or the anthropological study of genes and genetic relationships, is another vital component of biological anthropology. Comparisons among groups separated by time, geography, or the frequency of a particular gene can reveal how humans have adapted and where they have migrated. As experts in the anatomy of human bones and tissues, physical anthropologists lend their knowledge about the body to applied areas such as gross anatomy laboratories, public health, and criminal investigations.

Paleoanthropology

Human evolutionary studies (known as **paleoanthropology**) investigate the origins and predecessors of the present human species, focusing on biological changes through time to understand how, when, and why we became the kind of organisms we are today. In biological terms, we humans are primates, one of the many kinds of mammal. Because we share a common ancestry with other primates, most specifically apes, paleoanthropologists look back to the earliest primates (65 or so million years ago) or even the earliest mammals (225 million years ago) to reconstruct the complex path of human evolution. Paleoanthropology unlike other evolutionary studies, takes a **biocultural** approach, focusing on the interaction of biology and culture.

physical anthropology Also known as biological anthropology. The systematic study of humans as biological organisms.

molecular anthropology A branch of biological anthropology that uses genetic and biochemical techniques to test hypotheses about human evolution, adaptation, and variation.

paleoanthropology The study of the origins and predecessors of the present human species.

biocultural Focusing on the interaction of biology and culture.

The fossilized skeletons of our ancestors allow paleoanthropologists to reconstruct the course of human evolutionary history. They compare the size and shape of these fossils to one another and to the bones of living species. With each new fossil discovery, paleoanthropologists have another piece to add to human evolutionary history. Biochemical and genetic studies add considerably to the fossil evidence. As we will see in later chapters, genetic evidence establishes the close relationship between humans and ape species—chimpanzees, bonobos, and gorillas. Genetic analyses indicate that the human line originated 5 to 8 million years ago. Physical anthropology therefore deals with much greater time spans than archaeology or other fields of anthropology.

Human Growth, Adaptation, and Variation

Another specialty of physical anthropologists is the study of human growth and development. Anthropologists examine biological mechanisms of growth as well as the impact of the environment on the growth process. Franz Boas (see Anthropologists of Note box, page 15), a pioneer of anthropology of the early 20th century, compared the heights of European immigrants who spent their childhood in “the old country” to the increased heights obtained by their children who grew up in the United States. Today, physical anthropologists study the impacts of disease, pollution, and poverty on growth. Comparisons between human and nonhuman primate growth patterns can provide clues to the evolutionary history of humans. Detailed anthropological studies of the hormonal, genetic, and physiological basis of healthy growth in living humans also contribute significantly to the health of children today.

Studies of human adaptation focus on the capacity of humans to adapt or adjust to their material environment—biologically and culturally. This branch of physical anthropology takes a comparative approach to humans living today in a variety of environments. Humans are remarkable among the primates in that they now inhabit the entire earth. Though cultural adaptations make it possible for our species to live in some environmental extremes, biological adaptations also contribute to survival in extreme cold, heat, and high altitude.

Some of these biological adaptations are built into the genetic makeup of populations. The long period of human growth and development provides ample opportunity for the environment to shape the human body. These *developmental adaptations* are responsible for some features of human variation such as the enlargement of the right ventricle of the heart to help push blood to the lungs among the Quechua Indians of highland Peru. *Physiological adaptations* are short-term changes in response to a particular environmental stimulus. For example, a person who normally lives at sea level will undergo a series of physiological responses if she suddenly

moves to a high altitude. All of these kinds of biological adaptation contribute to present-day human variation.

Variation in visible traits such as height, body build, and skin color, as well as biochemical factors such as blood type and susceptibility to certain diseases, contribute to human biological diversity. Still, we remain members of a single species. Physical anthropology applies all the techniques of modern biology to achieve fuller understanding of human variation and its relationship to the different environments in which people have lived. Research in physical anthropology on human variation has debunked false notions of biologically defined races—a notion based on widespread misinterpretation of human variation.

Forensic Anthropology

One of the many practical applications of physical anthropology is **forensic anthropology**: the identification of human skeletal remains for legal purposes. Although they are called upon by law enforcement authorities to identify murder victims, forensic anthropologists also investigate human rights abuses such as systematic genocides, terrorism, and war crimes. These specialists use details of skeletal anatomy to establish the age, sex, and stature of the deceased; forensic anthropologists can also determine whether the person was right- or left-handed, exhibited any physical abnormalities, or experienced trauma. While forensics relies upon differing frequencies of certain skeletal characteristics to establish population affiliation, it is nevertheless false to say that all people from a given population have a particular type of skeleton. (See the Anthropology Applied feature to read about the work of several forensic anthropologists and forensic archaeologists.)

Primatology

Studying the anatomy and behavior of the other primates helps us understand what we share with our closest living relatives and what makes humans unique. Therefore, **primatology**, or the study of living and fossil primates, is a vital part of physical anthropology. Primates include the Asian and African apes, as well as monkeys, lemurs, lorises, and tarsiers. Biologically, humans are apes—large-bodied, broad-shouldered primates with no tail. Detailed studies of ape behavior in the wild indicate that the sharing of learned behavior is a significant part of their social life. Increasingly, primatologists designate the shared, learned behavior of nonhuman apes as culture. For example, tool use and communication systems indicate the elementary basis of language in some ape societies.

Primate studies offer scientifically grounded perspectives on the behavior of our ancestors, as well as greater appreciation and respect for the abilities of our closest living relatives. As human activity encroaches on

all parts of the world, many primate species are endangered. Primatologists often advocate for the preservation of primate habitats so that these remarkable animals will continue to inhabit the earth with us.

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology (also called *social* or *sociocultural anthropology*) is the study of customary patterns in human behavior, thought, and feelings. It focuses on humans as culture-producing and culture-reproducing creatures. Thus, in order to understand the work of the cultural anthropologist, we must clarify what we mean by **culture**—a society's shared and socially transmitted ideas, values, and perceptions, which are used to make sense of experience and which generate behavior and are reflected in that behavior. These standards are socially learned, rather than acquired through biological inheritance. Because they determine, or at least guide, normal day-to-day behavior, thought, and emotional patterns of the members of a society, human activities, ideas, and feelings are above all culturally acquired and influenced. The manifestations of culture may vary considerably from place to place, but no person is "more cultured" in the anthropological sense than any other.

