



# ANTHROPOLOGY

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

THIRD EDITION

Robert H. Lavenda | Emily A. Schultz

OXFORD  
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*To Beatrice G. Schultz and in memory of  
Violet H. Lavenda, George Lavenda,  
and Henry W. Schultz*



# Brief Contents

**Boxes** xx

**Preface** xxi

**Chapter 1** What Is Anthropology? 3

**Module 1:** Anthropology, Science, and Storytelling 21

**Chapter 2** Why Is Evolution Important to Anthropologists? 31

**Chapter 3** What Can Evolutionary Theory Tell Us about Human Variation? 59

**Module 2:** Dating Methods in Paleoanthropology and Archaeology 85

**Chapter 4** What Can the Study of Primates Tell Us about Human Beings? 97

**Chapter 5** What Can the Fossil Record Tell Us about Human Origins? 119

**Chapter 6** How Do We Know about the Human Past? 163

**Chapter 7** Why Did Humans Settle Down, Build Cities, and Establish States? 193

**Chapter 8** Why Is the Concept of Culture Important? 229

**Module 3:** On Ethnographic Methods 247

**Chapter 9** Why Is Understanding Human Language Important? 261

**Module 4:** Components of Language 285

**Chapter 10** How Do We Make Meaning? 289

**Chapter 11** Why Do Anthropologists Study Economic Relations? 323

**Chapter 12** How Do Anthropologists Study Political Relations? 349

**Chapter 13** Where Do Our Relatives Come From and Why Do They Matter? 373

**Chapter 14** What Can Anthropology Tell Us about Social Inequality? 415

**Chapter 15** How Is Anthropology Applied in the Field of Medicine? 447

**Module 5:** Background to the Global Political Economy of the Twenty-First Century 475

**Chapter 16** What Can Anthropology Tell Us about Globalization? 479

**Glossary** 510

**References** 519

**Credits** 532

**Index** 537



# Contents

**Boxes** xx

**Preface** xxi

## Chapter 1 What Is Anthropology? 3



What Is Anthropology? 5

What Is the Concept of Culture? 6

What Makes Anthropology a Cross-Disciplinary Discipline? 7

Biological Anthropology 8

*In Their Own Words*: Anthropology as a Vocation: Listening to Voices 9

Cultural Anthropology 11

Linguistic Anthropology 13

Archaeology 14

Applied Anthropology 15

Medical Anthropology 16

The Uses of Anthropology 17

*In Their Own Words*: What Can You Learn from an Anthropology Major? 18

CHAPTER SUMMARY 19

FOR REVIEW 19

KEY TERMS 20

SUGGESTED READINGS 20

### Module 1: Anthropology, Science, and Storytelling 21

Scientific and Nonscientific Explanations 21

Some Key Scientific Concepts 23

MODULE SUMMARY 29

FOR REVIEW 29

KEY TERMS 29

## Chapter 2 Why Is Evolution Important to Anthropologists? 31



What Is Evolutionary Theory? 32

What Material Evidence Is There for Evolution? 33

Pre-Darwinian Views of the Natural World 33

Essentialism 33

The Great Chain of Being 34

Catastrophism and Uniformitarianism 35

Transformational Evolution 37

What Is Natural Selection? 38

Population Thinking 39

Natural Selection in Action 40

How Did Biologists Learn about Genes?	41
Mendel's Experiments	42
The Emergence of Genetics	43
What Are the Basics of Contemporary Genetics?	43
Genes and Traits	44
<b>Anthropology in Everyday Life: Investigating Human-Rights Violations and Identifying Remains</b>	46
Mutation	48
DNA and the Genome	49
Genotype, Phenotype, and the Norm of Reaction	51
<b>In Their Own Words: How Living Organisms Construct Their Environments</b>	53
What Does Evolution Mean?	54
CHAPTER SUMMARY	55
FOR REVIEW	56
KEY TERMS	57
SUGGESTED READINGS	57

## Chapter 3 What Can Evolutionary Theory Tell Us about Human Variation? 59



What Is Microevolution?	60
The Modern Evolutionary Synthesis and Its Legacy	60
The Molecularization of Race?	63
The Four Evolutionary Processes	66
<b>In Their Own Words: DNA Tests Find Branches but Few Roots</b>	67
Microevolution and Patterns of Human Variation	70
Adaptation and Human Variation	72
Phenotype, Environment, and Culture	77
What Is Macroevolution?	78
Can We Predict the Future of Human Evolution?	82
CHAPTER SUMMARY	83
FOR REVIEW	83
KEY TERMS	84
SUGGESTED READINGS	84

### Module 2: Dating Methods in Paleoanthropology and Archaeology 85

Relative Dating Methods	85
Numerical (or Absolute) Dating Methods	88
Modeling Prehistoric Climates	93
MODULE SUMMARY	95
FOR REVIEW	95
KEY TERMS	95

## Chapter 4 What Can the Study of Primates Tell Us about Human Beings? 97



- What Are Primates? 98
- How Do Biologists Classify Primates? 98
- How Many Categories of Living Primates Are There? 100
  - Strepsirrhines 100
  - Haplorhines 101
- In Their Own Words:* The Future of Primate Biodiversity 106
- What Is Ethnoprimatology? 108
- Are There Patterns in Primate Evolution? 109
- In Their Own Words:* Chimpanzee Tourism 110
- How Do Paleoanthropologists Reconstruct Primate Evolutionary History? 112
  - Primates of the Paleocene 112
  - Primates of the Eocene 112
  - Primates of the Oligocene 113
  - Primates of the Miocene 114
- CHAPTER SUMMARY 115
- FOR REVIEW 116
- KEY TERMS 116
- SUGGESTED READINGS 116

## Chapter 5 What Can the Fossil Record Tell Us about Human Origins? 119



- What Is Hominin Evolution? 120
- Who Were the First Hominins (6–3 mya)? 120
  - The Origin of Bipedalism 120
- In Their Own Words:* Finding Fossils 124
  - Changes in Hominin Dentition 126
- Who Were the Later Australopiths (3–1.5 mya)? 127
  - How Many Species of Australopith Were There? 127
- How Can Anthropologists Explain the Human Transition? 128
- What Do We Know about Early *Homo* (2.4–1.5 mya)? 130
  - Expansion of the Australopith Brain 130
  - How Many Species of Early *Homo* Were There? 130
  - Earliest Evidence of Culture: Stone Tools of the Oldowan Tradition 130
- Who Was *Homo erectus* (1.8–1.7 mya to 0.5–0.4 mya)? 133
  - Morphological Traits of *H. erectus* 134
  - The Culture of *H. erectus* 135
  - H. erectus* the Hunter? 136
- What Happened to *H. erectus*? 137
- How Did *Homo sapiens* Evolve? 138
  - What Is the Fossil Evidence for the Transition to Modern *H. sapiens*? 138
  - Where Did Modern *H. sapiens* Come From? 139

Who Were the Neandertals (130,000–35,000 Years Ago)?	140
What Do We Know about Middle Paleolithic/Middle Stone Age Culture?	142
<i>In Their Own Words: Bad Hair Days in the Paleolithic: Modern (Re)Constructions of the Cave Man</i>	143
Did Neandertals Hunt?	145
What Do We Know about Anatomically Modern Humans (200,000 Years Ago to Present)?	145
What Can Genetics Tell Us about Modern Human Origins?	146
What Do We Know about the Upper Paleolithic/Late Stone Age (40,000?–12,000 Years Ago)?	148
What Happened to the Neandertals?	150
How Many Kinds of Upper Paleolithic/Late Stone Age Cultures Were There?	151
Where Did Modern <i>H. sapiens</i> Migrate in Late Pleistocene Times?	152
<i>In Their Own Words: Women’s Art in the Upper Paleolithic?</i>	153
Eastern Asia and Siberia	155
The Americas	155
Australasia	157
Two Million Years of Human Evolution	157
CHAPTER SUMMARY	158
FOR REVIEW	160
KEY TERMS	161
SUGGESTED READINGS	161

