

# Anthropology and Public Policy

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Since anthropology was born amidst the controversy of abolition, it would be no surprise that the discipline has long had a concern with public issues. The debates over slavery were so acrimonious that the ethnographic societies of London and Paris both split apart over the issue, some members insisting that the new science should remain aloof from moral problems, other members insisting that any humane science must take a moral stance. This controversy continues among anthropologists today; it is often reflected even in the works of an individual. For instance, Edward B. Tylor made one of the earliest pronouncements of the need for anthropology to be culturally relative. Although he did not use the term, he (1871) stated the issue as clearly as it has ever been expressed by saying that anthropologists "must not measure other people's corn by their own bushel." Logically, then, Tylor was in no position to judge the morality of other nations, but he never hesitated in his condemnation of slavery.

## Anthropology and Colonialism

Contemporary Africans and some Asians readily indict anthropology as an imperialistic science because they judge it as a handmaiden to colonialism. Perhaps the best defense anthropologists have to this charge is that the monographs they wrote after their one or two years of fieldwork were so long and so technical that administrators rarely read them. More to the point, however, numerous colonial administrators spent part of their academic time studying anthropology, and it is these individuals who did use anthropology

in colonial administration. But the issue is: Did this knowledge make them more humane administrators or did it somehow allow them to continue colonial domination? The question may never be answered, of course, but after reading R.S. Rattray (1923), one of the anthropology-administrators, it is easy to conclude that anthropology enabled him to rule better than he otherwise would have governed.

For historical retrospect, one might consult the work of an obvious critic, a Marxist anthropologist. Talal Asad, who was born in Saudi Arabia, has examined the issue in depth, and offers a fairly objective critique. Asad (1973 : 17) makes his point this way: "...the scientific definition of anthropology as a disinterested (objective) study of 'other cultures' helped to mark off the anthropologist's enterprise from that of the trader, the missionary, the administrator...; but did it not also render him unable to envisage and argue for a radically different political future for the subordinate people he studied and thus serve to merge that enterprise *in effect* with that of dominant status-quo Europeans?" Asad proceeds to note that some anthropologists were accused of being "Reds" because of their liberal stance and their advocacy for the people they studied; nevertheless, he notes that they did choose to live at peace professionally with the administrator. In other words, any kind of cooperation with colonial administration might be condemned by Marxist analysis.

American anthropologists have tended to escape this kind of criticism because the United States had no colonies. But it might be noted that the Bureau of American Ethnology received its first funding shortly after the Philippines came under American rule, and some Congressmen envisioned a need for anthropological study of the indigenous people. Whether the Bureau was indeed intended for study of the Philippines may never be known; what happened in fact was that its staff directed its study to the American Indian. The reports from the Bureau tended to be historic reconstructions, linguistic analysis, or studies of subjects such as mythology so that the work could hardly be judged of any value to the Bureau of

Indian Affairs, which might be described as administering American internal colonies.

However, just as a crisis and rebellion among the Ashanti had inspired British administrators to seek the aid of anthropologists, an apparent uprising among the Sioux caused the Bureau of American Ethnology to send James Mooney to investigate the Ghost Dance. This nativistic movement reflected the despair of Plains Indians in using military means; instead they were now appealing to the supernatural to rescue Indians. As Mooney (1896) made clear, the Ghost Dance was never the basis for rebellion, and certainly it was not a just cause for the tragic massacre of Sioux that eventually occurred at Wounded Knee. Although Mooney's work was perceptive, it was well after the fact. It could hardly be judged as helpful to administration, and American anthropology did not again become active in Indian policy until the 1930's.

The "Brain Trust" of the Roosevelt administration engaged most of the social science disciplines in a variety of "recovery" or what would now be called "developmental" experiments. The Department of Agriculture, for instance, included a few anthropologists among the rural sociologists it hired to examine rural communities in a variety of regions. These social scientists helped in the initiation of conservation measures, and engaged in the debates over the issue of the future of American agriculture.

For anthropology, however, the major public issue was the future of American Indian policy. For forty years, a policy of forced assimilation led to economic disaster and great apathy among Indians who were still far from the "melting pot" of the American ideal. To improve this situation Roosevelt appointed John Collier, a reformer and welfare worker who had become interested and well-informed on Indian rights (Schusky 1978:430).

Collier wanted Indians to become self-governing as well as to improve their income. He also believed that Indians should have the right to maintain their own cultures, and he was able to secure Congressional support for a policy of cultural pluralism. Given the number and size of ethnic groups

in the United States, the public issue of cultural pluralism versus assimilation has always been important, with majority support usually for the latter. But in the 1930s America was ready for social experimentation, and cultural pluralism was adopted with some zeal.