Cultural anthropology has two main components: ethnography and ethnology. An **ethnography** is a detailed description of a particular culture primarily based on **fieldwork**, which is the term anthropologists use for on-location research. Because the hallmark of ethnographic fieldwork is a combination of social participation and personal observation within the community being studied, as well as interviews and discussions with individual members of a group, the ethnographic method is commonly referred to as **participant observation**.

forensic anthropology Applied subfield of physical anthropology that specializes in the identification of human skeletal remains for legal purposes.

primatology The study of living and fossil primates.

cultural anthropology Also known as social or sociocultural anthropology. The study of customary patterns in human behavior, thought, and feelings. It focuses on humans as culture-producing and culture-reproducing creatures.

culture A society's shared and socially transmitted ideas, values, and perceptions, which are used to make sense of experience and which generate behavior and are reflected in that behavior.

ethnography A detailed description of a particular culture primarily based on fieldwork.

fieldwork The term anthropologists use for on-location research.

participant observation In ethnography, the technique of learning a people's culture through social participation and personal observation within the community being studied, as well as interviews and discussion with individual members of the group over an extended period of time.

Anthropology Applied

Forensic Anthropology: Voices for the Dead ■ Clyde C. Snow, Karen Burns, Amy Zelson Mundorff, and Michael Blakey

Forensic anthropology is the analysis of skeletal remains for legal purposes. Law enforcement authorities call upon forensic anthropologists to use skeletal remains to identify murder victims, missing persons, or people who have died in disasters, such as plane crashes. Forensic anthropologists have also contributed substantially to the investigation of human rights abuses in all parts of the world by identifying victims and documenting the cause of their death.

Among the best-known forensic anthropologists is Clyde C. Snow. He has been practicing in this field forty years, first for the Federal Aviation Administration and more recently as a freelance consultant. In addition to the usual police work, Snow has studied the remains of General George Armstrong Custer and his men from the 1876 battlefield at Little Big Horn, and in 1985 he went to Brazil, where he identified the remains of the notorious Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele.

He was also instrumental in establishing the first forensic team devoted to documenting cases of human rights abuses around the world. This began in 1984 when he went to Argentina at the request of a newly elected civilian gov-

ernment to help with the identification of remains of the *desaparecidos*, or "disappeared ones," the 9,000 or more people who were eliminated by government death squads during seven years of military rule. A year later, he returned to give expert testimony at the trial of nine junta members and to teach Argentineans how to recover, clean, repair, preserve, photograph, x-ray, and analyze bones. Besides providing factual accounts of the fate of victims to their surviving kin and refuting the assertions of revisionists that the massacres never happened, the work of Snow and his Argentinean associates was crucial in convicting several military officers of kidnapping, torture, and murder.

Since Snow's pioneering work, forensic anthropologists have become increasingly involved in the investigation of human rights abuses in all parts of the world, from Chile to Guatemala, Haiti, the Philippines, Rwanda, Iraq, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Meanwhile, they continue to do important work for more typical clients. In the United States these clients include the Federal Bureau of Investigation and city, state, and county medical examiners' offices.

Forensic anthropologists specializing in skeletal remains commonly work closely with forensic archaeologists.



© Susan Meiselas/Magnum Photos

Physical anthropologists do not just study fossil skulls. Here Clyde Snow holds the skull of a Kurd who was executed by Iraqi security forces. Snow specializes in forensic anthropology and is best known for his work identifying victims of state-sponsored terrorism.

Ethnographies provide the information used to make systematic comparisons among cultures all across the world. Known as **ethnology**, such cross-cultural research allows anthropologists to develop anthropological theories that help explain why certain important differences or similarities occur among groups.

Ethnography

Through participant observation—eating a people's food, sleeping under their roof, learning how to speak and behave acceptably, and personally experiencing their habits

ethnology The study and analysis of different cultures from a comparative or historical point of view, utilizing ethnographic accounts and developing anthropological theories that help explain why certain important differences or similarities occur among groups.

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The relation between them is rather like that between a forensic pathologist, who examines a corpse to establish time and manner of death, and a crime scene investigator, who searches the site for clues. While the forensic anthropologist deals with the human remains—often only bones and teeth—the forensic archaeologist controls the site, recording the position of all relevant finds and recovering any clues associated with the remains. In Rwanda, for example, a team assembled in 1995 to investigate a mass atrocity for the United Nations included archaeologists from the U.S. National Park Service's Midwest Archaeological Center. They performed the standard archaeological procedures of mapping the site, determining its boundaries, photographing and recording all surface finds, and excavating, photographing, and recording buried skeletons and associated materials in mass graves.^a

In another example, Karen Burns of the University of Georgia was part of a team sent to northern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War to investigate alleged atrocities. On a military base where there had

^aConner, M. (1996). The archaeology of contemporary mass graves. *SAA Bulletin* 14(4), 6, 31.

been many executions, she excavated the remains of a man's body found lying on its side facing Mecca, conforming to Islamic practice. Although there was no intact clothing, two threads of polyester used to sew clothing were found along the sides of both legs. Although the threads survived, the clothing, because it was made of natural fiber, had decayed. "Those two threads at each side of the leg just shouted that his family didn't bury him," says Burns.^b Proper though his position was, no Islamic family would bury their own in a garment sewn with polyester thread; proper ritual would require a simple shroud.

In recent years two major anthropological analyses of skeletal remains have occurred in New York City dealing with both past and present atrocities. Amy Zelson Mundorff, a forensic anthropologist for New York City's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, was injured in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Two days later she returned to work to supervise and coordinate the management, treatment, and cataloguing of people who lost their lives in the attack.

^bCornwell, T. (1995, November 10). Skeleton staff. *Times Higher Education*, 20.

Just a short walk away, construction workers in lower Manhattan discovered a 17th- and 18th-century African burial ground in 1991. Archaeological investigation of the burial ground revealed the horror of slavery in North America, showing that even young children were worked so far beyond their ability to endure that their spines were fractured. Biological archaeologist Michael Blakey, who led the research team, notes:

Although bioarchaeology and forensics are often confused, when skeletal biologists use the population as the unit of analysis (rather than the individual), and incorporate cultural and historical context (rather than simply ascribing biological characteristics), and report on the lifeways of a past community (rather than on a crime for the police and courts), it is bioarchaeology rather than forensics.^c

Thus, several kinds of anthropologists analyze human remains for a variety of purposes, contributing to the documentation and correction of atrocities committed by humans of the past and present.

^cBlakey, M. Personal communication, October 29, 2003.

and customs—the ethnographer seeks to understand a particular way of life to a far greater extent than any non-participant researcher ever could. Being a participant observer does not mean that the anthropologist must join in a people's battles in order to study a culture in which warfare is prominent; but by living among a warlike people, the ethnographer should be able to understand how warfare fits into the overall cultural framework. She or he must observe carefully to gain an overview without placing too much emphasis on one part at the expense of another. Only by discovering how *all* aspects of a culture—its social, political, economic, and religious practices and institutions—relate to one another can the ethnographer begin to understand the cultural system. This is the holistic perspective so basic to the discipline.