## Chapter 6 How Do We Know about the Human Past? 163



What Is Archaeology?	164
Surveys	166
Archaeological Excavation	169
Archaeology and Digital Heritage	171
How Do Archaeologists Interpret the Past?	172
Subsistence Strategies	172
Bands, Tribes, Chiefdoms, and States	173
Whose Past Is It?	176
How Is the Past Being Plundered?	179
<i>In Their Own Words: Rescue Archaeology in Europe</i>	181
What Are the Critical Issues in Contemporary Archaeology?	183
Archaeology and Gender	183
Collaborative Approaches to Studying the Past	185
<i>Anthropology in Everyday Life: Archaeology as a Tool of Civic Engagement</i>	186
Cosmopolitan Archaeologies	187

CHAPTER SUMMARY 189  
 FOR REVIEW 190  
 KEY TERMS 191  
 SUGGESTED READINGS 191

## Chapter 7 Why Did Humans Settle Down, Build Cities, and Establish States? 193



How Is the Human Imagination Entangled with the Material World? 194

Is Plant Cultivation a Form of Niche Construction? 196

How Do Anthropologists Explain the Origins of Animal Domestication? 199

Was There Only One Motor of Domestication? 203

How Did Domestication, Cultivation, and Sedentism Begin in Southwest Asia? 204

Natufian Social Organization 204

Natufian Subsistence 205

*Anthropology in Everyday Life: Çatalhöyük in the Twenty-First Century* 206

Domestication Elsewhere in the World 208

What Were the Consequences of Domestication and Sedentism? 210

*In Their Own Words: The Food Revolution* 212

How Do Anthropologists Define Social Complexity? 213

Why Is It Incorrect to Describe Foraging Societies as “Simple”? 214

What Is the Archaeological Evidence for Social Complexity? 215

Why Did Stratification Begin? 217

How Can Anthropologists Explain the Rise of Complex Societies? 218

*In Their Own Words: The Ecological Consequences of Social Complexity* 220

Andean Civilization 221

CHAPTER SUMMARY 225

FOR REVIEW 227

KEY TERMS 227

SUGGESTED READINGS 227

## Chapter 8 Why Is the Concept of Culture Important? 229



How Do Anthropologists Define Culture? 230

*In Their Own Words: The Paradox of Ethnocentrism* 231

*In Their Own Words: Culture and Freedom* 233

Culture, History, and Human Agency 234

*In Their Own Words: Human-Rights Law and the Demonization of Culture* 235

Why Do Cultural Differences Matter?	237
What Is Ethnocentrism?	237
Is It Possible to Avoid Ethnocentric Bias?	238
What Is Cultural Relativism?	239
How Can Cultural Relativity Improve Our Understanding of Controversial Cultural Practices?	239
Genital Cutting, Gender, and Human Rights	240
Genital Cutting as a Valued Ritual	240
Culture and Moral Reasoning	241
Did Their Culture Make Them Do It?	242
Does Culture Explain Everything?	243
Culture Change and Cultural Authenticity	244
The Promise of the Anthropological Perspective	245
CHAPTER SUMMARY	245
FOR REVIEW	246
KEY TERMS	246
SUGGESTED READINGS	246

### Module 3: On Ethnographic Methods 247

A Meeting of Cultural Traditions	247
Single-Sited Fieldwork	247
Multisited Fieldwork	249
Collecting and Interpreting Data	250
The Dialectic of Fieldwork: Interpretation and Translation	251
Interpreting Actions and Ideas	251
The Dialectic of Fieldwork: An Example	253
The Effects of Fieldwork	254
The Production of Anthropological Knowledge	256
Anthropological Knowledge as Open-Ended	257
MODULE SUMMARY	258
FOR REVIEW	258
KEY TERMS	258
SUGGESTED READINGS	259

## Chapter 9 Why Is Understanding Human Language Important? 261



How Are Language and Culture Related?	262
How Do People Talk about Experience?	263
In Their Own Words: Cultural Translation	266
What Makes Human Language Distinctive?	266
What Does It Mean to “Learn” a Language?	268
How Does Context Affect Language?	268
How Does Language Affect How We See the World?	269
Pragmatics: How Do We Study Language in Contexts of Use?	271
Ethnopragmatics	271
What Happens When Languages Come into Contact?	272

What Is the Difference between a Pidgin and a Creole?	273
How Is Meaning Negotiated?	273
What Is Linguistic Inequality?	274
What Are Language Habits of African Americans?	274
<i>In Their Own Words: Varieties of African American English</i>	275
What Is Language Ideology?	276
What Is Lost If a Language Dies?	277
<i>Anthropology in Everyday Life: Language Revitalization</i>	279
How Are Language and Truth Connected?	281
CHAPTER SUMMARY	282
FOR REVIEW	283
KEY TERMS	284
SUGGESTED READINGS	284

#### Module 4: Components of Language 285

Phonology: Sounds	285
Morphology: Word Structure	285
Syntax: Sentence Structure	286
Semantics: Meaning	287
FOR REVIEW	287
KEY TERMS	287

## Chapter 10 How Do We Make Meaning? 289



What Is Play?	290
What Do We Think about Play?	290
What Are Some Effects of Play?	290
What Is Art?	291
Is There a Definition of Art?	291
“ <i>But Is It Art?</i> ”	295
<i>In Their Own Words: Tango</i>	297
“ <i>She’s Fake</i> ”: Art and Authenticity	298
How Does Hip-Hop Become Japanese?	299
What Is Myth?	300
How Does Myth Reflect—and Shape—Society?	301
Do Myths Help Us Think?	302
What Is Ritual?	303
How Can Ritual Be Defined?	303
How Is Ritual Expressed in Action?	303
What Are Rites of Passage?	304
<i>In Their Own Words: Video in the Villages</i>	305
How Are Play and Ritual Complementary?	306
How Are Worldview and Symbolic Practice Related?	307
What Are Symbols?	307
What Is Religion?	308

How Do People Communicate in Religion?	311
How Are Religion and Social Organization Related?	311
Worldviews in Operation: Two Case Studies	312
Coping with Misfortune: Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande	312
Are There Patterns of Witchcraft Accusation?	314
Coping with Misfortune: Listening for God among Contemporary Evangelicals in the United States	315
<i>In Their Own Words: For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former Life</i>	315
Maintaining and Changing a Worldview	316
How Do People Cope with Change?	317
<i>In Their Own Words: Custom and Confrontation</i>	318
How Are Worldviews Used as Instruments of Power?	318
CHAPTER SUMMARY	320
FOR REVIEW	321
KEY TERMS	321
SUGGESTED READINGS	321

## Chapter 11 Why Do Anthropologists Study Economic Relations? 323



How Do Anthropologists Study Economic Relations?	324
What Are the Connections between Culture and Livelihood? Self-Interest, Institutions, and Morals	324
How Do Anthropologists Study Production, Distribution, and Consumption?	325
How Are Goods Distributed and Exchanged?	329
Capitalism and Neoclassical Economics	329
What Are Modes of Exchange?	329
<i>In Their Own Words: "So Much Work, So Much Tragedy . . . and for What?"</i>	331
Does Production Drive Economic Activities?	331
<i>Anthropology in Everyday Life: Producing Sorghum and Millet in Honduras and the Sudan</i>	332
Labor	332
Modes of Production	332
<i>In Their Own Words: Solidarity Forever</i>	334
What Is the Role of Conflict in Material Life?	335
Why Do People Consume What They Do?	335
<i>In Their Own Words: Questioning Collapse</i>	336
The Internal Explanation: Malinowski and Basic Human Needs	338
The External Explanation: Cultural Ecology	338
How Is Consumption Culturally Patterned?	338
<i>In Their Own Words: Fake Masks and Faux Modernity</i>	341



How Is Consumption Being Studied Today?	342
The Anthropology of Food and Nutrition	343
CHAPTER SUMMARY	345
FOR REVIEW	346
KEY TERMS	346
SUGGESTED READINGS	346