Anthropologists were a logical choice to aid in the experiment, and a number of recent Ph.D.s were available from the founding departments. One group was assigned to study Indian political organization as a basis for instituting the changes that could lead to self-government. Another group undertook research in Indian schools to find what curriculum changes should accompany an education designed for cultural pluralism.

The challenge for the first group was awesome, and the individuals were poorly prepared for it. Their instructors had never considered such problems, and the anthropologists proceeded to reconstruct the old political structures, to undertake the long and arduous fieldwork that is necessary for sound anthropological analysis and to conclude with long, detailed reports. Neither Collier nor Congress had the patience to wait the results of such research. Instead, lawyers in Washington wrote model law codes and constitutions for the tribes, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs began to institute the changes it deemed necessary for democratic rule.

Quite in contrast, the anthropological research into Indian education can be judged highly successful. Even the fieldwork had unintended benefits. Anthropologists asked teachers to conduct interviews along with them, and many of the teachers reported that it was the first opportunity they ever had to visit the parents of their school children. The parents were pleasantly surprised that the teachers would come to their homes, and the new friendships were a basis for the beginnings of some parent-teachers' associations.

The conclusions of the research affected both curriculum and methods. The research stressed how difficult it was for a foreign speaker to have to begin reading by working in a foreign language. Therefore, texts for elementary students were written in Navajo, Sioux and other languages so

literacy was first acquired in native language to be followed by literacy in English. Indian children were also taught some of their own history and to take pride in their own culture, a major revision of former policy which often pictured Indian culture as inferior and shameful. Equally impressive changes were made in method, shifting from the customary emphasis upon competition to traditional forms of cooperation. Indian children in the elementary grades began to take much more interest in education, and increasing achievements were reflected in test scores.

The monographs that resulted from this work continue to be read. They show how anthropology can play an important role in public issues. Interestingly, many of the researchers were women, and a female anthropologist directed the overall project among five different tribes, some of them the largest in the nation. As director, Laura Thompson describes the project and her own fieldwork with recommendations for the Hopi in *Culture In Crisis* (1950). This book, like others in the series, begins with a short ethnography of the past and present; it then describes the school situation and the results of a variety of tests; selective biographies of children follow; and conclusions are recommendations about educational policy. Gordon Macgregor (1946) was responsible for the report on the Sioux Indians of Pine Ridge in South Dakota; Alice Joseph, Rosamond Spicer, and Jane Chesky (1947) report the research among the Papago of southern Arizona; Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton (1956) did the research among the Navajo of New Mexico. These books have received attention from a general audience as well as students, and they continue to remain in print. Some of the changes they helped to make are now fundamental parts of Indian policy.

The work established a place for anthropology in government which at first viewed anthropology with much suspicion. Among the work-welfare programs of the Great Depression were projects that involved extensive archaeological research, but the other branches of anthropology were thought to be overly idealistic in wanting to preserve native peoples as a kind

of laboratory. But this suspicion disappeared with the outbreak of World War II.

### **American Anthropology and Issues of World War II**

The all-out war effort of the 1940s employed anthropologists primarily in a study of the enemy, but also of allies. Clyde Kluckhohn analyzed the Russians while Gregory Bateson drew a picture of the British character in order to promote better feelings among the English and American GIs. In this study of national character Margaret Mead contributed one on the Americans, *And Keep Your Powder Dry*. However, the major effort was analysis and study of the Asian theater. Anthropologists were asked for their knowledge on the exotic cultures and languages of Oceania, and some anthropologists became instructors in the schools that prepared civil affairs officers. Anthropologists became civil affairs officers, themselves, some of them becoming prominent in the administration of the Trust Territory of Micronesia, a task that still continues for the United States under a mandate from the United Nations. Initially, civil affairs was thought to be limited to such matters as installing a safe water supply and helping to restore the economy. But anthropologists soon found themselves in the complex issues of what kind of government to install. Was the proper course to resurrect the old clan aristocracy or did the United Nations expect the introduction of democracy? Was a formal education a right of Micronesians, and if so, what should the curriculum be? One can easily imagine the host of problems that would arise when some remote Pacific island was destined to become part of the modern world. Barnett (1956) describes some of these issues and puts them in a context of how anthropology learned about administration through experience in the Trust Territory. The problems are also featured in the early issues of *Human Organization*. This journal is published by the Society for Applied Anthropology, which was founded during the war by the anthropologists engaged with such public issues.