The popular image of ethnographic fieldwork is that it occurs among people who live in far-off, isolated places. To be sure, much ethnographic work has been done in the remote villages of Africa or South America,

the islands of the Pacific Ocean, the Indian reservations of North America, the deserts of Australia, and so on. However, as the discipline of anthropology developed in response to the end of colonialism since the mid-20th century, peoples and cultures in industrialized nations, including Europe and the United States, also became a legitimate focus of anthropological study. Some of this shift occurred as scholars from non-Western nations became anthropologists. An even more significant factor is *globalization*, a worldwide process that rapidly transforms cultures—shifting, blurring, and even breaking long-established boundaries between different peoples.

Ethnographic fieldwork has changed from anthropological experts observing, documenting, and analyzing people from distant "other places" to collaborative efforts among anthropologists and the communities in which they work, producing knowledge that is valuable not only in the academic realm but also to the people being studied. Today, anthropologists from all parts of the globe

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employ research techniques similar to those developed in the study of traditional non-Western peoples to investigate a wide range of cultural niches, including those in industrial and postindustrial societies—from religious movements to conflict resolution, street gangs, schools, corporate bureaucracies, and health-care systems.

Ethnology

Although ethnographic fieldwork is basic to cultural anthropology, it is not the sole occupation of the cultural anthropologist. Largely descriptive in nature, ethnography provides the raw data needed for ethnology—the branch of cultural anthropology that involves cross-cultural comparisons and theories that explain differences or similarities among groups.

Intriguing insights into one's own beliefs and practices may come from cross-cultural comparisons. Consider, for example, the amount of time spent on domestic chores by industrialized peoples and traditional food foragers (people who rely on wild plant and animal resources for subsistence). Anthropological research among food foragers has shown that they work far less at domestic tasks, and indeed less at all subsistence pursuits, than do people in industrialized societies. Urban women in the United States who were not working for wages outside their homes put 55 hours a week into their housework—this despite all the “labor-saving” dishwashers, washing machines, clothes dryers, vacuum cleaners, food processors, and microwave ovens; in contrast, aboriginal women in Australia devoted 20 hours a week to their chores.³

Considering such cross-cultural comparisons, one may think of ethnology as the study of alternative ways of doing things. But more than that, by making systematic comparisons, ethnologists seek to arrive at scientific conclusions concerning the function and operation of cultural practices in all times and places. Today many cultural anthropologists apply such insights in a variety of contexts ranging from business to education to governmental interventions to humanitarian aid.

Archaeology

Archaeology is the field of anthropology that studies human cultures through the recovery and analysis of material remains and environmental data. Material products scrutinized by archaeologists include tools, pottery, hearths, and enclosures that remain as traces of cultural

³Bodley, J. H. (1985). *Anthropology and contemporary human problems* (2nd ed., p. 69). Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield.

archaeology The study of human cultures through the recovery and analysis of material remains and environmental data.

practices in the past, as well as human, plant, and animal remains, some of which date back 2.5 million years. The details of exactly how these traces were arranged when they were found reflect specific human ideas and behavior. For example, shallow, restricted concentrations of charcoal that include oxidized earth, bone fragments, and charred plant remains, located near pieces of fire-cracked rock, pottery, and tools suitable for food preparation, indicate cooking and food processing. Such remains can reveal much about a people's diet and subsistence practices. Together with skeletal remains, these material remains help archaeologists reconstruct the biocultural context of human life in the past.

Archaeologists can reach back for clues to human behavior far beyond the mere 5,000 years to which historians are confined by their reliance on written records. Calling this time period “prehistoric” does not mean that these societies were less interested in their history or that they did not have ways of recording and transmitting history. It simply means that written records do not now exist. That said, archaeologists are not limited to the study of societies without written records; they may also study those for which historic documents are available to supplement the material remains. In most literate societies, written records are associated with governing elites rather than with farmers, fishers, laborers, or slaves. Although written records can tell archaeologists much that might not be known from archaeological evidence alone, it is equally true that material remains can tell historians much about a society that is not apparent from its written documents.

Although most archaeologists concentrate on the human past, some of them study material objects in contemporary settings. One example is the Garbage Project, founded by William Rathje at the University of Arizona in 1973. This carefully controlled study of household waste continues to produce thought-provoking information about contemporary social issues. Among its accomplishments, the project has tested the validity of survey techniques, upon which sociologists, economists, and other social scientists and policymakers rely heavily.

For example, in 1973 conventional techniques were used to construct and administer a questionnaire to find out about the rate of alcohol consumption in Tucson. In one part of town, 15 percent of respondent households affirmed consumption of beer, but no household reported consumption of more than eight cans a week. Analysis of garbage from the same area, however, demonstrated that some beer was consumed in over 80 percent of households, and 50 percent discarded more than eight empty cans a week. Another interesting finding of the Garbage Project is that when beef prices reached an all-time high in 1973, so did the amount of beef wasted by households (not just in Tucson but in other parts of the country as well). Although common sense would lead us to suppose



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Few places have caused as much speculation as Rapa Nui, a tiny volcanic island in the middle of the southern Pacific Ocean. Better known as Easter Island, it is one of the most remote and remarkable places on earth. The landscape is punctuated by nearly 900 colossal stone "heads," some towering to 65 feet. The islanders call them *moai*, and they have puzzled visitors ever since Dutch seafarers first discovered the island on Easter Day, 1722. By then, it was a barren land with a few thousand people for whom the *moai* were already ancient relics. Since the 1930s, anthropologists have used evidence from many subfields, especially oral traditions and archaeological excavations, to reconstruct a fascinating but troubling island history of environmental destruction and internal warfare.⁴

just the opposite, high prices and scarcity correlate with more, rather than less, waste. Such findings are important for they demonstrate that ideas about human behavior based on conventional interview-survey techniques alone can be seriously in error. Likewise, they show that what people actually do does not always match what they think they do.

In 1987, the Garbage Project began a program of excavating landfills in different parts of the United States and Canada. From this work came the first reliable data on what materials actually go into landfills and what happens to them there. And once again, common beliefs turned out to be at odds with the actual situation. For example, biodegradable materials such as newspapers take far longer to decay when buried in deep compost landfills than anyone had previously expected. This kind of information is a vital step toward solving waste disposal problems.⁵

Cultural Resource Management

While archaeology may conjure up images of ancient pyramids and the like, much archaeological research is carried out as **cultural resource management**. This branch of archaeology is tied to government policies for

the protection of cultural resources and involves surveying and/or excavating archaeological and historical remains threatened by construction or development. For example, in the United States, if the transportation department of a state government plans to replace an inadequate highway bridge, steps have to be taken to identify and protect any significant prehistoric or historic resources that might be affected by this new construction. Federal legislation passed since the mid-1960s now requires cultural resource management for any building project that is partially funded or licensed by the U.S. government. As a result, the practice of cultural resource management has flourished. Many archaeologists are employed by such agencies as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Soil and Conservation Service to assist in the preservation, restoration, and salvage of archaeological resources.

