



# FOREWORD

## Odyssey—A Life in Anthropology

When Dr. H. James Bix, the editor of the *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, and I first met over lunch in a restaurant near the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles, we discovered that, in addition to our commitment to anthropology, we both have a passion for Charles Darwin and the profound way that his writings have permeated the fabric of Western science and culture. At that lunch, James proposed that I write the foreword to the encyclopedia, a foreword that relates to my life in anthropology.

Anthropology is the scientific study of humankind's origin, biology, and culture. It encompasses a vast—and some might say, untidy—body of knowledge that has rarely been organized. In real-life terms, an informal but yawning gap has existed between those who study culture, especially of present and past historically known societies, and those who wrestle with the issues of human origin.

Anthropology has many mothers and fathers, but it was Charles Darwin who shone the brightest light on the biological nature of humans and the fact that human culture ultimately emerged out of the biological reality of human beings and their evolution. Darwin also emphasized the unmistakable kinship of humans and apes.

It has been said that freedom is like air: You don't notice it, but if you lose it, then you suffocate. Culture is also like air in that most people don't notice it, but it is essential to human survival. Culture is the knowledge, beliefs, patterns of behavior, and institutions that are transferred from one generation to the next and shared by a group of people. Culture has enabled human beings to survive as a species, to prosper, and ultimately to have dominion over the earth. Culture is

the interface between humans and the environment. It buffers us. The extent of our dependence on culture is part of what makes us unique as a species. Without culture, a human being is naked.

I have been studying a population of wild orangutans now for almost 35 years. When a group of colleagues and I recently published a paper in *Science*



Source: Photograph by Linda Leigh/OFI.

citing evidence that orangutans have culture, the media took notice. We were interviewed by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as by other media. Our conclusion was seen as news. Yet, the observation that orangutans have culture should not have come as a surprise. Human beings and the great apes are close relatives, and we have known for some time that great apes possess the most fundamental elements of culture. Jane Goodall and others have long demonstrated that wild chimpanzees make tools in their natural environments according to patterns learned from other chimpanzees. In captivity, great apes such as the gorilla Koko and, under free-ranging conditions, the orangutan Princess have exhibited a limited but demonstrable ability to communicate through symbols.

The exception proves the rule. Other animals demonstrate culture, and it has been argued that even some bird species do. Nonetheless, in some ways, human culture is unique. Complex tool-making and full-blown language have long been considered the distinguishing characteristics of humans. It has been argued that humans are the only animals who make tools to make other tools. Yet, I have never believed in an absolute divide between humans and other animals. At most, we can certainly argue that no other animal depends so much on culture to survive as do human beings.

Thus, anthropology is the most global and inclusive of all disciplines. When H. James Birx first asked me to write the foreword to this encyclopedia, I was surprised to learn that this will be the first comprehensive international encyclopedia of anthropology. I was immediately impressed by the worldwide nature of the enterprise. Over 250 authors from dozens of universities, institutes, and museums have contributed to these five volumes, which were assembled in California for printing in China. In addition, contributors present subjects and issues in geology, paleontology, biology, evolution, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and, yes, even theology that are relevant to anthropology.

I became an anthropologist out of my interest in human origins and history. Human evolution has been interwoven with cultural evolution. I thought, like many before me, that the better we understand animals—especially our closest living relatives in the animal kingdom, the great apes—the better we would understand ourselves, our culture, and our evolution. My initial odyssey into anthropology came from

reading. I was a child who read everything that came into my hands, including the proverbial back of the cereal box. In elementary school, the very first book I took out from the public library was *Curious George*, the story of an adventurous and unruly monkey, who was brought to an urban environment by an explorer in a tall yellow hat. It had a profound affect on me. But it wasn't until my third year in university that I actually took an anthropology class, and the effect was like a parched person receiving water.

In my last year of undergraduate work, when I was 19, I had an epiphany. My psychology professor mentioned, in passing, a young English woman, who was living with wild chimpanzees in Africa. I didn't know who the woman was, but I later discovered that it was Jane Goodall. At that moment, in the psychology class, I knew that my destiny was to live with and study orangutans in their native habitat. I decided, however, that I would first get my PhD in archaeology. When I had achieved that, I would go to Southeast Asia and study wild orangutans in their natural habitat. I conducted archaeological fieldwork in Arizona, California, British Columbia, and the former Yugoslavia.

But fate intervened in the form of the late charismatic paleoanthropologist, Louis S. B. Leakey. In 1959, Louis and his wife Mary had electrified the world by finding ancient hominid fossils that demonstrated the great antiquity of humankind. He put actual bones, fossil bones that were dated scientifically, into the evolutionary story of our species. And he believed that the study of our nearest living kin, the great apes, would help add flesh and blood to those bones. Louis Leakey enabled me to pursue my life's work: the study and conservation of orangutans in Indonesia. Consequently, instead of archaeology, I received my PhD in physical anthropology for my study of wild orangutans.

Other anthropologists also inspired me. As I entered the graduate program in anthropology at UCLA, I learned about many anthropologists who played important roles in the life of Western societies. I am proud to be an anthropologist because anthropologists played a key role in steering Western culture away from racism and sexism. Anthropologists are also playing an important role in trying to save great apes from extinction in their own environments and by fighting for their rights in captivity. Clearly, anthropologists are not immune to the thoughts and beliefs of their times. But, both generally stressing the

unitary origin of our modern human species, in terms of biological evolution, and documenting the diversity and legitimacy of human cultures are important achievements that resonate in Western thinking.