## Chapter 12 How Do Anthropologists Study Political Relations? 349



How Are Culture and Politics Related?	350
How Do Anthropologists Study Politics?	352
Coercion	352
Power and National Identity: A Case Study	354
Can Governmentality Be Eluded?	356
<i>In Their Own Words: Reforming the Crow Constitution</i>	357
<i>Anthropology in Everyday Life: Anthropology and Advertising</i>	358
How Are Politics, Gender, and Kinship Related?	359
How Are Immigration and Politics Related in the New Europe?	360
Hidden Transcripts and the Power of Reflection	364
<i>In Their Own Words: Protesters Gird for Long Fight over Opening Peru's Amazon</i>	365
<i>Anthropology in Everyday Life: Human Terrain Teams and Anthropological Ethics</i>	368
CHAPTER SUMMARY	369
FOR REVIEW	370
KEY TERMS	370
SUGGESTED READINGS	370

## Chapter 13 Where Do Our Relatives Come From and Why Do They Matter? 373



What Is Kinship?	374
Sex, Gender, and Kinship	375
What Is the Role of Descent in Kinship?	378
What Roles Do Lineages Play in Descent?	379
Lineage Membership	379
Patrilineages	380
What Are Matrilineages?	382
<i>In Their Own Words: Outside Work, Women, and Bridewealth</i>	383
What Are Kinship Terminologies?	384
What Criteria Are Used for Making Kinship Distinctions?	384
What Is Adoption?	385
Adoption in Highland Ecuador	385
European American Kinship and New Reproductive Technologies	386

How Does Organ Transplantation Create New Relatives?	388
Marriage	388
Toward a Definition of Marriage	389
Woman Marriage and Ghost Marriage among the Nuer	389
Why Is Marriage a Social Process?	390
Patterns of Residence after Marriage	390
Single and Plural Spouses	391
<i>In Their Own Words: Two Cheers for Gay Marriage</i>	392
How Is Marriage an Economic Exchange?	395
What Is a Family?	396
<i>In Their Own Words: Dowry Too High. Lose Bride and Go to Jail</i>	397
What Is the Nuclear Family?	398
What Is the Polygynous Family?	398
Extended and Joint Families	399
<i>In Their Own Words: Law, Custom, and Crimes against Women</i>	400
How Are Families Transformed over Time?	400
Divorce and Remarriage	400
How Does International Migration Affect the Family?	401
Families by Choice	402
<i>In Their Own Words: Why Migrant Women Feed Their Husbands Tamales</i>	403
<i>Anthropology in Everyday Life: Caring for Infiltrated Women Giving Birth in Norway</i>	404
Friendship	406
How Are Sexual Practices Organized?	406
Ranges of Heterosexual Practices	407
Other Sexual Practices	407
Sexuality and Power	411
CHAPTER SUMMARY	411
FOR REVIEW	412
KEY TERMS	413
SUGGESTED READINGS	413

## Chapter 14 What Can Anthropology Tell Us about Social Inequality? 415



Gender	416
<i>In Their Own Words: The Consequences of Being a Woman</i>	417
Class	419
Class and Gender in Indonesia	420
Class and Caste in the United States?	420
Caste	421
Caste in India	422
<i>In Their Own Words: Burakumin: Overcoming Hidden Discrimination in Japan</i>	422

*In Their Own Words: As Economic Turmoil Mounts, So Do Attacks on Hungary's Gypsies* 424

Race 426

Colorism in Nicaragua 428

*In Their Own Words: On the Butt Size of Barbie and Shani: Dolls and Race in the United States* 429

Ethnicity 430

*In Their Own Words: The Politics of Ethnicity* 431

Nation and Nationalism 434

Australian Nationalism 435

*Anthropology in Everyday Life: Anthropology and Democracy* 436

Naturalizing Discourses 439

The Paradox of Essentialized Identities 439

Nation Building in a Postcolonial World: The Example of Fiji 440

Nationalism and Its Dangers 442

CHAPTER SUMMARY 443

FOR REVIEW 444

KEY TERMS 444

SUGGESTED READINGS 445

## Chapter 15 How Is Anthropology Applied in the Field of Medicine? 447



What Is Medical Anthropology? 448

What Makes Medical Anthropology “Biocultural”? 448

*In Their Own Words: American Premenstrual Syndrome* 449

*In Their Own Words: The Madness of Hunger* 451

How Do People with Different Cultures Understand the Causes of Sickness and Health? 452

Kinds of Selves 452

Decentered Selves on the Internet 453

*Anthropology in Everyday Life: Lead Poisoning among Mexican American Children* 454

Self and Subjectivity 455

Subjectivity, Trauma, and Structural Violence 457

How Are Human Sickness and Health Shaped by the Global Capitalist Economy? 460

*In Their Own Words: Ethical Dilemmas and Decisions* 461

Health, Human Reproduction, and Global Capitalism 464

Medical Anthropology and HIV/AIDS 466

The Future of Medical Anthropology 470

CHAPTER SUMMARY 470

FOR REVIEW 473

KEY TERMS 473

SUGGESTED READINGS 473

**Module 5: Background to the Global Political Economy of the Twenty-First Century** 475

- What Happened to the Global Economy after the Cold War? 475
- Cultural Processes in a Global World 476

**Chapter 16 What Can Anthropology Tell Us about Globalization?** 479



- What Does It Mean to Live in a Global World? 480
- Cultural Imperialism or Cultural Hybridity? 480
  - What Is Cultural Imperialism? 480
  - What Is Cultural Hybridity? 481
  - Are There Limits to Cultural Hybridity? 482
- How Does Globalization Affect the Nation-State? 483
  - Are Global Flows Undermining Nation-States? 483
- In Their Own Words: Slumdog Tourism* 484
  - Migration, Transborder Identities, and Long-Distance Nationalism 485
  - How Can Citizenship Be Flexible? 487
  - What Is Territorial Citizenship? 489
- Are Human Rights Universal? 490
  - Human-Rights Discourse as the Global Language of Social Justice 490
  - Rights versus Culture? 491
  - Rights to Culture? 492
  - Are Rights Part of Culture? 493
  - How Can Culture Help in Thinking about Rights? 493
- Anthropology in Everyday Life: Anthropology and Indigenous Rights* 494
  - What Is the Relationship between Human Rights and Humanitarianism? 498
- In Their Own Words: How Sushi Went Global* 499
- Can We Be at Home in a Global World? 501
  - What Is Cosmopolitanism? 501
  - What Is Friction? 501
- In Their Own Words: Cofan: Story of the Forest People and the Outsiders* 503
  - What Is Border Thinking? 505
- In Their Own Words: The Anthropological Voice* 506
- Why Study Anthropology? 507
  - CHAPTER SUMMARY 507
  - FOR REVIEW 509
  - KEY TERMS 509
  - SUGGESTED READINGS 509

- Glossary** 510
- References** 519
- Credits** 532
- Index** 537

## Anthropology in Everyday Life

- Investigating Human-Rights Violations and Identifying Remains 46
- Archaeology as a Tool of Civic Engagement 186
- Çatalhöyük in the Twenty-First Century 206
- Language Revitalization 279
- Producing Sorghum and Millet in Honduras and the Sudan 332
- Anthropology and Advertising 358
- Human Terrain Teams and Anthropological Ethics 368
- Caring for Infibulated Women Giving Birth in Norway 404
- Anthropology and Democracy 436
- Lead Poisoning among Mexican American Children 454
- Anthropology and Indigenous Rights 494

## EthnoProfiles

- |                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Tswana 238              | Rione Monti (Rome) 360 |
| Blackston 249           | "Sedaka" Village 364   |
| El Barrio 249           | Nuer 381               |
| Komachi 253             | Navajo 382             |
| Sidi Lahcen Lyussi 255  | Zumbagua 386           |
| Aymara 264              | Nyinba 395             |
| Java 269                | Mende 399              |
| Margi 294               | Alaskan Inuit 401      |
| Japan 300               | Los Pinos 402          |
| Trobriand Islanders 302 | Tikopia 407            |
| Yoruba 307              | Dani 407               |
| Dinka 309               | Mobasa Swahilis 408    |
| Azande 313              | Managua 409            |
| Kwaio 318               | Haiti 416              |
| Somalis (Northern) 324  | Gopalpur 423           |
| Boran 325               | Guider 432             |
| Nootka 330              | Samoa 436              |
| Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) 339  | Fiji 440               |
| Sinhalese 354           | Hawaii 497             |
| Tamils 355              |                        |