Archaeologists are also employed by state historic preservation agencies. Moreover, they consult for engineering firms to help them prepare environmental impact statements. Some of these archaeologists operate out of universities and colleges, while others are on the staffs of independent consulting firms. Finally, some archaeologists now also work for American Indian nations involved in cultural resource management on reservation lands.

cultural resource management A branch of archaeology tied to government policies for the protection of cultural resources and involving surveying and/or excavating archaeological and historical remains threatened by construction or development.

⁴For more information, see the following: Anderson, A. (2002). Faunal collapse, landscape change, and settlement history in Remote Oceania. *World Archaeology* 33(3), 375–390; Van Tilburg, J. A. (1994). *Easter Island: Archaeology, ecology, and culture*. London: British Museum Press.

⁵Details about the Garbage Project's past and present work can be seen on its website: <http://info-center.ccit.arizona.edu/~bara/report.htm>.

Linguistic Anthropology

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the human species is language. Although the sounds and gestures made by some other animals—especially by apes—may serve functions comparable to those of human language, no other animal has developed a system of symbolic communication as complex as that of humans. Language allows people to preserve and transmit countless details of their culture from generation to generation.

The field of anthropology that studies human languages is called **linguistic anthropology**. Linguists may deal with the description of a language (such as the way a sentence is formed or a verb conjugated), the history of languages (the way languages develop and change with the passage of time), or with language in relation to social and cultural contexts. All three approaches yield valuable information about how people communicate and how they understand the world around them. The everyday language of English-speaking North Americans, for example, includes a number of slang words, such as *dough*, *greenback*, *dust*, *loot*, *bucks*, *change*, and *bread*, to identify what an indigenous inhabitant of Papua New Guinea would recognize only as “money.” The profusion of names helps to identify a thing of special importance to a culture.

Anthropological linguists also make a significant contribution to our understanding of the human past. By working out relationships among languages and examining their spatial distributions, they may estimate how long the speakers of those languages have lived where they do. By identifying those words in related languages that have survived from an ancient ancestral tongue, they can also suggest not only where, but how, the speakers of the ancestral language lived. Such work shows linguistic ties between geographically distant groups such as the people of Finland and Turkey.

Linguistic anthropology is practiced in a number of applied settings. For example, linguistic anthropologists have collaborated with indigenous communities and ethnic minorities in the preservation or revival of languages lost during periods of oppression by dominant societies. Anthropologists have helped to create written forms of some languages that previously existed only by word of mouth. These examples of applied linguistic anthropology represent the kind of true collaboration that is characteristic of much anthropological fieldwork today.

linguistic anthropology The study of human languages, looking at their structure, history, and/or relation to social and cultural contexts.

empirical Based on observations of the world rather than on intuition or faith.

hypothesis A tentative explanation of the relation between certain phenomena.

ANTHROPOLOGY, SCIENCE, AND THE HUMANITIES

Anthropology has been called the most humane of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities—a designation that most anthropologists accept with pride. Given their intense involvement with people of all times and places, it should come as no surprise that anthropologists have amassed considerable information about human failure and success, weakness and greatness—the real stuff of the humanities. While anthropologists steer clear of an impersonal scientific approach that reduces people and the things they do and think to mere numbers, their quantitative studies have contributed substantially to the scientific study of the human condition. But even the most scientific anthropologists always keep in mind that human societies are made up of individuals with rich assortments of emotions and aspirations that demand respect.

Beyond this, anthropologists remain committed to the proposition that one cannot fully understand another culture by simply observing it; as the term *participant observation* implies, one must *experience* it as well. This same commitment to fieldwork and to the systematic collection of data, whether it is qualitative or quantitative, is also evidence of the scientific side of anthropology. Anthropology is an **empirical** social science based in observations about humans. But what distinguishes anthropology from other sciences are the diverse ways in which scientific research is conducted within anthropology.

Science, a carefully honed way of producing knowledge, aims to reveal and explain the underlying logic, the structural processes that make the world “tick.” It is a creative endeavor that seeks testable explanations for observed phenomena, ideally in terms of the workings of hidden but unchanging principles, or laws. Two basic ingredients are essential for this: imagination and skepticism. Imagination, though capable of leading us astray, is required to help us recognize unexpected ways phenomena might be ordered and to think of old things in new ways. Without it, there can be no science. Skepticism is what allows us to distinguish fact (an observation verified by others) from fancy, to test our speculations, and to prevent our imaginations from running away with us.

In their search for explanations, scientists do not assume that things are always as they appear on the surface. After all, what could be more obvious than that the earth is a stable entity, around which the sun travels every day? And yet, it isn’t so.

Like other scientists, anthropologists often begin their research with a **hypothesis** (a tentative explanation or hunch) about the possible relationships between certain observed facts or events. By gathering various kinds of data that seem to ground such suggested explanations on evidence, anthropologists come up with a

Anthropologists of Note

Franz Boas (1858–1942) ■ Matilda Coxe Stevenson (1849–1915)

Franz Boas was not the first to teach anthropology in the United States, but it was he and his students, with their insistence on scientific rigor, who made anthropology courses a common part of college and university curricula. Born and raised in Germany, where he studied physics, mathematics, and geography, Boas did his first ethnographic research among the Inuit (Eskimos) in Arctic Canada in 1883–1884. After a brief academic career in Berlin, he came to the United States. There, after work in museums interspersed with ethnographic research among Kwakiutl Indians in the Canadian Pacific, he became a professor at Columbia University in New York City in 1896. He authored an incredible number of publications, founded professional organizations and journals, and taught



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two generations of great anthropologists, including numerous women and ethnic minorities.

As a Jewish immigrant, Boas recognized the dangers of ethnocentrism and especially racism. Through ethnographic fieldwork and comparative analysis, he demonstrated that white supremacy theories and other schemes ranking non-European peoples and cultures as inferior were biased, ill-informed, and unscientific. Throughout his long and illustrious academic career, he not only promoted anthropology as a human science but also as an instrument to combat racism and prejudice in the world.

Among the founders of North American anthropology were a number of women who were highly influential among women's rights advocates in the late 1800s. One such pioneering anthropologist was **Matilda Coxe Stevenson**, who did fieldwork among the Zuni Indians of Arizona. In 1885, she founded the Women's Anthropological Society in Washington, D.C., the first professional association for women scientists. Three years later, hired by the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology, she became one of the first women in the world to receive a full-time official position in science.

The tradition of women being active in anthropology continues. In fact,



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since World War II more than half the presidents of the now 12,000-member American Anthropological Association have been women.