Even more anthropological talent was put to work in the Office of War Information. Two major tasks of this office were to study the Japanese as an enemy and to manage the relocation camps established for Japanese-Americans. Although anthropologists had always prided themselves on direct contact in fieldwork, Ruth Benedict and others began their "study at a distance." Part of this work was devising appropriate propaganda both for troops and civilians; some of its most effective advice was in the treatment of prisoners. Americans regarded the Japanese as fanatics whom they could rarely capture, but when they did so, prisoners seemed highly cooperative. They were not trusted in giving information until the Office of War Information explained that, being captured, they no longer regarded themselves as Japanese because they had so miserably failed. But the major task of Benedict and others was to plan for the occupation of Japan, a reflection on American optimism since such planning began when the Japanese were sweeping the Pacific. It is not possible to evaluate how influential Benedict was in helping to make a decision to retain the emperor in post-war Japan because some diplomats and others also recommended such policy. Certainly, however, the decision had to have sound logical backing because it was highly unpopular with Congress and the American people. For most Americans the emperor had been made a prime scapegoat, and it was difficult to see how he could remain, even as a figurehead.

For some of the logic that carried the decision to retain, one may consult Benedict's (1967) *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. This work is the first in anthropology that involved the discipline with a major public issue of national concern. Interestingly, the work is of such an academic as well as practical nature that it inspired a generation of Japanese social scientists to examine their own country, both refining and refuting parts of Benedict's analysis.

A second assignment of the Office of War Information was to administer camps established for Japanese on the West Coast. Their resettlement into virtual concentration camps is now a matter of shame, but at the time Japanese victories in the Pacific suggested the possibility of an invasion,

and when a Japanese submarine shelled a California oil field, plans were rushed to round up both Japanese resident in the United States and second generation Japanese who were born in the U.S.

They were hastily relocated in the desert and mountain states in barracks resembling ones used by the army, but they were surrounded by barbed wire and sometimes guarded. They were hardly suited for family life. To administer this difficult situation, some bureaucrats thought of the Bureau of Indian Affairs with its cross-cultural experience. Selection of their personnel meant that most officials had no experience with Japanese, but they had learned to appreciate the understanding of anthropologists, and anthropologists came to several of the camps as staff advisers.

These advisers were faced with a host of problems, ranging from discovery of the best use of barracks space for family life to quelling a riot that occurred in one of the camps. The best description of the problems anthropologists faced and came to grips with is provided by Leighton (1945) who was aided by Edward Spicer, both of whose wives were engaged in the study of Indian education and curriculum design. One of the most interesting parts of Leighton's book, *The Governing of Men*, describes the policy of instituting as much self-government as possible into the camps, after they had been established in such a highly authoritative manner. And to indicate that the camps were better than concentration camps, as has been charged, many Japanese-Americans were recruited by the army to become a Japanese regiment which distinguished itself in the Italian campaign.

Before the end of the war the camps had been closed due largely to a policy of relocation. This policy helped Japanese settle in the Midwest and East. Because of a shortage of labor Japanese were welcome in such cities as Chicago, but they were aided in such relocation tasks as finding housing, securing health insurance and related problems.

## Anthropology and the Post-War Years

Despite the success of Benedict's recommendations on an issue of national scope, anthropologists settled on small-scale, village-level projects for the most part, following World War II. America, of course, had turned its attention to rebuilding Europe in 1945, but the success of the Marshall Plan quickly turned her attention to the rest of the world. Some Latin American aid started under the Truman Administration and by the time of Eisenhower, the United States was attempting to change Asia and Africa as well. Foreign economic aid to the Third World had become an agreed upon policy although debate raged over amounts and purpose. Initially, anthropologists avoided much of this controversy as they settled into villages with undeniable poverty and tried to bring changes in health, education, and agriculture. A case study method evolved from this work, most of it illustrating the drastic and unexpected changes that may arise from introduction of a single innovation. Sharp (1952) epitomized how far ranging the change can be by documenting changes in age and sex structure, politics, and even religion when steel axes were substituted for stone axes in Australia. Using cases like this one, Spicer (1952) published a textbook for applied anthropology, offering lessons from his own work at a Japanese relocation camp and the work of others who were watching the introduction of new irrigation systems, vaccination programs, and elementary education.

The link between anthropology and public health became particularly strong, probably because of the success of such quickly understood benefits of the wonder drugs, D.D.T., and a sanitary water supply. Paul (1955) compiled a casebook of innovations analyzed by medical anthropology, and laid the foundation for an association of medical anthropologists who have found work with the World Health Organization and the Public Health Service of the United States.

Perhaps the single, best known project of this era is the Vicos Project,

undertaken by Cornell University in Peru. Since it was a time of optimism, there were unusual funds available so that Holmberg (1995) and others could begin by renting an hacienda in the highlands. In effect, anthropologists became the hacendado of a small fiefdom. They attempted very few changes in the first year, and in the second year they innovated simply by making a new variety of potato available. But in the third year, they called in the villagers and began to ask their advice on what to do with the profits from the new crop. The villagers were overwhelming in their desire for education for their children, and as they began the task of building a school, a home for the teacher, and helping in the hiring of a teacher, they learned the elements of self-government, the ultimate aim of the Cornell project. By the end of five years the community was ready to purchase the hacienda only to discover that the value of it had increased so much because of their efforts that they faced an inflated price. Nevertheless, they eventually were able to make the purchase and achieve an independence not otherwise known among Incan Indians.