## In Their Own Words

- Anthropology as a Vocation: Listening to Voices 9
- What Can You Learn from an Anthropology Major? 18
- How Living Organisms Construct Their Environments 53
- DNA Tests Find Branches but Few Roots 67
- The Future of Primate Biodiversity 106
- Chimpanzee Tourism 110
- Finding Fossils 124
- Bad Hair Days in the Paleolithic: Modern (Re)Constructions of the Cave Man 143
- Women's Art in the Upper Paleolithic? 153
- Rescue Archaeology in Europe 181
- The Food Revolution 212
- The Ecological Consequences of Social Complexity 220
- The Paradox of Ethnocentrism 231
- Culture and Freedom 233
- Human-Rights Law and the Demonization of Culture 235
- Cultural Translation 266
- Varieties of African American English 275
- Tango 297
- Video in the Villages 305
- For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former Life 315
- Custom and Confrontation 318
- "So Much Work, So Much Tragedy . . . and for What?" 331
- Solidarity Forever 334
- Questioning Collapse 336
- Fake Masks and Faux Modernity 341
- Reforming the Crow Constitution 357
- Protesters Gird for Long Fight over Opening Peru's Amazon 365
- Outside Work, Women, and Bridewealth 383
- Two Cheers for Gay Marriage 392
- Dowry Too High. Lose Bride and Go to Jail 397
- Law, Custom, and Crimes against Women 400
- Why Migrant Women Feed Their Husbands Tamales 403
- The Consequences of Being a Woman 417
- Burakumin: Overcoming Hidden Discrimination in Japan 422
- As Economic Turmoil Mounts, So Do Attacks on Hungary's Gypsies 424
- On the Butt Size of Barbie and Shani: Dolls and Race in the United States 429
- The Politics of Ethnicity 431
- American Premenstrual Syndrome 449
- The Madness of Hunger 451
- Ethical Dilemmas and Decisions 461
- Slumdog Tourism 484
- How Sushi Went Global 499
- Cofan: Story of the Forest People and the Outsiders 503
- The Anthropological Voice 506

# Preface

This book emerged out of our increasing dissatisfaction with all the available general anthropology texts. We found that they either overwhelmed beginning students with detail and the sheer volume of material or provided overly brief introductions that failed to convey the richness of the field. We therefore set out to write a book that introduces this broad field concisely yet thoroughly, providing diverse perspectives and examples to foster not only an appreciation of anthropology but also a deeper engagement with it—one that helps students better understand themselves and the world around them. We (and our students) needed a general anthropology text that struck the right balance, fit into a 15-week semester, and came with a complete package of ancillary materials including quizzes, exams, suggested videos, and supplemental readings.

Throughout the process of writing the first edition and revising for the second and now the third edition, two central questions have guided our decisions on what material to include. First, what is the essential material that a balanced introduction to four-field anthropology must cover? Second, how much detail on any particular topic could we include without overwhelming beginning students? Most general anthropology textbooks are essentially cultural anthropology textbooks that have bulked up, but we decided to start anew and build a general anthropology text chapter by chapter. We address the central issues of the discipline, highlighting the controversies and commitments that shape contemporary anthropology and that make it interesting and exciting.

## Approach

This book may be concise, but we cover the field effectively and in a way that is intellectually honest. **We take a question-oriented approach that illuminates major concepts for students and shows them the relevance of anthropology in today's world.** Structuring each chapter around an important question and its subquestions, we explore what it means to be human, incorporating answers from all four major subfields of

anthropology—biological anthropology, archaeology, linguistic anthropology, and cultural anthropology—as well as from applied anthropology. We have made every effort to provide a balanced perspective, both in the level of detail we present and in our coverage of the major subfields.

The questioning approach not only sparks curiosity but also orients students' reading and comprehension of each chapter, highlighting the concepts every student should take away from a general anthropology course. For example, students need to know about evolutionary theory, human variation, and the biological, social, and cultural critique of the concept of race, since knowledge in these areas is one of the great achievements of the discipline of anthropology. No other discipline (and possibly no other course) will teach about these matters the way anthropologists do. Students need to know about the fossil evidence for the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, which they are not likely to learn about elsewhere. Students need to know what archaeology can tell us about the human past, as well as what ethnography can teach us about social complexity and inequality. They need to know that culture isn't just the Festival of Nations and unusual foods and interesting traditional costumes. They need to know about language and cognition and the central role of learning in human development. They need to understand the wellsprings of human creativity and imagination. It is valuable for them to see the panoply of forms of human relatedness, and how people organize themselves. They need to know about globalization from the bottom up and not just the top down. They need to see how all the subfields of anthropology together can provide important, unique insights into all these topics and so many more and how anthropology can provide a vital foundation for their university education.

The world we face as anthropologists has changed dramatically in the last quarter century, and anthropology has changed, too. We have always felt it necessary to present students with a view of what contemporary anthropologists are doing; we therefore address the most current issues in the field and have thoroughly updated the text accordingly for this edition. Your students will take away from the book an appreciation of how these areas of specialization have developed over time and how they contribute to our understanding of the world in the twenty-first century.

## Organization

Divided into 16 chapters and 5 modules, this book is the ideal length for one semester. After Chapter 1, which introduces the entire field, 6 chapters are devoted to biological anthropology and archaeology: evolutionary theory (Chapter 2); human variation (Chapter 3); the primates (Chapter 4); the fossil record and human origins (Chapter 5); the human past (Chapter 6); and the first farmers, cities, and states (Chapter 7). Topics in cultural and linguistic anthropology are covered in chapters on culture (Chapter 8); language (Chapter 9); symbolic practices (Chapter 10, covering play, art, myth, ritual, and religion); economics (Chapter 11); politics (Chapter 12); kinship, marriage, and sexuality (Chapter 13); social inequality (Chapter 14, covering gender, class, caste, race, ethnicity, and nationalism); the anthropology of medicine and health (Chapter 15); and globalization (Chapter 16). In addition, brief methodological modules after Chapters 1, 3, 8, 9, and 15 discuss anthropology, science, and storytelling; dating methods for paleoanthropology and archaeology; ethnographic methods; the components of language; and background to the global political economy of the twenty-first century. Throughout the book, we incorporate discussions of gender and pay special attention to issues of power and inequality in the contemporary world.

## Key Features

- **We take an explicitly global approach.** In addition to the substantially revised chapter on globalization, we systematically point out the extent to which the current sociocultural situation of particular peoples has been shaped by their particular histories of contact with capitalism, and we highlight ways that the post–Cold War global spread of capitalism has drastically reshaped the local contexts in which people everywhere live their lives.
- **We incorporate current anthropological approaches to power and inequality throughout the text.** We explore how power is manifested in different human societies, how it permeates all aspects of social life, and how it is deployed, resisted, and transformed. We discuss issues of trauma, social suffering, and human rights.
- **Material on gender and feminist anthropology is featured throughout the text.** In addition to the discussion of gender inequality in Chapter 14,

the topic of gender is tightly woven into the fabric of the book, and includes (for example) material on gender and feminist archaeology, controversies over female genital cutting, supernumerary sexes and genders, varieties of human sexual practices, language and gender, women and electoral politics, gay marriage, women and colonialism, and contemporary forms of social inequality.

- **“In Their Own Words.”** New voices, including those of indigenous peoples, anthropologists, and nonanthropologists, are presented in the text in commentaries called “In Their Own Words.” These short commentaries provide alternative perspectives—always readable and sometimes controversial—on topics featured in the chapter where they appear.
- **“EthnoProfiles.”** These text inserts provide a consistent, brief information summary for each society discussed at length in the text. They emerged from our desire as teachers to supply our students with basic geographical, demographic, and political information about the peoples anthropologists have worked with. Each EthnoProfile also contains a map of the area in which the society is found. They are not intended to be a substitute for reading ethnographies, nor are they intended to reify or essentialize the “people” or “culture” in question. Their main purpose is simply to provide a consistent orientation for readers, though of course it is becoming more and more difficult to attach peoples to particular territories in an era of globalization. How does one calculate population numbers or draw a simple map to locate a global diaspora? How does one construct an EthnoProfile for overseas Chinese or transborder Haitians? We don’t know how to answer these questions, which is why EthnoProfiles for those groups are not included in the textbook.
- **“Anthropology in Everyday Life.”** Following the suggestions of reviewers, we have provided selections on anthropology in practice throughout the text; topics include agricultural development, archaeology and community engagement, doing business in Japan, Human Terrain Teams, and forensic anthropology and human rights, among others.
- **Additional learning aids.** Key terms are bold-faced in the text and defined in a running glossary on the page where they appear, in addition to in a glossary at the back of the text. Each chapter ends with a list of the key terms in alphabetical order with page references, a numbered

chapter summary, review questions, and annotated suggested readings. Maps are featured extensively throughout the text.