Recording observations on film as well as in notebooks, Stevenson and Boas were also pioneers in visual anthropology. Stevenson used an early box camera to document Pueblo Indian religious ceremonies and material culture, while Boas photographed Inuit (Eskimos) in northern Canada in 1883 and Kwakiutl Indians from the early 1890s for cultural as well as physical anthropological documentation. Today, these old photographs are greatly valued not only by anthropologists and historians, but also by indigenous peoples themselves.

theory—an explanation supported by a reliable body of data. In their effort to demonstrate linkages between known facts or events, anthropologists may discover unexpected facts, events, or relationships. An important function of theory is that it guides us in our explorations and may result in new knowledge. Equally important, the newly discovered facts may provide evidence that certain explanations, however popular or firmly believed to be true, are unfounded. When the evidence is lacking or fails to support the suggested explanations, anthropologists are forced to drop promising hypotheses or attractive hunches. In other words, anthropology relies on empirical evidence. Moreover, no scientific theory, no matter how widely accepted by the international community of scholars, is beyond challenge.

Straightforward though the scientific approach may seem, its application is not always easy. For instance, once a hypothesis has been proposed, the person who

suggested it is strongly motivated to verify it, and this can cause one to unwittingly overlook negative evidence and unanticipated findings. This is a familiar problem in all science as noted by paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould: “The greatest impediment to scientific innovation is usually a conceptual lock, not a factual lock.”⁶ Because culture provides humans with their concepts and shapes our very thoughts, it can be challenging to frame hypotheses or develop interpretations that are not culture-bound. By encompassing both humanism and science, the discipline of anthropology can draw on its internal diversity to overcome conceptual locks.

⁶Gould, S. J. (1989). *Wonderful life* (p. 226). New York: Norton.

theory In science, an explanation of natural phenomena, supported by a reliable body of data.

Fieldwork

All anthropologists are aware that personal and cultural background may shape their research questions and, more importantly, modify or even distort their actual observations. Engaging in such critical self-reflection, they rely on a technique that also has proved successful in other disciplines: They immerse themselves in the data to the fullest extent possible. In the process, anthropologists become so thoroughly familiar with even the smallest details that they may begin to identify possible relationships and underlying patterns in the data. Recognition of such suspected relationships and patterns enables anthropologists to frame meaningful hypotheses, which then may be subjected to further testing on location or “in the field.” Within anthropology, such fieldwork brings additional rigor to the concept of total immersion in the data.

Touched upon above in our discussion of cultural anthropology, fieldwork is also characteristic of the other anthropological subdisciplines. Archaeologists and paleoanthropologists excavate sites in the field. A biological anthropologist interested in the effects of globalization on nutrition and human growth will reside in the particular community of people selected for study. A primatologist might live among a group of chimpanzees or baboons just as a linguist will study the language of a people by living among them and sharing their daily life. Fieldwork, being on location and fully immersed in another way of life, challenges the anthropologist to be constantly aware of the possible ways that otherwise unsuspected cultural factors may influence the research questions, observations, and explanations.

Fieldwork requires researchers to step out of their

cultural comfort zone into a world that is unfamiliar and sometimes unsettling. Anthropologists in the field are likely to face a host of challenges—physical, social, mental, political, and ethical. They may have to deal with the physical challenge of adjusting to unfamiliar food, climate, and hygiene conditions. Typically, anthropologists in the field struggle with such mental challenges as loneliness, feeling like a perpetual outsider, being socially clumsy and clueless in their new cultural setting, and having to be alert around the clock because anything that is happening or being said may be significant to their research. Political challenges include the possibility of unwittingly letting oneself be used by factions within the community or being viewed with hostility by government authorities who may suspect the anthropologist is a spy. And there are ethical dilemmas: what to do if faced with a cultural practice one finds troubling, such as female circumcision; how to deal with demands for food supplies and/or medicine; how to handle the temptation to use deception to gain vital information; and so on.

At the same time, fieldwork often leads to tangible and meaningful personal, professional, and social rewards, ranging from lasting friendships to vital knowledge and insights concerning the human condition that make positive contributions to people’s lives. Something of the meaning of anthropological fieldwork—its usefulness and its impact on researcher and subject—is conveyed in the following Original Study by Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, an anthropologist who left her familiar New England surroundings two decades ago to do AIDS research among Zulu-speaking people in South Africa. Her research interest has changed the course of her own life, not to mention the lives of individuals who have HIV/AIDS and the type of treatment they receive.

Original Study ■ By Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala

Fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa: Traditional Healers on the Front Line

In the 1980s, as a North American anthropology graduate student at George Washington University, I met and married a Zulu-speaking student from South Africa. It was the height of apartheid, and upon moving to that country I was classified as “honorary black” and forced to live in a segregated township with my husband. The AIDS epidemic was in its infancy, but it was clear from the start that an anthropological understanding of how people perceive and engage with this disease would be crucial for developing interventions. I wanted to learn all

that I could to make a difference, and this culminated in earning a Ph.D. from the University of Natal on the cultural construction of AIDS among the Zulu. The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa became my professional passion.

Faced with overwhelming global health-care needs, the World Health Organization passed a series of resolutions in the 1970s promoting collaboration between traditional and modern medicine. Such moves held a special relevance for Africa where traditional healers typically outnumber practitioners



of modern medicine by a ratio of 100 to 1 or more. Given Africa’s disproportionate burden of disease, supporting partnership efforts with traditional healers makes sense. But what sounds sensible today

was once considered absurd, even heretical. For centuries Westerners generally viewed traditional healing as a whole lot of primitive mumbo jumbo practiced by witchdoctors with demonic powers who perpetuated superstition. Yet, its practice survived. Today, as the African continent grapples with an HIV/AIDS epidemic of crisis proportion, millions of sick people who are either too poor or too distant to access modern health care are proving that traditional healers are an invaluable resource in the fight against AIDS.

Of the world's estimated 40 million people currently infected by HIV, 70 percent live in sub-Saharan Africa, and the vast majority of children left orphaned by AIDS are African. From the 1980s onward, as Africa became synonymous with the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS, a number of prevention programs involved traditional healers. My initial research in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province—where it is estimated that 36 percent of the population is HIV infected—revealed that traditional Zulu healers were regularly consulted for the treatment of sexually transmitted disease (STD). I found that such diseases, along with HIV/AIDS, were usually attributed to transgressions of taboos

related to birth, pregnancy, marriage, and death. Moreover, these diseases were often understood within a framework of pollution and contagion, and like most serious illnesses, ultimately believed to have their causal roots in witchcraft.

In the course of my research, I investigated a pioneer program in STD and HIV education for traditional healers in the province. The program aimed to provide basic biomedical knowledge about the various modes of disease transmission, the means available for prevention, the diagnosing of symptoms, the keeping of records, and the making of patient referrals to local clinics and hospitals.

Interviews with the healers showed that many maintained a deep suspicion of modern medicine. They perceived AIDS education as a one-way street intended to press them into formal health struc-

tures and convince them of the superiority of modern medicine. Yet, today, few of the 6,000-plus KwaZulu-Natal healers who have been trained in AIDS education say they would opt for less collaboration; most want to have more.