Vicos was a remarkable success, yet in retrospect Holmberg was saddened by the achievement. Incans in neighboring valleys saw what Vicosenos had achieved and demanded the same thing, but unsympathetic hacendados there responded by calling in the army and raising the fears of revolution. In the end, several Indians lost their lives. Holmberg and applied anthropologists began to realize the cost of their goals. What did it matter that a village of several hundred Incans had improved their lives when five million others had experienced no change?

Such findings accompanied a move toward a more general approach to anthropology and public issues. Foster (1969) published a text, later called *Applied Anthropology*, that was matched by a book of the same title by Lucy Mair for students in England. A course in anthropology and public issues or applied anthropology became standard in the curriculum of most graduate students. From the beginning, many prominent anthropologists in the discipline had taken an interest in applied anthropology, and presidents

of the Society for Applied Anthropology were often presidents of the American Anthropological Association or editors of its journal.

Nevertheless, a growing pessimism marked the field. Senator Joseph McCarthy forced some anthropologists out of government work because of their liberal views, but the most difficult setback came with United States involvement in Vietnam.

Could anthropology be used to maintain or establish a fascist government? Undoubtedly it could, and professional anthropologists began to wonder what sanctions they must apply to other anthropologists who might use the discipline in such a way. However, the problem was actually much greater than one of establishing standards. Anthropologists began to discover that their work, even the most innocuous parts, could be used for the most devious ends without their knowledge. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of such an event is offered by Condominas (1957). This French-Vietnamese anthropologist had difficulty in getting his ethnography of a mountain people published in French, and after some attempts to have it published in English, he gave up. To his surprise an English translation later appeared although neither he nor his publisher had been notified. He was especially puzzled because the translation had been funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce. It was not until someone explained to him that Central Intelligence Agency funds are hidden in a variety of budget lines that he began to fear how his data might be used.

It was then far too late, but he realized that his outline of Montagnard political organization was a useful guide to CIA officers wanting to recruit village leaders. Even sketch maps of a village can be useful information for a military patrol. In a discussion of such problems Margaret Mead once said that perhaps anthropologists should consider not publishing data any more until it was out-of-date. Yet, she recognized that such a step was impossible for the scientific community, and her final answer was that anthropologists must assume responsibility for their data *and its use* by their own government. In short, she called upon anthropologists to commit

themselves morally to policy as well as to help make it.

It was a call that was scarcely needed. Anthropologists were among the campus leaders who first conducted teachings on Vietnam, and the professional association was among the first to petition the government to end its Vietnam involvement. But it was not only in Vietnam that social science was being misused.

Social scientists discovered that some of their work in Latin America was being used for Project Camelot, an undercover operation intended to aid a highly conservative government which had little sympathy for campesinos, the poor villagers anthropologists were supposedly helping. Anthropologists were not alone in finding themselves duped by their own government; political scientists, sociologists and others had unknowingly aided a covert operation. Reaction to such involvement produced unity among social scientists, and descriptions of the project, such as one by Horowitz (1965) brought public sympathy.

In retrospect, anthropology of the post-war years had started overly optimistic and continued for too long as too naive. Good intentions were far too little; minor innovations at a few selected villages were not enough, and anthropologists could not hope to be politically neutral while helping to make a few economic changes that would benefit the poorest of the poor.

### **Contemporary Anthropology and Public Issues**

While anthropology suffered a period of disillusionment through the early 1970s, it recovered somewhat in the late 1970s. It is no longer so naive, and many mature anthropologists have now spent their entire professional careers involved in some aspect of public policy (Schusky 1981). A steady growth has occurred so that an anthropological viewpoint now sees national or even international events as important as happenings at the village level.

Today anthropologists sit down as readily with bankers as with Australian

aborigines. On one side of the world an anthropologist may be collecting genealogies while on the other side, a fieldworker is collecting the table of organization for a multinational corporation. One anthropologist divides her time between interviewing executives of a tin marketing firm in New York City and tin miners in Bolivia. While anthropology students still often collect data for a dissertation on Indian reservations, others serve an internship in the United States Congress watching how Indian policy is formulated in Washington, D.C.

It is not possible to predict all the future policy involvements of anthropology, but surely the field will no longer limit itself to a single village or small community. All over the world an interrelated global economy is evolving that affects the most remote community. As multinational corporations push themselves into the most remote of economies, national governments or agencies of the United Nations are close behind. It is essential that anthropologists understand the actions and effects of these organizations. More than ever before, anthropologists must rely upon the knowledge of economists, political scientists, and sociologists as well as other social scientists.

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