- **Use of citations and quotations.** In our discussions, we have tried to avoid being omniscient narrators by making use of citations and quotations in order to indicate where anthropological ideas come from. In our view, even first-year students need to know that an academic discipline like anthropology is constructed by the work of many people; no one, especially not textbook authors, should attempt to impose a single voice on the field. We have avoided, as much as we could, predigested statements that students must take on faith. We try to give them the information that they need to see where particular conclusions come from. In our experience, students appreciate being taken seriously.
- **Supplemental chapter materials provide flexibility for instructors.** As we considered how to create a new book for this course, we realized we would have to omit material that you may want your students to know about or that might interest them. To offer you flexibility, we decided to include some of that material on the Instructor's CD and on the Companion Website ([www.oup.com/us/lavenda](http://www.oup.com/us/lavenda)). Each entry ranges in length from one or two paragraphs to about three pages and can easily be used either for lecture topics or as handouts. For example, if you'd like to stress the different routes that led to the rise of civilization, you could assign the reading about the rise of civilization in Mesopotamia to supplement the textbook's discussion of the rise of civilization in the Andes. If you're looking for more examples to illustrate ritual and cultural patterns in the United States, you could assign the selection on children's birthday parties in the United States. The bulk of the supplemental chapter material on the Instructor's CD and website is linked to the cultural chapters, and many entries are additional ethnographic examples.

## What's New in the Third Edition?

In addition to updating the text throughout, we have made a number of key changes to this edition:

- A new chapter on medical anthropology (Chapter 15). This entirely new chapter is devoted to

medical anthropology. A brief history of the field is followed by a series of examples of contemporary studies in medical anthropology. This chapter highlights the importance of structural violence and illustrates how this plays out in cases of population displacement, women's health, and the treatment of HIV/AIDS. It also touches on research in the anthropology of science, technology, and medicine relating to global pharmaceuticals.

- Expansion of discussion of species concepts in evolutionary biology, as well as other new work in biological anthropology, such as ethnoprimateology and studies that focus on issues surrounding the molecularization of race.
- Discussion of material culture in the culture chapter and discussions of new developments in archaeology theory and practice.
- Substantial revision and updating of discussion of fossil record.
- New module providing historical background to the rise of globalization processes and neoliberalism following the end of the Cold War.
- Several new "In Their Own Words" and "Anthropology in Everyday Life" boxes.

## Chapter-by-Chapter Improvements

- *Chapter 1: What Is Anthropology?* We have revised and extended the definition of culture to include material culture, a topic that has become increasingly significant in contemporary anthropology; many examples will be found throughout the book. We explicitly introduce and briefly discuss globalization, cyborg anthropology, and science studies, theoretical perspectives that are now well established in contemporary anthropology. We introduce some of the remarkable recent scientific advances in paleoanthropology with a brief discussion of the extraction of biomolecules from fossils, a topic treated in greater detail in Chapter 5.
- *Module 1: Anthropology, Science, and Storytelling.* This module now has an expanded discussion of science studies, introduced in Chapter 1.
- *Chapter 2: Why Is Evolution Important to Anthropologists?* This chapter has been edited for clarity, based on teaching experience with the book. The discussion of niche construction has been expanded.
- *Chapter 3: What Can Evolutionary Theory Tell Us about Human Variation?* We have added extensive new material that compares the biological



species concept with other species concepts used by biologists who are not studying living populations of organisms. The second edition discussion of the molecularization of race has been expanded and updated, featuring recent work by Ann Pollock, and Clarence Gravlee.

- *Module 2: Dating Methods in Paleoanthropology and Archaeology.* We have brought discussions of AMS, thermoluminescence, and ESR up to date.
- *Chapter 4: What Can the Study of Primates Tell Us about Human Beings?* We have updated and expanded our discussion of primate taxonomy, including new sections on strepsirrhines and New World monkeys. We provide further discussion of the recovery of DNA from fossilized bones. A new section on ethnoprimateology has been added. All headers within chapter have been transformed into questions.
- *Chapter 5: What Can the Fossil Record Tell Us about Human Origins?* The chapter has been updated to take into account the most recent research and discoveries concerning the hominin fossil record. Fossil nomenclature now reflects current usage. Increased discussion of *Ar. ramidus*, as well as new thinking about australopith species, including *Au. garhi* and *Au. sediba*. Location for earliest stone tools at Gona, Ethiopia. Expanded discussions of Dmanisi *H. erectus* populations, *H. heidelbergensis*, and Denisovans. New materials on physical origins of *H. sapiens*, including implications of Omo Kibish discoveries. Much expanded section on ancient DNA, interbreeding of Neandertals and human beings, including a discussion of the work of Svante Pääbo and his team.
- *Chapter 6: How Do We Know about the Human Past?* Most headers are now questions. New discussions of biomolecular evidence of past diets and the use of LiDAR in Central American surveys, as well as Ian Hodder's theoretical notion of "interpretation at the trowel's edge." Extensive new coverage of archaeology and digital heritage. Update on the Kennewick skeleton and the Anzick site in Montana. New "In Their Own Words" feature on rescue archaeology in Europe, by Jean-Paul Demoule.
- *Chapter 7: Why Did Humans Settle Down, Build Cities, and Establish States?* Most headers are now questions. Extended "In Their Own Words" on the work of Ian Hodder's team at Çatalhöyük.
- *Chapter 8: Why Is the Concept of Culture Important?* Discussion of socialization/enculturation has been moved to this chapter, and there is an expanded discussion of material culture throughout the chapter.
- *Chapter 9: Why Is Understanding Human Language Important?* Following many reviewers' suggestions, material on cognitive anthropology has been dropped from this chapter, making it easier for instructors to focus on language when teaching this chapter. Some of the material about self and subjectivity formerly in this chapter has now been incorporated into the new medical anthropology chapter. The chapter closes with new sections on language death and revitalization, as well as language and truth.
- *Chapter 10: How Do We Make Meaning?* New extended section on listening for God among Christian evangelicals, taken from the work of T. M. Luhmann.
- *Chapter 11: Why Do Anthropologists Study Economic Relations?* Updated discussion of the connection between theories of human nature and making a living, drawn from Wilk and Cliggett.
- *Chapter 13: Where Do Our Relatives Come From and Why Do They Matter?* Added discussion of work by Cymene Howe on female sexual practices in Managua, Nicaragua.
- *Chapter 14: What Can Anthropology Tell Us about Social Inequality?* Section on inequality and structural violence in Haiti moved to new chapter on medical anthropology. New "In Their Own Words" box about gender inequality in the Central African Republic from Bonnie Hewlett's ethnography, *Listen, Here Is a Story* (OUP 2013). New section on (middle-) class and gender in contemporary Indonesia, based on work by Carla Jones.
- *Chapter 15: How Is Anthropology Applied in the Field of Medicine?* This entirely new chapter is devoted to medical anthropology. A brief history of the field is followed by a series of examples of contemporary studies in medical anthropology. This chapter highlights the importance of structural violence and illustrates how this plays out in cases of population displacement, women's health, and treatment of HIV/AIDS. It also touches on research in the anthropology of science, technology, and medicine relating to global pharmaceuticals. This chapter includes a new "In Their Own Words" box that concerns ethics in ethnographic research, with a special emphasis on medical advertising.
- *Module 5: Background to the Global Political Economy of the Twenty-First Century.* This new module

reflects our recognition that globalization is no longer a new theoretical perspective in anthropology. We agreed with a reviewer's suggestion that a module that provided students with information about historical developments (and developments in anthropological research and theory) from the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War might be useful for students. This provides a setting for the discussion in the following chapter for key issues in the anthropology of globalization.