Treatments by Zulu healers for HIV/AIDS often take the form of infusions of bitter herbs to "cleanse" the body, strengthen the blood, and remove misfortune and "pollution." Some treatments provide effective relief from common ailments associated with AIDS such as itchy skin rashes, oral thrush, persistent diarrhea, and general debility. Indigenous plants such as *unwele* (*Sutherlandia*



Medical anthropologist Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala visits with "Doctor" Koloko in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This Zulu traditional healer proudly displays her official AIDS training certificate.

frutescens) and African potato (*Hyppoxis hemerocallidea*) are well-known traditional medicines that have proven immuno-boosting properties.

Both have recently become available in modern pharmacies packaged in tablet form. With modern anti-retroviral treatments still well beyond the reach of most South Africans, indigenous medicines that can delay or alleviate some of the suffering caused by AIDS are proving to be valuable and popular treatments.

Knowledge about potentially infectious bodily fluids has led healers to change some of their practices. Where porcupine quills were once used to give a type of indigenous injection, patients are now advised to bring their own sewing needles to consultations. Patients provide their own individual razor blades for making incisions on their skin, where

previously healers reused the same razor on many clients. Some healers claim they have given up the practice of biting clients' skin to remove foreign objects from the body. It is not uncommon today, especially in urban centers like Durban, to find healers proudly displaying AIDS training certificates in their inner-city "surgeries" where they don white jackets and wear protective latex gloves.

Politics and controversy have dogged South Africa's official response to HIV/AIDS. But back home in the waddle-and-daub, animal-skin-draped herbariums and divining huts of traditional healers, the politics of AIDS holds little relevance.

Here the sick and dying are coming in droves to be treated by healers who have been part and parcel of community life (and death) since time immemorial. In many cases traditional healers have transformed their homes into hospices for AIDS patients. Because of the strong stigma that still plagues the disease, those with AIDS symptoms are often abandoned or sometimes chased away from their homes by family members. They seek refuge with healers who provide them with comfort in their final days. Healers' homes are also becoming orphanages as healers respond to what has been called the "third wave"

of AIDS destruction: the growing legions of orphaned children.

The practice of traditional healing in Africa is adapting to the changing face of health and illness in the context of HIV/AIDS. But those who are suffering go to traditional healers not only in search of relief for physical symptoms. They go to learn about the ultimate cause of their disease—something other than the immediate cause of a sexually transmitted "germ" or "virus." They go to find answers to the "why me and not him" questions, the "why now" and "why this." As with most traditional healing systems worldwide, healing among the Zulu and most all African ethnic groups cannot be separated from the spiritual concerns of the individual and the cosmological beliefs of the community at large. Traditional heal-

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ers help to restore a sense of balance between the individual and the community, on one hand, and between the individual and the cosmos, or ancestors, on the other hand. They provide health care that is personalized, culturally appropriate, holistic, and tailored to meet the needs and expectations of the patient. In many ways it is a far more satisfactory form

of healing than that offered by modern medicine.

Traditional healing in Africa is flourishing in the era of AIDS, and understanding why this is so requires a shift in the conceptual framework by which we understand, explain, and interpret health. Anthropological methods and its comparative and holistic perspective

can facilitate, like no other discipline, the type of understanding that is urgently needed to address the AIDS crisis.

(By Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala. Adapted in part from S. Leclerc-Madlala (2002).

Bodies and politics: Healing rituals in the democratic South Africa. In V. Faure (Ed.), Les cahiers de l'IFAS, No. 2. Johannesburg: The French Institute.) ■

ANTHROPOLOGY'S COMPARATIVE METHOD

The end product of anthropological research, if properly carried out, is a coherent statement about a people that provides an explanatory framework for understanding the beliefs, behavior, or biology of those who have been studied. And this, in turn, is what permits the anthropologist to frame broader hypotheses about human beliefs, behavior, and biology. A single instance of any phenomenon is generally insufficient for supporting a plausible hypothesis. Without some basis for comparison, the hypothesis grounded in a single case may be no more than a particular historical coincidence. On the other hand, a single case may be enough to cast doubt on, if not refute, a theory that had previously been held to be valid. For example, the discovery in 1948 that aborigines living in Australia's northern Arnhem Land put in an average workday of less than 6 hours, while living well above a level of bare sufficiency, was enough to call into question the widely accepted notion that food-foraging peoples are so preoccupied with finding scarce food that they lack time for any of life's more pleasurable activities. The observations made in the Arnhem Land study have since been confirmed many times over in various parts of the world.

Hypothetical explanations of cultural and biological phenomena may be tested through comparison of archaeological, biological, linguistic, historical, and/or ethnographic data for several societies found in a particular region. Carefully controlled comparison provides a broader basis for drawing general conclusions about humans than does the study of a single culture or population. The anthropologist who undertakes such a comparison may be more confident that events or features believed to be related really are related, at least within the area under investigation; however, an explanation that is valid in one area is not necessarily so in another.

Ideally, theories in anthropology are generated from worldwide comparisons or comparisons across species or

through time. Anthropologists examine a global sample of societies in order to discover whether or not hypotheses proposed to explain cultural phenomena or biological variation are universally applicable. However, cross-cultural researchers depend upon data gathered by other scholars as well as their own. Similarly, archaeologists and biological anthropologists rely on artifacts and skeletal collections housed in museums, as well as published descriptions of these collections.

QUESTIONS OF ETHICS

The kinds of research carried out by anthropologists, and the settings within which they work, raise a number of important moral questions about the potential uses and abuses of our knowledge. Who will utilize our findings and for what purposes? Who decides what research questions are asked? Who, if anyone, will profit from the research? For example, in the case of research on an ethnic or religious minority whose values may be at odds with dominant mainstream society, will governmental or corporate interests use anthropological data to suppress that group? And what of traditional communities around the world? Who is to decide what changes should, or should not, be introduced for community "betterment"? And who defines what constitutes betterment—the community, a national government, or an international agency like the World Health Organization? What are the limits of cultural relativism when a traditional practice is considered a human rights abuse globally?

Then there is the problem of privacy. Anthropologists deal with matters that are private and sensitive, including things that individuals would prefer not to have generally known about them. How does one write about such important but delicate issues and at the same time protect the privacy of the individuals who have shared their stories? The American Anthropological Association (AAA) maintains a Statement of Ethics, which is regularly examined and modified to reflect the practice of anthropology in a changing world. This educational document lays out the rules and ideals applicable to an-

thropologists in all the subdisciplines. While the AAA has no legal authority, it does issue policy statements on research ethics questions as they come up. For example, recently the AAA recommended that field notes from medical settings should be protected and not subject to subpoena in malpractice lawsuits. This honors the ethical imperative to protect the privacy of individuals who have shared their stories with anthropologists.