We tend to understand the more recent work in our field better than we do its history. Cultural evolution is not a new area of work. Edward Tylor, who was the first professor of anthropology at Oxford, a Quaker who nurtured anthropology in Great Britain, influenced anthropology by his investigations into the similarities among cultures. Tylor also tried to understand prehistory when no historical record existed. Darwin's writings influenced Tylor; he saw cultures as examples of progressive evolution rather than cultures being the products of random selection. That the goal of culture was to progress to the next state or grade was a view that persisted in anthropology even into the 1960s.

Rebelling against 19th century cultural evolutionists, Franz Boas, the father of American anthropology, taught respect for technologically primitive peoples and fought long and hard against racism during all the years of his adult life in academia. He also left generations of his students, "Boasians," who were influenced by his views and carried on his work. One of his students, Alfred Kroeber, saw anthropology as a united field rather than a collection of specializations (physical/biological anthropology, archaeology, cultural/social anthropology, and linguistics). At the Department of Anthropology at UCLA where I was a graduate student in the 1960s, Kroeber's influence was very much felt. I had to take core courses in all four of the disciplines of anthropology before I received my master's degree.

While I was a graduate student at UCLA, two of the "stars" of the department were the archaeologists Lewis and Sally Binford. The Binfords introduced the "new archaeology" to the world, an archaeology that stressed scientific method and the processes that produced prehistoric societies. The Binfords ultimately departed UCLA, but the excitement they generated was palpable; like Louis Leakey, Lewis Binford could have been an Old Testament prophet for all the emotions that he stirred up with his proselytization of the new archaeology among faculty and students. But the new archaeology had not sprung fully formed from Binford's brain, like fully-armed Athena from the head of Zeus. Rather, Julian Steward's influence in developing ideas about cultural ecology and multilinear evolution was very apparent. Cultural

ecology, similar to biological ecology, investigates the relationship between environments and cultures or societies. Although his view of evolution stemmed from the idea of evolution as progress, Steward did not believe that all cultures follow the same pathway. Similarities among groups with no demonstrable contact were due to adaptations rather than diffusion.

But perhaps the most famous anthropologist in the world was Margaret Mead, certainly the anthropologist who was the most widely read of her time and a "Boasian" herself. Her work in Samoa, specifically on adolescence and child-rearing, had an unprecedented impact on American child-rearing practices through her influence on Dr. Benjamin Spock, the child-rearing guru of post-World War II North America. Her tangential influence on Dr. Spock permeated his advice. Child-rearing practices in North America reflected his thinking so much that his advice was taken as the natural way to parent.

Margaret Mead's influence on the development of feminism was also indirect but persuasive. Her detailed ethnographies were interesting for the way that they exploded conventional Western thinking on gender and sexual divisions in society. Other writers took division of labor for granted. Mead, however, demonstrated that gender differences meant more than just foraging issues and that they were played out in very complex and different ways in different societies. Mead described three cultures in New Guinea: In one, men were expected to be feminine (by Western standards); in another, women were masculine, even "macho"; in a third, gender differences were considered inconsequential because men and women were thought to be alike.

Although Mead's research was questioned after her death, she was probably the most influential anthropologist of the 20th century. In addition to her books, her frequent columns in a popular women's magazine helped propagate her views on child-rearing and gender. I briefly met Margaret Mead at a conference a few years before her death, and she was as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. Ironically, I also had a long correspondence with Derek Freeman, the Australian National University professor who led a campaign against Mead's academic work after her death. This campaign generated much controversy and very much reflected the stubborn character I knew through his correspondence. But in the end, North American society had moved on beyond the controversy and Mead's influence remains.

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The influence of Louis Leakey, Raymond Dart, and Phillip Tobias in demonstrating that humankind had a unitary origin, which includes all modern humankind, also cannot be underestimated, and I should mention as well the late Ashley Montagu as an indefatigable fighter against racism. In lectures, conferences, and documentaries and also in their writings, these men preached the message that all modern humans are descended from the same ancestors and are therefore kin. Perhaps this is the reason why a very inclusive *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* is so needed. We need to underscore the fact that anthropology gets its strength from its diversity of practitioners and disciplines, and that one of its main strengths is its global nature. Also, we need to understand that, ultimately, every human being is a natural anthropologist, simply by becoming aware of his or her own biology and culture.

As we do air, we frequently take culture for granted and ignore its influence on our own thoughts, beliefs, actions, and prejudices. Even in this era of global communication, we interpret what we see through our own local cultural lens. At the same time, human exploits and activities are constrained by the biological realities and limits imposed by our own origin and evolution.

This is why anthropology is so important: It illuminates and explains the continuum of human biological and cultural evolution, and it addresses its limits. Until we understand and acknowledge the importance of culture, we are doomed to make terrible mistakes. As the world becomes increasingly global, these mistakes can have greater repercussions than ever before. Ideally, there should be anthropologists at every important treaty negotiation, that is, anthropologists who can interpret the cultural realities that so often guide conflict and war. Perhaps if anthropologists rode on the tanks going to war, then there would be less war.

This monumental encyclopedia makes an astonishing contribution to our understanding of human evolution, human culture, and human reality through an inclusive global lens. These interesting five volumes will be important in explaining humans as biological and cultural beings, not only to academic anthropologists but also to all the natural anthropologists who constitute our human species.

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