- *Chapter 16: What Can Anthropology Tell Us about Globalization?* This chapter now focuses on the way anthropologists have had to rethink their ideas about culture in light of global transformations since the end of the Cold War. The chapter now begins with the critique of cultural imperialism, the challenges of cultural hybridity, and the issues surrounding cosmopolitanism. We then turn to issues surrounding human rights and citizenship in the twenty-first century. There is a substantial new section on territorial citizenship, based on the work of Juliet Erazo, whose work also figures in a revised "Anthropology in Everyday Life" on indigenous rights.

## Supplements

- The free **Ancillary Resource Center at [oup-arc.com/lavenda/](http://oup-arc.com/lavenda/)** features (1) **Instructor Resources**, including guest editorials (brief essays by anthropologists written specifically for our text), PowerPoint-based slides for lectures, an image bank containing digital versions of all of the images from the text, a sample syllabus, assignments, in-class activities, film suggestions and related questions by chapter, critical-thinking questions, suggestions for class discussion, and helpful links; and (2) a **Computerized Test Bank**.
- A free **Companion Website at [www.oup.com/us/lavenda](http://www.oup.com/us/lavenda)** features Student Resources, including a study skills guide (filled with hints and suggestions on improving study skills, organizing information, writing exam essays, and taking multiple-choice exams), self-quizzes, interactive exercises, flashcards, detailed annotated lists of suggestions for further reading (beyond the lists provided in the text), and helpful links.

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Once again, we are amazed at how much time and effort reviewers put into their task. The many reviewers and survey respondents for this project have contributed significantly to both the shape and the details of the book. We hope they can see where we have taken their advice, and we would like them to know that we carefully thought through every suggestion, even the ones we decided we could not follow. So, our thanks to the reviewers for this edition:

Jason Antrosio, Hartwick College  
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Bernard Means, Virginia Commonwealth University  
 (PowerPoint slides, sample syllabus, activities and assignments, suggestions for class discussion, supplemental chapter materials, annotated suggestions for further reading)  
 Imanni Sheppard, University of Texas Medical Branch  
 (film suggestions and related questions by chapter, critical-thinking questions, self-quizzes, helpful links)

This book is dedicated to our parents, both living and in memory. Relatedness remains important in human societies, and as we grow older, we better understand why. So we also recognize our children, Daniel and Rachel, whose lives have been bound up with our books in so many ways, not the least of which are our hopes that they and their generation will find something of value in the anthropological approach.



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# Anthropology

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## CHAPTER

# 1

# What Is Anthropology?

This chapter introduces the field of anthropology. We look at what anthropology is and explore its different subfields. We touch on anthropology's key concept—culture—as well as its key research method—fieldwork. We conclude with a discussion of the ways anthropological insights are relevant in everyday life.

## Chapter Outline

What Is Anthropology?

What Is the Concept of Culture?

What Makes Anthropology a  
Cross-Disciplinary Discipline?

Biological Anthropology

Cultural Anthropology

Linguistic Anthropology

Archaeology

Applied Anthropology

Medical Anthropology

The Uses of Anthropology

Chapter Summary

For Review

Key Terms

Suggested Readings

◀ *Children gathered on a school playground with a Maasai instructor.*

In early 1976, the authors of this book traveled to northern Cameroon, in western Africa, to study social relations in the town of Guider, where we rented a small house. In the first weeks we lived there, we enjoyed spending the warm evenings of the dry season reading and writing in the glow of the house's brightest electric fixture, which illuminated a large, unscreened veranda. After a short time, however, the rains began, and with them appeared swarms of winged termites. These slow-moving insects with fat, two-inch abdomens were attracted to the light on the veranda, and we soon found ourselves spending more time swatting at them than reading or writing. One evening, in a fit of desperation, we rolled up old copies of the international edition of *Newsweek* and began an all-out assault, determined to rid the veranda of every single termite.

The rent we paid for this house included the services of a night watchman. As we launched our attack on the termites, the night watchman suddenly appeared beside the veranda carrying an empty powdered milk tin. When he asked if he could have the insects we had been killing, we were a bit taken aback but warmly invited him to help himself. He moved onto the veranda, quickly collected the corpses of fallen insects, and then joined us in going after those termites that were still airborne. Although we became skilled at thwacking the insects with our rolled-up magazines, our skills paled beside those of the night watchman, who simply snatched the termites out of the air with his hand, squeezed them gently, and dropped them into his rapidly filling tin can. The three of us managed to clear the air of insects—and fill his tin—in about 10 minutes. The night watchman thanked us and returned to his post, and we returned to our books.

The following evening, soon after we took up our usual places on the veranda, the watchman appeared at the steps bearing a tray with two covered dishes. He explained that his wife had prepared the food for us in exchange for our help in collecting termites. We accepted the food and carefully lifted the lids. One dish contained *nyiri*, a stiff paste made of red sorghum, a staple of the local diet. The other dish contained another pasty substance with a speckled, salt-and-pepper appearance, which we realized was termite paste prepared from the insects we had all killed the previous night.

The night watchman waited at the foot of the veranda steps, an expectant smile on his face. Clearly, he did not intend to leave until we tasted the food his wife had prepared. We looked at each other. We had never eaten insects before or considered them edible in the North American, middle-class diet we were used to. To be sure, "delicacies" like chocolate-covered ants exist, but such items are considered by most North Americans to be food fit only for eccentrics. However, we understood the importance of not insulting the night watchman and his wife, who were being so generous to us. We knew that insects were a favored food in many human societies and that eating them brought no ill effects (Figure 1.1). So we reached into the dish of *nyiri*, pulling off a small amount. We then used the ball of *nyiri* to scoop up a small portion of termite paste, brought the mixture to our mouths, ate, chewed, and swallowed. The watchman beamed, bid us goodnight, and returned to his post.

We looked at each other in wonder. The sorghum paste had a grainy tang that was rather pleasant. The termite paste tasted mild, like chicken, not unpleasant at all. We later wrote to our families about this experience.

**Figure 1.1** Many people around the world eat insects. Here, a restaurant worker in Bangkok, Thailand, prepares grubs for cooking.



When they wrote back, they described how they had told friends about our experience. Most of their friends had strong negative reactions. But one friend, a home economist, was not shocked at all. She simply commented that termites are a good source of clean protein.

## What Is Anthropology?

This anecdote is not just about us; it also illustrates some of the central elements of the anthropological experience. Anthropologists want to learn about as many different human ways of life as they can. The people they come to know are members of their own society or live on a different continent, in cities or in rural areas. Their ways of life may involve patterns of regular movement across international borders, or they may make permanent homes in the borderlands themselves. Archaeologists reconstruct ancient ways of life from traces left behind in the earth that are hundreds or thousands of years old; anthropologists who strive to reconstruct the origin of the human species itself make use of fossil remains that reach back millions of years into the past. Whatever the case may be, anthropologists are sometimes exposed to practices that startle them. However, as they take the risk of getting to know such ways of life better, they are often treated to the sweet discovery of familiarity. This shock of the unfamiliar becoming familiar—as well as the familiar becoming unfamiliar—is something anthropologists come to expect and is one of the real pleasures of the field. In this book, we share aspects of the anthropological experience in the hope that you, too, will come to find pleasure, insight, and self-recognition from an involvement with the unfamiliar.

**Anthropology** can be defined as the study of human nature, human society, and the human past (Greenwood and Stini 1977). It is a scholarly discipline that aims to describe in the broadest possible sense what it means to be human. Anthropologists are not alone in focusing their attention on human beings and their creations. Human biology, literature, art, history, linguistics, sociology, political science, economics—all these scholarly disciplines and many more—concentrate on one or another aspect of human life. Anthropologists are convinced, however, that explanations of human activities will be superficial unless they acknowledge that human lives are always entangled in complex patterns of work and family, power and meaning.

What is distinctive about the way anthropologists study human life? As we shall see, anthropology is holistic, comparative, field based, and evolutionary. First, anthropology emphasizes that all aspects of human life

intersect with one another in complex ways. They shape one another and become integrated with one another over time. Anthropology is thus the integrated, or *holistic*, study of human nature, human society, and the human past. This **holism** draws together anthropologists whose specializations might otherwise divide them. At the most inclusive level, we may thus think of anthropology as the integrated (or holistic) study of human nature, human society, and the human past. Holism has long been central to the anthropological perspective and remains the feature that draws together anthropologists whose specializations might otherwise divide them.