Anthropologists recognize that they have special obligations to three sets of people: those whom they study, those who fund the research, and those in the profession who expect us to publish our findings so that they may be used to further our collective knowledge. Because fieldwork requires a relationship of trust between fieldworkers and the community in which they work, the anthropologist's first responsibility clearly is to the individuals who have shared their stories and the greater community. Everything possible must be done to protect their physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor their dignity and privacy. This task is frequently complex. For example, telling the story of a group of people gives information both to relief agencies who might help them and to others who might take advantage of them.

While anthropologists regard as basic a people's right to maintain their own culture, any connections with outsiders can endanger the cultural identity of the community being studied. To overcome these obstacles, anthropologists frequently collaborate with and contribute to the communities in which they are working, allowing the people being studied to have some say about how their stories are told.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND GLOBALIZATION

A holistic perspective and a long-term commitment to understanding the human species in all its variety is the essence of anthropology. Thus, anthropology is well equipped to grapple with an issue that has overriding importance for all of us at the beginning of the 21st century: **globalization**. This term refers to worldwide interconnectedness, evidenced in global movements of natural resources, human labor, finance capital, information, infectious diseases, and trade goods (including human organs as described in this chapter's Globalscape). Although worldwide travel, trade relations, and information flow have existed for several centuries, the pace and magnitude of these long-distance exchanges has picked up enormously in recent decades; the Internet, in particular, has greatly expanded information exchange capacities.

The powerful forces driving globalization are technological innovations, lower transportation and commu-

nication costs, faster knowledge transfers, and increased trade and financial integration among countries. Touching almost everybody's life on the planet, globalization is about economics as much as politics, and it changes human relations and ideas as well as our natural environments. Even geographically remote communities are quickly becoming more interdependent through globalization.

Doing research in all corners of the world, anthropologists are confronted with the impact of globalization on human communities wherever they are located. As participant observers, they describe and try to explain how individuals and organizations respond to the massive changes confronting them. Anthropologists may also find out how local responses sometimes change the global flows directed at them.

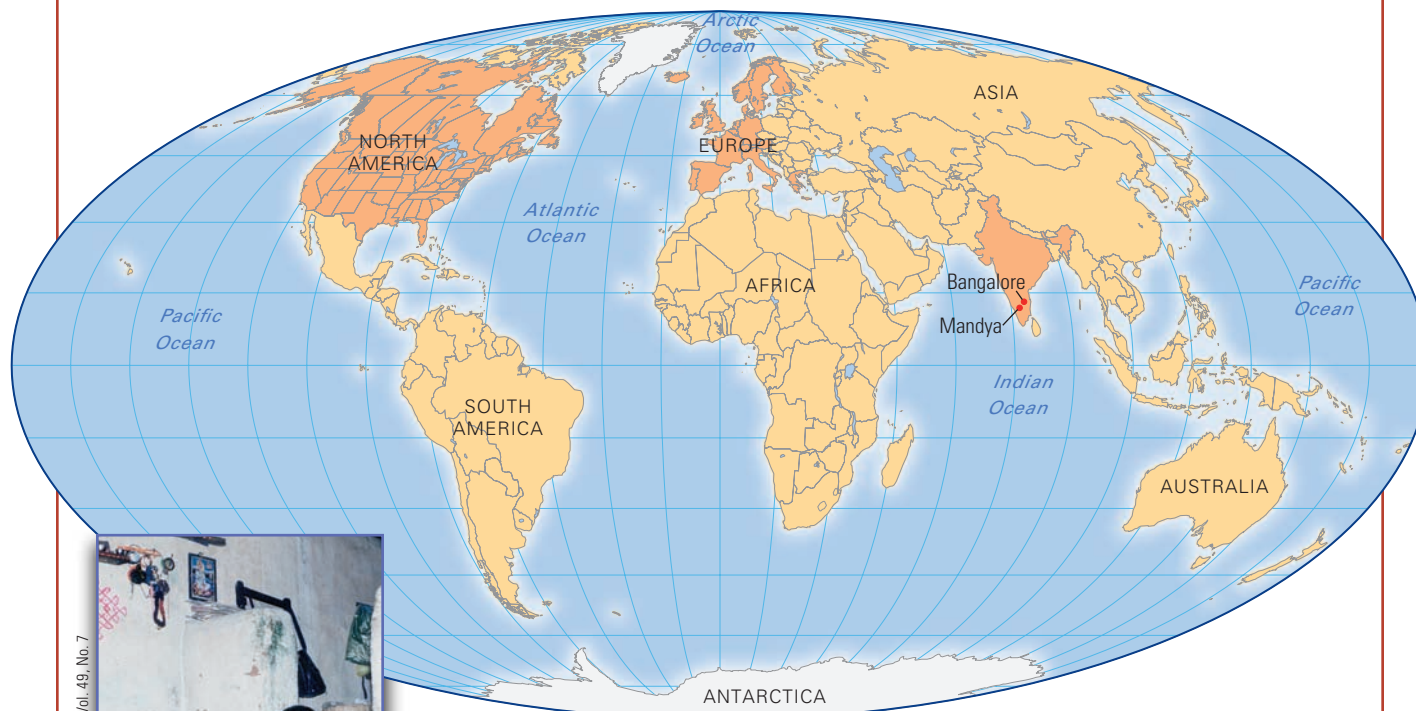
Dramatically increasing every year, globalization can be a two-edged sword. It may generate economic growth and prosperity, but it also undermines long-established institutions. Generally, globalization has brought significant gains to higher-educated groups in wealthier countries, while doing little to boost developing countries and actually contributing to the erosion of traditional cultures. Upheavals born of globalization are key causes for rising levels of ethnic and religious conflict throughout the world.

Since all of us now live in a global village, we can no longer afford the luxury of ignoring our neighbors, no matter how distant they may seem. In this age of globalization, anthropology may not only provide humanity with useful insights concerning diversity, but it may also assist us in avoiding or overcoming significant problems born of that diversity. In countless social arenas, from schools to businesses to hospitals to emergency centers, anthropologists have done cross-cultural research that makes it possible for educators, businesspeople, doctors, and humanitarians to do their work more effectively.

The wide-ranging relevance of anthropological knowledge in today's world may be illustrated by three quite different examples. In the United States today, discrimination based on notions of race continues to be a serious issue affecting economic, political, and social relations. Far from being a biological reality, anthropologists have shown that the concept of race emerged in the 18th century as a device for justifying European dominance over Africans and American Indians. In fact, differences of skin color are simply surface adaptations to different climatic zones and have nothing to do with physical or mental capabilities. Indeed, geneticists find

globalization Worldwide interconnectedness, evidenced in global movements of natural resources, trade goods, human labor, finance capital, information, and infectious diseases.

