Anthropology, Physical

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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ANTHROPOLOGY, PHYSICAL

SEE Anthropology, Biological.

ANTHROPOLOGY, PRACTICING

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ANTHROPOLOGY, PUBLIC

Public anthropology focuses the distinctive perspectives and methods of anthropology on public issues. Since the founding of anthropology as an academic discipline in the late nineteenth century, it has changed a great deal and divided into numerous specialties and schools of thought, but certain key features abide. Anthropology is comprehensive of space and time: it covers the entire world, and it treats humankind throughout its history and prehistory, including the present. It is also comprehensive in aspect, treating biological as well as cultural features of humans, and it tends to be holistic, considering how various aspects of life fit together rather than attending mainly to one aspect, such as economics or politics. Finally, anthropology relies strongly on fieldwork, whether archaeological excavation or participant observation of all manner of contemporary situations. Public anthropology deploys these characteristic approaches of anthropology to address public issues.

Some consider public anthropology to be an extension of an older field, applied anthropology, which is also termed practicing anthropology. That is a valid perspective, but public anthropology tends to focus less on specific problems than on the issues and policies that create the
problems. Applied anthropology, for example, might aid a community in correcting a problem with pollution, while public anthropology might address the policies or culture that create the pollution. Among those practicing and defining public anthropology, emphases and terminologies vary. Public interest anthropology, for example, emphasizes that the issues the field is concerned with are defined by public bodies’ interests (Sanday), while Rob Borofsky would include the publicizing of anthropology—connecting public figures and public arenas to anthropology.

Whereas anthropologists generally attempt to understand and appreciate all human behaviors, a public anthropologist may conclude that some behaviors or situations should change. She or he may judge that some actions violate human rights and move beyond cultural relativism to take a position against torture, child slavery, or the oppression of women, for example, and then work to prevent those actions or even to change the situations and culture that support them.

Moving from scholarly understanding to advocacy and action, public anthropology may modify classic methods. Ethnographic fieldwork is excellent for in-depth analysis but may take too long to be a good way of investigating urgent problems. Holism offers breadth but can distract attention from a problem at hand. Anthropology as a discipline offers much, but the work of addressing public issues cannot be confined to a single discipline. Instead, it requires a combination of academic disciplines and necessarily reaches beyond academics to involve the entire community. Researchers may need to engage with or even become leaders, administrators, and advocates.

Public anthropology welcomes such disciplinary intersections and forms of engagement (Peacock 1997).

Historically and in the early twenty-first century, a variety of anthropological efforts illustrate possibilities for public anthropology, though they are not always labeled as such. Lee Baker’s account suggests that the founder Franz Boas’s efforts to combat racism were an early example of public anthropology. Boas utilized careful research to demonstrate, for example, that the shape of one’s head is influenced by the environment. From this, he argued against racism on the ground that the environment, including culture, is a major factor in shaping physical characteristics that many of his contemporaries identified as being specific to race. Boas’s student Margaret Mead (1928) followed his lead by demonstrating through her fieldwork in Samoa that adolescence is culturally shaped and not merely biologically determined. After completing fieldwork in New Guinea and Bali, Mead went on to apply anthropology to a range of public issues, one of which was gender. She utilized her fieldwork to show how definitions of male and female depend on cultural context, and hence she argued for a more flexible understand-

ing and acceptance of wider variation in the roles of both women and men (Mead 1949).

Early twenty-first century examples of public anthropology are diverse. Paul Farmer, a physician and anthropologist, practiced in Haiti initially and addresses public-health issues globally (Kidder 2003). Johnnetta Cole is an anthropologist who has served as a college president, first of Spelman College and then of Bennett College—both historically black colleges for women that Cole has shaped into institutions that nurture positive values. Other examples range from James Peacock’s (2007) efforts to build international concerns at a state university and in a regional context to the creation of a union of academics and activists (CIRA) and investigation of public issues in communities (Holland et al. 2007).

Among formal anthropological organizations, public anthropologists can be found in the National Association of Practicing Anthropologists and the Society for Applied Anthropology and among the thirty-plus sections of the American Anthropological Association (identified by specialty or cultural/ethnic focus) as well as in the Royal Anthropological Institute and many international organizations. Several universities offer programs in public anthropology, and there are publications focused on the discipline. The work also occurs in interdisciplinary and nonacademic organizations ranging from local legislatures to international bodies, such as the United Nations.

Public anthropology, then, is not easily defined by pinpointing a single organizational affiliation or any certification; one is not certified to practice public anthropology. It is best recognized as an approach or practice that utilizes anthropological training, knowledge, and perspectives in addressing societal issues.

In a global and diverse world, issues require comprehensive perspectives. More so than most disciplines, anthropology is comprehensive, encompassing a century of field experience in diverse global contexts. The challenge for public anthropology is to deploy that experience in active engagement to address pressing issues effectively. On the one hand, public anthropology must broaden its vision beyond its British and North American academic origins as diverse cultures and communities assume leadership roles; on the other, it must hone its methods to make an impact.

SEE ALSO Activism; American Anthropological Association; Anthropology; Boas, Franz; Human Rights; Mead, Margaret; Public Policy

BIBLIOGRAPHY
ANTHROPOLOGY, URBAN

Throughout history, cities have been important places of associated life, human diversity, and interaction. However, while twentieth-century sociologists have been at the forefront of urban studies, social and cultural anthropologists have long neglected the city as a relevant field of research. In the late 1930s a few anthropologists, such as Robert Redfield (1897–1958), shifted their attention from tribal and rural communities to peasant city-dwellers. Influenced by the Chicago school, some American anthropologists engaged in problem-centered studies that focused on poverty, ecology, and minorities; they developed such concepts as the “culture of poverty,” cited by Oscar Lewis in Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty (1959). Many of these studies examined rural-urban migration in slums and shanty towns in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Meanwhile, a group of anthropologists led by the South African Max Gluckman at the Rhodes Livingston Institute of Northern Rhodesia studied the effects of urbanization on tribal economy and social relations, particularly in the Copperbelt area of central Africa. Research in African cities, however, was not really considered urban research, according to Ralph D. Grillo in Ideologies and Institutions in Urban France: The Representation of Immigrants (1985). Although such pioneering work was later criticized for its functionalist approach, it did contribute to the development of new anthropological methods, such as case and network analysis.

More generally, anthropologists seemed to consider the city a new laboratory in which to carry out traditional studies on kinship, small-group dynamics, and belief and value systems. This trend continued throughout the 1960s, prompting Ulf Hannerz in Exploring the City; Inquiries toward an Urban Anthropology (1980) to question whether urban anthropology had a specific subject of study.

A more eclectic and regionally diversified urban anthropology emerged during the 1970s as field research was conducted in Japan, India, and Indonesia, and across Africa and South America. Such socioeconomic and geopolitical variety raised some confusion in precisely defining the term urban. For some, urban referred to population aggregates of a certain size. Others defined urban in terms of occupations other than agricultural or subsistence production. Still others defined urban as the density of social interaction rather than just demographic or physical density. From a Marxist perspective, it was argued that class struggle constituted the essence of urban life. Two main positions eventually emerged. One regarded the city as a totality that should be studied in itself. The other argued that the city could not be studied as an isolated unit separated from the wider national and international context. Richard G. Fox in Urban Anthropology: Cities in Their Cultural Setting (1977) expanded on this position by including historical analysis in the locally significant global context.

By the early 1980s anthropologists appeared to be divided between those who focused on so-called third-world societies—continuing to address town-country relations, rural migration, and urban adaptation—and those with an interest in industrial societies. The latter were mainly native anthropologists.