Second, in addition to being holistic, anthropology is a discipline interested in **comparison**. Generalizing about human nature, human society, and the human past requires evidence from the widest possible range of human societies. It is not enough, for example, to observe only our own social group, discover that we do not eat insects, and conclude that human beings as a species do not eat insects. When we compare human diets in different societies, we discover that insect eating is quite common and that our North American aversion to eating insects is nothing more than a dietary practice specific to our own society.

Third, anthropology is also a field-based discipline. That is, for almost all anthropologists, the actual practice of anthropology—its data collection—takes place away from the office and in direct contact with the people, the sites, or the animals that are of interest. Whether they are biological anthropologists studying chimpanzees in Tanzania, archaeologists excavating a site high in the Peruvian Andes, linguistic anthropologists learning an unwritten language in New Guinea, or cultural anthropologists studying ethnic identity in West Africa or small-town festivals in Minnesota, anthropologists are in direct contact with the sources of their data. For most anthropologists, the richness and complexity of this immersion in other patterns of life is one of our discipline's most distinctive features. Field research connects anthropologists directly with the lived experience of other people or other primates or to the material evidence of that experience that they have left behind. Academic anthropologists try to intersperse field research

**anthropology** The study of human nature, human society, and the human past.

**holism** A characteristic of the anthropological perspective that describes, at the highest and most inclusive level, how anthropology tries to integrate all that is known about human beings and their activities.

**comparison** A characteristic of the anthropological perspective that requires anthropologists to consider similarities and differences in as wide a range of human societies as possible before generalizing about human nature, human society, or the human past.



with the other tasks they perform as university professors. Other anthropologists—applied anthropologists—regularly spend most or all of their time carrying out field research. All anthropology begins with a specific group of people (or primates) and always comes back to them as well.

Finally, anthropologists try to come up with generalizations about what it means to be human that are valid across space and over time. Because anthropologists are interested in documenting and explaining change over time in the human past, **evolution** is at the core of the anthropological perspective. Anthropologists examine the *biological evolution* of the human species, which documents change over time in the physical features and life processes of human beings and their ancestors. Topics of interest include both human origins and genetic variation and inheritance in living human populations. If evolution is understood broadly as change over time, then human societies and cultures may also be understood to have evolved from prehistoric times to the present.

Anthropologists have long been interested in *cultural evolution*, which concerns change over time in beliefs, behaviors, and material objects that shape human development and social life. Early discussions of cultural evolution in anthropology emphasized a series of universal stages. However, this approach has been rejected by contemporary anthropologists who talk about cultural evolution, like William Durham (1991) and Robert Boyd (e.g., Richerson and Boyd 2006). Theoretical debates about culture change and about whether it ought to be called “cultural evolution” are very lively right now, not only in anthropology but also in related fields like evolutionary biology and developmental psychology. In the midst of this debate, one of anthropology’s most important contributions to the study of human evolution remains the demonstration that biological evolution is not the same thing as cultural evolution. Distinction between the two remains important as a way of demonstrating the fallacies and incoherence of arguments claiming that everything people do or think can be explained biologically, for example, in terms of “genes” or “race” or “sex.”

**evolution** A characteristic of the anthropological perspective that requires anthropologists to place their observations about human nature, human society, or the human past in a temporal framework that takes into consideration change over time.

**culture** Sets of learned behavior and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society together with the material artifacts and structures that human beings create and use. Human beings use culture to adapt to and transform the world in which they live.

## What Is the Concept of Culture?

A consequence of human evolution that had the most profound impact on human nature and human society was the emergence of **culture**, which can be defined as sets of learned behavior and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society together with the material artifacts and structures that human beings create and use. Our cultural heritage allows humans to adapt to and transform the world around us through our interactions with material structures and objects in the communities where we live, through the connections we form with other people and other living organisms, through the actions and skills of our individual bodies, and through the ideas and values of our minds. The cultural heritage of the human species is both meaningful and material, and it makes us unique among living creatures.

Human beings are more dependent than any other species on learning for survival because we have no instincts that automatically protect us and help us find food and shelter. Instead, we have come to use our large and complex brains to learn from other members of society what we need to know to survive. Learning is a primary focus of childhood, which is longer for humans than for any other species.

From the anthropological perspective, the concept of *culture* is central to explanations of why human beings are what they are and why they do what they do. Anthropologists are frequently able to show that members of a particular social group behave in a particular way *not* because the behavior was programmed by their genes, but because they observed other people and copied what they did. For example, North Americans typically do not eat insects, but this behavior is not the result of genetic programming. Rather, North Americans have been told as children that eating insects is disgusting, have never seen any of their friends or family eat insects, and do not eat insects themselves. As we discovered personally, however, insects can be eaten by North Americans with no ill effects. This difference in dietary behavior can be explained in terms of culture rather than biology.

However, to understand the power of culture, anthropologists must also know about human biology. Anthropologists in North America traditionally have been trained in both areas so that they can understand how living organisms work and become acquainted with comparative information about a wide range of human societies. As a result, they can better evaluate how biology and culture contribute to different forms of human

behavior. Indeed, most anthropologists reject explanations of human behavior that force them to choose either biology or culture as the unique cause. Instead, they emphasize that human beings are **biocultural organisms**. Our biological makeup—our brain, nervous system, and anatomy—is the outcome of developmental processes to which our genes and cellular chemistry contribute in fundamental ways. It also makes us organisms capable of creating and using culture. Without these biological endowments, human culture as we know it would not exist. At the same time, our survival as biological organisms depends on learned ways of thinking and acting that help us find food, shelter, and mates and that teach us how to rear our children. Our biological endowment, rich as it is, does not provide us with instincts that would automatically take care of these survival needs. Human biology makes culture possible; human culture makes human biological survival possible.

To understand the power of culture, anthropologists are also paying increasing attention to **material culture** in the lives of biocultural human organisms. Many cultural anthropologists, including ourselves, have traditionally emphasized the way people's dealings with artifacts are shaped by the cultural meanings they attach to those artifacts. This emphasis has seemed particularly necessary in the face of the widespread assumptions in our own North American society that material objects have obvious functional meanings that are the same for everyone, everywhere. But cultural anthropologists have found repeatedly that the same object can mean different things to different people. Just consider the varied meanings attached to assault weapons or the "morning after pill" in the recent history of the United States.

All the same, innovative theories of materiality developed in fields called cyborg anthropology and science studies have provided cultural anthropologists with new ways of conceptualizing relations between persons and things, enabling new connections between work in cultural anthropology and archaeology, a field with long experience in dealing with, and thinking about, material culture (see Chapters 6 and 7). Other examples illustrating these new approaches will be found throughout this book. Many examples center on human experiences with new kinds of things—computers, cell phones, the Internet—that are increasingly central to the lives of people all over the world. For instance, persons who play online video games seem to join with the technology and the other players to form a seamless hybrid entity; or the technology that links us to friends on Facebook disappears from our awareness. This is a phenomenon that anthropologist Daniel Miller calls *the humility of things*: "objects are

important, not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but quite the opposite. It is often precisely because we do not see them" (2010, 50). The merging of persons and things is sometimes a source of pleasure, as when we do our holiday shopping on the Internet; but it can also be troubling when we realize that our web-surfing activities are being tracked by commercial web-bots or by government entities like the National Security Agency. For these and other reasons, we agree with Daniel Miller that "the best way to understand, convey, and appreciate our humanity is through attention to our fundamental materiality" (2010, 4). And this means taking material culture seriously.