GLOBALSCAPE



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A Global Body Shop? Lakshamma, a mother in southern India's rural village of Holalu, near Mandya, has sold one of her kidneys for about 30,000 rupees (\$650). This is far below the average going rate of \$6,000 per kidney in the global organ transplant business. But, the broker took his commission, and corrupt officials needed to be paid as well. Although India passed a law in 1994 prohibiting the buying and selling of human organs, the business is booming. In Europe and North America, kidney transplants can cost \$200,000 or more, plus the waiting list for donor kidneys is long, and dialysis is expensive. Thus, "transplant tourism" to India and several other countries caters to affluent patients in search of "fresh" kidneys to be harvested from poor people like Lakshamma, pictured here with her daughter.

Global Twister Considering that \$650 is a fortune in a poor village like Holalu, does medical globalization benefit or exploit people like Lakshamma who are looked upon as human commodities?

far more biological variation *within* any given human population than *among* them. In short, human "races" are divisive categories based on prejudice, false ideas of differences, and erroneous notions of the superiority of one's own group. Given the importance of this issue, race and other aspects of biological variation will be discussed further in upcoming sections of the text.

A second example involves the issue of same-sex marriage. In 1989, Denmark became the first country to enact a comprehensive set of legal protections for same-sex couples, known as the Registered Partnership Act. At this writing, more than a half-dozen other countries and some individual states within the United States have passed similar laws, variously named, and numerous countries around the world are considering or have passed legislation providing people in homo-

sexual unions the benefits and protections afforded by marriage.⁷ In some societies—including Spain, Canada, Belgium, and the Netherlands—same-sex marriages are considered socially acceptable and allowed by law, even though opposite-sex marriages are far more common.

As individuals, countries, and states struggle to define the boundaries of legal protections they will grant to same-sex couples, the anthropological perspective on

⁷Merin, Y. (2002). *Equality for same-sex couples: The legal recognition of gay partnerships in Europe and the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; "Court says same-sex marriage is a right" (2004, February 5), *San Francisco Chronicle*; current overviews and updates on the global status of same-sex marriage are posted on the Internet by the Partners Task Force for Gay & Lesbian Couples at www.buddybuddy.com.

marriage is useful. Anthropologists have documented same-sex marriages in many human societies in various parts of the world, where they are regarded as acceptable under appropriate circumstances. Homosexual behavior occurs in the animal world just as it does among humans.⁸ The key difference between people and other animals is that human societies entertain beliefs regarding homosexual behavior, just as they do for heterosexual behavior—beliefs that specify when, where, how, and with whom sexual relations are appropriate or “normal.” An understanding of global variation in marriage patterns and sexual behavior does not dictate that one pattern is more right than another. It simply illustrates that all human societies define the boundaries for social relationships.

A final example relates to the common confusion of *nation* with *state*. Anthropology makes an important distinction between these two: States are politically organized territories that are internationally recognized, whereas nations are socially organized bodies of people, who putatively share ethnicity—a common origin, language, and cultural heritage. For example, the Kurds constitute a nation, but their homeland (Kurdistan) is di-

⁸Kirkpatrick, R. C. (2000). The evolution of human homosexual behavior. *Current Anthropology* 41, 384.

vided among several states, primarily Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. The modern boundaries of these states were drawn up after World War I, with little regard for the region’s ethnic groups or nations. Similar processes have taken place throughout the world, especially in Asia and Africa, often making political conditions in these countries inherently unstable.

As we will see in later chapters, states and nations rarely coincide, nations being split among different states, and states typically being controlled by members of one nation who commonly use their control to gain access to the land, resources, and labor of other nationalities within the state. Most of the armed conflicts in the world today, such as the many-layered conflicts among the peoples of the former Yugoslavia, are of this sort and are not mere acts of tribalism or terrorism, as commonly asserted.

As these examples show, ignorance about other peoples and their ways causes serious problems throughout the world, especially now that we have developed a global system of fast information exchange and mass transportation that greatly increase our interaction and interdependence. Anthropology offers a way of looking at and understanding the world’s peoples—insights that are nothing less than basic skills for survival in this age of globalization.

Questions for Reflection

1. Anthropology uses a holistic approach to explain all aspects of human beliefs, behavior, and biology. How might anthropology challenge your personal perspective on the following questions: Where did we come from? Why do we act in certain ways? What makes us tick?
2. From the holistic anthropological perspective, humans have one leg in culture and the other in nature. Are there examples from your life that illustrate the interconnectedness of human biology and culture?
3. Globalization can be described as a two-edged sword. How does it foster growth and destruction simultaneously?
4. The textbook definitions of *state* and *nation* are based on scientific distinctions between both organizational types. However, this distinction is commonly lost in everyday language. Consider, for instance, the names *United States of America* and the *United Nations*. How does confusing the terms contribute to political conflict?
5. The Biocultural Connection in this chapter contrasts different cultural perspectives on brain death, while the Original Study features a discussion about traditional Zulu healers and their role in dealing with AIDS victims. What do these two accounts suggest about the role of applied anthropology in dealing with cross-cultural health issues around the world?

Suggested Readings

- Bonvillain, N. (2000). *Language, culture, and communication: The meaning of messages* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- An up-to-date text on language and communication in a cultural context.
- Fagan, B. M. (1999). *Archeology: A brief introduction* (7th ed.). New York: Longman.
- This primer offers an overview of archaeological theory and methodology, from field survey techniques to excavation to analysis of materials.
- Jones, S., Martin R., & Pilbeam, D. (Eds.). (1992). *Cambridge encyclopedia of human evolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- This comprehensive introduction to the human species covers the gamut of biological anthropology, from genetics, primatology, and the fossil evidence to a detailed exploration of contemporary human ecology, demography, and disease. Contributions by over seventy scholars.
- Kedia, S., & Van Willigen, J. (2005). *Applied anthropology: Domains of application*. New York: Praeger.

22 Chapter One/The Essence of Anthropology

Compelling essays by prominent scholars on the potential, accomplishments, and methods of applied anthropology in domains including development, agriculture, environment, health and medicine, nutrition, population displacement and resettlement, business and industry, education, and aging. The contributors show how anthropology can be used to address today's social, economic, health, and technical challenges.

Peacock, J. L. (2002). *The anthropological lens: Harsh light, soft focus* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

This lively and innovative book gives the reader a good understanding of the diversity of activities undertaken by cultural anthropologists, while at the same time identifying the unifying themes that hold the discipline together. Additions to the second edition include such topics as globalization, gender, and postmodernism.

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The Anthropology Resource Center

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The Anthropology Resource Center provides extended learning materials to reinforce your understanding of key concepts in the four subfields of anthropology. For each of the four subdisciplines, the Resource Center includes dynamic exercises including video exercises, map exercises, simulations, and “Meet the Scientists” interviews, as well as critical thinking questions that can be assigned and e-mailed to instructors. The Resource Center also provides breaking news in anthropology and interesting material on applied anthropology to help you link what you are learning to the world around you.