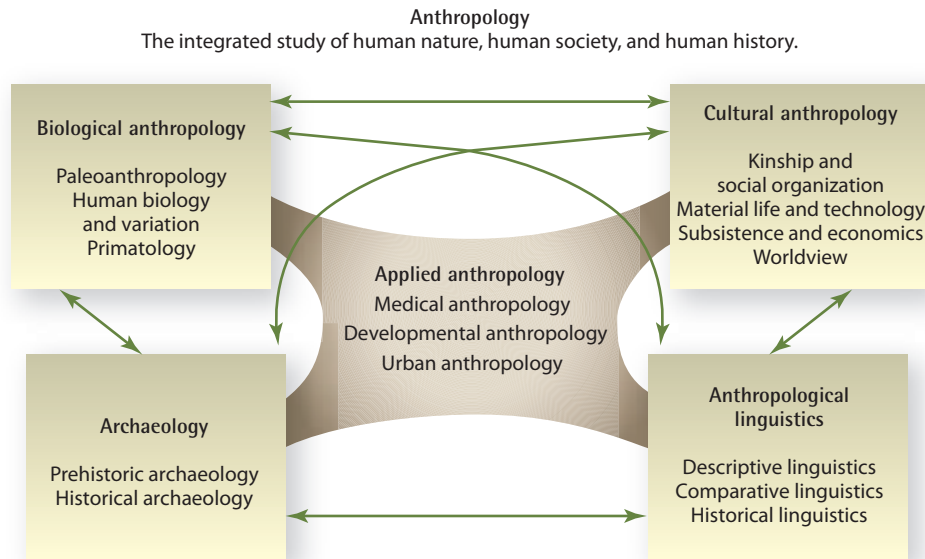
## What Makes Anthropology a Cross-Disciplinary Discipline?

Because of its diversity, anthropology does not easily fit into any of the standard academic classifications. The discipline is usually listed as a social science, but it spans the natural sciences and the humanities as well. What it is *not*, as we will see, is the study of the "exotic," the "primitive," or the "savage," terms that anthropologists reject. Figure 1.2 brings some order to the variety of interests found under the anthropological umbrella.

Traditionally, North American anthropology has been divided into four subfields: *biological anthropology*, *cultural anthropology*, *linguistic anthropology*, and *archaeology*. Because of their commitment to holism, many anthropology departments try to represent most or all of the subfields in their academic programs. However, universities in other parts of the world, such as Europe, usually do not bring all these specialties together. Many North American anthropologists, however, associate holistic four-field North American anthropology with the successful repudiation of nineteenth-century scientific racism by Franz Boas and other early twentieth-century anthropologists. They also value four-field anthropology as a protected "trading zone" within which anthropologists are encouraged to bring together fresh concepts and knowledge from a variety of research traditions. North American anthropologist Rena Lederman (2005), for example, has stressed that four-field anthropology does not insist on a single way of bringing the subfields together.

**biocultural organisms** Organisms (in this case, human beings) whose defining features are codetermined by biological and cultural factors.

**material culture** Objects created or shaped by human beings and given meaning by cultural practices.



**Figure 1.2** In the United States, anthropology is traditionally divided into four specialties: biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, anthropological linguistics, and archaeology. Applied anthropology draws on information provided by the other four specialties.

Anthropological holism is attractive even to those who were not trained in North America. British anthropologist Tim Ingold (1994), for example, argues, “The best anthropological writing is distinguished by its receptiveness to ideas springing from work in subjects far beyond its conventional boundaries, and by its ability to connect these ideas in ways that would not have occurred to their originators, who may be more enclosed in their particular disciplinary frameworks” (xvii). We share the views of Lederman and Ingold: trained in holistic, four-field anthropology, we continue to value the unique perspective it brings to the study of human nature, human society, and the human past. Indeed, as the organizers of a recent anthropological conference observed, “Even those who were the least persuaded that the traditional four-field organization of American anthropology was still viable (if it ever was) came away with a strong sense that the subfields had a great deal to say to one another and indeed needed one another” (McKinnon and Silverman 2005; viii).

## Biological Anthropology

Since the nineteenth century, when anthropology was developing as an academic field, anthropologists have studied human beings as living organisms to discover

**races** Social groupings that allegedly reflect biological differences.

what makes us different from or similar to other animals. Early interest in these matters was a by-product of centuries of exploration. Western Europeans had found tremendous variation in the physical appearance of peoples around the world and had long tried to make sense of these differences. Some researchers developed a series of elaborate techniques to measure different observable features of human populations, including skin color, hair type, body type, and so forth, hoping to find scientific evidence that would allow them to classify all the peoples of the world into a set of unambiguous categories based on distinct sets of biological attributes. Such categories were called **races**, and many scientists were convinced that clear-cut criteria for racial classification would be discovered if careful measurements were made on enough people from a range of different populations.

European scientists first applied racial categories to the peoples of Europe itself, but their classifications soon included non-European peoples, who were coming under increasing political and economic domination by expanding European and European American capitalist societies. These peoples differed from “white” Europeans not only because of their darker skin color but also because of their unfamiliar languages and customs. In most cases, their technologies were also no match for the might of the West. In the early eighteenth century, the European biologist Carolus Linnaeus (Carl von Linné, 1707–1778) classified known human populations into four races (American, European, Asian, and Negro)

# In Their Own Words

## Anthropology as a Vocation

### Listening to Voices

*James W. Fernandez (Ph.D., Northwestern University) is a professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago. He has worked among the Fang of Gabon and among cattle keepers and miners of Asturias, Spain. This is an excerpt from an essay about the anthropological vocation.*

**F**or me, the anthropological calling has fundamentally to do with the inclination to hear voices. An important part of our vocation is "listening to voices," and our methods are the procedures that best enable us to hear voices, to represent voices, to translate voices.

By listening carefully to others' voices and by trying to give voice to these voices, we act to widen the horizons of human conviviality. If we had not achieved some fellow feeling by being there, by listening carefully and by negotiating in good faith, it would be the more difficult to give voice in a way that would widen the horizons of human conviviality. Be that as it may, the calling to widen horizons and increase human conviviality seems a worthy calling—full of a very human optimism and good sense. Who would resist the proposition that more fellow feeling in the world is better than less, and that to extend the interlocutive in the world is better than to diminish it?

At the same time, there is a paradox here, one that demands of us a sense of proportion. Although the anthropologist is called to bring diverse people into intercommunication, he or she is also called to resist the homogenization that lies in mass communication. We are called by our very experience to celebrate the great variety of voices in the human chorus. The paradox is that we at once work to amplify the scale of intercommunication—and in effect contribute to homogenization—while at the same time we work to insist on the great variety of voices in communication. We must maintain here too a sense of proportion. We must recognize the point at which wider and wider cultural intercommunication can lead to dominant voices hidden in the homogenizing process. Human intercommunication has its uses and abuses.

Source: Fernandez 1990, 14–15.

based on skin color (reddish, white, yellow, and black, respectively). Linnaeus also connected racial membership with the mental and moral attributes of group members. Thus, he wrote, Europeans were "fickle, sanguine, blue-eyed, gentle, and governed by laws," whereas Negroes were "choleric, obstinate, contented, and regulated by custom" and Asians were "grave, avaricious, dignified, and ruled by opinion" (Molnar 2001, 5–6).

In the nineteenth century, influential natural scientists such as Louis Agassiz, Samuel George Morton, Francis Galton, and Paul Broca built on this idea of race, ranking different populations of the world in terms of brain size; they found the brains of "white" Europeans and North Americans to be larger and saw the other races as representing varying grades of inferiority, with Africans ranked at the bottom (Gould 1996). These findings were used to justify the social practice of **racism**: the systematic oppression of members of one or more socially defined "races" by another socially defined "race" that is justified in terms of the supposed inherent biological superiority of the rulers and the supposed inherent biological inferiority of those they rule.

Biological or physical anthropology as a separate discipline had its origins in the work of scholars like these, whose training was in some other discipline, often medicine. Johann Blumenbach (1752–1840), for example, whom some have called the "father of physical anthropology," was trained as a physician. Blumenbach identified five different races (Caucasoid, Mongoloid, American, Ethiopian, and Malayan), and his classification was influential in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Molnar 2001, 6). He and his contemporaries assumed that the races of "mankind" (as they would have said) were fixed and unchanging subdivisions of humanity.

However, as scientists learned more about biological variation in human populations, some of them came to realize that traits traditionally used to identify races, such as skin color, did not correlate well with

**racism** The systematic oppression of one or more socially defined "races" by another socially defined "race" that is justified in terms of the supposed inherent biological superiority of the rulers and the supposed inherent biological inferiority of those they rule.